

The British
Labour Party and
twentieth-century
Ireland

The cause of Ireland, the cause of Labour

Edited by Laurence Marley

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- Labour), Gerry Fitt (later Republican Labour) and Paddy Devlin (later NILP and SDLP).
- 32 Interview with Brendan Mackin, 10 January 2006. By the mid-1960s, the Falls Labour Party had 200 people on its books, most of whom were Catholic working-class people from the district. For more, see Edwards, *A history of the Northern Ireland Labour Party*.
- 33 R. J. Lawrence, *The government of Northern Ireland: public finance and public service, 1921–64* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1965), p. 100.
- 34 J. A. V. Graham, *The consensus-forming strategy of the Northern Ireland Labour Party* (Belfast, Queen's University, 1972), p. 138.
- 35 Interview with former NILP activist, Anne Foster, 16 August 2005.
- 36 Patterson, 'Socialism in Ulster', p. 155.
- 37 Interview with former NILP Chairman and Stormont MP, David Bleakley, 21 March 2006.
- 38 S. McAughtry, 'A question of politics', *Irish Times*, 13 May 1981.
- 39 For more on this, see Bob Purdie, *Politics in the streets*, and Graham Walker, *A history of the Ulster Unionist Party*.
- 40 Aaron Edwards and Cillian McGrattan, *The Northern Ireland conflict: a beginner's guide* (London, One World Publications, 2010), pp. 25–7.
- 41 The National Archives (TNA), Cj4/1147, 'Meeting between the Secretary of State, PUS and NIO Departmental Heads', 27 May 1974.
- 42 TNA, Cj4/1147, 'Meeting with UVF at Lanside on 27 May, 1974'.
- 43 Brendan O'Leary, 'The Labour government and Northern Ireland, 1974–9', in J. McGarry and B. O'Leary (eds), *The Northern Ireland conflict: consociational engagements* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 210.
- 44 Edwards, *A history of the Northern Ireland Labour Party*, p. 221.
- 45 *Irish News*, 4 April 1997.
- 46 See Edwards, 'Interpreting New Labour's political discourse'.
- 47 House of Commons debates, *Hansard*, 7 July 1987, vol. 119, col. 231.
- 48 J. Carvel, *Citizen Ken* (London, The Hogarth Press, 1987 [1984]), p. 157.
- 49 Carvel, *Citizen Ken*, p. 185.
- 50 Ken Livingstone, *You can't say that: memoirs* (London, Faber, 2011), p. 224.
- 51 House of Commons debates, *Hansard*, 7 July 1987, vol. 119, col. 231.
- 52 K. McNamara, J. Marshall and M. Mowlam, 'Towards a new Ireland: reform and harmonisation: a dual strategy for Irish unification', 1988; see Edwards, 'Interpreting New Labour's political discourse'.
- 53 Blair, *A journey*, p. 159.
- 54 Blair, *A journey*, p. 159.
- 55 See P. Dixon '“An honourable deception”? The Labour government, the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland peace process', *British Politics*, vol. 8, no. 2, June 2013, see pp. 108–37.
- 56 B. Monteith, '“A nation and a half”', Labour in Northern Ireland', dated January 2013, archived at: www.labourparty.ni.org/nation-and-a-half-articles-by-1pni-member-ben-monteith (accessed 15 January 2014).

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'That link must be preserved, but there are other problems': the British Labour Party and Derry, 1942–62

Máirín Ó Catháin

As a prism through which to examine the British Labour Party's relationship with Ireland in the mid twentieth century, and as a way of highlighting factors that contributed to civil unrest in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, this chapter will focus on local politics, especially local Labour party politics, in Derry during the Second World War and in the immediate decades that followed. Although the British Labour Party had been sympathetic to Irish nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was Labour governments, both in 1924 and after the Second World War,² that consolidated partition and consequently the Unionist status quo, latterly through the Ireland Act 1949, which affirmed the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. In Derry, a city with a majority Catholic and nationalist population on the border between two states, this was less than welcome news to many. There were certainly fissures and 'problems', as alluded to by junior Labour shadow cabinet minister, James Callaghan, in 1955 (as cited above). But in Derry, a climate of pragmatism emerged, and sections of organised labour in the city engaged with the progressive social policies of the post-war Labour government, to the point indeed that it fed into a new climate of protest that would set the Labour Party of Harold Wilson on a major course of crisis management in Northern Ireland in the 1960s.

