

**Irish Republican Internal Politics, c.1965-72: Competition,
Fragmentation, and the Adoption of Violence**

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Abstract

This dissertation traces the changing strategies adopted by Irish republicans in competition with one another, during the period 1965-72. Two distinct forms of political conflict are identified and examined: internal and inter-organisational competition. In each political context, the competitive strategies devised and employed were markedly different. Between 1965-9, the predominant form of republican competition was intra-organisational in nature. Rival teams within the IRA were formed as a result of ideological divergence. In a most strategic fashion, these teams adopted a range of manoeuvres aimed at securing the levers of power. This dissertation argues, contrary to former historical accounts, that the IRA split of 1969 was triggered by a shift in control. One team managed to eventually obtain the means of control so as to allow them to determine the direction of that revolutionary vehicle. Consequently, the losing faction(s) were forced to adopt a second-rate, schismatic, strategy. Splits are, therefore, indicative of centralisation within an organisation and can only be indirectly explained by ideological and strategic divisions. The split, in severely fragmenting republican politics, qualitatively transformed the competition. Rival IRAs, amid decentralisation in Northern Ireland, engaged in a dual contest between themselves and the British state to control events and spaces. In this context, violence was frequently adopted as a means of extending and maintaining authority. By isolating the strands of republican competition for analysis, it is argued that the civil war in Northern Ireland must be re-examined as an entanglement of secondary and primary conflicts. Multiple lines of competition overlapped with one another making it difficult to determine who were allies and enemies.

Introduction

I

Republican Car Share

On the morning of 7 July 1972, in the border region of north-west Derry, MI6 officer Frank Steele awaited the arrival of a Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)¹ leadership delegation. Talks between them and the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, William Whitelaw, had been scheduled for later that day. Concerned by their lateness, Steele feared that the talks were off, when suddenly 'up drove a car at a rate of knots, absolutely bulging with IRA.'²

The historic meeting was reached as a result of a dual bargaining process. Discussions between British and republican representatives paralleled internal talks within the PIRA. The PIRA Chief of Staff (C/S), Seán MacStíofáin, who headed the delegation that day, had on 27 June visited North Belfast to explain policy direction to volunteers in a pub, the Starry Plough.³ A few weeks prior to that, MacStíofáin had been set an ultimatum by the Belfast brigade staff regarding the release of an important detainee.⁴ Leading PIRA members also made incompatible judgements regarding the political significance of these talks. Some of those in the car that day were optimistic, while others were pessimistic. Some interpreted the forthcoming meeting in military terms; one of them had even contemplated arriving in paramilitary regalia. While others hoped that it would be the start of a dynamic process of political negotiation.⁵

The above episode allows us to arrive at a conceptualisation of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) as a revolutionary vehicle. The primary and secondary material available on the IRA is littered with metaphoric hints of 'roads' and 'paths'. Dieter Reinisch noted the preponderance of such

¹ Also known as the Provisionals and Provos.

² Steele recalled these events in a rare interview with journalist Peter Taylor; see Peter Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (London, 1998), 139-140.

³ The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), War Office (WO) 305/4747/2, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 5 July 1972.

⁴ The specified detainee was Gerry Adams, see Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men's War in Ireland* (London, 2010), 96-7.

⁵ Dave O'Connell, an Army Council member present that day, took non-violent strategy seriously. See, Maria McGuire, *To Take Arms: A Year in the Provisional IRA* (London, 1973), 73, 125, 132. O'Connell and Gerry Adams's political acumen was recorded by British officials following a preliminary meeting which appears to have distorted their view of the PIRA leadership as a whole; TNA, Prime Minister's Office (PREM) 15/1009, Note of a Meeting with Representatives of the Provisional IRA, 21 June 1972. The leadership figure who considered wearing military outfit was Ivor Bell, a prominent member of the Belfast brigade. He and Belfast Commanding Officer, Seamus Twomey, were noted as being eager to return to the war path. MacStíofáin appears to have propitiously believed that the 'British wanted out' and sought to dictate rather than engage in open-ended dialogue; see Taylor, *Provos*, 137, 142-4.

figurative speech in a recent round of interviews he conducted with female republicans.⁶ Still further, a British intelligence report in mid-1975 stated that volunteers ‘may have been waiting for a steer from the Dublin leadership’, and a British observer, in July 1977, recorded a ‘change of direction’ following that year’s Bodenstown oration.⁷ A decade previous, Sean Garland, in his 1968 Bodenstown oration, stated that the IRA ‘must only be regarded as a weapon or instrument by which we can attain the freedom of the Irish people...’.⁸ Garland did not specify what type of ‘instrument’ the IRA resembled. This conceptual imprecision, however, can be addressed by combining the above source material. References to steering, changes of direction, and the mapping of revolutionary routes all suggest that the IRA served a transportive function comparable to that of a vehicle.

Elsewhere revolutionaries have produced similar images. The Guinea-Bissau nationalist, Amilcar Cabral, turned his listeners into spectators when he said: ‘A revolution is like a train journey. At every stop, some people get on, other people get off.’⁹ For Cabral, a revolution transformed disparate persons into a ‘well defined entirety seeking one path’. This newly formed unity was to be understood in a ‘dynamic sense’, ‘unity... in motion’.¹⁰ Cabral’s emphasis upon there being ‘one path’ was not unique, it pervades revolutionary rhetoric.¹¹ The idea that revolutionary vehicles are unidirectional, however, does not correspond with reality. As suggested by the opening vignette, the direction taken is disputed internally, and such disputation often leads to competition for control of that instrument.

This conceptualisation is important in understanding Irish republican internal politics for it dispels the assumption that organisations, or groups in general, are unitary actors, possessing a cohesion comparable to that of an individual agent. In giving an organisation, or group, a mind of its own, it deprives its membership of agency, rendering them unable to act and think for themselves, and instead portrays them as ‘following a script handed down to them’.¹² Once we understand organisations to be instruments, whose control and direction are contested from

⁶ Dieter Reinisch, ‘Women’s Agency and Political Violence: Irish Republican Women and the Formation of the Provisional IRA, 1967-70’, *Irish Political Studies*, 34 (2019), 428.

⁷ TNA, WO 305/4646/1, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 20 August 1975; TNA, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 87/626, Provisional Sinn Fein: Change of Direction, 27 July 1977.

⁸ *United Irishman*, July 1968.

⁹ William Finnegan, *A Complicated War: The Harrowing of Mozambique* (London, 1992), 133.

¹⁰ Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writing*, trans. Michael Wolfers (New York, 1979), 28-9.

¹¹ For references to ‘the right road’ see *Liam McMillen: Separatist, Socialist, Republican* ([Official] Sinn Fein, 1976), ii; *Republican News*, May 1971.

¹² Simon Prince and Geoffrey Warner, *Belfast and Derry in Revolt: A New History of the Troubles* (Dublin, 2012), 5. For a more detailed discussion see Rogers Brubaker, ‘Ethnicity without Groups’, *European Journal of Sociology*, 43 (2002), 163-89.

within, agency is restored to individuals. In the case of Irish republican organisations, we are contending with vehicles constructed so as to reach a particular political destination, an all-Ireland democracy. Revolutionary vehicles were not bounded by train tracks as Cabral sought to convey but rather the possibilities of direction were diverse. As Simon Prince and Geoffrey Warner, have asserted, 'The IRA was no more a unitary actor than the civil rights movement was'.¹³ Republicans formulated different visionary road maps and sought to implement them by securing the 'levers of power'; the abstract steering wheel determined direction, while the gears adjusted the speed of motion.¹⁴

II

Political Conflicts in Political Contexts

This dissertation is concerned with the political conflicts that arose within and between republican organisations during the period 1965-72. In taking the organisation as the unit of analysis I am building upon a burgeoning literature which seeks to move beyond ethnic interpretations of civil conflicts.¹⁵ Academics from across the scholarly field, including political scientists, sociologists, and historians, have recently questioned the analytical veracity of understanding such conflicts in principally ethnic terms. The formerly fashionable atavistic and ethnic interpretations argued that affective bonds and/or cultural affinity mobilised people into coherent, highly antagonistic, communal blocs. Most modern conflicts were, thus, taken to be intercommunal struggles between polarised groups.¹⁶ This view, however, was premised upon an outdated primordial understanding of how group identity works. The now widely accepted constructivist approach stresses that identity is multi-layered and changeable; 'groupness' hardens and weakens according to the situation.¹⁷ Group identity is, thus, a most 'situational construct' not some transhistorical entity.¹⁸

¹³ Simon Prince and Geoffrey Warner, 'The IRA and its Rivals: Political Competition and the Turn to Violence in the Early Troubles', *Contemporary British History*, 27 (2013), 277.

¹⁴ Belfast PIRA operator, Brendan Hughes, referred to obtaining the 'reins of power'; see Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 204.

¹⁵ Stathis Kalyvas, 'Ethnic Defection in Civil War', *Comparative Political Studies*, 41 (2008), 1063.

¹⁶ The foundational work here being Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, 1985). It has been challenged by David Laitin and James Fearon who find that 'weak' states, not ethnically diverse societies, are more prone to civil war. For this see James Fearon and David Laitin, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War', *American Political Review*, 97 (2003), 75-90.

¹⁷ For emphasis upon groupness as opposed to groupism, see Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 164-8, 176-9.

¹⁸ For the view that identity is a 'situational construct', see Fredrik Barth, 'Introduction', in Frederik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Ethnic Difference* (Boston, 1969), 9-38. The specialist work focused on Northern Ireland is as follows: Richard Bourke, 'Languages of Conflict and the Northern Ireland Troubles', *The Journal of Modern History*, 83 (2011), 544-78; Simon

The argument was, however, always flawed in another important aspect, in that, as Richard Bourke has argued, 'common feeling is not sufficient to unite individual wills into a coherent plan of action.'¹⁹ This point was reinforced in the opening section of this thesis, republicans came together to form an entity, the IRA, out of shared beliefs. In order to escape political alienation, they elected a representative leadership, the driver, who possessed the means of control, and simultaneously transformed themselves into a functionable instrument, a car, pertaining a degree of coordination otherwise impossible. Both the driver and vehicle were mutually dependent upon one another.²⁰

In contrast, ethnicity is incapable of mobilising people into singular, coordinated, units. Kathleen Cunningham, Kristin Bakke, and Lee Seymour, have shown that those who share the same ethnicity, or some other group identity, such as class, are politically fragmented, leading to the proliferation of competing parties and paramilitaries all claiming to represent the same 'group'.²¹ Organisations do not embody 'groups' rather they align themselves with certain group identities; and for political purposes often go to great lengths to summon and strengthen those identities through planned agitation and provocation.²²

Turning specifically to the case of the Northern Ireland Troubles we are confronted with a most political conflict, in two different senses of the term 'political', one regarding stimuli and the other form. The 'master cleavage', as enunciated by Bourke, was a contest over the meaning of democracy, each party to the conflict, unionist, nationalist, republican, and socialist, legitimated their political aspirations in pointing to some majority will. An article in the PIRA's Belfast paper, *Republican News*, in July 1972, vehemently assured its readers that the British forces and loyalist 'thugs' would be swept away by a 'people who are the MAJORITY'.²³ For republicans, the majority was the Irish nationalist people. While unionists contended that, as the majority in Northern Ireland, they had the right to rule even at the expense of full citizenship rights to the

Prince, 'Against Ethnicity: Democracy, Equality, and the Northern Ireland Conflict', *Journal of British Studies*, 57 (2018), 783-811.

¹⁹ Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas* (London, 2012), xiv.

²⁰ Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's assertion that 'One must always risk political alienation in order to escape from political alienation', see Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, 1991), 204.

²¹ See, for example, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, Kristin M. Bakke and Lee J.M. Seymour, 'E pluribus unum, ex uno plures: Competition, Violence, and Fragmentation in Ethnopolitical Movements', *Journal of Peace Research*, 53 (2016), 3-18; Kristin M. Bakke, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and Lee J.M. Seymour, 'A Plague of Initials: Fragmentation, Cohesion, and Infighting in Civil Wars', *Perspectives on Politics*, 10 (2012), 265-83.

²² The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) engaged in deliberate provocation in a 'group-making' project, see Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without Groups', 171-2.

²³ *Republican News*, 14 July 1972.

minority. In each case the democratic 'majority' was taken to be the sovereign 'people'. The majoritarian foundations of each ideology led to the unanswerable question of which majority ought to matter. The essence of a democratic state being the right of a community of privilege, not some section of it, and a democratic government, established by the will of the majority, ruling for the total good, was lost. Instead each party was fuelled by an egalitarian drive to fulfil their supposed democratic rights and any opposition was countenanced as a violation of normative modern principles.²⁴

The form that the conflict took by 1970, that being a civil war, was not predetermined. As Bourke stated: 'Ideas on their own did not simply make war- but still, without a clash of ideas there would have been no war.'²⁵ In other words, while ideas stimulate political actions, they do not determine their nature. The political context sets the limits and possibilities of action. Many are inclined to view the Troubles as one 'long hot summer'.²⁶ John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, proponents of the ethno-national approach, have even referenced the famous weather analogy offered by the seventeenth century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes.²⁷ Violence, according to the ethnic interpretative scheme, is a degree of an intractable intercommunal conflict that occurs with the rising temperature of tensions.²⁸ Antagonism may be latent for a while, restrained by deterrence, but there is every chance the ethnic flame will rekindle. According to Frank Wright, peace on an ethnic frontier is merely a cold war.²⁹ Northern Ireland is, thus, taken to be an inherently unstable polity that could collapse, just as the weather changes, into a frenzy of violence. But this is a misappropriation of Hobbes's analogy, war is not a most unpredictable occurrence rather behaviour in the context of war is. Civilians are left in a state of anxiety as human behaviour becomes increasingly unpredictable; war is, thus, not saturated by untrammelled rage but fear.³⁰

War is instead understood in this thesis to be the equalisation of social power. It is a political context in which either no authority exists, exposing the equality of humankind, termed anarchic, or rival authorities proliferate, known as civil and interstate wars. More specifically,

²⁴ Bourke, *War of Ideas*, xi-xxiv, 1-20; Bourke, 'Languages of Conflict', 549-50, 570-1, 574; Prince, 'Against Ethnicity', 800.

²⁵ Bourke, *War of Ideas*, xviii.

²⁶ Summary and critique offered in Malachi O'Doherty, *The Trouble with Guns: Republican Strategy and the Provisional IRA* (Belfast, 1998), 43, 126-7.

²⁷ Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London, 1996), 327.

²⁸ The argument pervades the literature, see, for example, Gearóid Ó Faoleán, *A Broad Church: The Provisional IRA in the Republic of Ireland 1969-1980* (Newbridge, 2019), 168.

²⁹ Tim Wilson, 'Frank Wright Revisited', *Irish Political Studies*, 26 (2011), 280-2.

³⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xiii, 8. Also see O'Doherty, *Trouble with Guns*, 127.

civil war is the equalisation of social power between rival authorities within a formerly centralised setting. This is in line with the definition given by the political scientist, Stathis Kalyvas. Kalyvas defines civil war as follows, 'armed combat within the boundaries of a recognised sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the onset of the hostilities.'³¹ Kalyvas's classification moves beyond the typically held notion that war can simply be reduced to largescale violence; in his words, 'Civil wars are political contexts where violence is used to challenge and to build order'.³² War is not a quantitative degree of violence or conflict, it is a qualitatively distinct context in which violence is likely to be used.³³ Violence is adopted in this context of divided sovereignty as each armed actor seeks to extend its authoritative reach.³⁴ The relative military power between the armed actors may be symmetrical or asymmetrical, leading to conventional or irregular warfare.³⁵ However, even in irregular civil wars, the armed guerrillas still manage to exert themselves over local areas through the selective use of violence and the creation of alternative administrative structures. Notably then, even when military power is unequal, guerrillas manage to find ways to equalise social power. Violence, in this context, becomes a function of control, produced in proportion to the level of control held by an armed actor in a certain space.³⁶

This innovative definition of civil war, allied with the outlined revisionist scholarship, allows us to re-examine the Troubles through an organisational lens equipped with political tools of analysis. Prince has already begun this task of revision by highlighting newly released archival material which shows that, in the autumn of 1969, 'Belfast was breaking up into little republics', as action and defence committees proliferated. Loyalist confrontations that occurred on 10-11 October 1969, previously interpreted as an emotional outburst from 'Protestant Belfast' following the publication of the Hunt report on policing in Northern Ireland, are instead shown to have been pre-planned and coordinated.³⁷ Prince and Warner's collaborative work shows that by the summer of 1970, republican organisations, the PIRA and their rivals, the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA),³⁸ were dictating the course, and pace, of events in the nationalist areas

³¹ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York, 2006), 17.

³² Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'Promises and Pitfalls of an Emerging Research Program: The Microdynamics of Civil War', in Stathis N. Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro, and Tarek Masoud (eds.), *Order, Conflict, and Violence* (Cambridge, 2008), 406.

³³ Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 20.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 87.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 83-85.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 87-145, 210- 245.

³⁷ Prince, 'Against Ethnicity', 801-4.

³⁸ Also known as Officials and Stickies.

of Belfast.³⁹ Central authority was receding while rival organisations were, crucially, proliferating. The focus can now shift to a specified analysis of these republican organisations who were to prove such crucial actors during the civil war in Northern Ireland.

III

Irish Republican Internal Conflicts

The conflicts between Irish republicans can be disaggregated into two forms: internal and inter-organisational competition. In each political context, the strategies adopted were different, and changed overtime. The competitive options available expanded and contracted relative to the levels of control held by competitors. The internal competition was stimulated principally by divisions over direction which led to the formation of internal teams who competed to obtain the means of control at the expense of their rivals. The aim of the internal game was to acquire 'seats of authority' through a range of manoeuvres. The 'game changer', in this context, was found to be structural changes which sought to create, and tactically fill, new 'positions of influence'.⁴⁰ This form of competition was mostly peaceful in nature despite high levels of frustration and anger being recorded.

In examining the internal dynamics of the IRA between 1965-9 in this way, a new understanding of the 1969 split is reached. Instead of thinking of splits as 'breaking points' I argue that they must be seen as turning points.⁴¹ In the case of the 1960s, one competitive team, labelled as Marxist republican, eventually managed to win the internal game by obtaining the 'levers of power'. This allowed them to positively determine the direction taken. The losing faction(s), in order to salvage some control, and compete on a new plain, formed a splinter group, the PIRA. Splits are, therefore, indicative of centralisation and can only be indirectly explained by ideological and strategic divisions.⁴²

The consequent inter-organisational competition, between the OIRA and PIRA, that occurred from 1970 onwards was markedly different. Republicans were fragmented into two distinct political entities creating new strategic concerns. Foremost among them was the limitation of a rival organisation's activities. In addition to this, each organisation sought to create, and fill, voids of authority left behind by the recession of the regional, and central, power. Violence, in

³⁹ Prince and Warner, 'The IRA and its Rivals', 282-3.

⁴⁰ Ruairí Ó Brádaigh referred to opponents marking and moving into 'positions of influence', see Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA & Sinn Fein* (Dublin, 1999), 111.

⁴¹ This terminology is specifically found in Marisa McGlinchey, *Unfinished Business: The Politics of 'Dissident' Irish Republicanism* (Manchester, 2019), 38.

⁴² Centralisation denotes the concentration of power.

this context, was increasingly used as a means of authoritative extension and retention. The violence varied in type, the most used and effective being an intrusive form of violence which sought to forcefully convey a message.⁴³ This inwards violence was paralleled by increasing outwards violence as each organisation sought to be heard above the other.⁴⁴

In sum, this dissertation traces the changing competitive strategies adopted by republicans in competition with one another. It argues that contextual shifts altered the utility and availability of certain non-violent and violent strategies. So, while Sean Swan may have rightly argued that ‘violence was always a potential factor in republican political disputes’, I go further in attempting to identify the specific triggers.⁴⁵ In doing this, I am adopting the ground-breaking work of political scientists, Erica Chenoweth and Adria Lawrence, which emphasises that violence is a choice, not an outcome, and is not simply dichotomously absent or present. Instead, as they urge, we must recognise the diversity of strategic options available to operators in particular moments, and ‘unpack’ both non-violent and violent strategies accordingly.⁴⁶ This forces us, quite rightly as historians, to consider the alternative courses of action that were planned, and given a certain degree of preference, but never achieved or enacted; ‘plan As’, so to speak, were rarely fully accomplished, and more often than not ‘plan Bs’ were settled for. Still further, this piece notes the competitive limits placed upon republican women as a result of the cultural mould of patriarchal militarism. Their ability to influence the IRA’s direction was infringed by their institutional subordination and cultural marginality.

IV

Sources: Separating the Competition from the History

The competition between republicans has not ended; it continues through new mediums, one of those being the secondary literature itself. The source material, therefore, presents a problem which must be methodologically confronted by the historian. In his review article of the recent work released on the IRA, Ian McBride noted a most ‘bizarre twist’ in the literature he had surveyed. It was not unionists, or even revisionist historians, that had generated the moral critique of the PIRA’s armed struggle, it was rival republicans. The specific literature that McBride had reviewed was the work of journalist Ed Moloney and terrorist studies expert Rogelio Alonso, who had both gained unprecedented access into the clandestine world of Irish

⁴³ Violence here is understood as the deliberate infliction of harm. For a discussion of violence as a function of control, see Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 19, 26.

⁴⁴ Prince and Warner, ‘The IRA and its Rivals’, 276, 283.

⁴⁵ Sean Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism, 1962 to 1972* (Lulu, 2008), 118.

⁴⁶ Adria Lawrence and Erica Chenoweth, ‘Introduction’, in Erica Chenoweth and Adria Lawrence (eds.), *Rethinking Violence: States and Non-State Actors in Conflict* (Cambridge, 2010), 1-19.

republicanism through the collection of extensive interview material.⁴⁷ However, McBride noticed a trend, unmentioned or tackled by those authors, 'Moloney's anonymous sources include a disproportionate number of disgruntled militants, cast aside as Adams and McGuinness steered the Provisionals toward compromise. Alonso's emphases bear the fingerprints of the Official IRA... now exacting their literary revenge.'⁴⁸ It, thus, becomes increasingly difficult to tell whether these historical accounts are separate from or a part of the competition itself.

