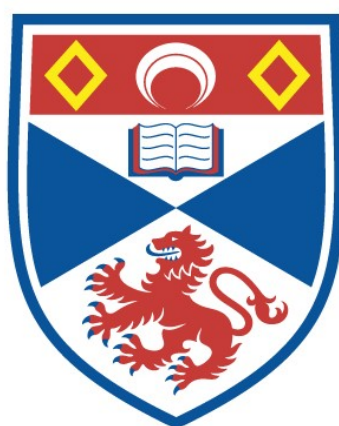


# JOHN HUME: ORIGINS OF A DERRY ICON 1960-74

Daniel James Keenan

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



2019

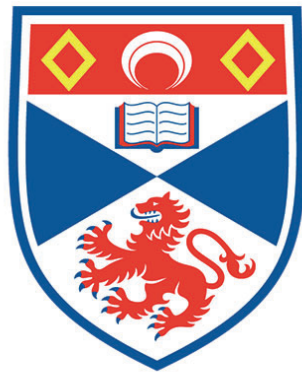
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# John Hume: Origins of a Derry Icon 1960-74

Daniel James Keenan



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)  
at the University of St Andrews

April 2019

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# Abstract

John Hume held executive office for just five months out of a political career lasting more than 30 years. Yet he became one of the most influential politicians of the past 50 years and was instrumental in changing the course of politics not just in Northern Ireland, but also Dublin, London and Washington. This thesis examines Hume's political origins from his earliest appearances in public life in the 1960s and how he rejected much of the received political ideology which endured for 40 years after the Partition of Ireland. It explores how Hume synthesised and entwined various strands of fresh thought and formed a distinctive approach which he made his own. It explains his rise from relative obscurity using a thematic approach. A chapter explores the "hidden history" of Hume's Derry and its formative effect on him. Another chapter details Hume's efforts to supplant the Nationalist Party and, along with five others, to create a new political force to further his distinctive approach to the Irish question. The third chapter examines in detail Hume's efforts to reformulate the Northern Ireland policy of the Irish government and a fourth details his efforts to harness the power of the US. Hume's troubled and arguably counter-productive relations with unionists in Northern Ireland are explored in chapter five and an explanation is offered as to why Hume failed to convince so many unionists of his case. It plots the changes in Hume's approach which occurred in response to the eruption of the Troubles. The final chapter examines Hume's relations with the British government and cites his insistence that London, as a sovereign power, involve itself fully in the search for a settlement. Throughout, constant reference is made to Hume's Derry origins and the centrality of the city's history and politics in his political make up.

## A note on nomenclature

There is little neutral terminology in Northern Ireland and even the most basic of terms, such as the name of the state itself, is encoded with subtle meaning. Someone, somewhere will not use that term while another, somewhere else, will insist upon it. As a result the author generally uses formal names throughout. The two states on the island of Ireland are thus referred to as ‘Northern Ireland’ and the ‘Republic of Ireland’ although the ‘Free State’ is occasionally used in the correct historical setting i.e. before the formal declaration of a republic by Dáil Éireann, the Irish parliament, in 1948. The United Kingdom refers to Great Britain (incorporating England, Scotland and Wales) and Northern Ireland. The UK and Britain are not employed interchangeably as they are not co-terminus. Similarly, Ireland is not used solely in reference to the Republic of Ireland for the same reason.

With regard to political parties, ‘Unionist’ is used in the context of membership of the Unionist Party whereas unionist (with a lower case u) is taken to mean an individual who generally supports the Union of Northern Ireland with Great Britain. At various times, this party was called the Official Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party – but the same identification will be used in all cases. The Nationalist Party is similarly capitalised and a nationalist is generally taken to mean an individual who wishes to see a united Ireland. The terms Catholic and Protestant are used in the religious sense and to denote, broadly speaking, Northern Ireland’s two main communities. The terms are not used interchangeably with Unionist and Nationalist.

There is no unanimity on the name of the city where John Hume was born. This research follows the convention used by the majority of studies and refers to the city as Derry. ‘Londonderry’ is insisted upon by some unionists and the politically correct ‘Derry/Londonderry’ is inelegant to say the least and is not employed here. Stormont and Westminster are often used as shorthand for the parliaments based in Belfast and London respectively. ‘Ulster’ is largely avoided, and is sparsely used only in the historical sense as an ancient province containing nine counties. It is not used as shorthand for the state of Northern Ireland. For the same reason, the term ‘province’ is not used to denote Northern Ireland.

The only exception to these rules is when citing someone who follows different guidelines and they are clearly quoted directly. Names and titles in the Irish language are translated in the first mention.

# Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks are due to Dr Tim Wilson and to Dr Kieran McConaghy for their unfailing help, guidance and encouragement throughout this research. They epitomise all that is good about post-graduate study at the University of St Andrews. Their encouragement and patience seem limitless. I am grateful to the staff at the university library and to all at the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence. Without exception they have provided invaluable assistance.

Particular thanks are due to Prof Richard English whose vital encouragement instilled a sense of belief that led to this research being carried out. I am indebted also to Prof Paul Teague (Queen's University Belfast) for his insight and advice. My thanks also go to Eamonn Rafferty for his specialist help with the final draft.

To my wife, Heather, and to my family, Claire and Conor, my gratitude and my apologies. You were the difference between success and failure. My thanks for everything. Sorry this took so long and demanded so much.

Dan Keenan  
April 26<sup>th</sup> 2019

# Introduction

*'Before 1969 scarcely a word was written by British, Irish or any other political scientists about Northern Ireland....'*

Eunan O'Halpin<sup>1</sup>

Academic research on Northern Ireland has not been in short supply. What then is the purpose of another study? Have the life and times of John Hume – easily one of the most decorated politicians of the era – not adequately been examined? The answer to both these questions is encapsulated in the quotation from O'Halpin above. Research into Northern Ireland's peculiarities was not deemed a priority before the violence of late 1968 suddenly whetted an appetite for explanations. Much of what has been written since displays a, perhaps understandable, bias towards the most attention-grabbing elements of the period: popular agitation, state repression, political violence, a state-led security response and the resulting political efforts by an array of actors to end it all. Certainly some researchers have looked to the years before 1969 to help explain what happened subsequently.<sup>2</sup> This research gratefully acknowledges and aims to complement such work by seeking critically to build on it.

It also seeks to integrate the specifics of Northern Ireland with the wider study of conflict and peace processes, particularly the theoretical contexts in which initiatives to end bloodshed are conceived, formulated, conducted and concluded. The focus of this work is on one actor in Northern Ireland and a specific time period. But it also speaks to the wider study of peace building, particularly in a setting where domestic figures seek to exert leverage across international borders in search of a settlement as Hume did in the US, the Republic of Ireland and (to a lesser extent) in the EU. It seeks to uncover how Hume set about building influence with political figures *outside* Northern Ireland who claimed a legitimate interest *in* Northern Ireland. It also explores his reasons for so doing and also explores the efforts in support of Hume made in particular by key Irish civil servants. This theme recurs throughout the chapters which examine Hume's work in the Irish Republic, the United States and with

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<sup>1</sup> O'Halpin, Eunan (2001) 'Northern Ireland: the Troubled Peace Process' *The Irish Review* (1986-), No. 1 (1986), pp. 1-5. This point is developed by Arthur, Paul (2017) 'The British-Irish relationship' in Ó Dochartaigh, Niall; Hayward, Katy; and Meehan, Elizabeth (eds) (2017) *Dynamics of Political Change in Ireland: Making and Breaking a Divided Island*. London. Routledge. p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> In particular see Arthur (1985, 2000, 2015); Craig (2010); Fitzpatrick (2010); O'Brien (ed) (1999); Mulholland (2004); Murray (2007); McKeown (1986); Ó Dochartaigh (2005); Phoenix (1994, 2015); Purdie (1990) and Prince (2007).

regard to the British government. Peter Gourevitch<sup>3</sup> has suggested that this phenomenon is in need of further study. It should therefore have relevance for those whose research interests lie in theoretical concepts of conflict resolution but are not familiar with the specifics of Northern Ireland. This work also touches on questions raised by Michele Gawerc in her suggested route map for possible further research into what makes peace processes work.<sup>4</sup> She asks how various peace efforts which are cross-cutting and integrative (such as that in Northern Ireland) operate and function. How do such peace efforts adapt and develop in regard to setbacks and breakdowns? Building on the work of John Paul Lederach<sup>5</sup> she encourages research into the motivations of peace makers. “[I]t is also important, for reasons of sustainability, to look into the personal reasons people have for being engaged in this work and persevering during the precarious, difficult, and often highly polarized periods.”<sup>6</sup> This research seeks to contribute something to her quest for answers.

This thesis sifts through the arguably under-researched years of Northern Ireland, examining the formative years of John Hume to establish what elements combined to produce the leader (widely and not necessarily accurately) credited more than any other with the settlement of 1998. It examines the emergence of a Derry icon – the title is deliberately chosen – because, as will be established here, to describe Hume without reference to the specifics of his city of origin misses a vital element in his make-up. Such work is essentially one of revisionism, but that brings with it its own problems.

Northern Ireland was established as a polity in 1921 and formed by six counties in the north east of the island which had unionist majorities opposed to the independence from Great Britain won by the remaining 26 counties. The newly independent territory, known as the Irish Free state (or Saorstát Éireann in the Irish language), declared itself a republic in 1948. The new Irish state, with its capital in Dublin, adopted a strongly Gaelic and republican character, retaining an ambition to reunify the two states after partition. Such ambitions were incorporated into its original Constitution – an issue hotly contested by unionists in Northern Ireland. Its population was overwhelmingly Catholic and elements of that church’s teaching were reflected by the state. The Northern state, centred on Belfast, had its own parliament which was subservient to the UK. It moved quickly to underpin Unionist parliamentary control and a

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<sup>3</sup> Gourevitch, Peter (2002) ‘Domestic Politics and International Relations’ in Carlsnaes, Walter; Risse-Kappen, Thomas and Simmons, Beth A (eds) *Handbook of International Relations*. London. Sage.

<sup>4</sup> Gawerc, Michelle (2006) ‘Peace-building: Theoretical and Concrete Perspectives.’ *Peace & Change*, Vol. 13. No. 4, pp. 435-478.

<sup>5</sup> Lederach, John, Paul (1997) *Building Peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington DC. US Institute of Peace.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* p. 463.



Protestant ethos despite the presence of a one-third Catholic minority which felt degrees of grievance following partition from the rest of the island and a sense of alienation in the strongly pro-British state. Grievance was heightened by moves by the ruling Unionist Party to consolidate their grip on power via a series of discriminatory measures and the availability of drastic special powers. With the Irish state to the south concentrating on state-building and the UK parliament at Westminster happy to devolve Northern Ireland issues to the Stormont parliament in Belfast, the Catholic/nationalist minority felt defeated and abandoned to a second-class fate. Political violence marked the creation of the new state and at various points in the following 50 years. Paramilitary groups emerged on both sides of the political divide. Both sections of the Northern population harboured further divisions. Unionists were split between more moderate and extremist factions, including those who supported state repression and paramilitary violence. The broadly nationalist community was divided between those dedicated to a non-violent and constitutional approach to effecting change and others who claimed adherence to the revolutionary principles of those who rebelled violently against British rule in Dublin in 1916.

It was into such a political and social climate that John Hume was born in 1937. By the early 1960s Northern Ireland was characterised by what Paul Bew describes as “a dead weight of unionist-nationalist antagonism which expressed itself in the denial of equal citizenship to the Catholic and nationalist minority”<sup>7</sup>. The early 1960s saw efforts to modernise Northern Ireland. Unionist prime minister Terence O’Neill distanced himself from the more stridently anti-Catholic positions of his predecessor and offered a prospect of gradual reform. Yet that decade was also marked by demands for civil rights, equality and full citizenship. Nowhere in Northern Ireland was this confluence of ideas more keenly felt than in its second city Derry. Hume’s entry into public life was provoked not by the overarching “national question” but by efforts to provide public housing, to establish a credit union, to have a planned new university sited in the city and to encourage Catholic/nationalist participation in civic affairs despite obvious discriminatory measures aimed at them. His earliest writing, examined in detail in this research, makes no mention whatever of the wider constitutional issue concentrating instead on pressing for a new consensual approach. He insisted on non-violence and abhorred both paramilitarism and the nationalist attitudes which fuelled it. The “solution” to the problems of Hume’s city was, in his eyes, a consensual settlement that enabled all to live in a more just society. It is in that context that this research is offered.

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<sup>7</sup> See Prince (2007) p. xi.

Revisionism has an unfortunate pejorative reputation in Ireland when it comes to the examination of history. Some are suspicious of the term, taking it to mean a rewriting of (usually republican) history towards a (counter-republican) political end - a suspicious and possibly traitorous departure from the 'facts' and a wilful departure from the institutionalised narrative. The charge against revisionism seems to lie in a belief that the 'past' is fixed and therefore cannot be undone in the same way that not one of us can re-live yesterday and do things differently. The idea runs that the Story of Ireland, to borrow Roy Foster's title,<sup>8</sup> with its defeats, injustices, calamities and humiliations has been written – usually with Britain cast as the villain of the piece. Questioning of such a narrative, therefore, leaves the questioner open to the charge of being up to something – perhaps trying to get Britain off the hook and/or delegitimising those who sought to effect change through physical force. Revisionism-as-a-dirty-word is not the preserve of popular commentators either and it has its detractors within the academic community also.<sup>9</sup>

This study seeks to portray the concept of revisionism neither as a stain on the historian's character nor as a politically motivated campaign. Rather it takes historiographical revisionism in its literal sense, stripped of negative connotations and slurs, and views it instead as an imperative. Re-examination is at the core of this study, building on the volumes of sound inquiry and questioning – departing even – from others. It seeks to re-open the inquiry into the genesis of one of Derry's political icons with a view to deepening our understanding of both John Hume and, particularly, the environment which produced him.

One need look no further than the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic to see nationalism's ability to present the counterfactual as the reverse – not least that document's references to “the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past”. This blaming of divisions among those living on the island of Ireland on the perfidy of the British - a charge incidentally Hume never made in nearly 40 years of public life - is not new as Tom Garvin's in-depth work on one of the foremost characters of post-partition Ireland illustrates.<sup>10</sup> But revisionism is not so much a pitfall of history as a necessity, and an ongoing and never-ending one at that. Roy Foster colourfully and often humorously situated what he once called “the pieties of Irish nationalism” in a more questioning environment and sought to release Irish history from whiggish treatment. In doing so he sounded a warning about the trap inherent in the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* approach. “The

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<sup>8</sup> Foster (2001) *The Irish Story: Telling tales and making it up in Ireland*.

<sup>9</sup> See: Brendan O'Leary, 'Cuttlefish, cholesterol and Saoirse', *Field Day Review*, iii (2007) pp. 192-4.

<sup>10</sup> Garvin (2009) *Judging Lemass* p. 10.

thinking behind the Act of Union, or the relief measures in the first years of the Famine, or the concept of Home Rule, are more profitably interpreted in terms of what people knew or assumed at the time, rather than what we know (or assume) to have happened subsequently,” he wrote.<sup>11</sup> That is why this research, taking as its subject one of the most studied characters in one of the world’s most studied conflicts, is still needed. The irony is that despite the vast verbiage provoked by Northern Ireland’s conflict (and arguably even more produced in response to its peace process) – research into pre-Troubles Northern Ireland is thin by comparison. There is, in addition, a bias towards the study of violence as opposed to constitutional politics – the whiff of cordite apparently more of a scholarly appetiser than the protracted tedium of democracy. In response, this work will examine Hume’s attitudes, and campaigns in light of their own time and will avoid, where possible, the trap of assessing his work in terms of outcomes years after the event. Foster helpfully quotes Ronan Fanning’s suggestion that ‘revisionism’ ought to be dropped as a term in favour of another that does not carry so much pejorative baggage. “The notion should be thankfully abandoned,” Fanning advised, “that historians need to apologise for querying ‘truths’ that are by no means self-evident.”<sup>12 13</sup>

There are, to be sure, present-day examples of “telling tales”<sup>14</sup> when it comes to John Hume from both ends of the spectrum. On the one hand, he is popularly held to be “Ireland’s Greatest”.<sup>15</sup> As the holder of more than 20 honorary degrees and doctorates, Hume’s name is associated with a proliferation of medals, assorted honours, university chairs and prizes handed down from everywhere from the Vatican to the Nobel committee. The late Maurice Hayes, former Irish Senator and senior Stormont civil servant, is among the most polished when it comes to the eulogising of Hume:

He is without question the moving and conceptual genius of what has become known (often with bizarre claims to ownership) as the peace process. All the seminal ideas are his. From an early stage he drew out the geometry of a settlement, the three strands which needed to be spun out and then woven together, to be affirmed North and South in simultaneous synchronised referenda. He put together the vital coalitions and networks of interest in USA and Europe, and had the courage and the vision to draw militant republicanism into dialogue and ultimately into engagement in the political process –

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<sup>11</sup> Foster (1986) p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p. 3 and taken from Fanning’s paper *The great enchantment: essays in honour of Garret FitzGerald*, p.143 and edited by James Dooge. Dublin 1986.

<sup>13</sup> This point is helpfully developed by English (2011) p. 459.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Foster (2001) *The Irish Story: Telling tales and making it up in Ireland*.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.rte.ie/news/2010/1023/137189-irelandsgreatest/> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-11612280>

knowing the potential risk to himself and his party, while all the time maintaining his inflexible commitment to non-violence.<sup>16</sup>

While some accounts are effusive in their praise of Hume, others are hostile or appear to write him out of the picture or, at least, diminish him to a supporting role with Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness taking centre stage.<sup>17</sup> Eamonn McCann, Hume's main radical socialist opponent in Derry in the 1960s, relates overhearing a republican interpretation of the city's past in which Hume's name does not appear at all until the heady days of the peace process and the talks with the Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams.<sup>18</sup> McCann is understandably sensitive to such treatment given his conviction that the role of his radical socialism has been edited out of the agitation of the Civil Rights movement in Derry in 1968 and subsequently.<sup>19</sup> Unionists were vociferously opposed to Hume and, though the temperature may have lowered somewhat since 1968, their assessments of him remain hostile. Arthur Aughey, in one of his more polemical works, asserts Hume was a "persistent and tireless hawker of platitudes".<sup>20</sup> He allows that Hume, like nationalists in general, had grand vision but accuses him of having little insight into the specifics of the unionist mind.<sup>21</sup> David Trimble suggests: "We would have regarded, in 1969-70, the leading members of the SDLP as carrying a heavier responsibility than Paisley for the onset of the Troubles. I'm not sure I would hold that view now, but I'll tell you what I thought then."<sup>22</sup> Peter Robinson outlines his case that, over time, Hume "was becoming more and more of an ogre".<sup>23</sup> Hostility was more widely felt. Basil McIvor expresses his exasperation with Hume thus:

Either deliberately ignoring or being unaware of Unionist fears to the point of arrogance, Hume's was to be a fatal misjudgement. .... If he ever addressed the fears of unionists it was to say blandly that they had nothing to fear, that they had no need to keep pressing the British government to reiterate its policy that the status of Northern Ireland would remain as it was unless there was a majority in favour of change. The unionists, he argues, should stand on their own feet and see how they could come to live in peace and harmony with the 'people of this island'. This is a splendid piece of hypocrisy considering the pan-

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<sup>16</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> Annual John Hume Lecture, delivered at the MacGill Summer School, Glenties, Co Donegal July 20<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>17</sup> See Maillot, Agnès (2005) *New Sinn Féin: Irish republicanism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. London. Routledge.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in the documentary *In the Name of Peace: John Hume in America* by Maurice Fitzpatrick (2017).

"I listened in to one of these guys giving schoolchildren from southern Ireland an account of a history of the Bogside, in which John Hume didn't figure until the Hume-Adams talks." For more on the Sinn Féin analysis of this period which tends to award Hume a more marginal role see Ó Broin (2009) *Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism*. London: Pluto.

<sup>19</sup> *Derry Journal* October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Aughey (1989) *Under Siege* p. 115.

<sup>21</sup> Aughey (2005) *The Politics of Northern Ireland* p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> 'John Hume' – a film documentary produced by Below The Radar 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with author, Belfast July 13<sup>th</sup> 2018.

nationalist front he has established in Dublin and amongst the Irish-American lobby to bolster his own political position.<sup>24</sup>

Conor Cruise O'Brien, an often lone voice of sympathy from 'nationalist' Ireland for unionists, has sounded off long and loud in his opposition to Hume since the 1970s<sup>25</sup> and capped off his utter dislike of Hume during the latter's discussions with Adams in 1993, regarding the peace process as a sinister twist in a republican master plan with Hume as little more than an IRA accomplice.

Depending on the choice of criteria, there are around 12 titles (eight of which incorporate his name into the title) examining Hume's life and/or that of his party which he helped found and led for 22 years. Ian McAllister's in-depth study of the SDLP examines, as its subtitle suggests, "political opposition in a divided society" and Hume's role in that task. Published in 1977 – fully two years before Hume assumed the formal role of party leader – McAllister was not to know how prescient some of his insights were to be, particularly where he analyses (all too briefly) Hume's requirement for unionist power to be "broken".<sup>26</sup> But while McAllister's research covers a similar time period as this study, his focus is firmly on the grand narrative of Northern Ireland politics, as his section 'The options for Catholics politics in the 1960s' clearly shows.<sup>27</sup> He examines this period primarily through Catholic and nationalist lenses. This research, by looking much more closely at Hume's city, finds that the Hume's first forays into public life were motivated by social and economic factors and by political issues which had particular resonance in Derry – namely gerrymandering, the property qualification and plural voting at local government level. Thus McAllister misses Hume's vital role in the Credit Union movement and also the 1965 University for Derry campaign. Both had cross-community characteristics and were, largely, detached from the traditional orange/green political divide. McAllister's approach thus misses out on what Niall Ó Dochartaigh aptly terms the "hidden history" of Hume's Derry and the particularities of its experiences which formed Hume the politician and activist, which this research attempts to uncover in depth. Without doubt, Derry already has produced its fair share of writers who concentrate on Derry-centric history during the 1960s – McCann's *War in an Irish Town* is as illuminating, valuable and readable as it is often humorous and self-deprecating (always a relief in an area where home-grown writers tend to cast themselves in starring roles). Paddy Doherty's first-hand insider account<sup>28</sup> is useful and

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<sup>24</sup> McIvor (1998) pp. 103-5.

<sup>25</sup> For a vivid example of this see O'Brien (1998), pp. 341-342.

<sup>26</sup> McAllister (1977) p. 107.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid pp. 18-21.

<sup>28</sup> Doherty, Paddy (2001) *Paddy Bogside*. Cork. Mercier Press.

complements more thoroughly academic work, particularly by Purdie<sup>29</sup> and Prince,<sup>30</sup> about the origins of street protest and violence in Derry. Fitzpatrick's retrospective in *The Boys of St Columb's* opens a door on the school which produced Hume, Heaney, McCann and others, offering a fresh social and human perspective which is missing from more "political" accounts. McAllister had rightly concluded that Hume had indeed a fervently-held belief in the need to face down unionist power in Northern Ireland (or at least to get the British government to do so). What is not so clear from his work is that Hume did not set out in public life with this objective in mind. Rather, he came to prominence advocating strongly in 1964 that his community adopt a positive and participatory role in the *existing* constitutional framework of the time in Northern Ireland – a position he later abandoned. He further extolled the virtue of working alongside unionists as equals, insisting that adherence to the Union with Great Britain did not make them sectarian bigots. That attitude, as this research shows, was to change and Hume's commitment to the breaking of unionist power was a product of his experiences post-1964, notably the University for Derry campaign, and confirmed by the response to the Civil Rights campaign in the latter years of that watershed decade.

Gerard Murray's examination of the Hume-led SDLP has the obvious benefit of publication 21 years after McAllister when Hume's reputation was at its zenith and he was being hailed as a visionary peacemaker.<sup>31</sup> However, he too adopts the grand narrative approach to Northern Ireland's high politics – an inevitable outcome of flying at altitude over Hume's early formative experiences. Indeed its very title is misleading in that Murray addresses more fully the development of the SDLP, following an admirably detailed paper trail, rather than the strategic development of John Hume himself. Murray also makes significant use of interviews with leading SDLP figures largely conducted in the post-IRA ceasefire environment and the apparent fruition of the Hume-Adams talks. As such they are reflective – but they do demonstrate an extent to which the SDLP was dominated by Hume's leadership.

The same can also be said of Seán Farren and Robert Mulvihill<sup>32</sup> whose examination of the 'paths to a settlement' include their first mention of Hume only in the context of the formation of the SDLP. Farren has an academic background, aside from his involvement in the SDLP

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<sup>29</sup> Purdie, Bob (1990) *Politics in the Streets: The origins of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland*. Belfast. Blackstaff.

<sup>30</sup> Prince, Simon (2007) *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the origins of the Troubles*. Dublin. Irish Academic Press.

<sup>31</sup> Murray, Gerard (1998), *John Hume and the SDLP: Impact and survival in Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.

<sup>32</sup> Farren, Seán and Mulvihill, Robert F. (2000) *Paths to a settlement in Northern Ireland*. Buckinghamshire. Colin Smythe Ltd.

alongside Hume whom he clearly holds in high regard. Either alone or in conjunction with Robert Mulvihill or Denis Haughey (another member of the SDLP's top table, and Hume's Derry office staff), he has authored four works since 2000 aiming to underscore the Hume/SDLP view in the literature. He contends with the problem of telling a history in which he himself plays a role by referring to himself in the third person and portrays his party's and his leader's drive for a settlement as one of unflinching commitment. This is not to say that such an approach is invalid, far from it. Farren's work does well to add a great deal of vital information to the record in the wake of Hume's retirement from public life – particularly useful is his edited volume of Hume's public comments.<sup>33</sup> But his purpose is not to take a step back and to examine more deeply the origins and trajectory of 'Humeism'. Indeed, insofar as it is possible to nail down a particular motive, Farren's writing appears driven by a desire to have his close friend and colleague's story committed to paper in the years when the SDLP waned as a political force in the face of the rise of Sinn Féin. It could be that Farren, rather like McCann, saw evidence of Hume being written out of the story of the Troubles and the peace process which eventually ended them. More interesting from the perspective of this research is Farren and Haughey's edited collection of essays<sup>34</sup> which has the added value of including scholarly contributions from a range of sources including, highly unusually, Hume's wife Pat – normally the most reticent of public contributors. They portray him as an (or *the?*) 'Irish Peacemaker' while Haughey builds on Hayes's claims, for instance, that it was Hume and Hume alone who deconstructed and then rebuilt the networks of political relations within Ireland, between Ireland and Britain, and between Ireland, the US and Britain. "John Hume transformed the politics of Ireland North and South, and reshaped relations between Ireland and Britain. He also changed perceptions of the Northern Ireland situation in the outside world, particularly in Britain and the United States but also within the European Union, and much further afield as well."<sup>35</sup> Given such a context, it is little wonder that Éamon Phoenix adopts the near-biblical sounding title of 'Before John' for his contribution to the same volume which examines the genesis of Hume and the society which shaped his politics. There is a suggestion of gentle fun being poked with its delineation of pre-Hume/post-Hume eras.<sup>36</sup> Phoenix's work on pre-Civil Rights Northern Ireland is, nonetheless, an important contribution, along with the

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<sup>33</sup> Farren (2018) *John Hume In His Own Words*. Dublin. Four Courts Press.

<sup>34</sup> Farren, Seán and Haughey, Denis (eds) (2016) *John Hume: Irish peacemaker*. Dublin Four Courts Press.

<sup>35</sup> Farren and Haughey (2015) *John Hume: Irish Peacemaker* p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* p. 27.

likes of Michael McKeown,<sup>37</sup> Michael Farrell,<sup>38</sup> Patrick Buckland<sup>39</sup> and especially Gerard O'Brien's helpfully in-depth study of Derry's history and society.<sup>40</sup> Collectively these works help set the scene for the tumult of the 1960s – but O'Brien's collection is alone in stressing the central and emblematic importance of Derry for the whole of Northern Ireland, a foundation on which this paper seeks to build. It may appear paradoxical and even ultimately self-defeating but while there is a vital need to consider Hume within the concentric circles of influence – Irish, British, American and European – there is an equal imperative to concentrate on the uniquely local specifics of Derry. Such an imperative has its roots in good academic practice, as Whyte, Ó Dochartaigh, Ó Tuaighaigh and English insist.<sup>41</sup> For it is within the city limits of Derry that the key to understanding what made John Hume and what formed his world view lie. Unless the specifics of Derry's experience are explored, the risk is run that the essence of Hume and his politics will be missed in the sweep of grand historical narratives and chronologies.

To this end it is helpful to turn to biography, placing the story of Hume's life in the context of his community, the mood of the times and broader historical setting. It is important to remember that such relationships are two-way in nature. Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid's discussion of the role of biography in historical study is most useful in this regard.<sup>42</sup> Pointing out that biographers of 50 years ago tended to focus on the lives of 'great men', there has been a more recent enthusiasm for the possibilities of biography as a useful tool to the historian. Biographers and historians do not work different, unconnected disciplines. Rather, it is contended here, they are complementary approaches. "[I]ndividual biographies...are significant not just in terms of what they reveal about individual subjectivity in relation to historical moments of political violence – family background, process of radicalisation, or position within the group," Nic Dháibhéid writes. "[B]ut also for what they reveal about the response in different societies at different historical moments ...."<sup>43</sup> In relation to Hume, biography offers many benefits to consider – but this must be done while mindful of the potential weaknesses of political biography, some of which are evident in his case.

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<sup>37</sup> McKeown (1986) *The Greening of a Nationalist*. Fionnuala O'Connor's later examinations of broader Catholic opinion in *In Search of a State* (1993) and *Breaking the Bonds* (2002) are also useful from a retrospective standpoint.

<sup>38</sup> Farrell (1980) *The Orange State* and (1983) *Arming the Protestants*.

<sup>39</sup> Buckland (1979) *The Factory of Grievances*, and (1981) *A History of Northern Ireland*.

<sup>40</sup> O'Brien, Gerard (ed) (1999) *Derry and Londonderry: History and Society*.

<sup>41</sup> See Whyte (1990), Ó Dochartaigh (2005), Ó Tuaighaigh – in Townshend, Charles the *Irish Times* March 14<sup>th</sup> 2015, and English (2011).

<sup>42</sup> Nic Dháibhéid (2017).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* p. 4. For a more in-depth discussion of this see Riall, Lucy (2010) *The Shallow End of History? The substance and future of political biography*. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Vol. 40. No. 3, pp. 375-397.



The search for uncovered details about Hume's political origins, and explanations as to what made Hume the stand-out politician of Northern nationalism has been taken up largely, in the first instance, by his three biographers – Barry White and Paul Routledge, who were also noted political journalists, and George Drower. All of them offer work which is rather more descriptive and narrative than analytical and they treat Hume with varying degrees of reverence, much to the chagrin of unionists in Northern Ireland<sup>44</sup> and to Conor Cruise O'Brien in the Republic. White was the first to plough the biographical furrow in 1984, fully 35 years ago, and his work is detailed despite a lamentable absence of references. He looks up to his subject rather than opt to discuss and evaluate him in detail. This is especially true in White's treatment of Hume's early adulthood and the beginning of his public life. He writes with rather more analysis and insight on Hume's later years, no doubt as this overlaps with White's career as a political journalist. However it remains a pity that there is little reference to Hume's political opponents across the spectrum which White could have offered given his range of political contacts, especially within unionism. White also has a tendency to make significant claims which are unsourced. He refers to Hume's address to the Oxford Union in 1983 citing an aside made by one (unnamed) Irish delegate to another: "I wonder how many people here realise that every new idea about Ireland has come out of that man's head?"<sup>45</sup> There is no basis in fact for such a claim and no evidence is offered. We are left with anonymous sources sharing unsubstantiated, inaccurate claims.

Drower's work adds least in terms of new material, depends heavily on recollections from Hume's close friends many years after the event and it was, perhaps unfairly, criticised for its distinctively British perspective.<sup>46</sup> However there are omissions and oversights and while Drower offers a mere handful of references, this is only a slight improvement on White. All of his biographers refer to Sam Hume, John's father, and outline a central role for him in the formation of his son's world view. Despite Hume's repeated assertions that women were the "dominant influence" in Derry, there is a paucity of insight into his mother Annie's bearing on her first-born to say nothing of his extended family. Fitzpatrick's is a lone voice, citing poet Seamus Deane's observation that Derry's "cult of masculinity" was undercut by mass unemployment and hopelessness while women emerged as wage earners.<sup>47</sup> Drower, for example, unearths evidence suggesting Hume's motivation for the Credit Union in Derry came

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<sup>44</sup> See Robert McCartney's review of White's biography *A smart salesman for old-time nationalism*. *Fortnight* magazine No. 212 pp. 19, 25.

<sup>45</sup> White (1984) p. 272.

<sup>46</sup> See 'A British view of John Hume' – a review of Drower's biography. *The Irish Times* May 9<sup>th</sup> 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Fitzpatrick (2010) pp. 74-75.

courtesy of his mother and her sisters<sup>48</sup> - but unfortunately he leaves it at that. Nor is there arguably anything like enough emphasis on the influence of his wife – a common weakness in the literature, Farren and Haughey excepted. Routledge’s work is the best, if only because it is the most recent (and even that was 22 years ago) and the author had his foundations well laid by others – indeed he shares many anecdotes and even a chapter title with White. He goes some way to improving on White’s deficiencies and there is useful critical material, not least from his interviews with Hume’s SDLP contemporaries. But in common with all three biographies, Routledge tends to treat Hume as the originator of new thinking simply because he addressed such ideas. His treatment of Hume’s landmark *Irish Times*<sup>49</sup> articles in May 1964 typify this weakness.

In contrast, this research asserts that Hume absorbed many fresh ideas about democratic participation, Partition and eventual Irish unity by consent from a range of sources and fashioned his own distinctive message around them. But he was not the sole author of them. Routledge further claims that Hume’s “radical proposals” must have prompted Derry’s Catholics to draw breath – yet he offers no evidence of such jaw-dropping disbelief at Hume’s “heresy”.<sup>50</sup> In short, Hume’s biographers offer personal rather than political elements of Hume’s story, sometimes quite richly detailed. But their narratives carry little critical analysis and their close focus on Hume himself tends to exclude the deeper contextual discussion which this work seeks to offer. The most valuable study of Hume’s Derry is Ó Dochartaigh’s. It is a first point of reference for any study of the early Troubles and its mining of Derry’s history make it a stand-out reference. This research, however begins earlier than Ó Dochartaigh – 1960 rather than 1968 – and has Hume front and centre which gives it a different focus.

This work emphasises the importance of Hume’s first showing in the *Irish Times* in 1964 arguing that his articles represent his earliest, clearest and most cogent manifesto – the template by which his later actions and beliefs can be judged. More than anything else they demonstrate how the Hume approach was changed, both by others and by circumstance throughout the 1960s until the collapse of the Sunningdale powersharing initiative in 1974. They further show that, rather than the prophet status his biographers accord him, Hume was as much the product of a climate of ideas and approaches which were emerging in wider Irish nationalism from the

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<sup>48</sup> Drower (1995) p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> *The Northern Catholic*. The Irish Times, May 18<sup>th</sup> 1964. Also available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0518/Pg008.html#Ar00113:4527FE4758184847FE4B2818> and *The Northern Catholic*. The Irish Times, May 19<sup>th</sup> 1964. Also available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0519/Pg008.html>

<sup>50</sup> Routledge (1998) p. 41.

late 1950s onwards. Hume certainly became the one figure most closely associated in the public mind with the articulation and advocacy of such ideas as unity by consent and the concept that Irish unity was a question of uniting divided people rather than conjoining two states. But it is surely not enough to leave it at that – there is an academic imperative to dig deeper and to discuss the origin of ideas. There is a general failure to situate Hume as an emerging public representative in the climate of ideas *at the time* – a fault this research seeks to redress. In doing so the aim is to show to what extent Hume was an agent for change, but this can only be done on the basis of a more accurate portrayal of the society which formed him.

Perhaps curiously, there is an unexpected volume of close and valuable discussion of Hume contained in academic literature about other political figures, especially others in the SDLP. Sarah Campbell's examination of Gerry Fitt,<sup>51</sup> alongside Michael Murphy's research<sup>52</sup> and Chris Ryder's rather kind appreciation of the SDLP's first leader,<sup>53</sup> offer more critical insights into Hume post-1969 and his election to Stormont. More questioning assessments of Hume are further contained in the memoirs of Hume's party colleagues. There are degrees of exasperation about life in a political party alongside Hume in the pages of Austin Currie's recollections.<sup>54</sup> Consider the following portrayal of Hume in the early days of the SDLP. Contrasting the more focused and analytical Hume with the scattergun style of Fitt the Belfast 'everyman', Currie writes:

Hume initially made his mark at our meetings because of his capacity to quickly write a statement expressing the consensus of our discussions. Paddy Devlin could write a statement and so could I, but neither of us could do it as well as John. He had to be watched however, as he had a tendency to introduce certain words, Hume-speak, easily identifiable as his and which gave the impression that he was responsible for the proposal or idea. Sometimes he was and sometimes not. The ability to quickly write a statement is a valuable facility for a politician or civil servant, as the author of a working draft is in a strong position to influence the eventual outcome. John was the best draft-writer I ever experienced. He had formidable capacity to analyse a situation and present it as part of a consistent line of argument. He was an original thinker, but extremely good at picking up points made by others and presenting them as his own.<sup>55</sup>

Valuable insight is also offered by the more pugnacious Paddy Devlin who makes typically little effort to disguise his animosity towards Hume as any form of praise.<sup>56</sup> "He had a tendency to identify the most powerful and influential people among those we encountered and go off

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<sup>51</sup> Campbell, Sarah (2015) *Gerry Fitt and the SDLP. In a Minority of One*. Manchester University Press. Manchester.

<sup>52</sup> Murphy, Michael (2007) *Gerry Fitt: A Political Chameleon*. Cork. Mercier.

<sup>53</sup> Ryder, Chris (2006) *Fighting Fitt*. Belfast. Brehon Press.

<sup>54</sup> Currie, Austin (2004) *All Hell Will Break Loose*. Dublin. O'Brien

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* p. 206.

<sup>56</sup> Devlin, Paddy. (1993) *Straight left: an autobiography*. Belfast. Blackstaff.

into corner-huddles with these pace-setters and opinion-formers,” writes Devlin, adding: “Editors of important newspapers and TV programmes were the most regularly endowed with these special briefings which laid the ground-stones for his later reputation as a political visionary and fixer extraordinaire.” More acerbically he notes that “...despite his apparent radicalism, Hume was cast from the stuff that old nationalists were made of.”<sup>57</sup> While there is constructive praise for various RUC chief constables and leading Unionists, there is barely a positive word about Hume anywhere. He further asserts that he [Devlin] and Fitt were moved to assert themselves during the formation of the SDLP to prevent a Hume leadership and so embed their socialism into the fabric of the emerging SDLP. Devlin’s portrayal of Hume as an air-brushed Nationalist and power politician with a tendency to perform solo runs far removed from the cabinet-like collegiality required by a party is a particularly valuable insight which is striking by its absence from the assessments of Hume by those more favourably disposed to him. Hume’s most pronounced solo run in 1988 with Gerry Adams, while beyond the remit of this research, surely illuminates the worth of Devlin’s hostile description and underscores the value of digging deeper and in earlier years than some researchers and biographers tend to.<sup>58</sup> The considerations of fellow SDLP founding fathers thus have their place in the literature – as indeed do Hume’s own personal memoirs. Surprisingly, Hume is parsimonious with details of his earliest years, offering little more than what is already available courtesy of his biographers. If his SDLP colleagues all venture their views on Hume, even deeply critical ones, he has not bothered to reciprocate. Currie and Devlin merit precisely one mention each while Fitt is awarded the honour of two. His one-time fellow SDLP MPs in Westminster are all passed by with single references – including that of Seamus Mallon, Hume’s deputy leader who served 22 years in the role.<sup>59</sup> The University for Derry campaign is startlingly absent while the formation of the SDLP itself is summed up in seven controversy-free lines. Throughout, Hume employs the pronoun ‘we’ when referring to the SDLP. But in doing so he encourages the suspicion that, given the absence of reference to his colleagues, he really means ‘I’. Mallon, while always publicly underscoring Hume’s political acumen and academic capacity, also tempers his praise with a claim that his relationship with Hume was frequently difficult, a fact not helped by what he describes as Hume’s selfishness.<sup>60</sup> Such treatment lends support to the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid pp. 137-8.

<sup>58</sup> For more on this see Stephen Hopkins (2013) *The Politics of memoir and the Northern Ireland conflict*. Liverpool University Press.

<sup>59</sup> Devlin, Currie and Fitt are mentioned in Hume (1996) p. 12 – Fitt merits another entry on p. 13. Mallon is referred to only on p. 90.

<sup>60</sup> Speech at book launch for Fitzpatrick (2017) January 25<sup>th</sup> 2018. Recording in author’s possession. For more on Mallon’s considered opinion of Hume see the *Irish Times* December 12<sup>th</sup> 2015.

idea that Hume's leadership of the SDLP was one of total dominance. His memoirs were published in 1996 at a time when the IRA ceasefire had spectacularly broken down and when Hume was understandably under intense pressure over his controversial engagement with Sinn Féin. Perhaps because of this, possibly also because of Hume's emerging health problems in the early 1990s, memoirs read like a cautious and expanded version of his 'single transferable speech' – the mildly derided and oft-repeated statement of core beliefs.

Two works in the literature give Hume and his leadership of the SDLP equal prominence. The first of them, written by Gerard Murray,<sup>61</sup> bridges a gap of more than 20 years since McAllister's work<sup>62</sup> and thus met a need for examination of Hume as party leader rather than political personality which his biographers tend, understandably, to do. Indeed Murray's work underscores the paucity of attention shown to the SDLP given its centrality as a party over 30 years. Perhaps as a nod to McAllister's treatment of the early years of the SDLP Murray gives the bulk of his attention to the years following the collapse of the Sunningdale experiment. This is a reasonable approach, but it comes at the cost of breezing through the origins of the SDLP which are identified in this work as the early 1960s. Murray devotes just 24 pages to the first stirrings of a new challenge to the dominance of the Unionist party, as well as to the Civil Rights era and its aftermath. Despite Murray's brevity concerning this period, he nonetheless offers some invaluable nuggets of insight. Consider, for example, his (sadly undated) interview with Ivan Cooper, a fellow Independent Stormont MP alongside Hume after February 1969 and later a founder member of the SDLP. "...[W]e were all dedicated to bringing Stormont down once the Unionists deflected from implementing the various reforms..... The Irish Dimension was always on our minds because we had to sell it to our constituencies."<sup>63</sup> A clearer illustration of Hume's and later the SDLP's approach would be harder to find. So much for the contention in some later literature that the SDLP's emphasis on institutional links with the Republic represented a fork in the road and the choice of a more traditionalist approach. However, it remains the case that the focus of Murray's work lies post 1975, hence the need for this research.

Peter McLoughlin's innovative work<sup>64</sup> examines Hume from the particular perspective of a revisionist of traditional Irish nationalism – a development of a theme encouraged by Richard English who advocates that it is the most important framework within which to explore recent

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<sup>61</sup> Murray (1998).

<sup>62</sup> McAllister (1977).

<sup>63</sup> Murray (1998) p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> McLoughlin (2010).

Irish history.<sup>65</sup> McLoughlin excels in revisiting Hume's political development via what paper trail there is – speeches, newspaper accounts and, after 1970, SDLP policy papers which, as is being argued here, were largely authored by Hume. That being the case, there is a strong emphasis on Hume's work after 1969, when he was first elected to Stormont, and particularly after 1974 and the collapse of the Sunningdale agreement – the first major British effort at a constitutional settlement of the Troubles. This thesis concentrates on what McLoughlin does not – Hume's early and formative years. In doing so it uncovers earlier origins of Hume's positions and argues forcibly that Hume's 'revisionism' of Irish nationalism emerged in the early 1960s rather than out of the ashes of the 'old' Stormont in 1972 and the short-lived powersharing executive in 1974. McLoughlin and others<sup>66</sup> propose that Hume's thinking after 1972 amounts to an undefined "drift to a more nationalist position" and a "greening" of the SDLP – an apparent contradiction with the contention that Hume revised nationalism. He could not have reformulated nationalism and fallen back on traditional views at the same time. This thesis points instead to Hume's growing rejection of Stormont in late 1968 and 1969 rather than in 1972 following the twin disasters of internment and Bloody Sunday. Deeper research into this critical period points to a more consistent approach taken by Hume from the late 1960s rather than a form of *volte face*. It further argues that Hume's all-Ireland approach also had its genesis in this period and was not adopted in response to the 1974 loyalist strike against powersharing. McLoughlin has done vital, original and valuable work in examining Hume's legacy in a necessarily wide series of contexts from Derry to Washington. This research will, however, take issue with his contention that Hume was only able to bring the full weight of his ideas to bear on Irish state and society with the New Ireland Forum in 1983-4.<sup>67</sup> It will be argued forcibly here that the Hume imprint was felt at governmental level and in wider society in the Republic up to 15 years earlier. It will also delve deeper into Hume's negative relations with unionism, an area which McLoughlin has arguably left under-explored. It will further take issue with his conclusion that it was Hume's persistent upholding of Irish unity (his definition of it) which lay behind unionists' deep and enduring distrust of him.<sup>68</sup>

This thesis also underlines that Hume's politics were formed in opposition to *two* predominant political forces – violent nationalism and unionism. There is a pronounced emphasis on the

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<sup>65</sup> See English (2006) and particularly (2011) p. 447.

<sup>66</sup> For example see McGrattan (2010).

<sup>67</sup> McLoughlin (2010) p. 214.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid p. 224.

latter throughout the literature and, especially in the 1960s, and rather less of his stance against the nationalist physical force tradition. Certainly, Hume and others stood in defiance of Unionist dominance and state oppression but they also personified opposition to the array of non-state actors intent on armed revolt. It is understandable that so many scholars are fixated on the opposition of Hume and the wider Civil Rights movement to the authoritarian state which oppressed them. But as Hume's earliest writings show, particularly those in the *Irish Times* in May 1964, he reserved as much disdain for the IRA and Sinn Féin as he did for what he saw as the political atrophy of the Nationalist party. This is a balance that needs to be restructured. "Nationalism," wrote English "remains arguably the most important framework within which to explore, explain and understand Irish history."<sup>69</sup> This being the case, it is particularly valuable to study Hume and his emergence as a pre-eminent political leader in the 1960s from a nationalist ideological/cultural perspective and particularly from what Marianne Elliott refers to as "politicized religion"<sup>70</sup> – the intertwining of Irish Catholicism and 'gaelicized' Irishness. Hume reflects on these themes in both his documentaries, *A City Solitary* and *John Hume's Derry*, and while his own Catholicism no doubt is mirrored in his forthright opposition to the use of violence, it also helped shape his world view. However, as scholars have pointed out, nationalism was the defining political ethos and it was therefore no accident that Hume directed so much of his *Irish Times* articles to a severe criticism of both the Nationalist Party and to the traditional nationalist ideology which had helped shape the politics of his community before and after Partition.

An appreciation of context is as vital here as in any historical analysis and there is much merit to be gained in drawing on English's work, especially his examination of Irish nationalism,<sup>71</sup> as well as that of Elliott, Lynn, Phoenix and Rafferty.<sup>72</sup> Elliott signals the inherent *political/cultural* differences between Irish Catholicism and Protestantism – a process which aided and abetted the tendency for both camps towards rivalry and "otherness". She refers to the primacy of anti-Catholicism to Ulster Protestants and it is perhaps no accident that Hume pleaded, unfashionably no doubt, in 1964 for Catholics not to see Protestants as default bigots purely on the grounds that they wish to maintain the Union with Britain. Phoenix helps to situate Hume in a wider nationalist context, particularly in the despondent post-Joseph Devlin era. Rafferty's work on the confluence of Irish nationalism and the political influence of the

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<sup>69</sup> English (2011) p. 447.

<sup>70</sup> Elliott (2009) *When God Took Sides: Religion and Identity in Ireland*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

<sup>71</sup> English (2006).

<sup>72</sup> Elliott (2000), (2009); Lynn (1998),(1999); Phoenix (1994), (2015); Rafferty (1994), (2008).

Irish Catholic stands out in Rafferty's work<sup>73</sup> and illustrates the extent to which Hume's political efforts were detached from what was once a considerable power. Evans, Tonge and Murray examine Hume's SDLP on two sliding scales: a light-green/dark-green one indicating degrees of traditional nationalism; and another red/green scale which is used to place political views on a continuum between nationalism and socialism. "Greening" of political outlooks – indicating a tendency towards nationalism – is a recurrent theme in the literature. O'Clery<sup>74</sup> applies it to his study of US foreign policy on Ireland, for example and there are other such descriptions of Hume's "greening" tendencies especially after 1972. But it will be contended here that both are inappropriate. Much better to examine Hume from the perspective offered by Jennifer Todd who holds that it is more helpful to examine *types* rather than plus-or-minus degrees of nationalism. "The first principles of Hume's ideology are pluralist, egalitarian, dialogic and non-nationalist," she writes.

He decisively rejected the classic nationalist model of a world of nation states and with it the classic nationalist view that nation and state should coincide, a view he took as irrelevant in an age of European integration and the decreasing importance of state sovereignty.<sup>75</sup>

This thesis looks to build on Todd's claim, arguing that examining Hume through a civic/libertarian nationalist lens helps makes sense of both his ideology and political approach. Viewing Hume as one of a number of shades of green only hinders understanding as it is arguably the wrong system of metrics and Hume ends up appearing confusingly as both a nationalist and a non-nationalist at the same time. It is arguably such an approach that permits space for Simon Prince to outline his thoughts on "A Third Road" – a study of constitutional nationalism, militant republicanism and non-violence in the civil rights era.<sup>76</sup> However Hume appears only as a bit-player in this treatment given its lengthy timescale.

Given the volume, to say nothing of the spread, of commentary on Hume the task this work addresses is to identify and separate the hagiography from the hatchet-job and, in doing so, to establish a detailed and reliable assessment of Hume on solid historical foundations. There is more motivation for such an attempt than merely setting the record straight. This work is relevant not just because it casts an analytical eye over the literature to date, but because it

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<sup>73</sup> Rafferty (2008).

<sup>74</sup> O'Clery, Conor (1997) *The Greening of the White House*. Dublin. Gill and Macmillan.

<sup>75</sup> Todd (1999) 'The distinctive liberal nationalism of John Hume and the SDLP' in Ruane and Todd (1999) *After the Good Friday Agreement: Analysing Political Change in Northern Ireland*. Dublin. University College Dublin Press.

<sup>76</sup> Prince, Simon (2010) *A Third Road: Constitutional Nationalism, Militant Republicanism, and Non-Violence in the Civil Rights Era* in Nic Dháibhéid, Caoimhe and Reid, Colin (eds) *From Parnell to Paisley: Constitutional and Revolutionary Politics in Modern Ireland*. Dublin. Irish Academic Press.



endeavours to take one step further the study of Hume and his various roles with Dublin, Washington, London and to a lesser extent Brussels. This thesis will take a fresh and more forensic look at Hume's founding statements – principally his articles published in the *Irish Times* in May 1964 – and his scripts for documentaries *A City Solitary*<sup>77</sup> and *John Hume's Derry*,<sup>78</sup> placing them more squarely in their historical context. It will examine the coherence of Hume's subsequent approach in light of the Northern Ireland which emerged into the transformative 1960s after 40 years of largely unfettered Unionist control. It will also question Hume's consistency in light of events, particularly in Derry, after 1965. Foster emphasises what too many researchers sometimes appear to forget, namely that history is not a predictive science. “[I]t is at its most illuminating when written with the full consciousness of what people wrongly expected to happen.”<sup>79</sup> It will be contended here that while Hume produced a notably cogent and persuasive analysis in 1964 for his landmark pieces in the *Irish Times* in which he got the past and present right, he got the future wrong. There was promise in the early years of the 1960s when Hume envisaged what he later termed a “new Ireland” based on the ‘three Rs’ – reform, reconciliation and reunification. Reform there has been, although it is debateable whether there has been enough of the right kind. There has been some, but arguably not enough reconciliation and perhaps even less reunification.

The research approach adopted here allows for more focus and depth on a critical period for Ireland as a whole and for Hume himself. This study centres on a narrow timeframe beginning, loosely, with Hume's involvement in Derry's Credit Union in 1964 and the beginning of his community activism in the city. It ends, again loosely, amid the bitter political wreckage of the powersharing Sunningdale agreement in 1974. (Some leeway is allowed in the chapter which details Hume's network-building in the US to allow for analysis of key developments involving the Carter election of 1976. Likewise with the chapter examining Hume's troubled relations with Unionists. Attention is given to a longer-term consideration of the effect of Hume's failure to engage more fully with Unionists before 1974.) The limited time focus enables two things. Firstly it permits in-depth concentration of the circumstances which led to his establishment as a key political opinion-former, not only in Derry but on a wider stage – an examination which, it is argued here, is underexplored. Secondly, by beginning with his first foray into public life

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<sup>77</sup> *A City Solitary* is available at: <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-a-city-solitary-1963-online>

<sup>78</sup> *John Hume's Derry* was a special edition of RTE's 'Seven Days' current affairs programme broadcast on October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1969.

<sup>79</sup> Foster (2007) p. 3.

– the Credit Union and local activism – and ending in 1974 after his only (brief) period in an executive office as a government minister it becomes possible to analyse a defining experience which marked the John Hume of the barren years in Northern Ireland politics. This despondent time of political drift in Northern Ireland coincides with the era ‘between the strikes’ beginning with the victory of the loyalist workers’ general strike in 1974 in opposition to powersharing at Stormont. It ends with the republican hunger strikes at the Maze prison of 1981 and the arrival of Provisional Sinn Féin as an electoral force. The post-hunger strikes period, leading to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and ultimately the peace process itself, is more amply researched – particularly the years following the first negotiations between Hume and Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams in 1988 until the Belfast Agreement. The peace process, arguably from 1988 (the first Hume-Adams talks) onwards, is already well served in a manner that the pre- and early Troubles years are not. This study therefore excludes Hume’s years as SDLP leader – perhaps an odd self-imposed restriction at first glance. It further excludes in-depth examination of Hume’s enthusiastic involvement in Europe. Although he served as an adviser to Richard (Dick) Burke, an Irish Commissioner in the mid-70s, Hume was not elected to the European Parliament until 1979. The research does however acknowledge the fundamental importance of the ideological impetus that the European project provided for Hume, particularly in the context of the changing dynamics of relations between Dublin and London and as a template for conflict resolution.

What the timeframe does is permit a narrow but deep study of the formation of Hume as a political leader from the mid-1960s and subsequent influences which caused him to alter course. In doing so it will be shown that Hume was not always the personification of steadfast commitment to principle he was held to be in the literature to date. The years to 1974 show instead Hume’s ability to revise his opinions and approaches, especially in regard to unionists, and to display both flexibility and pragmatism in the face of harsh political reality. Above all it will be shown that Hume’s key skills were not as an exerciser of political power – he had very little of that - but as a networker, a lobbyist, a deal-maker, an influencer and even a schemer.

The 1960s were a decade in which the Unionist elite at Stormont found, to borrow from Gramsci, that it could not rule Northern Ireland and that the ruled - particularly in Derry - proved that they no longer wished to be governed by them.<sup>80</sup> Stormont also discovered, to

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<sup>80</sup> “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” Translated from Italian in *Prison Notebooks* (2011) Vol 1-3. Columbia University Press.

borrow this time from de Tocqueville, that it was not at the lowest point of nationalist despair that the spark of revolution was struck but at the point of rising expectation.<sup>81</sup> The growing and highly vocal dissent emanating from the wider Catholic/nationalist community, so evident throughout Hume's University for Derry campaign and his push for a vast increase in public sector housing, helped create extraordinary conditions. The old Stormont order, led by Terence O'Neill, described pointedly by Marc Mulholland as a traditional unionist with some reforming ideas,<sup>82</sup> could not contain the situation which confronted it. Crucially, there was no new structure capable of taking its place. It will be argued here that it was into such a dangerous vacuum, made worse by traditional Westminster reticence to intervene, that Hume emerged as a political leader. So also did a rejuvenated IRA.