The very contemporary confluence of a flags dispute and preparations for a major UK festival thrust Derry into the spotlight in 1951.³ The Festival of Britain was under way, the major economic and cultural showcase of the post-war Labour government. Most of the money was being spent on the suitable decoration of the Guildhall, the town hall in Derry, though the corporation also voted through £245 worth of improvements themed around the Festival for the city's library.⁴ In itself, the inclusion of Northern Ireland and its second city in the Festival of Britain was at once an expression of the Labour government's

integrationist perspective on the North's place in the 'nation' and an indication of its naivety about the reception this would accord.⁵ The subsequent tumult over the flying of the Irish national flag at Derry's St Patrick's Day parade that year was not part of that reception, but the melee between police and nationalist protesters ably demonstrated the distance between Whitehall and Guildhall.⁶ While eliciting no response even from sympathetic Labour backbenchers in Westminster, the day's events may well have had a bearing on the decision of the Irish president, Éamon de Valera, to visit the city, cutting a swathe through streets either bedecked or painted in the Irish national colours later that year.⁷

Irish nationalism in Derry was at the height of its popularity, appearing ebullient and bellicose; and the careful calibration of anti-partition sentiment, during the flags dispute and at elections, enabled the dominant Nationalist Party figure, Eddie McAteer, to neutralise his own party rivals and to see off the challenge from republicans and the frustrated and divided ranks of the local Derry labour movement. Of course, this had not always been the case, and while the posture of the Nationalist Party disguised the emergence of a practical engagement with the Northern Ireland state, and by association Britain, the city's cluster of labour activists had been and would again be significant to this engagement in spite of their own national-religious divisions.

Like many places, the beginnings of a socialist movement in Derry can be traced to the break with craft exclusivity in the period of new unionism between 1889 and 1891.⁸ Supporters of the British socialist group, the Socialist League, existed in the city in the 1890s, and the Social Democratic Federation's paper, *Justice*, was sold there too.⁹ Yet the early twentieth century saw the Derry labour movement adopt an implicitly nationalist position that became explicit in the 1919–21 period under the twin pressures of the War of Independence and the creation of Northern Ireland.¹⁰ It was into such a fractious environment – capitalising in many ways on a wider current of working-class discontent, rising unemployment and economic decline – that the Londonderry Labour Party (LLP) came into being in 1925. The LLP quickly affiliated to the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) and geared up for its first electoral contest.¹¹ In later years, however, a number of splits in the LLP created a veritable alphabet soup of labour parties in the city: the Independent Derry Labour Party (IDLDP), which broke away in 1938 and led, in 1945, to the nationalist-inclined Derry Labour Party (DLP); a local branch of the unionist-inclined Commonwealth Labour Party, established in 1942 and dissolved in 1943; and a branch of the Irish Labour Party (ILP) between 1949 and 1952. These various incarnations were obviously driven by objective social and economic conditions in Derry that more

or less followed a pattern of general decline after the First World War, but they were also governed by the larger constitutional and sectarian politics of the time.

The formation of the LLP came at a fortuitous moment in local politics. The Nationalist Party, which had observed a boycott of local government since 1923, had a number of members keen to return to the corporation, and they saw in the appearance of the LLP an opportunity to do so. Although this involvement with Labour was short and difficult and resulted in a split in LLP in 1929, the re-designation of these members as Labourists resulted in the return of sixteen Labour councillors.¹² However, the following years of in-fighting between a mainly anti-partitionist, Connollyite majority and a smaller integrationist element took its toll. The Connollyite tradition in the LLP ultimately saw the achievement of a united and independent Irish socialist state as the goal and key to the solution of the social and economic decline resulting from partition. The minority tradition, conversely, was one that stressed what it believed to be the mixed blessings of the Union – greater economic opportunities and collaboration with and support from the stronger labour movement in Britain and the Commonwealth.