There is, then, a real danger that scholarly literature on Irish republicanism will merely be an extension of the competition. The issue arises as a result of scholarly entanglement and a parochial source base. Irish republican conflicts were not confined to the backstreets of Belfast or the backrooms of pubs, they sought to use external actors as tools to strengthen their internal and inter-organisational position. Moloney, who had operated as a journalist during the Troubles, was, as he has himself recorded, used by a republican element within the PIRA commonly referred to as the younger Northerners. He was to later realise that their motive had been to indirectly denounce their southern-based internal rivals publicly, while keeping a safe distance from the action.⁴⁹

This manipulation has clearly left an indelible mark on Moloney, whose 'secret history' is concerned, first and foremost, with the rise of this element, and their leader Gerry Adams. McBride was left with the impression after reading Moloney's investigative work that Adams was a 'mastermind' and 'remarkable puppet-master' whose 'hidden hand' dictated the course of the republican campaign at every significant turn, from beginning till end.⁵⁰ There is no doubting that Adams was a key player, the point being raised here is that the narrative produced by Moloney is difficult to disentangle from the dissident counter-narrative of British imperialistic manipulation. Moloney's following comment reinforces my point, 'while Adams and his people were prepared to break the rules to advance their agenda, Ó Brádaigh believed in playing by the rules, even though they might damage his interests', 'Ruairí Ó Brádaigh can thus be said to be the last, or one of the last, Irish Republicans.'⁵¹ The story given is a typical colonial one. The 'last of the republicans' are left marginalised, and few in number, while the traitors, now

⁴⁷ Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London, 2007); Rogelio Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle* (Abingdon, 2007).

⁴⁸ Ian McBride, 'The Shadow of the Gunman: Irish Historians and the IRA', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46 (2011), 709.

⁴⁹ See the foreword by Moloney to Robert White, *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary* (Bloomington, 2006), xiii- xvii.

⁵⁰ McBride, 'Shadow of the Gunman', 702-3.

⁵¹ White, *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, xvii.

indistinguishable from the imperialist, are all powerful.⁵² We can only properly move away from competitive accounts by writing a history of the competition itself.

This thesis has attempted, within the realms of possibility, to use a wide range of primary material including: a limited number of republican documents, newspapers, memoirs, second-hand interview material, and a significant number of archival documents. It must be emphatically stated that republican organisations were clandestine in nature. Memoirs, interview material, and British intelligence reports, promise the reader the prospect of a 'secret entrance' into a clandestine world. Secondary accounts based on new interview material are sold as 'secret' histories; the dusk jackets of memoirs are emblazoned with revelatory terms such as 'UNCENSORED'; and the sight of a bold lettered 'SECRET' stamped on an intelligence report can make the researcher feel as if they are 'behind the scenes'.⁵³ This terminology, however, works to give the material a level of automatic receptiveness. In recognising this, McBride and Stephen Hopkins have been foremost in stressing the need to approach memoirs with their contextual background in mind; emphasising authorial incentive, the influence of commercial-minded publishers, and the competing republican narratives that structure such accounts.⁵⁴ With regard to intelligence material, operators on the ground were continually assessing the validity of information garnered; they came to trust some contacts, regarding them as 'reliable', while deeming others suspect. British intelligence came from multiple sources, such as surveillance, captured documents, vigilant soldiers, contacts, informers, paramilitaries, prison officials, and the special branch of the provincial police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).⁵⁵ The underlying theme here is one of uncertainty, which, crucially, contradicts our distorted present-day view of the past as being a certainty. This ties in with the approach to history forwarded by Roy Foster which appreciates the fact that past actors were faced with 'uncertain futures'.⁵⁶ We often forget that the past was at one time a present.

⁵² The classic example being James Fenimore Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans* (London, 1986).

⁵³ Moloney, *Secret History*; Gerry Bradley and Brian Feeney, *Insider: Gerry Bradley's Life in the IRA* (Dublin, 2009).

⁵⁴ Ian McBride, 'Provisional Truths: IRA Memoirs and the Peace Process', in Senia Pašeta (ed.), *Uncertain Futures: Essays about the Irish Past for Royster* (Oxford, 2016), 235-247; Stephen Hopkins, *The Politics of Memoir and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Liverpool, 2013), 1-50.

⁵⁵ The British forces in raids often found documentation belonging to the paramilitaries, TNA, WO 305/4599/3, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 28 October 1971.

⁵⁶ Senia Pašeta (ed.) *Uncertain Futures: Essays about the Irish Past for Roy Foster* (Oxford, 2016).

V

Road Map

The journey ahead is not a straightforward one; it is, therefore, necessary that I map out the historical roads that follow. The thesis has been broken down into three chapters containing thematic sub-sections. Chapter 1, entitled 'The Source, Language, and Logic of the Competition', seeks to provide the reader with a much-needed preparatory discussion of the foundations of the competition. It encompasses the whole chronological period under study so as to lay out the variant republicanism(s) formed during this period, the sub-culture of Irish republicanism, and why republicans felt it logical to remain and compete within an organisation despite the realisation of internal divisions. With this completed, chapter 2, entitled 'Internal Competition within the IRA, 1965-9', traces the competitive moves made by rival internal teams who sought to maximise their control over that vehicle. These are unpacked to show how institutionalised competition offered competitors an array of peaceful manoeuvres that meant violence, or the threat of it, was rarely adopted. Furthermore, while both factions possessed the ability to block any changes of direction the option of splitting was relegated. However, once one team managed to secure a 'game changer' in 1968, allowing them to change the direction of that vehicle, the resultant competitive moves planned and enacted by the losing faction(s) became more desperate. They were in the end, forced to go with 'plan B', that being to split.

The split, in severely fragmenting republican politics, changed the nature of the competition. Chapter 3 is concerned with the dynamics of the inter-organisational competition between the OIRA and PIRA. It revisits the Sinn Fein walkout of 11 January 1970 and questions the 'inevitability' of that event. The central contention being that the expected walkout did not materialise. The discussion then moves on to the competing narratives produced by the rival organisations as they engaged in a 'meta-conflict'.⁵⁷ Following this is a discussion of outwards violence, which was being competitively driven as each organisation sought to raise the volume of their actions. This sub-section works principally with evidence found within the archival files. As does the final sub-section on inwards violence, which identifies a number of patterns that emerge from the British intelligence reports. It finds that moments of contestation and shifts in territorial control triggered at least some of the republican violence. Other competitive means are also noted, such as the provision of services through the opening of shops. To conclude, the civil war in Northern Ireland is analogised as an entangled ball of wool.

⁵⁷ Ian McBride, 'The Truth about the Troubles', in Jim Smyth (ed.), *Remembering the Troubles: Contesting the Recent Past in Northern Ireland* (Notre Dame, 2017), 14.

Chapter 1: The Source, Language, and Logic of the Competition

I

The Source

Politics is a distinct form of human activity that, at its core, is concerned with determining the common life within a given social remit. In comparison to culture, politics is a most conscious activity. Cultural games are often ingrained in one's youth through a process of socialisation, producing what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls the *habitus*: a wired, unconscious, feeling for the game. In different cultural settings, our *habitus* determines the most valuable actions to be deployed.⁵⁸ In contrast, political action presupposes conscious thought. Political ideas are produced via engagement with particular intellectual debates of the time.⁵⁹ Strategies are then formulated and deployed in a number of settings, ranging from cabinet rooms to the street.⁶⁰

Ideas are not neatly bound concepts; they are topics of continual debate. Irish republicanism was likewise debated and revised as the context changed. Henry Patterson was one of the first to stress, in an analysis of what he termed 'social republicanism', that 'a more discontinuous, "conjunctural" analysis' was needed.⁶¹ At the primary level, British officials developed an acute awareness of the divisive nature of Irish republicanism. Merlyn Rees, Northern Ireland Secretary of State between 1974-6, in a paper submitted to the Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, stated that 'the Provisional Army Council is not a homogenous entity with a single view...'.⁶²

What is witnessed in the primary material are heterogenous Irish republicanism(s). The qualitative differences relating to the degree, and form, of positivity. Two distinct republican approaches were held between 1965-72: a Marxist republican approach and an independence-focused republicanism. While all republicans shared the belief that an all-Ireland democracy was righteous, the form it would take, and the processes involved in reaching that end destination were conflicting.⁶³

⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Abingdon, 2010), 165-171.

⁵⁹ For political ideas as interventions in pre-existing intellectual debates see Quentin Skinner, *From Humanism to Hobbes: Studies in Rhetoric and Politics* (Cambridge, 2018), 1-11.

⁶⁰ Prince, 'Against Ethnicity', 784-5.

⁶¹ By 'social republicanism' Patterson meant the taking up of economic and social issues so as to rally the masses to the 'anti-imperialist' struggle. See Henry Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion: A Political History of the IRA* (London, 1997), 12.

⁶² TNA, Ministry of Defence (DEFE) 70/637, Letter from Lieutenant General to Chief of the General Staff, Annex A, 30 December 1974.

⁶³ McGuire, *To Take Arms*, 70.

To best understand these internal divisions, we need to rewind a little to the end of the failed Border Campaign. In early 1962, having been rendered militarily obsolete by the security forces North and South of the border, the IRA leadership in a public declaration announced its cessation of violence highlighting a number of factors contributing to its failure. At the top of that list, was public support:

‘Foremost among the factors motivating this course of action has been the attitude of the general public whose minds have been deliberately distracted from the supreme issues facing the Irish people- the unity and freedom of Ireland.’⁶⁴

The implication here being that an elitist military struggle, detached from the people, had no hope of success. In consequently searching for an injection of positivity, the leadership were to conceptualise different republicanisms. The journalists Patrick Bishop and Eamon Mallie captured the essence of this revision best when they wrote, the dispute ‘did not concern the desirability of developing a new political formula. It concerned the nature of the recipe and the proportions of the ingredients it contained.’⁶⁵

All Irish republicans viewed the situation in Ireland as a colonial one. Britain, its imperialist neighbour, was said to utilise the classic method of divide and rule to dominate Ireland. Official Sinn Fein, in February 1970, released the following statement: ‘Britain has always lived well off our differences and intends continuing on doing so in the future... join us in condemning this British tactic of divide and conquer.’⁶⁶ The partition, under the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, and the communal divisions in the North, premised upon an ascendant Protestant class, were considered to be manifestations of imperialistic manipulation. The Free state government was deemed a neo-colonial one, economically controlled and exploited by capitalistic enterprise, while the North remained an occupied territory.⁶⁷ In their belief that the obstacle to an all-Ireland democracy was British imperialism, their political formulations were concerned with combatting the artificial divisions supposedly created by that force. The means conceived in which to overcome these divisions were highly divergent.

One positive formulation espoused by 1960s, and later OIRA, leaders, Cathal Goulding, Seamus Costello, and Garland, derived from the positive definition of freedom offered by Marxism. The

⁶⁴ TNA, WO 305/1799, 39 Brigade Intelligence Liaison Letter, 5 March 1962.

⁶⁵ Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London, 1987), 49.

⁶⁶ TNA, FCO 33/1197, Press Extract, Press Release from Sinn Fein, 2 February 1970.

⁶⁷ This was outlined clearly in a policy document produced in 1969, *Ireland Today*, March 1969, 2-7. The Southern state was not always judged as illegitimate, Liam Kelly’s splinter group, *Saor Uladh*, accepted the 1937 Irish constitution. For a thorough analysis of imperialism see Richard Bourke, “Imperialism” and “Democracy” in Modern Ireland 1898-2002’, *Boundary 2*, 31 (2004), 93-118.

theoretical foundations of this Marxist republican approach were introduced by the intellectual Roy Johnston, who was instrumentally invited into the IRA by Goulding, who had become C/S after the ceasefire of 1962.⁶⁸ Johnston had, in the early 1960s, been a member of the Connolly Association in London, headed by James Connolly biographer Desmond Greaves, and was to become a prominent figure within the Wolfe Tone Societies set up in 1963. The presence of these republican intellectuals, as Richard English has asserted, contributed to the civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland.⁶⁹ This move towards political agitation was underpinned by the Marxist belief, derived from Hegelian philosophy, that true freedom was the realisation of one's real interests, those interests being socio-economic ones. Agitation was necessary to stir the class consciousness of the people of no property, the working class. These republicans were, therefore, 'striving towards reality'.⁷⁰ A whole raft of agitational measures were endorsed by them including industrial strike action, attacks on multi-national companies, and housing protests.⁷¹ In addition, many Marxist Republicans, especially Costello, felt that the age-old abstentionist policy, that prevented Sinn Fein candidates from taking their seats in the partitionist parliaments, needed to be jettisoned if they were to agitate in every possible political space. The insularity of republicanism would be further reversed by an alliance with other radical left-wing political groups in a National Liberation Front (NLF).⁷² This was not simply a combination of new tactics; it was a distinct ideological approach that fused together Irish republicanism and Marxism.⁷³

The Marxist republicans, crucially, believed that unification would have to precede independence. This radically altered the ideal timing of an armed campaign.⁷⁴ The position was summed up best by Goulding in his Drogheda oration of August 1965: 'the only way to rid this country of an armed British force is to confront them with an armed force of Irishmen back(ed) by a united Irish people'.⁷⁵ That unity was premised upon the workers of Ireland; it was this subaltern class that would play the 'leading role' in the revolution.⁷⁶ The end democratic goal

⁶⁸ Patterson, *Politics of Illusion*, 99.

⁶⁹ The key word here being contribution. Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London, 2012), 85-91.

⁷⁰ Found in *Liam McMillen: Separatist, Socialist, Republican* ([Official] Sinn Fein, 1976), 8.

⁷¹ Liam Cullinane, "'A happy blend'? Irish republicanism, political violence and social agitation, 1962-69', *Saothar*, 35 (2010), 49-65.

⁷² *Ibid.* 188-9, 242-44.

⁷³ The agenda for a special commission, drawn up by Johnston, in 1969 was 'not abstentionism but acceptance or otherwise of Irish Marxism'. Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 225.

⁷⁴ Militancy was not jettisoned see Brian Hanley, "'Agitate, Educate, Organise": The IRA's "An tOglach", 1965-68', *Saothar*, 32 (2008), 51-62.

⁷⁵ *United Irishman*, September 1965.

⁷⁶ Gerry Foley, *Ireland in Rebellion* (London, 1972), 22.

was refined to a socialist democratic republic which was to be controlled by the majority class, the workers.⁷⁷ In a 1975 interview, Goulding legitimated Irish socialism in the following terms: 'Socialism is a philosophy for me, it's a science which means in fact the greatest happiness for the greatest number'.⁷⁸ Driven by this democratic righteousness, they believed that the imperialistic manufactured social divisions would be transcended by the realisation of true freedom. The false consciousness of communal affiliation would be dissolved, and class identification would be promoted. Only at the point at which class unity was reached could a successful independence struggle then be accomplished.

This staged class struggle for freedom was not accepted by independence-focused republicans, such as Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Dave O'Connell, and MacStíofáin. For them, the source of the division, the divider, had to be removed first before national unity could be realistically accomplished. Like the Marxist republicans, they gave little autonomy to unionism, viewing it as a product of imperialistic manipulation. For them, the true unit of democratic decision was the Irish nation. In an interview, in March 1972, Ó Brádaigh addressed the issue of unity, 'Once the prop of the Northern state in the form of the British presence is removed things will find their own level.'⁷⁹ Unionism was not the obstacle; it was instead a blind fold, that would perish with the accomplishment of independence. Their task was to free Ireland so that could it then unite. This ordering of the ends mattered greatly for it meant that a military campaign was an essential and immediate necessity.⁸⁰ They believed entrance into constitutional politics would side-track Irish republicans down a dead-end of parliamentary politics and an abandonment of revolutionary struggle.⁸¹ These independence-focused republicans were, however, divided over the perceived effectiveness of non-violent methods.

The independent-oriented republican approach can be broken into two strands, positive and negative. The positive independents, foremost among them Ó Brádaigh, his brother Sean, and O'Connell, saw themselves as socialist republicans.⁸² The struggle, for them, was not simply a negative one, concerned solely with fighting against something, they believed in fighting for a new Ireland, *Eire Nua*. They, therefore, sought to complexify what a united Ireland would look

⁷⁷ Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 194-5.

⁷⁸ Cathal Goulding: *Thinker, Socialist, Republican, Revolutionary, 1923-1998* (Dublin, 1999), 6.

⁷⁹ TNA, FCO 87/2, Press Extract, Interview of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, President of Sinn Féin, by Keith Kyle, 7 March 1972.

⁸⁰ Robert White, *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of The Provisional Irish Republican Movement* (NewBridge, 2017), 49.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 69-70.

⁸² White, *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, 120-1, 136.

like, and this materialised within the re-examination of the 1960s.⁸³ For them, a free Ireland would be a socialist society marked by a redistribution of wealth, nationalisation of key industries, and the free association of workers in cooperatives. The democratic foundations of that new state would be federal, inspired by the canton system of Switzerland. Maximum devolution would allow provincial, regional, and local majorities to have a significant say over governance. *Dail Uladh*, the envisioned nine-county parliament of Ulster, would allow unionists to retain a slim provincial majority.⁸⁴ For this republican sub-section, the military and political had to be balanced, they could not afford to be marginalised to the periphery, they had to occupy a central place in political discussions over Ireland's future.⁸⁵ With this in mind, the struggle for them needed to be multifaceted; alongside the military, elections would be contested on an abstentionist stance, *Eire Nua* publicised, anti-EEC campaigns would be mounted, and co-operatives promoted.⁸⁶

In contrast, some republicans saw 'political' activity as distractive and ineffective. MacStíofáin was to become a proponent of this mono-focused militaristic approach allied to key veteran Belfast militants, such as Seamus Twomey.⁸⁷ This approach was encapsulated by Jimmy Steele's vociferous July 1969 Mullingar Oration, '...the only methods that will ever succeed, not the method of the politicians nor the constitutionalists, but the method of soldiers, the method of armed force...'⁸⁸ Force had been used to establish the imperial hold over Ireland and by these means it would be freed. In a private conversation, in May 1972, Miles Shevlin, an important Provisional, disclosed that the PIRA 'was not interested in seeking public support of any kind for our actions', the British 'exploiters' had to 'be driven out'.⁸⁹ A 'traditionalist' faction did not form the leadership of the 1969 splinter group, the PIRA, rather it was a 'coalition' between those who agreed on the necessity of an immediate armed campaign.⁹⁰

The sheer ambiguity of Irish republicanism is revealed by the above discussion. The distinctive approaches all sought to direct the revolutionary vehicle along divergent paths. These divisions,

⁸³ *Eire Nua*, the social and economic programme, had been formulated in the mid-1960s as part of an attempt to offer a credible alternative. See Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution* (Dublin, 2009), 79.

⁸⁴ *Eire Nua: The Social and Economic Programme of Sinn Fein* ([Provisional] Sinn Fein, 1971). An appendix was added in June 1972, setting out the prospective governmental structure.

⁸⁵ McGuire, *To Take Arms*, 32-33, 112. Confirmed by secret channel of information found in TNA, FCO 87/4, NIO London Telegram No. 33.

⁸⁶ White, *Out of the Ashes*, 64.

⁸⁷ TNA, DEFE 11/789, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 20 April 1972.

⁸⁸ Taylor, *Provos*, 45-46.

⁸⁹ TNA, FCO 87/3, Record of P.J.C. Evans with Miles Shevlin, 25 May 1972; TNA, DEFE 24/1933, FCO Telegram No. 445.

⁹⁰ Ó Faoleán, *A Broad Church*, 1.

most importantly, led to the formation of internal teams who competed for control of the steering wheel.

II

The Language

The January 1965 edition of the IRA's secretive internal organ, *An tOglach*, stated that 'the IRA needs men, men who are not dreamers, men who are no wasters... In short Real Men'. It then asked its readership, the rank-and-file volunteer, 'what kind of a man are you? Can you truthfully call yourself a soldier? More important still can you truthfully call yourself a Revolutionary?' In posing these evaluative questions the journal then probed some of the possible motives behind joining the IRA, was it to 'be in something "tough"?' or 'because you want to be a hero'. The author concluded that 'unless you're nuts' the fundamental drive was a political one, the accomplishment of the ultimate political ideal, a united and free Irish Republic. It exclaimed in a most emphatic way that a revolutionary was not synonymous with a soldier, other preparatory duties, 'fighting injustice and inequality', were necessary before another campaign could be launched, and so it pressed the volunteer to 'GET THIS TECHNICOLOUR FILM OUT OF YOUR MIND now, it is unrealistic, stupid, childish.'⁹¹ The author of this edition was attempting to convey a particular political product, in line with the Marxist Republican view, that agitational activity was a prerequisite to any future campaign. The manner in which it was packaged clearly played on a number of possible social motives and cultural tropes; the prestigious badge of being a 'revolutionary' could not be worn, it argued, by those immature enough to believe that it was simply a case of soldiering.

In studying revolutionary organisations, the social motives of recruits, and their organisational sub-culture, should not be overlooked. Terrorist studies scholar, Max Abrahms, has asserted that people participate in such organisations purely for social reasons. His argument is based on the natural systems model, devised by Chester Barnard, which drew a line between the organisation's goals and those of its members. Instead members are said to participate for personal inducements: a sense of solidarity, challenges, excitement, and above all friendship. In arguing this position, Abrahms was discrediting the strategic model which, in short, placed emphasis on political considerations.⁹² Despite his iconoclastic attempt, Abrahms has not managed to overturn the strategic model, rather, as Chenoweth, Nicholas Miller, and Elizabeth

⁹¹ Hanley, 'The IRA's "An tOglach"', 51.

⁹² Max Abrahms, 'What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy', *International Security*, 32 (2008), 80, 94-5, 100-1.

McClellan, have responded, the intervention has shown that scholars need to take more seriously the often-complicated interests of the rank-and-file.⁹³ Emphasis is now placed on a multiplicity of motives, political and social.⁹⁴

In order to sell a republican political product, it had to be marketed in a revolutionary way. Republican leaders were clearly conscious of this as they often sought to convince their audience by presenting their particular revolution as the path of greatest resistance (see figure 1). Goulding, in his Bodenstown oration of 1967, unveiled a revolutionary mountain which could only be surmounted by those possessing a revolutionary resolve. The 'gruelling work' of organised resistance, he said, would separate the revolutionaries from the romantics. Lambasting the romantics as follows:

'It isn't easy to admit to one's self that one is tired, that others must come forward. It isn't easy to state that one hankers for a quick, glory-full military victory with none of the painful, slow, gruelling work necessary to create the situation where we can grasp this victory. This is not any longer a movement for dream-filled romantics... This movement has room only for revolutionaries, for radicals, for men with a sense of urgent purpose who are aware of realities...'⁹⁵

Goulding knew that the mountainous task ahead, while terrifying at first, would delight those looking for a challenge. In rhetorical terms, he was attempting to move republicans over to his side of the debate. Simply outlining his Marxist republican blueprint was unlikely to win people over, he had to engage them by asking 'were you up to the task?'. According to Adams, Goulding managed to at least win over one person that day, the young Belfast republican, Joe McCann, who 'was quite taken by it'.⁹⁶

One recurrent theme in this republican rhetoric is gender. More precisely, the claim that becoming a revolutionary was something only 'real men' could accomplish. The concept of patriarchal militarism envisaged men saving women. This understanding was inherited from the early twentieth century. For example, the cartoonist Gordon Brewster in 1919 drew the Irish nation as a woman deprived of her 'place in the sun' by the menacing English lion (see Figure 2). The image was replicated in republican propaganda during the 1960s and 70s. More specifically, Ireland was depicted as a mother in need of saving. The first 1971 edition of *Republican News*

⁹³ Erica Chenoweth, Nicholas Miller, Elizabeth McClellan, Hillel Frisch, Paul Staniland, Max Abrahms, 'What Makes Terrorists Tick', *International Security*, 33 (2009), 186.