This research adopts a thematic approach, one borrowed from Paul Arthur who used it to good effect in his analysis of the conflict before 1998.<sup>83</sup> Thus it examines Hume's legacy from a series of overlapping perspectives. The first of these examines the centrality of Derry in Hume's thinking. Hume's "Derryness" was a core element in the formation of his politics which reflected a strong sense of citizenship – a citizenship denied in the fullest sense in Derry because of socio-economic factors as well as systematic disenfranchisement by the state. It will attempt a necessary rebalancing of the discussion about the origin of the Troubles – away from the bias towards constitutional issues and back more in favour of a calm assessment of the deliberate denial of access to public resources. Indeed it will be made clear that the advancing of *some* public resources, courtesy of the British welfare state and the 1947 Education Act which provided Hume and others with free grammar school education, and the denial of other resources – housing, local democracy, regional investment - propelled Hume into community agitation and ultimately electoral politics.

The second explores his work in the formation of the SDLP, the reasons behind its formation, the problems inherent in the initiative and how the new party lived up to its billing as the new, national political front envisaged by Hume in 1964. The third chapter looks at the growth of political and diplomatic links between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic in the immediate aftermath of the violence of 1968 and Hume's role within it. It asks if 'realpolitik' propelled Hume and Dublin towards each other rather than nationalist ideology and will examine the extent to which the North-South axis acted as sponsor to the SDLP as a state-created agency

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<sup>81</sup> de Tocqueville, Alexis (1856) *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*. Translated from French in Gilbert, Stuart (1978) Gloucester, Mass. Peter Smith.

<sup>82</sup> *Belfast Telegraph* November 4<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>83</sup> Arthur (2000) *Special Relationships: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland Problem*.

with Hume its highest ranking actor. Two further chapters explore the concentric circles of Hume's networking and influence beyond Ireland as a whole, specifically in the United States and in Britain. Another chapter examines Hume's troubled relations with unionists, the very people with whom he sought reconciliation. It will explore Hume's deep antagonism towards (elected) Unionists and questions whether he had a full understanding of them – a recurrent accusation levelled against him by some of them and some scholars, notably Bew and Aughey. Between these themes it is hoped that fresh perspective will emerge that is not already apparent in those works which adopt chronological narrative, purely biographical or comparative methods as their principal tools. To that end the research makes qualified use of a range of techniques – typically those of the historian, the biographer and, to no small extent, the journalist. There is a difficulty here in that any study of a man who never kept a diary, nor organised his papers – save those produced by his constituency office – will be hampered by a dearth of original written source material. Add to that the complications caused by the fact that Hume held ministerial office for only a matter of weeks in 1974 (and even then he was still inclined to adopt unofficial means of contact). His political life, at least in terms of an official record taken at the time, is poorly documented. But as Niall Ferguson suggests the “biggest changes in history are the achievements of thinly documented, informally organized”.<sup>84</sup> Hume was certainly that. To that end, it is necessary to use a wide range of primary sources and to support them with secondary ones where possible. It draws on resources at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the (UK) National Archives and the National Archives of Ireland, a range of journals and newspapers, films and documentaries as well as interview material, memoirs and other sources. It is also necessary to use more informal sources (in a qualified manner) such as personal anecdotes and recollections – some of them the author's own. There is a personal dimension here in that the author was employed by Hume's party as a press officer (1985-88) and later a journalist at the Belfast-based *Irish News* (1988-94) before moving to the *Irish Times* (1994-2016). The experiences at the SDLP's party head offices in Belfast were indeed formative and strong recollections of Hume's use of the author's office and telephone for many private calls prompted questions at the time which led to this research many years later. (Hume's personal office was in Derry and he did not have a private office and phone in the Belfast office.) What was he doing? Who was he calling and why? The answer was usually key personnel in the Republic's Department of Foreign Affairs – particularly in the wake of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement which formalised a role for the Irish government in Dublin in

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<sup>84</sup> Ferguson, Niall (2017) *The Square and the Tower. Networks, hierarchies and the struggle for global power.* London. Allen Lane p. xix.

the running of Northern Ireland then under direct rule from London. Experiences like this and the absence of detail on Hume's North-South networking in the existing literature prompted this research. The author does not pretend to know Hume well on a personal level, nearly always finding him difficult to talk to on the few occasions where conversations took place. There was also a strong personal sense of a 25-year-old in his first employment being somewhat overawed by a political figure of his stature. The motivation for this work arises in part from such experiences and a resulting desire to know more about Hume's manoeuvring, especially in relation to his Dublin contacts. The objective is neither to seek to enhance his reputation or attempt to demolish it – rather to uncover and analyse the evidence. To that end, some of the research that follows supports the contention that Hume was a key constructive political figure. Other elements, particularly in the chapters detailing Hume's relations with Unionists and some British ministers, are (more counter-intuitively) pointed and critical. A key task is to bring to this research personal recollections of dealings with Hume which inform it using both journalistic readability and academic rigour.

The timing of this work is thus important. Interview material and recollections from Hume's contemporaries cited here, while fallible, are nonetheless valuable as they offer an opportunity to exploit memory sources which, as time passes, are slipping out of reach. Personal testimony from this critical era will soon be lost and the emerging body of scholarship will rely increasingly on authors who did not experience these years. For the reasons outlined, it cannot be truly scientific. However as much cross-checking with other sources as possible is employed, with appropriate qualifiers if necessary. Clifford Geertz, the noted anthropologist stated: "Believing with Max Weber that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."<sup>85</sup> This work is an attempt to interpret the culture – political, social, religious and economic - of Hume and his times. The thematic design employed throughout this work incorporates as wide a range of sources, both primary and secondary, as well as official and unofficial. Twelve interviews were conducted in the field for this work and are detailed in the Bibliography at the end of this thesis. Eleven were conducted face-to-face at various locations in Ireland, North and South, and another was by telephone. All were recorded digitally. Six involved officials from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs all of whom, with the exceptions of Michael Lillis and Sean Donlon, do not normally give interviews. Access was gained thanks to the offices of Lillis who

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<sup>85</sup> Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected essays*. New York. Basic Books.

made initial contact on the author's behalf. Lillis was also instrumental in establishing access to British official Sir David Goodall. Hume's wife, Pat, who is known to the author, was among the interviewees (she, too, is usually interview-shy). DUP leader Peter Robinson and Alex Kane, a former Ulster Unionist official, are known to the author via existing journalistic connections. Sir Kenneth Bloomfield was approached directly by the author while Austin Currie is known to the author since the mid-1980s. Questions were not submitted in advance although general indications were provided as a courtesy. Interview material is used here in support of other evidence and, where useful, to provide commentary and assessment of the period in question. Throughout, the author was mindful of the potential pitfalls of interviews – a tendency for individuals to mis-remember, to put a more positive gloss on their own involvement or to enhance their centrality. To that end, interview material presented in this research is supported by other evidence and not left as mere contention.

This is a broad approach and every source has its biases and limitations. But a judicious balancing of sources, this triangulation, leads this work towards tentative but confident conclusions concerning the importance of early experiences and influences on Hume. This approach is particularly suited to a study of Hume *precisely* because of his informal and discreet manner of work and his influence which was exploited through networks rather than formal institutions. The thematic approach adopted here, though arguably addressing different aspects of Hume's long and eventful career, allow for commonalities to be explored and conclusions to be drawn.

One such will be Hume's undoubted ability to appeal to the uncommitted and the semi-detached outside Northern Ireland. For the many in the Republic who felt a (welcome) disconnect from the horrors "up North" Hume provided a readily usable set of principles against which it was generally difficult to argue. Anti-sectarianism and non-violence were positions with which many "down South" could readily identify when faced with a political crisis which was marked by both horrific violence and blatant sectarianism. To say "I agree with Hume" was a line which permitted those who felt they ought to take a stand, safe in the knowledge that they would not be led towards any of Northern Ireland's extremes. Support for Hume meant they could offer their backing and yet hold Northern Ireland at a safe distance at the same time. In the United States, support for Hume was seen as principled, practical and, in contrast to so many other issues on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures – largely bi-partisan. Hume, along with officials from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, clearly delineated territory from where it was possible to pressure the British government to act in Northern

Ireland and to criticise them when they got it wrong – all the while still holding out against US supporters of the physical force tradition in Ireland. The Hume lobby in the US was also employed to press Northern Ireland Unionists into accepting change. (President Clinton's overtures towards Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble throughout the peace process and his wooing of a huge rally in Belfast<sup>86</sup> derive from this.

This, as will be shown, was always a key motive for Hume in the US. So it was with parliamentary opinion at Westminster. The House of Commons, never Hume's favourite chamber, voted for the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 (admittedly beyond the timeframe of this research) by one of the largest parliamentary majorities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was due in no small way to Hume's appeal to the uncommitted.

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<sup>86</sup> Belfast November 30<sup>th</sup> 1995. For a short account of this landmark visit see *Divided Society, Northern Ireland 1990-98* produced by Belfast's Linen Hall Library available at: <https://www.dividedsociety.org/outreach/toolkits/bill-clintons-visit-northern-ireland>

# 1: ‘Derry’

Is it any wonder that the images of places like Derry are those of frustration and anger?  
*John Hume.*<sup>1</sup>

Two things are central to any understanding of the political character of John Hume and his leadership which helped transform Irish politics in the latter half of the 20th century. The first of these, the historical roots of the armed conflict in Northern Ireland which he helped end, is much more obvious than the second. It is more difficult to examine simply because it is more abstract and frequently obscured by the grand narratives of Ireland’s history. Hume’s references to Derry, his home city, are cast in a mould which would appear familiar to anyone from Ireland or any outsider with even the vaguest of understanding of the character of the place. However Hume’s “Derry” goes well beyond the more readily recognisable love of home and of place. In his case, the story of his city from its earliest days to the present has had a formative and enduring impact, particularly on his social/political outlook, the depth and breadth of which requires at least some understanding if Hume the political leader is to be fully appreciated. Derry, for him, is more than a warm sense of local pride. It encapsulates history, a micro-level history which examines the importance of key *local* events and their formative effects which are often otherwise missed by more all-embracing narratives. Hume’s Derry acknowledges differences between the two great Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist traditions of its population and also – crucially and simultaneously – a commonality. This is summed up in the phrase Hume used with emphasis to conclude a television documentary in 1969: “Derry is the mother of us all”.<sup>2</sup> It is not known if Hume was aware of the 1947 opera by US composer Virgil Thompson *The Mother of Us All*, a work depicting the struggles of Susan B Anthony and the campaign for women’s suffrage in the US. But the overlapping messages are clear – emancipation and a coming-together on a basis of equality are fundamental requirements for social progress. This thesis argues that Hume was always, at most, a heavily qualified Irish nationalist in the sense of the *Volkgeist* as the German founders

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<sup>1</sup> *Derry Journal* October 22nd 1965.

<sup>2</sup> *John Hume’s Derry*, broadcast by Radio Teilifis Éireann (RTÉ) 1969.



of nationalism might have it.<sup>3</sup> If there existed an inner common unity of the people of Ireland, according to Hume it lay, ironically, in their division as his exchanges of letters with Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Féin, showed in 1988. He never referred to the “nation” playing a motherhood/fatherhood role for the people. But he *did* use such a precise analogy for Derry. Hume would have been a radically different political figure had he originated in any of the home areas of the other five co-founders of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) – the party he helped establish and which he led from 1979 until his retirement more than 20 years later.

### **Distinctive Derry**

A brief discussion of Derry’s local history helps to illustrate what sets Hume apart from his SDLP contemporaries. In a direct way, he reflected Derry’s uniqueness and his political stance was formed in its image. Partition of Ireland in 1920 was a disaster for Derry which lost half its natural hinterland in Donegal to the new Irish Free State separated by a border. Economically, Derry declined, apart from a temporary resurgence during World War II. More importantly, proportional voting was abolished by the new Northern Ireland government at Stormont and Derry’s Catholic/nationalist numerical majority which was relegated to the status of a political minority. Having taken control, Unionists engineered local politics to maintain that supremacy. Before the 1960s this was done by gerrymandering of local government boundaries.<sup>4</sup> From roughly 1960 onwards, as Niall Ó Dochartaigh states,<sup>5</sup> Unionist supremacy was maintained by economic measures designed to prevent Catholic access to local government franchise which retained a property qualification. Thus state investment was concentrated in unionist areas to Derry’s cost. John Hume fervently believed that Unionist government policy was to “destroy Derry”<sup>6</sup> economically and he told a sit-down protest in Derry on October 19<sup>th</sup> 1968 that gerrymandering, leading to minority rule, was “the basic fundamental evil .... [b]ecause out of that came every other evil”.<sup>7</sup> By examining the specifics of Derry’s (as opposed to Northern Ireland’s) history it

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<sup>3</sup> McLoughlin (2010) explores Hume’s approach to the “revision” of Irish nationalism.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this see Lynn (1999) ‘Nationalist Politics in Derry 1945-1969’ in O’Brien, Gerard (ed) *Derry and Londonderry: History and Society*. Dublin. Geography Publications

<sup>5</sup> Ó Dochartaigh (2005) p. xii.

<sup>6</sup> *Derry Journal* December 10<sup>th</sup> 1965.

<sup>7</sup> *Derry Journal* October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1968. See also Prince (2007) pp. 164-7.

becomes easier to pinpoint the driving forces of Hume's politics. For him such injustices were not just political issues, they were moral ones.<sup>8</sup>

Socially, the establishment of the Welfare State after 1945 gave rise to a burgeoning Catholic middle class. Its teachers, lawyers, doctors gave voice to Catholic grievance and, eventually, a spirit of self-help, community action and co-operative enterprise. This was the environment into which Hume, born in 1937, emerged. His was the first generation to benefit from the 11-Plus exam which allowed state-funded access to grammar school education. While his parents personified the decades of Derry's decline and discrimination, the young Hume embodied the contradictions of post-war Northern Ireland. While he thrived on its opportunities, especially in education, he railed against the sectarianism and stasis of its political climate – just as his father had urged him. Derry was never a smaller version of Belfast and was spared extreme sectarian confrontation that was prevalent there after Partition. Frank Curran, editor of the nationalist *Derry Journal*, cites “surprisingly good parochial relations”<sup>9</sup> between Catholics and Protestants despite the sharp political divide. Such a climate, arguably, provided the scope for fresh political thinking which Hume was later to embody. It further explains how Derry's unionists and nationalists, with their overlapping senses of civic pride and identity, were free to combine under the banner of the University for Derry campaign in 1965. That campaign failed – a bitter and, as will be argued in this thesis, transformative blow for Hume personally. But the campaign illustrated that Derry had a capacity for political mobilisation which Belfast did not. Despite their second-class status, Derry's disadvantaged, both Catholics and Protestants, retained a strong sense of local identity and communal political grievance. This was different in both intensity and nature from the class-and-creed street politics of Belfast's Catholic enclaves which gave rise to Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin.<sup>10</sup> Derry, situated on the Irish border, had deep and organic contacts – familial, economic, social and cultural – with the Free State (a republic after 1948) in a manner utterly alien to Belfast. It is in such a context that Hume's beliefs and thinking had developed, and his principles were well formed before the turmoil of Derry's epochal events – October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968, August 1969, the Battle of the Bogside and Bloody Sunday.

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<sup>8</sup> Purdie (1990) pp. 191-2.

<sup>9</sup> Curran (1986) *Countdown To Disaster* p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Purdie (1990) p. 166 shows how traditional 'Labour' politics did not take root in Derry in the manner which it did in Belfast.

‘Derryness’ is thus the foundation stone of Hume’s politics, a basic element which gave rise to his later admiration for the European project as well as for *E Pluribus Unum* and the tenets of the US Constitution. It was formed in Derry and by Derry and then projected onto a bigger, international stage – not the other way around. Of course Hume’s life, leadership and legacy need to be examined in a wide historical context extending from Ireland to include London, Brussels and the US, all of them political settings where he exerted considerable influence. But research must also concentrate on the specifics of Derry and the unique place Hume insists it holds in both the Irish nationalist and Ulster unionist psyche. His Derryness was not merely a narrow and parochial obsession with the intensely local. Rather it reflects the social, political, cultural and economic lessons of one place and applies them more widely. Far from being blinkered, it illustrates how the “hidden history”<sup>11</sup> of one small city provides vital insights to a much wider and more general narrative. Modern historians, helpfully, find common cause in this approach. Charles Townshend suggests:

Simply setting violent events in context is a step forward. And when contentious anniversaries have to be acknowledged it is a good idea, as Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh has suggested, to proceed by “exploring the lived experience of communities in Ireland”. There may be some loss of drama but a gain in understanding.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Ó Dochartaigh’s research into Derry’s pre-eminent role in the political turmoil that erupted into violence in the late 1960s illustrates how an over-reliance on general approaches to history of the conflict in Ireland:

By relying solely on such higher level narratives and imagining them to be in some way comprehensive, we run the danger of developing academic theories on the basis of a chronology of events that is insufficiently detailed and which obscures the specifics of place. We risk building theories on sand. Accounts written at local level cannot be comprehensive either, but they can fill in many of the gaps in our understanding.<sup>13</sup>

In support of this stance Ó Dochartaigh cites John Whyte’s landmark work and its appeal for greater historical research to be carried out on “sub-regional variations”.<sup>14</sup> Whyte’s choice of words, and Ó Dochartaigh’s argument may give an impression that intensely local micro studies are in some way of lesser importance to regional or

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<sup>11</sup> Ó Dochartaigh (2005) p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> The *Irish Times* Saturday March 14<sup>th</sup> 2015. Also available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/review-a-nation-and-not-a-rabble-the-irish-revolution-1913-1923-by-diarmaid-ferriter-1.2138860>.

Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh is an author and historian at National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway.

<sup>13</sup> Ó Dochartaigh (2005) p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> See Whyte (1990) p. 259.

national level narratives and that their use is confined to a mere need to “fill in many of the gaps” in an overall picture. Rather than contradicting Ó Dochartaigh and Whyte, the intention here is to amplify their belief in the importance of “the specifics of place”. It is thus contended that some higher level historical accounts skim over vital “local” evidence and its formative effect not just on Hume, but on other prominent figures as diverse as political activist Eamonn McCann<sup>15</sup> and author Seamus Deane<sup>16</sup>. Indeed some of Deane’s work is predicated on the fact that the grand sweep of history misses vital local narratives:

[P]recious wonder that Deane should publish a volume called History Lessons which mediates between how the big frame of History, with a capital H imposes order and authority upon the workings of ordinary family life “underneath”..... As with the earlier volumes, History Lessons relives *different kinds and sources of history: the local, familial, unvoiced world* of Deane’s upbringing and the authorising, validating structure of state and imperial power. [emphasis added]<sup>17</sup>

Paul Routledge acknowledges Derry’s centrality: “To be born in Derry, and reared in the city, has a ‘unique effect’ on its citizens, according to Professor Sean Breslin, a contemporary of Hume. ‘They cling to it with more than the usual *pietas*’.”<sup>18</sup> Routledge unfortunately leaves it at that, but had he dug deeper, no doubt he would have found more that helps contextualise both the young Hume and the earliest days of his public life. Simon Prince<sup>19</sup> too could have uncovered supporting evidence for his valuable work had he concentrated more on the specifics of Derry as a counterpoint to Dungannon, Co Tyrone or west Belfast.<sup>20</sup> To borrow Deane’s distinction, History with a capital H and its regional perspective can leave us mystified as to why Derry, seemingly geographically peripheral (at least with reference to Belfast, Dublin and London) is so central to the events of the late 1960s and, by extension, why Hume drew

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<sup>15</sup> See McCann (1993, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Deane’s testimony to Fitzpatrick (2010) pp. 3-4 illustrated how local history had a formative effect on the novelist.

<sup>17</sup> Dawe, Gerald ‘Seamus Deane the poet: coming to terms with the past’. The *Irish Times* (online ed) April 6th, 2017. Also available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/seamus-deane-the-poet-coming-to-terms-with-the-past-1.3037428>

<sup>18</sup> Routledge, Paul (1997) *John Hume*. London. HarperCollins. p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> Prince (2007, 2010, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Both Austin Currie (Nationalist MP at Stormont for East Tyrone and later a co-founder of the SDLP) and Gerry Fitt (Republican Labour MP at Westminster for West Belfast and the first SDLP leader) arguably did appreciate Derry’s centrality, hence their roles in the Civil Rights march in the city of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968.

so heavily on its example. Ó Dochartaigh's following of Whyte's advice to explore "hidden history" holds an answer.<sup>21</sup> Unionist discrimination, particularly in housing, job allocation, public investment and local government in Northern Ireland since partition was patchy in general. But it was pronounced in Derry where local unemployment, housing need and local authority gerrymandering were acute. Grievance was therefore amplified in Derry beyond the levels of the nationalist ghettos of Belfast. "It was no coincidence that it was in Derry that virtually all of the early civil rights marches took place (between October and December 1968)," writes Ó Dochartaigh, "and in Derry that most of the early rioting took place (up until August 1969). In this case the local 'exception' must be central to any understanding of how the conflict developed."

That "exception" was highlighted in advance. Frank Curran produced *Ireland's Fascist City*,<sup>22</sup> perhaps a dramatically entitled but nonetheless well-researched analysis of his city's housing need and of the sophistication of local authority gerrymandering to ensure Unionist control. (This work provided substantial impetus for the Anti Partition League, an ultimately fruitless nationalist campaign founded in 1945 to reverse the 1920 drawing of the Irish border.) "If you are robbed your indignation will receive general sympathy," wrote the then Nationalist MP for Foyle at Stormont Eddie McAteer in a foreword to Curran's work. "If you are robbed every day people will weary of your complaints. It may even be that in time they will cease to believe you because they will consider that no robber could possibly be so bare-faced as to victimise you each day. Time and custom provide eventual justification for robbery."<sup>23</sup> Usurpation of political power, he continued, might conceivably be justified in the eyes of some "if it resulted in better civic government". Derry, on the other hand, stood "branded as the most backward of its size in Britain or Ireland". McAteer exhorted Irish nationalists – "our people"- in Derry and beyond to organise. They didn't, at least not under the banner of McAteer's party. Nor would they act collectively and effectively across Northern Ireland for at least another 20 years, not least because the Nationalists had neither party structure nor organisation.

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<sup>21</sup> Ó Dochartaigh (2005) p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Curran (1946) *Ireland's Fascist City*. Londonderry. Derry Journal.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* foreword.

### **‘Local’ issues – national significance**

Hume thus saw Derry as both the embodiment of the Northern Ireland problem and its origin, not as a local detail. He based his political approach to the constitutional question of Northern Ireland on that. He was motivated into political/public life not because of a primary desire to reframe Irish nationalism or (re)unite Ireland in some way, but because of “local” Derry factors – failures to address sub-standard housing and unemployment as well as a politically-motivated dearth of state investment and, not least, by a campaign to site Northern Ireland’s new university in his home city. There is abundant evidence for this in Hume’s earliest writing, particularly in his MA thesis, and in a script he prepared for a television documentary *A City Solitary* in 1963 and broadcast by RTÉ the following year as well as subsequent articles.<sup>24</sup>

Hume submitted his thesis, *Social and Economic Aspects of the Growth of Derry 1825-1850*, to the National University of Ireland at Maynooth in September 1964.<sup>25</sup> (Hume uses the acknowledgements in the first instance to thank the librarian “at Magee University College, Londonderry and his staff”, before referring to “Father Fee, both for the enthusiasm for history which he gave me as a teacher and for his advice and guidance as thesis supervisor”.<sup>26</sup>) Its very title excludes mention of the “political”, yet it is replete with insights into Derry’s formative years and an understanding of how the city became the focus on Northern Ireland’s constitutional and political crisis in the late 1960s. In it, Hume outlines the growth of the nationalist Bogside area outside the city’s walls and explains its religious complexion.<sup>27</sup> He also examines the character of city’s Waterside area, on the other bank of the River Foyle,<sup>28</sup> and offers an analysis of Derry’s English connections and of its “defensive mentality”.<sup>29</sup> He then explores the migration to Derry of Donegal people, details the poverty they experienced, efforts at poor relief and the origins of community action.<sup>30</sup> Later chapters detail the arrival and development of shirt-making industries, the employment of women and the origins of Derry’s local government.<sup>31</sup> Throughout, attention is given to the differences with Belfast.

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<sup>24</sup> *A City Solitary* was directed by Terence McDonald (1926-2001), another Derry man and, like Hume, a teacher. It is available at:

<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-a-city-solitary-1963-online>

<sup>25</sup> Available at <http://eprints.maynoothuniversity.ie/5395/>.

<sup>26</sup> Father Fee is better known as Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, later Catholic primate of Ireland.

<sup>27</sup> <http://eprints.maynoothuniversity.ie/5395/>. p. 45 passim.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p. 176.

Much of his research was used as background material for *A City Solitary*, which Hume scripted. Not normally given to biblical references, let alone from the King James Version, the title of Hume's script is taken from The Book of Lamentations – usually attributed to Jeremiah<sup>32</sup>: “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people? How is she become as a widow she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary?” The city, in the Hume/McDonald film, is Derry and “she” has suffered a grievous wrong, diminishing her rightful standing – a theme which permeates the 22 melancholy minutes of the work. It begins with Hume's own lament, similar in tone to that of Jeremiah, as it follows the image of a reluctant emigrant to the ship, forced out by the “dissatisfaction with their lot at home ... their almost total lack of opportunity”. The story is rooted in local history, encapsulating the collapse of the linen industry principally in Co Donegal and the resulting influx of rural flax workers to the city in the hope of bettering their lot. The film quotes John Wesley on the growth of Methodism in the north of Ireland in general and in Derry in particular. Yet is also portrays the city as a victim of its own past and more generally to forces beyond its control. Suppression of the United Irishmen's rising in 1798 led to the Act of Union (1800)<sup>33</sup> by which time “Derry's two main streams of population were well on their course”. The Protestant merchant class were ensconced within the protective confines of the city's walls while the Catholic “natives” were in the “cabin suburbs” of the Bogside. Protestant workers coalesced in what is now known as the Fountain where their reputation for “gravity and seriousness” developed. Thus the seeds of poor housing and overcrowding began not with Partition and Unionist control of Londonderry Corporation, but a century earlier. Religious antagonism originated from this time, Hume claims, and arising from the wealth and power disparities. *A City Solitary* emphasises the importance of bridges, both physical and metaphorical in linking both banks of the Foyle and all sections of the compartmentalised community, “bridges of class, bridges of creed”. It refers to the original Foyle bridge and its “heavy tolls” – abolition of taxes led to free trade and economic growth - perhaps an indication of Hume's later enthusiasm for entrepreneurship, self-help schemes and economic development - along with a commensurate spurt in the population. The city quadrupled in the century to 1920 before Partition “dealt a damaging blow” to its commercial life,

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<sup>32</sup> Also known as Jeremias.

<sup>33</sup> The Act combined the Kingdom of Ireland and the Kingdom of Great Britain in a single entity. It came into effect on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1801.

robbing it of its Donegal hinterland. Apart from a brief, if significant, war dividend which was lost after 1945, Derry suffered from chronic unemployment and a resultant loss of hope leading to “a frustration demoralising the unemployed, drawing the strength from the city, shrouding it in hopelessness”. What manufacturing work there was lay in the shirt factories which employed thousands of women. “As a city, modern Derry has been built largely by its women,” wrote Hume. This was a point he returned to time and again in later writing,<sup>34</sup> yet one which is only thinly referred to in much of the literature on him and the city’s history before the outbreak of sustained civil conflict in 1968. With women, like his own mother, employed in shirt-making, while also running the household, the overall Catholic male jobless rate often topped 20 per cent, but was locally much higher in the Bogside and Creggan.

Religion and unemployment in Derry

Catholic	17.3% (male)	7.0% (female)	13.9% (total)
Protestant	6.6% (male)	3.6% (female)	5.6% (total)

These figures, from the 1971 Census, the nearest official measure to the time in question, illuminate the religious disparity.<sup>35</sup>

“The effect on the soul of the city is immeasurable,” Hume wrote, “It is tragic.” Yet, for all that, the film ends with a glimmer of optimism and “hope in the rise of new industries” (sadly not defined) and “hope in the people themselves ... becoming *more and more conscious of their own responsibility for their city’s future*”. [emphasis added]. It was a call for community action and self-help.

It was not for nothing that Sam Hume, John’s father, advised his eldest son on witnessing a Nationalist Party event in Derry not to “get involved in that stuff” on the basis that “you cannot eat a flag”.<sup>36</sup> The anecdote is recalled in much of the literature on the future political leader<sup>37</sup> – but sadly bereft of a detailed historical or social context.

<sup>34</sup> Hume returned to the theme of Derry’s plight frequently in his public life. In particular see *John Hume’s Derry*, broadcast by RTÉ on October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1969 and in his maiden speech to the House of Commons in 1983. HC Deb, 28 June 1983, c507.

<sup>35</sup> Northern Ireland Population Census 1971. For a detailed discussion on this see Osborne, R.D. and Cormack, R. J. (1986) Unemployment and Religion in Northern Ireland. *The Economic and Social Review*. Vol. 17, No. 3. April 1986, pp. 215-225. Additional data is included in *Wallace, Martin (1971) Northern Ireland: Fifty years of self-government*. Newton Abbot. David & Charles p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> McLoughlin (2010) p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> See White, Barry (1984) *John Hume: a statesman of the troubles*, Belfast: Blackstaff. p. 55.



Both McLoughlin and White seem to imply Hume senior's advice to his son was avoid politics. George Drower, surely correctly, qualifies the don't-get-involved-in-that-stuff advice given in 1947, viewing it instead as a call to avoid Derry's then binary Unionist/non-Unionist politics rather than shunning all political activity.<sup>38</sup> Certainly Hume senior wanted his son to focus on issues which had a direct and daily bearing on the welfare of the community, as he had done himself, rather than on more abstract symbols of statehood which had never put food on anyone's table. It is even fair to suggest that as a man of Scots lineage who had benefitted in his early working life from employment by the British state, Hume senior may well have had a cautious view of traditional Irish nationalist anti-Britishness especially as his son was benefitting from the British welfare state with a free grammar school scholarship and health care. Certainly Hume junior did when he referred to the resources available to the younger generation that their parents were denied.<sup>39</sup> Of Hume's biographers White and Paul Routledge pay Sam Hume the credit he merits in the formation of his son's world view. McLoughlin indeed begins his examination of Hume with a description of this paternal influence and, while details are sparse, it is abundantly clear that Sam Hume endowed in his son both morals and an ethical framework which informed him throughout his career in public life. Unfortunately few writers refer much to Annie Hume, John's mother. But it is outlandish to assume that the "very intelligent but totally uneducated" woman who held the family together with her income as an outworker in Derry's indigenous shirt-making industry throughout the years of her husband's unemployment had no part in shaping the mind of the young John. "She, like many of the women of Derry, was a dominant influence in the family," Hume recounted later.<sup>40</sup> She must have been so, given her dual role as mother/wife and bread-winner for a family of seven including an unemployed husband. It is a pity that this dominance was never examined more fully, especially by his biographers. As a result we can only guess at the influence such a capable, intellectually able, if formally uneducated, mother would have had during Hume's formative years in post-partition Northern Ireland.

While Hume's parents laid many of their son's political foundations it was Derry which provided the context from which Hume emerged into adulthood and the lens through

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<sup>38</sup> Drower, George (1995) *John Hume: Peacemaker*. London. Victor Gollancz. p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> See The Irish Times p. 8 May 18th and p8 May 19th 1964. Available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0518/Pg008.html> and at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0519/Pg008.html>

<sup>40</sup> Hume, John (1996) p. 2.

which Hume, the eventual political leader, viewed the wider world. We know from Hume himself what politics he opposed: “Nationalist politics was always emotional; elections were about flag-waving, and the real problems of unemployment, housing and poverty – the problems of politics except those of consequence of division – were rarely an issue,” he wrote.<sup>41</sup> Derry held a significance for the major nationalist and unionist traditions. For Protestants, Londonderry was the unionist citadel, the “Maiden City” whose walls had never been breached during the Williamite Siege of Derry of 1688-89 and its legendary holding out in the face of an armed and powerful Catholic opponent placed it on the highest of pedestals in unionist mythology. It was in Derry that the unionist battle cry of “No Surrender” was first heard and echoed down the centuries. For nationalists however, in a numerical majority but political minority after partition, Derry and not Belfast stood above all as the fulcrum of everything that was wrong with the unionist state of Northern Ireland. Their stark internal divisions, their fearfulness and bitter sense of being forgotten by Dublin, ignored by Stormont and discriminated against from within by their own electoral (Unionist) minority cemented its status as a “capital city of injustice”, according to the later socialist, republican MP Bernadette Devlin. Cochrane encapsulates this, stating succinctly: “In Ireland the present is informed by the past to an extraordinary degree. It colours and shapes current attitudes, grievances, belief systems, hopes, fears and desires.”<sup>42</sup> This was particularly true in Hume’s Derry. According to Liam Canniffe, a key member of the Anglo-Irish section of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin,<sup>43</sup> Derry’s experiences both before and after the partition of Ireland exemplified the political troubles of Ireland as a whole. Here was a city which had lost half of its natural hinterland (Co Donegal) to the new Irish Free State in 1921 and which subsequently saw its inherent Catholic/Irish nationalist majority reduced to political impotence by the gerrymandering of local government, sanctioned by the Unionist government at Stormont. Derry, already diminished by Partition and the loss of its Donegal hinterland, was the largest and most important centre in the north-west but lost its economic standing thanks to the recommendations of three commissions established by Stormont: The Matthew

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Cochrane (2013) p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Canniffe was a key Irish government official who worked in and reported from Northern Ireland in the institutions established under the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. He had previously served as Irish Consul in Boston and later Chicago before joining the Anglo-Irish division of the Irish foreign ministry. He later served as Irish Ambassador to Nigeria before retirement.

Commission on economic development which called for the building of the new city in Co Armagh of Craigavon (named in honour of the first Unionist prime minister. The Benson Commission which closed supposedly uneconomic railway lines, notably those west of the River Bann which is the accepted divide between the largely nationalist west of Northern Ireland and the largely unionist east; and most critically the Lockwood Commission which recommended the development of a second Northern Ireland university not at the existing Magee college campus in Derry which was ripe for expansion, but at a greenfield site in (solidly unionist) Coleraine. According to Canniffe: “Derry had gravitas, unlike other equivalent cities anywhere in Ireland. Its experience after partition proved that, despite its location on the periphery of Northern Ireland and hours from Dublin, it was politically central. More than politically important, it was also culturally important both in terms of music and poetry.”<sup>44</sup> James Sharkey, another prominent figure in the Republic’s Department of Foreign Affairs, a driver of its approach to Northern Ireland, and himself a Derry native, amplifies this, pointing in particular to the influence of St Columb’s College. “Hume was first and foremost a historian and I think there was something in the chemistry of St Columb’s, maybe it comes out of the teaching of history [there].”<sup>45</sup> The “something” alluded to was, he believes, what prompted Hume’s later relentless questioning of established historical assumptions, particularly that which held that the Irish people were deliberately divided by the British and the so-called Irish question was somehow all their fault. Emblematic of Hume’s approach as a teacher was his role in forming the first debating society at St Columb’s and his initiatives in leading groups of pupils firstly to meet Terence O’Neill, the new, ostensibly reforming Unionist prime minister at Stormont and also to Áras an Uachtaráin<sup>46</sup> in Dublin to meet President Éamon de Valera – a veteran of the Irish rising in 1916 and a father figure of the subsequent republic. St Columb’s was no ordinary school as the list of its most famous pupils, including Hume, Sharkey, socialist activist and author Eamonn McCann, writers Seamus Deane, Seamus Heaney and Brian Friel, all testify. “Catholic Derry is steeped in the influence of St Columb’s,” McCann claims. “Almost every Catholic teacher, Catholic doctor, Catholic solicitor, Catholic architect, accountant and businessman in

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with author Drogheda, Co Louth, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with author. Dublin. September 13<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Official residence of the President of Ireland in Dublin.

the city was schooled there.”<sup>47</sup> Thanks to the post-war Attlee government, free state education transformed places like Derry, opening up schools such as St Columb’s to the children of working class families. Enda Staunton states that the influence of the Education Act 1947 on Northern Ireland’s Catholic/nationalist consciousness is exaggerated, claiming it was a myth that free grammar school scholarships had a transformative effect.<sup>48</sup> Certainly the fact that the young Martin McGuinness, a Derry native and eventual IRA commander as well as Sinn Féin chief negotiator and Deputy First Minister at Stormont, seemed not to be hampered by failing the 11-Plus examination used to select those eligible for free grammar school places. It is also true that of the Nationalist MPs elected to Stormont in 1945, before the new Education Act, around half were educated to third level.<sup>49</sup> However the weight of evidence supports the opposing conclusion. Hume himself is in no doubt about the transformative effects on Northern Ireland society of free education to university level: “When the history of Ireland in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is written, a major element will be the emergence of a new educated generation from a section of the community that never before had such education. This event cannot be overemphasised.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Origins of Hume’s collective approach**

Hume himself states clearly: “My education allowed me to put something back into my community. I became involved in housing and poverty and self-help organisations.”<sup>51</sup> Writing in the *Derry Journal* in 1961, Hume stated that the benefits of the local Credit Union went well beyond the financial and fostered an enabling sense of self help among the community. The spirit which underpins the Credit Union “if brought to bear on other and larger problems at the local level would soon solve them”.<sup>52</sup> Maurice Fitzpatrick’s inquiry into the role played in local Derry society by St Columb’s College is the more convincing. “We, as a community, felt isolated within Derry as a majority

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<sup>47</sup> McCann (1983) pp. 14-15.

<sup>48</sup> Staunton (2001) p. 259.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p. 259. Staunton claims: “In 1945, for example, six of the ten nationalists elected to Stormont had third-level education.”. Evidence suggest this is, at least partly, true. Of the 10, TJ Campbell and James McSparran were barristers; Eddie McAteer was an accountant and Paddy Gormley’s obituary cites his study at National University of Ireland Maynooth. (See <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/obituary-patrick-gormley-28356143.html>)

<sup>50</sup> Hume (1996) pp. 14-15.

<sup>51</sup> Hume, John (2008) ‘Transforming the Union: an evolving dynamic’ in Britain and Ireland III: *Lives Entwined. A new dawn?* The British Council. Purely Print. Also available at <https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/britain-ireland-lives-entwined>

<sup>52</sup> *Derry Journal* February 14<sup>th</sup> 1961. See also Prince (2007) p. 130.

which was politically lamed by gerrymander and housing discrimination,” Seamus Deane told the author. “In a series of concentric circles, the wider you went, the more remote from your community was from any contact with power or justice.” Explaining the significance attached to the state provision of free grammar school education he later adds: “[M]y parents actually recognised that a cohort of Catholic kids going to school was what was going to break the Northern Irish state.”<sup>53</sup> Heaney concurs, claiming that the “11-Plus generation” “had a sense of adventure, a sense of themselves as a generation with some sense of possibility and advantage and renewal... They were political in the way that they had a strong sense of being responsible. You can see that certainly in Hume....”<sup>54</sup> McCann adds his own perspective: “You could be educated to escape entirely from the constrictions of the Bogside. That only came in with the 11-Plus.... We were the first generation to have this opportunity. It was made very clear to you, from the very beginning, at the age of 11, that a great deal was expected of you. We were warned ... ‘you must not waste this’.”<sup>55</sup>

“St Columb’s described itself as a ‘junior seminary’ and one of its main functions was to supply candidates for the priesthood. Its other aim was to turn out upstanding Catholic citizens.”<sup>56</sup> This helps explain at least in part, Hume’s decision on leaving St Columb’s to go to Maynooth in 1954 to train for the priesthood, aged just 17. The existence of a priestly “vocation” was seen within Catholic communities as a great and divine blessing. No doubt the existence of scholarships to traditional Catholic institutions such as St Columb’s and Maynooth facilitated Hume’s education to third level and he was incentivised by their ethos. But the decision not to pursue training for the priesthood as far as ordination was - equally – seen in negative stereotypical terms. A “failed priest” was a shameful description which had potential to reflect as badly on families as it did on the individual. Hume never outlined precisely why he decided against the priesthood but both White and Routledge suggest a combination of influences from his experiences of the wider world – Hume spent summers in France honing his language skills for his degree in French and History – and a nebulous sense of claustrophobia at the strictures of the pre-Second Vatican Council church in Ireland at the time. Routledge quotes Hume senior, saying: “It takes a good man to enter the

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<sup>53</sup> Fitzpatrick (2010) p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid p. 65.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid p. 104.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid p. 15.

priesthood and an even better one to leave it.”<sup>57</sup> Thus Hume bears hallmarks of being both a conventional Derry Catholic and something of a renegade. His Catholicism, like his “nationalism”, was neither conventional nor typical. A regular attender at Mass and the sacraments he shared much in terms of socio-political outlook with individual members of the hierarchy – Bishop Edward Daly of Derry for one and Cardinal Cahal Daly for another. He avoided the type of public criticism of St Columb’s school in Derry which McCann colourfully details with relish,<sup>58</sup> was taught at Maynooth by Tomás Ó Fiaich, later to be Catholic primate of all-Ireland, and was happy to identify with fundraising for the seminary years after he had left it having given up his training for the priesthood. Yet he also is critical of the behaviour of the Catholic church in the Republic<sup>59</sup> and, more generally, was obviously dismayed that the bishops’ actions gave so much credence to claims of “Rome rule”. His views are muted, by his standards, but the criticisms are unambiguous. Perhaps this is because his natural political constituency was Catholic and he was always more of a critical adherent of his church than an utter iconoclast.

Hume makes much of his working class origins and his street credibility in Derry<sup>60</sup> – we know this much from his personal memoir and from the material he gave to his biographers. Yet Hume’s attitudes, as Eamonn McCann’s hostility attests, are inherently middle class. Indeed, while Hume was distinctly working class in terms of his parents’ income (or lack of it), he was utterly middle class – of the sort that Margaret Thatcher could have applauded – by virtue of this commitment to self-improvement through education, his entrepreneurial record and his commitment to the Credit Union. Hume’s moral and political compass was set primarily by his parents (and by extension, his church) but it was the experience of his native city down the ages and particularly in more recent times that specifically informed Hume’s approach to public life. These were an unshakeable belief in what his wife, Pat (née Hone) describes as “the emancipatory power of education”<sup>61</sup> and a commitment to self-help and community enterprise as evidenced by his role in the Credit Union movement and his work in establishing a salmon processing co-operative. Hume developed a strong and general antipathy to the Unionist party and what he saw as its drive to keep all power in its own

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<sup>57</sup> Routledge p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> See McCann (1993) pp. 13-19.

<sup>59</sup> See Hume, John (1996) p. 65.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid pp, 10-12.

<sup>61</sup> Hume, Pat (2015) p. 203.

hands, its not-an-inch political philosophy and its mistrust or even fear of anything outside the narrow confines of its own politico/cultural circle. However he was particularly antagonised by its actions in Derry. It is contended here that while Hume did see Unionism, or rather more accurately, the operation of Unionist government in Northern Ireland, as supremacist, he did not (initially at least) fall into the old nationalist trap outlined by Bew and insist that unionism was irrational per se.<sup>62</sup> Many unionists saw in his criticism of the Unionist government and in his high profile position in the Northern Ireland Civil Rights campaign an inherent, even sectarian, intolerance of unionist people. This would surface time and again throughout his political career, hindering his efforts at accommodation not only with unionism but also, on occasion, with various British governments.

By 1964, Hume had completed his BA and MA studies at Maynooth, had married, begun a family and become a noted teacher, firstly at St Colman's in Strabane, Co Tyrone before moving back to Derry and his alma mater, St Columb's. But he was also already deeply involved in community life, most notably in the Credit Union movement<sup>63</sup> which he helped found as a self-help financial co-operative designed to ease Derry's grinding poverty caused by the loss of traditional industries and consequent high male unemployment, as well as a campaigner for social housing (he later becoming a driving force behind the Derry Housing Association). Derry's social and economic plight, well described by Arthur,<sup>64</sup> pushed the young, idealistic Hume towards social activism rather than party politics despite attempts to attract him towards the Nationalist Party by the then leader and Stormont MP, fellow Derryman Eddie McAteer. Northern nationalism was never monolithic – even in the immediate post-Partition era. Further currents within nationalism emerged, particularly as the 11-Plus generation emerged, which were antagonistic to what they saw as the border-obsessed, flag-waving nationalists of the previous generation. Although there appears to be no direct communication between the core memberships of what was to become the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) and the civil rights movement in the southern states of the US, the rights-based political mood of early 60s America had been keenly felt by younger, energetic, self-aware, confident and educated Catholics in

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<sup>62</sup> Bew (1994) p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> For more on the ethos and origins of the Credit Union see Routledge p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur, Paul (2015) 'Political Apprenticeship' in *John Hume: Irish Peacemaker* Farren, Seán and Haughey, Denis (eds). In particular see pp. 46-48.

Northern Ireland. However, as Sarah Campbell points out,<sup>65</sup> the existence of diverse strands of opinion within wider Northern nationalism does not mean there had been a clear-cut split between the old and the new as both Peter McLoughlin and Gerard Murray along with Routledge and White suggest.<sup>66</sup> It should be remembered that among Hume's close political allies from 1968 onwards was Austin Currie – a Nationalist MP, but also later a founder member of the SDLP.

### **Hume's 'Magee' problem<sup>67</sup>**

By the mid-1960s if anything exemplified the Hume approach to politics and social agitation it was his city's response to the findings of the Lockwood Commission<sup>68</sup> which prompted the O'Neill government at Stormont not to expand Magee College in Derry to form Northern Ireland's second university, opting instead to downgrade Magee and to build a new campus in Coleraine. Opinion in the city, both Catholic and Protestant, was united in opposition.<sup>69</sup> Hume expressed the resentment of many in the city, accusing the Stormont government of underhand political manoeuvring in snubbing Derry city as part of an overall plan to deny state investment in the (largely Catholic) west of Northern Ireland in favour of the (largely Protestant) eastern counties, especially the pro-unionist area roughly centred on Belfast. He was one of three men to lead a 25-000-strong protest march to the steps of Stormont's Parliament Buildings to lobby O'Neill in February 1965. The central figure at the head of the protest was the Unionist Derry mayor Albert Anderson, Hume stood to his left while Eddie McAteer, leader of the Nationalist Party and Stormont MP was on his right. "I'm very delighted at the loyal support of the citizens of Derry," Anderson told the BBC, "All united together working for one object."<sup>70</sup> The event, taking place on the spot where, just four weeks earlier, O'Neill had shaken the hand of Taoiseach<sup>71</sup> Seán Lemass who had made

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<sup>65</sup> Campbell, Sarah (2015) *Gerry Fitt and the SDLP. In a Minority of One*. Manchester University Press. Manchester.

<sup>66</sup> McLoughlin, Peter (2010) *John Hume and the revision of Irish nationalism*. Manchester. Manchester University Press Murray, Gerard (1998), *John Hume and the SDLP: Impact and survival in Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press. Routledge, Paul (1997) *John Hume*. London. HarperCollins, White, Barry (1984) *John Hume: a statesman of the troubles*, Belfast: Blackstaff.

<sup>67</sup> The author acknowledges O'Brien's chapter, 'Our Magee Problem': Stormont and the Second University, in *Derry and Londonderry: History and Society*, Geography Publications, Dublin.

<sup>68</sup> Published in early 1965.

<sup>69</sup> See O'Brien (1999) *Derry and Londonderry* esp 'Our Magee problem' pp. 647-696. See also Purdie (1990) p. 165 for an account of the cross-community nature of the university campaign in Derry.

<sup>70</sup> BBC1 NI *Newsline* February 18th 2015.

<sup>71</sup> Irish prime minister and head of government.



the momentous political journey to meet the Stormont premier thus effectively ending some 40 years of unspoken hostility between the heads of government in the two Irish states. The composition of the crowd that day, the leadership of Anderson and McAteer and the setting, at the seat of power in Northern Ireland, powerfully illustrated the “Derry is the mother of us all” philosophy of Hume and the potential of what he hoped would be a transformative moment in Northern politics. McAteer had, days previously, agreed to take the formal position as leader of the Stormont opposition, a grudging acceptance that his party had accepted a need to work the system from within (as Hume had urged in his *Irish Times* pieces nine months previously) rather than opting for the abstentionism, slogans and flag-waving which Hume deplored. Looking down on the large demonstration from a first-floor vantage point along with dozens of other (mostly Unionist) Stormont MPs was Austin Currie a young Nationalist MP from east Tyrone and Gerry Fitt, the Republican Labour MP from Belfast Dock.<sup>72</sup> The significance of the protest was not lost of either of them, given the symbolism of the cause, the composition of the crowd and the challenge being presented to the Unionist government.<sup>73</sup> While richly symbolic, however, it was ultimately fruitless. The Unionist government endorsed Lockwood with O’Neill imposing a whip on his party’s backbench doubters at Stormont.<sup>74</sup>

Hume’s personal hopes for a cross-community political triumph were dashed and he was shocked that some Derry unionists backed Coleraine to the cost of their own city, recalls his wife, Pat. “This was his dream – the two communities had come together so strongly then .... He was really disillusioned after that especially when it came to light that some people who had be pro-Coleraine were actually Derry people who didn’t want the place to prosper or ‘get above itself’ .... so that the old gerrymandered system could continue.”<sup>75</sup> Ivan Cooper, a close colleague of Hume on the housing association, summed up the wider political effect of the decision: “It exposed the Unionist Party and

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<sup>72</sup> Both Fitt and Currie, along with Hume and others, were later to form the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP).

<sup>73</sup> See Farren and Haughey (eds) (2015) pp. 55-57 for an excellent first hand account.

<sup>74</sup> For more detailed local accounts of this controversy, both ‘unionist’ and ‘nationalist’ see the *Derry Journal*, February 10<sup>th</sup> 2015 <https://www.derryjournal.com/news/the-most-important-issue-to-come-before-the-city-this-century-1-6565941> and the *Londonderry Sentinel*, February 8<sup>th</sup> 2015 <https://www.londonderrysentinel.co.uk/news/the-most-important-issue-to-come-before-the-city-this-century-1-6556613>

Ó Dochartaigh (2005) p. 20 also stresses the civic, as opposed party political, nature of the issue in Derry.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with author April 18<sup>th</sup> 2014 Derry. For a contemporaneous report of this see the *Derry Journal* May 11<sup>th</sup> 1965.

what they were all about. To a large extent it was the forerunner of the civil rights [movement] and of things that were to come.”<sup>76</sup>

The import of that protest at Stormont was not lost subsequently on Hume’s biographers. White usefully quotes a Hume speech, made before the rally, at a packed protest meeting in Derry’s Guildhall, seat of local government in the city and no doubt a focal point for many of Catholic grievances. “It was a unifying speech which caught perfectly the mood of the meeting and brought the crowd to its feet in recognition of this new ideal, so powerfully expressed by someone who was unmistakably a Derryman and yet could not be slotted into any of the existing pigeon holes,” he writes.<sup>77</sup> Routledge astutely points to the political damage done to McAteer by the university decision, claiming McAteer’s tactic of allowing the progressive-sounding O’Neill some political space relatively free of Nationalist opposition to deliver reform had backfired. But Hume suffered no such damage. He was duly invited to address a group of backbench MPs in London who had organised themselves under the banner of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster (CDU) in response to the convention that no Northern Ireland issues were raised at Westminster in deference to the local parliament at Stormont. Hume’s performance at the CDU meeting had a striking effect on his audience, notes Routledge.<sup>78</sup> The speech he delivered to that audience was later re-used back in Derry, this time as an opinion piece in the local *Derry Journal*. There was “not a single academic criterion” to be found in the decision to site the new university in Coleraine, Hume wrote.<sup>79</sup> “The minority in Northern Ireland resides mainly in the western counties of Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh. To develop those areas is to develop areas opposed to the government and to lose the few Unionist seats held there.

“The plan is, therefore, to develop the strongly Unionist Belfast-Coleraine-Portadown triangle and to cause migration from West to East Ulster,” he wrote, “redistributing and scattering the minority so that the Unionist Party will not only maintain but strengthen its position.”<sup>80</sup> He further opined that the timing of the university decision was most unfortunate as it was taken when the “problem shows more hopeful signs of internal solution than ever before”. McLoughlin<sup>81</sup> notes Hume’s significant use of the heavily-

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<sup>76</sup> BBC1 NI *Newsline* February 18th 2015.

<sup>77</sup> White (1984) p. 39.

<sup>78</sup> Routledge (1997) pp. 50-52.

<sup>79</sup> *Derry Journal* August 6<sup>th</sup> 1965.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>81</sup> McLoughlin (2010) p. 9.

loaded phrase “internal solution” which today conveys a belief that the political ills of Northern Ireland could be successfully addressed solely within the context of the state. (Hume later advocated that only a more wide-ranging political approach involving both Dublin and London could ever lead to change within Northern Ireland.) But McLoughlin misses the equally significant use of the word “minority” as a descriptor of the Catholic population of Northern Ireland. Established nationalist opinion saw Ireland’s Catholics in general as “the Irish people” and therefore Northern Ireland’s Catholic population not as a minority but as part of the overall Irish majority, abandoned in another, unjustly created state against its wishes. In Northern Ireland, use of language, terminology and toponyms are significantly politically coded and are more multi-layered in meaning than is immediately apparent. Hume’s use of the term points to a desire for Northern Ireland’s nationalists to face the realities of their situation – they were a minority regardless of the rights and wrongs of history.

But while the O’Neill government’s dismissal of the University for Derry Campaign case was a bitter blow,<sup>82</sup> another personally significant setback was yet to be delivered by the local corporation in the city. A planning application by Hume and Cooper’s Derry Housing Association to ease the local chronic housing need by building more 500 council houses in a part of the city which was unionist controlled was turned down. O’Neill was certainly a reformer and did indeed seek to modernise Northern Ireland, he was also determined to maintain the unionist position throughout Northern Ireland from Stormont to Derry. Hume and others from a non-Unionist background in Northern Ireland, rather like the Irish government in Dublin under Seán Lemass, had hoped the drive for modernisation of Northern Ireland and the warming of relations across the Irish border would not fall victim to unionism’s most pressing need – to hold their position. They were wrong. Hume’s efforts, in the Credit Union movement, in teaching, in the housing association and in the University for Derry Committee were badly compromised by O’Neill and his party to maintain their control almost without regard to the cost.<sup>83</sup>

“Those things spurred him on to the political road,” claims Pat Hume. “The whole civil rights campaign – that’s why he embraced it so strongly. He felt the demands were

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<sup>82</sup> The *Derry Journal* May 11<sup>th</sup> 1965 later reported allegations made by a North Down Unionist MP at Stormont, Robert Nixon. These were that “names, faceless men” in Londonderry Unionist circles had advised the O’Neill government against siting the new university in the city, and that it had also been opposed to industrial development due to its profile as “a papist city”.

<sup>83</sup> Prince (2007) is particularly strong on this issue. See pp. 126-161.

basic human rights demands and ... regardless of what your political view is you cannot disagree with the basic demands the civil rights movement were making.”<sup>84</sup>

When the short-lived era of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights began in 1967, Hume was an obvious leader in Derry. He had the street credibility, the proven leadership track record, the network of like-minded activists not to mention the high-level press contacts and the media skills - just as Austin Currie was in Tyrone and Gerry Fitt was in Belfast. Like them both, Hume was spurred into political action by local issues. Unlike both, Hume viewed Derry’s experiences as central to the problems of 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland. “The city of Derry is in many ways a microcosm of the Irish problem,” Hume later wrote.

In it Ireland’s two major traditions meet in roughly the same strength as they do in the island as a whole. It also has a deep significance in the history of both traditions.

For the Protestant and unionist tradition it is the place where their battle was fought, the siege tradition going back to the siege of Derry in 1689, and beyond that to the walled city by the Companies of the city of London – the London connection. It was in a sense their Mecca which had to be held at all costs, a necessity which in the end proved a major factor in their downfall.