It is tempting to read this division, creating as it did that range of separate parties between the 1930s and 1950s, as an expression of the nationalist and unionist politics (and demographics) of Derry. But at least one alternative is to see the split as utopian (anti-partitionist) versus pragmatic (partitionist) responses to the challenges imposed by the re-configuration of political boundaries, relationships and priorities in the inter-war years. The story of the nationalist-inclined Derry Labour Party and the unionist-inclined Londonderry Labour Party is one in which, in the 1950s, unlike other such parties in places like west Belfast and Newry, the pragmatists gain ground on the utopians in a way that not only mirrored the growing engagement of the British Labour Party with Northern Ireland but also arguably exerted a powerful influence on the changing mood of the Derry Catholic electorate. More importantly, it is that tendency towards engagement and pragmatism that ironically exerted the greatest pressures eventually on the Unionist regime and contributed to a crisis of international proportions for the British Labour government of the late 1960s.

The impact of nationalist and unionist politics on the success or otherwise of the various Derry Labour parties had naturally very little impact on the Labour Party in Britain. The gerrymandered political ward system had received hostile coverage in the *Manchester Guardian* as early as 1921 and there was equally scurrilous coverage in the *Daily Herald*, but it is probably fair to say that Labour leader, Ramsay MacDonald,

was more concerned with and enamoured of Lady Londonderry than the North's second city.¹³ His successors, and the wider Labour Party, maintained this ambivalence and the bipartisan approach generally at least until the Clement Attlee administration in 1945; and even then, the over-arching bipartisanship remained, as Dixon and Edwards have noted, the most consistent policy in relation to the North.¹⁴ Nevertheless, John Clynes, Arthur Hayday and Ernest Bevin had all visited Derry between 1927 and 1929, and Bevin returned with Arthur Deakin in 1938.¹⁵ The focus of these visits was the trade union movement, but they served as grist to the mill for those LLP activists keen to demonstrate their links to the British Labour Party as well as giving some indication of Labour's recognition that socialism existed outside Belfast.

There was a very small Marxist presence in the city around this time, represented in some ways by Thomas Finnegan, Professor of Classics at Magee College, and also by Jack Dorricott and John De Courcy Ireland, both of whom gave regular talks on various facets of Marxist ideology and anti-imperialism via the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC).¹⁶ De Courcy Ireland had an influence on the LLP. However, while he engaged in a public row of sorts with the emerging Connollyite, Paddy Fox, over the merits of Fianna Fáil's social policy, it was clear that their shared anti-partitionism was the basis for the new Independent Derry Labour Party (IDL) which they founded in 1938 as a break-away from the LLP. In the local elections of 1938 and 1939, the former uncontested by the LLP, they failed to win any seats, ignored the mainly Protestant and Unionist Waterside ward completely and closed the year in opposition to the Second World War as an imperialist conflict.¹⁷ Besides the remnants of those who departed the LLP in the 1929 split, Fox and De Courcy made some advances with republicans around this time, bringing one or two away from the ranks of Sinn Féin and into the IDLP. This may have been as a result of their opposition to Stormont's interment of republican suspects at the outbreak of the war or their involvement with the Prisoners' Aid Society in the city.¹⁸

The Second World War brought Derry into the limelight as an important strategic post in the Battle of the Atlantic: the old shipyards once again sprang into life, and the city even faced some aerial bombardment in 1941. The local Catholic bishop, Neil Farren, encouraged support for the war effort, and a great many Catholics joined the British forces alongside their Protestant neighbours.¹⁹ Such apparent unity did not extend to the local labour movement, and the main pre-war split between Paddy Fox's IDLP and the LLP not only continued but suffered another splinter with the emergence of the Londonderry branch of the Commonwealth Labour Party, a more ardently pro-Unionist organisation led by NILP

veteran, Harry Midgley. The new party lasted less than a year in the city before its remnants re-joined the LLP and re-affiliated to the NILP.²⁰ For a brief time, it appears that there had been no fewer than three different Labour parties in a population not much bigger than that of east Belfast, though De Courcy Ireland remembered the divisions as cordial, if occasionally sectarian in nature, and saw Midgley's creation in a relatively sanguine, if not supportive, manner.²¹