⁹⁴ Richard English, *Does Terrorism Work? A History* (Oxford, 2016), 36-8, 111, 142.

⁹⁵ *United Irishman*, July 1967. Some years later, in interview, Ó Brádaigh was to invert the language, saying that Goulding should have walked away, 'if you're tired, Jesus, like, just opt out'. White, *Out of the Ashes*, 65.

⁹⁶ Gerry Adams, *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography* (Dublin, 2017), 82.

contained a lengthy article entitled 'Mother Ireland', who was stranded and in need of rescue, and it ended with the following: 'So let my pleas be heard- give my children back to me...'.⁹⁷ A subsequent edition was to stress the supportive role that republican women were to play, 'We believe in the ideals of our men. We follow them where they lead giving support and help at all times and in all places.'⁹⁸ This cultural mould also stemmed from the late nineteenth century attempt to define 'true womanhood'. As shown by Edwin Coomasaru's research, 'true womanhood' was encapsulated in the figure of the 'handmaiden', clean, domestic-bound, and caregiving. Social change was to occur during the Troubles, but it was slow.⁹⁹ As a result, while republican women were to fight as volunteers and act as auxiliaries in the Cumann na mBan, their internal influence was restricted by cultural marginalisation; the drivers were to be men.

Internal scrutiny was underpinned by social and cultural definitions. A 'revolutionary' was understood to be a dedicatory and resolute activist. Signs of individualism were not only condemned but viewed as potentially lethal for the revolutionary organisation; any elitist politician could, it was held, easily be seduced by the prospect of self-promotion.¹⁰⁰ Gerry Brannigan, under the pseudonym Vindicator, was to address this very theme in a February 1976 article. He wrote 'The "personality cult" (or self-promotion), is symptomatic of the 'professional politician' who tends to view the political situation in terms of personal gain, rather than the overall objectives of the organisation to which he belongs, and is a characteristic easily exploited by imperialistic and capitalistic interests.'¹⁰¹ Republican leaders were, thus, scrutinized for signs of individualism, or for that matter any other weakness that could impede their directive task. Alcoholism (drink driving), sexual promiscuity, and lavish expenditure were all possible flaws that could be used to discredit and marginalise. This often led to concealment, as recorded by ex-Provisional Maria McGuire, PIRA leader O'Connell 'wasn't worried by the newspaper reports of how many beds had been used, so long as they didn't discover all the whiskey bottles underneath them!'¹⁰² Not only was the IRA a secret to the outside world but its members had to keep personal secrets from one another, or risk being discredited.

⁹⁷ *Republican News*, December-January 1971.

⁹⁸ *Republican News*, March 1971.

⁹⁹ *Irish Times*, 1 September 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Eamon Collins and Mick McGovern, *Killing Rage* (London, 1997), 206-7, 235.

¹⁰¹ *Republican News*, 14 February 1976.

¹⁰² McGuire, *To Take Arms*, 54.



Figure 1: The goliath task facing republicans. *Republican News*, May 1971.

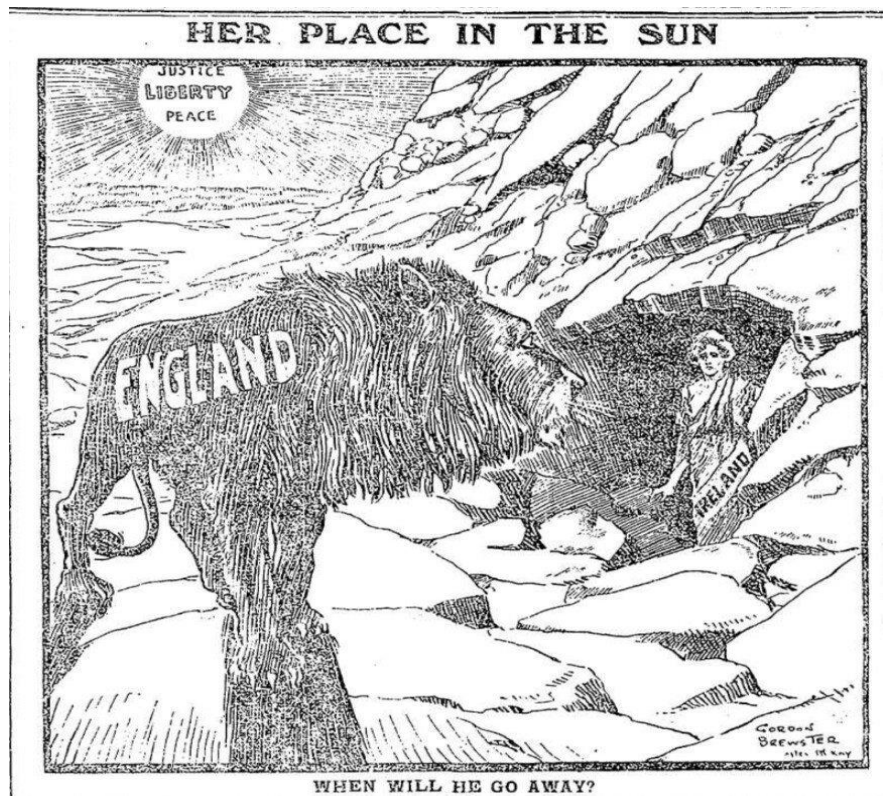


Figure 2: Ireland deprived of her place in the sun. *Evening Herald*, 24 August 1919.

III

The Logic

Internal divisions are often presented as the cause of splits. This is a most logical explanation; highly divergent interests cannot be satisfied within the parameters of one organisation. It is maintained that internal fissiparity causes relations to breakdown, and once tensions reach breaking-point splintering becomes an 'inevitable' outcome.¹⁰³ This dissertation, however, suggests that splintering was a second-rate strategic choice, taken from a position of internal weakness. The first-rate course of action was to gain control of that vehicle by playing the internal game.

The breaking-point interpretation lacks a degree of precision as internal divisions were often realised long before the, supposedly, destined split was to occur. The answer given to explain the conspicuous temporal gap is that overtime tensions were exacerbated, as John F. Morrison has entitled it, 'The tinder piles up'.¹⁰⁴ Morrison has provided the most detailed exposition of republican organisational splits. He argues that divisions lead to factions; if one faction's 'voice' fails to be received then a split becomes inevitable; competition then arises in the form of the mutual enticement of supporters in preparation for that destined split.¹⁰⁵ Others have also stressed the importance of external pressures in exacerbating internal relations.¹⁰⁶ This explanatory approach presents splits, as is so often done with violence, as a degree of conflict. To the contrary, within the IRA, during the 1960s, we see a high degree of tension throughout the period, with suspensions, 'verbal ambushes', and angry, even violent, thoughts being recorded.¹⁰⁷ In the case of workability, it was recognised in 1967, by both factions that they had 'no movement', militarily or politically. They had reached a most frustrating stalemate in which progress in either direction was being blocked, yet still no split materialised.¹⁰⁸ There is much to be credited in the current historiography. Morrison has, crucially, broken down splits into phases

¹⁰³ McGlinchey, *Unfinished Business*, 38; O'Doherty, *Trouble with Guns*, 55-6; Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, 49; Ó Faoleán, *A Broad Church*, 2, 19.

¹⁰⁴ Republican intellectual Anthony Coughlan produced this quote in interview with Morrison, see John F. Morrison, *The Origins and Rise of Dissident Irish Republicanism: The Role and Impact of Organization Splits* (New York, 2013), 39.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 26, 29, 40, 62-3, 66, 72, 75-6.

¹⁰⁶ The violence of August 1969 is frequently said to have 'exacerbated' and 'crystallised' internal republican divisions. John Bew, Martyn Frampton and Iñigo Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country* (London, 2009), 31. See also Taylor, *Provos*, 59; Moloney, *Secret History*, 68; Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 8-9; Ruan O'Donnell, 'The Provisional IRA: History, Politics and Remembrance', in Jim Smyth (eds.), *Remembering the Troubles: Contesting the Recent Past in Northern Ireland* (Notre Dame, 2017), 47.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Ó Faoleán, *A Broad Church*, 3-4.

¹⁰⁸ Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 64.

of activity. While Swan, Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, have undertaken extensive empirical research without which the internal picture would be barely viewable. I must stress that I am simply offering an alternative reading that employs new political tools of analysis.¹⁰⁹

Political conflicts are fundamentally concerned with control, in the case of intra-organisational competition that being the means of control. The political approach, forwarded here, holds that the relative levels of control held by competing internal teams changed the preferentiality of splitting as a strategic choice. In other words, splintering was always an option, its adoption, however, depended on the calculated effectiveness and availability of other strategies. Splintering, as will be shown below, was a risky move that had failed consistently in the past. Republicans learnt from this splinter group history and relegated the choice of splintering. This explains why in 1967 the factions decided to remain within the same organisation as they both possessed negative control, and the possibility of obtaining positive control, for both parties, was still very much open.¹¹⁰ Splits are, therefore, indicative of centralisation; the competitive process ends with one team obtaining the means of control, while the losing team is faced with the prospect of a difficult choice between internal marginality, an admittance of defeat by accepting the rival approach, or salvaging some control with the formation of a competitor vehicle.¹¹¹

Upon the realisation of divisions, internal, as opposed to schismatic, strategies were formulated. In 1965, following a number of policy proposals, including the end of abstentionism, it was recognised by MacStíofáin that a divide had emerged internally, his response, as he later recalled, was a most calculating one, 'I was hopeful that we could retain a majority opposed to the policy changes that were being pushed. And I was confident about how to do it.'¹¹² To successfully compete a plan was required.

The logic of playing the internal game was derived from republican history. The obsolescence of splinter groups, present and past, was noted by leading republicans. For Goulding, the failure of the Republican Congress initiative of the 1930s, formulated by Peadar O'Donnell and George Gilmore, rested with the decision to move outside the IRA.¹¹³ As a consequence of this reading,

¹⁰⁹ Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*; Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*.

¹¹⁰ Negative control denotes the ability to block new initiatives.

¹¹¹ Research on organisational splintering in the Middle East finds that a competitive leadership structure was the key determiner. See Victor Asal, Mitchell Brown, and Angela Dalton, 'Why Split? Splits among Ethnopolitical Organisations in the Middle East', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 56 (2012), 94-117.

¹¹² White, *Out of the Ashes*, 44.

¹¹³ O'Donnell and Gilmore had spent nearly a decade struggling internally. See Richard English, 'Socialism and Republican Schism in Ireland: The Emergence of the Republican Congress in 1934', *Irish Historical Studies*, 27 (1990), 48-65.

Goulding is said to have shown a most blasé attitude to the 1969 split, commenting that splits had never really worked in the past.¹¹⁴ In fact, this sceptical approach to moving outside the ‘official’ republican organisation was shared by Goulding’s republican rivals, MacStíofáin, and veteran Belfast republican Joe Cahill. MacStíofáin, in a later interview, stated, ‘I didn’t want to split the movement... they (Goulding and co.) could have shaken hands with us and said... we’re leaving to set up our own organisation’.¹¹⁵ In essence, MacStíofáin would have preferred his rivals to have formed a breakaway organisation. Still further, Cahill after resigning from the IRA, in the mid-1960s, came to regret his decision:

‘I believe(d) that if I resigned from the movement I could draw attention to what was happening. The opposite was the effect and I became completely isolated... I realise with hindsight that the only way to bring about change was from within the ranks of the movement.’¹¹⁶

The rationale here being that if you chose not to play, you stood no chance of winning, whereas if you chose to compete inter-organisationally, you stood little chance of winning.

This reinforces the validity of comments made by Marxist republicans that they welcomed the prospect of the 1969 split, so long as they were not the ones splintering.¹¹⁷ Splinter groups of the past, most notably Republican Congress and Saor Uladh, were localised, ill-funded, and ultimately short-lived. The two splinter groups in operation during the 1960s, a Cork-based Irish Revolutionary Force and a Dublin-based Saor Eire, were peripheral actors, with the latter principally concerned with robbing banks.¹¹⁸ The success of the PIRA between 1970-72 stands out as an outlier in a trend of splinter group failures. This success, without doubt, has much to do with the degree of that split and the unique context in Northern Ireland during that period. The republican players of the 1960s acted as they did in the belief that splits were a second-rate strategic choice, a ‘plan B’, the preference was to always play, and win, the internal game.

¹¹⁴ Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 148.

¹¹⁵ White, *Out of the Ashes*, 64.

¹¹⁶ Brendan Anderson, *Joe Cahill: A Life in the IRA* (Dublin, 2002), 158, 339-40.

¹¹⁷ Matt Treacy, *The IRA, 1956-69: Rethinking the Republic* (Manchester, 2011), 142.

¹¹⁸ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 17 February 1970.

Chapter 2: Internal Competition within the IRA, 1965-9

I

Keeping Score

Political winners and losers are distinguishable by their relative levels of authoritative control. The strategic acquisition of control must, therefore, occupy the political actor's attention. In contemplating the prerequisites to political success, Cabral envisaged politics as a game comparable to that of a football match:

'Each one can preserve his personality, his ideas, his religion, his personal problems, even a little of his style of play, but they must obey one thing: they must act together to score goals against any opponent with whom they are playing...'.¹¹⁹

The IRA was itself a political field in which contests for control could materialise. The predominant form of republican competition in the period 1965-9 was marked by its institutional nature. Localised splinter groups were active during this period, but their small size meant that the degree of republican fragmentation was limited. Most republicans were engaged in the internal competition taking place within the IRA. It is this form of competition that this chapter is concerned with.

The structure of the IRA was a tiered democracy. Every two years, in peacetime, a General Army Convention was held comprising delegates sent from units across the island. The delegates present elected an Army Executive of twelve who in turn selected a seven-member Army Council, the supreme leadership.¹²⁰ The C/S was chosen from among, and by, the seven council members. Once appointed the C/S hand-picked a General Headquarters (GHQ) team which acted as the administrative unit; divisional roles relating to publicity, intelligence, and procurement were filled. Crucially, the C/S also had a significant say over the appointment of local commanders (O/Cs). Sinn Fein, the subordinate political wing, was a metaphorical trailer that followed and supported the direction taken by the IRA. There was significant cross-organisational membership here and any notable divergence was neutralised through IRA infiltration. Sinn Fein was likewise headed by a High Council, Ard Chomhairle, that consisted of fifteen members who were elected at annual conventions, known as Ard Fheis. Local branches, Cumann or Clubs, engaged in local political activism. The role of women was confined to Sinn Fein and the auxiliary organisation, Cumann na mBan, until late 1968 when they were allowed

¹¹⁹ Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, 29.

¹²⁰ Extraordinary Conventions could be called to address constitutional changes.

to join the IRA. However, throughout the period the key leadership positions, the Army Council, GHQ, and local brigade staff, were to be dominated by men.¹²¹

The aim of the internal game was to secure positions of influence, principally Army Council seats, so as to determine the direction taken. In order to do this a process of authoritative displacement was necessary. This displacement encompassed two phases. The first comprised the creation of authoritative voids through marginalisation or structural changes. While the secondary phase of centralisation involved filling those spaces with allies of a similar republican persuasion so as to maximise control. The possible methods uncovered were as follows: marginalisation,¹²² structural changes,¹²³ 'turning',¹²⁴ 'conventional' moves,¹²⁵ external help and interference,¹²⁶ and, finally, coup d'états and the use, or threat of, physical force.¹²⁷

For the period 1965-9, a number of strategic phases are detectable. Marginalisation techniques of suspension, expulsion, and discredit, coupled with several turning attempts, were deployed in the hope of shifting the power balance. By 1967, however, these moves had proven ineffective as rivals became adept at defensive measures rendering the republican vehicle directionless.¹²⁸ This stalemate scenario led to the design and adoption of new competitive strategies. The winning move came in 1968 with calculated 'democratisation' motions being forwarded and passed in both the Army Convention and Ard Fheis of that year. This led to a shift in control, in favour of the Marxist republicans, allowing them to finally change the direction. In response, the independence-focused republicans were forced to formulate a number of last-ditch strategies consisting of a compromise deal, a planned coup, and schism. The specific 'styles of play' varied between and within the competing teams.

¹²¹ Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 24, 67.

¹²² This entailed unseating a leadership figure. Three different types are viewable: having an opponent suspended, removing the rival through demotion or expulsion, or discrediting them through revelation and rumour. Reference was made to IRA etiquette and rules, or their revolutionary fibre was questioned.

¹²³ If authoritative space was proving difficult to prise open, then it could be manufactured.

¹²⁴ This involved pressurising or persuading a former opponent to switch sides in the debate. It was often confirmed in a public manner.

¹²⁵ Motions were forwarded and debated at conventions making it possible for competing teams to tactically forward, delay, re-order or amend motions. Other, more sinister, moves consisted of manipulating attendance through location selection, extra-parliamentary activity, and denying rivals transportation.

¹²⁶ Outside parties with an interest in one team securing control could interfere in different ways depending on the powers available to them. Republicans often went looking for external help in moments of internal frustration.

¹²⁷ On rare occasions violence was adopted to achieve a redistribution of power. Political assassination appears to have been pondered at times but not enacted.

¹²⁸ Defending one's standing was just as important. Concealment, playing by the rules, and avoiding imprisonment were key facets of this.

With this competitive framework in mind, the micro-dynamics of the game can now be explored. In 1965, the Ard Chomhairle was faced with ten policy proposals formulated by a special conference that had been tasked with re-examination. It had been agreed by a joint meeting of IRA and Sinn Fein leaders that the Ard Chomhairle would discuss each proposal with the intention of recommending, amending or rejecting it. The assessment occurred over three meetings between April and May. Some of the proposals were clearly concerned with the insularity of the IRA and Sinn Fein. The most important in this regard was the ninth, the anti-abstentionist proposal. The recorded minutes, accessed by Swan, show that following a 'long debate' it was proposed that the 'Ard Chomhairle give no direction to the Ard Fheis'. This was to be defeated by a vote and instead the Ard Chomhairle recommended the rejection of this most contentious motion.¹²⁹ This episode offers us an insight into the nuts and bolts of political practice. The extended debate on the policy would have allowed the participants to assess the mood in the room. By bringing together circumstantial and historical information they could estimate voting patterns. Those who favoured the motion to drop abstentionism, most notably Costello, had evidently reached the conclusion that a positive response was unlikely. In that situation, the best they could hope for was a neutral response that would allow the membership to decide without recommendation. The leadership stamp of approval was all important in influencing the decisions reached at conventions, especially on a constitutional issue.¹³⁰

The policy document was to trigger a dispute within, and a phase of internal contestation was to begin. Goulding, in a reflective interview, identified 1965 as the year in which discussions had ended and standpoints were made. To raise political awareness, he believed that they needed to extend their 'guerrilla activities and tactics into the very Parliament itself'. He, however, understood the importance of the leadership recommendations in altering the receptiveness of the policies, 'The Army Council called a special convention of the IRA and recommended acceptance of the first eight points and that the ninth be rejected.'¹³¹ The special conventions of both the IRA and Sinn Fein had been called for June; by May Goulding knew that the likelihood of the key anti-abstentionist motion being passed was slim. The Marxist Republicans were immediately on the back-foot. Alert to the likelihood of contestation, Goulding attempted to delay the match in a pre-convention message:

'To the volunteers of long service to the Army and Republic I would address a special word. Think well on these recommendations... Recommendation number nine raises the burning question of entering Leinster House... With this recommendation

¹²⁹ Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 137-8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 139.

¹³¹ *This Week*, 31 July 1970.

in particular, an unemotional attitude is essential... You will debate this question with comrades and friends not with enemies.¹³²

This call for tolerance and unity crucially acknowledged that former comrades could very well become enemies.

Goulding's message was to fall on deaf ears. Rival teams were roughly formed, and the first offensive was to be mounted by the independence-focused republicans. MacStíofáin, O/C of the Cork/South Kerry unit, was elected to the Army Council at the June special convention in which a large majority defeated the anti-abstentionist motion. The Council was now evenly split between Marxist-oriented republicans and independence-focused republicans; Goulding, Costello and Garland were opposed by Ó Brádaigh, MacStíofáin and, most probably Paddy Mulcahy, while Tomas Mac Giolla was to shift between the two elements.¹³³ In his first Army Council meeting, MacStíofáin audaciously began by proposing that Roy Johnston's IRA membership be rescinded citing General Army Order No.4 which forbade membership to communists.¹³⁴

In order to best understand this marginalisation attempt, we need to break it down. The first point of significance is selection, MacStíofáin had identified 'where some of the new influence was coming from.'¹³⁵ Johnston had been appointed by Goulding as 'Political Education Officer' and in March of that year had begun making trips to local units to educate volunteers on 'political, economic and social issues.'¹³⁶ Goulding's plan to raise political awareness was, therefore, dependent on Johnston spreading the message. MacStíofáin had, therefore, successfully identified a key link in the Marxist republican chain. The proposal also carried weight in that Johnston had been closely associated with the Connolly Association and Communist Party of Great Britain while he stayed in London during the early 1960s. MacStíofáin had, thus, selected a lower-ranked target with a communist background who presented a considerable threat to his brand of republicanism. Any resultant internal investigation or removal would have greatly discredited the Marxist republicans giving credence to rumours of communist infiltration.¹³⁷

¹³² Hanley, 'The IRA's "An tOglach"', 52.

¹³³ White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 120.

¹³⁴ Seán MacStíofáin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975), 93.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Roy Johnston, *Century of Endeavour: A Biographical & Autobiographical view on the Twentieth Century in Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), 185.