Employing a subtle change in tense, he added

From the Catholic and broadly nationalist tradition it is the place where their battle was *being* fought [emphasis added]. It was the living symbol of what they perceived to be wrong in the Northern Ireland that was created in 1920s, the place where the injustices of the unionist state were at the most blatant, and which was in effect and in the end the Achilles’ Heel of the whole unionist-based Northern Ireland experiment.<sup>85</sup>

Purdie<sup>86</sup> astutely summarises the effects of the failed University for Derry campaign by emphasising three key points. Firstly, the campaign failed because the O’Neill government was not going to relent regardless of popular cross-community protest. The issue also demonstrated that younger, educated Catholics, mostly from Derry and unmoved by the Nationalist Party, would join a cross-party campaign in support of non-partisan aims. Thirdly, and on a personal level, it demonstrated forcefully to Hume – and to others – that Unionists in Derry would diminish their own city for the sake of their party’s supremacy throughout Northern Ireland. Derry may indeed have been a “mother” to Catholics/nationalists and Protestants/unionists alike in the city, but the

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with author April 18<sup>th</sup> 2014 Derry.

<sup>85</sup> Curran (1986) p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Purdie (1990) p. 165.

unionist political supremacy would always take precedence – and do so at nationalist expense. Purdie could have added a fourth – and arguably key – point. It was that the specifics of Derry’s politics posed a threat to Unionist supremacy in that it could pit Derry Unionist against Stormont Unionist. This was a threat that neither O’Neill nor any other Unionist could take lightly. The Derry protests therefore, beginning with the university campaign and with Hume at their centre, inherently jeopardised the Unionist monolith from 1965 onwards.

## **Conclusion**

Hume’s political outlook was formed in distinctive Derry. He cannot be studied or understood without studying and understanding Derry and its “hidden history” which is liable to be overlooked by the grand national narrative approach is prone to overlook. This chapter shows that the uniqueness of Hume’s Derry was key to the development of his collective approach as exemplified by his campaigning around the University for Derry question and the foundation of the city’s Credit Union. It was this initiative which grounded his civic activity and led to his first and formative visit to the US.

Hume was thus both a product of his times and the principal architect of a new political era. The two are not mutually exclusive. He read, taught, questioned and absorbed the lessons of history, particularly in relation to his home city, at a time when many seemed content to believe solely their own version and to deride any other perspective. His views and his approach to public affairs were formed during the decade before 1968 which witnessed sweeping cultural and political change across the world, while Derry in particular and Ireland in general appeared relatively cocooned. That decade of strife left Ireland, north and south, shackled to the apparently mutually exclusive forces of irredentist Irish nationalism and implacable opposition from Ulster unionists. In contrast, Hume’s social and economic focus was such that it made little reference to “traditional” constitutional shibboleths, namely Partition and the border. By 1966 and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rising in Dublin which hastened the creation of Northern Ireland, Hume was at odds with traditional Irish nationalism and the Nationalist Party which gave voice to it. As will be shown, Hume was closer to its antithesis. Nothing mattered more than employment, housing, education and equal citizenship. Nowhere did these things matter more than in Derry.

## 2: The awkward squad.

### Hume and the difficult birth of the SDLP

‘We were not elected to form a new party.’  
*Gerry Fitt dismisses the need for the SDLP.*<sup>1</sup>

‘The formation of a new political movement based on social democratic principles.’  
*John Hume’s principal manifesto demand in his first Stormont election campaign, January 1969.*<sup>2</sup>

John Hume’s lifelong distrust of anyone other than his closest political colleagues goes part of the way to explaining the delay in delivering on his ambition announced in 1964 of a ‘national political front’.<sup>3</sup> However a new urgency was brought to bear on the situation by the events of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968, the subsequent disturbances and the calling of a Stormont election by O’Neill in February 1969. Hume’s efforts to contain the politics of the street in Derry also marked his approach to the formation of a new party. As in the heady times after October 5<sup>th</sup>, Hume displayed his ability to give voice to anti-Unionist sentiment in Derry. He also worked assiduously, sometimes desperately, to contain and control the passions of the street. These were the same qualities which he employed in the formation of his party – he wanted a new political force, but one that he could manage and control. It is necessary at this point to examine more closely the political climate from a wide nationalist perspective as this sets the scene for the eventual arrival of the SDLP and explains why it was such a convoluted and extended process.

Hume displayed something of an ambiguous attitude towards a role in electoral politics before 1968. He had clearly thought long about the failings of democratic institutions in Northern Ireland, and of course particularly in Derry, and committed many of those thoughts to paper in his *Irish Times* articles of May 1964. He may even have flirted with standing for the Nationalist party (the literature is contradictory and far from conclusive) but it seems odd that Hume would have seriously thought of representing

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<sup>1</sup> The *Irish Times* February 26<sup>th</sup> 1969.

<sup>2</sup> The *Irish News* February 7<sup>th</sup> 1969.

<sup>3</sup> The *Irish Times* May 18<sup>th</sup> 1964.

the party in the Stormont election of 1965 which he excoriated so publicly in 1964 and which, as Foster claimed, was “caught on the sterile hook of irredentism on the North”.<sup>4</sup> A decision to stand the for the Nationalists would seem even odder given Hume’s belief that “the Northern Ireland problem shows more hopeful signs of [an] internal solution than ever before”.<sup>5</sup> Such a statement was utterly at odds with the traditional stance of the anti-partitionist Nationalist party. “There has been a great growth in liberal feeling, but unfortunately, it is my fear that by the time this upsurge in tolerance and right thinking reaches the corridors of power in Northern Ireland, it will be too late for places like Derry, and irreparable danger will have been done,”<sup>6</sup> – a theme to which he returned in a speech at a New Ireland Society at Queen’s University, Belfast in October that year. There can be little doubt that Hume supported moves by Unionist prime minister Terence O’Neill to liberalise Northern Ireland, to improve cross-border relations with the Irish government in Dublin and to invest in infrastructure.

### **Catholic impatience**

The O’Neill premiership appeared to Hume, as to many Catholics, a welcome wind of change following 20 years of the reactionary Lord Brookeborough. Gone was the former prime minister’s dogged refusal to recognise the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and an utter objection to centralised planning. Gone too was the refusal to engage with the non-unionist minority in the manner which O’Neill did with broad smiles for the press.<sup>7</sup> But for all the polite ecumenism from O’Neill, Hume and others were quickly disappointed, viewing O’Neill’s approach as one built more on PR than substance. In fairness to O’Neill motorways were indeed built, but not in the west of Northern Ireland or anywhere near Derry. Railways were decommissioned, especially in the west and in Derry. A new city was planned, but was sited in Co Armagh and named after James Craig, the first Unionist prime minister of Northern Ireland. A new university was also

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<sup>4</sup> Foster (2007) p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> Address of a public meeting of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster, Fulham Town Hall, London July 1965 and quoted in Farren (2018) p. 28.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid..

<sup>7</sup> O’Neill said of his predecessor in his memoirs: “He was a man of immense personal charm. He was good company and a good raconteur and those who met him imagined that he was relaxing away from his desk. What they didn’t realise was that there was no desk. A man of limited intelligence, his strong suits were shooting and fishing in Fermanagh and when he came up [to Stormont] on Monday night or Tuesday morning it was difficult to shake him from some of his more idiotic ideas.” p. 40.

“In 20 years as prime minister he never crossed the border, never visited a Catholic school and was never received or sought a civic reception from a Catholic town.” p. 47.

envisaged – not for Derry but for the safe unionist town of Coleraine. As O’Neill praised his own government’s attraction of foreign direct investment and lauded social housing schemes in unionist Northern Ireland, Catholic outrage grew and Hume campaigned all the more loudly at their absence in his home city. O’Neill’s reforms, such as they were, and his overtures towards the Catholic community north of the border and the government south of it, had the unwitting effect of reinvigorating old passions which had been long in abeyance. The prime minister stoked both primal passions in the Unionist Party and provoked unmet expectation among the Catholic community. He later chided the deeply conservative elements on his backbenches as well as in his cabinet – “the albatross of a reluctant party hanging around my neck” - <sup>8</sup> accusing them of stalling his reform programme.

The future of Ulster was wrecked not by Treasury meanness, not by lack of forward looking, thinking and planning, but by outdated bigotry. We had all the benefits of belonging to a large economy which were denied to the Republic of Ireland, but we threw it all away in trying to maintain an impossible position of Protestant ascendancy at any price.<sup>9</sup>

But while he criticised intolerance, both in Unionist parliamentary ranks and in the hordes led by the Rev Ian Paisley who barracked him at every public opportunity, O’Neill appeared unable to recognise Catholic impatience at the slow pace of reform and the suspicion that O’Neillite liberalism wasn’t that different after all from Brookeborough’s coldly dismissive ascendancy. O’Neill later drew parallels with French revolutionary history, claiming his Unionist opponents could not see that “reactionary attitudes and survival, as the Bourbons discovered, do not go hand in hand.”<sup>10</sup> He could, perhaps, have heeded de Tocqueville’s maxim that the masses do not resort to revolution at the depths of their immiseration, rather it is at the point of rising, frustrated ambition.<sup>11</sup> O’Neill, though he may not have known it, was the personification of the moderate centre in Ulster politics. On him depended the hopes of many in the Catholic community who despaired of the parliamentary Nationalist Party on one hand and feared the IRA’s paramilitarism. The British government, too, looked to O’Neill for reform in Northern Ireland, if for no other reason to keep them out of

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<sup>8</sup> O’Neill (1972) p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> de Tocqueville, Alexis (1856) *L’Ancien Régime et la Révolution*. Translated from French in Gilbert, Stuart (1978) Gloucester, Mass. Peter Smith.



Ulster politics. So too with the Irish government. The governments of both Lemass and Lynch were wary of overt dealings with the likes of Hume for fear of upsetting O'Neill's tentative piece-meal reforms. They could hardly be seen to endorse Stormont Opposition MPs while hoping for the success of the Unionist government's programme. Given that background, it is perhaps less surprising that Hume was more than cautious about standing for election.

In Derry Hume had established himself as a central figure in the Credit Union movement, an agitator for equality in the city's public housing provision, a leader of the popular cross-community campaign in the city for it to be chosen as the site for Northern Ireland's second university, and a tireless advocate of increased investment in employment not only in Derry but in western counties of Northern Ireland. He was by now widely known and generally, though not universally, well regarded. Eamonn McCann, a radical socialist and well-known agitator on social issues in Derry was among Hume's noted critics, mostly from the revolutionary left. But McCann and colleagues from the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC), a radical socialist group which protested about the city's chronic housing shortage, also acknowledged the standing in which Hume was held. Hume "has always been reassuring," he said, "he has always been safe to follow. In that sense he is a conservative leader: safe and reassuring. People needed that at that time."<sup>12</sup>

Despite his reputation as an effective community advocate, Hume had rebuffed calls to enter representative politics in his native city. This was despite his by now well-publicised critical views of the Nationalist Party - "the head without a body type of party" he described it - as exemplified in his *Irish Times* article of May 1964.<sup>13</sup>

### **'Political stalemate' and denigration of the west**

"The need for action on a non-political front, however, is probably greater," he wrote.<sup>14</sup> "Most people feel that little can really be achieved politically in the existing political stalemate." In 1965, despite pressure to stand for election to the Stormont parliament in Belfast in opposition to both the Nationalists and the ruling Unionists, Hume declined

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<sup>12</sup> Routledge (1998) p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> The Northern Catholic. *The Irish Times*, May 18<sup>th</sup> 1964. Also available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0518/Pg008.html#Ar00113:4527FE4758184847F E4B2818>

<sup>14</sup> The Northern Catholic. *The Irish Times*, May 19<sup>th</sup> 1964. Also available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0519/Pg008.html>

saying: “I am not anxious to enter active politics” – meaning standing for election.<sup>15</sup> His pessimism stemmed from a conviction that with Unionists “holding all power in their own hands,” as he often repeated, and with Londonderry Corporation so ruthlessly gerrymandered to maintain Unionist control, there was clearly little point. It was a widely shared belief. Nationalist participation at Stormont was marked by a glum defeatism with its handful of MPs drifting pointlessly from occasional abstention to weary participation. Hume’s despair was compounded by the realisation that non-unionist opinion was spread thinly and widely across a range of organisations – the Nationalist Party, Sinn Féin (which boycotted Stormont elections but managed to elect two abstentionist MPs to Westminster in 1955), the Northern Ireland Labour Party, Irish Labour, Independent Labour, the Independent Labour Group, Ulster Liberals, National Democratic Party and Republican Labour. Each had its own localised centres of support reflecting regional differences and none of which was effectively organised and capable of electorally confronting the Unionist machine. Non-unionist MPs at Stormont could not agree to form a lasting and coherent Opposition. The “stalemate” to which Hume referred arose from the fact that, following the 1959 and 1964 Westminster elections, all Northern Ireland seats were held by Unionists. At Stormont following the 1963 election, unionists held 34 of the 52 seats giving them an all-powerful majority, just as they had won at each Stormont election since the foundation of the state. Instead, it was quite clear that Hume, and he was not alone in this, drew clear distinctions between “active politics” and activism on social and economic issues ranging from education to housing to employment and investment. Hume threw himself into his Credit Union activities, housing action and, most significantly, a campaign to have Northern Ireland’s planned second university located at the campus of the city’s Magee college on the west bank of the Foyle.

Frank Curran, editor of the *Derry Journal*, the leading nationalist-inclined local newspaper which circulated in the city and neighbouring north Co Donegal, argues convincingly that the University for Derry campaign illustrated “one of the peculiarities about Derry”, namely that the political/constitutional cleavage in the city between nationalists and unionists was marked not by general hostility but rather by “surprisingly good parochial relations”.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Routledge (1997) p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Curran (1986) *Countdown To Disaster* p. 27

He writes:

The proposal for a new university offered the Protestants an issue on which they could identify with Catholics without threat to their political control. The more liberal-minded elements embraced the opportunity with enthusiasm and the more hard-line followed carefully.... Public expression of opposition would not have been politically wise.

Terence O'Neill's government at Stormont eventually accepted recommendations to site the new university in nearby (unionist) Coleraine, rather than expanding the Magee campus, provoking outrage in the city. Already incensed by what he saw as a deliberate and politically-motivated stripping of the mainly nationalist western areas of Northern Ireland of infrastructure and public investment, Hume moved inexorably in the direction of representative politics. O'Neill's rejection of the cross-community appeal for Derry as the site for the second university was, said Curran "a significant factor in turning Hume's fertile mind towards a search for other means of tackling the inequalities of Northern society".

The violation of the West policy was to be continued under O'Neill as rigidly as under any of his predecessors. He lost all credibility in Derry as a crusading premier and reinforced among the Catholic community all over the North the conviction that the Unionist leopard could not change its spots and that change would have to be wrested from them.<sup>17</sup>

The Unionist government decision regarding the university, like earlier decisions concerning development of the new city of Craigavon in Co Armagh and the scrapping of railway infrastructure in the west, was in Hume's mind deeply provocative and tantamount to "Stormont support for minority rule in the city".<sup>18</sup> The charge was repeatedly denied by unionists, not that it mattered given their electoral dominance, and the counter-charge levelled that nationalists in general simply opted out of public life (a point conceded in part by Hume in his *Irish Times* pieces in May 1964). Brian Faulkner, O'Neill's commerce minister and later Stormont prime minister, stated:

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<sup>17</sup> Curran (1986) p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid p. 57. For a detailed account of the University For Derry Campaign see O'Brien, Gerard (ed) (1999) 'Our Magee Problem: Stormont and the second university' in *Derry and Londonderry: History and Society*. Dublin. Geography Publications. Hume also campaigned for a public housing scheme in Derry which was also refused. For more on this see Ó Dochartaigh, Niall 'Housing and Conflict: Social Change and Collective Action in Derry in the 1960s', also in O'Brien *Derry and Londonderry*.

“Allegations that nationalist areas were deliberately neglected are totally without any foundation in fact.”

There was actually government bias towards these areas: more generous financial inducements were available to firms prepared to go to the predominantly Catholic border areas such as Newry, Strabane and Londonderry than were available elsewhere.....[T]he economic consultants who drew up the 1970-5 Development Plan concluded ‘the main facts about the period since 1964 do not support the view that the West has been neglected in public expenditure’.<sup>19</sup>

Hume brushed off criticisms that he opted not to stand for election to the Stormont parliament in 1965 and instead quit his teaching job in 1967 and turned down a post at Magee college<sup>20</sup> to start up Atlantic Harvest, a salmon processing company, in an effort to boost community employment while persisting with his community campaigns.<sup>21</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter repeatedly warns against what he terms the “compartmentalisation” of affairs, arguing that “society,” “the economy” and “politics” are far from separate spheres.<sup>22</sup> Building on Ferriter’s observation, it is argued here that Hume understood fully that social issues such as housing, the location of university campuses, welfare and education were not divorced from “politics”.<sup>23</sup> He did not address the problems of his community and his city at the expense of politics, rather his Credit Union involvement and housing agitation, his salmon processing enterprise and his campaigning for the expansion of Magee college were all deeply political (in the widest sense of the word) and interconnected. In this he was at one with Eamonn McCann who argued that in Derry ownership of a house meant a local government vote, and a vote could be used to alter the delicately constructed and maintained unionist predominance on Londonderry Corporation. Hume knew that state funded second- and especially third-level education had great emancipatory powers which were central to the empowering concept of citizenship shared among those protesting against Unionist rule

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<sup>19</sup> Faulkner (1978) p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> See White (1984) p. 36

<sup>21</sup> Close colleagues at Atlantic Harvest such as Michael Canavan believe Hume was building up the business to help fund an intended move into the electoral arena.

<sup>22</sup> Address to the Patrick MacGill Summer School, Glenties, Co Donegal July 29<sup>th</sup> 2013. Available at <http://www.macgillsummerschool.com/the-hollowness-of-the-rhetoric-of-irish-republicanism/> He regularly rails against ‘compartmentalisation’ in his newspaper columns, for example <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/diarmaid-ferriter-paddy-harte-s-courage-is-still-needed-1.3353184>

<sup>23</sup> See Hume’s speech to a civil rights rally in Derry’s Guildhall Square on October 19<sup>th</sup> 1968: “We are a peaceful and dignified people ... we are a determined people and we will stand for these social, economic *and political* injustices no longer.” [Emphasis added] Reported in the *Derry Journal* October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1968 and in Purdie (1990) p. 191.

from the mid 1960s onwards. All of these issues then were inherently political – a point shared by Terence O’Neill in his autobiography where he states that state education to grammar school and higher levels “had a dramatic effect on the rising generation. An effect which many people of my generation were quite unable to comprehend when it hit them in the late sixties and early seventies”.<sup>24</sup> The deliberate denigration by Stormont of the mainly nationalist west (and particularly Derry) in favour of the mainly unionist east by as Hume saw it, was not therefore a question merely of social and economic policy but also one of politics. The oft-repeated story of Hume’s father advising his 10-year-old son on encountering a Nationalist Party rally in 1947 “not to get involved in that stuff... because you can’t eat a flag”<sup>25</sup> is not an example of a stern paternal directive to avoid public representation. Sam Hume, keenly aware of his second-class citizenship thanks to chronic unemployment and sectarian discrimination, had been deeply involved in letter-writing and advocacy on behalf of his equally discriminated-against neighbours. Rather it was an exhortation to shun empty rhetoric, simplistic nationalism and flag-waving as alternatives to effective action. By February 1964 there was clearly a mood among the wider Catholic community for such action. Such a mood was signalled by an inept TV performance by a Nationalist MP at Stormont, James O’Reilly, in discussion with the more TV-savvy Unionist minister Brian Faulkner. The bitter response to the unfortunate O’Reilly’s inability to articulate and substantiate any sense of Catholic grievance typified the failure of the Nationalist Party in the eyes of its electorate. Michael McKeown told Michael Viney of the *Irish Times*: “The Unionist ran rings around the Nationalist – it was humiliating to watch. Next day I was inundated with telephone calls from Catholics who had finally reached the point of exasperation.”<sup>26</sup> Conn and Patricia McCluskey cite this as motivation for their Campaign for Social Justice<sup>27</sup> and Hume himself was outraged enough to refer to it in his landmark *Irish Times* articles later that month.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> O’Neill (1972) p. 29 and Routledge (1997) p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> See McLoughlin (2010) p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> The *Irish Times* May 5th 1964, p8. Also available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0505/Pg008.html> See also McKeown (1986).

<sup>27</sup> See Van Voris (1975).

<sup>28</sup> The *Irish Times* May 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 1964.

## October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968

Whether or not Hume was planning privately throughout the second half of the 1960s to enter the electoral arena at some stage is a moot point. What is more relevant is that the key events of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968<sup>29</sup> in Derry and their immediate aftermath dramatically transformed the political climate at a stroke. Worldwide television images of unrestrained use of police batons against demonstrators marching under the banner of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA),<sup>30</sup> among them three Westminster Labour MPs, demanding universal suffrage at local government level and an end to systematic discrimination had a seismic effect throughout Northern Ireland – and beyond.

Hume had been on the march, which was banned by the Stormont government, though not in a leadership role. McCann insists that Hume had adopted a cautious one-foot-on-the-pavement-the-other-on-the-road approach, adding that the day belonged to the leftist who had been active in Derry over preceding months. “All of us in the group that organised the 1968 march saw ourselves not as nationalists or unionists, but as leftists,” he told the BBC.

We looked for example and inspiration, not backwards into Irish history, but outwards into the wider world, for example, the black civil rights movement in the United States, the campaign against the American war on Vietnam, the student uprising in France and the resistance of the people of Prague to Soviet imperialism.<sup>31</sup>

Whatever Hume’s reactions were to the events of October 5<sup>th</sup>, he kept them to himself. His memoirs make no reference whatsoever to the day and he is not quoted by either the *Derry Journal* or the *Londonderry Sentinel* or indeed any other newspaper. But, as became clear, his subsequent actions did his talking for him. Unknown to the main organisers of the October 5<sup>th</sup> march, Hume contacted others whom he had worked with on the University for Derry campaign and on other issues. He formed the Derry

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<sup>29</sup> See [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/5/newsid\\_4286000/4286818.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/5/newsid_4286000/4286818.stm) <http://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1031-civil-rights-movement-1968-9/1034-derry-5-october-1968/> For considered analysis Prince (2007) pp. 1-7, 156-165; McCann (1993) pp. 83-118; Hennessey, (2005) pp. 137-144; Purdie (1990) pp. 138-146; Currie (2004) pp. 109-112 - are particularly readable and informative.

<sup>30</sup> NICRA was formally established in Belfast in 1967 with the aims of countering discrimination in local government, electoral law, housing and job allocation. It had many origins not least a meeting in August 1966 of the Wolfe Tone Society (named after the father figure of Irish republicanism) and members of the IRA after the failure of its border campaign in 1962. See Bardon (2001), English (2003), and Purdie (1990). It can also be traced to the Campaign for Social Justice founded by Conn and Patricia McCluskey in Co Tyrone in 1964.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-45758816>

Citizens' Action Committee (DCAC), a deliberate counterpoint to McCann's action group, and planned a subsequent rally which he could control.<sup>32</sup> It was clear that Hume's intentions were to accommodate the spirit of the October 5<sup>th</sup> march but in a way which looked to controllable outcomes. His other intention was to promote himself as a responsible street protest leader, blocking McCann, and striving to negate McCann's ideology. It was no accident that Hume declared at the subsequent DCAC rally: "It has been said against this movement that its purpose is to unite Ireland and to unite the working class... We are not dealing with political issues. Civil Rights is not a political issue but a moral issue."<sup>33</sup> Hume may not have seen Civil Rights as 'political', but everyone else did – the protesters, unionists in Derry and, importantly, the O'Neill government at Stormont. The governments in London and Dublin watched in horror in the aftermath of October 5<sup>th</sup> unsure how to respond, while the Stormont government saw in the march not so much a left wing challenge as an existential threat to the Northern Ireland state and the Union. Coverage of the trouble was widespread and comment was almost universally critical of the police.<sup>34</sup> Key members of O'Neill's cabinet praised the RUC and castigated the marchers.<sup>35</sup> This prised wider the fissure in the O'Neill cabinet at Stormont between the premier himself on one side and Brian Faulkner and William Craig on the other. Some backed the Northern Ireland premier's instincts to press ahead with reforms to quell the situation which he duly did under considerable pressure from British Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Cabinet minutes reveal that O'Neill endorsed the legitimacy of the civil rights campaign: "...there are anti-partitionist agitators prominently at work," he told his government, "but can any of us truthfully say in the confines of this room that the minority has no grievance calling for remedy?"<sup>36</sup> Others in Unionist administration others dug their heels in. William Craig, the home affairs minister who had banned the civil rights march in Derry on October 5<sup>th</sup> said he "wouldn't have given two hoots for the (British) Labour MPs who were present, or the TV pictures".<sup>37</sup> Brian Faulkner, in a speech delivered on the same day as the ill-fated march expressed his "sincere respect" for those on the march

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<sup>32</sup> See Ó Dochartaigh (2005) pp. 19-23, and Purdie (1990) pp. 189-97.

<sup>33</sup> *Derry Journal* October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1968.

<sup>34</sup> See Fergus Pyle's report, *The Irish Times* p.1 October 7<sup>th</sup> 1968. Also available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1968/1007/Pg001.html#Ar00105>

<sup>35</sup> Faulkner later referred to "world-wide publicity – carefully organised by the instigators of the march". See *Memoirs of a Statesman* p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> McKittrick and McVea (2000) p. 43.

<sup>37</sup> McKittrick and McVea (2000) p. 42.

who were dedicated solely to the precepts of civil rights and who sought to avoid “provocation or civil strife”. Yet he later opined: “[NICRA] became for nationalists and republicans a new way of getting at the Unionists and discrediting the Stormont government in the eyes of the world.”<sup>38</sup> There can be no doubt that the march organisers in Derry were indeed intent on confrontation with the state. “The Civil Rights Association was a liberal body with no pretensions to revolutionary politics,” wrote McCann. “But then we were paying little attention to them. Their sponsorship of the march was nominal.” Prince claims: “[William] Craig, the RUC, and NICRA were acting out the roles that the Derry radicals had scripted for them”.<sup>39</sup> However Austin Currie, a rising star in nationalist politics following a high-profile housing protest at Caledon, Co Tyrone in June that year, contends that a Derry civil rights march, far from being conceived solely by young Derry revolutionaries intent on “mayhem,” to use McCann’s phrase, was being discussed by those he had joined on the successful (and peaceful) Coalisland to Dungannon NICRA march the previous August in Co Tyrone. He claims:

It had already been suggested prior to the 24<sup>th</sup> of August that the next march would be in Derry. We wanted to call it a civil rights march and we wanted [NICRA] nominally to be in charge but we will provide the stewards and all the organisation locally. If this works out it could be the first of a number of them.<sup>40</sup>

Disputes over “ownership” of the Derry march aside, there seems little doubt that all involved knew the October 5<sup>th</sup> demonstration, planned to enter Derry’s walls which represented a citadel to unionism and from which all non-unionist marches had long been banned, represented a clear challenge to the authority of the Northern Ireland state. Unionists, like the city’s nationalists and Hume in particular, also displayed a version of Derryness.<sup>41</sup> (“No Surrender” was originally a battle cry of Derry’s Apprentice Boys as they slammed the gates to the forces of the Catholic King James who laid siege to the walled city in 1689. It therefore related originally and specifically to Derry rather than to some Protestant vision of ‘Ulster’.) The response of Stormont and the police showed that the state’s authority was vulnerable. What could not have been known by

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<sup>38</sup> Faulkner (1978) pp. 47-8.

<sup>39</sup> Prince (2007) p. 160.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with author, January 21<sup>st</sup> 2014 in Allenwood, Co Kildare.

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 1.



anyone at the time was the speed with which the authority of the Unionist government would collapse.

October 5<sup>th</sup> in effect shattered the political stalemate so complained-of by Hume in 1964. Within days of the Derry civil rights march, Hume and Ivan Cooper, a close associate of Hume who is also a Protestant and former member of both the Unionist party and later the Northern Ireland Labour Party, speedily formed the Derry Citizens Action Committee (DCAC) to act as a moderating counterbalance to McCann's more radical Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) which had initiated the Derry protest march under the auspices of NICRA. DCAC was speedily formed to provide a controlled outlet for Catholic anger in Derry post October 5<sup>th</sup> while striving to minimise the risk of an all-out conflagration in which civilians would be the losers. A second, less obvious but equally vital, objective was to maintain a strong sense of community solidarity and unity. Both objectives were formed in the Derry political environment and became hallmarks of the Hume political style which were evident for most of the following 30 years of his career. "If I am going to fight a battle, I want to fight it in my own area," he said. "No matter what we do we must stay together. Let our first principle in any decision we make be that we do it together."<sup>42</sup> Hume displayed a career-long distrust of people and situations he could not control which helps explain why it took 18 months for the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) to emerge following the electoral demise of the Nationalist Party even though it was a long-stated aim of Hume to create a new political force. McCann, though an opponent of Hume, again praised his ability to make common cause with the people of the nationalist Bogside who were incensed at the police handling of the October 5<sup>th</sup> demonstration, and who were also unsure how to give expression to their anger.

He could go out and march behind Hume, confident that he would not be led into violence, in no way nervous about the political ideas of the men at the front of the procession and certain that he was, by his presence, making a contribution to the struggle. The [Derry Citizens' Action Committee] did not challenge the consciousness of the Catholic masses. It updated the expression of it, injected life into it and made it relevant to a changed situation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Irish Times* January 9<sup>th</sup> 1969 p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> McCann (1980) p. 47.

Hume sought to consolidate his prominent role in Derry via the DCAC with a view to containing public passions in the city and avoiding civil conflict. As Ó Dochartaigh shows, many Protestants in Derry harboured grave doubts about the Civil Rights campaign as the *Londonderry Sentinel*, the main unionist local paper in the city, makes clear.<sup>44</sup> But there was also some admiration among them for the control exerted on the streets by Hume's DCAC.<sup>45</sup>

The positions adopted by DCAC included an agreed moratorium on street demonstrations and protests (out of fear that they could not be controlled) and the deployment of stewards on those carefully planned street events to keep the risk of a spontaneous clash with police to a minimum. This contain-and-control approach worked in the febrile atmosphere after October 5<sup>th</sup> appeared to work – at least in the short term. Hume's DCAC managed to have called off an attempt by McCann to have the October 5<sup>th</sup> march re-run the following weekend in favour of a planned and closely marshalled sit-down protest on October 19<sup>th</sup> at Guildhall Square, significantly *outside* the city walls. The protest passed off peacefully following the adoption of a vague declaration calling for universal suffrage in local authority elections – without the hated property qualification – the granting of civil rights and the announcement of a significant social house-building programme in the city. These demands, as stated by Ó Dochartaigh, “hardly constituted a civil rights charter,”<sup>46</sup> but no doubt, Hume intended more to provide an immediate outlet for peaceful, civic protest so soon after the shock of October 5<sup>th</sup> than to provide a detailed list of demands. The sit-down protest was followed on November 2<sup>nd</sup> by a heavily controlled re-run of the original October 5<sup>th</sup> march by 15 or 16<sup>47</sup> DCAC committee members, followed by 4-5,000 others walking on the footpaths, which did congregate peacefully at the Diamond inside the city walls. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human rights was read out by the 11-year-old son of Eamonn Melaugh, one of McCann's closest associates and the protesters then sang *We Shall Overcome* – the anthem of the US civil rights campaign.<sup>48</sup> A further and much larger march was staged on November 16<sup>th</sup>. It too was banned by home affairs minister William Craig, who had banned the October 5<sup>th</sup> demonstration. Determined to demonstrate that DCAC could defy Craig, organise a large and

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<sup>44</sup> *Londonderry Sentinel* November 6<sup>th</sup> 1968.

<sup>45</sup> *Londonderry Sentinel* November 20<sup>th</sup> 1968.

<sup>46</sup> Ó Dochartaigh (2005) p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> Purdie (1990) and Ó Dochartaigh (2005) dispute the actual number.

<sup>48</sup> For an account of the six weeks following the October 5<sup>th</sup> march, see Purdie (1990) pp. 192-197.

disciplined parade, and display its own moral authority, Hume addressed some 15,000 marchers inside Derry's walls:

We have broken the ban. This was an effort by Mr Craig to show the people of Derry to be divided and incapable of peaceful protest. We intend to throw that back in his teeth. We are within the [city] walls and will stay here. I am not a law-breaker by nature, but I am proud to stand here with 15,000 Derry people who have broken a law which is in disrepute. I invite Mr Craig to arrest the lot of us."<sup>49</sup>

However the march attracted a loyalist counter demonstration and at which it was apparent how high the risk was of a breakdown of order.<sup>50</sup> The rest of that tense month was marked by a series of highly localised and often spontaneous protests any one of which could have triggered street violence and which saw Hume's by now overstretched DCAC carrying out "fire-brigade operations"<sup>51</sup> in an effort to keep a lid on the rapidly rising activism of many from the Bogside.

Civil rights, as this key period showed, was still overwhelmingly a Derry campaign rather than a NICRA-sponsored Northern Ireland-wide protest. Despite this intense localism, there were increasing signs of nervousness at Stormont but also in Dublin and London and growing impatience in Belfast. It was obvious that DCAC lacked any enduring authority on the streets in Derry to contain passions without imminent positive and effective moves by O'Neill's government to reform. Hume was, in effect, relying on the cabinet at Stormont he had criticised remorselessly since 1964 to underscore his leadership position in Derry by working against their instincts and granting the demands of the increasingly restive people of the city. The needed reforms were not to materialise, mostly due to the cautious O'Neill's growing weakness as head of a government with widening splits between gradualist reformers such as himself and unionist hard-liners the most prominent of which was William Craig. Meanwhile in Belfast People's Democracy (PD), a more radical student protest organisation and natural allies of McCann, was formed at Queen's University by Bernadette Devlin and Michael Farrell among others in the week after the October 5<sup>th</sup> march. The PD adopted a revolutionary Marxist and strongly nationalist standpoint. While Hume worked to quell passions in the Bogside, initially with some success in the final weeks of 1968, he had much less sway over younger radicals from Queen's and right across Northern

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<sup>49</sup> Routledge (1998) pp. 72-3.

<sup>50</sup> *Derry Journal* November 19<sup>th</sup> 1968.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid* p. 194.

Ireland and his insistence on unity founded on his personal political credo came to little. DCAC, which did so much to coral tensions in Derry, soon found that its authority was quickly draining away.

Terence O'Neill, styled himself as a reforming Unionist prime minister, anxious to improve community relations and, through that process, hopefully convince more Catholics and nationalists in Northern Ireland of the value of the Union with Britain. Chosen by his party in 1963 to succeed the reactionary Basil Brooke who had held ministerial office at Stormont for 33 years, nearly 20 of them as prime minister. Like Brooke, O'Neill was of gentry stock. Born in England and educated at Eton and Sandhurst, he followed the best Unionist traditions by using his British army title and extolling his membership of the exclusively Protestant Orange Order. His cabinet was marked by divisions between those who backed his well-intentioned but incremental reforms and those, such as Home Affairs minister William Craig, who urged resistance and viewed the civil rights agitation as an ill-disguised Irish republican plot to break the Union with London. Brian Faulkner, O'Neill's Minister of Commerce, had lost out to the more blue-blooded O'Neill for the leadership in 1963 despite showing more acute political skills. Consequently, every rumoured plot to oust the mild-mannered if over-promoted O'Neill throughout the mid 1960s appeared to have Faulkner somewhere near the centre. In a quiescent Northern Ireland O'Neill had little problem holding on to the office he described as difficult and lonely. But the Northern Ireland he attempted to govern after October 5<sup>th</sup> highlighted his unsuitability. His planned mild reforms and genuine desire for better community, as well as cross-border, relations seemed hopelessly inadequate. Direct appeals to the electorate via TV addresses such as his "Crossroads" speech<sup>52</sup> could gloss over the fact that visiting Catholic schools, smiling for photographs with nuns and meeting bishops could not cover his inadequacy in the eyes of the nationalist community, particularly in Derry.<sup>53</sup> Forced to confront his cabinet rivals, O'Neill sacked Craig – "a narrow-mined sectarian"<sup>54</sup> - and attempted to press on with a series of reforms pressed on him by an increasingly impatient British prime minister in Harold Wilson who was no doubt frustrated that a British government was being dragged back in to Northern Ireland affairs in the wake of the initial Derry

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVAqAsAUxmY>

<sup>53</sup> *The Derry Journal* November 26<sup>th</sup> 1968 equated O'Neill's efforts to reform Northern Ireland as a concession to the Civil Rights campaign.

<sup>54</sup> O'Neill (1972) p. 104.

disturbances. O'Neill later admitted such measures amounted to little more than a "small, timid reform package"<sup>55</sup> John Taylor, a young Stormont MP, first elected in 1965 and later a Stormont minister and member of the House of Lords, summed up O'Neill's lack of suitability for high office as at time of rapid change: "[I] think the days of being led by Anglo-Irish people were over, but the Ulster Unionist Party had not recognised the change in politics in Northern Ireland."<sup>56</sup>

The first week of 1969 saw the PD organise a march from Belfast to Derry to demand civil rights. An ambush a short distance from Derry city at Burntollet by an organised loyalist crowd which included off-duty officers from the B Specials<sup>57</sup> left many injured.<sup>58</sup> The attack transformed the march into a much more significant protest that it would otherwise have been. Thousands greeted what was left of the original protest and there was further significant sectarian strife in Derry as the influence of Hume's DCAC evaporated. Michael Heney reported in the *Irish Times* that DCAC stewards were "perhaps for the first time, helpless" in trying to ease the potential for trouble on the streets of Derry. "Provocation had gone too far," he wrote. "The passions of the Catholics were to be unleashed and the time for listening to the leaders was, for the moment, past."<sup>59</sup> This forced Hume's hand. The era of community campaigns, street protest and carefully managed demonstration risked morphing into all-out, anarchic civil disturbance. "We realised how very quickly that you can only march people up to the top of the hill and down again so often," said Seamus Mallon of the decision to "go political".

So the civil rights marches became redundant and we realised that if you are going to change things, which we had to do, then you had to have the power to change them. And the only way to power was through the ballot box.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid p. 107.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-21875466>

<sup>57</sup> The "B" Specials were a special reserve force of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Established after the foundation of the state, they were exclusively Protestant and came to symbolise Protestant Ulster's ability to defend itself from republicans. The Specials were hated by ordinary nationalists and their disbandment was a key demand of NICRA in 1968.

<sup>58</sup> See Egan and McCormack (1969) *Burntollet*. London. LRS Publications. The Cameron inquiry also examined Burntollet as part of investigations into the incidents of 1968-9. See Lord Cameron Cmd. 532 (1969) *Disturbances in Northern Ireland. Report of the Commission appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland*. Belfast. HMSO.

<sup>59</sup> *The Irish Times*, February 21<sup>st</sup> 1969 p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> *Hume* produced by Trevor Birney, directed by Michael Fanning for Below The Radar TV. Broadcast by BBC1 Northern Ireland September 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.

### **Hume stands for Stormont**

A decision to stand for election became necessary not just for Hume but also for others from across the spectrum of non-unionist opinion who were involved in the wider civil rights campaign across Northern Ireland. There was nowhere else to take popular protest other than the electoral arena. Hume contested the snap Stormont election, called by O'Neill in a doomed attempt to re-establish his authority within the divided Unionist cabinet, with the bulk of the Unionist electorate and with the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland whose favour he had courted since 1963 with the offer of reforms. The February '69 election kick-started a range of political careers on the anti-unionist side and marked the beginning of the gradual disintegration of the once all-powerful Unionist Party. It also provided the Rev Ian Paisley and his followers an opportunity to oppose the hitherto monolithic Unionist Party from the religious right.

Hume announced his candidacy as an Independent in the Foyle constituency standing in opposition to both the Nationalist party leader Eddie McAteer and Eamonn McCann who ran under the banner of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. Borrowing heavily from the *Just Society* policy platform developed in the Republic by opposition party Fine Gael, Hume outlined his manifesto. In a press statement he set out four priorities, not one of which touched on the wider constitutional question or referred even obliquely to Irish reunification or the Union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain:

1. To work for the formation of a new political movement based on social democratic principles with open membership and elected executives to allow complete involvement of the people in the process of decision-making;
2. The new movement must provide what has been seriously lacking at Stormont, namely a strong energetic opposition to conservatism, and pursue radical social and economic policies;
3. The new movement must be non-sectarian and committed to rooting out a fundamental evil in our society, sectarian division, and;
4. The new movement must be committed to the ideal that the future of Northern Ireland should be decided by its people, and no change in its constitution accepted except by the consent of the people.<sup>61</sup>

Elsewhere, Paddy O'Hanlon stood as an Independent in the Hume mould in South Armagh, and Ivan Cooper ran in Mid Londonderry. Michael Farrell and Bernadette

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<sup>61</sup> The *Irish Times* February 7<sup>th</sup> 1969. See also Hennessey (2005) p. 195.

Devlin also opted to run as PD candidates in the constituencies of leading Unionist figures. Devlin stood in her native Tyrone, opposing Maj James Chichester-Clarke, a distant cousin of O'Neill, and the man who within three months replaced him as prime minister, while Farrell – like the Rev Ian Paisley - ran against O'Neill in Bannside, Co Antrim. For the Unionist prime minister it was his first contested election as he had been sent to Stormont unopposed at every poll since 1946. This fact alone was emblematic of the new forces aligned against the Unionist party. Hume easily defeated both McAteer, thus effectively killing off the moribund Nationalist Party as a fighting force in Northern Ireland, as well as the radical McCann. The Foyle seat had been “waiting there to fall into his arms,” states Austin Currie, somewhat dismissively.<sup>62</sup> It was “low-hanging fruit”. The results of the poll in Foyle tend to support such a claim, Hume won 8,920 votes to McAteer's 5,267. McCann polled 1,993 and lost his deposit. Hume's associates, Ivan Cooper and Paddy O'Hanlon, won seats as Independents, soundly defeating their respective Nationalist rivals, but the arrival of others on to the Opposition benches at Stormont showed the spread of opinion and extent of competition for the wider Catholic vote. The performances by Devlin and Farrell, while unsuccessful, illustrated the effectiveness of the PD as an emerging force just over four months since its foundation.

The effects of October 5<sup>th</sup> were thus seismic. They marked the end of the comfortable dominance the Unionist party had at Stormont since the foundation of the state. From a British perspective, the Irish question, which had bedevilled Westminster politics between 1886 and 1920 and which had effectively been quarantined by Partition in Ireland, was now back on the table and in a more bothersome and convoluted form than previously given the presence this time of a sovereign government in Dublin, the emergence of a new and potentially more deadly IRA and the international media glare. Within four months of October 5<sup>th</sup> O'Neill felt compelled to call a snap Stormont election in a failed attempt to bolster his waning position within his own cabinet. Within six months he had resigned, notably because of internal Unionist opposition to his plan to establish universal local government franchise, and within 10 months Northern Ireland was perched on the precipice of civil war with the British army called to police the streets of Derry and Belfast.

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with author. Allenwood, Co Kildare January 21<sup>st</sup> 2014.

### **The fall of O'Neill and the rise of the SDLP**

The fall of O'Neill represented much more than the failure of a moderate reform programme. The brittle centre political ground had fractured, leaving the British and Irish governments floundering with no-one in office they could enthusiastically support and who could deliver on the reforms both were demanding. Both the British and Irish governments' tactics in regard to the crisis in Northern Ireland were built on a premise of "working through" the government in Belfast. The O'Neill government was therefore to an extent their combined instrument through which change could be fostered. With O'Neill gone and replaced as prime minister by his more right-wing and less able distant cousin Maj James Chichester-Clark that approach began to fall apart.<sup>63</sup> The entire political establishment based at Stormont was also increasingly held by opposition MPs, civil rights campaigners and, perhaps more covertly, senior officials in the British as well as the Irish political systems, as incapable of enacting sufficient and swift reform. Dublin moved to realign its approach by turning more towards direct dealings with the British government and remodelled its diplomatic approach to that end. Constitutional politicians like Hume, Cooper, Currie and others on the nationalist Opposition benches at Stormont, decided a policy of further civil rights demonstrations should be set aside because of the risk of further street disturbances. A new party which could deal with the dramatically altered network of power between London, Dublin and Belfast was seen as the only way forward.

The collapse of the old Stormont power-structures and the single authority of the Unionist Party prompted a spate of party-building. 1970 saw the arrival not only of the SDLP, but also the avowedly cross-community and mildly unionist Alliance Party and the Rev Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party. In the shadows, the newly formed Provisional IRA, its title derived from the Provisional Government named in the Proclamation of 1916, prepared to make Northern Ireland ungovernable.

### **Sunningdale**

The British government, having prorogued the 'old' Stormont parliament in March 1972, moved to direct rule of Northern Ireland from Westminster in preparation for a

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<sup>63</sup> Fanning (2001) is particularly strong on this point in his assessment of O'Neill's fall.



new power-sharing initiative. This followed in 1974 and involved the SDLP, centrist Alliance Party, and members of Faulkner's Unionist Party forming a cross-party Executive with Faulkner as leader and Fitt as deputy. Known simply by the journalistic shorthand 'Sunningdale' it comprised also a Council of Ireland, a North-South body designed to foster cross-border relations, greater harmony and integration across both parts of Ireland and, crucially, to give institutional expression to the desire of nationalists to have recognition of the so-called Irish dimension. Hume was particularly enthusiastic about the Council of Ireland as, for him, it addressed what he saw as the core of the Northern Ireland problem. This was that unionists needed to be pressed to seek accommodation not only with their Northern nationalist neighbours but also with the people and government of the Republic. Two stand-out works by Kerr and Dorr offer exhaustive histories of the efforts to agree the 1974 settlement which combined power-sharing and an Irish dimension.<sup>64</sup> Dorr, then an Irish diplomat closely involved in the negotiations, records in detail the nuances of the negotiations and gives Hume the primacy he merits when it comes to assessment of the SDLP position. Dorr notes that Hume was insisting as early as 1971 that any new replacement for Stormont must be on a power-sharing basis and not on the simple majoritarian model as represented by Westminster. "This approach undoubtedly reflected the thinking of John Hume," he writes. "[T]he concept of power sharing in new institutions, in particular, may have originated with him and been developed by [Eamonn] Gallagher..."<sup>65</sup> It is Kerr who uncovers Hume's appeal (as early as 1972) that the British government should state publicly it had "no national interest which opposes the reunification of Ireland,"<sup>66</sup> The similarity between this and the British government's later declaration of no "selfish, strategic or economic interest"<sup>67</sup> in Northern Ireland and would facilitate unification if the population wished it is particularly striking. At the very least it illustrates Hume's persistence on a fundamental principle.

Kerr's account, equally exhaustive, is particularly strong in recording the differences between Hume and many of his party colleagues, particularly in relation to his insistence on the standing of the proposed Council of Ireland. His trawling of the

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<sup>64</sup> Kerr. (2011) *The Destructors* and Dorr (2017) *Sunningdale*.

<sup>65</sup> Dorr pp. 81-82.

<sup>66</sup> UK National Archives FCO 87/114 O'Sullivan to Whitelaw

<sup>67</sup> Speech by Peter Brooke, NI Secretary of State November 9<sup>th</sup> 1990. For more on this see [https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markdevenport/2010/11/selfish\\_strategic\\_and\\_economic.htm](https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markdevenport/2010/11/selfish_strategic_and_economic.htm)

official record highlights and reflects the divisions between Hume and his Belfast colleagues on this vital question. Evident from these accounts is Hume's single-mindedness on the elements he saw as essential to a 'successful' settlement. Time and again the British and Irish official archives point to Hume's forthright position on what did and what did not amount to an acceptable political arrangement capable of settling the constitutional question.<sup>68</sup>

The Sunningdale settlement eventually failed in the face of an unconstitutional loyalist workers' strike led by those opposed to both power sharing and the imposition of any all-Ireland body in what Kerr describes as "a very un-British coup".<sup>69</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The birth of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) had been a long and troubled one. Its roots can be traced back as far as the meeting in Maghera, Co Armagh in 1964 which established the National Political Front – a counterpoint to the Nationalist Party which was widely held to be ineffective and ill-organised. The Front collapsed in disarray just a year later. The SDLP is more directly linked to the National Democratic Party, but this attempt to provide a civil rights-based, left-of-centre party with a pragmatic approach to partition and eventual reunification was fatally hampered by the Nationalist Party's insistence that it limit its election activity to Stormont constituencies where there were no sitting Nationalist MPs. Effectively corralled into unionist areas, the NDP remained more of a political think-tank than a fighting electoral force prior to the February 1969 election. Hume had "campaigning strongly on the need for a new political party to provide what he called a real Opposition," reported the *Irish Times*<sup>70</sup> which, unlike other Dublin titles, had deployed a wide range of journalists to cover the Northern situation. But there were serious problems standing in the path of a united Opposition party. Hume was cautious about any link with Republican Labour, led by Westminster MP Gerry Fitt – a highly visible casualty of the October 5<sup>th</sup> march – and which now had two MPs at Stormont. Yet he also had to concede that it was Fitt, more than any other political figure, who had highlighted the Northern Ireland problem on the floor of the House of Commons since his election in 1966. In doing so, Fitt was

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<sup>68</sup> See NAI Taois 2005/151/696, Taois 2005/7/626. See also UK National Archives Prem 15/1694, Prem 16/150.

<sup>69</sup> Kerr (2011) P. xiv.

<sup>70</sup> The *Irish Times* February 26<sup>th</sup> 1969 p. 9.

therefore key to shattering the decades-old ‘convention’ by which Westminster absented itself from Northern Ireland affairs, leaving the Unionist Party in near total control for nearly 50 years. Thus, the new political force that Hume and Currie insisted was necessary could not be conceived without Fitt.

On a political level Fitt was very wary of those from outside his Belfast base because of what he saw as their more Irish nationalist standpoint which ran counter to his professed socialism. His biographer Michael Murphy aptly describes him as a “political chameleon”<sup>71</sup> and a major and influential figure who was, at the same time, a complicated and apparently contradictory personality. He identified both as Irish republican and socialist and perceived himself as a republican socialist in the sense of James Connolly, the 1916 rebel who viewed as co-equal the cause of Ireland and the cause of labour. But in truth he was most comfortable in the company of British socialists in the Labour Party as Westminster and it was with them he exercised most influence. He did not have anything like the same relations with the Irish Labour Party and seemed suspicious of Hume-style social democracy with its emphasis on community self-help and entrepreneurship. Fitt insisted, curiously, that it was the newly elected Independent MPs, Hume, O’Hanlon and Cooper who placed too much emphasis on Irish nationalism because of their origins outside Belfast, in border constituencies and west of the Bann. Certainly of the three it was Currie who voiced the strongest affinity to nationalism – “The spirit of Nationality has never been higher in the North”<sup>72</sup> – but Hume avoided such language and stuck to the principles outlined in his 1964 analysis of Northern Ireland in the *Irish Times*. Cooper, with his Unionist Party-Orange Order and NI Labour Party background could never have been realistically accused of old Nationalist Party-style green sympathies. Fitt also disliked what he perceived as the middle-class pretensions of those who were pushing for a new and united party. Currie and O’Hanlon had degrees and Hume had two. Murphy’s biography is replete with dismissive references to the “fucking schoolmasters”<sup>73</sup> who would make up the SDLP and the new and more confident Catholic intelligentsia who supported them. He, initially at least, opposed the formation of a new all-embracing non-unionist party claiming in the wake of the February election: “[p]eople are now voting for

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<sup>71</sup> See Murphy (2007).

<sup>72</sup> As quoted by Campbell (2015) p. 26.

<sup>73</sup> Murphy (2007). See Bloomfield (1994) p. 31 which also contains this reference. McKeown, Ciaran (1984) pp. 30-31 records Fitt’s portrayal of Hume as one of the “bunch of green teachers”.

personalities and not party manifestos”. He added: “I see a radical alliance on the left but not a terribly close one. We were not elected to form a new party.”<sup>74</sup> He thus echoed a position he first adopted in 1964 when Fitt rebuffed overtures from McAteer at Stormont to form a united political force incorporating the Nationalist Party and the Belfast “labour-oriented and anti-partitionist” MPs.<sup>75</sup> Austin Currie, who had warmer relations with Fitt thanks to his presence at Stormont since 1964, however took a more positive view of initial efforts to form a new party. “I would certainly hope that by the next election there would be some form or organised, united Opposition.”<sup>76</sup>

Paddy Devlin, who later joined the new SDLP, had won election to Stormont in February 1969 under the Northern Ireland Labour Party banner, a further source of irritation for Fitt as Devlin’s triumph was at the cost Fitt’s Republican Labour colleague Harry Diamond. But the NI Labour Party was prohibited by its constitution of liaising in coalitions with others, the inference being that they should all join NI Labour. There was, meanwhile, talk of promoting Currie to the leadership of the Nationalist Party following Hume’s defeat of McAteer. But Hume made it clear that any new non-unionist force had to be a new party and not a new label. The NDP, with no Stormont MPs and frustrated at being penned into areas where the Nationalist Party stood little chance of winning a seat, also wanted a new party. Their ranks included both Eddie McGrady and Alasdair McDonnell, both future SDLP Westminster MPs. It was clear any new political party would have to rest on liaisons between significant political characters with who had – at most - a highly qualified trust in each other. When formally announced in August 1970, the SDLP was not so much a unified party as a grand coalition of big personalities with diverse opinions who had a common denominator in what they opposed.<sup>77</sup> They opposed the politics of both the old Nationalists and Sinn Féin and the violence of the IRA. They clearly opposed the faction-riven Unionist Party, yet were reliant on the unionist dominated Stormont parliament as their platform.

Perhaps curiously, Hume adopted a somewhat distant approach to the new political movement he had long advocated. He was, admittedly, assiduously involved in the early days of policy formation of the SDLP, according himself the authorship of its key

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<sup>74</sup> *The Irish Times* February 26<sup>th</sup> 1969 p. 9. See also McAllister (1977) p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> For a detailed account of this see Murphy (2007) pp. 73-4.

<sup>76</sup> *The Irish Times* February 26<sup>th</sup> 1969 p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> See Murphy (2007) pp. 155-161 and Ryder (2006) especially chapter 8 ‘A Varied and Diverse Bunch’, and McAllister (1977) chapter 3 ‘Opposition Unity and Disunity’.

position papers in the early 1970s, particularly in the run-up to the British government's first attempt at a power-sharing and consociational initiative in 1974. Later years (and more particularly after he ascended the party leadership) Hume adopted a more hands-off approach, frequently missing the monthly meetings of the party's executive committee. He seemed remote from the party grassroots, other than at party annual conferences, said relatively little about party organisation and stood apart from its branch structures. With regards to party fundraising – a key issue in the early years of the party given that it had so few state-paid parliamentarians – he was responsible for attracting benefactors. But this was often done on a highly personal basis (and therefore within his control) and he left little by way of structure for future organisational and financial development much to the chagrin of some colleagues..

For all that, Hume (greatly supported by Currie who had better relations with Fitt) eventually managed to transform the somewhat unruly group of Stormont Opposition MPs from a “label” into a functioning party. The SDLP was often a storm of competing ideologies and characters with Hume's de facto leadership evident from the outset. It is remarkable that despite many tensions it remained a cohesive force for the following 30 years.

### 3: Starting from square one. Hume and Irish policy 1968-73

‘Maybe we were far too rigid in our approach [to partition]...whatever may have been the reason, we made no headway: so our successors must start from square one.’

*Seán McEntee*<sup>1</sup>

‘Hume in a sense threw a lifebelt to Southern politics as early as 1969-70.’

*Seán Donlon*<sup>2</sup>

‘John Hume was very much one of [the most influential], one of the thinkers as well as a major influence on the Taoiseach.’