Support for the British war effort crystallised in 1942 when the USSR entered the war, though there remained strong opposition to the threat of conscription, despite the support for such a move by Minister for Labour, Ernest Bevin, and most Unionist and Conservative politicians. However, the predictions of Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, of nationalist resistance and serious civil disorder helped persuade the British government not to proceed with the measure.²²

Although it seemed that past dissensions might be put to rest towards the end of the war, the gulf between the nationalist and unionist sections of Derry's labour movement remained and widened in the years afterwards, as the campaign against partition gained prominence. Paddy Fox's Derry Labour Party (DLP) – the name taken after the IDLP was wound up in 1945 – did not immediately directly challenge the LLP electorally, standing instead against the sitting Nationalist Party MP for the city in the predominantly Catholic Foyle constituency, while on the opposite bank of the river, LLP leader, William Irwin, stood against the Unionist Party candidate, William Lowry.²³ But Fox subsequently entered into an electoral pact with the Nationalist Party; and although this cost the DLP two key activists, it also delivered two seats for them on Londonderry Corporation. Stephen McGonagle, one of those activists who resigned, would later re-join Fox in the Derry branch of the Irish Labour Party (ILP) during the high mark of the anti-partition campaign from 1949 to 1952, but he ultimately yielded to the pragmatic position on the border and followed the British Labour Party lead on closer integration with Britain.²⁴

The nationalist trend in Derry labour politics was paradoxically strengthened rather than weakened by the election of the Labour government under Attlee, as a gap began to open up between, on the one hand, those who adopted a position clearly sympathetic to unionism, such as new Home Secretary James Chuter Ede and Herbert Morrison, the architect of the election victory, and, on the other, Labour's pro-nationalist 'Friends of Ireland' pressure group at Westminster, which began to make common cause with the newly founded Irish Anti-Partition League.²⁵ At the beginning of 1946, McGonagle brought Irish Anti-Partition League MP for Penistone in West Yorkshire, Henry McGehe, to Derry.²⁶ It was the first significant

post-war visit by a Labour MP to the city and of considerable importance because of McGhee's prominent role in the Friends of Ireland. As Purdie has noted, this group often blurred the lines between support for anti-partitionism and support for nationalism, and their linkages with the new Anti-Partition League (APL) was to muddy the waters of Derry labour politics.²⁷ McGhee's visit, however, reinforced the growing coalescence locally between Fox's Labour group and the Anti-Partitionists. Paradoxically, this does in some ways match the wider spirit promulgated by the British Labour Party at the time of a form of one-nation politics, even if to the Friends of Ireland that nation was Ireland rather than Britain.²⁸

These diversions did not entirely distract the local labour activists from the burning social and economic issues affecting the people of the city, but there is some evidence that they were in the rearguard rather than the vanguard of working-class politics. In the autumn of 1946, no doubt as a result of the desperate state of post-war housing conditions, and perhaps the example of others in Scotland, a mass squatting campaign quickly gathered pace in Derry. Over the space of a couple of weeks in August, abandoned army Nissen huts were seized by local people in various locations.²⁹ Pauline McClenaghan claims that Fox and the DLP had a key role in this action. Yet, while it is clear that he later personally emerged as spokesperson for the Springtown residents in the former American naval base, his opposition to local demands that the makeshift housing be given to those on the housing list in 1945 was unequivocal.³⁰ Nor is there any evidence of his involvement in the early stages of the occupations.