¹³⁷ Sean O'Callaghan, *The Informer* (London, 1998), 38-9.

In addition, the time and occasion mattered greatly. MacStíofáin had been appointed to a new senior role, and new jobs often require a transitional phase of adaptation. Mick Ryan has written that he required a settling in period after his appointment in the early 1960s, 'My contribution in the course of the first year was minimal, because of a lack of experience.'¹³⁸ The move made by MacStíofáin speaks volumes about his forthright character. Ó Brádaigh, his political ally throughout the 1960s, had doubts about MacStíofáin's actions which he found brash and confrontational, resulting in hard feelings instead of political success. Ó Brádaigh preferred a covert approach, 'I didn't tell Goulding of my intentions. Nor would I come out brash like MacStíofáin.'¹³⁹ The audacity of the manoeuvre was part of the act, however, in that its potential success partly rested on Goulding being caught off guard and given little time to prepare a response.

The success of Goulding's improvised rebuttal appears to have surprised MacStíofáin. Goulding is said to have retorted, 'that if the individual in question went, he would go too.'¹⁴⁰ This episode initially appears a most confusing one, MacStíofáin was opposed to those forwarding the new policies and with Goulding being foremost among them his departure would have secured a quick victory. MacStíofáin had, however, deliberately targeted a lower-ranking member first in that he knew he had 'a certain amount of support.'¹⁴¹ Goulding's response was crucially an amendment; he added a second clause to the motion so that any vote over Johnston's IRA future by the Council would jointly be a vote of no confidence in the C/S. Goulding, thus, managed to swiftly wipe out the support base for that motion and defend his political ally. Johnston, in his memoir, confirms that Goulding was acting as a protective shield, 'Goulding accepted this and was prepared to defend me from attacks from the right-wing traditionalist quarter.'¹⁴² MacStíofáin's first day had not gone to plan.

To fully appreciate the success of this defensive manoeuvre we can compare it to a similar marginalisation effort that occurred in 1960. This earlier attempt targeted the then imprisoned C/S Sean Cronin on the supposed grounds that he was a communist and former Free State Army executioner. The statement was from Clan na Gael¹⁴³ and delivered by Paddy McLogan, one of the infamous 'Three Macs'.¹⁴⁴ Ryan then a member of the Council, as was Goulding, felt that it

¹³⁸ Michael Ryan, *My Life in the IRA: The Border Campaign* (Cork, 2018), 297.

¹³⁹ White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 123.

¹⁴⁰ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 93.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Johnston, *Century of Endeavour*, 169, 190.

¹⁴³ Irish republican organisation in the United States.

¹⁴⁴ Leadership triumvirate in control throughout the 1950s.

was a shameful case of McCarthyism. The response made by Ó Brádaigh, the acting C/S, was to suspend the decision for two weeks so as to give consideration to the allegations. In giving thought to these claims it gave them a degree of authenticity. The letter was eventually dismissed but Cronin upon his release was angry, he reported to the then quartermaster, Goulding, that the two-week intermission looked like an internal investigation. Cronin felt that even the act of reading the statement at the Council had lent it credence, no acknowledgement should have been given. Believing that his reputation had been tarnished Cronin refused any renewed leadership position.¹⁴⁵ The telling point here is that the handling of such allegations could discredit the targeted individual. Goulding may well have learnt from this incident as he managed to avoid both forms of marginalisation and, crucially, retained control over education.

In addition to attacks aimed at Johnston, Denis Foley the editor of the IRA newspaper, *United Irishman*, was being heavily criticized. Foley, a Marxist Republican, had been printing some provocative material and had overreached with an editorial in March 1965, entitled 'Live Horse'. It contended that, 'Every avenue should we feel, be explored; every shackle cast off; every forum used...'.¹⁴⁶ Forcefully espousing the anti-abstentionist stance so openly while it was still constitutionally enshrined was probably unadvised. His fate as editor was sealed, however, by the accompanying caricature which ridiculed his opponents by depicting a frightened republican holding back his fellow Sinn Fein member from entering a haunted Leinster House (see figure 3). Sean Ó Brádaigh, in his capacity as a member of the Ard Chomhairle, condemned the editorial, questioned the editorship, and had a letter published in the newspaper countering its recent publications.¹⁴⁷ Significantly, Foley was not dismissed he resigned. Resignations are a form of disassociation and sometimes a calculated admittance of wrongdoing. In this case, Foley's resignation individualised the incident; in sporting terms, 'he took one for the team'. Had Foley been reprimanded by the leadership for the article it would have signalled to the volunteers that anti-abstentionist arguments warranted demotion. The nuanced argument, that it was the manner in which these ideas had been conveyed, would be lost. Foley's personal initiative allowed the Marxist republicans to retain control of the editorship and appoint another editor of their choice, that being Tony Meade.¹⁴⁸ By the end of 1965, the Marxist republicans had managed to retain control of the key internal organs of the IRA: education, the *United Irishman*, and *An tOglach*.

¹⁴⁵ Ryan, *Border Campaign*, 276-80.

¹⁴⁶ *United Irishman*, March 1965.

¹⁴⁷ Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 131-4, 142; *United Irishman*, May 1965.

¹⁴⁸ Meade was to convey a similar political message, *United Irishman*, November 1966. For further evidence of Marxist republican editorial control see Johnston, *Century of Endeavour*, 195-6.

These mediums were to prove vital in changing the makeup of the rank and file. One piece of demonstrative evidence will suffice here. A new Dublin recruit of the mid-1960s, Sean Dunne, has since recalled his introduction to Irish Republicanism:

‘A woman knitting in the corner, someone... talking about the abstentionist policy, I didn’t know what the abstentionist policy was, I thought it was to do with drink... when they said we won’t enter Leinster House... I thought it was a pub... I didn’t find out for about a year what they were actually arguing about... I realised that the politics I was reading in the *United Irishman*, which was left-leaning... wasn’t in the Cumann I was in...’¹⁴⁹

Dunne was to become a key IRA figure and proponent of the Marxist republican position so we must be careful in taking this account at face-value. Ridicule is a political weapon and his account is satirical. Nevertheless, Dunne was clearly attracted by the left-leaning rhetoric being propagandised; recruits were reading James Connolly and Soviet histories not simply Tom Barry’s *Guerrilla Days in Ireland*.¹⁵⁰ Overtime many volunteers would become increasingly aware of the agitational and constitutional political options available to them, and their perception of what constituted Irish republicanism would alter.

In this early phase of contestation, it was still believed that rivals could be converted. This contest of persuasion consisted of a rival being isolated for political debate. MacStíofáin remembers being repeatedly approached by those who hoped that he would abandon his particular republican philosophy. The frequent occurrence of such incidents even led MacStíofáin to develop a specific debating technique.¹⁵¹ One such occasion involved Johnston attempting to persuade the devout Catholic MacStíofáin of the link between Marxism and Christianity by stressing the altruism inherent in each. To reinforce his point Johnston referenced the work of Italian communist Pier Paolo Pasolini, whose film based on the gospel according to Saint Matthew presented ‘Jesus Christ as a revolutionary in the Roman environment.’¹⁵² MacStíofáin was not to be convinced, ‘After five or six such approaches, these attempts to convert me were seen as fruitless, and each group stuck to its own position.’¹⁵³ The fixation with MacStíofáin is explained by his outspoken character. If the Marxists had managed to turn MacStíofáin it would have changed the perceived internal score and made a lot of members re-think their position. With persuasion failing, rivals then turned to pressurisation. MacStíofáin appears to have sought to make Johnston’s life as difficult as possible. In a visit to Cork on an

¹⁴⁹ Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 81.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; *United Irishman*, July 1967.

¹⁵¹ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 100.

¹⁵² Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 41-2.

¹⁵³ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 100.

educational trip Johnston was made to feel extremely uncomfortable in the presence of local leaders MacStíofáin and Gearóid MacCárthaigh describing it as a 'verbal ambush'.¹⁵⁴ In sum, influential individuals were being targeted in a highly personable way with the objective of extending the authority of one team.

The sheer extent of this internal scrutiny meant that players were keenly aware of etiquette and rules. Playing by the rules mattered, one misplaced step could warrant a suspension or expulsion. With this in mind, republican players sought to rile up opponents in the hope that their emotions would get the better of them. Once again, MacStíofáin was targeted. In his memoir, he states how being in a revolutionary organisation allowed him to develop 'a certain sixth sense about provocateurs and their methods.' His revolutionary radar detected two attempts. One ranking member after weekly GHQ meetings would try to be friendly with MacStíofáin and then lambaste the 'softly, softly' policies being advocated by certain leaders. The second individual, active in Dublin, would lament personal grievances and then go on to denounce the Army Council.¹⁵⁵ The method here was to try and first establish a personal relationship and then use that influence to provoke the rival to make a disloyal criticism. This provocateur activity also confused the internal playing field, friend or foe became difficult to distinguish.

Yet sometimes stepping outside the rules was deemed necessary. MacStíofáin was suspended in mid-1966 for refusing to distribute an edition of the *United Irishman* containing an iconoclastic letter by Johnston. In short, Johnston felt that the recital of the Rosary at republican commemorations was sectarian in affiliating republicanism with one particular religious denomination.¹⁵⁶ MacStíofáin instead read this to be anti-religious Marxism and refused to distribute the paper in his local command area. Significantly, MacStíofáin knew he would be reprimanded but not too severely. In fact, he was confident that he would be re-elected at that year's Convention and he was proven correct.¹⁵⁷ MacStíofáin had seemingly jeopardised his place on the pitch only to strengthen his support base. 'Professional fouls' were worth the risk if they gained attention and plaudits.¹⁵⁸

By 1967 no significant shift in control had been achieved by either side. In an August 1967 meeting, Goulding asserted to those present that there 'must be an end to indecision to doubts,

¹⁵⁴ Ó Faoleán, *A Broad Church*, 3-4, 190.

¹⁵⁵ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 108.

¹⁵⁶ *United Irishman*, June 1966.

¹⁵⁷ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 96.

¹⁵⁸ Moloney, *Secret History*, 75-7.

to questioning... We are not playing around for amusement's sake. We are not immortal and what is to be done must be done now...'.¹⁵⁹ With no authoritative room for manoeuvre frustrations had peaked. No progress had been made in any direction because no course of action could be decided upon. Despite the heightened tensions, new competitive moves, that were less personalized, came to be strategized.

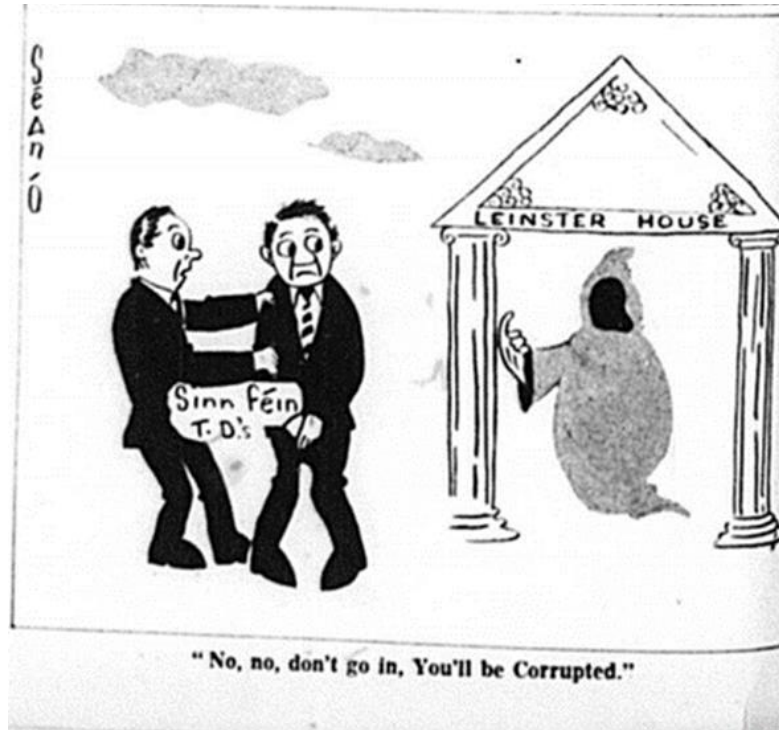


Figure 3: The haunted Leinster House. *United Irishman*, March 1965.

II

Structural Changes

The competitive breakthrough came in the Conventions of 1968. Conventions offered a distinct arena in which republicans could devise and implement political strategy. Motions and amendments were formulated beforehand or on the spot, and their specific wording and timing mattered to their success. All motions and amendments needed to be seconded before they were discussed, so an ally had to be consulted beforehand. For an impromptu motion to be seconded a gesture to an associate was sometimes required, such as a gentle kick.¹⁶⁰ A chairman was appointed to make sure procedure was followed. In fact, this appointment itself often became a tactical gambit; Ó Brádaigh came to realise that Goulding and Mac Giolla, now siding

¹⁵⁹ Brian Hanley, *The IRA: A Documentary History 1916-2005* (Dublin, 2010), 152.

¹⁶⁰ White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 133.

increasingly with the Marxists, kept asking him to oversee procedure so as to isolate him.¹⁶¹ Informal 'whips' were also active; Costello was on one occasion caught handing out edited voting instructions.¹⁶² Even tea breaks could become tactical intermissions.¹⁶³ Attendance fluctuated according to location, extra-parliamentary activity, and changing levels of success. Once in the political arena attendees were continually calculating the odds; as recorded by Johnston, one could grasp the 'political flavour' of a convention by those in attendance, the comments raised, and the success of certain motions.¹⁶⁴ It was through this competitive medium that the Marxist republicans managed to finally take the lead.

In changing the debate to questions concerning organisational structure the Marxists managed to out-manoeuvre their opponents. Up until 1968 the debate at these conventions had been dominated by motions regarding major policy changes.¹⁶⁵ If the dispute was to progress a more subtle approach was needed. The Army Convention preceded the Ard Fheis. This order mattered as IRA decisions took precedence; a motion passed by the IRA was likely to be replicated by Sinn Féin. At the Army Convention, a motion was forwarded to increase the size of the Army Council. On the surface, it was presented as a means of improving representation by giving regional leaders a chance to better influence decision making. MacStíofáin and Ó Brádaigh were immediately alert to the possibility that it was a ploy.¹⁶⁶ But counterarguments concerning logistics and security were unlikely to defeat a motion premised upon democratisation.

The actual political product, branded as democratic, had been carefully calculated with regard to size and electoral procedure. The council would be enlarged from seven to twenty. A new electoral scheme would see seven members elected by the Executive, as usual, while eight others would be elected at regional meetings, and a further five co-opted by the fifteen.¹⁶⁷ The Marxist republicans had a guaranteed majority as Goulding, as C/S, had a say over the appointment of local leaders who would be leading the regional meetings and elections. Because the electoral process was staggered a majority at the fifteen-member mark would consequently secure for them a majority of the co-opted nominees. In the end, there was a majority of 12-8 in favour of the Marxists, with notable figures such as Johnston, Malachy

¹⁶¹ A slim majority of four was not enough as the Executive could disband the Army Council and call for another leadership election. For this and the chairman tactic, see White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 141-2.

¹⁶² Johnston, *Century of Endeavour*, 242.

¹⁶³ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 136.

¹⁶⁴ Johnston, *Century of Endeavour*, 241.

¹⁶⁵ *United Irishman*, January 1969.

¹⁶⁶ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 110.

¹⁶⁷ White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 141.

McGurran, and Belfast O/C Billy McMillen being elected.¹⁶⁸ MacStíofáin was to concede that it was a clever move, 'the odds were now vastly increased against those of us who upheld militant republican separatism... That resolution cleverly outwitted the majority of the delegates...'.¹⁶⁹ Ultimately, with all the old seats of authority occupied and proving too difficult to open up, new positions of influence had to be made.

The Marxist republicans capitalised on their newly won advantage in the subsequent Ard Fheis. Discussion was dominated by a series of structural motions and amendments. Garland proposed that the Ard Chomhairle be expanded from fifteen to twenty-five persons. Thirteen including the president were to be elected by the Ard Fheis and the other twelve regionally. This succeeded by 48 votes to 37.¹⁷⁰ It is noticeable that in emphasising the need for regional representation the IRA's new democratic structure was to mirror the provincial Ireland envisaged by positive independents such as the Ó Brádaigh brothers. Any counterargument on democratic grounds was, therefore, difficult to mount.

With the structural changes secured, the Marxist republicans then returned to a discussion of policy. Garland rose to amend the planned anti-abstentionist resolution by calling for a commission to assess the new situation in Ireland. In seconding the motion, Costello made a vehemently anti-abstentionist speech.¹⁷¹ The subtlety of the move planned by Garland was nearly lost as a result of Costello's increasing impatience. Goulding and Garland later admitted finding Costello difficult to work with as his arrogance and abrasiveness often hindered progress.¹⁷² Recovery speeches, however, managed to re-brand the commission as open-ended and not a vote for anti-abstentionism.¹⁷³ With the motion eventually passing, the stage was set for a change of direction the following year.

III

Maximising and Salvaging Control

The shift in control was to mark another phase in the competition. With the Marxist republicans in a majority on the Army Council, the all-important leadership stamp of approval for constitutional changes had been secured. In acknowledgement of this, the moves planned by independence-focused republicans became far more daring. It was only in this context of

¹⁶⁸ Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 68.

¹⁶⁹ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 110.

¹⁷⁰ Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 219-20.

¹⁷¹ *United Irishman*, January 1969.

¹⁷² Patterson, *Politics of Illusion*, 116.

¹⁷³ *United Irishman*, January 1969.

centralisation that splintering became a serious strategic option. However, the preferentiality of splintering was not uniform. Key republican players such as Ó Brádaigh and MacStíofáin would continue to compete within the IRA right up until the defining extraordinary Army Convention of December 1969.

During this period, peripheral republican players concerned by the changing direction of the IRA came out in public against the GHQ line. Republican commemorations were strictly controlled by the leadership as such occasions presented them with the opportunity to communicate the way ahead.¹⁷⁴ However, this trend of commemorative leadership domination was to be disrupted in 1968-9 by members of the Cumann na mBan and veteran Belfast republicans. Public criticism was not tolerated, and those violating the rules understood that dismissals were likely to follow.¹⁷⁵ With that in mind, these competitive acts were only made if no other option appeared possible or effective in influencing developments. Lower-ranked members with little institutional authority were, thus, more likely to make such a stand. As stressed above, playing by the rules was vital if leaders were to retain their positions of influence.¹⁷⁶

The first act of defiance took place at the Bodenstown commemoration of 1968 by a substantial section of the Cumann na mBan. Infuriated upon seeing the Connolly Youth Movement's flag they refused to march claiming that it was communistic. Goulding, aware of their vocal criticisms, had already approached them, and told the dissident women they were not needed. Following this confrontation, the Army Council in autumn 1968 allowed women to join the IRA. Before the 1969 Bodenstown oration, Cumann na mBan, now separated from the IRA, released a public statement refusing to attend and lambasted the political direction being taken. Despite this press release, it is recorded that they did attend and handed out critical leaflets containing the 'Ten Commandments' from the re-examination of 1965.¹⁷⁷ In his research on republican women, Reinisch has challenged the general perception that republican women were passive. He argues that they did have agency and were active participants. Reinisch goes too far, however, in arguing that the Cumann na mBan dissidents were the 'first Provisionals', claiming that their open confrontation 'planted the seeds of the future split'.¹⁷⁸ This presents splits as symbolic acts of open defiance. Instead we need to view these acts in principally political terms.

¹⁷⁴ Bodenstown orations were dominated by Marxist republicans. *United Irishman*, July 1966; *United Irishman*, July 1967; *United Irishman*, July 1968.

¹⁷⁵ Taylor, *Provos*, 46.

¹⁷⁶ Also see Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 204.

¹⁷⁷ Reinisch, 'Women's Agency', 425-30.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 436.

Republican women were most certainly engaged in the political dispute. As one interviewee told Reinisch, 'we were unhappy with the political directions and so we said, as long as (the republican movement) is not back on the (correct) path, we have nothing to do with them.'¹⁷⁹ The women were clearly concerned with the direction being taken by the IRA leadership. However, as this comment reveals their ability to influence the direction was restricted. The competitive options available to them were limited as a result of their institutional subordination. They were not IRA members, they could not attend Army Conventions, and they could not compete for seats of authority. The only means available to them were public acts that condemned the approach being taken. Public stunts while they often succeeded in being disruptive exposed the actors to reprimand. Cumann na mBan were consequently prohibited from using IRA and Sinn Fein premises, and propagandised as having been disbanded.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, as Reinisch notes, republican women were 'used' by the competing factions.¹⁸¹ Goulding soon after the first Cumann na mBan confrontation allowed women to join the IRA in the knowledge that those joining would support him. Women did have agency, but it was restricted by the cultural mould of patriarchal militarism.

The second act of disobedience was to take place in July 1969. Thousands of republicans assembled in Mullingar for the reinternment of two IRA volunteers, James McCormick and Peter Barnes, executed on 7 February 1940 by the British state. Veteran Belfast republican, Jimmy Steele, used his oration that day to verbally attack the leadership who were metres away from him. He denounced the current direction as being 'more conversant with the teaching of Chairman Mao than those of our dead patriots'.¹⁸² Dunne, a member of the Dublin firing party that day, was so enraged by the speech that he contemplated shooting Steele.¹⁸³ Violent thoughts, however, did not materialise into violent acts. Violence was simply not necessary, other methods were readily available.¹⁸⁴ Two weeks later Belfast adjutant Jim Sullivan made a random visit to Steele's house and dismissed him under GHQ instruction for openly going against IRA policy. While the house visit was intended to be intrusive, an implicit 'we know where you live', it was not violent.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 428.

¹⁸⁰ *United Irishman*, May 1969.

¹⁸¹ Reinisch, 'Women's Agency', 421.

¹⁸² Taylor, *Provos*, 45-6.

¹⁸³ Treacy, *IRA*, 162.

¹⁸⁴ Gerry McCarthy called for Johnston to be 'kicked out... lock, stock and barrel.' However, violence was not adopted. See Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 94.

¹⁸⁵ Taylor, *Provos*, 46. Also see the case of Charlie Murphy's dismissal in Barry Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly: The IRA Border Campaign 1956-62* (Cork, 2009), 59.

The speech had, however, not been solely produced by Steele, other Belfast republicans of a similar generational background, such as Billy McKee and Cahill, had helped him to write it.¹⁸⁶ Many of these veteran Belfast republicans had resigned or been dismissed in the 1960s but were becoming increasingly energised by the changing political context in Northern Ireland. This offered Southern-based republicans, such as MacStíofáin, potential republican allies. MacStíofáin's verdict on Steele's speech was twofold, while he agreed with the political sentiments raised, he disagreed with the nature of the political act, he felt Steele should have kept quiet.¹⁸⁷ His dismissal was to further limit their capacity to compete internally.