*Sir David Goodall*<sup>3</sup>

Northern Ireland’s rapid descent into violence after October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968 represented a crisis for Stormont which was so severe its eventual demise in 1972 could be traced from this date. However the effects of October 5<sup>th</sup> were more widely felt. At a national/international level the violence represented a serious difficulty for the Irish and British governments – but in markedly different ways. Locally in Northern Ireland, or more specifically Derry, the sudden crisis which combined widespread civil disorder and an existential crisis for the Northern Ireland government, propelled John Hume from a position of local civil rights activist and small-time entrepreneur to that of a central figure in the redrawing of Irish government policy on Northern Ireland. It was a transformation that took just over four years. In October 1968, Hume’s name and reputation were known only to a handful in Dublin circles. But by March 1973, when Garret FitzGerald was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs in the new Labour-Fine Gael coalition which had just taken office, the man who was overlooked for the foreign affairs post complained at the growth of Hume’s influence in Dublin. Conor Cruise O’Brien, a former official at the Department of External Affairs recalls, in his memoirs, hearing news of his appointment to the Irish cabinet, not as Minister for Foreign Affairs

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<sup>1</sup> Sean McEntee, Fianna Fáil Tánaiste in 1969, quoted in the *Irish Press*, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1970 and in Kelly (2013) p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Seán Donlon, former head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, in *Hume* a BBC Northern Ireland documentary produced by Below The Radar and broadcast on September 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Sir David Goodall interview with the author, Dublin, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2010. Sir David was one of the most senior British officials negotiating with the Irish government on Northern Ireland especially in relation to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

but as Minister for Posts and Telegraphs – a decision which he cites, clearly with some resentment, was determined by Hume:

....I received a call from [Labour leader, Brendan] Corish offering me a seat in the new government as minister for Posts and Telegraphs.... Corish indicated that within the coalition I would retain my functions as spokesman for the party on foreign affairs and Northern Ireland. I accepted Corish's offer immediately. I was slightly disappointed not to be offered the post for which I was best qualified, that of Minister for Foreign Affairs. I can see in retrospect that I was quite wrong to be disappointed. For me the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs in that government would have been a fatal trap. John Hume was by now my deadly enemy, politically speaking, and John had enormous weight in the politics of the Republic in any matter with a bearing on Northern Ireland. The only way I would have placated John Hume on becoming Minister for Foreign Affairs, would have been by immediately reversing my opposition to joint administration, and the slavishly following the SDLP line as laid down by Hume. I could not do that. And as I could not do that, John Hume would have driven me from office, by telling Corish and [Taoiseach, Liam] Cosgrave that if they did not drop me forthwith he would denounce the coalition government as "anti-national". And if he did that the two parliamentary parties would split, the government would fall, and the two component parties would be wiped out at the ensuing general election. I did not consider any of this when I took on John Hume over joint administration. And the fact that I did not consider it shows how much I had changed from the man who had won two out-of-line promotions from Sean Mac Bride in the department of External Affairs, by doing whatever Mac Bride wanted. If I had still been continuous with that young man in the political conditions of the late 1960s and early 1970 and had coveted the position of Minister for Foreign Affairs, I would have seen immediately that the key to advancement was the cultivation of John Hume. When John came out for joint administration, I would have written "thoughtful" articles praising the wisdom and statesmanship of this policy. So John Hume would have urged my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs. So supported, I would have been appointed and I would have been rated a success as Minister. And I would have been ruined, morally and intellectually. But I had never even considered appeasing John Hume, nor had I weighed, even for a moment, the probable cost to my career if I failed to appease him.<sup>4</sup>

O'Brien's analysis may exaggerate somewhat the influence of Hume on the two-party coalition headed by Liam Cosgrave and Brendan Corish, perhaps at the expense of Garret FitzGerald who was thinking along lines similar to Hume in the late 1960s and up to 1973. Those memoirs, written in 1998, may also have been influenced by the torrent of near uncritical praise of Hume by many in the Republic and internationally in the immediate aftermath of the conclusion of the Belfast Agreement just the year before – a development stridently opposed by O'Brien. But it does show beyond doubt that Hume was a highly influential figure in the politics of the Republic especially in

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<sup>4</sup> O'Brien (1998), pp. 341-342.

relation to Northern Ireland and in dealings between Dublin and London and Dublin and Stormont.

How did such a rapid rise, taking just four and a half years, come about? There are two main reasons. The first was that Hume deliberately sought out and cultivated those with influence and power in the Republic as a means of effecting change in Northern Ireland. He worked to establish a network of contacts because what personal political faith remained in the Stormont institutions all but collapsed after the period from October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968 until the widespread and severe violence of August 1969 and the deployment of British troops. The second reason lay in the fact that the outbreak of sustained violence and the fracturing of the political centre at Stormont meant that the Irish government had quickly to reorient its attention away from Belfast and more in the direction of London. If Northern Ireland was increasingly held to be incapable of reforming itself then London would be pressed to intervene. In the 10 months since Derry's first civil rights march on October 5<sup>th</sup>, the Northern Ireland question, as Dublin and London would have seen it, quickly evolved into something new, more sinister and ill-defined. Dublin began to view Northern Ireland more as an Anglo-Irish problem. But London, no doubt arrogantly from a Dublin perspective, saw it more as an internal UK issue and interventions from Dublin, the United Nations or Washington were resented.

### **Dublin's policy vacuum**

To understand the extent and speed of Hume's rise as an influential figure in the politics of the Republic it is necessary to examine political attitudes there in the years between Partition and the 1960s. Hume's biographers, along with McAllister, Murray and McLoughlin, pay little attention to this arguably vital axis between Hume and a succession of Irish governments from 1968 onwards. Dorr's admirably detailed treatment of the Irish government's role in the Sunningdale agreement vividly illustrates the powerful bargaining position it held on Northern Ireland in late 1973. But his explanation as to how such a position was achieved following years of isolation is summarised only briefly.<sup>5</sup> Hence the need to provide a detailed historical context for Hume's achievement.

Dublin's attitude towards Northern Ireland had long historical roots. As taoiseach, Seán Lemass had ended post-war economic protectionism and a doctrinaire form of

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<sup>5</sup> Dorr (2017) pp. 26-30.



irredentist nationalism, both of which had been hallmarks of his predecessor as taoiseach, Éamon de Valera. He also had broken the permafrost which had gripped Stormont and Dublin relations since the 1920s courtesy of his landmark visit to Belfast for talks with the Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Terence O'Neill in January 1965. That was meant to symbolise a new, *de facto* acceptance of the border and of the Unionist government in the Northern state – a fact which was not lost on O'Neill. Jack Lynch, Lemass's successor, encouraged by TK (Ken) Whitaker, himself an Ulsterman and one of the Irish government's most senior, influential and respected civil servants,<sup>6</sup> had continued with the policy, pressing for social modernisation in Northern Ireland, reforming both the language,<sup>7</sup> and tone of Dublin's dealings with Stormont and slowly resiling from old-style irredentism.

However 1968-9 dramatically showed that both the British and Irish governments, especially that headed by Fianna Fáil leader Jack Lynch in Dublin, were caught without a policy on Northern Ireland. They had a position, but not a policy. The Irish government's position on Northern Ireland in the late 1960s was, bluntly, that it opposed the partition of Ireland and the formation of the northern state nearly 50 years earlier. There was no policy on what to do about it other than to restate that what had happened in 1920-21 ought not to have happened in the first place and to blame the British government for it. Irish State papers show the extent to which even senior ministers and civil servants appeared not to realise that there was, in effect, no policy towards Northern Ireland. Worse, given such a policy vacuum, debates raged among those who believed quiet diplomacy and gradualism was the only option and those who advocated military intervention. Such tensions were evident at the core of the Irish cabinet and would eventually lead to the expulsion and resignation of senior cabinet figures, such as Charles Haughey.<sup>8</sup> Joe Lee colourfully describes the non-policy on Northern Ireland:

‘Re-unification’ held ritualistic pride of place not only on the agenda of ‘national aims’ but in Fianna Fáil rhetoric. Public opinion, as far as one can tell in the absence of specific surveys, had subscribed overwhelmingly to the aspiration of a

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<sup>6</sup> Whitaker served as secretary to the Department of Finance and then as Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland. For more background on this influential figure see McCann (2012) and especially Chambers (2014).

<sup>7</sup> For example, the National Archives of Ireland hold a range of State papers referring to the terms used to describe the area formally known as Northern Ireland. For examples see file TSCH 2012/90/973 ‘Use of the terms ‘Six Counties’, ‘Ulster’ and ‘Northern Ireland’.’ See also Kelly (2013) pp. 360-1.

<sup>8</sup> There are many accounts of the ‘Arms Crisis’. Ferriter (2012) pp141-152 offers a brief and lucid outline of the controversy.

united Ireland since partition, at least as long as nothing need be done about it. In 1969 the majority seemed to be mainly concerned to prevent the problem spilling over into the South, while at the same time being anxious to protect Catholics in the North from feared Protestant pogroms.<sup>9</sup>

This disconnection between Northern Ireland and the Republic, both states shackled to their own versions of the past, was neither a sudden nor a new development. Rather it was the product of decades of drift following partition marked by simple, and often empty, rhetoric, along the lines suggested by Bowyer Bell:

In the end the Troubles came because Ireland was improperly synchronised; it was no one's fault and not easy to predict. The old values had not eroded and the new opportunities had not attracted... The traditional rites and rituals seemed so rational, so easy. These ways offered great benefits, Orange and Green, often unavowed, often psychological, not economic or political, often to those denied elsewhere by the existing organisation of society and the island. So there were always new and frantic believers suddenly converted to the past as the means into the future. Those who sought to act on events, to make history's patterns, had the legitimisation of the past as authority.<sup>10</sup>

### **Failure of the 1920-22 settlement**

It was such a state of affairs, eloquently described by Bell and Lee, which provided sufficient cover for the lack of pragmatic policy on the part of the Irish government. From an Irish perspective the origins of this problem lay in the fact that the settlement between London and Dublin of 1920-22 was really nothing of the sort. Oliver Wright, a senior Foreign Office official deployed to Belfast to monitor developments and report directly to the UK government in London in August 1969 admitted as much.<sup>11</sup> (In effect, the British government established a form of diplomatic mission *within* the UK.) He lamented his government's handling of Ireland over the centuries. On his departure from Belfast as the first UK Government representative<sup>12</sup>, he wrote a long and considered missive to James Callaghan the British Home Secretary who had, like his opposite number in Dublin, been stunned at the rapid descent of Northern Ireland into

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<sup>9</sup> Lee (1989) p458.

<sup>10</sup> Bell, J Bowyer (1993) *The Irish troubles: a generation of violence 1967-1992*. Dublin. St Martin's Press. p. 829.

<sup>11</sup> Following the severe violence of August 1969 and subsequent deployment of British troops, the British government had decided to send its own representation to Belfast rather than rely on versions of events from the Northern Ireland government at Stormont. See Chapter 6 where this is addressed in detail.

<sup>12</sup> Referred to in British state papers as UKREP.

chaos post October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968. “If ever there were a case of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children to the umpteenth generation, the Irish problem is it,” he wrote.

For 700 years the English in their folly sought to govern the Irish and employed every method including, alas, the plantation of colonists to achieve their aim. When they grew weary of ill-doing and decided, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to leave the Irish to their own devices, their Scots-Calvinist colonists shouted: ‘Hey, what about us?’ The inevitable non-solution was partition, with two Irish governments, an independent Catholic one in Dublin and a subordinate, colonial, Protestant one in Belfast; the main thing, at the time, was to enable Westminster to wish the Irish problem away. It is hardly surprising that, until mid-1969, Ulster was, and felt, remote, neglected and unhappy.<sup>13</sup>

Hume may well have shared Wright’s analysis – he certainly questioned the legitimacy of the Northern state, claiming: “The Northern Ireland government, therefore, existed on the basis of desperate injustice and to ask for justice was to question the whole philosophy of the state.”<sup>14</sup> His task therefore was to address the need as he saw it to draw both the British and Irish governments back into the picture, to widen the context of the Northern Ireland question. To understand how Hume could rise so rapidly from near obscurity to a key and influential figure, particularly in Dublin, in such a short time requires a close examination of North-South relations in the years before the advent of street politics in Derry in 1968. It is also necessary to understand the extent and effects of the policy black hole regarding the Northern state that existed in Dublin. It is also necessary to survey the nature and extent of cross-border relations following Partition and before 1968 as this illustrates how Dublin civil servants managed to be ahead of their political masters when it came to the question of Northern Ireland. Cross-border economic initiatives and diplomatic efforts are treated separately and the role of key civil servants will be highlighted. It is a complex and detailed story at both official and unofficial levels, but the full measure of Hume’s role in Dublin’s reformulation of Northern Ireland policy is best examined in such a context.

Viewed through the smoke that hung over Derry after October 1968, the Government of Ireland Act 1920, which divided Ireland, may indeed have seemed a sorry mistake to the departing Wright. But Partition and the subsequent treaty allowing for an Irish Free State did allow the new administration in Dublin some space and relative freedom to get on with state-building. Phoenix makes clear the centrality of the Irish state’s first priority when he quotes Éamon de Valera’s insistence that the survival of the Free State

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<sup>13</sup> The UK National Archives DEFE/13/1397.

<sup>14</sup> Hume (1996) pp. 9, 54, 142.

“could not be risked in any effort to reintegrate the country”.<sup>15</sup> It also provided cover for the British government in London to “divide and depart”<sup>16</sup> without much hindrance. Churchill told the House of Commons during the debate on the Irish Free State Bill in February 1922 that Britain had been “floundering in the Irish bog” for generations. It was the treaty, confirming the partition of Ireland and the granting of a measure of independence to the new Irish Free State, that set English feet on a “pathway” and a “causeway” which was “narrow, but firm and far-reaching”. From London’s perspective, Churchill’s view was apt. The Union had been saved and British primacy had been preserved by exporting most responsibility for Ireland to Dublin and devolving the remainder of that responsibility to Belfast. But for Northern Ireland the settlement, as the final years of the 1960s were conclusively to show, was a misnomer. This was despite the determined optimism of King George V who opened the first Northern Ireland parliament sitting in Belfast City Hall in June 1921 with the words: “May this historic gathering be the prelude of a day in which the Irish people, North and South, under one Parliament or two, as those Parliaments may themselves decide, shall work together in common love for Ireland upon the sure foundations of mutual justice and respect.”<sup>17</sup> Mansergh correctly asserts that the establishment of two new states in Ireland allowed the British government to withdraw psychologically from Ireland.<sup>18</sup> This process was hastened by subsequent political and military cataclysms including another world war, economic reconstruction post-1945, the drawing of the iron curtain across Europe and the accompanying perceived threat of communism, and decolonisation. Northern Ireland was deliberately kept at arm’s length by successive British governments while assurances were maintained that the Westminster parliament retained superiority over any devolved institution.<sup>19</sup> In practical terms, this meant little and the Speaker of the House of Commons in Westminster routinely ruled out of order

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<sup>15</sup> Phoenix in (2015) ‘Before John’ in *John Hume: Irish Peacemaker* Farren, Sean and Haughey, Denis (eds) Dublin. Four Courts Press. p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> See Arthur, Paul (1985) ‘Anglo-Irish relations and the Northern Ireland problem’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/docs/lynch/lynch69.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Mansergh, Martin. (1995) ‘The background to the peace process.’ *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol 6 (1995) pp. 151-52.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Hennessey (1999) p. 6. “Northern Nationalists complained that the Northern Ireland parliament refused to give justice to the minority (Catholics) and their representatives. Every attempt to have the grievances of the minority discussed at Westminster was defeated by the existence of a ‘convention’ which prevented discussion of matters within the competence of the Northern Ireland Parliament. Northern Nationalists protested at discrimination against Catholics in the civil service, the creation of a Protestant-dominated paramilitary police force and the gerrymandering of electoral wards to produce artificial Unionist majorities. In turn Ulster Unionists regarded Northern Nationalists as enemies determined to destroy the devolved administration”.

questions relating to Stormont's handling of Northern Ireland affairs after 1922-3. The fact that the convention kept Northern Ireland affairs off the British government's agenda for more than 40 years was apparently to the relieved satisfaction of Labour Home Secretary Sir Frank Soskice who said of Ulster Unionism in 1965: "From England, we watch it, we admire it, and we rejoice in it."<sup>20</sup> The outworkings of the 1920 Act underscore the claims made by Fanning:

Although the treaty settlement proved fatal to [David] Lloyd George's prospects of remaining, or ever again becoming, prime minister, his excision of the Irish cancer from the British body politic endured for almost half a century. 'It does not rest with one individual, with one government,' wrote Arthur Balfour in 1890, 'completely to solve so ancient a controversy, so old an historic difficulty as ... The Irish Question'. Maybe not, but David Lloyd George solved the Irish question in the form in which it had bedevilled British politics since 1886.<sup>21</sup>

If the Government of Ireland Act and partition allowed the British government to divide and depart, as Arthur and Fanning suggest, leaving two mutually hostile Irish governments refusing to deal with other, then October 5<sup>th</sup> and its aftermath dragged London back in. The same applied, in a fashion, to the government in Dublin. The safeguards built into the 1920 act at Irish insistence, had long been gradually, on occasions even imperceptibly, forgotten or sidelined. The leaders of the polity were getting on with the business of the new state while indulging, for the most part, in empty rhetoric about the perceived injustice of the agreement which brought them their measure of independence. Given this situation, it is hardly surprising that Mansergh was able to claim: "The four safeguards in the Government of Ireland Act, (1920) - proportional representation, the Council of Ireland, the non-discrimination clause, and the Boundary Commission - were all dismantled or ignored."<sup>22</sup>

### **Derry's grievances**

Against such a backdrop, the grievance felt by Derry's Catholics over housing, gerrymandering and state-sponsored discrimination incensed Hume. But their plight barely figured on London's priorities and British governments habitually referred calls to deal with the situation in Northern Ireland back to the parliament in Belfast. For the

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<sup>20</sup> *Belfast Telegraph*, April 29<sup>th</sup> 1965 and quoted in Paul Arthur (1985).

<sup>21</sup> Fanning (2013) p. 361.

<sup>22</sup> Mansergh (1995) Vol. 6, p. 147.

Irish government, for which Irish reunification was a constitutional imperative, demands for civil rights in Northern Ireland in the early 1960s which led to street politics, agitation, civil disobedience tactics and eventually violence were met with surprise, confusion and some measure of desperation. The Dublin government's response appears to presume that Irish nationalism was as united behind the same presumed ideal and as monolithic as what was then held to be its mirror opposite in Northern Ireland namely Ulster Unionism – a point Hume stressed in his *Irish Times* articles in May 1964. State papers and official speeches from the mid-1960s illustrate the distance that had emerged between the Irish government and Northern nationalism in the 40 years since partition<sup>23</sup>. Indeed Keatinge<sup>24</sup> asserts that apart from UN commitments, ongoing efforts and an awareness of the need to tread warily so as not to make life any more difficult for O'Neill's reform programme, foreign affairs – i.e. issues relating to the Irish state from beyond its borders – scarcely provoked much attention. Taking 1968 as his baseline, Keatinge claims:

At this time foreign policy consisted of a limited number of well established diplomatic routines, most of which were enacted at the United Nations. Admittedly there was novelty in an Irish foreign minister, Frank Aiken, flying to Moscow, but this was in order to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty which he had helped into existence some years before in New York. There was an air of business-as-usual; a peace-keeping force in Cyprus, failure to interest President de Gaulle in the enlargement of the EEC, the gradual implementation of the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement, and conciliatory noises about changing the wording of the Constitution so as not to offend the susceptibilities of Captain O'Neill's supporters. The world outside had its uncertainties, but for most people it was not the sort of manifest crisis which might threaten Irish society. This may be seen in the Dáil's annual debate on external affairs; although James Dillon (by then a former leader of the opposition Fine Gael party) spoke of being 'in the middle of World War III' and of 'a communist conspiracy from Dublin to Hanoi', the conventional wisdom was represented by the Minister, Frank Aiken, who talked about the United Nations to an audience of less (sic) than 10 deputies.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See National Archives of Ireland files: TSCH 2001/43/1437 Lynch meeting with Stormont Opposition MPs; Northern Ireland disturbances 2001/43/1447; Civil Rights 2000/5/18; Northern Ireland disturbances 2000/5/33, 2000/5/34, 2000/5/35; Use of the term 'Northern Ireland' 2000/14/439; Recognition of Northern government and Northern Ireland DFA/5/305/14/340

<sup>24</sup> Keatinge, Patrick (1979) 'New Directions in Irish Foreign Policy'. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*. Vol 1 No.1 pp. 72-78.

<sup>25</sup> See also a report on this Dáil debate in the *Irish Times*, May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1968

## North-South contacts 1920-69

Lemass had already flown the kite of greater North-South contacts, firstly at the Oxford Union in 1959 and, more explicitly, in a speech in Tralee, Co Kerry in late July 1963 when he stated: “The solution of the problem of partition is one to be found in Ireland by Irishmen,”<sup>26</sup>. This new language was a sharp departure from the frozen and sterile anti-British and anti-border rhetoric that had marked the four decades of Irish government policy since the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The Tralee speech, while still hallmarked with some traditional language – the “problem of partition” being a prime example – clearly dedicated the Irish government to at least a limited *de facto* recognition of Northern Ireland and its government and to a commitment to work together at all levels for the mutual benefit of citizens. It was a move designed to provoke a positive response, and it succeeded. On January 14<sup>th</sup> 1965 Taoiseach Seán Lemass accepted an invitation from Northern Ireland prime minister Terence O’Neill and met him for talks at Stormont House beside Parliament Buildings, the first meeting of its type since partition.<sup>27</sup> Foster colourfully sums up the significance of Lemass’s decision to travel North:

Lemass’s gritty realism.... was in tune with the current mood of the South. The old 1916 revolutionary had arrived at a position where he was ostentatiously impatient with the knee-jerk shibboleths of his party regarding not only partition but economic self-sufficiency, frugal book-balancing and the sacred first national language [Irish].<sup>28</sup>

Lemass, like O’Neill, was radically different from his predecessor as head of government and party leader. Although a founder, along with de Valera, of his Fianna Fáil party, Lemass worked assiduously to end de Valera-style economic protectionism which was a main policy plank since the 1930s. He also differed with him in relation to Northern Ireland. It is unthinkable that de Valera would have agreed to go to Belfast for talks with the Unionist prime minister. In much the same way, O’Neill’s predecessor as Unionist leader and prime minister Lord Brookeborough would scarcely have sought talks with a taoiseach. Despite O’Neill’s reformism, the initiative was highly controversial and he did not inform his cabinet colleagues until the morning of the

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<sup>26</sup> The *Irish Times* July 30<sup>th</sup> 1963, available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1963/0730/Pg001.html#Ar00101>

<sup>27</sup> A reciprocal meeting took place in Dublin the following month (February 9<sup>th</sup>).

<sup>28</sup> Foster, R.F. (2007) *Luck and the Irish*. p. 101.

meeting. Lemass informed only a small number of his most trusted colleagues.<sup>29</sup> Irish state papers in the wake of the talks, which assiduously avoided discussion of the border, partition and the constitutional question<sup>30</sup>, illustrate how thin the veneer of nationalist consensus was between the Nationalist Party at Stormont and the Fianna Fáil leadership in government in Dublin. Lemass admitted to Nationalist leader Eddie McAteer that “my knowledge of the grass-roots political situation in the North was not such as to permit my offering any advice”.<sup>31</sup> This was a telling admission on the part of a man who had taken part in the 1916 republican uprising in Dublin against British rule. By the 1960s he clearly had a more pragmatic approach to Northern Ireland than the more doctrinaire de Valera and considered that the Nationalist Party might adopt its formal role as the official opposition in Stormont, organise branches throughout all Northern constituencies and accept that Irish unity, rather than viewing it as a mere reversal of partition, would “involve the continued existence of the Northern Ireland parliament with its present powers”.<sup>32</sup> Minister for External Affairs Frank Aiken, exchanged letters with Lemass in the weeks following the O’Neill talks about what the policy approach should be. The foreign minister advised the Taoiseach to avoid mention of the word “federal” in relation to proposed new all-Ireland arrangements when talking to the Nationalist leader Eddie McAteer and concluded tellingly:

With regard to the suggested arrangement for consulting Mr McAteer and his colleagues on any practical proposals affecting Six County commercial interests arising in the course of future discussions on economic matters with the Northern Ireland Ministers, I agree that it would be useful to have such consultations. I doubt, however, whether such consultations should become any more formalised than those which take place from time to time with representatives of the Nationalist group. Naturally no Government wishes another Government with which it is negotiating to be in regular formal consultation with its own Opposition in Parliament.<sup>33</sup>

As far as the Irish government was concerned, the Nationalist Party clearly had its place and should not be encouraged to rise above it. Instead it should occupy itself organising effectively at branch level and adopting a more pragmatic approach at Stormont by “working the system”. The return visit in Dublin was also attended by the secretaries

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<sup>29</sup> For an insider’s account see O’Neill (1972) pp. 68-76.

<sup>30</sup> Communiqué signed by Seán Lemass and Terence O’Neill regarding their meeting in Belfast January 14<sup>th</sup> 1965 TSCH/398/6/429.

<sup>31</sup> Lemass reporting on the meeting with McAteer to his foreign minister Frank Aiken TSCH/398/6/429.

<sup>32</sup> Aiken to Lemass, TSCH/398/6/429.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



of the departments of external affairs<sup>34</sup> and finance, Hugh McCann and Ken Whitaker, both of whom were to become highly influential in terms of the formulation of Northern policy in the closing years of the 1960s. (Whitaker had developed a close working relationship with Lemass during negotiations on free trade with the UK in the early 1960s).

### **Key civil servants**

In the early years of the Northern troubles, senior civil servants and some diplomats appeared to be well ahead of their elected political masters when it came to original thinking on the rapidly emerging situation on the streets of Northern Ireland. Official papers show that much of the initiative behind the first ground-breaking meeting between the premiers from both sides of the border sprung from a close and trusting relationship between Whitaker<sup>35</sup> and James (Jim) Malley, O'Neill's private secretary, head of the civil service at Stormont<sup>36</sup> and a decorated Royal Air Force veteran with an impressive war record. Bloomfield<sup>37</sup> correctly sets the context for the meeting, citing the rarely referenced contacts decades earlier between James Craig, Northern Ireland's first prime minister, and Eamon de Valera, Michael Collins and WT Cosgrave. Little came from these talks, but more was to flow from the meetings, firstly at Stormont and later at the Department of External Affairs in Dublin.<sup>38</sup> The choice of both locations was significant. Lemass's decision to meet O'Neill at Stormont, a physical manifestation of unionist power and of the 'illegitimate' and partitionist northern state, represented a physical manifestation that the old de Valera-style simple anti-partitionism was being supplanted by a cautious form of *realpolitik*. Similarly, the choice of Iveagh House where the Department of External Affairs afforded O'Neill limited cover for the exposure he risked with his political foes, not least of them the Rev Ian Paisley – the most strident and vocal opponent of O'Neillism and its programme of gradual reform. The communiqué following the Stormont meeting, echoed the caution inherent in the decision of the two premiers, by insisting that the talks were non-constitutional and even non-political when in fact the symbolism of their

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<sup>34</sup> Known as the Department of Foreign Affairs from 1971.

<sup>35</sup> Ken Whitaker was himself a native of Rostrevor, Co Down, Northern Ireland and became a most trusted public servant and adviser on Ulster affairs in the late 1960s.

<sup>36</sup> See communication relating to the Lemass-O'Neill visit between Whitaker and Malley. (NAI) TSCH/398/6/429.

<sup>37</sup> Bloomfield, Kenneth (2007).

<sup>38</sup> See Bloomfield (2007) pp. 129-30 for a valuable insider account of this initiative.

get-together was intensely significant. It read: “We have today discussed matters in which there may prove to be a degree of common interest, and have agreed to explore further what specific measures may be possible or desirable by way of practical consultation and co-operation. Our talks - which did not touch upon constitutional or political questions - have been conducted in a most amicable way, and we look forward to a further discussion in Dublin.” Bloomfield says he drafted that communiqué, and prides himself in composing a form of words which said as little as possible.<sup>39</sup> The communiqué following their second meeting the following month in Dublin, listed the attendees at lunch which this time included the two premiers along with their wives as well as the secretaries in the departments of external affairs, Hugh McCann; commerce and industry, HJ Nolan; and finance, Ken Whitaker. Of these senior government officials, both Whitaker and McCann were later to play particularly influential roles in government relating to Northern Ireland. The communiqué, again using the blandest phraseology, confirmed that after lunch the ministers discussed “a general review of the scope for mutually beneficial co-operation in matters of common interest and arrangements were made to continue to explore specific possibilities in further meetings at both Ministerial and official levels”.<sup>40</sup> Cross-border co-operation was nothing new despite the dearth of official political contacts between Belfast and Dublin at the time of the O’Neill-Lemass talks, and there existed two templates for future action which had not been knocked off course by disagreement on the overall constitutional question. One such precedent was tourism, the other was electricity generation.<sup>41</sup> Government officials had already learned to some degree that they could work together for mutual benefit without treading on the constitutionally sensitive toes of their respective ministerial masters. Referring to the 1950s Zuelow writes:

[W]hile the Irish government was usually content merely to offer advice on the content of tourist publications in the hope of ensuring positive “cultural propaganda,” it was more forceful when representations of the border with Northern Ireland were involved. For example, when the Irish Tourist Association published a guide titled *Introducing Ireland* in 1950, the Department of External Affairs was stimulated to provide editorial feedback. The ITA’s secretary, J. Fitzpatrick, was told that the department would not accept “the statement [that] . . . the Six Counties ‘are governed by the parliament of Northern Ireland under the

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with author. December 11<sup>th</sup> 2013. Holywood, Co Down.

<sup>40</sup> NAI TSCH/3 98/6/430.

<sup>41</sup> See Kennedy, Michael (2006) *The Realms of Practical Politics: North-South co-operation on the Erne Hydro-Electric Scheme 1942-57*. Dublin and Belfast, Institute for British-Irish Studies, University College Dublin; and the Institute of Governance, Centre for International Borders Research, Queen’s University Belfast.

British Commonwealth’.” Instead, External Affairs demanded that the emphasis be placed on British rule of the province. The department wanted the paragraph to read: ‘The constitution of Ireland states that “the national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands, and the territorial seas.” By an act of the British parliament in 1920, however, six counties, part of the province of Ulster, were separated from the rest of Ireland and are administered by a local parliament subject to the British parliament. The remaining Twenty-Six Counties are under the authority of the government of the Republic of Ireland in Dublin.’<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, this demand from the Department of External Affairs was written by Conor Cruise O’Brien, then an official at the department. In the end the guide simply stated: “The area known as ‘the Six Counties’ or ‘Northern Ireland’ is, at present, under the control of a Parliament in Belfast, which is subordinate to the British Parliament.”<sup>43</sup> Zuelow’s case study usefully highlights that even when the troublesome issue of Ireland’s contested constitutional arrangements did rear its head, officials on both sides of the border were adept at side-stepping damaging political controversy. Kennedy details the Erne waterway hydro-electric scheme and, specifically, proposals by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) in the Republic to pay for and carry out dredging and other works on Lough Erne in Co Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, so as to promote a supply of water to drive its turbines which were planned for Ballyshannon in Co Donegal (in the Republic) where the River Erne flows into the Atlantic. He correctly states that the success of the Erne project proved that meaningful and large-scale economic co-operation did take place between the (at least officially) mutually hostile administrations in Belfast and Dublin:

Finally, in May 1950, parallel legislation introduced in the Dáil and in Stormont on the same day led to the Erne Drainage and Development Act which allowed the Electricity Supply Board and the Northern Ireland Ministry of Finance to sign an agreement to facilitate co-operation in September 1950.... [F]or the 1940s and 1950s, and given the strongly anti-partitionist mood in Irish foreign policy, the agreement over the Erne scheme marked a major step forward for relations between Dublin and Belfast and provided a workable template for co-operation.<sup>44</sup>

It is worth emphasising that Kennedy’s work contradicts the tone of Coakley and O’Dowd who claimed: “the researcher will hunt in vain in cabinet papers in Dublin and

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<sup>42</sup> Zuelow, Eric (2006) ‘Ingredients for Cooperation: Irish Tourism in North-South Relations, 1924-1998’ *New Hibernia Review*, Vol 10, Number 1, Spring 2006, pp. 17-39.

<sup>43</sup> O’Brien to Fitzpatrick NAI, DFA/366/32.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Belfast for evidence of significant cross-border links at political or even at administrative level”.<sup>45</sup>

### **Hume – ignoring the border**

Unlike many in the Nationalist Party in the North and those outside the pragmatic wing of Fianna Fáil in the Republic, the early pioneers of cross-border economic development were not gripped by the existence of the Irish border and the fallout from partition in the 1920s. Rather they insisted that such co-operation was needed, was realisable and was mutually beneficial not because it ignored the border but because it took it into account. Constitutional objections which arose in either jurisdiction were overcome because it was shown that economic progress could be made without any surrender of political principle. Indeed such an approach was reflected in the approach taken by Conn McCluskey and the Campaign for Social Justice in Co Tyrone – “forget about the owl border,” he told Austin Currie in 1965, urging the young Stormont Nationalist MP to concentrate on social and economic issues and to improve the day-to-day lives of constituents.<sup>46</sup> It was also mirrored by the approach taken by NICRA which mentions the border not once in its stated aims and objectives. It was this reality which emphasised for Hume the value of pragmatism as a means of building links between both sides of the border and, more importantly, between both traditional political communities in Northern Ireland. He maintained that any unionist would do [commercial] business with any nationalist anywhere in Ireland while adamantly digging in his heels against political nationalism. It had surely been no accident that his earliest community initiatives in his native Derry were the cross-community campaign to have Northern Ireland’s proposed second university located at the Derry city campus of Magee college, Derry Housing Association which tackled the city’s overcrowding problem, the Credit Union and Atlantic Harvest, his salmon processing scheme on Lough Foyle, which grew to involve fishermen throughout the whole of the north-west of Ireland on both sides of the border.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Coakley, John, and O’Dowd, Liam (2005) *The Irish border and North-South co-operation: an overview*. Dublin: Institute for British Irish Studies working paper no. 47.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Currie, January 21<sup>st</sup> 2014, Allenwood, Co Kildare.

<sup>47</sup> For useful accounts of these initiatives see Routledge (1997) pp. 37-58, White (1984) ch5, Hume (1996) pp. 5-8, Drower (1995) pp. 29-42. However these schemes are not discussed with reference to the constitutional position and the existence of the border.

## The diplomatic angle

While some Dublin government officials were blatantly ahead of their political masters, the most senior Irish diplomats posted abroad in the late 1960s clearly had little clue about Northern Ireland or what ought to be government policy in relation to it. Kennedy provides invaluable evidence as to the stark reality of the impact of 40 years of the Irish border on Southern opinion and the sheer scale of the policy black hole that persisted at the heart of government<sup>48</sup>. He cites a circular letter, drafted by Hugh McCann in September 1969 when he was secretary of the Department of External Affairs, to 20 ambassadors dotted across the world. In it he sought their views as to what could be included in a submission to government on Northern Ireland policy “in light of recent developments”. These “developments”, a glorious example of diplomatic understatement, included the advent of street politics in Northern Ireland, particularly in Derry, the widespread campaign of agitation for civil rights in which Hume (by now an Independent MP at Stormont having defeated Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer in Foyle) was centrally involved and the heavy-handed response from the Stormont government and the RUC and B Specials, the first civilian deaths and the arrival of the British army in Belfast and Derry.<sup>49</sup> Kennedy, having analysed the official communications between the ambassadors and their department’s secretary, notes their alarm at the outbreak of trouble in Northern Ireland claiming the diplomatic corps was “shocked, troubled and perhaps confused” at the scenes of violence portrayed on TV news reports. “[A] new outlook on Northern Ireland, or even the academic exercise of debating different perspectives on the future of the province, came slow to External Affairs. In the autumn of 1969, forced by events, the department had to think seriously for the first time about the future of North-South and Anglo-Irish relations. The response to McCann’s request for ideas on policy was the first step in this process.”<sup>50</sup> Kennedy shows most of the ambassadors contacted by McCann knew little about Northern Ireland or its inhabitants, appearing to assume some knowledge of Northern nationalists while admitting their dearth, if not complete absence, of understanding of

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<sup>48</sup> Kennedy, Michael. (2001) “This Tragic and Most Intractable Problem: the Reaction of the Department of External Affairs to the Outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland” *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol 12 pp. 87-95.

<sup>49</sup> For a succinct account see English, Richard (2009) “The Interplay of Non-violent and Violent Action in Northern Ireland, 1967-1972” in Roberts, Adam and Garton-Ash, Timothy (eds) *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The experience of non-violent action from Gandhi to the present*. Oxford University Press. For an exhaustive account see Purdie, Bob, (1990) chapter 6.

<sup>50</sup> Kennedy (2001) pp. 87-95.

unionists of any hue. Ambassador Gerard Woods replied from Brussels thought that “a vacuum was allowed to develop in our cognisance of the mental outlook and conditions of our people in the north”, while his equivalent in Stockholm, Timothy K Horan, confessed bluntly: “I know no Six-County unionists, and have no direct knowledge of what these people think and how they feel. As far as I can remember I have only on two occasions had contact with Six-County Protestants.” Collectively, the responses to McCann typically bear the hallmarks of traditional constitutional nationalist thought – the belief in the inevitability of reunification, the temporary and even unjust nature of the Northern state, and unionist opposition to this perspective. Some more nuanced ideas were evident, with some diplomats wondering what impact perceived higher standards of living and the extent of social welfare in Northern Ireland would have on nationalists there. John G Molloy, the Ambassador to London, who as might be expected was more closely associated with diplomatic efforts on Northern Ireland, advised McCann that Irish policy should not display too much hunger for reunification, especially when dealing with the British government.

### **Hume and the ‘vacuum’ in Irish diplomacy**

Kennedy’s research highlights the depths of Dublin ignorance on the issue that was to emerge from nowhere to dominate the work of the Department of External Affairs in particular and the Irish government in general from late 1968 onwards. It demonstrates the gap in understanding that Hume was to fill. Kennedy cites the steepness of the learning curve they faced. Despite the confusion however, (and this was particularly marked over the issue of UN and/or Irish Army deployment in aid of beleaguered nationalist communities living close to the border) clear policy trends were evident in the thinking of the wider Irish diplomatic corps. There was general agreement that a political initiative capable of quelling the tensions on Northern streets as well as in its parliament, would most likely be found in a new and refashioned Anglo-Irish framework rather than in an internal one i.e. within Northern Ireland or even within a North-South context. As early as 1969, it is clear that the concept of three stranded relationships concerning Northern Ireland was already in evidence.<sup>51</sup> In one telling

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<sup>51</sup> The Belfast Agreement, concluded in 1997 and subsequent St Andrews Agreement of 2007 are based on acceptance that Northern Ireland is bound by three sets of relationships: namely, within Northern

reply to McCann, from the same Ambassador Woods who complained of a “vacuum” in Dublin’s understanding and knowledge of the North, the Department was urged to make direct contact with Hume in Derry where he had come to a position of some local prominence as a civil rights leader and lately as a Stormont MP.<sup>52</sup> Woods further suggested that “some administrative unit” be established within a government department in Dublin (he did not specify which) which would assume particular responsibility for Northern Ireland matters, as he did not know which existing department currently exercised such responsibility. In truth, no department did, but the Department of the Taoiseach came closest. Woods may not have known that Hume was already in direct contact with the Department of External Affairs courtesy of a fact-finding role being undertaken by another diplomat, Eamonn Gallagher recently returned to Dublin from Paris. However, what Kennedy does not record is the almost accidental manner in which even this - in the end, landmark - development had come about.

According to Sean Donlon, a long-standing friend of Hume, later to be appointed Irish ambassador to the US and then head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Gallagher had to return to Dublin from the Irish mission in Paris because of personal circumstances.<sup>53</sup> However there was no immediate specified task for him to perform. Fanning cites the department’s dearth of reliable, insightful and first-hand information on the rapidly developing situation in Northern Ireland and suggests that archival material from the department at that time showed how reliant senior officials were on press clippings and transcripts from news broadcasts.<sup>54</sup> The contrast with the British state papers is indeed stark. The department’s difficulties were compounded by the lack of formal channels of information between the Irish and British governments. Viewed from the present-day perspective where the two current premiers and other ministers are in regular contact and there exist institutions to maintain the best of relations, the absence of intelligence on Northern Ireland or about the position of the British government which retained overall responsibility, including over the subordinate

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Ireland itself (Strand 1), between Northern Ireland and the Republic (strand 2) and between the island of Ireland as a whole and Great Britain (Strand 3).

<sup>52</sup> Kennedy (2001) pp. 87-95.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Donlon August 10<sup>th</sup> 2011, Ballina, Co Tipperary and confirmed by interview with Dermot Gallagher, January 24<sup>th</sup> 2013. Dublin

<sup>54</sup> Fanning, Ronan (2001) ‘Playing it Cool: the Response of the British and Irish Governments to the Crisis in Northern Ireland 1968-9’: *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol 12, pp. 57-85.

Stormont government, seems baffling. In 1969 however, such lack of contact was the norm and even that situation was made more complex by two additional compelling factors. The first of these was the fear among senior British cabinet ministers that any overt involvement of their opposite numbers in Dublin could further undermine the relatively weak position of Terence O'Neill's government in Belfast.<sup>55</sup> The other concerned the outright opposition of O'Neill himself who was already under attack from his own party colleagues and from more militant extra-parliamentary voices led in the main by the Rev Ian Paisley.

This was the context in which Eamonn Gallagher found himself upon his return to Dublin. However the Department of External Affairs did not at that time have within it a self-contained unit dealing with Northern Ireland or Anglo-Irish matters and no-one within the Department of the Taoiseach had been assigned to specific duties relating to Northern Ireland. It was telling indeed that, rather like Lemass, Jack Lynch who succeeded Lemass as taoiseach in November 1966, also relied heavily on Whitaker for advice on Northern Ireland even though Whitaker's career was spent at the Department of Finance and (from 1969 onwards) the Central Bank. The latter's influence was significant as the gradualist approach taken in respect of backing O'Neill and his reforms was maintained by Lynch following Lemass's retirement and in spite of the more traditional republican voices within his cabinet. Lynch, like Lemass, also travelled to visit O'Neill in Belfast at O'Neill's invitation in December 1967 and hosted a return meeting in Dublin the following month. Given the spirit of the times between Dublin and Belfast there was much less secrecy surrounding the visit than was the case with the Lemass visit in 1965 and Lynch was introduced to the Stormont cabinet and the Northern Ireland attorney general. Such a meeting was no doubt intended to establish a trend and to underscore the belief in Dublin that cross-border progress would be built on the centre ground of Northern Ireland politics – ground occupied by the O'Neillite wing of unionism and those on the nationalist side who had clearly rejected the IRA. However the O'Neill-Lynch get-together – only the second of its type – was also the last time a taoiseach and a Stormont prime minister would meet. Between them, Hugh McCann and Ken Whitaker were foremost influences in the development of the Republic's position on Northern Ireland and in dealing with the British government –

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<sup>55</sup> O'Neill's moderate reforms programme encountered opposition from hardline elements within his cabinet. Moves were made to remove him as prime minister in 1966, with Commerce Minister Brian Faulkner strongly implicated.



not that there was much competition for that role. McCann was well paced to do this as he was a former ambassador in London. His decision to enlist the active advice of his senior diplomats, as outlined by Kennedy<sup>56</sup> showed a hunger for information, not just simple reporting but also inside analysis. The culture within the Department of External Affairs at that time was not to dwell on such concerns, ambassadors believing it was their duty instead to deal with matters relating to Irish citizens overseas and to the promotion of the Republic's tourism and exports.

The bewilderment shown in the series of replies to McCann's circular<sup>57</sup> illustrates a structural defect and lack of preparedness to advise actively on the formation and development of government policy more than it does the cluelessness of senior diplomats in relation to Northern Ireland. The bulk of ambassadors simply did not see it as their job. It is little surprise, therefore, that no formal paper was compiled by McCann following the collation of his ambassadors' thoughts and nothing was passed on to ministers. Craig, in his forensic analysis of Anglo-Irish relations in the late 1960s, cites McCann's impatience with his successor in London, John G Molloy, over his alleged failure to provide the service McCann desired.<sup>58</sup> "McCann rebuked Molloy in 1966 for complacency, complaining of his embassy's lack of initiative. There is a 'necessity', McCann wrote, 'for increased activity on the part of your mission with a view to meeting at least the minimum requirements governing political reporting.' He then went on to outline to Molloy the eight main topics of concern to the department. The first three concerned British attitudes towards foreign and defence policy, towards the EEC and EFTA<sup>59</sup>, and towards international issues and the stance adopted by NATO. Northern Ireland was McCann's fourth priority.<sup>60</sup> Given McCann's insistence on the gathering of analysis<sup>61</sup> – as opposed to the compilation of press cuttings and broadcast transcripts – and the hugely significant role he played in policy formation, it was no wonder that Gallagher, himself an Ulsterman (from Co Donegal, near the border with Derry), found himself in the unheard-of position as intelligence gatherer on

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<sup>56</sup> Kennedy, Michael J (2001) 'This tragic and most intractable problem: The Reaction of the Department of External Affairs to the Outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.' *Irish Studies in International Affairs*. Vol 12 pp. 87-95.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Craig (2010).

<sup>59</sup> European Economic Community – which both the UK and Republic of Ireland wished to join in the face of opposition by Gaullist France – and the European Free Trade Association.

<sup>60</sup> Craig (2010) p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, Craig (2010) also cites complaints by British diplomats about a shortage of valuable information from its mission – see p. 58.

Northern Ireland. It was a role he was, in part, allocated. But the bulk of it was self-acquired. He simply took it upon himself and often acted on his own initiative.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Hume-Gallagher axis**

In time he built up a substantial network of contacts, principally with Hume, providing his department with much-needed intelligence on which a coherent and realisable policy could be based. Currie recalls the arrival of the committed and enthusiastic Gallagher as evidence of a step-change in the Irish government approach to Northern Ireland. Currie admits that hitherto Irish governments showed little enthusiasm for talking of Northern Ireland “other than at election times”.<sup>63</sup> But Gallagher, by virtue of his obvious diplomatic ability, his knowledge of Ulster in general and Derry in particular (the city is a short distance from his home town of Letterkenny, Co Donegal) and his keenness for involvement, was different to anything he had encountered before from a Dublin official. “He also had the ear of Jack Lynch,” Currie recalls – a fact which made Currie, Hume and others as keen to see Gallagher as he was to see them. None of this is evident from the bulk of academic literature on this period.

Gallagher’s role was double-edged. His task was also, where possible, to influence those in Northern Ireland (John Hume among them again) and Irish government policy was urgently recast in light of the outbreak of violence and the threats that posed to the stability of the southern state. Much of the key literature of this period underplays the role as performed by Gallagher – especially the second task, that of influencing Northern actors, as Craig, Fanning both demonstrate. Their work appears to proceed on the unwritten assumption that diplomats working outside their home state confined themselves to reporting on and making sense of events there rather than working quietly to influence them through non-governmental channels. Bew,<sup>64</sup> does not refer to Gallagher at all. Nor does Staunton,<sup>65</sup> nor any of Hume’s biographers – Drower, White

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<sup>62</sup> This practice culminated in a visit made for Irish foreign minister Patrick Hillery, with Gallagher, to Belfast in August 1969 – in clear breach of protocol - without the foreknowledge of the British government, the authorities in Belfast or the British army. As will be shown in the succeeding chapter on the work of Hume and Irish diplomats in the US, this is not an isolated example

<sup>63</sup> Interview with author, January 21<sup>st</sup> 2014 in Allenwood, Co Kildare.

<sup>64</sup> Bew, Paul (2007).

<sup>65</sup> Staunton, Enda (2001).

or Routledge. O'Donnell affords him a single mention.<sup>66</sup> Both Kelly<sup>67</sup> and Dorr,<sup>68</sup> give Gallagher's role the treatment it merits while Kennedy,<sup>69</sup> provides the clearest indication of Gallagher's role in Northern Ireland throughout 1969 and thereafter, especially following Hume's election to Stormont and in the months prior to the formation of the SDLP. "Hume continued to gain a political foothold and by September 1969," he writes.

Eamonn Gallagher of the Department of External Affairs who had by then become on the Dublin's key Northern Ireland policy makers, would write that 'Mr Ateer's popularity has decreased considerably, while Mr Hume has retained a position of considerable influence,' Hume's growing role in Dublin's Northern Ireland policy was very clear through 1969. *Through Gallagher, he became Dublin's number one contact in Derry and his views held an increasing influence over the Dublin government's Northern Ireland policy from this period.*<sup>70</sup> [Emphasis added.]

Kennedy's finding here is astute, but even here though, the levels of two-way influence are under-explored. Donlon insists<sup>71</sup> that while Hume was clearly a highly influential figure as far as the Irish government was concerned, he was, in turn, influenced by Department of External Affairs officials. One key task the department set itself was to convince Hume to retain faith in the some form of devolved administration in Northern Ireland despite the collapse of trust in O'Neill's capacity to reform. Throughout the 1960s, and particularly before the events of 1968-69, Hume had stuck to the principles as outlined in his *Irish Times* article of May 1964 that Northern nationalists who had lost what little faith existed in the McAteer-led Nationalist Party should organise politically and actively work to influence the unionist government of the day, changing the system from within especially in relation to policing, electoral law and discrimination in housing and economic development. That faith was badly dented by the failure of Hume's social housing scheme and particularly by the overtly non-sectarian campaign, jointly led by Hume, to have Northern Ireland's second university located in Derry rather than in largely unionist Coleraine. This was compounded by the pace of O'Neill's reforms - clearly far too slow for the Civil Rights movement and yet

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<sup>66</sup> O'Donnell, Catherine (2007) p. 38.

<sup>67</sup> Kelly, Stephen (2013) pp. 311, 323-5, 329, 348, and 361.

<sup>68</sup> Dorr, (2017) pp. 66-8, 77-8, 81-4, 87, 91, 95-6, 98-9, 100, 104, 114, 121, 129, 143, 145, 146, 149-52, 160, 183, 22, 226 and 376.

<sup>69</sup> Kennedy, Michael J. (2000) Chapter 15.

<sup>70</sup> Kennedy (2000) p. 323.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with author, Ballina Co Tipperary August 10<sup>th</sup> 2010.

far too rapid for O'Neill's conservative cabinet ministers as well as backbenchers to say nothing of the implacable opposition they provoked from the Rev Ian Paisley. The street disturbances and the O'Neill government's response to them blunted Hume's faith yet further just as it had also undermined O'Neill's power and his capacity to control his divided cabinet. After October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968, O'Neill's grip on power ebbed. The failure of O'Neill's reforms, at least in Hume's eyes, caused him to doubt the ability of Northern Ireland reforming itself from within. This was exemplified by the more decisive push for reform, in breach of the established "convention", by James Callaghan, the British Home Secretary, in the wake of the Derry disturbances and the reaction to them by O'Neill's government at Stormont.

Over the same time period, Dublin stood by the Lemass-Whitaker line on Northern Ireland which held that any settlement could only be achieved "in Ireland, by Irishmen" – a reference to Lemass's speech in Tralee in July 1963, which committed to eventual unification by consent.<sup>72</sup> This was maintained by Jack Lynch, Taoiseach from 1966, who as stated, was heavily reliant on Whitaker's counsel on Northern Ireland. However, with the Department of External Affairs now taking a more proactive role in policy formation and basing its response to the growing conflict in Northern Ireland on Gallagher's findings, Dublin changed its emphasis on Northern Ireland. Relegated was the Whitaker dream of a new and productive *détente* with the Stormont government and in its place was a growing, Gallagher-inspired Irish government drive to build a more dynamic relationship with the British government in the hope that it could deliver desired outcomes, presumably despite those in government in Belfast rather than by dint of their good intentions. Both the Irish and British governments outwardly called for the backing of the Stormont government and the reform programme, but as Craig concludes, the Wilson government was preparing more thoroughly behind the scenes for that to fail. Dublin too had its inconsistencies to confront and Lynch had cabinet divisions to manage<sup>73</sup> with ministers of varying shades of green around the cabinet table and some of them distinctly unhappy with Whitaker's unionist-accommodating gradualism. *De facto* recognition of the Northern state and its government, an undeniable bending of traditional nationalist and republican philosophy since 1920, was

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<sup>72</sup> Kennedy (2000) p. 199.

<sup>73</sup> Local government minister and Donegal TD Neil Blaney and cabinet colleague Charles Haughey were vocally opposed to Lynch's approaches on Northern Ireland, arguing instead for a more traditional and anti-partitionist policy.

a position authored by Whitaker and a leap taken by Lemass. It was supported and later adopted by Lynch. But the Irish government, aware of the contradiction of its own position - it relied on the success of a Unionist dominated administration at Stormont which it constitutionally opposed - also began to recalibrate its approach to Northern Ireland. Craig sums up the new and fluid situation:

Instead of trying to create an alliance with unionism, a principle that had guided Lemass's trips to Stormont and one characteristic of Ken Whitaker, Lynch was now refocused on allying with London. A London-Dublin alliance, alongside links with an emergent SDLP<sup>74</sup>, became the typical aim of Dublin governments up until 1974. As a policy, this was the brainchild of Eamonn Gallagher and the Department of Foreign Affairs, as Ken Whitaker was gradually sidelined from Northern Ireland affairs after September 1969.<sup>75</sup>

Care however is needed here not to overstate the situation. It is important to remember that the fault lines in Dublin as far as Northern policy was concerned were not drawn between Whitaker and Gallagher – influenced as he was by Hume. Events in 1970, principally the Arms Crisis,<sup>76</sup> were to show all too clearly and dramatically that old-style Fianna Fáil policy, exemplified by Haughey, Boland and Blaney within the Irish cabinet, and based on anti-partitionist rhetoric and hostility to the governments in Belfast and London was the real counterpoint to Lynch. Craig is perhaps a little quick to record the demise of Whitaker. Kelly records the fallout after a speech made by Jack Lynch in response to the breakdown of law and order, especially, in Derry in August 1969 following a two-day explosion of violence known as the Battle of the Bogside.<sup>77</sup> In response to the rapidly escalating crisis Lynch had made an address on television in which he denounced the Unionist government and the RUC as well as plans to bring the British army onto the streets of Derry and Belfast. Lynch also made what were widely interpreted as hints of possible military intervention in Northern Ireland.

It is evident that the Stormont Government is no longer in control of the situation. Indeed the present situation is the inevitable outcome of the policies pursued for decades by successive Stormont Governments. It is clear, also, that the Irish

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<sup>74</sup> For 'emergent SDLP' read John Hume – the SDLP's formation was not agreed by its founders until Spring 1970 and not formally announced until August that year.

<sup>75</sup> Craig (2010) p. 60.

<sup>76</sup> Two cabinet ministers, Charles Haughey and Neil Blaney, were sacked by Taoiseach Jack Lynch amid allegations that the pair had tried to import arms illegally into Ireland for use by the IRA in Northern Ireland.

<sup>77</sup> Kelly (2013) pp. 306-7.

Government can no longer stand by and see innocent people injured and perhaps worse.<sup>78</sup>

The address provoked strong criticism from Maj James Chichester Clark, successor to Capt Terence O'Neill as Unionist prime minister, who had stepped down the previous April, as well as from British Home Secretary James Callaghan – to say nothing of the wider unionist reaction in Northern Ireland who thought Lynch's words were confirmation of an intended invasion of Derry by the Irish army. As the political crisis escalated, Kelly records the lengths to which Lynch went to involve Whitaker and to act on his counsel. Whitaker's calming influence was also to the fore the following month when Lynch made another speech<sup>79</sup> bearing the Whitaker hallmarks of gradualism, moderation in dealings with Belfast and London, and conciliation towards unionists. It came to define his tenure of office as Taoiseach especially in relation to Northern Ireland. Craig makes much, perhaps too much, of the changes to the text made by Lynch himself.<sup>80</sup> But the effect of the speech was as intended and even Chichester-Clark felt motivated to make a qualified yet positive response. Throughout the rest of 1969 and into the new decade Whitaker kept to his line that Northern Protestants and unionists, if guaranteed that their interests and standing would be maintained, would not stand in the way of eventual reunification of Ireland. To that extent that he commissioned two senior civil servants from the Department of Finance to examine if a way could be found to separate Northern Ireland from Britain constitutionally while keeping long-term economic links with London. He had been secretary at the Department of Finance earlier and many of its star performers would have been known to him. Craig makes much of the fact that Whitaker did not approach the departments of the Taoiseach, External Affairs “or even Local Government”<sup>81</sup> to help him in this task. Craig cites this in support of the claim that Whitaker “was losing responsibility for Northern Ireland and wanted to keep any input if he could”.<sup>82</sup> What he overlooks is

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<sup>78</sup> Full text of Lynch's address on RTÉ available at NAI TAOIS 2000/6/657. The address can also be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9e-dGwiDM4>

<sup>79</sup> This speech was made in Tralee, Co Kerry. Much more conciliatory in tone than his television address, this speech was reminiscent of an address made by Sean Lemass in the same town on July 29th 1963. Lemass had then called for the Irish government to “recognise that the government and parliament there [Northern Ireland] exist with the support of a majority in the Six County area – artificial though that area is”. He added: There remains the question of Partition, which it would be our dearest wish to bring to an end by agreement made in Ireland between Irishmen – by a family reunion in which the memory of past dissensions would be forgotten.” See also: the *Irish Times* July 30<sup>th</sup> 1963 p. 1 also available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1963/0730/Pg001.html#Ar00101>

<sup>80</sup> Craig (2010) p. 62.