The move and the militancy involved in the campaign seems to have genuinely taken local socialists by surprise, in spite of their repeated campaigning around the issue over the years. Herbert Morrison was on holiday in Ireland at this time and spent a few days in the North before travelling back to Britain. He therefore must have been aware of the controversy when the squatter issue was discussed in the first cabinet meeting he attended on his return. Downing Street issued a statement the day after, on 17 September, which was uncompromising in its view of the squatter movement. It stated that there was no excuse for trespassing and that the police would be used to remove the squatters wherever they were found.³¹ Morrison himself reinforced this position at the annual meeting of the Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council of the Labour Party soon after. While it may have been the involvement of Communist Party activists with squatting in London that put the Labour government on guard, the solution offered by Morrison of 'buckling to and making more building materials and putting up more dwellings' seemed

remarkably naive and out of touch, given the scale of the post-war housing crisis, not to mention the specific sectarian gerrymander that directed where houses could be built in Derry.³² Only Springtown camp in the politically less sensitive rural ward was allowed to remain. A mixture of military demands, private property challenges and fears of dramatic changes to the electoral profile of certain Unionist wards combined to produce predictably tragic eviction scenes and numerous prosecutions.³³

Housing was very much on the mind of Unionist prime minister, Basil Brooke, when he visited the city in February 1947. However, the beginnings of the Creggan housing estate which he toured could not keep pace with the demand for public housing that the squatters' campaign had so clearly spotlighted. The city's Unionists used their annual meeting to declare proudly to their leader that they had effectively seen off the challenge of the LLP in the North Ward the previous year, thereby demonstrating the cohesion of the unionist electorate.³⁴ Yet while the importance of the Springtown camp faded in the early 1950s, it would come to be viewed as a twenty-year indictment of Unionist misgovernment, and would be taken up by a later generation of LLP activists in the mid-1960s.³⁵

Shortly after the Springtown camp dispute, the DLP left the nationalist fold and re-configured its anti-partitionism along more solidly social class lines. The pact between the APL-Nationalist Party and the DLP fell apart over the latter's continued support for British welfare legislation, something that discomfited Nationalists and their more blatantly sectarian opposition to a grant for 'Protestant' Magee College. Also around this time, Geoffrey Bing MP, perhaps the most prominent of the Labour Party's Friends of Ireland, paid a visit to Derry. This was significant. While he was adamant about his disinterest in the border, he nevertheless spoke of his work in gathering information about gerrymandering.³⁶ This work was somewhat tangential to the anti-partitionist focus of the Friends of Ireland, but the information did prove significant in talks within the NILP about the issue, as it did later during debates on the Northern Ireland bill.

Bing was not a traditional supporter of Irish unity, but his visit and his interest in the North did signal a wider re-engagement by a small section of the British Labour Party with the aspiration for a united Ireland.³⁷ He was attractive to the pragmatists of the LLP because he was clear that the link with Britain was, as Purdie has written, 'the most likely source of progressive political change'. Yet he could also appeal to Fox and company as someone who felt Ireland's longer-term economic future was best dealt with as a single unit, or at least a re-partitioned one.³⁸ This, of course, was entirely in keeping with the

NILP's own chimerical position down to 1949, though the confluence of various nationalist streams, both Irish and British (in terms of the Friends of Ireland), between 1947 and 1952 lends weight to Rumpf and Hepburn's conclusion that labour could not operate 'outside of the sectarian framework' because the constitutional position of Northern Ireland remained a source of division.³⁹

Aaron Edwards has noted that, much to the chagrin of the NILP at times, there was a growing liaison between the Unionist Party and some figures in the British Labour Party, in particular Herbert Morrison, especially after the passing of the Ireland Act in 1949.⁴⁰ Artee himself only visited Northern Ireland once around this time in order to dine with Sir Basil Brooke and his wife while he was on holiday in Co. Mayo.⁴¹ Chuter Ede's talk to the London Ulster Association and Club in December 1949 is perhaps another expression of this coming together. In his talk, he praised the ministers for health and local government at Stormont and received in turn the gracious thanks of Dehra Parker, minister and MP for Londonderry South, who described him as 'Ulster's friend' and reflected on the importance of the historic link between the cities of Derry and London.⁴² Ede in particular would have been in no doubt about the importance and significance of that link, but it was the strategic concerns of the mid twentieth century rather than the seventeenth that underlined the city's place in the rapidly changing geopolitical map of the region. This has been recognised in part by Ronan Fanning and more recently by Graham Walker but has generally been ignored in much of the Belfast-centric analyses of British-Irish relations.⁴³