The disorder and violence that unfolded in Belfast and Derry in August 1969, leading to the deployment of the British Army, offered an opportunity to those seeking an armed independence struggle. The argument made by the PIRA that the militarily moribund old-IRA ran away instead of providing defence has been countered by the research of Hanley and Warner; units had been deployed by McMillen and Sullivan. Warner has argued that, 'what the violence of 13-15 August did was provide a chance to breakaway...'.¹⁸⁸ The utility of the events is emphasised in an account given by PIRA volunteer Brendan Hughes, 'McKee always said, "This was our opportunity, the Brits are here...".'¹⁸⁹ Warner's argument importantly moves away from the view that the PIRA were formed out of a gut reaction to loyalist violence. The veteran Belfast republicans were most certainly energised by the events, but the nature of their consequent actions was strategic. In fact, their first course of action was to devise a coup. Once again, the preference was to always compete internally.

Reconstructing the variant plans and their preferentiality is no easy task.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the available evidence shows that splintering was a choice amongst others, and the timings suggest that splintering was a plan B implemented after other strategies failed. Plans were devised at a secret meeting in Belfast on 24 August. Those present were Jimmy Steele, McKee, Cahill, John and Billy Kelly, Leo Martin, Twomey, Jimmy Drumm, the young Adams, and the Southerner O'Connell.¹⁹¹ Those assembled were united in their dissatisfaction at the demilitarised state of the IRA. John Kelly, in a later interview, told journalist Peter Taylor that they had planned a

¹⁸⁶ Anderson, *Joe Cahill*, 159-60.

¹⁸⁷ Taylor, *Provos*, 59-60.

¹⁸⁸ Prince and Warner, *Belfast and Derry in Revolt*, 279; Brian Hanley, "'I ran away'? The IRA and 1969: The Evolution of a Myth', *Irish Historical Studies*, 38 (2013), 671-87.

¹⁸⁹ Moloney, *Voice from the Grave*, 48, 51.

¹⁹⁰ One dissident active during the period remembered 'lots of clandestine activity going on inside the movement'. Many of these machinations are unrecoverable. Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 94.

¹⁹¹ English, *Armed Struggle*, 105.

coup.¹⁹² The actual makeup of this meeting is itself revealing. O'Connell a close friend and ally of Ó Brádaigh was Donegal O/C.¹⁹³ O'Connell was, therefore, a link between this Belfast faction and those independence-focused republicans in the South. In addition to this, MacStíofáin had established strong contacts with disgruntled Belfast republicans in his role as IRA intelligence officer.¹⁹⁴ This channel of communication appears to have allowed the Belfast republicans to devise a thorough plan of action.

On 22 September, a contingent led McKee stormed into a Belfast brigade meeting. In carrying weapons, they transformed themselves into gunman. This was done so as to redress the power balance and give Belfast leaders McMillen and Sullivan an offer they could not refuse. The four conditions agreed upon after a tense discussion are said to be as follows: six veteran Belfast republicans were incorporated into the Belfast IRA staff; four members of the national leadership, including Goulding, were to be removed; a separate Northern Command was to be set up; and Belfast delegates were, apparently, ordered not to attend the special Army Convention arranged for mid-December in a move to suspend communications with Dublin. The Convention was clearly on their mind, however, as a three-month deadline was given.¹⁹⁵ Taylor has commented that 'Given the subsequent internecine history of IRA feuds, it was a miracle that there was no bloodshed.'¹⁹⁶ This is unconvincing, in trying to stage a re-entrance the actual use of violence would have been counterproductive; force was limited so as to ease re-entry. In this context, violence was always the last option.

Each demand needs to be examined closely if we are to best understand their intentions. The first, concerning the expansion of the Belfast brigade staff, was a means of re-entrance that allowed them to obtain local positions of influence. The second condition was of greater significance. The Marxist majority within the Army Council was four members strong. If four key leaders were removed it would reverse the discrepancy in power on the Council. A purge of Marxists was not envisaged; their plan was far more intricate. The four leaders supposedly targeted for removal were Goulding, Ryan, Costello, and Johnston. One account goes further in asserting that they posited Garland as a replacement C/S. Swan has stated that this suggests the Belfast republicans lacked relevant information.¹⁹⁷ This is unconvincing, Southern-based

¹⁹² Taylor, *Provos*, 60.

¹⁹³ White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 149.

¹⁹⁴ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 115-117, 128.

¹⁹⁵ David Sharrock and Mark Devenport, *Man of War, Man of Peace: The Unauthorized Biography of Gerry Adams* (London, 1998), 67; *Fianna Fáil and the IRA* (Dublin, 1972), 25.

¹⁹⁶ Taylor, *Provos*, 60.

¹⁹⁷ Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 312; *Fianna Fail and the IRA* (Dublin, 1972), 40.

republicans, as shown above, were in direct contact with them and could have easily conveyed such information.

Their best chance of success was to base their selection on those directly connected to August 1969, that being Garland and Ryan who dealt with Belfast officers seeking weapons, and weaker targets, such as Costello and Johnston, who were disliked by many.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, Ryan has revealed that MacStíofáin visited his house in July and said that he admired both him and Garland.¹⁹⁹ Fracture lines within the opponent team were identified and exploited. Garland was absent for much of the year in Glasgow distancing him from events.²⁰⁰ Whether Garland was in fact aired as a replacement is unverifiable, the important point here is that a wholesale change in personnel would have stood little chance of success, the isolation of a few influential persons was far more realistic. The third demand, the establishment of a Northern Command, would have allowed for a degree of regional autonomy weakening the Marxists degree of control. At this stage of the analysis, it is apparent that this was a most complicated strategy aimed at an internal redistribution of power.

The fourth clause, regarding attendance at the Army Convention, further complicates matters. MacStíofáin and Ó Brádaigh apparently tried to persuade the discontented Belfast republicans to attend.²⁰¹ Their objective was to make August '69 a topic for discussion at the expense of the major policy motions. A first-hand account from a Belfast republican would have increased its resonance. However, there was a problem, the delegation from Belfast would surely have been led by the O/C McMillen, a Goulding supporter on the Army Council, and possibly another person accepted by him. The incorporation of dissidents onto the Belfast brigade staff may well have sought to address this obvious problem.

More recently, a new piece of evidence has come to light. An internal memo dated 18 October, for Marxist republican eyes only, addressed the issue of the 'core of the "non-political" wing of the Belfast movement' who having stood aside during the agitational build up were said to 'not understand it'. It forcefully stated they had 'no right to influence decisions that are made from here out'. Most surprisingly, it listed a set of terms that Belfast would have to agree to: an immediate resumption of *United Irishman* sales and an acceptance 'that there would be no representation at the Convention for anybody who had publicly attacked the movement or for

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 296-7.

¹⁹⁹ Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 124.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 144.

²⁰¹ Treacy, *IRA*, 179.

any unit with such people in a position of influence.’²⁰² Steele’s Mullingar oration had proved very costly indeed, for it gave the Marxist republicans the grounds to prevent him and his allies attending the all crucial December Convention. Cahill and McKee have stated that their intention was to sever ties with Dublin and form a separate ‘Northern IRA’.²⁰³ In other words, a breakaway was their preferential choice. But one piece of evidence refutes this, a separate ‘Northern IRA’ was never formed. In fact, these Belfast republicans waited patiently until the Convention was completed before they set up an alternative organisation with leading dissidents from the South. The September 22 demands crucially kept their organisational position ambivalent. By late October, their possible role in the internal competition had been effectively blocked by the Marxists on the grounds of their public attack. At that point, with the odds of a coup succeeding low and the Convention unlikely to block the new proposals, plan B came to the fore.

South of the border, MacStíofáin and Ó Brádaigh were still manoeuvring internally while acknowledging the prospect of a schism. Ó Brádaigh recalls that during these final months he was ‘maximizing’ his position.²⁰⁴ The Garland commission had produced a document, entitled *Ireland Today*, proposing two key policy changes: a National Liberation Front (NLF) of leftist groups and the abandonment of abstentionism.²⁰⁵ These were subsequently recommended by both leadership Councils.²⁰⁶ The ‘general feeling’ from preliminary local brigade meetings was that the authority of ‘the Republic should remain with the Army Council...’.²⁰⁷ With the Marxist republicans having seemingly secured victory, MacStíofáin presented them with a compromise deal. He proposed that the motions only be debated at the Ard Fheis leaving the IRA to military matters. This was rejected as unacceptable. The Marxists were not prepared to give up control of the parent organisation.²⁰⁸

Despite these setbacks, internal competitive moves would continue up to the finishing line. Ó Brádaigh remembers signing a document drafted by Goulding for Irish American supporters. While he disagreed with its contents, he predicted that a failure to sign it would have resulted in his dismissal.²⁰⁹ Others were less cautious, O’Connell walked out of a Donegal IRA meeting and was subsequently suspended for transgression. Ó Brádaigh felt that O’Connell had made a

²⁰² Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 317-8.

²⁰³ Anderson, *Joe Cahill*, 182; Taylor, *Provos*, 60.

²⁰⁴ White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 148.

²⁰⁵ *Ireland Today*, March 1969.

²⁰⁶ Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 245.

²⁰⁷ Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 116-7.

²⁰⁸ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 130.

²⁰⁹ White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 148-9.

mistake, as his republican profile and rhetorical skill would be missed at the upcoming Convention.²¹⁰

When the Convention finally took place on 13 December, MacStíofáin still tried to influence proceedings.²¹¹ He proposed that the policy motions be re-ordered in order to prevent a long leftist debate on the NLF motion affecting the mindset of delegates.²¹² The independence-focused republicans also accused the Marxists of deliberately providing selective transportation. Mulcahy, from Limerick, and a few others were missing that day.²¹³ In the end, a large majority, 28-12, voted for the anti-abstentionist motion. The minority twelve sat together in the hall, undertook tactical discussions at breaks, and refused to participate in the leadership elections.²¹⁴ Ryan feared that MacStíofáin would draw a gun at the Convention and had a number of volunteers armed as a precaution.²¹⁵ However, the suspected coup did not arise, and the meeting broke up in an amicable fashion. Goulding approached MacStíofáin and said, 'I hope you'll have a talk with me before you do anything'.²¹⁶ Goulding may have maximised control over the 'Official' IRA, but, as this final comment suggests, he lacked control over the breakaway element. After the Convention, O'Connell rang Ó Brádaigh for an update, Ó Brádaigh responded, 'The minority is going to expel the majority.'²¹⁷ The competition had not finished it was merely changing form. MacStíofáin the next day held a meeting with the veteran Belfast republicans to relay the result and confirm the schismatic plan of action. On 18 December, a 'Provisional' Convention brought about the formation of the PIRA.²¹⁸

In sum, the split was the culmination of an internal competitive game in which one team managed to obtain the means of control so as to allow them to determine the direction of the IRA. The methods of obtaining and maintaining authority in this ordered institutional setting were notably peaceful; violence was contemplated but rarely used. The page can be turned in the knowledge that alongside reading guerrilla and socialist texts Goulding had consulted Niccolò Machiavelli's political manual, *The Prince*, to help him *maintenaro la stato* (maintain his

²¹⁰ Ibid. 149.

²¹¹ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 1 January 1970.

²¹² MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 134.

²¹³ White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 149.

²¹⁴ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 136.

²¹⁵ Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 144-5.

²¹⁶ MacStíofáin, *Memoirs*, 137.

²¹⁷ White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 151.

²¹⁸ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INSTUM, 1 January 1970.

standing).²¹⁹ Guidance on winning both external and internal political conflicts was needed to succeed.

²¹⁹ Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 298.

Chapter 3: Inter-organisational Competition between the OIRA and PIRA, 1970-72

I

The Expected Walkout?

With two rival IRAs now in existence, the matter of who was to control Sinn Fein remained unsettled. The Ard Fheis planned for 10-11 January 1970 was given upmost importance. In the month-long interval between the Army Convention and Ard Fheis, the inter-organisational competition had begun at a vigorous pace. A republican publication recalled that 'the scramble for delegates was only equalled by the scramble for (arms) dumps.'²²⁰ Each organisation was seeking to promote itself above the other.

The newly deployed British Army was keen to keep track of this republican competition. A meeting of OIRA leaders from across the six-counties had, according to British intelligence, taken place on 7 January in order to setup a 'Northern Command'. The impetus was a competitive one, it was hoped that its creation would counteract criticisms claiming that they were unable to offer armed protection to the Catholic areas of Belfast.²²¹ This initiative, as intended, would have been fresh in the minds of Sinn Fein delegates.

Most anticipated that the Ard Fheis would endorse the new policy motions. Delegates aligned to the PIRA had planned a walkout upon the approval of the anti-abstentionist motion. Their objective in mustering supporters was to establish themselves as a large minority and make a show of strength in front of the press, which was to be stationed outside the prospective venue, the Dublin Intercontinental Hotel. The plan then envisaged delegates congregating at a separate hall to form a rival Sinn Fein subordinate to the PIRA. With this in mind, Ruan O'Donnell has claimed that the walkout that occurred at the Ard Fheis was 'all but inevitable'.²²² This view overlooks the important point that the actual walkout enacted was not the one planned; the anti-abstentionist motion did not pass. Republican predictions were proven wrong, what appeared to be a certainty did not materialise. The walkout, therefore, needs to be revisited.

The walkout was in fact triggered by an ad hoc political manoeuvre devised by impatient Marxist republicans. The attendance recorded for 11 January session was 257 delegates.²²³ This near three-fold increase in attendance from the last Ard Fheis was a result of the extra-parliamentary

²²⁰ *Fianna Fail and the IRA* (Dublin, 1972), 50-1.

²²¹ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 15 January 1970.

²²² O'Donnell, 'The Provisional IRA', 49.

²²³ *United Irishman*, February 1970.

activities undertaken by the rivalrous republican organisations.²²⁴ After a four-hour long debate, the motion was taken and failed to secure the required two-thirds majority; although 153 delegates had voted in favour. Following this an impromptu proposal called for a vote of confidence in the OIRA leadership. With this motion requiring a simple majority, MacStíofáin rose to declare his allegiance to the PIRA Army Council and a walkout was staged of some 60-100 persons.²²⁵ The opinion held by Séamus Ó Tuathail, editor of *United Irishman*, was that 'it was a principle not to splinter the Republican Movement on the issue of a tactic'.²²⁶ In his view, a walkout could, and should, have been avoided.

Those Marxist republicans who favoured a complete break were concerned that Sinn Fein would become an anchor infringing the progress of the OIRA. Máirín de Burca published an article in 1986, with the aim of dispelling the 'misconception that the people who left the IRA and Sinn Fein... did so because the abstentionist policy had been abandoned.' She emphasised that what people often forgot was that the Ard Fheis defeated that very policy.²²⁷ This presented the independence-focused republicans with the opportunity to block the electoral strategy of the Marxist republicans. In defeating the proposal, they retained a degree of negative control not only over Sinn Fein but the OIRA. De Burca recalled that to 'everyone's astonishment the vote fell just short... the hall erupted into shouting and cheering and stamping of feet.' The anti-abstentionist group, to which she was a part of, feared that this had 'starved off the walk-out' planned by their rivals. Dennis Cassin, an Armagh delegate, and close associate of Costello, then waited for a lull between resolutions, took hold of the microphone, and in a 'thunderous voice' proposed a vote of allegiance to the Official Army Council. The motion had been deliberately manufactured to trigger a walkout by the Provisionals, as de Burca recalled, so that 'Each group was free to pursue its own politics without having to placate a dissident rump.'²²⁸ Full control could only be secured following a complete severance.²²⁹

The Marxist republicans needed Sinn Fein more than the Provisionals. MacStíofáin's proposed compromise deal, mentioned in the last chapter, had crucially focused on control of the IRA. An opportunity to severely disrupt the Marxist republicans' agitational plans, without hindering the

²²⁴ Some hundred delegates were present at the late 1968 Ard Fheis. See Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 220.

²²⁵ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 15 January 1970.

²²⁶ *United Irishman*, February 1970.

²²⁷ The topic had been raised in 1986 as a result of the PIRA split of that year. TNA, FCO 87/2320, Press Extract, When a Split was Last on the Agenda, Sunday Times, 2 November 1986.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Schismatic strategies were not favoured by all. In February, British intelligence received a report that Johnston had met Ó Brádaigh in Donegal at which the possibility of a reconciliation was discussed. TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INSTUM, 26 February 1970.

PIRA's militaristic agenda, had presented itself. In realisation of this, Cassin moved to cut loose those who could further prevent the OIRA's change in direction.

II

Framing the Split

With the split complete, competing republican narratives were propagandised. Each republican organisation sought to define events according to their particular interpretative scheme. As Prince and Warner have stated, 'The struggle to shape how an event is described and interpreted- to control the narrative- is an integral part of the event itself.'²³⁰ This analysis stems from Paul Brass's research on Hindu-Muslim riots that disaggregates political acts into three interlinked phases: preparation, enactment, and interpretation.²³¹ The 1969 IRA split was planned, enacted, and its meaning contested.

The OIRA presented the split as a Fianna Fail²³² plot. Multiple press releases were made by the Officials in an attempt to assert their story.²³³ Leading Belfast OIRA member McMillen, in his 1973 Bodenstown oration, weaved the split into a narrative of imperialistic manipulation. He stated that the imperialist forces had needed 'a new Catholic sectarian force' to retain their hold over Ireland. The August 'pogroms' had been instigated by the forces of sectarianism who manufactured, and fed off, communal divisions. The Dublin government then played 'their part in the imperialist plot' by fuelling the sectarianism with money and guns. He concluded by saying:

'Thus the Provisionals were born, and the mindless violence and senseless sectarianism which followed their birth fitted perfectly into the plans of the imperialists.'²³⁴

This OIRA narrative depicted the split as having been manufactured by the forces of imperialism, making its offspring, the Provisionals, an imperialist tool used to exacerbate sectarianism at the expense of unification, namely class unity.²³⁵ To the contrary, Matt Treacy's research has compellingly shown that the Dublin government did not feel threatened by some 'mythical leftist threat'.²³⁶ Following the violence of 13-15 August, three Fianna Fail ministers had been given the task of dealing with the North in possession of a sizeable Grant-in-Aid fund. These

²³⁰ Prince and Warner, *Belfast and Derry in Revolt*, 155.

²³¹ Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (London, 2003), 305-327.

²³² Fianna Fail is the Southern 'Irish republican' political party formed by Eamon De Valera, in 1926, following a split from Sinn Fein.

²³³ FCO 33/1197, Press Extract, Press Release from [Official] Sinn Fein; *United Irishman*, April 1971.

²³⁴ *Liam McMillen: Separatist, Socialist, Republican* ([Official] Sinn Fein, 1976).

²³⁵ Also publicised in the pamphlet: *Fianna Fail and the IRA Connection* (Dublin, 1972).

²³⁶ Treacy, *IRA*, 174.

ministers, along with an Irish Army intelligence officer, contacted IRA members, including Goulding and Ryan, offering money to help defend the North. The narrative constructed by the Officials asserts that the money was selectively given to dissidents as part of an attempt to split the IRA. To the contrary, Treacy has highlighted that money was offered and transferred to Goulding and OIRA members in the North.²³⁷ External interference by outside forces was always a possible factor in internal developments. However, the lack of selectivity and incentive here suggests that Fianna Fail's involvement was spun by the Officials in order to undermine the PIRA. In fact, the Marxist republicans, believing a split to be likely, had, in autumn 1969, begun preparing their narrative. Articles in *United Irishman* were published warning readers to beware of Fianna Fail's 'tainted gold' and an *Evening Standard* article referred to Fianna Fail intervention.²³⁸

The PIRA's narrative mirrored the Official's in that it placed emphasis on the influence of external forces in causing the split. Ó Brádaigh, in a 1970 interview, claimed that the Goulding leadership were 'taking directions from the outside'.²³⁹ In its first edition, *An Phoblacht* stressed that the split had been caused by 'An Attempt to Take Over the Republican Movement'.²⁴⁰ This theme of outside 'masterminding' was reinforced in a most vehement article, in the *Republican News*, which declared that 'Gradually into executive positions both in the IRA and Sinn Fein the Red agents infiltrated... Young men and girls were brainwashed...'.²⁴¹ The split, according to the PIRA, was an act of purification in which the IRA was salvaged from an alien communistic element masquerading itself as republican.

These narratives had important consequences, especially in securing Irish American support. Most Irish American republicans were staunchly anti-communist and anti-Free State. The competing republican interpretations of the split were, therefore, partly aimed at winning Irish American funds and weapons. It was recorded by British intelligence, in May 1970, that the Irish organisations in America, except for one, were financially supporting the PIRA. It explained that the Officials were finding it difficult to raise funds because of their communist affiliations.²⁴² In fact, Goulding had tried to curtail this possibility by making a trip to America in December 1969 where he declared, at a Convention of the Clan na Gael, that Fianna Fail had seduced members

²³⁷ Ibid. 169-177.

²³⁸ For a secondary discussion see Treacy, *IRA*, 175. The primary material is: *Evening Standard*, 14 October 1969; *United Irishman*, November 1969.

²³⁹ FCO 33/1197, Press Extract, This Week, August 18, 1970.

²⁴⁰ *An Phoblacht*, February 1970.

²⁴¹ *Republican News*, June 1970.

²⁴² WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INSTUM, May 14, 1970.

of the IRA. Through narration the rival IRAs were competing to win the allegiance of their Irish American counterparts who, distanced by the Atlantic, were reliant on such stories to determine their allegiances.²⁴³

A 'heliocentric' pattern is evident in these republican narratives. Moments of open divergence that run contrary to their proclamation of national unity are accounted for by recourse to some conspirator. There is a parallel here to the accounts collected by Ted Swedenburg in his study of the Palestinian *thawra* (revolt) of 1936-9. His interviewees repeatedly referred to intrigues against the Palestinians as a means of explaining their failure to fulfil their national objective.²⁴⁴ Patrick Wright coined this type of historical thinking 'heliocentric'; it is a 'history which cuts in from above'.²⁴⁵ This heliocentrism is a reflection of their belief in imperialism, when events do not correspond with nationalist logic some external, often hidden, actor is mentioned as denying them their righteous future.