<sup>81</sup> Craig (2010) p. 63.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

the fact that the Department of Local Government was under Kevin Boland as minister, one of the most hardline members of the Lynch cabinet and an opponent of the argument that unionists should be wooed by Dublin. The Department of the Taoiseach, while a key department, was very small. The Department of External Affairs had, at that stage, no dedicated branch to working on Northern Ireland or Anglo-Irish links. It could be therefore that Craig saw evidence of Whitaker's eventual demise which did not exist. Dermot Keogh, Lynch's biographer, records the following assessment of Whitaker's standing and the arrival of Eamonn Gallagher in his new Northern Ireland role at the Department of External Affairs which, it is argued here, is closer to reality:

Lynch relied very heavily on [Whitaker's] advice and speech-writing skills throughout the critical period of 1968–73. Dr Whitaker, as governor of the Central Bank from 1969, continued to advise Lynch and to help formulate policy on Northern Ireland. The delineation of that relationship does not in any way downplay the important role in this regard played by his senior officials in the Departments of An Taoiseach and External Affairs. The diplomat Eamonn Gallagher .... is deserving of a major study. He was consistently the diplomat most central and important to Lynch in the early and most difficult years of the conflict in Northern Ireland. His deep knowledge of, and high-level contacts in, Northern Ireland were to make his reports essential reading for Lynch.<sup>83</sup>

Craig appears to deal with Whitaker's role vis-à-vis the Hume-Gallagher axis as some form of zero-sum game. It is rather more accurate to cast the Lynch approach to the highly volatile situation as an evolution which incorporated the calming influence of Whitaker and the dynamic input of Gallagher which was based on his priceless intelligence gathered in Northern Ireland – not least from Hume. The two, Whitaker and Gallagher, complemented rather than competed with each other. Lynch's Northern Ireland policy did not run on twin tracks, rather it was a single approach combining Whitaker and Gallagher elements which were not in competition. The key point here is that both of them reflect Hume's position on the emerging situation. Furthermore both of them, as Lynch's key advisers on the new and dangerous situation north of the border, helped Lynch quell his most outspoken front bench colleagues in Fianna Fáil. In doing so they buttressed the taoiseach's stance in opposition to the strident nationalism of Haughey,<sup>84</sup> Blaney and Boland. Noel Dorr and Anne Chambers support

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<sup>83</sup> Available at: <http://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/jack-lynch-and-the-defence-of-democracy-in-ireland-august-1969-june-1970/>

<sup>84</sup> See Kelly (2012) for a useful discussion of evidence concerning the nationalist position adopted by Charles Haughey.

this position, relating the continuing presence of Whitaker's sought-after influence well into 1972.<sup>85</sup> This assessment contradicts the conclusions of Hennessey who claims that Lynch's government appeared helpless to resist the pull of traditional Irish nationalism as the Northern crisis deepened. Hennessey asserts:

[L]ike a recovering alcoholic as the drinks trolley rolls by, the Irish government – in particular the Ministry of External Affairs and civil servants such as Eamonn Gallagher – could not resist the opportunity to see the crisis in the North as a political opportunity to further Nationalist aims for a united Ireland. This in itself could be destabilising. What springs forth from the Dublin documents is the centrality of the goal of Irish unity. The point here is that such gifted men – politicians and civil servants never sought to question their Nationalist fundamentalism.<sup>86</sup>

According to Bloomfield, such a description is a “gross distortion”<sup>87</sup>, and with a vantage point at the side of the Stormont prime minister he is surely well placed to comment. Hennessey is wrong on (at least) three counts. Firstly he treats the Irish cabinet under Lynch as addicted to “nationalist fundamentalism” and accuses them of allowing inherited republican dogma and de Valera-style ideology to dictate their approach. If this were true, such accusations relate only to the likes of Charles Haughey and Neil Blaney and not to Lynch or Erskine Childers, the Tánaiste<sup>88</sup>; or to Patrick Hillery as foreign minister who had faced down the irredentists and advocated gradualism and accommodation. If the Lynch cabinet was addicted to anything it was the search for *political stability within the Republic* – arguably their first priority - as Northern Ireland erupted and Anglo-Irish relations were thrown into turmoil. As has been shown, the decades between partition and 1968 in the Republic, a period dominated by Fianna Fáil governments, were marked not so much by an alcoholic-style dependence on irredentist nationalism but by a growing disengagement between South and North with little other than empty rhetoric at election time. McCann's circular to his ambassadors and Lemass's admission of a lack of first-hand experience of unionism illustrate that much. Secondly, Hennessey refers to “Irish unity” as if it were a concept capable of only one, very traditional, meaning. Bloomfield saw more room for interpretation than Hennessey is prepared to admit.

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<sup>85</sup> Dorr (2017) p. 145, Chambers (2014) p. 304.

<sup>86</sup> Hennessey (2005) p. 392.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with author. December 11<sup>th</sup> 2013. Dublin.

<sup>88</sup> Deputy prime minister.



What was at issue here was a question of the most fundamental importance. Did Irish unity mean the final victory of Catholic and republican Ireland over unionism and ‘the Brits’, with the shoe of dominance shifting firmly to the other foot, or did it mean a growing together by patient and peaceful means on terms widely acceptable throughout the island?<sup>89</sup>

Lynch, advised by Whitaker and Gallagher, saw *eventual* unity as the only long term and viable solution to the constitutional question. His means of getting there were outlined in a policy document, largely drafted by Whitaker in November 1969. O’Donnell<sup>90</sup> usefully refers to this paper and its advocacy of “a policy of friendship” and its assertion that

[T]he only successful policy is likely to be our most recent one of achieving unity by friendship and co-operation by being prepared to accept a future structural set-up between the two parts of Ireland which would allay Northern Ireland’s fears and safeguard her interests. This is the course that is now accepted.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, Hennessey was also wrong in that he ignores the importance of the principle of consent – the basis on which (the majority of) the Irish cabinet would insist any eventual reunification of Ireland could be obtained. The consent principle – alluded to in July 1963 by Seán Lemass when he was Taoiseach when he suggested unity would follow agreement “in Ireland among Irishmen” – was what allowed the Irish government to slip off what Foster terms “the sterile hook of irredentism”.<sup>92</sup> Consent was also a cornerstone of what Hume had presented in his 1964 articles in the *Irish Times* just as it was what was being advocated by the likes of the National Democratic Party (forerunner of the SDLP) in Northern Ireland in the early part of the decade and by Dr Garret FitzGerald in the Republic.<sup>93</sup>

### **Hume ‘throws a lifebelt to Southern politics’**

Lynch’s problems with nationalist hardliners within his own cabinet amounted not so much to a split as much as an explosive fission as the events of his party’s following

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<sup>89</sup> Bloomfield (2007) p. 132.

<sup>90</sup> O’Donnell (2007).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid p. 33. The full text of the policy document ‘The Constitutional Position of Northern Ireland’ is available at National Archives of Ireland TSCH 2001/8/6.

<sup>92</sup> Foster (2007) p. 107.

<sup>93</sup> See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

ard fheis<sup>94</sup> were to demonstrate.<sup>95</sup> Despite the pressure from tremendous forces, Lynch generally held to the moderate line as encouraged by Whitaker and increasingly by Gallagher – with the occasional rhetorical foray onto the territory of hardliners<sup>96</sup> presumably in an attempt to keep his raucous cabinet in line. It was into just such a dangerous and volatile scenario that Hume’s arrival on the political stage was made. Sean Donlon recalls the importance that Hume’s interventions made:

Jack Lynch and Paddy Hillery (his foreign minister) began to realise here is the voice of sanity, not just sanity, here is the voice of construction. He [Hume] had a concept, he had a vision. That consistency was a huge beacon for people in Dublin who were floundering, who didn’t know what way to go. Were we going to go the armed route? Were we going to go the peaceful route? If we were going to go down the peaceful route what sort of peaceful vision were we aiming at? Hume in a sense threw a lifebelt to Southern politics as early as 1969-70.<sup>97</sup>

Hume and the Department of Foreign Affairs were now to be closely aligned in a role which the department sought for itself and which fitted nicely with Hume’s aim for greater Dublin involvement in Northern Ireland as his faith evaporated in the ability of the Unionist government at Stormont to reform Northern Ireland. London, as the sovereign power in Northern Ireland would have to do the reforming, Hume believed, and the Irish government would have to push it relentlessly to do so. This widening of the political context beyond the near claustrophobic confines of Northern Ireland to include the British and Irish governments in dealing with the worsening crisis was however fraught with danger. Constitutional nationalists of every shade throughout Ireland now put all their efforts into attempts to influence the British government directly and, by dint of this, to alter the course of events in Northern Ireland. Westminster, meanwhile, grew more concerned about both the stability of the Stormont administration and the Irish government’s capacity to hold the moderate Lynch/Gallagher/Hume line against its more pugilistic and diehard elements.

The impact of Eamonn Gallagher’s work at External Affairs was highly significant. Dermot Gallagher, then a senior official at External Affairs and later ambassador to

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<sup>94</sup> Annual conference

<sup>95</sup> Kelly (2013) is particularly strong in his analysis of the events of late 1969 and 1970 within Fianna Fáil especially pp. 295-334

<sup>96</sup> Fanning (2001) refers to “the design of the coat of many colours that passed for his government’s Northern policy”

<sup>97</sup> Sean Donlon quoted in *Hume*, a BBC Northern Ireland documentary produced by Below The Radar and broadcast on September 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Washington, recalls Eamonn Gallagher (no relation) and the almost obsessive commitment he showed in his dealings with Northern Ireland: “There was a canteen in Iveagh House<sup>98</sup> and Gallagher would go there and talk about the North with the rest of us. He would warn, ‘The North is going to collapse’.”<sup>99</sup> Fanning<sup>100</sup> refers in detail to Gallagher’s intelligence-gathering forays in Northern Ireland, many of which were less than formally approved and carried out almost as an act of subterfuge . “Nobody has ever done this before, why don’t you keep it up,” Gallagher was told by Hugh McCann’s secretary.<sup>101</sup> He did. The informality of much of Gallagher’s work was formalised by the final policy suggestion, drafted by McCann, in a memorandum prepared for the government on Northern Ireland. This called for a new section to be formed within External Affairs which would correct the sins of the past by specialising in all aspects of Anglo-Irish relations, addressing long-term and short term problems and solutions, co-ordinating cross-border contacts and those in Britain and throughout the diplomatic network in relation to Northern Ireland. Such a desk would also act as a “clearing house for the activities of other Departments in relation to the North”.<sup>102</sup> This was the proposal which established what is now the Anglo-Irish section at the Department of Foreign Affairs – the key element in the Irish government’s dealings with Northern Ireland to the present day. It transformed the way in which business was conducted. What Fanning could have stressed, but did not, is that the new official channels of communication worked in both directions. It was an opportunity not lost on the likes of Hume and Currie, and on their new party that was soon to be launched.

The birth of the Social Democratic and Labour Party had been a long drawn-out process, as can be seen from Chapter 2. Lemass and later Lynch had both been critical of the Nationalist Party and had channelled their focus on dealing with O’Neill’s unionists in the run up to October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968. But it had always been clear, to Fianna Fáil governments in Dublin as well as to many in the wider Civil Rights movement (Hume included as he had stated in 1964) that a new political party was needed. The formation of the Provisional IRA in Belfast in December 1969, heightened that need, as Dublin saw it. It was Eamonn Gallagher, having been in regular contact with Hume and Currie

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<sup>98</sup> Home of the Department of External Affairs on Dublin’s St Stephen’s Green.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with author. January 24<sup>th</sup> 2013. Dublin.

<sup>100</sup> Fanning (2001).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid* p. 80.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid* p. 82. See also “Policy in Relation to Northern Ireland” NAI TSCH 2000/6/658.

among others, who relayed information to Lynch as early as February 1970 that a new party was finally to be formed which would incorporate the strains of constitutional nationalism, a centre-left approach to social issues and, of course, and eventual Irish unity based on the principle of consent.<sup>103</sup> This was to be the fulfilment of Hume's campaign manifesto during the Stormont election of March 1969 – to say nothing of his aspirations in the *Irish Times* in 1964. The SDLP launched in August 1970 to critical acclaim from Fianna Fáil – a significant change of tack for Lynch who had previously resisted calls for closer links with the Nationalist Party and who had followed a softly-softly approach to engagement with political forces lined against the Unionist government at Stormont for fear of upsetting any prospect of the Unionist state reforming itself. The new party had immediate impact on Irish government thinking. “In the early days there is no doubt that the SDLP was the bigger influence,” recalls Currie, who was given the role of liaising with both government and opposition parties, as well as key civil servants and others, in Dublin.

We made it clear that that was the way we saw the relationship. We were the ones who were driving policy. At a later stage when the [Northern Ireland situation] became international, in meetings with the British government in the lead up to Sunningdale<sup>104</sup> - at that level – when there were intergovernmental conferences, when the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister were meeting well clearly the SDLP didn't have a [role]. It was the civil servants and politicians in Dublin.<sup>105</sup>

James (Jim) Sharkey<sup>106</sup> who, according to Eamonn Gallagher was the only other man in External Affairs who knew anything at that time about Northern Ireland, states Hume's political appeal south of the border lay in his inherent non-violent moderation and in his ability to frame his political approach in a cogent way. It was Hume who made it clear to the government in Dublin that mere anger directed against the Unionist government in Belfast and the British government in London was insufficient.

Hume's great strength was to show people in the South that a simple solution based on bi-lateral anger, based on bi-lateral tension was not enough. [He saw it as] a minority problem but it required somebody else to help solve it. The problem of competing minorities required other actors - and it is still the truth today. I think

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<sup>103</sup> See Staunton (2001) pp. 274-6.

<sup>104</sup> The talks in late 1973 which concluded with agreement on the establishment of a power-sharing Assembly in Northern Ireland with a Council of Ireland to discuss all-Ireland matters

<sup>105</sup> Interview with author. January 21<sup>st</sup> 2014. Allenwood, Co Kildare

<sup>106</sup> Sharkey was also from Derry and, like Hume, attended St Columb's College.

it emerged out of the logic of Hume's analysis, and it would have emerged very early on.<sup>107</sup>

By 1970 the newly-forged SDLP-Department of External Affairs<sup>108</sup> relationship was mutually beneficial and mutually influential. Sharkey explains the nature of the Hume-Department of Foreign Affairs relationship:

In a sense it was symbiotic, inevitably it was a two-way thing. Hume becoming the agent of the Department of Foreign Affairs? I can't think of a good example. He was too much his own man and he was too senior a personality in Ireland. You would have to say that the four big personalities in nationalism were [Garret] FitzGerald, [Charles] Haughey, [Jack] Lynch and Hume. My admiration for Hume as a Northerner and a Derry man was always that he was never, never subordinate to any personality. He was their co-equal. Sometimes he would take delegations – I heard, I wasn't part of it - into the Department of the Taoiseach and read the riot act. Whatever had annoyed him about not being informed of some aspect of policy or some policy moving in a particular direction.<sup>109</sup>

As the Lynch government, fearful for the future stability of the government at Stormont (as well as its own) it recognised the need, as Gallagher stressed, to switch its emphasis from the Dublin-Belfast axis to a Dublin-London one. Such an approach was a core belief of Hume who, as far back as the failed University for Derry campaign in 1965, had long doubted the Unionist government's ability to deliver reforms. Similarly, Hume who was a confirmed supporter of an Anglo-Irish joint authority approach to the governance of Northern Ireland, as suggested again in his *Irish Times* platform article in May 1964, was constantly pressed to accept that some form of regional administration in Belfast, would always have to be included in any new package of measures. Sean Donlon, who succeeded Gallagher as the Department's principal contact man on Northern Ireland insists this was always a key task alongside political and diplomatic efforts to have London allow an Irish government input into the handling of the Northern crisis.<sup>110</sup>

### **Hume and the importance of informality**

This chapter has demonstrated how Irish government policy altered dramatically in late 1969-70 following violence at Derry's first Civil Rights march and the turmoil and violence on the streets of Northern Ireland which it provoked. The development of a revised approach to Northern policy, as has been shown, was greatly influenced by

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with author. September 13<sup>th</sup> 2013. Dublin.

<sup>108</sup> The Department of External Affairs was renamed the Department of Foreign Affairs in 1971.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with author. September 13<sup>th</sup> 2013. Dublin.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with author, Ballina, Co Tipperary, August 10<sup>th</sup> 2010.

Hume – more than any other single figure in what became the SDLP after August 1970 – working with a series of influential figures from the Department of Foreign Affairs. What is less evident from the events recounted here is the near unique manner in which Irish government policy came to be formed. The complex story outlined above is supported by state papers, personal memoirs and by other published academic work all of which rely on formal sources. However it is clear from a closer reading of the research presented here that a significant factor in the rise of Hume and the growth of Department of Foreign Affairs influence in the determination of new policy was the role played by *informal* contacts. Indeed the wider story of Dublin-Belfast relations since the early days of rapprochement between O'Neill and Lemass has, to a significant degree, been driven by a network of semi-official (even unofficial) contacts, among influential people who were at one remove from the formal levers of power. The Stormont prime minister met the Taoiseach because, primarily, of the efforts of two senior officials – Jim Malley and Ken Whitaker, who already knew and trusted each other courtesy of their work for their respective governments at meetings of the World Bank and IMF – well away from the political confines in Belfast or Dublin. Formal procedures could not have provided the secrecy on which such a radical departure from established norms depended. Eamonn Gallagher's work in Northern Ireland following his return to Dublin from Paris was similarly under the radar and often outside the established norms of diplomatic behaviour. Fanning notes that while Gallagher did report to McCann, his department's secretary-general, McCann often did not record an official report. It was not for nothing that his colleagues in Iveagh House called him "Canny McHugh".<sup>111</sup> Gallagher's freelancing, not least his decision to drive Patrick Hillery to Belfast to see the situation for himself in the absence of diplomatic clearance was a dramatic breach of protocol.<sup>112</sup> Noteworthy also is Dermot Gallagher's recollection of Eamonn Gallagher's informal word-of-mouth reporting of the situation in Northern Ireland which is quite apart from his formal recording of events as contained in state papers. It is clear also that Jack Lynch's approach to the outbreak of sustained and serious violence in Derry and elsewhere in August 1969 was clearly influenced not by officials from his own Department of the Taoiseach but by Gallagher *and* Whitaker who, it should be noted, was the Governor of the Central Bank and

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<sup>111</sup> Fanning (2001) p. 80.

<sup>112</sup> See Craig (2010) p. 73.

therefore outside the realm of department civil servants. If other governments, notably in the UK and US are more clear cut in their top-down approach to policy direction, then the Republic of Ireland was clearly less formal and structured. Noel Dorr, former secretary-general of the Department of Foreign Affairs, states: “[O]ur system, at least in those days, worked somewhat differently.....”

Historians may find this strange, perhaps – in principle, they would think, policy should always be determined at political level and it did indeed always require political approval. But this does not mean that it always had to come downward in the first instance by way of directive or instruction, or that it had to be based solely on formal position papers submitted and approved at government level. In my experience policy was often developed also in a creative interaction between the person who had been asked to prepare a draft speech and the political leader who could choose to modify or adapt it, or to accept and deliver it.<sup>113</sup>

If Eamonn Gallagher became, as Dorr describes him, “the gatekeeper of official policy” on Northern Ireland – and there is little evidence to the contrary – then it should be equally clear that the people from whom Gallagher accepted advice were highly influential. Hume was to the fore of Gallagher’s coterie in a manner that Fitt and [Paddy] Devlin were not. There is here, amid all the thinly documented suggestions of unofficial happenings, a “hidden history”<sup>114</sup> of the Irish government’s revision of policy on Northern Ireland.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explains the rise of Hume as a major political figure, growing from relative obscurity to a position of considerable influence in terms of Irish government policy on Northern Ireland and (to a lesser extent) on relations with London. It analyses how Hume helped fill the Irish state’s policy and diplomatic vacuum that arose following the 1920 Act which partitioned Ireland and permitted London to “divide and depart” from the policy area which had bedevilled it since the time of Parnell. In doing so it adds to the Gourevitch’s appeal for more research to be conducted at the interface between domestic actors and political forces from another state. Explicitly, it shows how Hume involved himself centrally in the policy formation processes of the Republic of Ireland. It demonstrates that this involved a concerted drive by Hume to build influence in Dublin with a view to effecting change within Northern Ireland. Crucially,

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<sup>113</sup> Dorr (2017) p. 142.

<sup>114</sup> Ó Dochartaigh (2005) p3.

it also shows how and why civil servants from the Republic sought to promote Hume's political analysis and strategy in an effort to fill a glaring policy vacuum. In doing so the chapter places in a new context the growth of North-South contacts and the emergence of key (Irish) civil servants who frequently worked at sub-official level. It shows how Hume simply ignored the constraints of the Irish border (in contrast with many figures in the old Nationalist Party) by direct and personal engagement with the Irish government and its officials who were doing the same – often in the absence of official sanction.

It was in such contexts that the formal arrival of the SDLP in 1970 fitted in wonderfully with the aims of the Irish government, incorporating as it did the prominent political Belfast personalities of Paddy Devlin and Gerry Fitt, the West Belfast MP and new party leader; Hume and Currie, as well as Ivan Cooper, Hume's long-term ally, and Paddy O'Hanlon who was born in Drogheda, Co Louth but had strong Co Armagh connections. Gallagher's influence at this turbulent time was evident and the birth of the party provided the Irish government, and Southern opinion generally, with a new force alongside which they could rally. The SDLP was, at one and the same time, a major influence upon the Irish government while it simultaneously reflected many of the positions adopted by it. The alliance was tri-partite in that the same rules of engagement applied to Fine Gael and to Labour and continued along seamlessly following the Dáil election of 1973 which saw the arrival of key Hume ally Garret FitzGerald as Minister for Foreign Affairs – and the maverick Conor Cruise O'Brien sidelined at Posts and Telegraphs.



## 4: Quiet Diplomacy.

### Hume and the conversion of US policy 1969-1976

‘It was a mistake that unionism didn’t recognise earlier the importance of that influence, the significance of that influence, the way in which Hume would use the pressure point of Washington to apply pressure on London to do business with Dublin, almost to the exclusion of the unionists.’

*Jeffrey Donaldson MP<sup>1</sup>*

‘[Hume] looked at this as a political process that was going to be built upon different traditions and mutual respect. It was going to be resolved in a political evolution ... A process was going to be established that he believed could move the whole debate and discussion within a non-violent framework and could result eventually in some settlement.’

*Sen Edward Kennedy on his meeting with Hume in W Germany 1972<sup>2</sup>*

John Hume makes no reference to the US in any of his early writing or film scripts other than as a destination for Derry’s many emigrants.<sup>3</sup> Yet he was very much aware of the US role in international affairs, and particularly insofar as they affected his native city not least during the war years. His first comments from a platform in Derry referred not to America but to the European project which he maintained from the outset of his public life was the exemplar for a society as divided as Northern Ireland’s. (As early as 1959, the 22-year-old Hume spoke at a public debate in the city in favour of Britain and Ireland joining the then EEC.) Like many of that era, and especially those in the Civil Rights movement in Derry,<sup>4</sup> he was also profoundly affected by the US Civil Rights movement and the leadership of Martin Luther King, as his memoirs disclose. In different ways, both Europe and particularly the US continued to resonate with his thinking on Northern Ireland and the need for emancipation and reconciliation. While both were of lasting importance, it is contended here that the US was the more important to Hume’s mind. The Washington relationship had the capacity to exert raw political leverage on London in respect of policy towards Ireland, both North and South in a manner which Brussels did not. Further, such leverage was also felt by the unionist population in Northern Ireland both

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<sup>1</sup> The DUP MP quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph* July 15 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Fitzpatrick (2017) Foreword.

<sup>3</sup> See ‘The Northern Catholic’, *The Irish Times* p. 8 May 18 and p. 8 May 19<sup>th</sup> 1964. Available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0518/Pg008.html> and at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0519/Pg008.html> and *A City Solitary*, directed by Terence McDonald (1926-2001) available at <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-a-city-solitary-1963-online>

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2 for Eamonn McCann’s linking of the Derry agitation with other 1968 campaigns in Europe and the US.

in terms of pressure on political leaders as well as encouragement on the usually cautious and sceptical unionist electorate as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

The problem was that successive US administrations of both political hues had formally maintained a strict hands-off approach in favour of maintenance of the arguably more central transatlantic alliance with Britain. Hume, frustrated with Stormont's (lack of) commitment to reform and London's apparent inability to force the pace, looked to the US to change the dynamics of the situation. In doing so, Hume encountered key figures from the Irish diplomatic corps – many of whom were already known to him. Dublin had hitherto looked to the United Nations as a focus for efforts to effect change in Northern Ireland in the aftermath of civil disturbances after October 1968. Such an approach was stymied by Ireland's lack of international clout and the sheer political weight of the Washington-London axis. As a result Ireland's diplomatic efforts in America had withered to the point that Seán Donlon, an Irish diplomat who would eventually win appointment as Ambassador to the US, looked upon his posting to the Consul-General's office in Boston in 1969 as a forced removal "to a quiet backwater where nothing happened".<sup>6</sup> In 1969, Hume and the Department of External Affairs<sup>7</sup> discovered what each could do for the other in relation to America. Their co-ordinated efforts produced a remarkable shift in the forces that helped shape UK policy on Ireland. This chapter addresses the origins of that process. In contrast to O'Clery,<sup>8</sup> it stresses the need for a much earlier starting point.

It thus builds on the work of Martin Mansergh<sup>9</sup> by examining the nature of US involvement in the Northern Ireland peace process. However, like Paul Arthur<sup>10</sup> and Andrew Wilson,<sup>11</sup> the choice of a much earlier starting point – 1969 in preference to Mansergh's "late 1970s" - is necessary to place the US and wider international involvement in Ireland in its proper historical context, to show how "the international" has been a factor in Irish political life and to correct

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<sup>5</sup> Although outside the time period of this study President Clinton's overtures towards Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble throughout the peace process and his wooing of a huge rally in Belfast<sup>5</sup> illustrate this point. For more on the Clinton effect on unionism see *Divided Society, Northern Ireland 1990-98* produced by Belfast's Linen Hall Library available at: <https://www.dividedsociety.org/outreach/toolkits/bill-clintons-visit-northern-ireland>

<sup>6</sup> Donlon, Sean. 'Bringing Irish Diplomatic and Political Influence to Bear on Washington'. *The Irish Times*. January 25<sup>th</sup> 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Known as the Department of Foreign Affairs after 1971 – the preferred title for this research.

<sup>8</sup> O'Clery (1997) *The Greening of the White House*.

<sup>9</sup> Mansergh, Martin. (1995) The background to the peace process. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol 6 pp. 145-158.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur, Paul (2000) *Special Relationships: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland Problem*. Belfast. Blackstaff.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson (1995) *Irish America and the Ulster Crisis*. Washington DC. The Catholic University of America Press.

a recurrent theme in the literature that American influence originated in the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> This chapter also develops Joseph Thompson's theme that while the diverse strands of Irish America had a range of links to Ireland, the US government was wedded to its ties with the British government.<sup>13</sup> In doing so it attempts to answer the question Thompson leaves hanging: who was ultimately responsible for the US government decision to become involved in Northern Ireland?

It will be shown that John Hume, acting in a solo capacity rather than as a member of the collective leadership in the SDLP, deliberately developed a network of powerful contacts within the US political system and in doing so helped enmesh the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in building "one of the most influential lobbies in Washington," and one which was grossly disproportionate to the size of Ireland. Dermot Gallagher, Irish ambassador to the US from 1991-97, said: "There was a bit of an Irish mafia then".<sup>14</sup> This was deliberately constructed with the intention of harnessing US soft power to influence British governments, especially post-1972. (It was also notably later employed by the Clinton presidency to encourage and sustain unionist involvement in the peace process.) In doing so it will be shown that Hume had a clear understanding of the exercise of US influence abroad and was aware from an early stage of the impact this could have both in relation to British policy in Northern Ireland and on a range of political figures within Northern Ireland itself, not least Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble and Hume's fellow Nobel peace prize recipient. The fact that the US remained involved in Northern Ireland some 20 years after the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 and continues to identify a role for itself is testament to Hume's foresight. Political influence is a two-way street and it will be shown that Hume's intensive efforts in the US also had a direct bearing on his own political activity which was also shaped, at least in part, by those whom he influenced so directly.

### **Early US influences**

Hume did not have extensive family or personal relations in the US but his native city did. Derry had much closer than usual connections with North America based on mass emigration in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The city was also disproportionately exposed to American

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<sup>12</sup> For example see O'Clery (1996) pp3-4 also MacGinty, Roger. "American Influences on the Northern Ireland Peace Process". The Journal of Conflict Studies Vol. XVII No. 2, Fall 1997, Dumbrell (2006) p. 357 and Dixon (2006) p. 409.

<sup>13</sup> Thompson (2001) p. xxv.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with author, January 24<sup>th</sup> 2013, Dublin.

cultural influences during World War II, as Leanna McCormick illustrates.<sup>15</sup> Hume's initial interest in, and admiration of, the US is virtually certain to have arisen from a historical and academic sources. Both directly and indirectly, the war had influenced the Hume family. Sam Hume had spells of employment in Derry's shipyard and later as a government clerk handling rationing papers. Peace in 1945 resulted in unemployment and Hume's father never worked again.<sup>16</sup> Hume, whose mind was already open to US influences, was inspired by Robert Kennedy and particularly Martin Luther King – in particular Dr King's drive not just for civil rights but also for economic emancipation and the lifting of poverty which blighted so many of King's natural constituency. The civil rights movement, particularly in Derry, was modelled on the protest for racial equality in the US, although there is no evidence of contact between key figures in either of the two movements. Yet its influence was both profound and direct. "The American civil rights in the 1960s gave birth to ours," Hume recalled. "Their successes were for us a cause of hope. The songs of their movement were also ours. We also believe that 'we shall overcome'; that rallying song is sung every year at my party conference."<sup>17</sup> Hume also confirmed his own opposition to violence thanks to King's non-violent principles. Like King, he saw violence as both counter-productive and immoral.

Hume's involvement in the Credit Union movement too was inspired by the movement's growth in Irish America, particularly in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.<sup>18</sup>

Hume first visited the US following his election as president of the Irish League of Credit Unions in 1964. He travelled to Boston and met Ray Flynn, a young Democrat hopeful who later became the city's mayor and US Ambassador to the Holy See.<sup>19</sup> It was the first of a series of fortunate political contacts Hume was to develop. He was invited back to Boston five years later in the autumn of 1969, following his election to the Stormont parliament and the eruption of violence in Derry, to address one of the many Irish societies. It was on this occasion he met Sean Donlon, whom he knew from his student days at Maynooth, and who (presumably) was still getting over his forced deployment from Bonn. The Irish government was already alerted to the threat, as they saw it, of the latent support in Irish America for an armed response to the outbreak of trouble in Derry and Belfast. Barry White, Hume's first biographer, notes the extent

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<sup>15</sup> At peak (December 1943), there were 120,000 American troops in Northern Ireland: 'the equivalent of one-tenth of the total population before the start of the second World War..' 'Londonderry served as naval headquarters and was the main US communications base in Europe during the war as well as being the largest convoy escort base in the UK.' L. McCormick, (2009) *Regulating Sexuality: Women in Twentieth-Century Northern Ireland*. Manchester University Press, p148.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 1 'Derryness'.

<sup>17</sup> Hume (1996) p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> See Farren (2018) pp. 31-32.

<sup>19</sup> Fitzpatrick (2017) p. 31.

of early support among Irish-Americans at that time for opposition to Stormont rule adding: “[o]ld IRA veterans could have no quarrel with [Edward] Kennedy’s telegram to the civil rights chairman in June 1969 – ‘Today the Irish struggle again but not alone. Your cause is a just cause. The reforms you seek are basic to all democracies worthy of the name’.”<sup>20</sup> Such sentiments were arguably typical of the time,<sup>21</sup> but now seem rather more sinister in light of the formation of the Provisional IRA in Belfast six months after Kennedy’s cable. It is wrong to assume there existed a unity of opinion among Irish-American communities across the US, as Bernadette Devlin was to discover when she visited just ahead of Hume’s trip. While many audiences were hungry for (and probably expected) the shibboleths of anti-British rhetoric, there was rather less of an appetite for Devlin’s revolutionary socialism and she encountered opposition as well as some admiration. Hume’s first steps also lacked a sure footing and White succinctly observed that Hume took time both to get to know his audiences and to counter Devlin’s “erratic” approach<sup>22</sup> - a point Drower<sup>23</sup> could have explored more fully and which Maurice Fitzpatrick does.<sup>24</sup> Paul Routledge adds little other than to say that Hume’s “new message” of non-violent reform “initially fell on stony ground”.<sup>25</sup> What is key here, and what so many accounts underplay, with the welcome exceptions of McLoughlin and Fitzpatrick, is what Hume did learn quickly on that 1969 US visit. Donlon states it was that access to US power lay not via the plethora of Irish societies with their discordant voices and that a direct route to the sources of power in Washington DC was needed. As Peter McLoughlin perceptively observes,<sup>26</sup> this entailed a targeting of the US political elite rather than a general appeal to the Irish-American masses. The track record of Irish political leaders breaking into Washington politics was not inspiring. “Parnell tried and failed. De Valera tried and failed. Mac Bride tried and failed,” Donlon declared in 1993. Perhaps his is a rather harsh assessment and it is fairer to state that Donlon himself, Hume and others could not have done what they

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<sup>20</sup> White (1984) p. 184.

<sup>21</sup> Sean Donlon states that such opinions were little more than “emotional froth” and that there existed little cogent analysis behind such rhetoric – let alone any plan for the future. See ‘Bringing Irish Diplomatic and Political Influence to Bear on Washington.’ *The Irish Times* January 25<sup>th</sup> 1993. Also available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1993/0125/Pg006.html>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* p. 187.

<sup>23</sup> Drower (1995) p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> Fitzpatrick (2017) p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Routledge (1997) p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> McLoughlin (2010) pp. 107-11.

did in influencing US political, diplomatic and entrepreneurial opinion had they not learned from previous generations of leaders who had laid the groundwork before them.<sup>27</sup>

President John F Kennedy, despite his triumphant trip to Ireland in 1963, did nothing for the Irish government in the context of taking sides on the question of Northern Ireland against the British. It mattered little to the many thousands of Irish who turned out to cheer Kennedy in Dublin in 1963 or to elected representatives of the Oireachtas<sup>28</sup> that this was the most pro-British president to have been elected in 100 years or that Kennedy seemed to have inherited his foreign policy attitudes towards London from his father who had served as ambassador there. Certainly some Irish diplomats, and particularly Michael Lillis, subsequently working in the US, regard Kennedy as more of a British ally than an Irish idol.<sup>29</sup>

JFK's successor, Lyndon Johnson, did likewise as did Richard Nixon who won the White House for the Republicans in 1968. He too visited Ireland, although receiving much less of a public welcome, and that trip was seen to have been made in the concept of the Three I's – Ireland, Italy and Israel. Nixon (1969-74) and Gerald Ford (1974-77) were preoccupied with the Cold War – to say nothing of Watergate. It is often assumed that this militated against US direct involvement in Ireland, but as MacLeod illustrates,<sup>30</sup> Nixon was concerned enough about the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland to raise it during his summit with Edward Heath in Bermuda in December 1971 in defiance of the so-called “special relationship” between the US and UK which made a priority of the Cold War alliance over other “domestic” issues.

Perhaps this relationship was more “special” when viewed from Downing Street than from Pennsylvania Avenue, particularly as US power grew during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and after World War II as Britain declined relatively as a global force. It was under Clinton that such tensions within the US governmental system were recognised for what they were and the locus of decision-making, especially in relation to Ireland, shifted internally from the Department of State to the White House with the weight of political influence of key figures in Congress in support. It follows from this – and this is a key point to be established here – that such a “turf war”, to use the valid and appropriate phrase of Timothy Lynch<sup>31</sup> was fought on the ground which was so successfully exploited by senior Irish diplomats working in tandem with John

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<sup>27</sup> De Valera was a noted fund-raiser in the US and addressed huge public rallies of Irish Americans. Charles Stewart Parnell was well-known in Washington circles, was heavily financially supported and had been invited to address Congress.

<sup>28</sup> Houses of parliament comprising the Dáil (lower house) and Seanad (senate). Kennedy was invited to address the Dáil.

<sup>29</sup> Personal communication from Lillis, July 30<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>30</sup> MacLeod, Alan. (2016) *International politics and the Northern Ireland conflict: the USA, diplomacy and the troubles*, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> Lynch (2004) *Turf War: The Clinton Administration and Northern Ireland*.

Hume.<sup>32</sup> (MacLeod further asserts that some State Department officials harboured serious criticisms of British handling of the early Troubles in Derry and Belfast and floated the possibility of involvement.)

There can be little doubt that Hume welcomed any and all international attention – particularly that which pressed the British government to assume control in Northern Ireland over the heads of the Stormont which he and his colleagues had boycotted since mid-1971.

### **The Kennedy Connection**

Hume's efforts to harness US influence began with the combined aims of effecting political change in Ireland and fostering economic development via foreign direct investment on one hand and countering traditional republicanism on the other. In Hume's mind, the three objectives were inextricably linked and, in the style of Martin Luther King, of equal importance. Hume argued, as had King, that the foundations of an equal and truly democratic society lay in a literate and educated electorate with equal access to learning and opportunity. To do so, Hume quickly learned language, approaches and themes which chimed with Irish America and Americans' view of themselves rather than the revolutionary rhetoric of Free Derry and the barricades. No doubt his considerable political acumen assisted him, but the guidance and contacts offered by Donlon and others in the Irish mission in the US were just as vital. In the near anarchy following Bloody Sunday in 1972, Hume returned to the US for a whirlwind round of meetings which had all the hallmarks of Irish diplomatic preparation. Hume, alongside Ireland's Ambassador Con Cremin, visited the United Nations in New York and met Kurt Waldheim, the Secretary-General. He met senior editorial staff at the *New York Times* before meeting Martin Hillenbrand, the US Assistant Secretary of State, stating afterwards: "I urged the US government to use its influence with the British government to have the [Northern Ireland] situation resolved."<sup>33</sup> Hume then met – for the first time – Senators Edward (Ted) Kennedy and Abraham (Abe) Ribicoff, both of whom had sponsored a Bill demanding the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland pending negotiations on Irish unity. The measure was also supported by Congressman Hugh Carey in the House of Representatives. Separately, Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs Patrick Hillery asked Nixon during talks at the White House that "his government did not seek open or public declarations

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<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to touch upon the point here that such inter-departmental struggles were much less of a feature within the Irish governmental system. Relations between the departments of the Taoiseach, Foreign Affairs and Finance were more fluid and accepting of cross-fertilisation as has been seen in Chapter 3.

<sup>33</sup> The *Irish Times* March 22nd 1972 p. 8.

by the United States government” in relation to the Bloody Sunday deaths. Instead he (perhaps timidly) hoped that the US would make their concerns about Northern Ireland known in their “private discussions with the British”.<sup>34</sup> Nixon was soon overwhelmed by the scandal over Watergate, which would bring him down and also dog his successor Gerald Ford and any chance of momentum which the Hillery proposal had was lost.<sup>35</sup> Hume also kept speaking engagements in Hartford, Connecticut and Cincinnati, Ohio, where he maintained his themes of opposition to violence, rejection of traditional republicanism and the need for the US to engage in efforts to accommodate reconciliation in Ireland – with unity a distant objective.<sup>36</sup> In November that year Kennedy phoned Hume at his home in Derry claiming that he “needed to know what is really going on in Northern Ireland” and that claiming he was told that Hume “was the man to talk to”.<sup>37</sup> Hume thought the call was a prank and hung up, but Kennedy tried again and the two arranged to meet at short notice for talks in Bonn, West Germany when the senator would attend a Nato Assembly meeting. It was no accident that the pair met at the residence of the Irish ambassador to West Germany, Sean Ronan, who knew Hume courtesy of his time in Dublin before his posting to Bonn. Kennedy already had voiced strong anti-British views on Northern Ireland particularly in the wake of Bloody Sunday just 10 months previously. While not supporting paramilitary violence, he had called for a British withdrawal of troops and used an address to Trinity College Dublin in 1970 to voice a strong condemnation of oppression in Northern Ireland. In October 1971 he controversially referred to the problem during a debate in the US Senate as “Britain’s Vietnam” and he referred to the Northern Ireland violence in the context of colonialism and the fight for independence.<sup>38</sup> (He was far from alone on this. Thomas P (Tip) O’Neill claimed that anti-Britishness was an inherited attitude among

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<sup>34</sup> Fanning (2003) p. 207.

<sup>35</sup> Nixon visited Ireland during his presidency, and is recalled for making no remarks whatever about the Irish questions during his stay.

<sup>36</sup> When Hume subsequently returned to the US, during his brief tenure of office as a minister in the short-lived power-sharing initiative of 1974, his primary focus was on foreign direct investment. (Hume had turned to Maurice Hayes, Assistant Secretary to the Executive, to help him write a “stump” speech aimed at encapsulating the US spirit of enterprise and presenting it in a Northern Ireland context. Hume felt hampered by what he saw as a lack of co-operation from some in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. They declined to assist in the drafting on the grounds that his speech was “too political”.)

<sup>36</sup> The power-sharing executive collapsed in May 1974 leaving Hume with no income and few political prospects in the short term.

<sup>37</sup> The story was recounted in a video message made by Kennedy and played to the SDLP conference of November 2001 which marked Hume’s retirement from the leadership of the Social, Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). The story is supported by Clymer (1999) pp. 182-3.

<sup>38</sup> He said: “The tragedy of Ulster is yet another chapter in the unfolding larger tragedy of the Empire – it is India and Palestine and Cyprus and Africa once again. It is the struggle of men everywhere for the basic rights of freedom and self-determination.... Without a firm commitment to [British] troop withdrawal and [Irish] unification there can be no peace in Northern Ireland. The killing will go on and the intolerable, mounting violence will go on.”



Irish-Americans, admitting in a 1977 TV interview: “I always gave to the cause of the IRA because I thought it was the right thing to do.”<sup>39</sup>) Kennedy’s comments outraged London – Edward Heath referred to them as an “ignorant outburst” - and the unionist government in Belfast. In Dublin, Jack Lynch was less vocal in his criticisms though he did express some in an interview with the *Washington Post*. In Dublin, Hume’s friend at *The Irish Times*, editor Douglas Gageby greeted the Kennedy speech insofar as it showed that “Northern Ireland is no ‘domestic UK problem’. It is now a problem on the world stage.”

Hume borrowed the money for his flight from Derry Credit Union, the community self-help initiative he had helped launch nearly 10 years previously. The talks clearly influenced Kennedy who subsequently and significantly moderated his tone, at least in terms of overt criticism of the British government’s handling of Northern Ireland affairs, and stepped up his condemnation of paramilitary violence and especially that of the Provisional IRA. Kennedy had learned from Hume that calls for the ending of partition in Ireland had emotional appeal among Irish-Americans in the US but was seen as fantasy politics in Ireland. Clymer explains how this was done and places it correctly within the overall aim of getting US support for Irish government policy in Northern Ireland:

After Bloody Sunday [Irish] diplomats began trying to educate friendly politicians like Kennedy on the situation, especially on the importance of rejecting violence, and of dropping demands for unification, which sounded romantic in the States but was (sic) utterly unrealistic in Ireland. The Irish [government] were late in this effort, and for two or three years the only alternative to British policies heard in the United States was the IRA’s.<sup>40</sup>

Kennedy, quoted by Wilson, confirms the influence Hume had on his position on Ireland but also credits what he termed London’s “more moderate” position on Northern Ireland for the easing of his own tone. “I have great respect for John Hume’s leadership and insights, but my more moderate tone was a reaction to Great Britain’s more moderate policy toward Northern Ireland.”<sup>41</sup> The more moderate British policy referred to was, according to Wilson, the abolition of the majoritarian Stormont parliament and the ending of internment without trial. Referring to their Bonn meeting, Hume later said: “At that stage our objective was to get equality of treatment and civil rights for everybody in Northern Ireland. Our strategy was, having got that, that we begin the process of reconciliation and breaking down the bias between the two sections of our people because reconciliation can only be based on equality.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Wilson (1995) p. 131.

<sup>40</sup> Clymer (1999) p. 182.

<sup>41</sup> Wilson (1995) p. 115.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Clymer, Adam (1999) p. 183.

### **Hume and the new-style diplomatic push**

Three months after the Hume-Kennedy meeting in Bonn a general election in the Republic saw a Fine Gael and Labour coalition government take office with Garret FitzGerald at Foreign Affairs.<sup>43</sup> The significance of this was twofold – FitzGerald was particularly close to Hume, and he recognised the roles Donlon and Lillis could play in countering traditional support for Irish republicanism while advocating a new approach with key figures on Capitol Hill. But, as Donlon points out, FitzGerald also developed good relations with the Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State. With Ireland now a member of the EEC and holding the rotating presidency, FitzGerald was able to pursue a specific Irish agenda within the context of the wider one embracing Europe and the US.<sup>44</sup> These were fortunate developments for Hume who was the “first to recognise and do something about” the need to harness the political clout of powerful Irish-Americans in Congress.

What was available and capable of being organised and harnessed was a small number of politicians, who had an ethnic Irish background, a genuine interest in Ireland and a desire and ability to do something for the old country. Hume was the first to recognise this and to do something about it. He was quickly joined by others and when Garret FitzGerald became Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1973, he directed Irish diplomats in the US to concentrate on harnessing the real Irish power there, that was in the hands of a few politicians who were uniquely well-placed to respond to clear political leadership from Ireland.<sup>45</sup>

Hume’s range of contacts in the US widened considerably after 1976 thanks to his temporary fellowship at Harvard University’s Center for International Relations. His time there was spent under Roger Fisher, Williston Professor of Law Emeritus at Harvard Law School and Director of the Harvard Negotiation Project.<sup>46</sup> This placed him at the heart of Irish-American influence in the US, close to Kennedy and on the doorstep of Congressman Tip O’Neill who later became Speaker of the House of Representatives. Hume, with his wife and young family remaining in Derry, networked extensively among members of Congress anywhere from Massachusetts to Washington DC, journalists and opinion formers. It is clear that he could not have done this without the diplomatic expertise and list of contacts provided by the likes of Donlon and Lillis – the template for such an approach had already been set in 1972. In general, his message was two-fold – to argue against Irish-American support for paramilitary violence and to encourage

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 2 for a fuller account of the significance of FitzGerald’s appointment.

<sup>44</sup> Donlon (1993).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> For more information on the HNP see [https://www.pon.harvard.edu/research\\_projects/harvard-negotiation-project/hnp/](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/research_projects/harvard-negotiation-project/hnp/)

US engagement in Ireland, especially to influence British policy.<sup>47</sup> But the philosophy on which both interlinked messages was founded was non-violence – an approach which resonated powerfully with Democrats and civil rights activists and recalled the Martin Luther King era less than 10 years previously. Fitzpatrick quotes Loretta Brennan Glucksman: “In the early years, it was crucial for our Irish-American community to believe that there was an alternative to the Troubles, that we could find a different way than the bombs and the bullets. John Hume was the single figure who presented, especially to Irish-America, an alternative to violence.”<sup>48</sup> Hume showed considerable adroitness and foresight in this policy. It was Hume who spotted the openings and pursued them, identifying the individuals who could be convinced by the new diplomatic push and knowing what to say to convince them. It was Hume who brought a gritty and first-hand realism to the move to counter traditional Irish-American support for violent republicanism. And it was Hume who, more than any diplomat, who had the gravitas of an elected representative and the persuasive powers to draw Irish America behind constitutional nationalism. No doubt Irish diplomats knew names, numbers and contacts and know-how in navigating the complex interlocked circles of US political power. But the concept, to say nothing of the drive, was Hume’s and it was FitzGerald who made it Irish government policy.<sup>49</sup> Thus the Hume/Irish diplomatic lobby began to exercise considerable and transformative influence in the US with its first major success, involving a newly elected President Carter, coming as early as 1977, fully 15 years before the US rapidly increased the scale of its engagement in Northern Ireland with close presidential input and the appointment of a special envoy.

### **The Carter Campaign and the NGOs**

The Carter campaign after 1975 added a fresh US foreign policy focus on human rights thus providing a vital context in which Hume and the Irish diplomatic mission in the US were quick to spot and which provided their efforts with a new-found relevance.

The outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland prompted a fresh flurry of organisational efforts on the part of the Irish lobby in the United States. Guelke cites the founding in 1970 of the Irish Northern Aid Committee, better known by its abbreviation Noraid, as the foremost of these.<sup>50</sup> Started by Michael Flannery, a veteran of the IRA from the 1920s, it provided relatively small-

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<sup>47</sup> For more detail on this see Farren (2018) p. 101.

<sup>48</sup> Fitzpatrick (2017) pp. 58-59.

<sup>49</sup> For more on the centrality of Hume’s role see FitzGerald (1991) pp. 347-9.

<sup>50</sup> Guelke (1996) pp. 523-26.

scale but nonetheless vital funding and support for the campaign of violence waged by the Provisional IRA after its establishment in Belfast in December 1969. Such a network helped ensure that the failure of the earlier Border Campaign by the IRA did not recur due to lack of resources. On a more diplomatic and constitutional level, the Irish National Caucus (INC), founded in 1974 by Fr Sean McManus, began to challenge the level of US involvement in Ireland and to press for it to deploy its significant influence on London.<sup>51</sup> Guelke points out that while heavily influenced by Noraid in its formative years (a fact which almost certainly earned it the opposition of the Irish and British governments), the INC thereafter established its own character and practices. In 1976, eight months before the presidential election, Irish republican lobbyists successfully pressed Carter's campaign team to have their candidate take part in the St Patrick's Day parade in New York wearing a "Get Britain out of Ireland" badge. The literature on this period misses a key point insofar as the *style* of Irish lobbying in the US is concerned. Irish republicans and NGOs in Washington had hitherto attempted to confront the US and its policy, particularly its hands-off recognition that Northern Ireland was an "internal" problem to be left to UK domestic policy. One tactic was to highlight alleged British denials of civil rights in Northern Ireland and to press the US for a counter response. Hume, Donlon, Lillis and others did not openly confront, they engaged with influential US political figures and sought to bring about a change of approach on their part towards Ireland and, importantly, in relation to London's stance on Ireland. This engagement was of necessity a slow process as it was based on personal contacts and on the building of trust on a one-to-one basis.

Hume used Kennedy's contacts and ability to open doors both with key figures from politics notably Congressman Tip O'Neill, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Governor Hugh Carey – who alongside Kennedy became known as the Four Horsemen.<sup>52</sup> Hume also sought out Irish-American figures from business who were also influential in the political sphere. One such contact was Paul Quinn, a lawyer, business consultant and lobbyist especially on American-Irish issues. "The friendship that Hume forged with Ted Kennedy and also with Tip O'Neill became the glue that made the entire peace process possible from the perspective of Irish Americans," said Quinn.

They were key advocates in nudging the US government, starting in the mid-to late 1970s, through the formation of the Four Horsemen and the leverage they imposed on Jimmy Carter to speak out

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<sup>51</sup> See McManus, Sean (Fr) (2011) *My American Struggle for Justice in Northern Ireland*. Cork. Collins.

<sup>52</sup> The nickname was taken from the formidable backfield four from the 1924 Notre Dame football team also known as "The Fightin' Irish".

for the first time as an American president on [Ireland]. That was essentially how the process began, how it was adhered to and why it made such a major contribution to [the Belfast Agreement].<sup>53</sup>

Quinn's account of Hume's lobbying and organisational ability bears close examination:

I first met John Hume in 1974 after Tip O'Neill introduced me to him and asked me to take on the responsibility of mediating between Congress, the White House and John in advancing his approach to the road to peace in Northern Ireland. The American Irish were involved in the Northern Ireland peace process before there was a peace process.

There was also a key role played by staff and advisers to Kennedy, O'Neill, Moynihan made during that period. In particular there was Carey Parker who was Kennedy's adviser and confidante ... and Kirk O'Donnell. His role was indispensable – he was able to mediate while I was able to conspire with him to nudge our government in the right direction.<sup>54</sup>

He said this “humanised” the process. Quinn was later one of those behind the formation of the Committee for a New Ireland in 1985 which pushed the Hume line on Northern Ireland within on Capitol Hill.<sup>55</sup> Explaining the importance of the initiative, Quinn states:

We had two objectives, one was to sell the concept of John Hume's approach to peace in Northern Ireland. The second was to undermine and block out the effect of Noraid and [Fr] Sean McManus and those people who were propagandising Northern Ireland - essentially hijacking the debate on Northern Ireland from the early 1970s through to the 1980s. The whole issue of Northern Ireland throughout the 1970s was so toxic that [US] politicians wouldn't get involved in it because they were afraid of being tagged pro-IRA or dupes for Sinn Fein. There was this void and there was no effective role played so we formed this group (Committee for a New Ireland, CNI) and I did think it played an effective role in intervening between Congress and John. On occasion we had occasion to deal with Sean Donlon and ... He was very active in working with us and I think that was a constructive bridge that was created in that for the first time the Irish-American community got actively involved particularly in Washington but also in New York and Boston. We got the right-thinking members of Congress who were willing to listen to become educated on the issues.<sup>56</sup>

Hume was not the only Irish figure involved in this approach – but it was his philosophy which lay at its core. Michael Lillis in particular states that Tip O'Neill was his key contact:

O'Neill used to come by my little house in Georgetown every week to steal my Cuban cigars and drink a sup of Paddy [whiskey]. Hume who had already lined up Kennedy jumped on this strategy and together we got Moynihan and Governor Carey (NY) aboard. Starting with Carter (the Carter initiative was savagely resisted by the British as they *correctly* feared that it ended the British ability to have any Dublin/SDLP input excluded from US policy statements on N.I.) and going on to Reagan.... It was all based on O'Neill's unique power and Reagan's need of it. At that period Ted Kennedy, though already a significant figure in the Senate, did not compare politically with O'Neill who had unique power to call the shots

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<sup>53</sup> Comments made by Quinn to a University College Dublin symposium “The United States and Northern Ireland: A Diplomatic Perspective” 17th November 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Comments by Quinn at the same UCD symposium.

<sup>55</sup> For a useful short account of the Committee for a New Ireland (CNI) see Wilson (1995) p255.

<sup>56</sup> Comments by Quinn at the same UCD symposium.

in the White House and did systematically at his weekly sessions with the President and regularly more frequently - both on our [Irish government's] behalf and Hume's.<sup>57</sup>

Fitzpatrick perceptively notes that the building of a network by Hume and Lillis in particular was, of necessity, a moderately-paced endeavour designed not to stoke UK concerns about what the Irish were up to. He quotes Donlon's description of the new-style diplomatic push in the years before 1976:

There were many Irish-American lobbyists in Washington..... a lot of people with Irish connections and many of them, like Paul Quinn were interested in Ireland but they had to be persuaded and converted. It was natural enough for people like Paul Quinn, going to see US Senators or members of the House of Representatives, that Ireland would come up; when it did, it was critical that the line was John Hume and the Irish government's line..... But we were very careful not to ask the Americans to take sides because we knew if we did, we would get a 'no' because the American-London relationship, the so-called special relationship was so strong that we were never going to crack that nut by saying 'side with us'.<sup>58</sup>

### **Breaking the bonds – Hume and the Carter Statement**

In the final stages of the 1976 presidential election, the INC was among those who lobbied Democratic nominee Jimmy Carter to issue a statement, were he to win the White House, highlighting US concerns at the ongoing trouble in Northern Ireland and the widespread allegations of human rights abuses by [British] state forces. The Caucus succeeded insofar as Carter agreed to include the proposal in his campaign platform, but by the time he won the White House in November 1976 and the new president's ground-breaking statement was eventually made, it reflected the concerns of key Irish-American sympathisers who were themselves elected representatives, strongly influenced by Hume and senior Irish diplomats in the US rather than the harder line nationalist philosophy of the INC itself.