Derry had demonstrated its usefulness to Britain and its allies during the Second World War and was the site chosen for NATO's joint Anti-Submarine Warfare School and Air Sea Warfare Development Unit in the early days of the Cold War. It had been visited by the chief of US naval air operations in April 1949, and the evicted squatters of 1947 gave way to the development of the US Naval Communications Station (later known as NAVCOMMSTA) at Clooney.⁴⁴

The strategic re-positioning of the city had little or no bearing on the politics and divisions at the heart of the Derry labour movement. The Nationalists saw off the challenge of the IRLP and Sinn Féin at the 1950 general election with relative ease, and Eddie McAteer pushed his abstentionist party rival, Paddy Maxwell, aside in 1953 to take the Foyle seat. Paddy Fox, the IRLP's sole representative on the corporation, did not contest the 1951 election, and he and Stephen McGonagle wrapped up the branch the following year. McGonagle remembered the city as 'not as bad as Belfast' but still marked by people 'making speeches about all kinds of things not along labour lines'.⁴⁵ Fox had concentrated much of

his activities on various sorts of acts of disruption and civil disobedience, and hosted a delegation of women protesters from Springtown camp when they 'occupied' the Guildhall, but he left politics disillusioned at the failure of the Connollyite approach and died of tuberculosis in 1954. McGonagle re-joined the LLP and carried on into the later 1950s and early 1960s.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the LLP, perhaps as a reaction to the emergence of the IRLP in their midst or in response to the new clarity of the NILP and British Labour's position on the constitutional status of the North, had proposed a merger with the IRLP at a special conference in Belfast in 1949.⁴⁷ However, resolutions at the annual conference that year and again in 1950 – on affordable public transport, ground rents and equitable leasehold tenures ('for students and workers', interestingly), and speed limits of 20mph in urban areas – gives an indication of some of the more pressing issues for the LLP.⁴⁸ By the latter year, though, things had obviously gone into decline. The NILP described its organisation in the city and county as 'in a very bad way' in April 1951, and the party appears to have continued to decline in spite of visits by James Callaghan and others in 1954, and by Labour leader, Hugh Gaitskell, in 1959, both of which drew attention to many of the social and economic problems of the city but which were also largely fleeting visits.⁴⁹

These, however, did tend to throw the spotlight on McGonagle, who stood as an Independent Labour candidate in the Northern Ireland general election in 1958. His electoral challenge to McAteer (5,238 votes to McAteer's 6,953) showed a rising sense of dissatisfaction among nationalists over the failure of McAteer's party to engage with the practical realities of government and partition. Desmond Fennell's 1958 serialised study of Northern Catholics and nationalists showed this developing mood of pragmatism and perhaps the beginnings of a newer discussion focused on rights and equality rather than national sovereignty.⁵⁰ It is possible that, in part, McGonagle's support, indeed his own increasingly practical integrationism, reflects an engagement with the Union that formed part of the wider post-war consensus; even though he was more heavily defeated in 1962, his vote actually increased. It is also around this time that McAteer began to explore assuming the position of the official opposition to the Unionist Party at Stormont (not officially adopted until 1965).

As part of the new textiles economy, Du Pont, the American chemicals company, came to Derry in 1956, around about the time of the loss of the naval dockyard attached to the joint Anti-Submarine Warfare School, which transferred to Plymouth. Despite a bitter strike in 1958, Du Pont remained, but other factors began to illustrate an overall pattern

of economic decline, which neither the NILP nor British Labour seemed willing to address. Birmingham Sound Recordings shut with the loss of over 1,000 jobs in 1960; Monarch Electric followed with a similar number in 1962; and the city's rail and maritime trade was drastically cut back in the same period. A later LLP activist, the early modern historian, Keith Lindley, who arrived to take up a post at Magee College in 1965, remembered Derry as 'grim ... a city that was dying ... which had a general run down feel'.⁵¹