III

Fragmentation and Decentralisation

In an August 1974 interview, Goulding gave an assessment of the 1969 split, 'We had the Provisional split. But for two or three years before that we had the foot-dragging', he went on to say that the split 'was a positive help in that it helped clear the deck of all the flotsam and jetsam that was in our way.' Within the space of a few sentences, Goulding came to contradict this positive appraisal remarking that, 'they finally broke away and started the physical-force campaign, and they constituted another obstacle.'²⁴⁶ These comments are vital to understanding the significance of fragmentation.²⁴⁷ The maximal level of control, as demonstrated by Goulding's comment, could only be achieved by no split taking place. Controlling and limiting the actions of organisational rivals was a difficult task. Theoretically, fragmentation could have been avoided. Two possible scenarios come to mind: the losers remaining within the confines of the original organisation, subordinate to the winners; or alternatively, the dismissal of the losers without a splinter group being formed.²⁴⁸ In late 1969,

²⁴³ Niall O Dochartaigh, "'Sure, it's hard to keep up with the splits here": Irish-American Responses to the Outbreak of Conflict in Northern Ireland 1968-74', *Irish Political Studies*, 10 (1995), 148.

²⁴⁴ Ted Swedenburg, *Memoirs of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayetteville, 2003), 144.

²⁴⁵ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford, 2009), 191.

²⁴⁶ *Inside the IRA* (Philadelphia, 1974), 18.

²⁴⁷ Fragmentation is a continuum, the number of organisations, their relative power, and the regulation of relations are all factors. See Bakke, Cunningham and Seymour, 'Plague of Initials', 266.

²⁴⁸ A split was avoided in 1962. See White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 110-4.

of course, the losing faction undermined this ideal situation for the Marxist republicans by creating a rival organisation. In doing this, the competition was extended and qualitatively transformed.

The form of the 1969 split mattered greatly in the extent to which it fragmented republican politics. Previous splinter groups had failed because they relied on a localised support base and struggled to be heard above the IRA. The Irish Revolutionary Force, that had emerged in the early 1960s, was geographically circumscribed to Cork and failed to effectively extend its authoritative reach beyond that area. Saor Uladh, formed in the early 1950s, after the expulsion of prominent east Tyrone republican Liam Kelly, epitomised this localised trend. This organisation had a distinctive Northern complexion with most of the East Tyrone and South Derry IRA units following Kelly. By 1959, it had run out of fuel having been largely reliant on the local popularity of Kelly who emigrated to America.²⁴⁹ Interorganisational competition was, therefore, always a risky choice. The 'Official' IRA had a national framework in place and a symbolic gravitational pull difficult to rival. The PIRA, in contrast to the splinter groups outlined above, was from its infancy a cross-border organisation. This best explains the patience shown by veteran Belfast republicans in the autumn of 1969. Had the Belfast faction broken away by itself the chances of it succeeding would have been minimal. Gearóid Ó Faoleán has emphasised that without the material and logistical support of republicans in the South, the PIRA would have been unable to sustain its campaign for more than a year.²⁵⁰ The Northerners were reliant on the training camps, safe houses, bomb factories, and weapons the Southern republicans had to offer. Conversely, those Southern-based republicans, whose principal support base was in the rural Western counties, such as Ó Brádaigh, needed allies living in the destabilised urban areas of the North from which a new campaign could be launched. Thus, in order to best compete inter-organisationally they formed a coalition.

Republican fragmentation converged with the decentralisation of regional and central governance in Northern Ireland. The civil rights movement had called into question the democratic legitimacy of the Stormont regime. Beginning in late 1968, civil rights protestors took to the streets demanding that the political system be reformed. The demands made concerned gerrymandering, one man one vote, the Specials Powers Act, and the unfair allocation of housing and jobs. Protestors argued that provincial and local governance often ruled in favour of a particular section of the populace, namely the Protestant community. Fuelled by this sense of

²⁴⁹ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 33-35, 59-60, 176.

²⁵⁰ Ó Faoleán, *A Broad Church*, x, 50-54, 168, 172.

political injustice demonstrations were held bringing the protestors, sometimes deliberately, into conflict with the local security forces, and as pictures of bloodied protestors emerged the RUC and the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC) increasingly became another source of grievance.

During this period, the British cabinet were tentative and viewed the protests in social rather than political terms. This stemmed from the appraisal given by Northern Ireland Prime Minister Terence O'Neill, who believed that housing and unemployment were the central issues at play. Reforms proposed by him, therefore, fell short of addressing the issue of political equality. Some form of inclusive settlement which incorporated Catholics into the administration was required. In opposition to this, unionist organisations were mobilising people against the call for civil rights in the belief that it was a subversive IRA ploy and that the Stormont parliament was a democratically elected institution. With the proliferation of rival organisations, decentralisation occurred. It must be stressed that this was not a straightforward linear process; the appeal and authority of these rival organisations would oscillate overtime. In this decentralised context, the formulation and implementation of a reform programme was relegated below the task of restoring law and order.²⁵¹

During late 1969 and early 1970, defence committees and associations became key actors. Behind the barricades in west Belfast, designated the 'No Go Land', Sullivan, adjutant of the OIRA in Belfast, acted as Chairman of the Central Citizens Defence Committee (CCDC). The role played by Sullivan during this early period provides a crucial insight into the OIRA's strategic approach and how it was to be 'spoiled' by the PIRA's strategy of provocation. On 27 August 1969, the First and Second in Command of the Royal Hampshire Regiment attended an emergency meeting of the CCDC. The meeting was held in Leeson Street, in the Lower Falls road area, and Sullivan acted as the spokesperson for a group comprising representatives from across the Catholic areas of Belfast, including MPs Paddy Devlin and Patrick Kennedy. The committee were anxious about having not yet received a response to their conditions for a 'return to normality'. These conditions were as follows: the disbandment and disarming of the RUC and USC who were to be replaced by an impartial police force; the release of those who had recently been arrested; implementation of a 'Covenant of Civil Rights'; and, finally, the call in of all personal weapons including shot guns. Sullivan's control over this committee was limited; the CCDC was a conglomerate of political activists and residents who all demanded input.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Regrettably a short summary will have to suffice here. For a more detailed discussion see Bourke, *War of Ideas*, 43-117.

²⁵² TNA, WO 305/3808, 39 Commanders Diary, Report of a Meeting with the Central Defence Committee, 27 August 1969.

The extent of Sullivan's involvement in this committee and his cooperation with the British Army is striking. Despite the above demands not outrightly being agreed to, he appears to have remained hopeful that far-reaching reforms were possible. With this in mind, he was continually negotiating the dismantling of barricades and the re-entrance of the security forces. On 15 October, it was agreed by the Central Defence Committee (CDC) of the Falls Road that the RUC could be gradually re-introduced into the area.²⁵³ Following this re-introduction trouble occurred and Sullivan complained to the British that a particular Constable, named Green, would not be well received if he was allowed to patrol again.²⁵⁴ The message was relayed to the RUC and Green was no longer permitted to patrol that area.²⁵⁵ Keeping good relations with the locals was clearly a priority.²⁵⁶

However, Sullivan's cooperative stance was not favoured by all.²⁵⁷ British intelligence in late 1969, received a report, from a 'reliable source', that an 'extreme republican element' in the Falls road were criticising Sullivan for encouraging the people to co-operate with the British Army. It was their view that the British Army should not be welcomed, and militant action taken against soldiers. In contrast, Sullivan and his republican supporters argued that the immediate aim was to first secure reforms. Once that was achieved, it would be a case of the 'People v. the British Army' and an IRA military campaign would stand a greater chance of success against an 'Army of Occupation'.²⁵⁸ The OIRA strategy, therefore, depended on an avoidance of violence in the immediate term so as to allow for the implementation of reforms.

By January 1970, security force patrols into the 'No Go Land' had become the major source of grievance. On 15 January, a military vehicle responding to the report of an alarm at 31 Balkan Street was confronted by a crowd of some 200 persons. It was felt by members of the crowd that this was an attempt by the RUC and Army to patrol the area ad lib. British Army personnel recorded that the 'saving grace' was Sullivan who upon his arrival calmed the crowd and persuaded them to let the vehicle pass through.²⁵⁹ Sullivan had, in fact, returned a favour, in the previous week he had expressed his gratitude to the security forces for allowing him to deal with two cases of domestic strife without the involvement of the police.²⁶⁰ A symbiotic relationship

²⁵³ TNA, WO 305/4231, 39 Log, 15 October 1969.

²⁵⁴ TNA, WO 305/4231, 39 Log, 20 October 1969.

²⁵⁵ TNA, WO 305/4231, 39 Log, 23 October 1969.

²⁵⁶ TNA, WO 305/4231, 39 Log, 22 October 1969.

²⁵⁷ In November, Sullivan as CCDC chairman took part in meetings at the RUC station on the Springfield road and the Knock RUC Headquarters. TNA, WO 305/4316, 1st Royal Green Jackets, Battalion Historical Events, 31 March 1970.

²⁵⁸ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 1 January 1970.

²⁵⁹ TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Log, 15 January 1970.

²⁶⁰ TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Log, 11 January 1970.

between the British Army leadership and Sullivan had developed. Not only did Sullivan react to mitigate cases of confrontation but he also proactively worked to prevent them occurring. In a phone conversation with a British Brigade Commander, Sullivan said he suspected that bogus 999 calls were being made to get the police into the area and worsen relations. He promised that he would do all he could to prevent this happening.²⁶¹ Conflicts are complicated; a leading Belfast republican was actively cooperating with the British to defuse the situation so that reforms stood a chance of being discussed and implemented.

At the same time, unionist organisations in the Shankill were attempting to mobilise people in opposition to the security forces. On 20 January 1970, it was recorded that plans were being prepared by the Shankill Defence Association (SDA) to forcibly remove the RUC from the Shankill area. Reports indicated that the SDA hoped to hold a meeting at Argyle Primary School to formulate a plan of action.²⁶² Having placed watchers in Leeson street, loyalists concluded that the RUC were not patrolling key areas of the Falls and that the Protestant community were being 'hood-winked'.²⁶³ However, the SDA were not the only organisation seeking to assert itself. Residents from the Shankill in late January formed a 12-person representative committee, headed by MP John McQuade, with the aim of communicating their grievances to the military hierarchy. According to a local, trouble was likely to occur over any minor incident.²⁶⁴ On 24 January, police were prevented from carrying out an arrest in the area after a crowd of 30-40 persons intervened, exclaiming that if the RUC were unable to make arrests in the Falls then neither could they in the Shankill.²⁶⁵ In an attempt to defuse the situation, Shankill residents were given the opportunity to raise their grievances to security force personnel on 25 January. The main points raised concerned negotiations with Jim Sullivan. They urged the security forces to get behind the barricades otherwise the IRA would be allowed to build up their weapons stocks.²⁶⁶

The SDA, having refused to participate in discussions, enacted their expected confrontation with the military the next day. Charles Coggle, brother in law of the SDA Chairman, was identified as having masterminded the demonstration. A crowd had been formed by Coggle and in moving toward Unity Flats it was blocked by the First Parachute Regiment. In pinpointing Coggle, the British Commanding Officer (C/O) convinced him to ring his 'masters' and arrange a meeting

²⁶¹ TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Log, 15 January 1970.

²⁶² TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Log, 20 January 1970.

²⁶³ TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Log, 17 January 1970.

²⁶⁴ TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Log, 21 January 1970.

²⁶⁵ TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Log, 24 January 1970.

²⁶⁶ TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Brigade, Crowd Night, 26 January 1970.

between himself and them. Following a positive response, Coggle then helped to dissipate the crowd. It was suspected by the British C/O that the SDA had hoped to use force against them that night. This suspicion was strengthened when it was later learnt that several persons in the crowd had been carrying weapons. The SDA had seemingly hoped to contest the authoritative remit of the security forces through provocation and then 'retaliatory' violence. This strategy of provocation appears to have also been adopted as a result of competition with the newly formed committee. As the British C/O noted, while the crowd was behind the SDA that night, it did not represent the majority of those living in the Shankill.²⁶⁷ This was instead an organisation seeking to bolster its legitimacy.

It must be emphasised that these organisations did not embody the communities they claimed to represent. In fact, they often used violence against members of their own community to enforce their authority. On 28 October 1969, a shooting incident occurred outside MacKey's factory on the Springfield Road, categorised, in the British military records, as an 'internal squabble'. A Catholic civilian, Gerald Hasset, at 05:15 am appeared running from Springfield road bloodied from a fight and was heard saying that he was going to 'fix the vigilantes'. At 06:05 am automatic fire was heard and three minutes later he staggered into the street with several shots to the chest. All those involved were identified as being Catholic.²⁶⁸ Such co-ethnic violence underlines the point that the primary actors of this conflict were not ethnic groups but rival organisations who claimed to act in the name of particular groups. Those who disputed such claims were often dealt with in a most violent manner.

Following the IRA split, republican organisations engaged in a dual contest between themselves and the British state. Inter-organisational competition was distinct in that it concerned the control of streets and districts. The aim of this unordered game was to determine the behaviour of those living in geographically circumscribed areas. The specific geography of the split explains why republican outwards and inwards violence was to be mostly produced in Belfast. Of the twelve IRA units in Belfast only one remained loyal to the Goulding leadership. This was the Lovers Fall road unit under the command of McMillen and Sullivan, estimated to be seventy members strong. The Ballymurphy unit, to which Adams was a key member, took a neutral stance for three months before siding with the Provisionals. Whereas Andersonstown, Ardoyne, and New Lodge were from the start PIRA areas. The Markets, Short Strand, Twinbrook, and Turf Lodge were also republican zones of authority. It must be stressed that organisational control

²⁶⁷ TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Log, 27 January 1970.

²⁶⁸ TNA, WO 305/4231, 39 Log, 28 October 1969.

was incomplete, each republican organisation would overtime establish companies in every Catholic area of Belfast, and the degrees of control would shift overtime.²⁶⁹ In stark contrast, in the early phase of the conflict, the OIRA retained near complete control of the Creggan and Bogside areas of Derry. Consequently, relations between the republican organisations there were never as competitive. For instance, in July 1970, the PIRA in Derry was said to be 'Sean Keenan's one man band', with members at a mere 15-20.²⁷⁰ In rural areas, sides were often not taken, and if allegiance was given to one particular organisation it resulted from the provision of weapons.²⁷¹ With decentralisation and fragmentation most acute in Belfast, it was there that the republican competition was most violent.

IV

The Adoption of Violence

In November 1970, a British intelligence summary compared the situations in Belfast and Derry:

'On the IRA side, the current policy for the Londonderry/Donnegal groups continues to be one of non-violence within the city. Again to use the parallel of events in Belfast, the alleged influx of IRA groups has considerably raised the level of violence, and we must continually guard and be alert against such a manoeuvre in Londonderry'.²⁷²

A correlation was identified between fragmentation and the adoption of violence. Before delving into an analytical account of why outwards violence was adopted by the competing IRAs in Belfast, some scholarship must first be consulted. Recent contributions to the study of nationalist struggles have questioned the assumption that violence is a result of intractability. Lawrence, in a study of the Moroccan independence movement, has argued that violence was only adopted after a power struggle between nationalists was triggered. According to her, the specific trigger was leadership decapitation. The removal of powerful nationalist figures, the sultan and Istiqlal party leadership, in 1953, by the French, left the movement 'comparable to a boat with neither helmsman nor rudder.' A power vacuum was created, and multiple organisations sprung up to fill it. Despite sharing similar political objectives, they competed with one another using both outwards and inwards violence. In focusing on temporality, Lawrence crucially shows that contextual shifts alter the perceived necessity and appeal of certain

²⁶⁹ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INSTUM, 8 January 1970; TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 29 January 1970; TNA, WO 305/4230, 24 Brigade INTSUM, 6 September 1972; TNA, WO 305/4742/2, 39 Brigade INSTUM, 12 July 1972; Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 152-3.

²⁷⁰ TNA, WO 305/3355, 8 Brigade INTSUM, 8 July 1970; Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 51.

²⁷¹ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 29 January 1970; TNA, WO 305/3554, 8 Brigade INTSUM, 17 June 1970; Anderson, *Joe Cahill*, 189-90.

²⁷² TNA, WO 305/3359, 8 Brigade INTSUM, 5 November 1970.

strategies.²⁷³ In a context of fragmentation, some organisations will adopt violence so as to extend their authoritative reach.

A fundamental building block of authority is recognition, and violence provides a short-cut to achieving this. Bullets and bombs transmit political messages at a raised volume allowing them to be heard above a cacophony of spoken words. For marginal players, therefore, violence can often present a quick way to centrality. Politically relevant actors are a force to be reckoned in that they can dictate the nature and pace of events. This influence need not be positive, violence is often effective in 'spoiling' peaceful initiatives.²⁷⁴ Moreover, organisations employing peaceful strategies are faced with a dilemma of prospective marginality if a rival decides to adopt violence. In other words, once one organisation becomes violent, emulation is likely to follow. In sum, fragmentation, in producing an influx of organisations, changes the form of conflict and reshuffles the preferentiality of certain strategies.²⁷⁵

Another point raised here is that political actors in war are engaged in multiple contests simultaneously. No longer should we view civil wars as simply two-sided affairs; they are instead an entanglement of secondary and primary conflict(s).²⁷⁶ Examining secondary conflicts is vital to understanding when and why violence is adopted. Turning back to the specific case of Irish republican inter-organisational competition, Philip Beresford has argued that the rival IRAs engaged in a 'bitter competition to win the allegiance of the Catholic ghettos in Belfast', and that solely concentrating on the Provisionals, who were to later dominate republican proceedings, to the exclusion of the OIRA gives an 'inaccurate picture'.²⁷⁷ Prince and Warner have developed this argument further by stating that the OIRA and PIRA were engaged in a 'race for relevance'. The turn to violence, in their view, cannot be simply explained by an unalterable determination on the part of the PIRA to launch a military campaign.²⁷⁸ Violent strategies were being deployed for varied reasons and the OIRA, who favoured agitation first, were confronting the British Army violently by the summer of 1970 in an attempt to emulate the PIRA's 'defensive' operations.

²⁷³ Adria Lawrence, 'Triggering Nationalist Violence: Competition and Conflict in Uprisings against Colonial Rule', *International Security*, 35 (2010), 88-122.

²⁷⁴ O'Doherty, *Trouble with Guns*, 10.

²⁷⁵ Key readings here are: Kathleen Cunningham, Kristin M. Bakke and Lee J.M. Seymour, 'Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow: Dual Contests and the Effects of Fragmentation in Self-Determination Disputes', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 56 (2012), 69-75; English, *Does Terrorism Work?*, 30, 34-6.

²⁷⁶ Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 4-5, 364-6.

²⁷⁷ Philip Beresford, 'The Official IRA and Republican Clubs in Northern Ireland 1968-74, and their relations with other Political and Paramilitary Groups' (University of Exeter, PhD, 1979), 2, 303-4.

²⁷⁸ Prince and Warner, 'IRA and its Rivals', 271-6, 283.

Building on this scholarly literature and using new archival evidence, this section argues that the so-called 'defensive' operations enacted by the rival IRAs, in 1970, were aimed at accelerating decentralisation and gaining organisational recognition. These 'defensive' operations did not comply with conventional military rationale. Such events, as O'Doherty has stated, were not 'the pitting of one army against another for the sake of coercing an enemy with physical force... The gun battles were a type of propaganda theatre'.²⁷⁹ The victims of republican violence on such occasions may have been Protestants and British soldiers but the message was intended for the local Catholic populace. Before any guerrilla campaign could be properly launched a strategic base of support was required.

In the course of 1970, the OIRA's plans were to be rendered obsolete by an increasing number of violent confrontations in Belfast. As noted in the previous section, Sullivan was working to limit the occurrence of riotous and violent behaviour through a constructive relationship with the security forces. This was in line with the OIRA Army Council position. In early 1970, the British were informed, by a high-level source, that the Dublin-based OIRA leadership favoured a 'political approach'. They feared that a sectarian civil war of Catholic versus Protestant would be exploited by the British in the form of a federal solution for the whole of Ireland. For them, political success depended on the civil rights movement channelling the fight. This was reinforced at a meeting in Maghera, on 1 February, in which a strategy was devised to accomplish civil rights and proportional representation in Northern Ireland. One tactic discussed was the hosting of ceremonies where a covenant of civil rights could be signed en masse.²⁸⁰ An upsurge in violence, however, ruined these plans and forced the OIRA to take an increasingly militant stance.

The increased number of disturbances in Belfast appear to have been provoked and amplified by PIRA members. This was part of the PIRA's plan to assert itself as the most effective defence force and upstage its republican rivals. In March, Provisional auxiliaries circulated leaflets in Andersonstown addressed to residents; the message conveyed was an ominous one, 'the danger to our community is far from ended... we find that our people in this area seem to ignore the signs of trouble... the volunteers of the Irish Republican Army are actively engaged in preparation for the defence of the area in the event of a possible attack upon it.'²⁸¹ Provisionals were telling 'their people' that trouble was on the horizon and they were the force who would

²⁷⁹ O'Doherty, *Trouble with Guns*, 80-81.

²⁸⁰ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 8 January 1970; TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 26 February 1970; *United Irishman*, February 1970.

²⁸¹ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 26 March 1970.

defend them. At the end of March, two separate Easter parades to Milltown Cemetery were held demonstrating the strength of both factions in Belfast. The PIRA's march was roughly three thousand strong while the Officials mustered over two thousand supporters.²⁸² A contest for prominence was set to begin.

Following the Easter commemorations, two days of rioting, spanning 1-2 April, occurred in Ballymurphy. The first day of rioting was triggered by Protestant families moving out of the area. At eight in the evening, crowds of both communities gathered, and a violent confrontation ensued. Sullivan and Devlin made their way to the scene in an attempt to calm the situation but ultimately failed. What happened the next day confirmed to British military observers that the 'trouble was not spontaneous.' At three in the afternoon, seventy Catholic youths broke into the houses on Springfield road that had been evacuated by Protestant families. Shortly afterwards, women and children were moved into the premises prompting a response by the British Army to evict them. A local councillor, however, managed to persuade the occupants to return without incident to the Ballymurphy estate. This initiative bore the hallmarks of a pre-planned act of provocation, the speed with which women and children were moved in and their willingness to return without trouble indicated that some script was being followed.