The principal agitators who eventually shaped the tone and content of Carter's statement were Ted Kennedy, Tip O'Neill, Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Governor Hugh Carey.<sup>59</sup>

They were persuaded by Hume to draft a St Patrick's Day statement in 1977 pressing for support for peaceful, constitutional approaches in Ireland and for an end to support, in any form, for the IRA and other paramilitary groups. The called on "all those organisations engaged

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<sup>57</sup> Personal communication from Lillis July 30<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Fitzpatrick (2017) pp. 56-57.

<sup>59</sup> Like some of the other 'Horsemen', Kennedy had made comments on Ireland – comparing Bloody Sunday in Derry to the My Lai massacre for example - which had generated more heat than light in London and to a certain extent Dublin.

in violence to renounce their campaigns of death and destruction”. They continued: “We appeal as well to our fellow Americans to embrace the goal of peace and to renounce any action that promotes the current violence or provides support or encouragement for organisations engaged in violence.”<sup>60</sup> According to Donlon, there were many drafts of that St Patrick’s Day statement which was composed in Neary’s pub in Manhattan (the same pub Michael Lillis used for his informal get-togethers with Governor Hugh Carey) with input from Hume, Lillis and journalist Jimmy Breslin. Elements of the final draft were “dictated by Hume”, he says.<sup>61</sup> The intention, in addition to establishing the Four Horsemen as an influential collective with serious political weight, was to influence another statement, this time from President Carter expressing the near revolutionary claim that the US had a legitimate right to speak out on Ireland given the seriousness of the violence there and the presence of so many citizens in the US who claim Irish ancestry. Carter had already made a pre-election pledge on foot of lobbying by Fr McManus and the Irish National Caucus (INC) to speak out on Ireland. Hume, Donlon and Lillis among others sought to ensure that if indeed a statement was forthcoming it would be along the line desired by Hume and the Irish government.

The Carter statement, when it came, was an appeal for an end to violence and support for paramilitary forces with an unspecified promise of US aid in the event of a political settlement.<sup>62</sup> Its effect, however, was seismic especially in London where it was noted with quiet alarm. Such was the behind-the-scenes furore over the statement that it was not released until the end of August, more than four months after St Patrick’s Day. It did not in itself prompt a radical or urgent recasting of British policy in Northern Ireland which was stuck in a rut following the collapse of the first attempt at a consociational arrangement at Stormont, and the persistence of paramilitary violence. However the impact of his intervention, which cast the entire issue of Northern Ireland clearly as a key and legitimate issue for US foreign policy and not as a mere domestic issue for the British government was long lasting and profound. The importance of this cannot be overstated and it was the opportunity it provided which was ultimately exploited so effectively by Hume and senior Irish diplomats. The statement was

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<sup>60</sup> Coogan, Tim Pat (2002) *The Troubles: Ireland’s Ordeal and The Search for Peace* gives a different view of Irish diplomatic efforts in the US and the attempts made by Fr McManus and the INC to effect a change in US policy. See pp. 409-413. Coogan asserts that the INC was not pro-IRA and that Fr McManus did not support the organisation personally. He claims the DFA in Dublin was “piqued at being upstaged by what was wrongly perceived as the pro-IRA McManus securing the ear of the president of the United States” and only then began to act.

<sup>61</sup> Comments made by Donlon to a University College Dublin symposium “The United States and Northern Ireland: A Diplomatic Perspective” 17th November 2012.

<sup>62</sup> The statement is available at: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/northern-ireland-statement-us-policy>

drafted in the main by Carey Parker and, according to Donlon, the inclusion of the final paragraph in which Carter committed to encouraging job-creating investment in Northern Ireland. “There is no doubt that was Hume,” says Donlon. He was “adamant” at its inclusion.<sup>63</sup> Lillis gives a flavour of the vehemence with which London fought against the idea of Carter’s intervention. “The Carter initiative was savagely resisted by the Brits as they *correctly* feared that it ended the British ability to have any Dublin/SDLP input excluded from US policy statements on Northern Ireland.”<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

For at least 15 years before Clinton’s inauguration – the starting point for some accounts of US involvement in the peace process<sup>65</sup> - Irish diplomats and Hume had been quietly exploiting the ideas inherent in the American Dream and deploying them in an Irish context. Hume in particular had lobbied in the US since 1972 in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, arguing that the very concept of America with its notions of freedom, equality and civil rights could and should be replicated in Ireland which had suffered due to a centuries-old conflict with sharply contested nationalisms and colonial overtones. He constantly referred to the ability of the US to accommodate diversity and contrasted that with Northern Ireland which failed to embrace just two main politico/cultural traditions.

Written on the smallest [US] coin is the message of the greatest value, the cement of American society – *e pluribus unum* – from many one. The tragedy of divided people everywhere, as in Ireland, is that they have pushed difference to the point of division and have not yet learned the lesson that the essence of unity in every democratic society in the world is to accept and respect diversity.<sup>66</sup>

Fitzpatrick claims Hume was first struck by the Latin phrase when he was brought to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC by Edward Kennedy during Hume’s fellowship at Harvard.<sup>67</sup> His love of, and repeated use of, the *e pluribus unum* reference, illustrates the point. He appealed to America’s positive view of itself as enabler of peace in the land which had sent millions of emigrants across the Atlantic including some of the Founding Fathers.

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<sup>63</sup> Comments made by Donlon to a University College Dublin symposium ‘The United States and Northern Ireland: A Diplomatic Perspective’ 17th November 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Personal communication from Lillis July 31<sup>st</sup> 2010.

<sup>65</sup> In particular O’Clery (1997).

<sup>66</sup> Hume (1996) p. 20. The reference is often repeated by Hume. For examples see the *Independent* (London) September 4<sup>th</sup> 1994 also available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/ceasefire-its-all-just-coming-together-for-the-fixer-john-hume-risked-all-when-he-met-sinn-fein-now-1446738.html>

Also <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/COMMUNITY/12/10/hume.cnn/index.html>

Such references are typical and plentiful.

<sup>67</sup> Fitzpatrick (2017) p. 53.



In the 1970s the most significant actors in Washington's transatlantic policy circle at that time were the British embassy, which had more staff in one mission than the entire Irish foreign service; the US State Department, which governed foreign policy jealously; and the White House. Ireland had little influence and even less scope for gaining any. But as the violence in Northern Ireland worsened and was met with an emergency response from London, clear "soft power" approaches were proposed in the US while outward maintenance of the Cold War 'special relationship' policy with Britain was preserved. Denial of civil rights (an issue which resonates in the US), street violence, the deployment of British troops, the suspension of civil liberties including the introduction of internment without trial in 1971 – all these were exploited by a range of pro-republican Irish-American groups. But it was Hume who provided the hands-on campaigning against such groups while supporting a new coalition of powerful US figures (mostly) in Congress which backed the Irish government line.<sup>68</sup> The election of Carter cleared the air and provided a fresh opportunity for renewed attempts by Hume, Donlon and Lillis to turn American influence to Irish advantage.

In terms of political theory, Hume's protracted efforts to raise and shape the US response to the conflict in Ireland clearly answer, in a specific yet significant way, Gourevitch's appeal for new research on conflict resolution to be conducted at the point where national actors seek to harness outside political forces. "[T]he interaction of domestic and international [politics]." He said, is "the least well developed and the place that particularly requires further analysis".<sup>69</sup> Building on the previous chapter dealing with Hume's efforts to build influence with the Irish government in Dublin, this chapter shows how he engaged in similar actions in the US, again with Irish diplomatic support – this time with the specific intention of harnessing Washington's leverage on British policy. Christine Bell dubbed the 1990s as "the decade of the peace agreement" – a claim arising out of the sheer number of deals concluded in the post-Cold War environment.<sup>70</sup> Hume's relentless activity in the US, from his first stumbling foray in 1969, and analysed here gives some added grounds for supporting Bell's statement and for meeting Gourevitch's call for specific inquiry into the effectiveness of actors in states beyond their own borders. Thus, two examples are provided – one dealing with Hume and the the Irish government and the other examining Hume's efforts in the US.

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<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>69</sup> Gourevitch (2002) p. 310.

<sup>70</sup> Bell, Christine in Darby and Mac Ginty (eds) (2003) 'Human Rights and Minority Protection,' in *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict Violence and Peace Processes*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 161.

It is helpful to draw some parallels between the growth of Hume's influence with Irish governments following the outbreak of serious violence and political turbulence after October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968 and his remarkable rise to prominence as a powerful player in American involvement in Ireland. Hume was lucky in both scenarios. While still in Derry he was fortunate to have been "discovered" by *Irish Times* journalist Michael Viney and equally by DFA official Eamonn Gallagher. He was lucky in that, thanks to his local profile, it was Senator Edward Kennedy who reached out to him in 1972 for guidance after the disaster that was Bloody Sunday in Derry in January that year. He was fortunate, too, in that their first meeting in Bonn was hosted at the residence of the Irish Ambassador to West Germany, Seán Ronan, whom Hume knew from his earliest dealings with the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin. So it was with many of Hume's connections in the US. It was by chance, to put it mildly, that Senator Kennedy shared home turf with Tip O'Neill and that Hume's appointment to Harvard enabled him to cultivate the strongest of political links with them and widely throughout Irish-America. It was extraordinary that Hume's close friend and confidant since his early days in politics, Sean Donlon, was a senior diplomat in the US at this time and that he became Ireland's Ambassador to the US. Both of them in turn were blessed to have the likes of Michael Lillis and later James Sharkey (who was from Co Donegal and a contemporary of Hume's at St Columb's College in Derry) in post in the US at the same time.

Good fortune and coincidences aside, Hume's extraordinary advances in the US could not have happened without determination and a clarity of mission. While he continued to display a singular drive for a political settlement in Northern Ireland, he packaged his beliefs in a way which struck a chord with the US political establishment. He appealed to Americans' positive and highly moral view of themselves as forces for good in a troubled world<sup>71</sup> and it was this, aligned to considerable political skill on the parts of Hume and many in the Irish diplomatic mission, that enabled this approach to maintain and build political relations with a series of presidents after Gerald Ford regardless of party affiliation or the composition of Congress.

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<sup>71</sup> See Thompson (2001) especially 'Introduction' pp. xvi-xxvi and Note 7 for astute summations of Americans' view of themselves and their moral obligation in an international relations context.

## 5: A Petty People?

### Hume and the unionists

‘We against whom you have done this thing, are no petty people.’  
*WB Yeats rails against legislation to outlaw divorce. Speech to Seanad Éireann June 11<sup>th</sup> 1925.*<sup>1</sup>

‘As for the Unionists themselves, they had become a petty people. They represented themselves as the defenders and protectors of the Protestant heritage in Ireland. No-one had done more to destroy it. ‘Ourselves Alone’<sup>2</sup> was their motto, ‘Let us hold all power in our own hands’ was their agenda. Exclusivism.’  
*John Hume (1996) p85.*

‘Few human beings of my acquaintance are as petty and mean-spirited as those in the Afrikaner wing of unionism.’  
*Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin president, Belfast Telegraph November 14<sup>th</sup> 2008*

‘We reiterate that we cannot resolve this problem without the participation and agreement of the Unionist people.’  
*John Hume, Gerry Adams and Albert Reynolds joint statement. September 6<sup>th</sup> 1994*

John Hume’s troubled relations with unionists of all hues and at all levels throughout his political career hampered efforts to reach agreement on a constitutional framework for Northern Ireland. The legacy of this toxic relationship also contaminated the immediate post-Belfast Agreement climate thus acting against the very settlement Hume had dedicated his political life to achieving. For all his skills as a builder of influential political and diplomatic networks in Dublin, Europe and in the United States, he was spectacularly unsuccessful as a persuader when it came to unionists – even those from his own city.

#### **Mutual antipathy**

There is no suggestion here that Hume disliked unionists simply because of their political beliefs or any other marker. Nor does it suggest that he was anti-Protestant. To have been so would have meant that Hume disliked that part of his own ancestry which was Scots-Protestant. It takes at face value Hume’s claims that he grew up among and mingled with Protestants in Derry and thought little of it other than to acknowledge there were differences.<sup>3</sup> In 1963 Hume

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<sup>1</sup> Also quoted in Tuohy, Frank (1976) *Yeats: An Illustrated Biography*. London. Macmillan. p.188.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Ourselves Alone’ is a translation of ‘Sinn Féin’ from the Irish language. It can also be translated as ‘We Ourselves’.

<sup>3</sup> Hume (1996) p. 3 and p. 49 for example.

insisted the historic Catholic and Protestant traditions in Derry were, together, vital for his city's future. "The independence and seriousness of Derry's Protestant, allied to the discipline and resourcefulness of the Catholic will build a bridge for Derry's future," he wrote. "The symbol of the bridge could be the future full acceptance of the term 'Londonderry,' for it summed up the two great traditions of the city."<sup>4</sup> Apart from a mention in his MA thesis, this research could unearth no further evidence of Hume's use of the Unionist-favoured name for the city. White, Hume's first biographer, finds that Hume's early optimism<sup>5</sup> about working with Protestants/unionists for the betterment of Derry and Northern Ireland illustrated Hume's fundamental Christianity.<sup>6</sup> This research however takes the view that Hume's initial vision – his belief that 'Derry is the mother of us all'<sup>7</sup> - represented his belief in the need for a social contract of sorts rather than Christian fellowship. When Hume's social housing plans for Derry and his University for Derry campaign failed in the face of Unionist opposition, he never quite forgave them for it – hence the finding here that Hume's anti-Unionist sentiments hardened over the course of the 1960s. That said, it is important to emphasise at the outset that of the Unionists contacted as part of this research, not one suggested they found Hume anti-Protestant.

This chapter maps the history of the antipathy between the SDLP leader and the elected representatives of the people whose consent he insisted was a prerequisite for any settlement and suggests reasons for it. It will assert that Hume's negative attitudes towards Unionism began as early as 1965 and hardened over time, making rapprochement less likely. It will support this with evidence from key moments of his career in public life. It will be shown that Hume was culpable of sending mixed political messages to unionists – at once conciliatory and yet apparently hostile – and that he was habitually seen by them as talking out of both corners of his mouth. For all his talk of "an agreed Ireland," the "principle of consent," "acceptance of diversity" and the oft-repeated citing of both the US and the emerging EU as exemplars of multi-national, multi-ethnic agreement and accommodation, unionists believed he was scheming, disingenuous and untrustworthy. Humespeak meant Doublespeak. From his earliest pronouncements in the 1960s Hume was consistent in his belief that unionists had to buy in to his vision of a "new Ireland". He was enraged by unionist responses to demands for equality in the early 1960s – beginning with the University for Derry campaign along with his social

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<sup>4</sup> *A City Solitary* (1963) directed by Terence McDonald (1926-2001). It is available at: <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-a-city-solitary-1963-online>

<sup>5</sup> See Hume's pieces in the *Irish Times*, May 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 1963.

<sup>6</sup> White (1984).

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 1.

housing plans for Derry. He viewed the collapse of powersharing government at Stormont in 1974 as a total betrayal and, as a result, worked determinedly (often with the Irish government) to undermine Unionism's political power. He sought to neutralise what he called the Unionist veto on change in Northern Ireland and strove, particularly, to isolate them from their traditional sources of support in the British government. While Arthur Aughey, Thomas Hennessey and Conor Cruise O'Brien address such questions, they remain under-researched and there is too little focus on the effect of the sour relations between Hume and unionists on the troubled implementation of the Belfast Agreement after 1998. That agreement was passed by 71 per cent of voters in the Northern Ireland referendum on the Agreement, but the apparently comfortable overall victory masked the deep levels of Unionist mistrust in anything positively endorsed by Hume and wider Irish nationalism – a key factor which could, and arguably should, have been addressed by Hume and his party. Unionist suspicions concerning his true motivations, alongside those of the Irish government and Sinn Féin, ran at such levels that Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble was severely compromised vis-à-vis his own electorate. How could Trimble, after all, continue to show faith in Hume, Sinn Féin, the British and Irish governments when unionist doubt about the Belfast Agreement grew daily? That gradual loss of faith was prompted not just by the vociferous and effective opposition of the Rev Ian Paisley and his (initially anti-Agreement) Democratic Unionists but by the glacial pace of progress by the IRA on weapons decommissioning and Sinn Féin's slow acceptance of new policing and justice structures.

Despite Trimble's obvious difficulties with his own constituency,<sup>8</sup> Hume's resolve appeared more focused on securing Sinn Féin and the IRA in the constitutional fold rather more than on the fears of unionists whose consent was just as vital to the implementation of the entire Belfast Agreement structure. Hume's career has been accurately evaluated in terms of the striking successes he had in engaging the US and the Irish government while building effective alliances at Westminster and Brussels in support of his drive for a settlement in Northern Ireland. His inability to convince unionists, even those open to the concept of powersharing, equality and a formal role for Dublin in Northern Ireland, of his benign intentions must also be included as a vital counter-balance in any assessment of his legacy.

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 4 for references to US President Bill Clinton's efforts to encourage unionist support for the Agreement.

## Partition and Unionism

Unionists, especially since the foundation of the Northern Ireland state, have been generally viewed by nationalists as victims of some form of “nostalgic arrest”,<sup>9</sup> imprisoned by their interpretation of their own past, trapped by a non-existent siege, representative of a *laager* mentality and unwilling or incapable of looking to a more positive future in harmony with their neighbours. They were held in some sort of grip by inherited certainties about unionist defiance and were wedded to holding firm, doggedness and consistency, (especially after the Siege of Derry in 1689 – the event which gave rise to “No Surrender” loyalism). By the late 1960s Irish nationalists and republicans therefore looked on their fellow citizens, with whom they wished to find an accommodation based on equality and freely-given consent, as having lost an ability to look to a future or to envision something new and different. Aughey usefully sums up the unionist-nationalist chasm, suggesting unionists generally thought of nationalists (and Hume in particular) as being “very good at articulating a grand vision but .... hopelessly without insight into what was practical or attainable”. He continues: “[U]nionists suspected that the desire to speak in visionary generalities so characteristic of Hume had little to do with intellectual grandeur and everything to do with avoiding commitment to the specifics of making Northern Ireland work”.<sup>10</sup> There were, as a result, “two diametrically opposed understandings”.

One desired a steady-state Union and the other desired a dynamic arrangement. One attributed to membership of the United Kingdom permanent worth and value and the other perceived it to be provisional and of diminishing significance. One wanted a settlement to be substantially British and only residually Irish and the other aspired to a settlement substantially Irish and only residually British.<sup>11</sup>

Hume’s quotation, cited above, exemplifies this. Perhaps his failing was that he came to see unionism as something to be circumvented or emasculated – this was something he later admitted to. It could further be asserted that Hume believed unionists could be manoeuvred politically into a situation whereby they would review their position and view more positively his propositions. Hume’s reflection illustrates a decades-old impatience with unionists

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<sup>9</sup> Aughey (2005) p. 29. Aughey draws on Berki’s (1981) assertion that some groups are nostalgic for an idealised past while others are fixated by an idealised view of a future, and casting this assertion in a Northern Ireland context with unionists in one role and nationalists in the other.

<sup>10</sup> Aughey (2005) p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid p. 51.

stemming, as many of his deeply held opinions do, from his experiences in Derry in the 1960s and before. Hennessey and O'Brien suggest explanations based on what they believe to be Hume's inability to comprehend unionist objections to Irish nationalist proposals. Hennessey suggests that, rather than helping to redefine Irish nationalism and to fashion it in a more open, pragmatic and liberal way,<sup>12</sup> Hume merely reflected nationalism's inability to appreciate unionists' "completely different perceptions of the political, social and cultural world that constituted Northern Ireland in the 1960s".

Republicanism seemed a denial of all Irish associations the Ulster Protestants held dear to them. Gaelicisation re-emphasised this. Dublin did not even respect the Ulster Protestant identity and instead claimed Northern Ireland as part of the national territory: Northern Protestants were defined as Irish only and Northern Ireland was deemed by the Irish Constitution to be not a part of the United Kingdom but a part of Éire. It was not, believed unionists, they who were the partitionists: it was nationalists who had artificially partitioned the natural geographical entity of the British Isles.<sup>13</sup>

O'Brien goes further alleging that Hume, like the rest of Irish nationalism, was somehow in thrall to "ancestral voices,"<sup>14</sup> a colourful metaphor for the received wisdom passed down the generations of Irish nationalism. Whether or not Hume did or could grasp the idea that the constitutional models based on consent, which he advocated, were capable of being interpreted darkly by unionism as denials of everything they held dear is not the task of this chapter. What is important is to detail, explore and explain unionists' chronic lack of trust in him and then to suggest how this affected the drive for the political accommodation finally arrived at in Belfast on Good Friday 1998. This research uncovers the origins of unionist suspicions (at best) of Hume and situates them firmly in the strategies he adopted from the mid-1960s onwards when, particularly following the blocking of his social housing plans, the defeat of the University for Derry campaign and the resistance to the Civil Rights demands, Hume began to think in terms of getting the British government to force Unionists into reform.<sup>15</sup>

### **Finding common cause**

Hume's earliest forays into community activity were prompted by widespread poverty in his native city and by a desire for cross-community social justice, no doubt stimulated by the optimism and global clamour for change in the 1960s. Some of his earliest contributions to this question are punctuated with pleas to nationalists to attempt to see things from another

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<sup>12</sup> McLoughlin (2006) is particularly strong on this question.

<sup>13</sup> Hennessey (2005) p. 377.

<sup>14</sup> O'Brien (1994).

<sup>15</sup> See Hume (1996) pp. 24-5 where Hume castigates Unionists over their denial of rights to others.

(unionist) perspective. Denis Bradley, a pupil of Hume at St Columb's, later a Catholic priest in Derry, community activist and vice-chairman of the NI Policing Board, recalls Hume as a "provocative" history teacher. He cites Hume's instruction to pupils in the early 1960s to prepare debating notes in support of the argument that nationalists should join the Unionist Party so as to change Northern Ireland from within.<sup>16</sup> By 1963, Hume was portraying Derry's unionists as victims (of a sort) of their own history. He asserted that religious divisions in Derry arose from the gulf in wealth between Protestant merchants and Catholic labouring classes, were heightened by the Act of Union in 1800 (which created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland) and by social and economic forces in play during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as much as by Partition in 1921. "The greatest hope of all," he said, "lies in uniting the great streams of Derry's population, each of which has contributed so much in its own way to its past successes and failures."<sup>17</sup> In 1964 Hume used his seminal opinion pieces in *The Irish Times* to allow so-called ordinary unionists some political leeway, and imploring nationalists not to dismiss unionists collectively as unreasonable and illogical and to permit them freedom of opinion. "Such recognition is our first step towards better relations," he wrote. "We must be prepared to accept this and to realise that the fact that a man wishes Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom does not necessarily make him a bigot or a discriminator."<sup>18</sup> He went further, telling *Irish Times* reporter Michael Viney: "The independence and seriousness of Derry's Protestant, allied to the discipline and resourcefulness of the Catholic will build a bridge for Derry's future. The symbol of the bridge could be the future full acceptance of the term 'Londonderry', for it summed up the two great traditions of the city."<sup>19</sup>

In fairness to Hume, his (no doubt sincere) efforts to decouple unionist-nationalist constitutional differences from other political questions were repeated throughout his political career.<sup>20</sup> He often sought to find common ground beyond the limits of the constitutional/religious question – a determination illustrated by his (sometimes fruitful) co-

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<sup>16</sup> *Hume*. A TV documentary produced by Below The Radar and first broadcast by BBC Northern Ireland on September 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>17</sup> 'A City Solitary', scripted by Hume and first broadcast in 1963.

<sup>18</sup> *The Irish Times* May 18<sup>th</sup> 1964 p. 8. Also available at:

<https://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0518/Pg008.html#Ar00806:0DB17611E18F0564D80944F203761207762A00023E0C325810252B14A5420A91210F213B03645507E46D0BD55C1035731075E114B5F810760214C61A>

<sup>19</sup> *The Irish Times*, May 9<sup>th</sup> 1964. As previously stated these sentiments here are also recorded in *A City Solitary* (1963).

<sup>20</sup> For example, Hume urged Irish American Democrats to end a boycott of Bushmills Irish whiskey. The protest began over allegations of anti-Catholic bias by the distillery in a strongly unionist part of Co Antrim. Hume intervened to halt the protest and to boost inward investment in the area instead. For further information see:

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/hume-wants-end-of-whiskey-boycott-1.29146>



operation with fellow MEPs John Taylor and the Rev Ian Paisley over many years on a range of economic programmes. His mildly derided “single transferable speech” – an oft-repeated restatement of the need to make common cause on issues beyond the constitutional divide – with its call to “spill our sweat and not our blood” exemplified this approach to politics as well as his dealings with unionist representatives. His *Irish Times* pieces of May 1964 were also noteworthy for their criticisms not so much of unionism per se nor indeed of British policy in Northern Ireland post-1921, but of irredentist Irish nationalism. They railed against the failures, as Hume saw them, of both militant republicanism and abstentionist constitutional nationalism. Hume saw an opportunity for such a “bridge” between unionist and nationalist in Derry in the form of the University for Derry campaign, founded by Hume and others, which had the vociferous support of the city’s Unionist mayor Albert Anderson whom Hume held in particular high personal regard.

### **Unionist distrust, Unionist fear**

Hume’s early years in public life therefore are marked not by holding unionism in the contempt which is a hallmark of his 1996 memoirs, but rather by a call for nationalists to cut unionists some slack. What ire he directs is aimed at republican abstentionism and occasional bouts of anti-state violence along with nationalist refusal to modernise, organise politically and engage more fully in the local parliamentary process flawed though it clearly was in the first 50 years of the Northern Ireland state. It was these which fired his motivation rather than the overt manifestations of nationalist sentiment which characterised the political climate, especially in Derry after August 1969. As a result, Hume’s activism was “totally different from the politics we had been used to,” claimed John Taylor, the Unionist home affairs minister from 1970-72 and a product of the Queen’s University Belfast student scene which fostered the activism of Austin Currie, Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin.<sup>21</sup> Hinting at the possible origins of Hume’s dysfunctional relations with unionism, Taylor added: “The new form of politics presented by John Hume was much more threatening to unionism because he was concentrating on issues such as social justice and equality.”<sup>22</sup> David Trimble goes further, claiming: “We would have regarded, in 1969-70, the leading members of the SDLP as carrying a heavier responsibility than Paisley for the onset of the Troubles. I’m not sure I would hold that view

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<sup>21</sup> See McKeown (1986) p. 24. He describes Taylor at Queen’s University debating scene in the early 1960s as “The only one on the unionist side who struck me as being a match for [Currie, McCann and Devlin].”

<sup>22</sup> *Hume* – a film documentary produced by Below The Radar 2011.

now, but I'll tell you what I thought then.”<sup>23</sup> To his credit, Trimble is at least consistent in this critical view of Hume, dismissing one of Hume's central claims – that he is in favour of seeking genuine unionist consent on any future forms of government for Ireland as a whole. “John Hume never actually gets his head around the concept,” he said, claiming that nationalist Ireland never really sought nor accepted a need for unionist consent until the talks leading to the Belfast Agreement.

The Irish state in Sunningdale<sup>24</sup> in 1973 does not accept consent. The Anglo-Irish Agreement<sup>25</sup> gets to a sort of fudge position where people say ‘there will be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without consent,’ but without defining what the status was and without asking people to consent to that Agreement. It's like sort of saying, ‘We're going to impose this upon you but we promise we won't impose anything else’.<sup>26</sup>

Former Stormont prime minister Terence O'Neill portrayed Hume and other civil rights activists as a form of political chancer.

I believe that political opportunists, although they may win short-term successes, generally fail in the long run, because in due course people find them out. One cannot forever be a republican in Belfast and a socialist in London, a nationalist at Stormont and a British subject at Westminster. Nor can one build an enduring political career upon a great heap of irresponsible criticism and denigration.<sup>27</sup>

Peter Robinson, the long-time deputy leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and later First Minister at Stormont states that by 1970 it was obvious to him that Hume was “different ... therefore dangerous”. Unionists harboured suspicions about him “as they were aware he was a manipulator”.

It wasn't that he had any great [political] expertise himself. What he was successful at was putting other people in the front line on his own behalf so that he could stir up the Irish-American lobby, he could stir up the Dublin government, he could stir up the left wing of the [British] Labour Party and effectively get other people to take up cudgels for him.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> A common name for the first attempt to enact a powersharing executive at Stormont with a formalised North-South dimension, concluded in 1973 but which collapsed in May 1974 in the face of unionist opposition and a loyalist workers' general strike.

<sup>25</sup> An agreement reached in November 1985 by London and Dublin, with Hume's wholehearted support, in which the Republic of Ireland was given a formalised consultative role in the operation of British direct rule in Northern Ireland. Unionists were excluded from the talks leading to the agreement. The accord, signed at Hillsborough, Co Down, was a focus for heated opposition for the years before new and inclusive talks led to the Belfast Agreement of 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Millar (2004) p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> *The Irish News*, May 25<sup>th</sup> 1968.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Peter Robinson. July 13<sup>th</sup> 2018. Belfast.

Robinson accuses Hume of working *against* unionists rather than genuinely trying to work with them in search for an accommodation.

Hume's time was spent not in engaging with unionism but in attempting to undermine unionism. They were never going to be friendly or well-disposed to him. He was the head of the pan-nationalist front. That was always his role. I don't think anybody ever thought that Hume was somebody who was thinking of the wider interests of the community. It was always the interests of the nationalist community.

For Robinson therefore, and many others in the wider unionist community, Hume was inherently deceitful, a trait not helped by unionist belief that he was "too smart by half and up to something".<sup>29</sup> From his earliest days as an elected representative in Derry then, unionists were deeply suspicious of the media-savvy and articulate young man who had helped kill off the old Nationalist Party and who insisted that "Derry is the mother of us all" and that a confluence of the city's political traditions was the only guarantor of peace. While he had not consciously invited much of the unionist hostility towards him and certainly could not be held responsible for being "too smart" (he often quipped privately, "What am I supposed to do? Be stupid?")<sup>30</sup> he is guilty of failing to counter such suspicions – perhaps even of attempting to do so. It was a miscalculation as the resultant dearth of unionist trust in him proved problematic towards the end of his career as unionist support for the Belfast Agreement quickly drained away and their doubts hardened into scepticism and ultimately opposition. Despite the apparent generosity of his earliest remarks, Hume's attitude towards unionism seems to have shifted markedly from the days when he appealed to Northern Catholics/nationalists not to view automatically Protestant/unionists negatively simply on account of their background.

### **Breaking point**

By the end of 1969, a watershed year following the explosion of street violence, the deployment on the British army and the formation of the Provisional IRA, Hume's tone had clearly changed and his criticisms of unionism sharpened. The origins of this are detectable particularly in the wake of the failed University for Derry campaign in 1965 when it emerged that some Unionist councillors in his native city had supported the planned location of Northern Ireland's second university in the unionist town of Coleraine rather than in Derry city with its nationalist majority – a decision lambasted by Hume as nakedly political, sectarian and emblematic of Unionism's desire to strip the nationalist west of Northern Ireland of public investment. For Hume, chairman of the University for Derry Action Committee and organiser of the 25,000-

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Personal recollection.

strong protest on the steps of Stormont (accompanied by Londonderry mayor Albert Anderson and Foyle Stormont MP Eddie McAteer) Derry's case for rapid development of Magee college was "unanswerable" and the decision against doing so offended against the people's "normal sense of justice".<sup>31</sup> Hume's stance was underscored by the decision of some Unionist elected representatives, referred to in Derry as the "faceless men", to vote against the city's interests in the pursuit of the maintenance of their overall hegemony,<sup>32</sup> as well as the decision of some Stormont Unionist MPs to do likewise. These included Fermanagh MP Harry West, a future Unionist Party leader, who voted along party lines in defiance of his personal support for Magee and the economic development of the west of Northern Ireland in general. Thus the defeat of the University for Derry campaign was a double blow for Hume. Derry had lost its chance to become a university city and, more importantly, the coming together of unionists and nationalists in the city had failed in the face of Unionist insistence at Stormont. This, and the ensuing Civil Rights campaign in Derry, prompted him towards electoral politics and politicising the Catholic electorate in Derry. Hume's political career stems more from this event in 1965 rather than exclusively from the fallout of the infamous events in Derry of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968 following the first civil rights march there. He made it clear how polarising and defining a moment the Magee controversy became:

The university decision electrified the people on the nationalist side, and I think was really the spark that ignited the Civil Rights movement, though I suppose nobody could have articulated it in those terms then. And when the university went to Coleraine, the chance of orderly change in Northern Ireland probably disappeared. It became clear to me certainly that change could only be affected by positive political action.<sup>33</sup>

This contention is further supported by Frank Curran, editor of the nationalist *Derry Journal*, and a keen observer of Hume's early career as a public figure. The two became close, as indeed Hume was (as has been shown) to the editor of the *Irish Times* and also later to the owner of the nationalist *Irish News* in Belfast, Jim Fitzpatrick. "The university set-back was crucial for [Nationalist Party leader] McAteer, traumatic for Hume," Curran wrote.

He had poured time, effort and imagination into the role of chief organiser of the campaign. The university decision cut right to the core of Derry's cultural background. The

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.derryjournal.com/news/the-most-important-issue-to-come-before-the-city-this-century-1-6565941>

<sup>32</sup> For more on the "faceless men" see Mulholland (2002) p. 55. See also: History Ireland <https://www.historyireland.com/uncategorized/nameless-faceless-men/> also <https://www.derryjournal.com/news/the-most-important-issue-to-come-before-the-city-this-century-1-6565941>

<sup>33</sup> Brendan Lynn, *Holding the Ground: The Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland, 1945-1972* from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/lynn97.htm>

[Stormont] government's policy was clearly to denude the west and enrich the east. While the Nationalist Party reaction was to resume the political battle at [Londonderry] Corporation level with a renewed offensive against the Unionists on housing, unemployment and the gerrymander, Hume was thinking on a longer-term strategy.<sup>34</sup>

He continued: "...[t]he Nationalists suffered from an important flaw that Hume spotted clearly."

They failed to see that a more *subtle and more devious approach could pose a far more serious threat to Unionism's vested interests than the long-pursued emphasis on the border and electoral abuses*. His strategy for undermining Unionist supremacy was basically different from theirs. The Nationalists listed national unity as the goal from which all blessings would flow. Hume numbered the removal of the border as the dividend to follow on the establishment of true equality of all Northerners. That disagreement pointed the way to the eventual political conflict that reached its climax when Hume challenged McAteer for the Foyle seat at Stormont.<sup>35</sup> [emphasis added]

Curran's choice of words is illustrative here, not least because Hume accepted Curran's invitation to write a foreword to his book – something he would hardly had done if had taken issue with Curran's work. The university controversy provided a new and more critical context for nationalist politics, a point agreed upon by a diverse range of historians.<sup>36</sup> Post-1965 Hume appeared to have moved on from his earlier hopes that united action by the "great streams of Derry's population" would deliver progress. Such a significant coming together had failed to block a decision in favour of Coleraine, a decision many in Derry saw as a glaring injustice. It was much more than a local injustice, it was one which was emblematic, Hume believed, of the Unionist administration of Northern Ireland. As a result Hume was more inclined to see Unionism per se as the oppressor and his stance hardened accordingly. This contention is supported both by his actions and by his language. "There has been a great growth in liberal feeling," he told a public meeting of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster, an informal group of Labour Westminster MPs who agitated for reform in Northern Ireland.

It is my fear that by the time this upsurge in tolerance and right thinking reaches the corridors of power in Northern Ireland, it will be too late for places like Derry and irreparable damage will have been done. *The Unionist administration must be taught that they cannot run away from Derry and West Ulster* and that if they seriously want to create

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<sup>34</sup> Curran (1986) pp. 39-42.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See Harkness, David. *Northern Ireland since 1920* (Dublin, 1983), pp 42, 143. Coogan, Tim Pat. *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace* (London, 1996), pp. 50, 51. Bew, Paul, Gibbon, Peter and Patterson, Henry *Northern Ireland 1921/2001: Political Forces and Social Classes* (London, 2002), p. 129. O'Brien, Gerard "Our Magee problem: Stormont and the second university" in G. O'Brien (ed), *Derry and Londonderry: History and Society* (Dublin, 1999), p. 647.

a modern community they must treat all citizens with dignity and equality. [emphasis added]<sup>37</sup>

This quotation illustrates that Hume's entry into the electoral arena was as much a product of frustration with the unionist status quo in Northern Ireland as it had to do with a desire to foment political change. The two are indistinguishable, one followed from the other. It is thus contended here that if Hume were to have attempted an answer to the topic he set his history pupils while a teacher at St Columb's, namely should Catholics have joined the Unionist Party to effect social change in Northern Ireland from within, his answer after 1965 may have been that the moment had passed and the chance of progress had been well and truly lost. Following the failure of the University for Derry campaign, Hume did not opt for representative politics for another four years, but the strengthening anti-Unionist basis on which he did so was clear from late 1965. By February 1969 when Hume decided to stand as an independent candidate against McAteer in Foyle for the Stormont parliament, his election literature contained not one word about "the constitutional issue" – but as Michael McKeown later recounted, there was no need to. Hume's position on the border and eventual Irish unity was taken by the nationalist electorate "as a given".<sup>38</sup> Hume's independent colleagues in that landmark election, Paddy O'Hanlon and Ivan Cooper, also steered clear of the "national question". No mention was needed as their nationalist credentials were unquestioned. For all their protestations about demanding only British rights for (notionally at least) British citizens,<sup>39</sup> the first leaders of the civil rights movement, appeared Janus-like to many unionists. At one level, they sought nothing other than full and equal citizenship within the constitutional status quo. But at another they were seen as posing an existential challenge to the state.<sup>40</sup> Unionists, well attuned to any signs of conspiracy against their state, did not need that spelled out to them.

After 1969 the political/constitutional context had changed fundamentally. It was no longer simply about Catholic opposition to the Unionist government's policy concerning a university for Derry, gerrymandering in local government, industrial development west of the Bann or

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<sup>37</sup> Speech delivered at Fulham Town Hall in July 1965 and quoted in Farren (2018) p. 28. Hume enlarged on this point in a similar address, also cited by Farren, at Queen's University Belfast in October that year.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell (2015) p49.

<sup>39</sup> For an example of this see Nell McCafferty's comments in 'Battle of the Bogside' (2004), directed by Vinny Cunningham and broadcast by BBC Northern Ireland January 7<sup>th</sup> 2008. "When we went marching [for civil rights] the unionists tried to stop us, the British ignored us, the police were attacking us – there was a feeling we were going to overturn the Unionist government and that, crucially, we would get full British rights. One has to stress again and again, we were not marching for a united Ireland. We were marching for the right to become full British citizens." (2m.56s).

<sup>40</sup> For further discussion of this see Bob Purdie, 'Was the civil rights movement a republican/republican conspiracy?' Irish Political Studies, Vol 3, 1988 Issue 1.

public housing allocation. It became impossible for many unionists or their elected representatives to take nationalism in general or Hume, in particular, at their word – convinced as they were that there was another agenda. When Taoiseach Jack Lynch denounced the street violence in Derry following the first Civil Rights marches and blamed the August 1969 riots on the partition of Ireland (and the resultant formation of Northern Ireland) as a root cause, it undermined, in unionist minds at least, any claims that the demand for civil rights was about “British rights for British citizens” equality and little else. The point was amplified by Austin Currie, another of the Civil Rights movement leaders, in a speech in 1970 said: “At the beginning of the Civil Rights campaign with its emphasis on ‘British rights for British subjects’ some people had been concerned lest the desire for national unity would be diminished. They need not have worried. The fire burns stronger and brighter than ever.”<sup>41</sup> Eamonn Gallagher, a key (Irish) Department of Foreign Affairs official,<sup>42</sup> clearly supported such a view, reporting to his government that the civil rights campaign was a particular means to a general nationalist end.<sup>43</sup> Hume himself later admitted that the Civil Rights movement “called into question the fundamental validity of the state in Northern Ireland”.<sup>44</sup> He continued:

It also threatened the Unionists, since the border had been drawn specifically to ensure there were two Protestants to every one Catholic. The Northern Ireland government, therefore, existed on the basis of desperate injustice and to ask for justice was to question the whole philosophy of the state. Once the movement for equality gained momentum, it led to the inevitable collapse of the governmental system in Northern Ireland.<sup>45</sup>

At community level in Derry there was also little doubt that the civil rights campaign stoked nationalist fervour. Following the establishment of “Free Derry”, a short-lived No-Go enclave in Derry’s Bogside in 1969 where the police were excluded by popular force, Martin McGuinness, later an IRA commander and Sinn Féin Deputy First Minister at Stormont, claimed: “[the violence in Derry] had had a liberating effect on the people. The forces of the state were effectively defeated by the heroism and courage of just ordinary people on the streets”.<sup>46</sup> Tommy Makem, a well-known Irish traditional folk singer and member of the Clancy Brothers, recalled his amazement at the outpouring of nationalist sentiment as he sang a popular ballad “Four Green Fields” at a music festival organised by Eamonn McCann and

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<sup>41</sup> Speech delivered at University College, Dublin January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1970.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>43</sup> National Archives of Ireland Taois/2000/6/70 “Meetings with individuals in NI”.

<sup>44</sup> Hume (1996) p9.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> ‘No-Go: The Free Derry Story’ produced by Open Reel Productions available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4Ai6QND-vc> It was first broadcast on September 6<sup>th</sup> 2006.

others during Free Derry. “When I sang that song it was like a huge electrical storm, it seemed like the whole city was electrified and lit up.... seared by it anyway. This was more than a song, it was touching a lot of people in their soul and in their heart.”<sup>47</sup> The film also details tentative links between Free Derry’s “defence association” and members of the Irish Army in nearby Co Donegal regarding the possibility of arms training. Little wonder, then, that Gregory Campbell, later a Democratic Unionist representative from Drumahoe just outside Derry, referred to civil righters as “republicans” whose true ambition was not civic equality but the furthering of a constitutional threat to the state itself.<sup>48</sup>

Yet overtly at least, Hume’s earliest forays into civic leadership and elected politics still displayed a clear cross-community element. Of his two independent colleagues, O’Hanlon and Cooper, the latter, a Protestant and former member of the Unionist Party, was among Hume’s closest political and personal friends in Derry. Claude Wilton, a leading liberal, civil rights activist and Methodist, was another. Hume also had made common cause, particularly in relation to the university controversy, with Albert Anderson the Unionist Mayor of Londonderry Corporation – a man he described in his maiden speech to Stormont as “the gallant member for Derry city”.<sup>49</sup> This is a particularly generous description given that Anderson headed the unionist-dominated local authority so loathed by Hume and by Catholics in the city.

### **Blaming the Unionists**

In 1969, in *John Hume’s Derry*, the second of the two documentaries he scripted for television, Hume was still imploring unionists to make common cause with the Catholic or non-unionist population in his city – but his language elsewhere had hardened. As before, he argued that their common Derry heritage trumped their differences over the Northern Ireland constitutional issue and insisted that Derry could only reach its considerable potential via a coming-together of its two traditions. “Derry is the mother of us all,” he said. Much of that film is devoted to Hume’s appreciation of the centrality of its Protestant and unionist components. But equally clear is the citing of unionism as a guilty party in the Northern conflict – inflexible and apparently unwilling to change of their own volition:

Derry is at the heart of the Irish problem, the place where Ireland’s two traditions meet in strength. For unionists it is the place where their battle was fought. For the Irish, it is the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid (43 mins).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid (47 mins).

<sup>49</sup> Northern Ireland House of Commons *Debates* March 5<sup>th</sup> 1969. See also Farren (2018) p43.



place where their battle *is being* fought. Derry is the birthplace of the Protestant tradition as we know it in the north of Ireland. A Mecca. Bible and sword. [Their] views have not shifted in 300 years.<sup>50</sup>

It could be argued that accusing unionists of 300 years of obduracy is little more than traditional nationalist fare which held that Catholics were (largely) blameless victims of unionist intransigence. However he expanded on his view, describing unionist reaction to the violence following the city's first civil rights march of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968 in the following terms: "These people are afraid.... They are victims of a past they did not create." He placed Derry at the centre of the Northern Ireland constitutional quarrel.

Catholics never shared in the prosperity that has been the lot of large sections of the dominant community. Divisions sharpened with the partition of Ireland in 1921 when Derry lost its natural hinterland in Donegal. Derry became the heart of the Northern Ireland problem but the Achilles heel of unionism. People in [the Catholic enclave of the] Bogside became living examples of the injustices of the Northern Ireland state.<sup>51</sup>

Catholicism is the only thing which unites the Bogside, he said, in the face of "many political outlooks". It was this collective Catholicism which represented a "strong factor in moulding their endless patience in the face of adversity" and an "intense distrust of all things unionist." The documentary, commissioned by RTÉ to mark the first anniversary of the October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968 civil rights march, concludes with Hume's assertion that both Catholics and Protestants in Derry are victims of what he called "raw, elemental forces of history". However he adds, tellingly, that the "root cause" of the city's troubles in 1968-9 was "the right wing of unionism". While Hume was explicit in his calls for nationalist tolerance of the unionist viewpoint, there is, however, an equally unmissable laying of blame for Derry's (and therefore Northern Ireland's) plight in late 1969 at the feet of unionism. At best, Hume's thoughts appear ambiguous at best. Derry, he said, was home to two sets of victims. Unionists were paying the price for a history "they did not create" – they were sinned against. But they were also sinners, whose actions placed them at the "root cause" of the Northern Ireland problem.<sup>52</sup> Mixed messages such as these did little to endear him to those whose consent he sought.

### **Lost in translation**

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<sup>50</sup> Broadcast by RTÉ October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1969.

<sup>51</sup> 'John Hume's Derry' broadcast by RTÉ, October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1969.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Hume also refers to Unionist culpability in his memoirs. Hume (1996) p. 25.

Thus when Hume marched for civil rights, many unionists suspected a covert nationalist assault on the foundations of the Northern Ireland state. When Hume advocated power-sharing government at Stormont, an objective realised in 1974, with an accompanying Council of Ireland (which was not realised) unionists saw a mechanism for corralling them into an unwanted and feared United Ireland. Hume's SDLP colleague Hugh Logue gave them cause through his ill-advised comparison of the Council of Ireland with a "vehicle that would trundle unionists into a united Ireland".<sup>53</sup>

To see the long-term consequences of Hume's failure to engage with the unionists more fully, it is useful to look ahead briefly to the 1980s, beyond the chosen time scale of this research. This allows a clearer view of the effects of his deliberate adoption of bypassing strategies towards the Unionists which were born out of his experiences in the Derry in the mid-1960s. For example, when Hume pushed for, and became the most visible face of, the New Ireland Forum of 1983-4,<sup>54</sup> the unionist parties saw, not an attempt at deconstruction of traditional Irish nationalism with its irredentist undercurrents, but rather fresh manoeuvrings by nationalist Ireland in concert against them and orchestrated by Hume. Unsurprisingly, most declined to participate. Unionists could take Hume's words and Farren's assessment of them at face value only at the cost of ignoring the evidence of their own ears. Christopher and Michael McGimpsey, both members of the Ulster Unionist Party, broke ranks with their party's official position to attend the New Ireland Forum in a personal capacity. They outlined plainly why they had no interest in a United Ireland and clearly dispelled claims that nationalist Ireland could make them a constitutional offer they could not refuse. "I do not believe that any Southern Irish government could make up an attractive enough package to attract us into a united Ireland because our British identity is part really of our feeling that we are British and you could not be within a united Ireland and be British at the same time," said Christopher McGimpsey.

What I am saying is that while blueprints [for any potential United Ireland] are all very well and while it is certainly a positive step that you should meet here and try to discuss what you think the shape of a New Ireland should be, do not expect the Unionists suddenly to say, 'Those guys have come up with something good: we should think about that'. We do not want a United Ireland almost under any terms as it stands at present.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> McLoughlin (2007) p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> This was a Dublin-based forum comprising the SDLP, the main constitutional parties in the Republic; Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour; along with input from the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, independents, some unionists acting in personal capacity, academics and others. Its self-ascribed task was to detail what forms a united Ireland might take and how citizens' rights would be protected. It also examined social and economic factors favouring greater unity between North and South. Unionist parties, at official levels, declined invitations to make submissions.

<sup>55</sup> Christopher and Michael McGimpsey in a public session of the New Ireland Forum, January 19<sup>th</sup> 1984. See New Ireland Forum *Proceedings* (1984) pp20-39.

His brother, Michael, enlarged on this point questioning the rationale of the nationalist project and the very basis of Hume-ism and the SDLP.

I am not opposed to reconciliation; I am opposed to the ending of the Border because that breaks my citizenship with the rest of the United Kingdom. I cannot see how I can be a citizen of the UK and of an all-Ireland republic at the same time. It escapes me.... as long as the majority of the citizens of Northern Ireland – and it is a substantial majority – wish Northern Ireland to remain as part of the United Kingdom I think the Nationalist population must accept that as the democratic will. If we have the right to say ‘yes’ to a united Ireland, surely we have the right to say ‘no’ to a united Ireland?

Chris McGimpsey returned to this criticism throughout his political life. We wrote in the *Irish Times* later: “John Hume’s pursuit of an ‘agreed Ireland’ does not focus on obtaining the autonomous agreement of unionist consent but on the independent inducement of unionist consent.”<sup>56</sup> Consider this also from Basil McIvor, a Stormont Unionist MP”

Either deliberately ignoring or being unaware of Unionist fears to the point of arrogance, Hume’s was to be a fatal misjudgement.... He finds it hard to empathise with unionists.... If he ever addressed the fears of unionists it was to say blandly that they had nothing to fear, that they had no need to keep pressing the British government to reiterate its policy that the status of Northern Ireland would remain as it was unless there was a majority in favour of change. The unionists, he argues, should stand on their own feet and see how they could come to live in peace and harmony with the ‘people of this island’. This is a splendid piece of hypocrisy considering the pan-nationalist front he has established in Dublin and amongst the Irish-American lobby to bolster his own political position.<sup>57</sup>

These comments illustrates the point later made by Trimble, and quoted above, that Hume was guilty of selective hearing when it came to unionist consent and claims that he and wider nationalism were deaf to unionist concerns. What part of the word No did Hume not understand? Were unionists free to agree with him but not disagree? Was a right to give consent matched by an equal right to withhold it? To unionists, the answers to such questions were clear and unequivocal. Yet there appeared to be much equivocation on the nationalist side about what unionists had a right to say No to. These were issues among those examined by the Opsahl commission (1992-93) which invited submissions on the future of Northern Ireland.<sup>58</sup> Its report

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<sup>56</sup> The *Irish Times*, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1993.

<sup>57</sup> McIvor, Basil (1998) pp. 103-5.

<sup>58</sup> The commission saw its work as “a report of what around 3,000 people in 554 written and taped submissions said to Initiative 92’s citizens’ inquiry into ways forward for Northern Ireland, and the reflections on those submissions of seven eminent observers: Professor Torkel Opsahl, Lady Faulkner of Downpatrick, Mr Padraig O’Malley, Professor Ruth Lister, Mr Eamonn Gallagher, Professor Marianne Elliott and the Rev. Dr Eric Gallagher. The whole exercise: launching the work of initiative, holding public meetings, canvassing for submissions, organising ‘focus groups’ and oral hearings, and preparing publishing and launching the report - was carried out in 13 months between May 1992 and June 1993”. It was chaired by Torkel Opsahl, a Norwegian human rights scholar, professor of the University of Oslo and head of the board of its Human Rights Institute

is replete with concerns that nationalist Ireland was occasionally deaf when it came to unionist concerns and fears. The Rev John Dunlop, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, told the commission: “Presbyterians have little time for ambiguity. We were told in the Anglo-Irish Agreement that we should read between the lines. We don’t want to read between the lines.”<sup>59</sup> Inherent in Dr Dunlop’s complaint was that there was always more to Hume’s and Irish nationalism’s words and assurances than first appeared. There is a suggestion here of a cultural clash in addition to the political/constitutional one, a difference in the use of language, the employment of ambiguity and the suspicions that arose from what is perceived as duplicitous use of words. It is exemplified by other leading churchmen of the time as recorded by Opsahl. The Very Rev Victor Griffin, Dean of St Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin, complained:

Protestants are really puzzled by what they feel is the ambiguous attitude of Catholics and their failure to define ordinary concepts in a clean, straightforward way. There is much more of what I would call sophistry, casuistry, in the Roman Catholic approach to honesty. Protestants generally find that Catholic concepts of right and wrong, truth and honesty are more complicated. Honesty and truth and right and wrong have a rather simplistic, straightforward, uncomplicated meaning for Protestants, and Protestants sometimes find it very difficult to understand the sophistry, the playing with words which we (sometimes) get from Catholics.<sup>60</sup>

Rev Sidney Callaghan, past President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, was more specific on this point, claiming: “Northern Protestants believe that Catholics do not say what they mean, that they are profligate with words, past masters of the art of the fine point, the innuendo and the half-truth.”<sup>61</sup> Another former Presbyterian Moderator, the Rev Robert Dickenson, allied ecumenism – defined here as the search for unity among diverse Christians - with its political first cousin and alleged that Protestants were suspicious of it, seeing within it a threat to their political and religious identity: “Many unionists see ecumenism as but another means of undermining their Protestant heritage by blurring the fundamental differences between the Reformed and Unreformed faiths. It is clear that in all the Protestant Churches, whatever the clergy may pretend of even wish, the people are determined that their Protestant faith and heritage are not for sale.”<sup>62</sup> Such expressions, emanating from prominent Protestant clergy cannot be seen solely in a religious context, their frustrations extend also to the political arena

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since 1987. From 1970 to 1984, he was a member of the European Commission of Human Rights. Between 1977 and 1986, he was a member of the UN Human Rights Committee.

<sup>59</sup> Dr John Dunlop oral evidence to Opsahl Commission January 19<sup>th</sup> 1993.

See also Pollak (ed) (1993) *A Citizens’ Inquiry* p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid* p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid* p. 37

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid* p. 104.

where they believed that Irish nationalism in general and arguably Hume in particular were being less than straight with them. It is impossible to ascertain whether or not Hume and others were aware of, accepted or even understood this. What is undoubtedly clearer is that, despite Hume's many personal and private meetings<sup>63</sup> with Protestant church figures throughout his career as SDLP leader, his attempts to convince them of his bona fides were less than effective. That said, Hume was also capable of winning admirers from perhaps unlikely sources. Lucy Faulkner, wife of the last Unionist prime minister at Stormont, wrote to Pat Hume to say: "One of the minor miracles was being able to watch John Hume on television. Fury gave way to fear (maybe he will say the wrong thing) and fear to respect and respect to very genuine admiration."<sup>64</sup>

### **Hume's political language**

The issues raised above are well explored by Michael Cunningham who has deconstructed Hume's political language,<sup>65</sup> analysed its roots and influences and, by doing so, offers an explanation why unionists found it so objectionable. Hume's invocation of post-nationalism and critique of the "outdated" nation state is, nonetheless, built on his long-standing assertion that Ireland is a people and not a territory (see, again, his *Irish Times* pieces from May 1964). Despite the fresh tone of this argument, this approach is still linked with traditional Irish nationalism in that it is a 32-county approach. Nor does it confer legitimacy on the people solely of Northern Ireland or on the people of the United Kingdom as a whole as unionists are wont to do. It could therefore be held to be a repudiation of unionist rights in Northern Ireland. His talk of unifying the "great streams" (Catholic and Protestant) in Derry and therefore throughout Northern Ireland is deeply reminiscent of Parnell and Tone and their desire to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter. More importantly, Cunningham offers a reading of Hume's language which suggests that he, and by extension the SDLP, are the only ones who have freed themselves from the "fixities and shibboleths" of territorial nationalism – as arguably Hume had done back in 1964. Similarly, Hume appears to set himself up as the only one who can identify unionism's determination to "hold all power in their own hands" (see his opening quotation in this chapter). It was he who claimed the ability to recognise the unionist Achilles' Heel. By claiming such insights, his political opponents believed he saw himself as more

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<sup>63</sup> Hume held regular discussions with Protestant church figures at SDLP headquarters as well as at private locations in Belfast at which he claimed to answer their questions and to outline his political approach.