Having heard the news, a Protestant crowd assembled at nine that evening at the corner of Springfield Road/Springmartin Road followed by a similarly sized crowd of Catholics. Approaching midnight, after the Protestant crowd had mostly dissipated, violence was enacted by Catholic youths against the security forces. Some fifty petrol bombs were thrown, and the British responded by firing 2 CS grenades and 104 CS cartridges. Of those arrested several were identified as having IRA connections; 'one man', the son of an IRA member, was caught carrying an automatic .22 rifle and 53 rounds of ammunition. On 3 April, the *Belfast Telegraph* received an anonymous call from a man claiming to be an IRA member who said that they had been close to using guns. Further evidence suggested that the Provisionals had 'in some ways organised' the rioting. A series of meetings, attended by known IRA characters, had been held in the Ballymurphy area during the previous weekend to discuss 'anti-establishment' and 'anti-Protestant' strategy.²⁸³ In republican terms, what is most striking about this episode is Sullivan's attempted conciliatory approach in contrast to what appears to have been acts of provocation, in particular the occupation of the vacant houses. The events further polarised the two

²⁸² TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 2 April 1970.

²⁸³ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 9 April 1970. Also see Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 70.

communities and the PIRA's organisational legitimacy as a necessary Catholic defence force was bolstered.

With the Provisionals surging ahead and the situation inauspicious to reform, the Officials responded by adopting a more militant tone. On 5 April, a 'Dungannon meeting of the Northern Command of the IRA' issued a threat to British troops. It was initially assumed by the British that this emanated from the Provisionals. However, to their surprise they came to learn that this announcement in fact stemmed from an OIRA Army Council meeting held in Dublin. At that meeting, Costello had proposed a 'Life for a Life' policy which was seconded by McMillen and passed by a comfortable majority of three. In making it seem as if the decision had been reached in Dungannon, the OIRA leadership had hoped to counter-criticisms that all their policies were made in Dublin.²⁸⁴ In an interview on Ulster Television, an anonymous OIRA member stated on air that the Provisionals were 'doing nothing about the present situation' and suggested that 'it may be 5 or 10 soldiers for every Irishman shot'.²⁸⁵ In announcing the potential use of violence, the Officials had been forced to partially jeopardise their planned campaign of political agitation.

While the Officials were speaking of retaliation, the Provisionals were proactively 'stirring up trouble'.²⁸⁶ A sequence of riots occurred in May that once again suggested Provisional provocation. On 9-10 May rioting in the New Lodge area replicated the Ballymurphy riots. After Protestant and Catholic crowds had confronted one another a 'fight' between Catholic youths and the British military took place. 'Battles' were waged along six different streets with 159 CS cartridges being fired by the British and a multiplicity of missiles, including two petrol bombs, being hurled by the rioters. Another night of serious rioting followed on 17-18 May after three fires broke out simultaneously across the city. Crowds deliberately obstructed fire brigades from dealing with the blaze, and with troops consequently drawn into the Ardoyne and New Lodge areas, rioting unfolded with 20-30 petrol bombs being thrown.²⁸⁷

These incidents revealed three observable patterns. The first relating to location; interface areas were identified as spots where Provisional provocation was most likely to occur and succeed. In making this assessment, the British correctly predicted that the Ardoyne and Ballymacarrett would be sites of future unrest. Spontaneous communal outpourings were not in evidence rather coordination and acts of provocation were required to mobilise people. 'Republican

²⁸⁴ TNA, WO 305/4235, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 15 April 1970; TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 16 April 1970.

²⁸⁵ TNA, WO 305/4235, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 15 April 1970.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 14 May 1970; TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 21 May 1970.

elements' had prepared the ground before rioting in both cases and exploited the resulting polarisation.²⁸⁸ Ballymurphy, Ardoyne, and New Lodge were also importantly areas where the OIRA had little to no influence at that time. Secondly, acts of intimidation towards civilians was in evidence. For example, an anonymous call to Northern Ireland HQ, on 18 May, claimed that Catholic Ardoyne residents who had helped the troops during the night had been threatened, and others who preferred to stay neutral were told they would be shot, and their houses wrecked.²⁸⁹ When authoritative recognition was not given it was enforced through intimidation. Lastly, responsive public statements were repeatedly made by the OIRA as they lacked control over proceedings. On 18 May, a joint appeal for peace was made by the Belfast brigade of the OIRA and CCDC.²⁹⁰ Once again, violent confrontations were polarising groups and slowly rearranging organisational allegiances.

In the summer of 1970, petrol bombs were superseded by bullets. So-called 'defensive' operations were mounted by both IRAs in a highly competitive fashion. Warner has done most to elucidate these events; he convincingly argues that the Falls Road Curfew was not a crucial turning point but a marked stage in the evolution of Catholic opinion.²⁹¹ Organisational allegiances and feelings of 'groupness' were situational. In acknowledgement of this, republican organisations were adopting violence to transform the situation to their advantage. An IRA document, captured in early July, instructed its readers to be proactive, 'Don't wait on a revolutionary situation to arise- get up and out and create it... "Violence breeds violence", "Reprisals invite counter-reprisals"'.²⁹² Furthermore, a new piece of archival evidence has been unearthed which offers greater insight into the PIRA's strategic thinking during that summer. As well as seeking to promote themselves above the OIRA they were also attempting to further accelerate decentralisation by prompting arms searches of loyalist premises in East Belfast. James Callaghan's fear that 'might both majority and minority communities turn on the British Army' was the PIRA's ideal situation.²⁹³

With the marching season approaching, organisations made detailed plans of action. A report was received in early June stating that the OIRA were planning to use firearms at Cupar Street to halt an Orange Order march scheduled for 27 June.²⁹⁴ Rival plans were also said to have been

²⁸⁸ Ibid.; TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 17 September 1970.

²⁸⁹ TNA, WO 305/4236, 39 Log, 18 May 1970.

²⁹⁰ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTUSM, 21 May 1970.

²⁹¹ Geoffrey Warner, 'The Falls Road Curfew Revisited', *Irish Studies Review*, 14 (2006), 342.

²⁹² TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 9 July 1970.

²⁹³ James Callaghan, *A House Divided: The Dilemma of Northern Ireland* (London, 1973), 23.

²⁹⁴ TNA, WO 305/4237, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 11 June 1970.

prepared by the Provisionals at meetings held around 13-14 June, and individual units briefed by 26 June.²⁹⁵ In advance of the highly anticipated events, a host of preparatory acts were utilised in order to heighten fears, these encompassed 'malicious rumours', 'threatening letters', and the placing of national flags in sensitive spots.²⁹⁶

Acting on the intelligence received, the 27 June Orange march was re-routed so as to avoid Cupar street.²⁹⁷ This minor adjustment proved futile. At 14:54 pm a crowd of 600 formed at Cupar street and by 15:07 pm it was moving down the Kashmir onto the Springfield road so as to meet the march. At 15:18 pm a confrontation developed at the Mayo/Springfield junction. A rendition of 'The Soldier's Song' was given by republicans and after one bottle was hurled at the parade, a stone throwing melee ensued. At 15:32 pm four rounds were fired from the republican crowd and two empty 9mm cases were later retrieved.²⁹⁸ This confrontation appears to have been an amended version of Sullivan's original plan; plain clothed military personnel in the Catholic crowd heard one civilian say, 'Don't worry, the right boys are up front'.²⁹⁹ At the exact same time a coordinated republican onslaught of the New Barnsley RUC station was staged. This managed to draw off an Army patrol from the parade who en route to the police station were bombarded with stones.³⁰⁰ Within the space of six months, Sullivan's approach had dramatically changed. In January he had been told by a British officer that a 'return to normal is inevitable' and that if he opposed this, he would lose support.³⁰¹ Now in June, in fear of losing support to the Provisionals, the OIRA leader was actively planning violent engagements.

The Officials may have fired the first shots that day, but these were to be muted by Provisional bullets. Typically, 27-28 June is remembered as the 'defence' of St Matthew's Church in the Short Strand area of East Belfast. The Provisional Belfast brigade O/C, McKee, became a republican legend overnight, suffering serious wounds during a shootout in the churchyard.³⁰² This PIRA operation was only possible, however, because British troops were distracted by violence in the Ardoyne area. Following the trouble on the Springfield road, opposing crowds had gathered at Hooker/Disraeli street. At 17:00 pm shots were fired from Hooker street and the first fatality was reported ten minutes later.³⁰³ Heavy fire then continued late into the evening. In

²⁹⁵ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 2 July 1970.

²⁹⁶ TNA, WO 305/4237, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 11 June 1970; WO/305/4237, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 24 June 1970.

²⁹⁷ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 2 July 1970.

²⁹⁸ TNA, WO 305/4237, 39 Log, 27 June 1970.

²⁹⁹ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTUSM, 2 July 1970.

³⁰⁰ TNA, WO 305/4237, 39 Log, 27 June 1970.

³⁰¹ TNA, WO 305/4232, 39 Log, 10 January 1970.

³⁰² Taylor, *Provos*, 75-77.

³⁰³ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 2 July 1970.

Ballymacarrett, East Belfast, trouble between rival crowds was likewise transformed into a gun battle when shots were fired in Seaforde street at 23:35 pm; with shooting continuing in the area until 05:30 am. Tied down elsewhere, the British military were not deployed into this area until 01:50 am. During the night, republicans discharged up to 1500 rounds. The victims of that day's violence were mostly civilians: five Protestants and one Catholic were killed by gunfire, and a further fifty-eight civilians and three soldiers were injured.³⁰⁴ The Provisionals had flexed their muscles and in doing so 'captured the headlines'.³⁰⁵

A week later, on 3-4 July, the OIRA emulated the PIRA's performance with a fiercely fought firefight with British troops. At about 18:00 pm, acting on a tip-off from a housewife, the Royal Scots Regiment and RUC carried out a successful arms search of 24 Balkan street, situated in the Lower Falls road area. A hostile crowd quickly developed, and the Army patrol was attacked with stones and bricks. A small PIRA company then escalated the situation by wounding five soldiers with two grenades. The resultant gun battle, however, was decided upon and carried out by OIRA members, who principally controlled the area.³⁰⁶ A demonstrative act of violence was required to forcefully transmit their commitment to the republican cause; no 'saving grace' was to aid the British this time. At 21:24 pm it was logged that the 'IRA intend to fight an all-out battle tonight. Barricades were pre-fabricated.' At 22:02 pm a curfew was implemented by the military for the Falls road area: people were instructed to stay indoors, or face arrest, and exits were wired off. Shooting exchanges between OIRA snipers and British troops went on into the night and early morning.³⁰⁷ During the gun battle, OIRA members were also frantically trying to salvage their 'more attractive weapons'. Once the British managed to effectively cordon off the area, a largescale search was undertaken yielding 52 pistols, 35 rifles, 6 automatics, 14 shotguns, 251 lbs of explosives, and 21,000 rounds of ammunition.³⁰⁸ The weapons haul was a significant one, but the traumatic experience endured by the residents felt like, and was easily portrayed as, an invasion by a foreign occupying force.

The Provisionals immediately tried to redefine this event to the exclusion of the OIRA. On 5 July, with the curfew practically ended, a women's march was instigated by Provisional Sinn Fein. Early that morning, notices were put through letterboxes about a procession from Casement Park to the Lower Falls 'in an effort to break the present curfew'. Great emphasis was placed

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Beresford, 'The Official IRA', 234.

³⁰⁶ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 9 July 1970; TNA, WO 305/4238, 39 Log, 3 July.

³⁰⁷ TNA, WO 305/4238, 39 Log, 3 July.

³⁰⁸ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTUSM, 9 July 1970.

upon gender; only women and children could attend, each carrying a 'loaf or a bottle of milk'.³⁰⁹ This march allowed the Provisionals to address both of their principal competitors: according to them, the British Army had 'raped' the Falls road area and women consequently came to rescue it.³¹⁰ Note here how the cultural mould of patriarchal militarism was used to discredit the OIRA. Men were traditionally depicted as saving women. In this case, however, the women's march was deliberately constructed to invert this equation.

The decision to implement the curfew had also been influenced by unionist politicians applying pressure in the intervening week. Following the widespread incidents of violence on 27-28 June, doubts had been raised about the military's ability to keep order, and demands were made for a re-arming of the RUC and a revival of the USC.³¹¹ In the aftermath of the curfew, relations between the military and Protestants markedly improved, it was noted that 'troops were more readily accepted in extreme Protestant areas'.³¹² Political actors on the ground understood that organisational support was never fixed. Efforts were thus made by the PIRA to undermine the British Army's newfound authority in Protestant areas. Sometime in late July, an important meeting between Lieutenant Colonel A.D. Myrtle of the King's Own Scottish Borderers and nationalist politician Gerry Fitt took place. Fitt informed Myrtle that as he was about to get into a car, in the area of the *Newsletter*, he was approached by a man and handed an envelope on which was written:

'K. Tombs(?) and Cyril Johnstone(?) next door. That is where they've got their stuff- we can't get it, it's up to you to get it.'³¹³

Fitt suspected that the man who passed him the envelope was a Provisional. In light of this, British military personnel made a number of observations. The named persons were identified as suspected Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) members, and Johnstone was located as living at 1 Woodstock Road, East Belfast. It was assumed that the weapons were either stored there or next door. With this in mind, they concluded that the republicans had used Fitt as a means of passing information onto them in the hope that the Army would search these premises. Fitt was chosen in this incidence for two deducible reasons: firstly, he was frequently in contact with the Army; and, secondly, it placed greater pressure on the British to act. As they themselves noted, 'it is important that we act on this if... there is an incident concerning Tombs(?) and Johnstone(?)

³⁰⁹Ibid.

³¹⁰ *An Phoblacht*, August 1970; *Republican News*, May 1971; *Republican News*, July 1971; Anderson, *Joe Cahill*, 207.

³¹¹ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 9 July 1970.

³¹² TNA, WO 305/3365, 24 Brigade INTSUM, 16 July 1970.

³¹³ The names are barely legible. TNA, WO 305/3792, 5 Log, 25 July 1970.

there could be nasty repercussions for the Army, particularly from Fitt'. In concluding that some positive action needed to be taken, they planned to inform Special Branch and have 45 Commando watch the premises.³¹⁴

Two other pieces of evidence may be connected to this. The Provisionals, at this time, declared publicly that if Protestants were attacked, they would offer assistance.³¹⁵ In trying to provoke arms searches into East Belfast, the Falls Road Curfew will have been fresh in their mind. Moreover, on 28 July, an incidence of 'IRA factional fusion' was recorded: a military patrol witnessed McMillen pick up, in his Volkswagen car, a badly limping McKee.³¹⁶ What was discussed between them is unknown. However, the timings suggest that the above strategy may have been ventilated; an attempt to turn Protestants against the British Army was in line with the OIRA's strategic approach. In this game of politics, the teams were constantly in flux; enemies one day could be allies the next.³¹⁷ To complicate matters further, hostile actors were using each other as tools to engineer certain ends. If we combine this evidence, it amounts to an attempt to accelerate decentralisation. An intelligence summary in October stressed that a rise in organisations made the 'imposition of central discipline difficult'.³¹⁸ This is exactly what the PIRA were aiming for. Loyalist paramilitaries hostile to central control would further destabilise Belfast, and any opportunity to extend their own authority into previously unsupportive areas would have been a bonus. This stratagem ultimately failed but its excavation is important for it demonstrates the political nature of the conflict. Confrontations originally interpreted as spontaneous incidents of communal outrage were in fact the result of planned acts of provocation designed by political actors to mobilise people.

During the remaining months of 1970, the Army managed to regain some support in Catholic areas. Aid provided by British soldiers during flooding in North Belfast, on 16 August, improved relations there.³¹⁹ Later that month, residents in the Ardoyne welcomed moves by the military to remove some barriers and cut doors in others.³²⁰ Even in late September, the New Lodge area was noted as being 'extremely quiet and well behaved'. A 'marked change of attitude' was evident across Catholic areas, with residents being 'extremely friendly with the security

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 6 August 1970.

³¹⁶ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTUSM, 30 July 1970.

³¹⁷ Prince and Warner, 'IRA and its Rivals', 273.

³¹⁸ TNA, WO 305/3358, 8 Brigade INTSUM, 21 October 1970.

³¹⁹ TNA, WO 305/3793, 5 Brigade INTSUM, 19 August 1970.

³²⁰ TNA, WO 305/3793, 5 Brigade INTSUM, 26 August 1970.

forces'.³²¹ What emerges from the intelligence material is oscillating levels of organisational support, no linear pathway or critical moment is viewable.

This situation was to be reversed in early 1971. Following house searches in the Clonard area, the PIRA murdered the first British soldier, Gunner Robert Curtis, on 6 February 1971. Journalist Dominick J. Coyle, in an article entitled 'Enemy in Ulster', perceptively wrote that 'Their sniper bullets are indeed aimed at ordinary British soldiers, but the message is intended for the IRA regulars...'.³²² In other words, victims were selected with other targets in mind. Deciphering the 'intended targets' of violent acts is far from straightforward, one bullet can target many.

V

Raising the Volume

On 14 May 1972, an article in *Republican News*, entitled 'How the War is Being Won', asserted that it had taken 'the roar of the bomb and gun to make them listen.'³²³ This desire to be heard was the driving force behind increasing levels of republican violence in 1971-2. In order to provide an insight into this escalation, a short case study, spanning 15-21 April 1972, will be detailed here. This single week was one of the most violent periods of the whole thirty-year conflict and, in republican terms, was an anomaly in that OIRA violence eclipsed the PIRA's activities. The PIRA's response to these developments reveals the extent to which the secondary and primary conflicts were entangled. With the Officials surging ahead of them, they tried to stage a sensational bomb attack that, had it succeeded, would have literally shook Northern Ireland. In essence, violence was amplified by republican organisations so as to drown out rival political acts.

In a high-level meeting, on 21 April, GOC Harry Tuzo stated that activity 'had been more intense than in any single period since internment'. In validating this point, he said 'there were up to 20 shootings in a 24-hour period in Belfast, largely round the Divis Flats.'³²⁴ In fact, the level of violence was so high the British were having difficulty keeping track. Another summary suggested that over a three-day period 'approximately 140 shooting incidents' had occurred.³²⁵ The spatial distribution of this violence, however, meant they were certain about one thing: it was the OIRA producing it. British personnel measured the changing levels of republican control across the city and could confidently state, at that time, the 'Divis Flats are an Official

³²¹ TNA, WO 305/3793, 5 Brigade INTSUM, 30 September 1970.

³²² 'Regulars' was another name for the OIRA. *Financial Times*, 10 February 1971.

³²³ *Republican News*, 14 May 1972.

³²⁴ TNA, DEFE 11/789, CGS Meeting with GOC Northern Ireland, 21 April 1972.

³²⁵ TNA, DEFE 11/789, HQ Northern Ireland OPSUM, 21 April 1972.

Stronghold'.³²⁶ Two explanations for this OIRA violence were given: firstly, leading OIRA member Joe McCann had been shot dead on 15 April by British forces; and, secondly, it was asserted that 'the Officials did not want to lose out to the Provisionals', violence allowed them to 'prove their ability to control events'.³²⁷ In weighing up the two reasons, British observers placed greater emphasis on the second; Tuzo felt that 'they used the shooting of McCann as an excuse'.³²⁸ In support of this view, they had received intelligence reports in the preceding weeks that indicated both IRAs were about to launch a major offensive. Discounting the influence of McCann's death maybe a mistake here, in personal terms he was liked by many and in organisational terms, leaders often become symbolic markers of organisational strength. In reaction to high profile losses, organisations often seek to reassert themselves; the Officials, in this case, chose to do this through violence. A competitive logic was also at play, they could not afford to appear weak in comparison to the PIRA and violence offered them an opportunity to regain primacy.

In fact, the Provisionals were recorded as having tried 'to cash in on McCann's death'. Barricades, mostly constructed from hi-jacked vehicles, were raised in the Falls, Ballymurphy, Turf Lodge, and Andersonstown districts, with the aim of establishing 'No Go' areas. A cautious security force approach, however, limited the trouble to Divis Flats. In a lengthy gun battle, one soldier was killed, and five others wounded. Moving westwards to Derry, the OIRA killed two soldiers in what they called 'revenge operations'. These shooting incidents, according to British records, had not been 'the most significant event of the week'. Elsewhere in Derry, the PIRA had planted a 450 lb bomb in Essex factory situated beside the Blighs Lane Army post. Their aim in planting this bomb was to strike a sensational blow against the security forces. The Ammunition Technical Staff spent seven hours dismantling the device and estimated that, had it exploded, it would have severely damaged all houses within one hundred yards and shattered every window in Derry. The sheer size of this bomb indicates that the Provisionals were concerned with the OIRA's newly gained prominence. In their eagerness to outbid their rivals, the British felt that the PIRA had 'not considered the effects of the explosion'.³²⁹ Violence was deliberately tuned to achieve maximum impact. The tendency in this highly competitive environment was to raise the

³²⁶ TNA, DEFE 11/789, CGS Meeting with GOC Northern Ireland, 21 April 1972.

³²⁷ TNA, DEFE 11/789, HQ Northern Ireland OPSUM, 21 April 1972; TNA, DEFE 11/789, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 20 April 1970.

³²⁸ TNA, DEFE 11/789, CGS Meeting with GOC Northern Ireland, 21 April 1972.

³²⁹ TNA, DEFE 11/789, HQ Northern Ireland OPSUM, 21 April 1972.

volume, but, as Bloody Friday would later show, the potential consequences of such spectacular acts were not always given careful thought.³³⁰

VI

Message in a Bullet

At 22:36 pm, on 24 April 1967, the RUC received a 999 call from John Francis Hendron, a republican by politics and electrician by trade. Hendron detailed how he had been shot in the neck by one of four men who had accosted him at the junction of Abercorn Street North, Sorella Street, and Dunville Street, Belfast. Although Hendron failed to identify his assailants, the RUC deduced that the attack was carried out by the IRA who were 'concerned about the activities of Hendron's splinter group'. Notably, Hendron had already received threats and warnings.³³¹ Unable to limit Hendron's activities with spoken and written words, the IRA had sent him a message in the form of a bullet. The act was intended as a most intrusive one, trauma alters the perceived value of certain actions, and Hendron would be consequently forced to think twice before contesting the IRA's authority again.³³² Other means of coercion, such as imprisonment, were unavailable to the IRA, and so violence was adopted.

Internal republican violence was, of course, never absent. Localised splinter groups had been in action during the 1960s.³³³ After the 1969 split, however, a dramatic increase in incidents of inwards violence is visible.³³⁴ The intricate detail necessary to provide a thorough chronological account of inwards violence is currently impossible due to the unavailability of key archival documents. The purpose of this final section, therefore, is to lay the groundwork for future oral and archival research. I do this by highlighting several patterns identifiable in the patches of evidence available.

Fundamentally, inter-organisational competition was a distinct form of conflict in which violent methods were adopted so as to limit the activities of organisational rivals and to control local areas. This violence can itself be unpacked: intrusive, disabling, and extractive violence, such as pistol-whippings, punishment shootings, beatings, kidnappings, and torture, was predominantly

³³⁰ The OIRA's disastrous Aldershot bombing, on 22 February, is another example. For this see Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism*, 346; *United Irishman*, March 1972. For Bloody Friday see Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 104-5.

³³¹ TNA, DEFE 69/730, RUC Security Intelligence Review, 14 July 1967.

³³² Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 26-7.

³³³ The IRA in 1968 had tried to drown out small-scale splinter group activity by planning a spectacular attack against the British Ambassador in Dublin. TNA, FCO 23/169, *The IRA and the Republic*, 5 July 1968.

³³⁴ Republican inter-factional violence would at times exceed primary levels. TNA, DEFE 11/789, Joint Security Committee, Minutes of Meeting, 10 May 1972.

used. Republicans often avoided lethal violence as they were conscious of keeping the local populace onside.³³⁵ Sociologist Frank Bourton, who undertook fieldwork in Belfast, in 1972-3, found that Provisionals took care not to overstep the mark: 'If the movement persistently violated community norms, doors would stop opening, billets would be harder to get, informing would rise and their isolation would increase.'³³⁶ Moreover, high levels of intelligence allowed for finely tuned operations. British military observers noted that the victims of internal republican violence were well-targeted, that conscious efforts to enforce a shoot-to-wound policy were made, and even assumed that one fatality resulted from a 'panicky gunman'.³³⁷

Understanding the spatial distribution and temporal variation of this violence presents the researcher with a most challenging task. A pattern is, however, observable in the available material: moments of contestation and shifts in spatial control appear to have triggered at least some of the violence. Endogeneity is stressed here as opposed to some exogenous 'hangover' from the split.³³⁸ Still further, British Army personnel were keenly aware that the success of their operations had a major impact on the degrees of republican control. This led them to predict with some confidence, the occurrence, location, and intensity of such rivalry. Other non-violent strategies included cross-organisational alliances, front organisations, and the provision of services.

In this irregular civil war, spatial control mattered greatly. In a 1973 British military paper, an in-depth analysis of popular collaboration was given. It stated that no matter how 'hard' an area maybe it is intimidation that ensures the IRA's safety: 'A little intimidation goes a long way. One tarring, or one assassination is enough...'. Collaboration was understood to be a continuum stretching from open opposition to open support. A common consequence of intimidation was no information being given to the security forces and passive support for the IRA. 'Passive support' consisted of the following: 'if the IRA want to use someone's house they can'. A few, however, engaged in 'active support', comprising participation in local riots and auxiliary tasks.³³⁹ Spatial control, therefore, mattered greatly to the revolutionary forces for it allowed them to act behind a 'veil of secrecy'.³⁴⁰ Equally as important was the influence local control had on political allegiances. Speaking of Father D. Wilson of Ballymurphy, who was suspected of

³³⁵ For selectivity and restraint see Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 146-209.

³³⁶ Frank Bourton, *The Politics of Legitimacy in a Belfast Community* (London, 1978), 109.

³³⁷ TNA, PREM 16/521, Shooting Incidents in Belfast, 30 October 1975.

³³⁸ Explanation given in Moloney, *Secret History*, 147.

³³⁹ TNA, WO 305/4210, 3 Brigade, IRA in the Rural Areas, 18 January 1973.

³⁴⁰ Quote found in PIRA pamphlet distributed in June 1973. TNA, WO 305/4214, 3 Brigade INTSUM, 19 June 1973.

involvement with the PIRA, a British Lieutenant Colonel stated that he 'could not avoid being associated with them because they live all around him.'³⁴¹ This epitomises the difficulty facing the incumbents; all security force operations depended on 'good' intelligence, and this information was mostly held by civilians who were within the authoritative remit of republican organisations.³⁴² In acknowledging this, the 'principal aim' of British military policy was to separate the Catholic community from the IRA.³⁴³

However, collaboration was complicated by the presence of competitors. It was mentioned in the above paper that 'Officials often act as a counter force to Provo intimidation- people are prepared to stand up to the Provos with the Officials backing.'³⁴⁴ Local control was, therefore, contested between rival republicans. In a 1974 interview, Goulding captured the essence of this inter-organisational competition. He asserted that the Provisionals had previously enjoyed predominant control within Belfast, citing the Ardoyne, Clonard, and Ballymurphy areas as having been PIRA strongholds, leaving the OIRA isolated to the Lower Falls. By 1974, he claimed a reversal had taken place, 'we have the best control of people in those areas (now)' and, in the Falls, 'I suppose 70% of the people support us'.³⁴⁵ This was a heavily skewed reading of territorial fortunes, but the topic of discussion is what matters here. Republicans were measuring the degrees of control and seeking to change or maintain those percentages.³⁴⁶ In this case, Goulding massaged the score line to make it seem as if his side were winning in order to help bring about authoritative displacement. Trumpeting victories, covering up defeats, and seeming to be winning influenced levels of support. The best-known example is the PIRA's declaration of 1972 as the 'Year of Victory'. This is often read as a sign of conviction, but while this may be partly the case, the accompanying article reveals the underlying strategic intent, as it stressed 'The time for sitting on the fence is past'.³⁴⁷

How control was measured by adversaries and the civilian population is a topic that needs closer attention. Adversaries appear to have measured operational capacity using the following measurements: the number, and operational ability, of volunteers; the quantity and quality of weapons; and financial resources.³⁴⁸ In terms of civilian receptivity, the number of safe houses,

³⁴¹ TNA, DEFE 70/637, Record of a Conversation with Father D. Wilson, 20 November 1974.

³⁴² TNA, WO 305/4215, 3 Brigade, Operational Directive No.7, 18 July 1973.

³⁴³ TNA, WO 305/4742/1, 39 Brigade, Directive for Future Internal Security Operations, 15 July 1972; TNA, Northern Ireland Office (CJ) 4/3463, The Undermining of the IRA's will to Fight, 31 January 1975.

³⁴⁴ TNA, WO 305/4210, 3 Brigade, IRA in the Rural Areas, 18 January 1973.

³⁴⁵ *Inside the IRA* (Philadelphia, 1974), 20.

³⁴⁶ Use of percentages is found elsewhere, WO/305/4230, 24 Brigade INTSUM, 27 September 1972.

³⁴⁷ *Republican News*, 2 January 1972.

³⁴⁸ For operational ability see, for example, O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, 72.

arms dumps, and the magnitude of rioting, along with security force success rates, appear to have been used as markers.³⁴⁹ From a civilian standpoint, propaganda, paramilitary patrols, and gossip must have been used as indicators. Knowing who was winning overall, and locally, helped civilians calculate the value of collaborating with certain actors or remaining neutral.³⁵⁰

Dominance of one republican faction, in a certain area, led to side changing. For example, in July 1972, in the New Lodge area of North Belfast, it was recorded that previously known OIRA members had 'converted' to the PIRA, substantiating the claim that the 'Officials had virtually no hold in North Belfast any more'.³⁵¹ By November, the pendulum had swung back in favour of the OIRA. In an intelligence summary, it was stated that the Officials in New Lodge, 'are in a much stronger position than the Provisionals in both manpower and weapons.'³⁵² Territorial fortunes fluctuated and with them so did allegiances. In sum, the aim of the inter-organisational game was to acquire spatial control. The victors, temporarily at least, secured organisational sustenance and social power.

In this form of conflict, violence was frequently used as a means of authoritative extension and retention. This was paradoxical to institutional competition where peaceful strategies were mostly chosen. Ó Brádaigh had, apparently, raised questions to the Marxist republicans about what would happen following a split:

'How are you going to cope with us? There'd never come an answer. And I know well what you'd do to us- put us against the bloody wall and behind barbed wire and six feet under... of course they were too smart to say that but this is the logical outcome of the whole damn thing.'³⁵³

The key words here are 'cope', 'smart', and 'logical'. Organisational rivals did not recognise each other's authority willingly. Violence was therefore used to coerce, disempower, and, on occasion, eliminate rivals who were hard to 'cope' with. The logic here was authoritative extension; violence allowed republicans to better control events. In terms of being smart, Ó Brádaigh may have outsmarted himself here, as the post-hoc justifications given by republicans persistently emphasised criminality and betrayal. Opponents were discredited as 'informers',

³⁴⁹ Captured IRA documents suggest this; found in TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTUSM, 9 July 1970. I suspect a street by street approach was taken, see Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 61.

³⁵⁰ It was stated that the best means of isolating the PIRA from the Catholic community was showing them that 'the IRA can no longer win'. TNA, CJ 4/3463, The Undermining of the IRA's will to Fight, 31 January 1975. Also see Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 12; English, *Does Terrorism Work?*, 140.

³⁵¹ TNA, WO 305/4742/2, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 20 July 1970. Another example found in TNA, WO 305/4212, 3 Brigade INTSUM, 17 April 1973.

³⁵² TNA, WO 305/4746/1, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 22 November 1972.

³⁵³ White, *Out of the Ashes*, 70.

‘renegade Irishman’, and social menaces.³⁵⁴ This, however, appears to have been interpretative coding. IRA members were instructed to carry out operations with justifications in mind. A captured IRA document stated that ‘when you have decided an operation has to be carried out the action must be justified.’³⁵⁵ Operations were deliberately enacted at certain times and styled in certain ways to enhance the creditability of their justifications.

Not all violence was instrumental. In a context of decentralisation, violence could be privatized. For example, on 2 June 1976, RUC Constable Ronald McAdam was murdered outside the Royal Victoria Hospital by an OIRA member. The motive for the murder was recorded as follows: ‘he had a personal grudge against the detective.’³⁵⁶ What first appears to be a killing arising from the master cleavage, was, supposedly, the result of a ‘personal grudge’. Crucially, personal, secondary, and primary conflicts overlapped to create a war that resembled an entangled ball of wool.³⁵⁷

Returning to internal republican violence, acts of territorial contestation were a notable trigger. In each area, organisational authority was contested through the distribution of propaganda and the mounting of operations against the security forces. Brendan Hughes, a former member of the PIRA’s D Company situated in the Falls road area, recalled that attempts to sell the PIRA’s Belfast paper, *Republican News*, during 1970-1, was suppressed by the OIRA: ‘we were constantly put against the wall, the papers taken off us and burned.’³⁵⁸ Propaganda was used to increase the profile of an organisation, making recruitment and support more likely. The predominant faction, in this case the OIRA, were clearly conscious of this, and sought to quell the prospect of a disadvantageous shift in control.

In spatial terms, inwards violence was mostly produced in areas where there was a discrepancy in control, and the area-specific republican power balance determined the direction of this violence. In most cases, the predominant faction targeted the weaker party.³⁵⁹ For instance, on 18 December 1970, eight OIRA members were detained overnight in a hall, in the Ardoyne area, by armed PIRA members, who used this act of disempowerment to reinforce their warning to the kidnapped persons that they would be shot if they operated in the area.³⁶⁰ Furthermore, in

³⁵⁴ *An Phoblacht*, June 1970; *Republican News* July 1971; *Republican News*, 1 November 1975.

³⁵⁵ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 9 July 1970.

³⁵⁶ TNA, DEFE 24/1226, Notes of a Meeting on Northern Ireland, 17 June 1976.

³⁵⁷ Comparative examples in Swedenburg, *Memoirs of Revolt*, 139-170.

³⁵⁸ Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 61.

³⁵⁹ An intelligence report commented that competition only occurred ‘where the Officials are strong enough to do something about it.’ TNA, WO 305/4742/2, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 27 July 1972.

³⁶⁰ TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTUSM, 31 December 1970.

March 1971, violent clashes between republicans occurred after the OIRA carried out operations against the British Army in Ballymurphy. This prompted the PIRA to use counteractive violence, in the form of a pistol-whipping, that in turn led to violent reprisals elsewhere.³⁶¹ These examples demonstrate that republican organisations were prepared to use violence against one another as a means of ensuring spatial control.³⁶² Counteractive violence, however, often triggered a vicious cycle of revenge. This only ceased when, out of strategic necessity, truces were established.³⁶³

Primary initiatives impacted upon the secondary contests at play. Security force activity, such as arrest operations, shootings, weapons finds, and detainee releases, could create, and fill, authoritative voids.³⁶⁴ In late 1972, a most telling intelligence assessment was given:

‘Security force success against the Provisionals in the (Lower Falls) area has created a vacuum and the people at present are undecided as to their actions and who to support.’³⁶⁵

Powers of release, as well as imprisonment, influenced the degrees of control. It was noted on one occasion that the OIRA had regained control of an area ‘probably as a result of the large number of recently released Officials’.³⁶⁶

Shifts in control, caused by security force successes, sometimes triggered internal republican violence. A two-month sequence of intelligence summaries, produced by the 24th Infantry Brigade, regarding the Markets and Short Strand area during August-September 1972, shows how increasing rates of attrition against the PIRA played to the OIRA’s advantage. The remaining Provisionals, having lost considerable local support, threatened the Officials. In early September, Provisionals, Gerard McCrory, James Gibney and Cormack McArt, ‘arrested’ two OIRA members, blamed them for recent arrests, and warned that if anymore Provisionals were picked up Officials would be shot in ‘retaliation’. The OIRA C Company Adjutant, Thomas Conlon, in response had four Provisionals kidnapped. A week or so later, on 18 September, a punch-up in

³⁶¹ Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 162-3.

³⁶² Control was maximised by driving out families known to support competitors. TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 7 May 1970; TNA, WO 305/4746/1, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 22 November 1972. Further examples of counteractive violence are viewable in the following material: TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 17 December 1970; TNA, WO 305/4212, 3 Brigade INTSUM, 3 April 1973.

³⁶³ Truces were mediated by Clergyman. For evidence of strategic thinking see Anderson, *Joe Cahill*, 217; Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 316.

³⁶⁴ To complicate matters further, in certain situations and in particular localities, co-operation led to joint defensive and offensive operations, even in Belfast. TNA, WO 305/4613/1, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 26 August 1971.

³⁶⁵ TNA, WO 305/4746/1, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 15 November 1972.

³⁶⁶ TNA, WO 305/4742/2, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 5 July 1972.

the Markets between rival members was recorded.³⁶⁷ In short, as levels of control changed overtime, violence was used to reverse or cement territorial fortunes.³⁶⁸

Inwards republican violence could, and had to, be restrained due to intimacy. A republican intelligence document, captured as part of an OIRA arms dump, best evinces the multiple contests that were simultaneously at play. One piece of paper bore information regarding possible UVF members, two registration numbers of vehicles alleged to belong to the 'Branch', and the following reference to PIRA movements: 'Proxies in Ardoyne moved gear to Rathcoole in light blue Zephyr...'.³⁶⁹ The key to operational success was intelligence. With this in mind, republican organisations were having to collect information on a multiplicity of enemies. The quality of intelligence regarding each organisation varied considerably. In terms of republican competitors, the level of information was high-grade. A volunteer of the PIRA's B Company third battalion, whose operational remit was East Belfast, under questioning, gave security force personnel a detailed insight into the hierarchies of both IRAs, detailing names and rank.³⁷⁰ This intimate knowledge allowed republicans to be highly selective and use violent methods that were non-lethal.³⁷¹

Non-violent strategies were also employed. In August 1970, a meeting was held in Dublin between leading members of the OIRA and Catholic priests who were intent on revolutionising their Church. The purpose of the meeting was 'to form an alliance for mutual support'. In the end, a trade-off was agreed to: the socialist-inclined priests would be helped in their institutional endeavour and be allowed to 'takeover' the CDCs; if a Bishop attempted to discipline the priests, the OIRA would pressurise the bishop to rescind; in return, the priests would speak on platforms about socio-economic issues and counter claims that the OIRA were 'communist controlled'.³⁷² In sum, a cross-organisational alliance had been formed, with the Marxist republicans hoping to utilise the soft power of the Catholic Church in their primary and secondary endeavours. Similarly, the OIRA also used front organisations in Belfast as a covert means of weakening the PIRA's strategic base. A branch of the Catholic Ex-Serviceman's Association (CESA) in Ballymurphy was understood by British intelligence, in October 1971, to have come under the

³⁶⁷ TNA, WO 305/4229, 24 Brigade INTSUM, 30 August 1972; TNA, WO 305/4230, 24 Brigade INTSUM, 13 September 1972; TNA, WO 305/4230, 27 September 1972.

³⁶⁸ More examples in the following material: TNA, WO 305/4631/1, HQ Northern Ireland Summary, 7 February 1973; TNA, WO 305/4212, 3 Brigade INTSUM, 17 April 1973;

³⁶⁹ TNA, WO 305/4599/3, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 28 October 1971.

³⁷⁰ TNA, WO 305/4230, 24 Brigade INTSUM, 27 September 1972.

³⁷¹ Evidence of 'prime targets' in Hanley and Millar, *Lost Revolution*, 316; TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 21 May 1970.

³⁷² TNA, WO 305/3783, HQ Northern Ireland INTSUM, 13 August 1970.

sway of the Officials who were attempting to use the organisation as means of undermining the Provisionals.³⁷³ Front organisations offered the Officials a chance to make a fresh appeal to the local people.

More promising and noteworthy, according to the British, were OIRA attempts to offer services to the local people. In July 1972, the OIRA O/C of C Company first battalion, upon release from prison, opened a shop, and signs in its window read, 'Support your Official Republican Movement and the People's Co-op'.³⁷⁴ A week later, it was recorded that the OIRA had opened another shop, this time a cut-price butchers in the Falls area. This effort to improve local facilities and win support by peaceful means was highlighted as an 'interesting' development.³⁷⁵ As well as opening shops they were protecting them, on 16 November, Provisionals planted a bomb in Magills shop on the Monagh road, in the New Lodge area, after it had been warned not to serve soldiers. Officials having heard of the incident arrived on the scene, dragged the bomb of out the shop, and called the security forces. In the end, the bomb was found to be a dummy, but the Officials, in risking their lives, had powerfully made their point that 'shops were for the good of the people' and they would not allow the 'few amenities that they have in the area to be destroyed.'³⁷⁶ This raises an important point; the means of authoritative extension could be 'soft' and/or 'hard'. In trying to stimulate the local economy by opening and protecting shops, the OIRA were attempting a small-scale project likened to Keynesian economics.

³⁷³ TNA, WO 305/4599/3, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 28 October 1971.

³⁷⁴ TNA, WO 305/4742/2. 39 Brigade INTSUM, 5 July 1972.

³⁷⁵ TNA, WO 305/4742/2, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 12 July 1972.

³⁷⁶ TNA, WO 305/4746/1, 39 Brigade INTSUM, 22 November 1972.

Conclusion

'A Tangled Skein'

In September 1972, a Derry businessman approached two British contacts and asked them to convey a message to MI6 officer Frank Steele. The message stemmed from the PIRA leader, Ó Brádaigh, and comprised two interlinked points. Point one confirmed that, despite maintaining a veil of unity, there was 'in fact a serious split in the IRA between militants led by MacStíofáin... and the "politicals" led by O'Connell and himself who wanted to end violence.' Point two, asked for help: 'He (Ó Brádaigh) wanted this message to be passed secretly to HMG in the hope that HMG could... strengthen the position of the 'political' faction sufficiently to enable them to beat MacStíofáin'.³⁷⁷

Former teammates, MacStíofáin and Ó Brádaigh, had become competitors. Ó Brádaigh, who favoured a move away from the war path, was seeking external help from the British government. Another point of intersection between the primary and secondary conflicts had developed.

In highlighting this final point, I want to conclude by emphasising that the Troubles was an entanglement of conflicts. Typically, two parallel narratives of the Troubles are given, one 'anti-republican' and one 'anti-British'.³⁷⁸ The primary evidence, however, presents a complicated history of not one conflict but many, and these conflicts overlapped in complex ways resembling an entangled ball of wool. Merlyn Rees conceptualised the situation in Northern Ireland in these very terms: 'These problems are a tangled skein; I want to make a start on unravelling them.'³⁷⁹

Keeping this analogy in mind, a critical eye can be applied to the historical endeavour. The historian uses remnants of the past, found in the present, to construct a history using a number of methodological tools. The historical process is, therefore, an intellectual one in that it seeks to create an abstract product, a history. Many historians often portray themselves as 'lie detectors' or 'regulators'.³⁸⁰ As a result of this, the historical task is often viewed as a negative one. While I wholly agree that histories should not be easily utilised, they should, however, encourage engagement. For instance, this dissertation has begun to construct an entangled ball of wool comprised of overlapping lines of competition. Crucially, a 'tangled skein' is of no immediate use; it requires critical engagement, in the form of disentanglement, before any

³⁷⁷ TNA, FCO 87/4, NIO London Telegram No.32

³⁷⁸ Ian McBride, 'Dealing with the Past: Historians and the Northern Ireland Conflict' (Unpublished paper, 2016), 26.

³⁷⁹ TNA, PREM 16/517, Statement to Parliament by the Secretary of State, 12 March 1975.

³⁸⁰ McBride, 'Dealing with the Past', 24-5; Prince and Warner, *Belfast and Derry in Revolt*, 261-2.

garment can be woven. As English has emphasised, the historian has no power over how their history will be received, the aim of history is to simply induce critical and reflective engagement.³⁸¹

In viewing the Troubles as a 'tangled skein', new questions and insights into the dynamics of civil wars and the politics of Northern Ireland are possible. For example, future research regarding centralisation within and between organisations could be conducted. McBride has already noted how in the 1980s republicans were actively engaging with state institutions, not only electorally, but in competition for regeneration projects. By the 1990s, the peace-and-reconciliation industry had become the largest employer in the region, funded from London, Dublin, and Brussels. Republican economic life had, thus, become dominated by state interventions.³⁸² Perhaps then instead of thinking of 'democracy' or consociationalism as the perquisite to peace in Northern Ireland we should be researching authoritative incorporation. For the conflicts in Northern Ireland have not ended, they have merely been institutionalised. As this dissertation has argued, political players choose their strategies in a most situational manner. Institutional competition offers political players an array of peaceful strategies, whereas inter-organisational competition is a qualitatively different playing field in which violence is more readily adopted.

³⁸¹ Richard English, 'Seminars and Shootings: Politics, History, and University Teaching in Belfast', in Senia Pašeta (eds.), *Uncertain Futures: Essays about the Irish Past for Roy Foster* (Oxford, 2016), 250-3.

³⁸² McBride, *Shadow of the Gunman*, 703.

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