<sup>64</sup> Hume, Pat (2016) 'Married to John' in Farren and Haughey (eds) *John Hume: Irish peacemaker* p. 209.

<sup>65</sup> Cunningham, Michael (1997). The Political language of John Hume. *Irish Political Studies* 12:1, 13-22.

enlightened, more visionary and superior. Cunningham's work therefore helps unlock unionist attitudes towards Hume's apparently conciliatory language. As Cunningham concludes:

It appears that, despite attempts at transcending the linguistic parameters of nationalist discourse, John Hume remains wedded to its fundamentals. This does not imply that Hume's formulations are consciously designed to deceive or are disingenuous but rather that this reassurances and concessions to unionism are ultimately likely to prove inadequate because they are informed by a conception of the Northern Ireland "problem" and a reading of history which cannot be reconciled with unionism through the reworking of language.<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, Hume's enthusiasm for the European Union was countered in Northern Ireland by unionist suspicion of it. They saw in the EU drive for "ever closer union" a malign intent. This was that the purity of their Britishness with its Protestant foundations was being diluted by pan-Europeanism. The Rev Ian Paisley's literature, especially from the 1979 first direct elections to the European Parliament and the *Protestant Telegraph*,<sup>67</sup> reflects the "Catholic plot" elements of the EU. Hume fuelled such concerns for example through his talk of "an Ireland that is whole in a Europe that is whole, in a world that is whole".<sup>68</sup> It is also contended here that the European project which Hume embraced with enthusiasm was conceived largely by French, Catholic, social democrats and it was always a possibility therefore that it would be contested by others antagonistic to all or one of these. Furthermore, Hume's "internationalism", his extensive networking in Dublin, the US and in the EU, illustrated his strong belief that the Northern Ireland problem was best considered in a wider forum. In doing so he doubtless provoked the suspicions of unionists who saw that "Northern Ireland problem" – itself a contested notion - as one best addressed at home in Northern Ireland. The EU, like the US and other international non-state actors were used by Hume to effect change in Northern Ireland. Arguably the more Hume lobbied abroad, the more some unionists warned "outsiders" to mind their own business.<sup>69</sup>

Cunningham is kind to Hume in terms of his linguistic analysis, in his outlining of how Hume's words were somehow lost in translation between his mouth and unionist ears. But there were times when Hume was more equivocal. Consider his advocacy of the Anglo-Irish Agreement

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid p20.

<sup>67</sup> This publication was founded by the Rev Ian Paisley in 1966 for the twin purposes of advocating Protestant fundamentalism and political attacks on unionist moderates. It was published by Puritan Printing Company and closely aligned with the Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church and later the Democratic Unionist Party until 1982 when it closed.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid p17. Kennedy, Denis (1994) *The European Union and the Northern Ireland question* pp166-88 in Barton and Roche (eds)

<sup>69</sup> For an example of this see Robert McCartney, a prominent Ulster Unionist, dismissing "the myth of an external solution". *Fortnight* January 18<sup>th</sup> 1984 No. 212 pp 19, 25.

in November 1985 which formalised a role for the Irish government in Northern Ireland in the teeth of fierce unionist opposition. That agreement established a permanent intergovernmental conference involving the Irish and British governments on matters relating to the day-to-day governance of Northern Ireland. It also established a secretariat, staffed by Irish officials including the most able from the Department of Foreign Affairs, which was sited just outside Belfast. “We have consistently argued that the proper framework in which to proceed towards the peace and stability that everyone desires is the British-Irish framework, since it is within that framework that all the conflicting relationships that have given rise to our problems can be addressed,”<sup>70</sup> Hume said on the day the accord was signed by the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and the Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald.

We do not believe that a final settlement of the Irish problem has been reached. We do believe that an opportunity has been created by the agreement in the setting up of a permanent Anglo-Irish institution to make progress towards goals of peace and reconciliation. It is an opportunity that can be developed if it is taken up with goodwill on all sides. The British government has declared that there is no British interest strategic or otherwise in being in Ireland....<sup>71</sup>

Hume, a key architect of that agreement along with Foreign Affairs officials, many of them the same people he had worked with so closely in the US before this date, expected unionist opposition not least because of their exclusion from the consultation process that led to its signing. In that sense at least it was less than honest for Hume to mention an opportunity for progress “if it is taken up with goodwill on all sides” knowing that unionist reaction would be one of shock and near unanimous opposition. It was also one of unanimity in rejection of Hume’s analysis of the core of the problem – the relationship between Northern unionists and the Irish government. James Molyneaux, the Ulster Unionist leader said: “It would be counterproductive to talk unilaterally to the prime minister of any minister in a foreign government”.<sup>72</sup> Party colleague and Fermanagh and South Tyrone MP Ken Maginnis went further:

For us to talk with Dublin would be a recognition of some sort of the right of Dublin to speak for the whole island. What John Hume suggests is seen as a ruse – ‘Go and speak to Dublin, get Unionists to speak to Dublin,’ and they are recognising Dublin’s inherent right to speak for the entire island.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The Irish Times November 16<sup>th</sup> 1985 p9. Also available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1985/1116/Pg009.html>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> O’Malley (1990) p32.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Alex Kane, a former aide of Molyneaux and later the Ulster Unionists' director of communications, summed up his party's view of Hume following the signing of the accord: "Hume was always the enemy. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was the evidence."<sup>74</sup>

The author, Pdraig O'Malley, goes on to cite similar complaints from Peter Robinson and Sammy Wilson of the Democratic Unionist Party before concluding himself:

Suspicion of Hume runs deep. His motives are not only questioned but belittled. Unionists do not trust him, do not believe what he says, and hear only what they believe he really means. For them his overtures are traps, the language of deviousness designed to conceal real intentions rather than to illuminate the political landscape. 'You can't trust John Hume,' says Paisley. 'For him it's a united Ireland or nothing'.<sup>75</sup>

Hume's claims about British neutrality were also arguably less than honest given that it took a further five years before a British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, to utter such an unequivocal statement of his government's position. Hume came clean on one of the prime motivations for 1985 agreement more than four years after the event. He told Frank Millar, the London Editor of the *Irish Times* (and a former general secretary of the Ulster Unionist Party at the time of the agreement's signing) that one of its main intended effects was to face down unionist power.

I would not dispute that there was a necessity to face down a certain type of unionist entirely because that, in my view, goes to the heart of the problem. No section of the community should be able to hold all power in its own hands and should be able to blackmail governments of the day from changing that society. And if that goes to the heart of the problem then it has to be done, it has to be faced up to and facing up to that is not triumphalist.... They [unionists] knew that something had to be done, they knew they couldn't do it for themselves but, once it was done, in their own heart of hearts they were glad it was done and to on from there.... You can't resolve ... differences if one section has its hands on all the power or if it has a veto on what a British government is going to do, and I think, now that we are on an equal footing, that the next stage is the development of a solution.<sup>76</sup>

Just for good measure, Hume repeated his claims: "In practice, this shift has meant the removal of the Unionist veto on British policy, the removal of their exclusive hold on power," in the *London Review of Books* a month later.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Interview. Belfast September 19<sup>th</sup> 2018.

<sup>75</sup> O'Malley (1990) p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> The *Irish Times*, January 13<sup>th</sup> 1989. See also Millar (2009) p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v11/n03/john-hume/john-hume-on-the-end-of-the-unionist-veto-in-ulster> . 'It's a united Ireland or nothing' is a quotation usually used against Hume to support an accusation that he was a traditional nationalist who used the rhetoric of consent to mask irredentist beliefs. Hume did indeed use the phrase but



There is a considerable gap in what Hume said was his position in 1985 and what he told Millar in 1989. All along, unionists suspected the accord was a Hume-inspired gambit to confront unionist power, break its veto on British policy in Northern Ireland and refashion relations between unionists and the British government – particularly when the Conservatives were in office. That was indeed the agreement’s purpose, in addition to those outlined in his press statement of November 1985 but only admitted to five years later. (So it was with the discussions with Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Féin, in 1988. Hume said those talks were about ending republican violence, but unionists suspected the construction of a new and threatening pan-nationalist front. In short, many unionists believed Hume, at various key stages throughout his long career, of pursuing a hidden agenda and that his talk of peace and reconciliation was cover for a pernicious plot to undermine them.)

Hume knew that such an admission would have considerable effect in early 1989 at a time when both British and Irish governments as well as Hume and Sinn Féin were gearing up for a new attempt at talks on a settlement. Hume confided in Millar as he arrived for the interview: “When they come to write the history this will be regarded as a seminal piece.”<sup>78</sup> Millar reflected later that he could be forgiven for not knowing he [Hume] “had actually just defined the architecture of what, 10 long years later, would become the historic Belfast Agreement”.<sup>79</sup> The interview was one of a series with political leaders in both parts of Ireland and in Britain about the possibility of a talks process about a potential settlement. This is standard journalistic practice and has been followed many times previously and since by many other titles. However the Millar series of interviews marked a significant departure in that interviewees were accorded an opportunity to revise what they had said on-the-record. More importantly, the *Irish Times* was clear that such material was published with the express intention of helping to facilitate a political outcome. In the words of then editor Conor Brady there was considerable danger “that the newspaper could leave itself open to charges of being used for political purposes or indeed of overstepping its role as a chronicler of the news rather than being a participant in it. I felt it was safer to apprise the members of The Irish Times Trust of what was in contemplation and to hear their various advices.... Happily, they were enthusiastic about the idea and recognised its potential.”<sup>80</sup> Brady is quite open about the purpose behind the series of interviews, of which Hume’s was the first.

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attributed the sentiment to the people of the Bogside in Derry and not to himself. For more on this see McLoughlin (2006).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid p1.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Written communication with the author dated July 10<sup>th</sup> 2018.

“Frank [Millar] saw the exercise as a means of enabling political rivals to set out their stalls and to comment on others’ positions in a way that would not be confrontational and which, he persuaded me, would clear the ground somewhat even before ‘talks about talks’ might begin.”<sup>81</sup> It is no coincidence that Brady was among very few leading journalists and editors with whom Hume kept in close contact.<sup>82</sup> It is interesting that he was less keen on courting the editors of newspapers such as the *Belfast News Letter* and the *Belfast Telegraph* which were more sympathetic to the unionist position. Sam Butler, former editor of the unionist-supporting *Belfast News Letter* claims:

I knew John before I became editor and when I worked with Brian Faulkner in the power sharing executive. I think a John had difficulty in relating to unionists. As editor, he never made any real effort to renew the contact. I don’t think [he] had any real respect for unionists. This may be the outcome of the unionist hierarchy in Derry at the time. They were largely old school who suspected and disliked Catholics.<sup>83</sup>

### **The ‘hidden agenda’**

In October 1993, almost 30 years after Hume first outlined his hopes for nationalist-unionist rapprochement in the *Irish Times*, John Hume addressed a meeting in St Thomas’s Church of Ireland church in Belfast. He insisted time and again that unionist consent was central to the search for a lasting settlement.<sup>84</sup> “If the conflict in the North is to be ended,” he said, “the unionist and nationalist peoples must begin a fundamental re-examination of their attitudes.” That Hume felt the need to repeat himself tells its own story. There is no “hidden agenda” he insisted, but unionists, as previously heard him differently and believed they had evidence on their side.

It is useful to build on Ian McAllister’s ideas concerning the need for, and establishment of, the SDLP in 1970. He states that a political and *parliamentary* party was needed in the wake of the civil rights activism of 1968<sup>85</sup> and subsequently – in much the same way that Hume had called for such an organisation in his *Irish Times* pieces of May 1964. Hume wanted an effective constitutional force to replace the inadequate (as he saw it) Nationalist party and to counter the well-entrenched physical force republican tradition as represented by the IRA and Sinn Féin. But McAllister adds, pertinently, that by August 1970 and the unveiling of the SDLP at its inaugural press conference “the SDLP appeared less a political party than a coalition of

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 1 and Hume’s early contacts with Brady’s predecessor at The *Irish Times*, Douglas Gageby.

<sup>83</sup> Personal correspondence with the author, October 24<sup>th</sup> 2018.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Hume seeks to allay unionist fears of a hidden agenda’ -The *Irish Times*, October 10<sup>th</sup> 1993.

<sup>85</sup> McAllister (1977) p. 34.

diverse parliamentary interests *linked only by a common opposition to unionism.*” [emphasis added]. Unionists could not, and did not, fail to detect this, conscious as they were of any and all threats to their position in Northern Ireland. Despite his many assertions of the need for unionist consent for an “agreed Ireland” Hume’s political stance was therefore always a counterpoint to that of unionism.

Yet his troubled relations with unionists is more than a repeated case of two parties with differing standpoints talking past each other. Hume actively concealed his true intentions and beliefs, notably in 1985, leaving his opponents free to make their own (hostile) conclusions about him – which they duly did. It has been stated above that Hume’s attitudes towards unionists toughened throughout his career, but significantly and most notably during the second half of the 1960s following some years of hope after decades of stalemate and one-party rule in Northern Ireland. While much has been made of new ideas and concepts (and the accompanying abandonment of old notions) less light has been shone on a similar process in unionism. Much historical analysis seems to suggest that unionist ideas were stored in permafrost after the partition of Ireland and the formation of the Northern Ireland state in 1921 – almost as if that year marked an ‘end of history’ for the majority community in the Northern state. However Raymond Ferguson, a former Assembly member for Fermanagh, South Tyrone helpfully points to undercurrents of change within unionism from the late 1950s onwards which were reflected in the failed premiership of Terence O’Neill. “Until the advent of the Civil Rights campaign in 1967, the more visionary leaders of unionism tentatively began a process of trying to accustom their followers to accommodating Roman Catholics within their political system, even entrusting them to government,” he claims.

There was, at the same time, the beginning of an attempt to rationalise their relationship with the Irish Republic. It was perhaps the beginning of an acknowledgement that to be a Protestant in a Protestant part of Ireland, even under a British system, was nevertheless to be Irish... The phase didn’t last. The civil rights marches and their aftermath revived all the old fears and insecurities. The terrorist campaign... and the political instability that has accompanied it have caused unionists yet again to seek security as a first priority. The effect has been to drive Protestant people in the North into a position where they fear to identify themselves in any way with things Irish. They rationalise that to secure their position, they must identify more closely with mainland British politics. They consequently seek to redefine their identity in order to match their would-be political position.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ferguson, Raymond (1990) ‘The Media in Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland’ Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University Belfast. P. 44.

There were, without doubt, opportunities for a refashioning of relations between the two Northern Ireland communities and between North and South in the early 1960s as has been shown. There is also little doubt that Hume was at the forefront of fashioning such ideas, at least on the non-unionist side, before the civil rights campaign and the political/security backlash, especially after 1969, drove respective communities back into their corners. After the catastrophe of August 1969, and in the wake of subsequent catastrophes including internment, Bloody Sunday, the paramilitary campaigns and the forced collapse of the first genuinely cross-community powersharing Executive in 1974, Hume's language hardened. His criticisms of unionism became more pointed and his political trajectory, aimed at securing influential networks of influence in Dublin, Washington and beyond earned him a reputation for deceit. This had a particularly negative effect on unionists who were permanently on guard for such perceived manoeuvrings as Ferguson attests. When it came to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 Hume's economy with the whole truth was more obvious. But by that time unionists were prepared to take little of what he said at face value.

His many admirers insist to this day that his intentions were true and that he was a victim of persistent falsehoods levelled at him by opponents. Michael Lillis, who first worked closely with Hume in the US in the late 1970s, insists Hume was careful when it came to choosing his words:

I was in his presence on occasion as he prepared some of those words: he approached this task with profound seriousness which sometimes took the form of the uninterrupted silence of deep reflection for two hours or even longer at a time. Then he would be ready to write. Those introspective concentrations were valuable exercises in self-challenging meditation and the development of tactics and strategy...<sup>87</sup>

Seán Farren, for many years one of Hume's most loyal lieutenants in the SDLP, has insisted that his thorough compilation of Hume's speeches and writing<sup>88</sup> insists Hume genuinely was in favour of agreement – freely reached – with unionists rather than conquest of them.

Run a word search through *John Hume In His Own Words* and “reconciliation” will appear more than 70 times, a pertinent reminder that for Hume reconciliation was always an essential part of political progress in the North – the “healing process” as John often referred to it. From his entry into public life in the early 1960s John Hume stressed that without reconciliation northern politics would remain as frozen as they had been since partition, and even earlier.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Dublin Review of Books May 2018. Available at <http://www.drbb.ie/essays/john-hume-s-legacy>

<sup>88</sup> Farren (2018).

<sup>89</sup> The *Irish Times* December 19<sup>th</sup> 2017. Also available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/john-hume-the-sort-of-creative-politician-the-north-needs-right-now-1.3332360>

Farren holds up the examples of the final report New Ireland Forum of 1984, the Anglo-Irish Agreement which flowed from it the following year, as well as the Belfast Agreement of 1998 weaving through all three the thread of Hume's insistence on nonviolence, constitutionalism and the essential need for agreement between unionist and nationalist regardless of the constitutional position eventually arrived at. If Irish unity is to be achieved, Farren wrote:

[I]t would only come about by those in favour of it persuading those opposed of its merits. To credibly enter into that debate, a process of reconciliation between both communities had to be engaged in. Hence Hume's emphasis on promoting reconciliation within the framework of the three key relationships involving the people of Northern Ireland, the people of Ireland as a whole and the people of Ireland and Britain. Critically, therefore, it is relationships that have had to be healed, not territory united.

Both Farren and Denis Haughey, another close party aide and author of another work on Hume allow that the unionist issue could have been handled better.

John is open to the criticism that he should have devoted more of his time and his formidable powers of persuasion to trying to change attitudes in the traditional unionist community. Possibly he decided that the task of prising open the closed mindset of unionism, as he perceived it, was beyond his or anyone else's capacity, and that his time and his powers were better used in pursuing objectives where the difficulties and obstacles were less forbidding. But it remains a moot point.<sup>90</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Hume is at his most enigmatic when it comes to elected Unionists and those who vote for them. He consistently underscored the need as he saw it for unionist consent when it came to the constitutional question of Northern Ireland – in doing so, making clear that his community would not inflict on them what he believed they had inflicted on his. Hume's 'New Ireland' would not be a turning of the tables. To that end he made considerable leaps from traditional irredentist nationalism, redefining it and insisting that a united Ireland without unionist involvement would be nothing other than a contradiction in terms. He campaigned alongside Unionist leader David Trimble in the Belfast Agreement referendum campaign in a bid to broaden cross-community support for the peace deal. Yet no similar efforts were made following the delivery of the referendum victory, especially as Unionist support for the deal waned and Trimble's position as leader (and deliverer of pro-accord unionist support) was gradually undermined. Hume appears to have done little to defend the centre ground he and

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<sup>90</sup> The Irish Times December 17<sup>th</sup> 2015. Also available at:  
<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/john-hume-the-politician-who-made-peace-possible-1.2469785>

Trimble had worked to buttress. Instead Hume's memoirs, published in 1996, betray hostility towards unionists – something that had its roots back in the days of his frustrated University for Derry campaign 30 years earlier.

It is inescapable that Hume, who stated from his earliest days as a public representative that his task was to find agreement with unionists, made his own task more difficult. Quite apart from the fact that Hume fervently believed that Unionist power had to be broken – a fact that would provoke unionist hostility on its own<sup>91</sup> – Hume made the situation worse by repeated use of inflammatory descriptions of unionists. His adoption of pathological terms did not help matters, as his claims that “the Protestant boil had to be lanced” illustrate.<sup>92</sup>

Such reflections are significant given the torrent of adulation that swept over Hume post-1998 and the signing of the Belfast Agreement. Had the realisation been made earlier, perhaps Hume might not have been so seemingly petulant when recording his memoirs and employing the quotation used at the introduction of this chapter as well as the following:

They [unionists] never had to be politicians or exercise the art of politics, which is the art of representing one's own view while treating others with fairness. They are still oligarchs. The faithful will line up when the drums beat. The other points of view, to which lip-service is publicly paid, don't really count.<sup>93</sup>

His comments sound truculent and mean-spirited particularly in light of the fact that two years later unionists signed the Belfast Agreement alongside Hume's own party and that David Trimble, the Ulster Unionist leader, shared the 1998 Nobel peace prize with Hume. No wonder then that Trimble retorted during his Nobel acceptance speech, claiming: “That agreement showed that the people of Northern Ireland are no petty people.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> For an early example of unionist and centre-ground Alliance Party dislike of Hume see Kerr (2011) p. 76.

<sup>92</sup> The *Observer*, April 27<sup>th</sup> 1986, and also quoted in Teague (1987) p. 46.

<sup>93</sup> Hume (1996) p. 85.

<sup>94</sup> “David Trimble - Nobel Lecture”. *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2014. Web. August 9<sup>th</sup> 2018. [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1998/trimble-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1998/trimble-lecture.html)

## 6: Brits In!

### Hume and the Anglo-Irish framework

‘If only we were dealing with reasonable people.’<sup>1</sup>

*Reginald Maudling, British Home Secretary describes his contacts with Northern Ireland representatives, November 10<sup>th</sup> 1971.*

‘Britain is, in fact, included in the quarrel as a central protagonist and must be centrally involved in the solution.’

*John Hume: ‘The Irish Question: A British Problem’*<sup>2</sup>

John Hume, regardless of whether he likes the accolade, was a significant and influential figure in British politics well before the heady days of the peace process and the glory of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Relatively little is known about Hume’s early attitudes towards Britain and, given the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is safe to assume they were unexceptional. His memoirs reveal he played cricket and is a keen follower of Derry City football club. He had visited both the US and France (many times as a student) before he ever set foot in England. His first visit there may have been to Fulham where he addressed a meeting of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster in 1965.<sup>3</sup> Politically, it has been established that he favoured British and Irish accession to the then EEC as early as 1959.<sup>4</sup> Following his election to the European Parliament, Hume joined the Socialist group, and the SDLP was a sister party courtesy of this association and via the Socialist International. In his *Irish Times* articles of May 1964 he made no reference whatever, critical or otherwise, to Britain’s role in Northern Ireland. The only negative reference to Britain uncovered in the course of this research is suggested by his wife Pat regarding her husband’s strong preference for Strasbourg over London. She recalls: “John never embraced the Westminster style of politics.....he was pragmatic about his time there [Westminster] and found it invaluable in communicating the complexities of the political situation in the North to the various parties and the need for a comprehensive solution.”<sup>5</sup>

As a historian Hume may have appreciated the argument put forward by English:

[T]he powerful Irish nationalism so long evident in the North was one that drew, historically, on influences with very British roots. This was true of the powerful

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<sup>1</sup> UK National Archives CAB 130/522.

<sup>2</sup> *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 58 No.2 Winter 1979 pp. 300-313.

<sup>3</sup> The CDU was promoted by Labour backbench MPs to highlight Northern Ireland issues in Britain. For a short account of Hume’s Fulham address see Chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> Pat Hume (2016) ‘Married to John’ in Farren and Haughey (eds) *John Hume: Irish peacemaker*. p. 210.

constitutional nationalist tradition of O’Connell, Parnell and Redmond – a tradition that, by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, was being pithily carried on by SDLP politicians such as John Hume.<sup>6</sup>

Either way, Hume had British forbears and had benefitted from the British welfare state – especially in terms of education (Maynooth, Hume’s university, was founded and funded by Britain). No doubt he absorbed British news and culture and recognised the two-way links of language, literature, culture, politics and trade across the Irish Sea. If he was hostile towards anything it was irredentist Irish nationalism and political violence rather than Britain. However the stark fact remains: Hume had more political clout in Dublin, where he had no formal mandate, than he had in London where he was an elected Member of Parliament.

### **Working the system**

His rise to a position of influence in London followed a path uncannily similar to that which saw him emerge as a significant figure in Dublin. Hume sought out and cultivated associations with key British ministers. He also identified means of access via civil servants and diplomats at a key time as the old Stormont order crumbled and the British government searched for an alternative approach. This mirrored his tactics both in the Republic and in the US with a view to Washington acting as a lever on both British policy in Ireland and on unionists at all levels to accept change.<sup>7</sup> Hume would regularly suggest privately that the best chance of an Anglo-Irish breakthrough would arise when what he called “the party of the flag” would hold office in Dublin and London – Fianna Fáil and the Conservatives respectively.<sup>8</sup> As his faith in the ability of the Northern Ireland government to deliver reforms crumbled in 1969, Hume lobbied all the more faithfully for an Anglo-Irish approach which would widen the search for a solution beyond the sectarian and claustrophobic political scene. He argued that the search for a solution would, out of necessity, need to be conducted within the same parameters as the problem itself – and he saw the problem as an Anglo-Irish one. In doing so he revised his earlier enthusiasm, as laid out in his landmark *Irish Times* platform pieces in May 1964, for an “internal solution” - purely within Northern Ireland. After the catastrophic events on the streets of his native Derry in 1968 and especially in the summer of 1969 he grew more insistent on London taking greater

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<sup>6</sup> English (2008) ‘Force will get us nowhere?’ In *Britain and Ireland: Lives entwined III. A new dawn?* The British Council

<sup>7</sup> See Chapters 3 and 4 respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Personal recollection.



responsibility as the sovereign power – and particularly when it meant the British government was pulling rank over the Unionists at Stormont.

### **Brits In**

Hume was an enigmatic Irish nationalist, having accepted some tenets of nationalism and, it will be argued here, rejecting others outright. As has been shown in Chapter 5 his political language implicitly reflected nationalist assumptions, especially the integrity of the entire island of Ireland as a political entity within which political accommodation had to be found. He relentlessly argued for an “Irish dimension” (i.e. a formal role for the government in Dublin) as part of any new constitutional arrangement he advocated for Northern Ireland. Unlike traditional nationalists however, as has been argued in Chapter 1, he urged Northern nationalists to accept the Northern state and to work within its institutions. Unlike the Nationalist Party and Sinn Féin, he was consistent in his advocacy of a redefined nationalism which prioritised the unity of the people on the island of Ireland rather than its territory. While this element of Hume’s philosophy has been highlighted in the literature<sup>9</sup> there has been rather less emphasis on Hume’s insistence that Britain ought to have an active and enduring role in any settlement – the antithesis of Sinn Féin’s demand for total British disengagement often sloganised as “Brits out” on gable walls.<sup>10</sup> In pursuit of this aim, Hume created for himself a political challenge on two fronts. The first was, obviously, within the confines of Irish nationalism – the second was with Britain itself, which had its own entrenched ideas about Ireland and its role and responsibility there. However, despite Hume’s relentless advocacy of an Anglo-Irish framework it will be contended that he could have displayed greater zeal in his dealings with the English half of that hyphenated context. As in his dealings with the Unionists in Northern Ireland, Hume showed less of his persuasive capacity when it came to his dealings with British ministers over the course of 30 years. Despite a positive encounter with British home secretary James Callaghan<sup>11</sup> in the Bogside in August 1969, he later criticised him claiming that Callaghan was “looking for a middle road between suspension of Stormont and

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<sup>9</sup> Hume’s biographers, especially White (1984) and Routledge (1997), underscore the importance of this departure from traditional “territorial” Irish nationalism. McLoughlin (2006) pp. 216 and 230 helpfully adds deeper analysis showing how Hume changed the character of nationalism.

<sup>10</sup> “The root of the failure is the constitutional connection with England. As an Irish republican party we say clearly that that connection must be broken.” Sinn Féin submission to multi-party talks ‘Peace in Ireland — Freedom, Justice, Democracy, Equality A Sinn Féin Submission to Strands One and Two of the peace talks.’ 17 October 1997. Also available at [http://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2009/MultiParty\\_7.pdf](http://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2009/MultiParty_7.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 6 passim.

doing nothing”.<sup>12</sup> He disliked Reginald Maudling, Callaghan’s (Conservative) successor having felt belittled by him after their first meeting which lasted “a contemptuous 25 minutes”.<sup>13</sup> He also did not rate Merlyn Rees, the Labour Northern Ireland Secretary who took office in 1974<sup>14</sup> and was appalled by Roy Mason, Rees’s successor, especially over his security policy.<sup>15</sup> (The pattern continued in later years beyond the scope this research - Hume could not see eye-to-eye with Thatcher or her first Northern Ireland secretary Humphrey Atkins and appeared to step back from her,<sup>16</sup> preferring to let President Ronald Reagan state his [Hume’s] case for a change in British policy.) Hume was arguably too dismissive at times of British influences, preferring instead to concentrate his efforts in the US and in the institutions of the EEC (now EU) after 1979. He was also possibly too partisan in the context of the House of Commons, siding all too easily with the Labour Party (Hume sat on the Opposition benches and took the Labour whip) despite his deeply ingrained belief that it was the Conservative Party which would be best placed to agree and enact any deal should his Anglo-Irish process bear fruit. This is in stark contrast to his approach in the Republic of Ireland where Hume and the SDLP senior figures were (at least outwardly) studious in their efforts to work alongside all three major parties in the Dáil.

### **Hume’s challenge to Britain’s view of itself**

Hume’s quotation above was intended as a double-edged rebuke to one of the most restated assertions about Ireland ever made by a British politician – contradicting the dual British claim prevalent after the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 of being neutral and uninvolved in the Irish question. Taking offence at Winston Churchill’s dismissively weary and somewhat superior complaint that the “dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone”<sup>17</sup> had re-emerged to interrupt England’s post Great War vision, and that the “integrity of *their* struggle” [emphasis added] lamentably persisted despite the emergence of a new world order. Hume was consistent in his belief throughout his public career that the British government, despite its hubris,<sup>18</sup> was central

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<sup>12</sup> *Derry Journal* September 5<sup>th</sup> 1969.

<sup>13</sup> *Derry Journal* July 7<sup>th</sup> 1970.

<sup>14</sup> ‘SDLP showed particular contempt for Merlyn Rees’. *Irish Times* January 4<sup>th</sup> 2005. Also available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/sdlp-showed-a-particular-contempt-for-merlyn-rees-1.403364>

<sup>15</sup> McKittrick ‘Dealing with British governments’ p. 98 and Hume, Pat ‘Married to John’ p. 210 in Farren and Haughey (2016).

<sup>16</sup> See minutes of Hume’s first meeting with Thatcher: UK National Archives PREM 19/280.

<sup>17</sup> Speech to House of Commons February 16<sup>th</sup> 1922.

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent and helpful discussion on the role of hubris on the part of the dominant power in a multi-nation state see Resnick, Philip (2008) ‘Hubris and melancholy in multinational states’. *Nations and Nationalism* Vol 14 No. 4 pp. 789-807.

to the problems of Northern Ireland and, logic would dictate, ought to be central in the search for, and implementation of, a solution. As far as Hume was concerned, the British government - like the unionists - had misunderstood both the nature of the “Irish question” and their role within it. It was a three-cornered problem and not merely one of the confounded Irish who were unable to agree among themselves despite the best, rather patrician, efforts of successive British governments. London, by Hume’s logic, was a central player and not, as many British politicians (not least of them Churchill) preferred to see it, an independent and disinterested referee in a squabble not of their own making. Hume’s contention was that Britain’s role in Ireland was not “their” struggle, but “ours”.

(There is evidence, had Hume chosen to refer to it, backing his argument and appearing to undermine Churchill’s over-quoted line. Not least among these are the minutes of a Lloyd George Cabinet meeting which discussed various proposals for the partition of Ireland, one at which Churchill himself attended, in 1919 when he was War Minister.

...the general feeling was that the ultimate aim of the Government’s policy in Ireland was a united Ireland with a separate parliament of its own, bound by the closest ties to Great Britain, but that this must be achieved with the largest possible support, and without offending the Protestants in Ulster: in fact, as Sir Edward Carson had put it, Ulster must be won by kindness: and the ultimate aim could only be achieved by something like general consent in Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

The tone of the minutes suggest that the British government did indeed have a preferred outcome in Ireland – a quiescent and self-governing partitioned country (however that was to be done) closely aligned with Britain.)

Hume’s position was inherently confrontational and therefore met some resistance from British politicians. Since the foundation of the Northern Ireland state in 1920, Britain had prioritised its desire to keep Ireland at arm’s length and to disentangle itself from day-to-day Irish affairs after decades of turmoil at Westminster over the Irish question. Hume summarised this as follows and went so far as to assert that the British were blind to the outcomes of their own actions:

The basis of British policy is concealed under layers of good intentions, ingenious initiatives, commissions of enquiry, attempted reforms, financial aid and a good deal of genial bewilderment. I do not use word ‘concealed’ maliciously. Many sincere and concerned British politicians and observers have the impression that they have tried everything possible to get the Irish to agree together: that is a measure of the extent to which the basic assumption of their policy has become imperceptible to the British themselves.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> National Archives: CAB 23/18/11. Minutes of a Cabinet meeting at Downing Street, December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1919.

<sup>20</sup> *Foreign Affairs* Vol 58 No 2 Winter 1979 p303.

London's "guarantee" to unionists, underscoring their constitutional position within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was founded on the notion that they should not be forced into an all-Ireland arrangement against their wishes – "a recognition also accorded by William Cosgrave, the first prime minister of the Irish Free State, in 1922".<sup>21</sup> This was consistently and resolutely opposed by Hume, who held that this "tragic mistake" resulted only in sectarian solidarity.<sup>22</sup> He argued that the Unionists need do nothing to ringfence their ascendancy position in Northern Ireland other than hold all power and maintain a united front against their fellow citizens. The irony was that it was the agitation for reform by the Civil Rights movement and its aftermath, not least Stormont's inflammatory response to it - and not the avowed loyalty to Britain of the unionists, that ultimately ensured "hands-on" British re-involvement in Northern Ireland, breaking the accepted practices of more than 40 years. Having largely extricated themselves by 1924, a policy outcome described by Paul Arthur as "divide and depart",<sup>23</sup> the events from October 1968 until August 1969 saw them dragged unwillingly back into the equation. The resulting difficulty for both the Unionist Party and the British government was that over the years they had slowly and almost imperceptibly grown estranged from each other. It was a fact not lost on Hume who learned very early on that there was more to be gained by going over the heads of local politicians in Northern Ireland and appealing directly to the genuinely powerful in London to achieve desired results. (At least some credit for this is due to Gerry Fitt, the West Belfast MP at Westminster and a Stormont Opposition MP who, along with Hume and others, was a high profile figure in the Civil Rights campaign. Thanks to his highlighting of Northern Ireland issues among back-bench Labour MPs between 1966 and 1968,<sup>24</sup> a precedent of sorts had already been set.)

### **First engagements**

Hume's earliest opportunity to engage a higher British authority presented itself in the person of James Callaghan, the British Home Secretary and the man who ultimately held most

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<sup>21</sup> Catterall and McDougall (1996) p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Hume described the guarantee as a "a guarantee of permanent exclusive power to one side, the unionists, and a guarantee of permanent exclusion from power to the other, the Catholic minority. Its existence undermined any hope of political negotiation between the two sides in Northern Ireland.... The suffering and frustration of the people.... overwhelmingly attest to the fact that the guarantee was, to put it very bluntly, a tragic mistake." *Foreign Affairs* (1979) p. 303.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur (1985) p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed three Labour MPs attended the October 5<sup>th</sup> Civil Rights march in Derry alongside Fitt.

responsibility, other than prime Minister Harold Wilson, for Northern Ireland at that time. Callaghan's visit to Derry's Bogside on August 28<sup>th</sup> 1969 came in the immediate aftermath of serious civil disturbances which resulted in the deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland. Callaghan was received by Hume and colleague Ivan Cooper – a hugely symbolic move as no Stormont minister had been there. “On behalf of the people who are, in my view, living symbols of injustice in Northern Ireland,” said Hume audibly enough for the television news crew to record it, “I welcome you here because you will find in this area, the worst housing, the highest unemployment and the heaviest emigration and I hope you are bringing the solution with you.”<sup>25</sup> Hume's appeal to a higher authority was obvious. Callaghan concluded his visit to the Bogside and his talks with Hume and community leaders in Free Derry<sup>26</sup> with an impromptu address from an upstairs window of an elderly woman's home where he had been served tea. Overturning established British policy of 40 years he said: “I was told yesterday I was welcome here because I am neutral. I am *not* neutral. I am on the side of those, whoever they may be and in whatever community they live who are deprived of justice and of freedom.”<sup>27</sup>

The presence of such a high-ranking British cabinet member lent a legitimacy both to Hume as a local political representative and to the claims of grievance of the city's Catholics against the Unionist administration at Stormont. The Wilson government in Britain had already been deeply concerned at the situation in Northern Ireland following October 5<sup>th</sup> the previous year and had pressed the Unionist government to reform. (Callaghan's memoirs showed how seriously London viewed the Northern Ireland situation and they reveal that Wilson had privately considered the threat of “cutting off Northern Ireland's representation at Westminster” if progress was too little or too late.<sup>28</sup>) Callaghan warned the Unionist Prime Minister, James Chichester-Clark – O'Neill's successor – that “a government which could not control the streets or the population was not a government in our understanding of the word,”<sup>29</sup> evidence indeed that what authority Stormont had was lost well in advance of its formal prorogation in March 1972. Cooper later expressed disappointment, as did Hume, at what he

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<sup>25</sup> *No Go: The Free Derry Story*. An Open Reel production for BBC Northern Ireland 2006. (37 mins) Also available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4Ai6QND-vc&t=2380s>

<sup>26</sup> Free Derry was a short-lived nationalist enclave in Derry's Bogside which was formed in the wake of serious civil disturbance in mid-August 1969. Ringed by barricades and protected by vigilantes, it excluded the Royal Ulster Constabulary and then the British army from its confines. It symbolised a nationalist rejection

<sup>27</sup> *No Go: The Free Derry Story*.

<sup>28</sup> Callaghan (1973) p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* p. 27.

saw as Callaghan's "superficial" immediate response in 1969 and his insistence on working through Stormont to enact reforms: "At the time it took courage on the part of the British government to dig out the root of the problem and at that time Callaghan wasn't prepared to grasp the nettle."<sup>30</sup>

However, disappointed by the Wilson government's caution or not at the time, an important tactical lesson had been well learned by Hume. The ability to access directly the source of real power in the United Kingdom had contributed to the de facto ending of British government support for the Unionist Party's monopoly on power in Northern Ireland.

### **Wilson: hoping for the best, preparing for the worst**

From late 1969 onwards, the British government publicly maintained support for a policy of driving reforms in Northern Ireland via Stormont. But privately, they began to anticipate the ultimate failure of such an approach and to prepare to assume direct rule of the region.<sup>31</sup> The events of August 1969 in Derry, and to a lesser extent in Belfast, illustrated for Hume the relative ineffectiveness of trying to change Northern Ireland *only* from within, using solely its devolved political structures – even with pressure being applied from without by London. There was potentially much more to be gained, by forcing British ministers to overcome their original reluctance to break a 45-year-old non-involvement protocol, by engaging British ministers over the heads of the Unionist cabinet at Stormont. The tactic was Hume's. He learned at first hand in the Bogside in August 1969 the value of political clout from having the personal ear of genuinely powerful ministers and engaging them, even reluctantly, in the Northern Ireland political process. His "Brits In" strategy used the logic of the United Kingdom against the Unionists – the very ones who were its strongest advocates. The Unionist government had taken the Union with Great Britain as their best guarantor of an ascendancy position in Northern Ireland and as a bulwark against some form of takeover by an irredentist Irish republic. By the end of 1969, that policy had backfired spectacularly. The Union had resulted in the British government siding with Catholic demands for equality and against the Unionists. Instead of propping up the Unionist ascendancy at Stormont, (which they had effectively done by looking the other way for more than 40 years) the British government gradually and effectively emasculated it from late 1968 onwards by pressing hard for speedy reforms, forcing some unionist hardliners to contemplate the unthinkable, and for an overhaul

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<sup>30</sup> *No Go: The Free Derry Story*. An Open Reel production for BBC Northern Ireland 2006. (39 mins).

<sup>31</sup> Beattie Smith (2011) p. 120.

of Northern Ireland policing. The decision by Callaghan to deploy British troops in Belfast and Derry was not just an emergency response to serious disorder on the streets of those cities, it was also a clear signal to the Unionist Party that its time was up. Hume had warned as early as 1964 that the Unionist leopard had to be seen to change its spots. Included in his *Irish Times* pieces of May 18-19<sup>th</sup> 1964 is the warning against a unionist rejection of Catholic appeals for reforms. “To date none of the leaders has shown any response to repeated statements of Catholic willingness to get together. Unionists must realise that if they turn their backs on the present goodwill there can only be a considerable hardening of Catholic opinion....” He continued: “[T]hey must realise that the vast majority of Catholics in Northern Ireland are responsible people, anxious for an improvement in community relations and for the future of the Northern Ireland in which they live and rear their children.” By 1971, and in the turmoil following the introduction of internment of Republican suspects without trial, he warned that, in the face of such obduracy, Catholics had largely “withdrawn their consent from the system of government”.<sup>32</sup> An interview given in 1980 shows how far his position had hardened from his initial optimism of 1964:

They [unionists] are one of the most right-wing forces in Europe – nobody else would stand for them, anywhere. If they had ever shown the slightest degree of generosity, or a willingness to negotiate while in office ... or even if they showed it now. But they don't. The reason why *we are going to Britain for a settlement* is because there isn't a single Unionist leader capable of engaging in dialogue.<sup>33</sup> [emphasis added]

### **The arrival of UKREP**

Hume's advances on London were far from the only sources of pressure on the British government to intervene directly in Northern Ireland and, critically, to liaise with the government in Dublin. International opinion weighed far more heavily on the Wilson administration which was itself anxious to be seen as welcoming the democratising winds of change that were sweeping across Europe, the US and much of the former Empire in 1968. Tarnishing that longed-for reputation was the apparent 17<sup>th</sup> century shadow of a part of Ireland with its tales of democracy denied, biased one-party government, draconian special powers and heavy handed policing. In an era of truly international television news, this was the sort of negative association Britain could have done without. It was in that context that Wilson decided

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<sup>32</sup> The *Irish Times* August 16<sup>th</sup> 1971. Also available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1971/0816/Pg001.html>

<sup>33</sup> 'The Northern Issue' The *Crane Bag*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (1980/1981), pp. 39-43. Also available at [https://www.jstor.org/stable/30059509?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/30059509?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents). Interestingly, this interview was carried out by Seamus Deane, a contemporary of Hume from St Columb's College, Derry.

to act. Tellingly his government despatched his former private secretary who was also an experienced diplomat, Oliver Wright, to Northern Ireland to act as the “UK Representative” in Belfast. It was as if Northern Ireland had been constitutionally, and not just psychologically, foreign territory. This highly regarded envoy, experienced in dealings with Rhodesia after UDI in 1965, was tasked with addressing the dearth of reliable political and security intelligence about Northern Ireland which Britain suddenly realised existed. Until that point the Wilson cabinet relied on information coming from Unionist-controlled Stormont.<sup>34</sup> In effect Wright, who would later become UK Ambassador to the US, was an envoy posted to an integral region of the United Kingdom to report privately on affairs to Wilson and Callaghan rather than directly to the Foreign Office, the Home Office and the Cabinet Office, all of which formally shared responsibility for Northern Ireland.<sup>35</sup> More crucially the Office of UK Representative, or UKREP as it became known, provided an official two-way mechanism for the British government to get direct, and if necessary, discreet access to Hume and other independent members of the Stormont Opposition – something that they had not been able to, or had even recognised a need, to do beforehand. Using such newly established lines of communications to the highest levels of government which bypassed Stormont and Whitehall, Wright’s reports (at least those which have been made available) are replete with references to “containment” and “managing the Ulster problem”<sup>36</sup> to the benefit of Westminster’s interests. But notably, Wright further advised both Downing Street and Whitehall to engage with Stormont Opposition figures including Hume as well as with Dublin, putting the situation in Northern Ireland onto a prototype Anglo-Irish basis and to “reaffirm the constitutional position, but discreetly and ex-gratia to keep the Dublin government informed and to encourage, when the time is right, discreet contacts, starting at official level, between North and South”.<sup>37</sup> Dorr puts it concisely: “Wright ... saw it as essential to open up lines of communication between Westminster and Dublin and Westminster and Belfast and keep them open.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For more on this see Beattie Smith (2011) pp. 100-1.

<sup>35</sup> Wright remained in Belfast for seven months before he was promoted and replaced. His valedictory letter to James Callaghan at the Home Office in which he details the “present state and future prospects of the province as they appear to me on my departure” is a valuable insight into how ‘fluid’ British policy was at that time and how the UK government perceived their response to the crisis. UK National Archives DEFE/13/1397.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid p. 9. Wright’s reports and those of successors are collated in UK National Archives file CJ 3/18. However some papers are to remain closed until 2027.

<sup>38</sup> Dorr (2017) *The Search for Peace in Northern Ireland*: Sunningdale. Dublin. Royal Irish Academy, p. 43 See also Wright’s reports to the Home Office UK National Archives FCO 33/758 Wright to Waddell. Further UKREP communications to London are available at FCO 33/759 and FCO 33/760.



The office of UKREP<sup>39</sup> quickly became a central if subtle element in London's consideration of the problems in Northern Ireland, particularly after the severe violence of late 1969. Outwardly, Wilson's Labour government – like the Conservatives under Edward Heath after June 1970 – maintained a security-led policy designed to contain violence while pressing the Stormont government to implement political and social reforms. However, UKREP's reports clearly point to a parallel development in which London's growing acceptance of a formalised role for Catholic/nationalist participation in government is obvious. Brian Faulkner,<sup>40</sup> who replaced James Chichester-Clark as Unionist prime minister at Stormont in 1971, disliked UKREP for this reason<sup>41</sup> and he believed the office undermined established devolved structures in Belfast – which it did. Indeed Beattie Smith goes so far as to suggest that Hume and colleagues in the newly-formed SDLP after August 1970 were emboldened to hold out against incremental reforms in Northern Ireland in the anticipation that Stormont would be abolished altogether by Westminster. UKREP's papers support such a contention.<sup>42</sup> It is contended here that, as British impatience increased with the pace and scope of Stormont reforms, so too did the influence of UKREP's thinking in Downing Street. While Faulkner shifted gradually to promote ideas including the reintroduction of proportional Representation for Stormont elections with multi-seat constituencies he held out against guaranteed seats at the Executive table for non Unionists. However, as Hume made patently clear, the introduction of internment meant that the time for discussions about Faulkner's plans had passed. Nationalists in Northern Ireland had made it clear that they were no longer interested merely in reforming the “old” Stormont. Announcing a campaign of civil disobedience in August 1971, Hume, in conjunction with his SDLP colleagues and the rump of the old Nationalist party at Stormont, stated:

The purpose of this campaign is to demonstrate clearly that a large section of this community has withdrawn its consent from the system of government. No system of government can survive if a significant section of the population is determined that it will not be governed under this system. We underline the importance of total involvement by everyone in this campaign and we reiterate that violence cannot solve our problems and urge everyone who agrees with the objectives of our campaign to channel their protest through our non-violent action.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> UKREP, based originally at the Conway Hotel in Dunmurry outside Belfast, later acquired its own offices at Laneside in Holywood, Co Down near Stormont. With the arrival of Direct Rule by Westminster in March 1972 many of its competences were taken over the Secretary of State and a new Northern Ireland Office. However its work developed into what became known as the Political Affairs office at the NIO.

<sup>40</sup> Faulkner had been a member and critic of Stormont cabinets led by both O'Neill and Chichester-Clark although stands accused of plotting against both throughout their premierships. He emerged as Unionist leader in a more pragmatic guise, quite distinct from his earlier conservatism, in March 1971 and served as Northern Ireland's final prime minister until March 1972 when Stormont was prorogued and Direct Rule by Westminster was imposed.

<sup>41</sup> Beattie Smith (2011) p. 227.

<sup>42</sup> UK National Archives CJ 4/56.

<sup>43</sup> The *Irish Times* August 16<sup>th</sup> 1971 p. 1.

The language is pure “Hume” although that is not to say his was the *only* defining influence, Devlin, Currie, Mallon and others had their say. (Hume later stated: “Gerry never made any contribution to debate within the [SDLP] party, to philosophy, to policy statements, to strategy. They were all written by me. Gerry was a figurehead..... He gets on with everybody in that sense but he had no direction. No plan for solving the problem.”<sup>44</sup>) Two things were clear from the summer of 1971 onwards - that the SDLP’s primary strategic and intellectual driving force was Hume, the party deputy leader, rather than Fitt, the de facto leader; and that the British government’s established policy of forcing reforms through Unionist-controlled Stormont had run its course. What little authority Stormont retained in the final months of 1971 was shattered on Bloody Sunday in Derry in January 1972. Heath soon bowed to the inevitable, forcibly transferred security powers back to London and demanded executive powersharing at Stormont. Faulkner, Northern Ireland’s sixth prime minister was also its last.

### **The hunt for ideas**

Like Wright, both Ronnie Burroughs and Howard Smith, who succeeded him in the post, both intensified the search for ideas from both Hume and the SDLP in Northern Ireland as well as in government circles in Dublin. Hume was by no means the only SDLP voice that UKREP heard and relayed to London – but his was the most influential. SDLP position papers, ideas and memos submitted were largely, but not exclusively, his. That search became more urgent following the introduction by Faulkner of internment without trial in August 1971. The move outraged all on the nationalist side as well as the political opinion in Dublin and forced nationalists further towards a position which reflected a near-total loss of confidence in Stormont’s reforms. “Every Northern Ireland Catholic sees the introduction of internment as the abandonment of the reform programme and the end of the principle of equal citizenship,”<sup>45</sup> claimed Oliver Napier, leader and founder member of the Alliance party, a centrist and avowedly non-sectarian pro-powersharing party. He was almost certainly correct in this assessment. Hume and his party leader (and Westminster MP) Gerry Fitt approached Reginald Maudling, Heath’s Home Secretary, in London to demand the replacement of Stormont as constituted by a new legislative Assembly, elected by proportional representation, and a

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<sup>44</sup> Murphy (2007) p. 159.

<sup>45</sup> The Irish News, August 12<sup>th</sup> 1971.

powersharing Executive. This represented a serious reversal for Faulkner who had offered nationalists seats on a series of new Stormont committees just two months earlier.

What Wright and his successors could not have known, but Callaghan and his Cabinet colleagues could have anticipated, was that the Office of UK Representative provided a template for the position of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland as head of a new Northern Ireland Office in Belfast. They had been planning for such an eventuality as British government papers from 1969 reveal.<sup>46</sup> This was formed from the wreckage of the policy of management and containment while working through Stormont which originated under Wilson and continued after the somewhat unexpected election victory of Edward Heath's Conservatives in June 1970. To Hume's despair, the Wilson government had previously diplomatically, and sometimes not so diplomatically, warned Irish ministers, especially Taoiseach Jack Lynch and, separately, Minister for Foreign Affairs Patrick Hillery that Northern Ireland was a purely internal United Kingdom matter.<sup>47</sup> Oliver Wright's note to Callaghan at the Home Office in March 1970 is evidence of the need in British eyes for a more nuanced approach to Northern Ireland in which Dublin's position would be at least sought, if not necessarily acted upon. There was a similar process underway in Dublin with a reassessment of the Republic's approach to the UK regarding Northern Ireland. As has been shown in Chapter 3, Eamonn Gallagher, of the Department of Foreign Affairs, had made it his business to report to his government on the gathering crisis post-1968, particularly in Derry. Hume was, needless to say, his most influential contact, as Seán Donlon recalls:

Gallagher .... began to travel to Northern Ireland to see Hume and others that Hume had introduced him to or recommended to him. Based on these meetings, he wrote analytic reports which he submitted to the secretary general of the Department of Foreign Affairs who in turn passed them to the minister, Dr [Paddy] Hillery and the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch.<sup>48</sup>

Dorr also attests to the formative influence of the Gallagher-Hume relationship on emerging Irish government policy. Gallagher's unusual status as a free-ranging diplomat-without portfolio in Northern Ireland was formalised in 1970 with the formation of a special Northern Ireland division of the Department of Foreign Affairs under the leadership of Sean Ronan (later the Irish ambassador to Bonn who would accommodate Hume's seminal, meeting with Senator

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<sup>46</sup> National Archives PREM 13/2842/1-3.

<sup>47</sup> See Dorr (2017) pp33-49. See also Fanning (2001) *The Response of the British and Irish Governments to the Crisis in Northern Ireland, 1968-69*. Irish Studies in International Affairs, Vol 12 pp57-85.

<sup>48</sup> Farren and Haughey (eds) 2015 p. 85.

Edward Kennedy.) Key to this development was an insistence, shared by both Gallagher and Hume, on the building of a viable and influential Anglo-Irish axis. By that stage, Anglo-Irish spats at the highest level had continued<sup>49</sup> with Heath and Lynch at each other's throats over who had a right to say what about the other's policy on Northern Ireland.

### **Direct Rule and the Irish Dimension**

Direct Rule was imposed in March 1972 in response to yet more crises in Northern Ireland, principally the disastrous introduction of internment without trial for republican suspects in August 1971 and the subsequent utter loss of control by Stormont. The British army killings of 13 unarmed anti-internment protesters in Derry on Bloody Sunday, January 30<sup>th</sup> 1972<sup>50</sup> eventually forced Heath's hand and within two months, control of security was taken from Stormont. The Unionist government collapsed amid a storm of protest and the Northern Ireland parliament was prorogued by the British government which had, by this stage, realised it could not depend on the Unionist cabinet in Belfast to deliver reforms. The arrival of William Whitelaw as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland demanded a reappraisal of governance of Northern Ireland by the British cabinet. Such a reappraisal duly arrived on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1972 in the form of the recognition by the British government of the "Irish dimension", a key section of a discussion paper *The Future of Northern Ireland*, produced by the Heath government. Commending its acceptance by the House of Commons on November 13<sup>th</sup>, Whitelaw reiterated the by-now traditional policy which held that the constitutional future of Northern Ireland was a matter for its electorate – the so-called "guarantee" which Hume opposed vehemently. However, in a key section of his address, Whitelaw then signalled a fresh policy departure which is worth quoting in full:

As there has been considerable discussion about those paragraphs in the paper headed "The Irish Dimension", I shall at this point re-emphasise the position of Her Majesty's Government. In accordance with the specific pledges given by successive United Kingdom Governments. Northern Ireland must and will remain part of the United Kingdom so long as that is the wish of a majority of the people. Equally, it is undoubted that the sole and ultimate responsibility for any constitutional proposals must rest with the United Kingdom Government and Parliament.

At the same time, it would clearly be desirable that any new arrangements for Northern Ireland should, while meeting the wishes of Northern Ireland and Great Britain, be so far as possible acceptable to and accepted by the Republic of Ireland. Furthermore, in the context of the European Economic Community, there is a clear opportunity for developing

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<sup>49</sup> See Peck (1979) pp. 129-145 and Dorr (2017) pp. 81-98.

<sup>50</sup> A 14<sup>th</sup> victim died later.

co-operation on economic and social issues which could bring considerable benefits to the people in both the North and the South of Ireland. Indeed, before direct rule the Ulster Unionist Government were themselves anxious to promote such contacts. Nor can anyone deny that co-operation on border security would be of inestimable benefit to all concerned. It is with these thoughts in mind that I welcome very much Mr Lynch's helpful approach to this paper as outlined in his recent speech.<sup>51</sup>

This was in effect a recalibration of British policy on Northern Ireland with regards to the Republic. Whitelaw clearly positioned the move, no doubt with Unionist sensitivities in mind, as a logical development of traditional British aims and objectives and linking them to Ulster Unionist appeals for greater cross-border security. Membership of both countries of the EEC, with its notions of ‘pooled sovereignty’ provided a fresh context in which this could take place. The arrival of the “Irish Dimension” did not herald a new era or even anything remotely comparable and October 30<sup>th</sup> 1972 is not a date fixed in the historical memory in the manner of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968. However it did signal change – away from the mutual British-Irish recrimination that had marked the horrendous events of 1972-73 and onto a different plane where Dublin and London took some tentative steps towards concerted action on Northern Ireland. The achievement of this was not solely down to Hume, far from it. But, having highlighted the injustices of Derry in 1969 to Callaghan and pressing relentlessly on the need for an Anglo-Irish approach in Dublin, via Gallagher, he was a key figure in advocating such a strategy and encouraging its adoption in both capitals. He had seen the effectiveness in his own city of appealing directly to London and had concluded that rather than trying to smash unionist power in Northern Ireland, he could more easily circumvent it by engaging a “British dimension” in Northern nationalist politics.

Hume’s approach thus turned on its head some traditional Irish nationalist assumptions about their relationship with the seat of political, military and commercial power in London. Throughout his political career Hume liked to quote Wolfe Tone,<sup>52</sup> long held to be the father of Irish republicanism,<sup>53</sup> whose (ostensibly non-sectarian) ambition was “to unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in the place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter...”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> House of Commons Debate. *Hansard* 13th November 1972 Vol 846 cc43-160.

<sup>52</sup> See Farren (2018) *John Hume: In His Own Words*. p130, pp. 200-1, p. 265.

<sup>53</sup> Both Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil separately attend his burial place in Bodenstown Co Kildare for an annual ceremony.

<sup>54</sup> Written in Paris, Aug. 1796; *Life*, 1826, p.69; quoted in Elliott, *Theobald Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Independence* (1989) p. 312.

But he clearly adopted a polar opposite position from Tone on a role for Britain in Irish affairs. While Tone (and generations of Irish nationalists who followed him, deplored English involvement,<sup>55</sup> Hume demanded they assist in, rather than stand aside from, the search for Irish reconciliation. He further insisted that they, along with the government in Dublin, establish institutional links to give expression to the east-west dimension of the relationship. Pádraig O'Malley summed up Hume's conviction as to what Britain's role should be: "John Hume has a plan, a clear vision of how the future can be made to work: establish a viable Anglo-Irish framework, abrogate the [British] guarantee [to unionists], and the combination of the two will alchemize a solution."<sup>56</sup> He quotes Hume:

British policy should be, 'there are no guarantees for any section of this community anymore. Our policy, the reason we are here, is to promote the coming together of the people of this island in a manner and form they can both agree to.' The British should join the ranks of the persuaders.<sup>57</sup>

O'Malley cites Hume's insistence that all attempts at a settlement to that point (1983) had "all failed because every attempt at an internal solution will founder on the rock of the [British] guarantee [to unionists]."<sup>58</sup>

You either keep on trying something you know is going to fail or you move on to a wider stage – the Anglo-Irish approach. I was the one who advocated that we move on to that approach because in the end we're not simply dealing with the question of the relations between Catholics and Protestants in the North; it's a question of relations with Ireland between North and South and of relations between Britain and Ireland.

O'Malley based his conclusions on detailed interviews with Hume outside the timeframe of this research. But the strident opinions Hume offered him were all concluded during the formative years of Hume's political career and particularly between 1968 to 1974.

## Conclusion

John Hume appeared more at ease in the surroundings of Irish, European and even US politics than he ever did in the Stormont parliament, to which he was elected in 1969, and in the UK national parliament 14 years later. Never a lover of Westminster and what he saw as its

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<sup>55</sup> For example, see Tone's speech from the dock, November 10<sup>th</sup> 1798: "For my earliest youth I have regarded the connection between Ireland and Great Britain as the curse of the Irish nation, and felt convinced that while it lasted this country could never be free or happy. Every day's experience, and every fact that arose, convinced me of this truth; and I resolved, if I could, to separate the two countries. But as I knew Ireland could not of herself, throw off the yoke, I sought for help wherever I could find it." quoted in Aldous (2007) p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> O'Malley (1983) p. 99.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid p. 100.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid p. 101.

antiquated procedures, Hume always recognised however the central importance of Britain's role in Ireland and sought to change – rather than end it. Throughout his political life he remained steadfast to his belief that Britain was part of the Irish problem and ought therefore to be part of the solution. In doing so he countered Britain's traditional view of itself – that of impartial bystander in a problem not of its own making – arguing that it has a central and enduring responsibility in terms of a settlement. Principally, he pressed the British to end what he termed their “unconditional guarantee” to unionism which he believed only rewarded their intransigence. In true Hume style, Hume identified the sources of British political power and worked where possible to harness it. To that end he famously lobbied British Home Secretary James Callaghan in Derry in 1969 (in much the same fashion that he was to lobby John Major in 1994). Yet, as one senior Irish official claimed privately, “Hume wasn't great with the British”.<sup>59</sup> Hume famously did not get on with British ministers Merlyn Rees<sup>60</sup> and Roy Mason. He regarded Harold Wilson's response to the loyalist strike which brought down the 1974 Executive at Stormont as an utter capitulation. He later found Margaret Thatcher difficult and appeared content on occasion, as the comment above from an anonymous Irish official source shows, to let Irish government officials do his talking for him.

Hume was however keen, as this research shows, to exploit the opportunities afforded by the appointment of UKREP, the diplomatic mission of sorts to Northern Ireland which bypassed the normal Stormont channels of communication, and he was keen to facilitate their hunt for ideas about an eventual settlement.

In doing so, he turned on its head Irish nationalism's tradition views of Britain and countered head-on the republican demand of Brits Out. Hume's 'Brits In' stance was therefore pivotal in supporting the Belfast-Dublin-London axis which later formed the architecture for the eventual settlement

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<sup>59</sup> Personal conversation with author.

<sup>60</sup> For example see UK Nat Archive PREM 16/150 Meeting between Rees and the SDLP for an assessment of the breakdown of relations between the two

# Conclusion

*“He was a far-seeing cunt.”*

Gerry Fitt offers his appreciation of John Hume.<sup>1</sup>

There have been many descriptions of John Hume but few bear Gerry Fitt’s Belfast street honesty and expletive-laden directness. Blunt and pithy, this backhanded compliment undoubtedly is. Fitt betrays a deeply embedded and enduring hostility (Currie opts for the more diplomatically descriptive “coolness”) between himself and Hume, the respective first leader and deputy leader of the SDLP. Yet Fitt nicely encapsulates both admiration and criticism in his summation of Hume, something which many others fail to do adequately. To do so with an economical six words is indeed an achievement. Summing up John Hume is, as two highly clichéd similes illustrate, like nailing jelly to a wall or picking up mercury with a fork. Many assessments of Hume are glowingly positive but a significant minority range from critical to downright hostile. However an all-embracing evaluation of Hume is difficult. A multi-faceted political figure, he is, at once, deeply complex, sometimes contradictory and occasionally enigmatic and difficult to read. This thesis has highlighted all of these – particularly the critical elements which tend to get lost amid the eulogising. As has been shown, Hume’s relations were particularly antagonistic towards unionists. This had an effect on his political work in Northern Ireland akin to that of a dragging anchor.

There are some hints of constructive criticism among even some of the most glowing assessments of Hume. Denis Haughey and Seán Farren state unequivocally: “[T]he visionary content of his message, and his mastery of the arts of communication through the mass media, won over to his point of view a whole generation of Irish political leaders, the elite of the Irish-American establishment, the overwhelming majority of European political leaders and a very significant section of British public opinion.”<sup>2</sup> Yet they also allow a little room for qualified criticism.

John is open to the criticism that he should have devoted more of his time and his formidable powers of persuasion to trying to change attitudes in the traditional unionist community. Possibly he decided that the task of prising open the closed mindset of

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<sup>1</sup> Currie (2004) p. 417.

<sup>2</sup> Farren, Seán; Haughey, Denis (eds) (2016) *John Hume: Irish peacemaker*. Dublin Four Courts Press p20.



unionism, as he perceived it, was beyond his or anyone else's capacity, and that his time and his powers were better used in pursuing objectives where the difficulties and obstacles were less forbidding. But it remains a moot point.<sup>3</sup>

A moot point indeed. It is to be expected perhaps that two of Hume's closest and longest-serving SDLP colleagues should choose to be effusive in their praise. Given the tendency of much academic work to concentrate more on Irish political violence than on the protracted constitutional efforts to stop it, theirs is an appreciation prompted in part by a readily identifiable gap in the market and an accompanying fear that their man could be relegated from the prominence he deserves. What is emphatically not to be expected is the inability of both Farren and Haughey to see the contradiction in their own findings. For them, Hume is the figure who possessed the capability to change the policy of three governments – Irish, British and US – and to enable a peace settlement ending decades of violent conflict costing 3,500 lives. They conclude with the possibility that “prising open the closed mindset of unionism, as he [Hume] perceived it, was beyond his or anyone else's capacity”. They say his intelligence, single-mindedness and driven ambition enabled the conclusion of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. They add that the Agreement's democratic, constitutional framework allows for the peaceful addressing of the networks of conflicting relations - not just within Ireland, but between Ireland as a whole and Britain. Yet, mysteriously, Hume did not have what it takes to persuade the unionists whom he saw as “petty people” labouring under a pathological rejectionist sectarianism. That Hume had more persuasive powers with Irish, British and US governments and with the Provisional IRA than he had with his unionist neighbours (even in Derry) whose consent, he insisted, was central to his redefinition of Irish unity takes some swallowing.

Hume's biographers also lavish praise, leading the cheers with descriptions of “peacemaker” and “statesman” a recurrent theme.<sup>4</sup> Grains of analytical criticism are much more difficult to sift from the torrent of accolades. The same applies in large measure to a legion of commentators and journalists. Small wonder then that one of Hume's sons, John junior, felt a need to admit that his father was far from perfect and that, if one looked, there were indeed “warts there for the world to see”.<sup>5</sup> He further suggested that descriptions of Hume senior embellished his record at the cost of a fuller and more accurate assessment of his wife, Pat:

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> See White (1984) and Drower (1995) for examples.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Book on John Hume does not present him as saint, says son.’ *The Irish Times* December 1<sup>st</sup> 2015.

“My father could not have got half the way if it wasn’t for my mother.”<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that everything positive written about Hume is hagiography. Those who idolise him do so largely on a solid foundation and most of what they state is true. Rather, their errors tend to be ones of omission or exaggeration. Those who dislike him intensely, and there are plenty, do so for their own reasons and with claims to validity. Edna Longley, Conor Cruise O’Brien, Peter Robinson, John Taylor, David Trimble, Arthur Aughey and Paul Bew (among many others) cannot be pigeon-holed under the “closed mindset of unionism” category where “prising open.... was beyond his or anyone else’s capacity” and openness to reason are alien concepts. How then to assess this giant hero/ogre figure other than to attempt to identify the ground where a debate can be conducted?

Hume was, rather like Ian Paisley (although he would probably not appreciate the comparison), a stand-out politician of his time and particularly in the formative years of the Troubles which are the focus of this research. Unlike Paisley, he was more widely influential and enjoyed political weight and clout in the Irish Republic, the United States and even, arguably, at Westminster. Again unlike Paisley, Hume’s legacy is not reflected within Northern Ireland in the fortunes of the party he envisaged, founded and led. The SDLP is now a shadow of its former self, its representation at Westminster, the Irish Senate and the European Parliament have gone. Its membership of the Stormont Assembly has halved and its presence on Northern Ireland’s local authorities has long been eclipsed by what Agnès Maillot aptly calls “New Sinn Féin”.<sup>7</sup> It is the DUP, having overcome its initial virulent opposition to the Belfast Agreement, that has established and retained a dominance of Northern Ireland politics, most notably at Westminster - a fact Peter Robinson is keen to establish by way of a counterpoint to the widespread canonising of Hume.<sup>8</sup> Yet, in an apparently contradictory but utterly logical way, the decline of the SDLP reflects Hume’s successes on a wider and more international stage. It is arguable that Hume’s great historical legacy is illustrated not so much by the weakening of the SDLP voice in Northern Ireland but by the content and tone of Sinn Féin’s. In the same way that Tony Blair is held (by some) to be Margaret Thatcher’s legacy-made-flesh,<sup>9</sup> the extent of Hume’s triumph in the revision of Irish nationalism, to build on Peter McLoughlin’s fine work, could be the constitutional face that Sinn Féin now presents. Hume forced Irish

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Maillot (2005).

<sup>8</sup> Interview with the author July 13<sup>th</sup> 2018. Belfast.

<sup>9</sup> <https://economicsociology.org/2018/03/19/thatcherisms-greatest-achievement/>

republicans to change their minds on the abandonment of “armed struggle” and acceptance of the Northern state, relations with Britain and Ireland’s place within the European Union.

As previously stated, this research has adopted a thematic approach – analysing Hume through a variety of prisms and from a series of perspectives. The intention inherent in such methodology is gain a deeper understanding of Hume-ism which is not fully developed by researchers using purely historical or biographical approaches. Hume, as Paul Arthur deftly points out, never kept a diary.<sup>10</sup> Such an inconvenience neatly encapsulates the problem scholars encounter in their attempts to get to the kernel of such a figure. The trouble doesn’t stop there. So much of Hume’s political life, from his earliest years to his clandestine meetings with Gerry Adams beginning in 1988, is thinly documented. His papers, generated largely by his office in Derry, largely reflect the ins and outs of his routine constituency work rather than his evolving design of an overall political settlement for Northern Ireland. (Add to that the inexplicable decision of the SDLP to hand over its internal files to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland only to require researchers to request access to individual papers by formal – and slow – written application.)

Similarly, references to his influence in both Irish and British state papers are often coded. Eamonn Gallagher from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin’s initially self-appointed envoy during the early years of the Troubles,<sup>11</sup> was apt to offer him a degree of cover by his use of the term “Derry businessman”. Communications from UKREP, the British government’s “diplomatic mission” of sorts within Northern Ireland from 1969 onwards, contain sparse formal evidence of Hume’s thinking and influence which have been reflected in this thesis.<sup>12</sup> But the problems with British official records are twofold. Firstly, a great many papers from UKREP to Whitehall are still subjected to extended classification and some files have decades to run. Secondly, and this factor is common to the Irish official record also, Hume’s dealings with key government figures and officials was often off-the-record, casual and informal. He was an exponent of the corner huddle approach to politics.<sup>13</sup> He could be the grandstanding speaker in the parliamentary chamber but was much more often the expert worker of the room, the bar, the lobby, the drinks reception or the dinner gathering. For this reason Hume’s “official” influence in politics is more difficult than usual to uncover for no

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<sup>10</sup> Arthur (2015) ‘Political Apprenticeship’ in *John Hume: Irish Peacemaker* Farren, Sean and Haughey, Denis (eds) Dublin. Four Courts Press, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>13</sup> See Currie (2004) p. 206 and Devlin (1993) p. 136.

other reason than that the was the “unofficial” type. Arthur suggests one possible response, namely “falling back on the memoirs of his fellow founding fathers of the SDLP”<sup>14</sup> but adds in his next breath that this, too brings its own problems. The first of these is, as Fitt illustrates almost brutally, that predominant characters attract animosity and there was no shortage of that in the SDLP. The second is that authors of memoirs tend, as Mark Durkan has pointed out and historiographers will concur, to write themselves into the centre of their commentary.<sup>15</sup> This underscores the importance then of academic treatments of Hume’s formative years and of first-hand journalistic accounts. The accompanying problem is that, as Eunan O’Halpin neatly points out<sup>16</sup> – and supported by Simon Prince, there are so few scholarly examinations of Northern Ireland pre-1969.<sup>17</sup> As Chapters 1 and 3 of this research show, a key objective of Partition in Ireland was the effective removal, for the first time since 1886, of the Irish Question from the British Cabinet table (and indeed from the agenda of the new independent Irish state which found plenty to occupy itself in the first 50 years of existence). It was the eruption of street protest and violence in Derry that forced Northern Ireland’s problems onto the radars of both journalists and academics. This in turn led to a seemingly inbuilt bias towards covering violence and its advocates - a “cascade of academic studies in a range of disciplines, in addition to popular histories, personal testaments and partisan polemics,” as O’Halpin describes it. Perhaps only with the relative calm of the post-Peace Process era did slow, considered analysis of the resolution process begin in earnest, arguably 30 years after Hume first floated his ideas in the *Irish Times* about what Northern Ireland’s problems were and how a future “new Ireland” could emerge from the stasis of one-party majority rule. It is in that context that this research has retraced steps to the earliest, relatively under-explored, days of pre-Troubles Derry and Northern Ireland. By doing so it has been possible to consider more fully the roots of Hume’s outlook and political philosophy and also to correct some assumptions which arise from studies which have not offered a narrow-but-deep analysis or an appropriate starting point.

Chapter 1 of this thesis argued that two things are central to a more complete understanding of John Hume, the political leader. The first was a thorough understanding of the historical roots of the conflict in Ireland, a historical topic which can hardly be described as under-explored.

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur (2015) p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> See Durkan’s comments in ‘Hume delighted to be greatest’. *The Irish Times* October 25<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>16</sup> O’Halpin, Eunan (2001) ‘Northern Ireland: The troubled peace process.’ *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 12, pp. 243-247.

<sup>17</sup> Prince (2012) ‘5 October 1968 and the Beginning of the Troubles: Flashpoints, Riots and Memory’ *Irish Political Studies* Vol. 27, No. 3, 394–410.

This requirement has been met more fully in the context of this decade of centenaries in Ireland commemorating the passing of the third, and ultimately enacted but not implemented Home Rule bill by Westminster; the threat of insurrectionist armed unionist rebellion; the Great War; the 1916 Rising in Dublin and subsequent partition of Ireland into an independent southern state and a quasi-autonomous Northern Ireland under Unionist control.

A wealth of more recent research from eminent historians<sup>18</sup> has provided welcome and fresh scholarship, deepening our understanding of the origins of conflict in Northern Ireland within the time focus of this study. What is less thoroughly researched and, is contended here, just as vital is Hume's "Derryness" – defined for my purposes here as not so much a perfectly common sense of local belonging, identity and pride but rather much more of a vital and central "moral and political compass".<sup>19</sup> This thesis builds on Arthur's insight into the political centrality (rather than physical periphery) of Hume's Derry. It expands the concept to include an examination of the formative and enduring impact Derry had, particularly on his social/political outlook. But it takes issue with Arthur's claim that Derry was important because it was a microcosm of Northern Ireland's problems at the dawn of the Civil Rights era.<sup>20</sup> The point here is not that Arthur is wrong, rather than he does not go far enough in underscoring the need for the fullest possible grasp of what Professor Sean Breslin called the "unique effect" that being born and reared in Derry had on its citizens. If Hume the political leader is to be fully understood, this can only be done by fully understanding the specifics of Derry. Its "hidden history", otherwise obscured somewhat in the grand chronological narrative of Ireland, especially since Partition, holds the key to fuller comprehension of those who brought the quest for Civil Rights to national and then wider international attention. Niall Ó Dochartaigh, arguably like John Whyte and Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh before him, has stressed the centrality of Derry's story. It is a lesson which scholars such as Bob Purdie<sup>21</sup> and Simon Prince<sup>22</sup> could have taken more literally as it would have added to their already excellent work. Hume saw Derry,

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<sup>18</sup> An indicative selection of recent scholarship includes:

Bew, Paul (2007) *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006*. Oxford. Oxford University Press;

English, Richard (2006) *Irish freedom: the history of nationalism in Ireland*. London. MacMillan and (2003) *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*. London. Macmillan;

Fanning, Ronan (2013) *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish revolution 1910-1922*. London. Faber & Faber;

Foster, Roy (2001) *The Irish Story: Telling tales and making it up in Ireland*. London. Penguin; and (2007) *Luck and the Irish: A brief history of change 1970-2000*. London. Allen Lane; and Townshend, Charles (2013) *The Republic, The Fight for Irish Independence 1918-1923*. London. Penguin.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur (2015) p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> Purdie (1990).

<sup>22</sup> Prince (2007).

not as a local example of Northern Ireland's problem, but as the origin and the embodiment of it. As has been shown here, Hume was not prompted into public life by a desire to "unite" Ireland, to undo Partition or even to revise Irish nationalism – although he did not disregard any of these. Rather, he was motivated by "local" factors, in Derry- housing, employment, endemic poverty, state investment, education and the gerrymandering of council areas by the local authority. He insisted, as was made clear in *A City Solitary*, which he scripted and narrated, that there was "hope in the people themselves ... becoming *more and more conscious of their own responsibility for their city's future*". He could just as well have been describing his own motives. Chapter 1 also places due emphasis on Hume's articles commissioned and published by the *Irish Times* in May 1964 for two reasons. Firstly, they set out Hume's first clearly enunciated political philosophy, critiquing the Nationalist Party, countering its territorial nationalist imperative and anti-Partition fixation and calling for its replacement by a new political front. *The Northern Catholic*, Hume's seminal articles, call for *de facto* acceptance by Northern Catholics/nationalists of the Northern state and its institutions, imploring them to play a fuller role in public life. Critically, Hume made a call for Catholics to cut their unionist neighbours some slack, and insisting that a desire to maintain the Union with Britain ought not to be equated automatically with sectarian bigotry. Hume made no reference to Britain's role in Northern Ireland – again moving away from a popular nationalist contention that Ireland's problems were London's fault.

Secondly, the articles have added value in that they permit a comparative study of the young and highly idealistic Hume of 1964 and the changed, arguably hardened, Hume after five years of civic action which met with official state retrenchment rather than positive engagement. Comparison is an underused analytical tool in this particular area of study and its employment here yields a series of insights into Hume's formative years. First among these is that it was the O'Neill government's dismissal of the University for Derry Campaign case, alongside unionism's opposition to Hume's Derry public housing application and appeals for inward investment, which were emblematic in propelling Hume from an activist into electoral politics. Nothing concerned Hume more than employment and the alleviation of poverty, housing, education, and civic equality. Nowhere did these issues matter more to him than in Derry. Denial of these fundamental rights by reactionary unionism and the Nationalist Party's inability to mobilise in opposition gave rise to Hume the politician. It is contended here that had Hume been commissioned to write his 'Northern Catholic' articles by the *Irish Times* in 1968 instead of 1964, they would have read rather differently.

Chapter 2 examines the somewhat delayed formation of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in 1970, fully six years after Hume advocated the founding of a new political force as an organised opposition to Unionists at Stormont and to transform popular street agitation for civil rights into a properly co-ordinated political campaign. The chapter sites the chronology of the SDLP's protracted, at times chaotic, and painful birth firmly in an analytical context and details the personal and political strains among the six-strong 'awkward squad' of Stormont MPs who first formed it.

1970 witnessed a rash of political party formation in Northern Ireland, with the centrist Alliance party and the Rev Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party also announcing themselves that year. This in itself illustrates the extent of political upheaval that followed the sudden proliferation of street protest, civil unrest and the Unionist government's reactionary approach especially after October 5<sup>th</sup> 1968. The formation of the SDLP is well served in the literature.<sup>23</sup> But the additional analysis here illustrates three defining characteristics of Hume's quickly developing leadership style. The first of these was a need – as Hume saw it - to contain and control developments as far as possible as the Civil Rights protest moved off the streets and into Stormont. The second was his marked tendency to trust only a small coterie of his closest associates (in Derry), while the third was his emergence from an initial position of equality among the SDLP's initial founders to its foremost strategist and thinker. Central to this discussion is the scale of diversity of the party's founding fathers and the potential for clashes. Fitt and Devlin were more traditional trade union socialists rather in the mould of the British Labour party, even though they came from different parties. Currie was a Nationalist MP at Stormont, though he shared Hume's reformist zeal and rejected his original party's innate conservatism and fixation with Partition. Hume, Cooper and O'Hanlon were all elected as Independents in the watershed Stormont election of February 1969 – the first two from Foyle and the third from South Armagh. Although Devlin was clearly intelligent and later showed flair as a writer, neither he nor Fitt had third-level education which Hume, Currie and O'Hanlon had. Fitt, it was clear, was anti-intellectual and openly distrusted the deep-thinking, analytical strategist that Hume represented, dismissing him as Derry-centric with no urban working class political consciousness.<sup>24</sup> Indeed Murphy, Fitt's biographer, asserts that such was the dislike of Fitt for Hume, the West Belfast MP had to be cajoled by his Labour friends at Westminster

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<sup>23</sup> McAllister (1977) pp. 25-35; Murray (1998) pp. 5-10; White (1984) pp. 94-108; Routledge (1998) pp. 92-99; Currie (2004) pp. 152-161; McLoughlin (2010) pp. 20-22.

<sup>24</sup> See Murphy (2007) p161.

into accepting Hume's vision of a new political party rather than some looser arrangement of anti-unionist Opposition Stormont MPs.<sup>25</sup>

The SDLP was therefore born with a series of defects, not least among them was the leadership of Gerry Fitt who was a reluctant convert to the concept of a new party in the first place and harboured deep distrust in most of his new party colleagues especially Hume. He was not alone in that. Devlin also distrusted Hume and – even occasionally Fitt also – as did Currie. It was also clear that while Fitt was anointed leader, largely because of his profile as a Westminster MP and his successes in drawing British attention to Unionist abuses, it was Hume who was the prime mover of both policy and strategy. His eventual election as leader was a formality, and a confirmation of what had been his unofficial role for nearly a decade.

When formally announced in August 1970, the SDLP was hailed by parliamentarians in both Westminster and Dublin. However, lurking beneath the veneer of the new party's unity lay a potentially fractious coalition of big personalities with diverse opinions. Their common denominator was not so much in what they advocated as in what they opposed.<sup>26</sup> They opposed the irredentist politics of both the old Nationalists and Sinn Féin as well as the violence of the IRA. They clearly opposed the Unionist Party, yet were reliant on the unionist dominated Stormont parliament as their platform. Hume, while he did not formally rise to the position of leader until after Fitt's resignation and Devlin's expulsion, was the dominant (though clearly not the only) intellectual force in the SDLP. The seeds of Hume's party leadership style were born in this period. He was at key times, highly autocratic much to the fury of his fellow elected representatives. His early advocacy of a "...fully organised democratic party which can freely attract and draw upon the talents of the nationally-minded community"<sup>27</sup> was not matched by his individualistic leadership which tended to create a party – better organised than the Nationalist Party to be sure – dominated by big names running local fiefdoms.

Chapter three analyses the development of Hume's hugely influential links with the political elite in Dublin and his marked impression on Northern (as well as Anglo-Irish) policy in Dublin. In doing so it illustrates the extent to which Hume revised his own approach to the Northern Ireland problem. Hume drifted from his early enthusiasm for 'internal' reform, notably in the wake of his setbacks over the University for Derry campaign and his public sector housing plan and particularly in the reluctant manner in which Stormont approached

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid p144.

<sup>26</sup> See Murphy (2007) pp155-161 and Ryder (2006) esp chapter 8 'A Varied and Diverse Bunch', and McAllister (1977) chapter 3 'Opposition Unity and Disunity'.

<sup>27</sup> The *Irish Times*, May 18<sup>th</sup> 1964, also available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1964/0518/Pg008.html>



reform despite considerable (even threatening) British pressure. After 1969, Hume's collapsing faith in the ability of the Unionist party to reform the state it had ruled for nearly 50 years prompted a newer reliance on forces from outside Northern Ireland, principally Dublin.

The research also highlights what was a formative quality of Hume's early political career – luck. He was fortunate in that he was 'discovered' by journalist Michael Viney. A chance meeting with him opened doors for Hume at RTÉ and with *Irish Times* editor Douglas Gageby. From this, Hume quickly became a well-known and respected figure in the Republic, a reversal of 50 years of relative estrangement following Partition. Hume was also lucky that Eamonn Gallagher, an official at the Department of Foreign Affairs, took upon himself a role as diplomat-without-portfolio feeding vital intelligence on the situation in Derry and throughout Northern Ireland and well outside the accepted norms of diplomatic conduct. He was fortunate also that Gallagher was a native of Co Donegal, close to Derry city, and that James Sharkey, another official, had been a pupil at St Columb's – Hume's alma mater. It is Sharkey's testimony in this chapter which highlights the speed with which Hume's star rose in government circles in Dublin and illustrates the two-way nature of influence between Hume and the governments he [Sharkey] served. While the Irish government under Jack Lynch clearly welcomed the arrival of the SDLP, Sharkey's evidence counters suspicions that Hume was in some way an agent of Dublin. "In a sense it was symbiotic, inevitably it was a two-way thing. Hume becoming the agent of the Department of Foreign Affairs? I can't think of a good example. He was too much his own man and he was too senior a personality in Ireland. You would have to say that the four big personalities in nationalism were [Garret] FitzGerald, [Charles] Haughey, [Jack] Lynch and Hume."<sup>28</sup>

Hume showed no little degree of skill in maintaining a strongly bi-partisan approach to his dealings with Dublin. (The outbreak of the Troubles nearly ripped apart the ruling Fianna Fáil party in the arms crisis of 1970.) It was vital that he did so as the SDLP in general, and Hume in particular, provided establishment opinion in Dublin with a potent force around which it could rally. Hume played a significant role in drawing Irish government policy away from sabre-rattling irredentism towards one closer to his own view of eventual unity, which was more accepting of the realities of the situation and couched in a more conciliatory tone. But, as this chapter makes clear, he was not the only one.

It is clear from the research presented here that a significant factor in the rise of Hume and the growth of Department of Foreign Affairs influence in the determination of new Irish

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with author, Dublin September 13<sup>th</sup> 2013.

government policy was the role played by *informal* contacts. Indeed the wider story of Dublin-Belfast relations since the early days of rapprochement between Terence O’Neill and Seán Lemass has, to a significant degree, been driven by a network of semi-official (even unofficial) contacts, among influential people who were at one remove from the formal levers of power. “Historians may find this strange,” notes Noel Dorr, a middle-ranking Department of Foreign Affairs official in the early 1970s and later Ireland’s Permanent Representative at the UN. “[P]erhaps – in principle, they would think, policy should always be determined at political level and it did indeed always require political approval. But this does not mean that it always had to come downward in the first instance by way of directive or instruction, or that it had to be based solely on formal position papers submitted and approved at government level.”<sup>29</sup> It was this, perhaps more than any other factor, that Hume understood well and used so effectively in his efforts to redraw Irish policy on Northern Ireland.

If Hume was a lucky politician, as his formidable influence in Irish government circles shows, he was especially fortunate when it came to campaigning for his beliefs in the United States – addressed in Chapter 4. It was Senator Edward Kennedy who phoned Hume in Derry to seek a meeting and gain his advice – an event so unimaginably without precedent that Hume thought the call was a prank and hung up. He was particularly fortunate in the calibre of officials at the Irish mission in the US, particularly Sean Donlon and Michael Lillis and both principal figures in what Dermot Gallagher described afterwards as “a bit of an Irish mafia”.<sup>30</sup> Denis Haughey, one of Hume’s closest colleagues, is surely correct when he refers to: “[t]hat unusually talented generation of servants of this nation with the Department of Foreign Affairs,” adding: “I think this country may not now yet realise the enormity of the debt owed to these great men and women.”<sup>31</sup> The confluence of ideas and personalities at that time and place was exceptionally lucky for Hume.

It is also true, as Chapter 4 shows that Hume did a great deal to earn that luck. His incessant work in the US campaigning among Irish Americans for an end to financial and political support for the IRA was the first of a two-prong strategy. The other was the building of a new international lobby which would exercise considerable sway over British government policy in Northern Ireland. This thesis analyses Hume’s cleverly targeted approaches to key political figures in the US and demonstrates how this began the process of weaning the US from a Cold War dependence on the “special relationship” with London to a newer relationship which

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<sup>29</sup> Dorr (2017) p. 142.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with author, Dublin, January 24<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>31</sup> *Irish Times* December 1<sup>st</sup> 2015.

offered scope for White House involvement in the search for a settlement in Northern Ireland. Chapter 4 argues that Hume's admiration of Martin Luther King lay not just in King's leadership of the civil rights movement in the US but, equally, in his less prominent campaigning for alleviation of poverty and social justice among the under-privileged. At a constitutional level, Hume believed fervently that US strength lay in its ability to accommodate diversity and to create a civic nationalism, marked by the motto *E Pluribus Unum*. Like the European project, Hume held from his earliest days that the US with its many political, cultural, religious and racial strands provided a template for a divided Ireland with its two main traditions. However, unlike Brussels, Washington had the influence (even raw political clout) to exert leverage on London in relation to Ireland. Many accounts of Hume's networking in the US portray him as confidently sure-footed. But by revisiting Hume's first engagements in the US in the 1960s, this research confirms that Hume made early initial mistakes and learned quickly from them.

Unlike London and Dublin, with their highly centralised systems of government and administration, Hume recognised that US political power is located not just in the White House and that Congress, the State Department and other bodies hold considerable sway. It was he who helped tilt the locus of decision-making, especially in relation to Ireland, from the Department of State to the White House with the weight of political influence of key figures in Congress in support. Hume's standing in the US was undoubtedly high, his influence pronounced and his reach extraordinary for someone in his position. As has been stated throughout this research his work is characterised by both intensive effort and no small measure of good fortune. He was aided in his efforts not only by Irish diplomats of rare ability but also by key figures in politics. Tip O'Neill and the Four Horsemen were but the best known of them. Hume's contacts book also included a great many other, largely unknown, names involved in the business of politics. These people - lobbyists, consultants, lawyers, advisers - what US politicians would call "staffers" were the ones Hume tracked down. They opened doors, had the ear of powerful people and formed opinions that Congress members acted upon. Hume's great skill lay not least in his uncanny ability to appeal to civic leaders' positive view of themselves and their country within a global setting as an enabling force for good. Hume understood the emotional appeal of Ireland to those who saw themselves as Irish Americans, and he fed their hunger for a strong sense of heritage and desire to help the "old" country of their forebears. More critically he enlisted the power of the presidency beginning with Carter, who had no personal links with Ireland, and finishing with Clinton who had. From the mid-1970s onwards the occupants of the Oval Office afforded a place for Irish representatives which

was grossly disproportionate to their global standing – an enduring legacy. What is more, in Clinton’s case, Hume coaxed an ambitious young president to make Ireland a key foreign policy objective. Clinton did a great deal more than press the British to moderate their stance on Northern Ireland – when crunch moments arrived, Clinton was vital. He was central to underpinning political support for the paramilitary ceasefires and for acting as a guarantor of sorts for sceptical Unionist leaders and a deeply wary unionist population. His visits to Ireland were carried out with aplomb and were transformative – especially in relation to unionists where Hume’s approach was arguably most at fault. While the Clinton era is beyond the scope of this research the process that led to his involvement was begun, as has been clearly shown here, in 1969.

Chapter 5 addresses Hume’s troubled relations with unionists - a clearly under-researched area of the past 50 years. It takes a critical view of Hume’s actions – and words – and contrasts them with his early idealism as expressed in the *Irish Times* in May 1964 and in the script of *A City Solitary* from 1963. Hume’s earliest forays into community activity were prompted by Derry’s social and economic rather than overtly party political issues. He pushed for public investment, lobbied for public housing, sought the siting of Northern Ireland’s second university at the city’s Magee campus and countered what he saw as Stormont’s inbuilt bias against the area west of the River Bann, the traditional demarcation between the largely unionist east and predominantly nationalist west. His early efforts were arguably blind to the religious divide, and his seminal articles in the *Irish Times* make little reference to Protestantism other than to urge Catholics not to equate denomination with sectarianism. His script for *A City Solitary* takes a similar tone, arguing: “The independence and seriousness of Derry’s Protestant, allied to the discipline and resourcefulness of the Catholic will build a bridge for Derry’s future. The symbol of the bridge could be the future full acceptance of the term ‘Londonderry’, for it summed up the two great traditions of the city.”<sup>32</sup> This research can find no references to Hume’s use of ‘Londonderry’ ever since. In *John Hume’s Derry* in 1969 he insists that “Derry is the mother of us all”. Yet unionists did not trust Hume, preferring to write him off as a cunning and scheming double-talker whose hidden ambition was to sabotage the Union with Britain and coerce them into a United Ireland. This chapter argues that Hume’s bitter experiences coming up against the sharp end of Unionist power, particularly in relation to his rejected housing scheme and the University for Derry campaign, led to a hardening of his attitude towards the Unionist ascendancy which endured after the fall of Stormont. It shows

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<sup>32</sup> His sentiments here are also recorded in *A City Solitary* (1963).

how his political outlook changed dramatically during the 1960s and particularly in the wake of the October 5<sup>th</sup> Civil Rights demonstration in 1968. He began to speak of unionism as a pathological condition, suggesting they suffered from a *laager* mentality. He dismissed them as “petty people” notably in his memoirs published in 1996. Throughout his career, as Michael Cunningham perceptively points out,<sup>33</sup> his language of his single transferable speech was overtly about reconciliation and peace, but couched in inherently nationalist terms which were easily decoded negatively by unionists. They felt, as Padraig O’Malley cogently puts it: “Reconciliation is a Catholic word for unification. Unification means conquest.”<sup>34</sup> Hume seemed to ignore the litany of calls by unionists from all backgrounds - religious, secular, academic – for him to be upfront, claiming they did not want to have to read between the lines of his comments for reassurance. Their evidence to the Opsahl Commission<sup>35</sup> in the early 1990s referenced what they saw as years of Hume’s efforts from the Civil Rights days onwards to blindside them as to what he was really up to. Their insistence that Hume’s push for an Irish dimension to any potential settlement was evidence of nothing more than a clever style of nationalist irredentism by opponents of the Union seemed to fall on deaf ears. Instead, Hume’s political career seems on occasion to have been driven by a need to break unionist power and to detach them from Westminster which they traditionally saw as their best guarantor of security and identity. At times, this accusation was flung at Hume unfairly. The idea that his ambition was “a united Ireland or nothing” was, as Peter McLoughlin has clarified, an unfair distortion both of what Hume said and believed.<sup>36</sup> He protested against this throughout his career. Yet, as O’Malley discovered, the Rev Ian Paisley, was happy to go on repeating the slur.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly, Hume’s earliest speeches, campaign addresses and writings all illustrate the immense frustration felt at the levels of enduring inequality in Northern Ireland particularly, as always, in Derry. For 30 years he preached on the need to kick into the long grass the overarching constitutional issue and his desire for Irish unity. Instead he set out to eradicate discrimination and inequality in the hope that, were this to be realised, reconciliation and eventual agreement on some form of all-Ireland constitutional arrangement would emerge as a natural and expected result. His 1964 *Irish Times* pieces are full of such idealism. Unionists

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<sup>33</sup> Cunningham (1997) *The Political Language of John Hume*. Irish Political Studies, 1743-9078, Vol 12, No 1, pp 13 – 22.

<sup>34</sup> O’Malley (1983) p.127.

<sup>35</sup> Pollak Andy (ed) (1993) *A Citizens’ Inquiry, The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Lilliput

<sup>36</sup> McLoughlin (2006), ‘... it’s a United Ireland or Nothing?’ John Hume and the Idea of Irish unity, 1964-72,’ *Irish Political Studies*, 21 (2).

<sup>37</sup> O’Malley (1990) *Northern Ireland: Questions of nuance*. Belfast. Blackstaff.

saw it differently and Hume appears to have been unable or unwilling to convince them otherwise. By 1969, Hume's tone had changed. Unionists were paying the price for a history "they did not create" – they were sinned against. But they were also sinners, whose actions placed them at the "root cause" of the Northern Ireland problem.<sup>38</sup> Mixed messages such as these did little to endear him to those whose consent he sought. Even by his own non-territorial definition of "unity" – he saw it as an agreed expression of will by the people living on the island Ireland, not necessarily in favour of political union – Hume contended faithfully for decades that there could be no solution to the Northern Ireland problem without unionists. Yet the same Hume was clearly bent on compromising Unionist power and displayed this by Stormont walkouts and conspiring to end the guarantee offered by Westminster that Britain would stand by whatever the Northern Ireland majority wanted. Hume appears to set himself up as the only one who identified unionism's determination to "hold all power in their own hands". It was he who claimed the ability to recognise the unionist Achilles' Heel. By claiming such insights, his political opponents believed he saw himself as more enlightened, more visionary and superior. They resisted and in doing so appeared to give credence to their own negative stereotype.

Farren and Haughey's comment above suggests, and they are well placed to make the claim, that "John is open to the criticism that he should have devoted more of his time and his formidable powers of persuasion to trying to change attitudes in the traditional unionist community".<sup>39</sup> The contention, they add, is moot and this research therefore takes up the invitation to debate what is a contentious issue. It is difficult on the evidence presented here to explain adequately why someone with Hume's extraordinary ability to change the course of arguments over years could have failed to make headway with his unionist neighbours. One possible, perhaps harsh, answer is that he did not try hard enough and, thus, made a rod for his own back. The massive distrust in which unionism held Hume for 30 years can only have made more difficult the task of convincing them to acquiesce in the Belfast Agreement – cautious as they were about what may have lain in store for them. Frank Millar, Ulster Unionist general secretary and later London editor of the *Irish Times*, is particularly well placed to make an assessment of Hume's standing from a unionist perspective.

It seems to me that any balanced assessment of John Hume's relationship with unionists must conclude with the fact that he conceived and delivered a historic political settlement on Northern Ireland, which he could not have done without acquiring a unionist partner capable in turn of commanding a majority (however narrow) of the unionist electorate. As

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<sup>38</sup> 'John Hume's Derry' broadcast by RTE October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1969.

<sup>39</sup> Farren and Haughey (eds) (2016) p. 21.

you know, to the surprise of many he found just such a partner in David Trimble. Hence Lord Bew's appropriate reminder on the 20th anniversary that the Belfast Agreement was an SDLP/Unionist achievement.<sup>40</sup>

He concludes:

His genius ... was to re-define the right of the peoples of the island of Ireland to 'self-determination' in a way that would enable them to agree to live constitutionally apart until such times as there was a majority in NI in favour of unification, meanwhile empowering northern nationalists and republicans to enter a devolved power-sharing administration and to support a reformed police service.<sup>41</sup>

It seems appropriate to leave this assessment of Hume and the Unionists at that.

Chapter 6 examines Hume's efforts in relation to the British government role in Northern Ireland. He made only passing reference to London in his *Irish Times* pieces and his later insistence that Britain was clearly part of the Irish problem emerged much later in his thinking.<sup>42</sup> This thesis finds that Hume, initially at least, used any dealings with British ministers in an effort to support his case against the Unionists as his involvement with British Home Secretary, James Callaghan, in Derry in 1969 clearly demonstrates. This was the first opportunity in which Hume could appeal over the heads of the Stormont authorities to the ultimate source of power in the United Kingdom, and he did so with relish.

The chapter sets the power structures of the time clearly in the context of the long years since Partition when London effectively absented itself from Northern Ireland, happy to let power reside at Stormont. Cover for such a practice of relative abandonment was conveniently provided by a House of Commons "Convention" which held that no Northern Ireland matter could be raised there that could not be dealt with at Stormont. The early Troubles dragged Britain swiftly and unwillingly back into the picture and Callaghan's arrival in Derry typified the moment. Hume quickly learned that, as with the Civil Rights protest the previous year, he could use the logic of the UK against its greatest advocates, namely Unionists themselves, and he appealed over their heads to the UK Home Secretary on the grounds that British standards did not apply in Northern Ireland. The Civil Rights agitation was always ostensibly about equality – "British rights for British citizens"<sup>43</sup> was the tongue-in-cheek, if not ironic demand

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<sup>40</sup> Personal communication June 4<sup>th</sup> 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> See the primacy afforded to Britain in the SDLP's 'Towards a New Ireland' policy document in 1972. Available at: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/crights/sdlp1972.htm>

<sup>43</sup> See Nell McCafferty's comments in 'Battle of the Bogside' (2004). "When we went marching [for civil rights] the unionists tried to stop us, the British ignored us, the police were attacking us – there was a feeling we were going to overturn the Unionist government and that, crucially, we would get full British rights. One has to

- and never openly about Irish reunification. Dues are paid to Gerry Fitt in this regard. It was his lone voice at Westminster from 1966 that raised the profile of Northern Ireland, especially among Labour backbenchers and the media – a platform which Hume later used as his own. Much of the literature retains an understandable focus on British engagement in Northern Ireland in relation to paramilitary violence and later to the peace process. Too little attention is paid to the origins of British re-engagement after 1969 – a gap this work strives to fill. While the bulk of Fitt’s efforts in London were in relation to Harold Wilson’s Labour government, with which he felt a particular affinity, it was Hume who advocated that any decisive engagement in Northern Ireland by London was more likely to come from the Conservatives, labelled by Hume as the “party of the flag”. (Chapter 6 concludes his prophecy was wrong in this regard. At key moments in Northern Ireland’s constitutional history since 1969, there were degrees of effective bipartisanship between the main government parties in both the UK and Republic of Ireland – a situation Hume was always keen to cultivate.) However what is key here is that, unlike traditional Irish nationalism which held that Britain personified the problem and ought to disengage quickly, Hume contended the reverse. He constantly held that Britain should face up to its responsibilities in Northern Ireland and engage fully in the search for a solution. Instead of holding to a ‘Brits Out’ slogan, Hume demanded ‘Brits In’ – whether they liked it or not. To that end, he quickly grasped all opportunities to engage with London, especially following the establishment of UKREP. The UK Representative, to give the official his full title, was deployed in Belfast effectively to be the eyes and ears of the British government and to bypass the traditional structures at Stormont – a development Unionists hated. It was an opportunity Hume exploited to the full and he sought British power to act as an external sovereign force to press the Unionists at Stormont to reform. London, by Hume’s logic, was a central player and not, as many British politicians (not least of them Churchill) preferred to see it, an independent and disinterested referee in a squabble not of their own making.

This research also stresses that Hume’s tactic of engaging with British ministers was mirrored by the Irish government which also, despite an initial insistence that Derry was an internal British concern, sought to bring whatever influence it had to bear on British decision-making. By the end of period under study here, it is shown that there had been a recalibration of British policy towards Northern Ireland with regards to the input from the Republic. Membership of

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stress again and again, we were not marching for a united Ireland. We were marching for the right to become full British citizens.” (2m.56s).



both countries of the EEC, with its notions of ‘pooled sovereignty’ certainly helped to reset relations between Dublin and London, but it is equally clear that this era saw – not least because of Hume’s emphatic insistence - the arrival of the ‘Irish Dimension’ into the wider politics of the time.

There was indeed also a remarkable shift in the balance of power *within* Northern Ireland between mid 1968 and late 1969. As has been shown here, in that time period Unionists lost their effective grip on authority to be replaced by a triumvirate: Sir Arthur Young, Sir Ian Freeland and Oliver Wright – all of them subject to oversight from Whitehall. Young was the RUC chief constable and the man charged with disbanding the B Specials which were hated by the nationalists; Freeland was the British Army GOC brought in ostensibly to quell the streets after some gross mishandling of a volatile situation by the RUC, and Wright was UKREP and had the ear of Hume, Fitt and others.

This thesis stresses that Hume was not the only figure, nor always the most significant, in such a dramatic redrawing of the power structures in Northern Ireland over a very short time. But he was nonetheless central to it. His exhortation to Callaghan to “bring a solution with him” to the Bogside in 1969 was rather more a case of him pushing on an open door rather than forcing a change on British policy. Those vital months in the early Troubles established a network of political connections which Hume was quick to identify and exploit.

On a wider level, this research has relevance beyond those for whom Northern Ireland and British-Irish relations are key interests. The findings and analysis presented here speak to those in the much broader fields of peace building, theoretical models – particularly those which addresses the contexts in which initiatives to end bloodshed are conceived, formulated, conducted and concluded. It also contributes to the theoretical analysis wider study of peace building in a setting where a domestic figure, Hume, seeks to exert leverage across international borders in search of a settlement as Hume did in the US, the Republic of Ireland and (to a lesser extent) in the EU. In a small, but hopefully significant way, it addresses the calls by Gourevitch, Gawerc and Lederach for research into the function of peace initiatives, especially those carried out at a sub-state level and at international level by a national/regional actor working assiduously outside his own borders to effect within his home polity. Hume worked assiduously across the borders of Northern Ireland to harness to influence of other government, specifically those in the Republic of Ireland and in the US and also at EU level. His objective was to internationalise the peace effort, removing it from the often claustrophobic and sectarian confines of Northern Ireland and to use what external political leverage he could

muster to effect change on British policy in Northern Ireland as well as to encourage the acceptance of a settlement within Northern Ireland.

This work focuses on Hume, a specific actor from Northern Ireland over a specific time period. But it provides a fresh perspective on Hume's activities beyond his own borders which can contribute to the much wider study of peace building, particularly in contexts where domestic figures seek to exert leverage across international borders in search of a settlement as Hume did in the US, the Republic of Ireland and (to a lesser extent) in the EU. Peter Gourevitch<sup>44</sup> states baldly that cross-border actions by individual actors are in need of further study. The research offered here should therefore be of relevance to those whose research interests lie in theoretical concepts of conflict resolution and who are not familiar with the specifics of Northern Ireland. By a similar token, the analysis presented here further touches on Michele Gawerc's call for research into what makes peace processes work – particularly what she terms the “people to people” contacts.<sup>45</sup> Building on the work of John Paul Lederach<sup>46</sup> she encourages research into the motivations of peace makers. “[I]t is also important, for reasons of sustainability, to look into the personal reasons people have for being engaged in this work and persevering during the precarious, difficult, and often highly polarized periods.”<sup>47</sup> This research offers some possible answers.

Hume exercised executive power for less than five months in 1974, instead wielding what influence he could as a constituency representative via lobbying and networking, particularly outside Northern Ireland's borders to bring pressure to bear on various British governments, Irish republican extremists and unionists within Northern Ireland itself. How this concept originated and developed, what tactics he adopted and how he widened his circle of influence – especially in Dublin, Washington DC and London - are all explored in this thesis. It should therefore offer findings which are of direct relevance to researchers of peace building and conflict settlement who study the informal, personal, unofficial approaches of actors such as Hume – particularly in a cross-border context.

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<sup>44</sup> Gourevitch, Peter (2002) 'Domestic Politics and International Relations' in Carlsnaes, Walter; Risse-Kappen, Thomas and Simmons, Beth A (eds) *Handbook of International Relations*. London. Sage.

<sup>45</sup> Gawerc, Michelle (2006) *Peace-building: Theoretical and Concrete Perspectives*. Peace & Change, Vol. 13. No. 4, pp. 435-478.

<sup>46</sup> Lederach, John, Paul (1997) *Building Peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington DC. US Institute of Peace.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid p. 463.

The years from 1960-74 were certainly transformative in Northern Ireland just as they were elsewhere. Europe rebuilt itself, Britain modernised and decolonised. Ireland emerged from the de Valera years to be transformed by Lemass. Political developments were matched by economic, social and cultural transformations. They were the years which saw the emergence of Hume's public life, full of optimism and full of calls – as his father had implored him - to shun the political sterility of the past marked as it was by irredentist nationalism on one hand and the Unionist ascendancy's Bourbon-like insistence on holding out against change. They were also the years which ended in levels of violence unimaginable even in 1968, with exceptional degrees of communal polarisation, sectarianism and a deepening political crisis. Those 14 years saw Hume's initial optimism tempered by bitter disappointment, particularly by the O'Neill government's dismissal of the University for Derry campaign, his massive social housing plan, and the hardening of his conciliatory tone towards them. Hume warned in his *Irish Times* articles in May 1964: "Unionists must realise that if they turn their backs on the present goodwill there can only be a considerable hardening of Catholic opinion...".<sup>48</sup> He could not have known that he was forecasting the trajectory of his own opinion. Similarly, with regard to the role he felt the British government ought to perform in Northern Ireland, Hume's faith went in a downward spiral. Gone was the optimistic lobbying of James Callaghan in the Bogside of August 1969 to be replaced by his bitter recrimination against the next Labour government which, he alleged, had been utterly supine in the face of an illegal and anti-constitutional loyalist workers' strike which collapsed the Sunningdale powersharing agreement.

John Hume left his minister's office at Stormont following the collapse of that Executive beaten, angry and dejected – resolving to break Unionist power in Northern Ireland and to force the British government to meet its responsibilities as he saw them. Everything that John Hume became and all that he eventually achieved had origins during the critical years of 1960-74.

His five months in an executive position were the only months he was to exercise real political power in more than three decades in politics. How could a man, who had such a sliver of executive experience, become so influential over the course of politics in Northern Ireland and over the direction of policy in Dublin, London and Washington? The answers lie in the close study of his formative years, the ones which gave rise to the origins of a Derry icon – the title of this thesis. The years chosen as the focus of this study began with great idealism on Hume's part. He reflected the potential, the anger, the sense of hope and the freshness of thinking that

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<sup>48</sup> The *Irish Times*, Tuesday May 19<sup>th</sup> 1964.

marked that time as markedly different from the despair and stasis that went before. This thesis concludes that, for all the overblown rhetoric elsewhere about the scale of his achievements, Hume was not the all-seeing original thinker some hold him to be. What he did instead was absorb and process the new and emerging ideas of the time and, vitally, become a leading and enabling advocate for change. Ideas about viewing Irish unity more as a reconciling of divisions among Irish minds rather than territory was discussed by the Irish essayist Hubert Butler long before Hume.<sup>49</sup> Seeking unionist consent, recognising the reality of the Northern state and playing a fuller part in its institutions were all under discussion before Hume made such arguments his own. He recognised what had been claimed since the late 1950s – that reunification was a process and not an event, that politics meant striving for individual social and economic rights and not merely national ones. He, arguably more than anyone at the time, became the figure who synthesised these and, entwining them with a rejection of paramilitary violence, developed a coherent political creed which was not reflected in any political party and required the creation of a new one. He made himself the political force around which new political efforts would coalesce – in Northern Ireland as elsewhere. Hume certainly had foresight and ambition and determination as Gerry Fitt opined in his unique Belfast fashion. If, as Edmund Burke contended, “the business of a politician” was as a “philosopher in action,”<sup>50</sup> Hume was the epitome. Perhaps Fitt’s and Burke’s comments both reflect Hume accurately. He also had luck.

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<sup>49</sup> Butler, Hubert (1990) ‘Crossing the border’ in *Grandmother and Wolfe Tone*. Pp. 64, 68. Dublin. Lilliput Press.

<sup>50</sup> Burke (1770) *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*. Dublin. George Faulkner.

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## **Candidate's declaration**

I, Daniel James Keenan, do hereby certify that this thesis, submitted for the degree of PhD, which is approximately 81,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

I was admitted as a research student at the University of St Andrews in September 2011.

I confirm that no funding was received for this work.

October 30<sup>th</sup> 2019

## **Supervisor's declaration**

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

October 30<sup>th</sup> 2019

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I, Daniel James Keenan, hereby certify that no requirements to deposit original research data or digital outputs apply to this thesis and that, where appropriate, secondary data used have been referenced in the full text of my thesis.

Date October 30<sup>th</sup> 2019

## University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee

31 January 2019

Dear Daniel,

Your ethical application has now been reviewed by the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC), alongside the following supporting documentation:

1. Ethical Application Form
2. Participant Information Sheet
3. Consent Form
4. Debrief form
5. Retrospective letter to participants

I am pleased to confirm that UTREC has granted this application ethical approval and the particulars of the approved ethical application are as follows -

<b>Approval Code:</b>	IR14057	<b>Approved on:</b>	23 January 2019	<b>Approval expiry:</b>	23 January 2024
<b>Project Title:</b>	The Theoretical Architecture of the 1998 Belfast Agreement				
<b>Researcher(s):</b>	Daniel J Keenan				
<b>Supervisor(s):</b>	Dr Tim Wilson				

Approval is awarded for five years. Projects which have not commenced within two years of approval must be re-submitted for review by your School Ethics Committee, who may escalate your application to UTREC for review. If you are unable to complete your research within the five-year approval period, you are required to write to your School Ethics Committee Convener to request a discretionary extension of no greater than 6 months or to re-apply if directed to do so, and you should inform your School Ethics Committee when your project reaches completion.

If you make any changes to the project outlined in your approved ethical application form, you should inform your supervisor and seek advice on the ethical implications of those changes from the School Ethics Convener who may advise you to complete and submit an ethical amendment form for review.

Any adverse incident which occurs during the conducting of your research must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee who will advise you on the appropriate action to be taken.

Approval is given on the understanding that you conduct your research as outlined in your application and in compliance with UTREC Guidelines and Policies (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/guidelinespolicies/>). You are also advised to ensure that you procure and handle your research data within the provisions of the Data Provision Act 2018 and in accordance with any conditions of funding incumbent upon you.

If you have any questions in relation to this ethical approval then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Richard Malham, Senior Research Policy and Integrity Manager, on behalf of UTREC

Ccs School Ethics Committee Convenor, Dr Javier Argomaniz  
Supervisor, Dr Tim Wilson