This chapter has considered the British Labour Party's connections with a town whose political, social and economic conditions would grab the world's attention in 1968 and 1969, catapulting the Labour government into the biggest crisis Britain had seen since Suez. The inability or indeed unwillingness of Labour to foresee this crisis needs to be viewed in the context of its rapprochement with the Ulster Unionist government and the nascent 'one nation' approach it increasingly embraced in the post-Ireland Act years. The utopian challenge of the backbench Labour Friends of Ireland group and their Irish allies in the APL during the later 1940s ran up against, and was ultimately unable to overcome, the pragmatic programme of Bevanite socialism, with its tangible advances in health and social welfare provision. That programme also encouraged a newer and younger generation of local labour activists such as Ivan Cooper, Eamonn McCann and Dermie McClenaghan to seek the same civil privileges enjoyed by those in other parts of the United Kingdom. It was, ironically in some ways, the success of the latter over traditional revanchist nationalism that contributed subsequently to the unification of the local labour parties after many years of division under the umbrella of the Londonderry Labour Party (rebranded as the 'Derry Labour Party' after a reorganisation in 1965), and the emergence of the civil rights agenda that would ironically prove so difficult for the first Wilson government during the outbreak of widespread civil disorder in 1969.⁵²

Notes

- 1 James Callaghan, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 5 May 1955, vol. 540, cols 2036–7.
- 2 On the 1924 Labour government's handling of the Boundary Commission issue, see Ivan Gibbons, 'The First Labour government and the Irish Boundary Commission', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly*, vol. 98, no. 391, Autumn 2009.
- 3 The controversy over the flying of the union flag in Belfast in 2013 and the accompanying civil strife overshadowed in some respects the celebrations surrounding Derry's nomination as the UK's first City of Culture.

- 4 *Festival of Britain Northern Ireland* brochure, http://craftni.org/images/uploads/Festival_of_Britain_Feature.pdf (accessed 23 February 2013); Derry City Archives (DCA), Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Parks, Libraries and Museums Committee, 1917–51, 8 January 1951. I am grateful to Bernadette Walsh, archivist at DCA, for her help and assistance. Derry was the first city to be nominated 'UK City of Culture' for 2013.
- 5 Gillian McIntosh, 'A performance of consensus? The coronation visit of Elizabeth II to Northern Ireland, 1953', *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2002, pp. 315–29. McIntosh concludes that the Festival of Britain made no discernible impact on the Catholic community, being greeted largely with indifference.
- 6 Frank Curran, *Derry, countdown to disaster* (Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1986), p. 12; Henry Patterson, 'Party versus order: Ulster unionism and the Flags and Emblems Act', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 13, no. 4, winter 1999, p. 116. Patterson notes that attempts had been made to fly the flag in St Patrick's Day parades in the city since 1948, without success.
- 7 Eamonn McCann, *War and an Irish Town* (3rd edn, London, Pluto, 1993), p. 82; *Derry Journal*, 1 July 2011.
- 8 Shane McAtee, 'The "new unionism" in Derry, 1889–1892: a demonstration of its inclusive nature', *Saothar*, vol. 16, 1991, pp. 11–22; Cathal MacManus, 'The Labour movement in Derry, 1907–1920?', unpublished MA dissertation, University of Ulster at Magee, 2003.
- 9 Fintan Lane, *The origins of modern Irish Socialism 1881–1896* (Cork, Cork University Press, 1997), pp. 91, 112.
- 10 MacManus, 'The Labour movement in Derry', p. 57.
- 11 Graham Walker, 'The Northern Ireland Labour Party, 1924–45', in Fintan Lane and Dónal Ó Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish working class, 1830–1945* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 230–2. The term 'Derry Labour Party' was mostly used in the local press, though the official name was, of course, the 'Londonderry Labour Party'. The unemployed workers used Londonderry officially as well and displayed it on their banner, the city name not inspiring at this time the same kind of rancour as it would in later years.
- 12 *Irishman*, 12 May 1928. Paddy Meenan was the father of Irish-language campaigner, Proinsias Ó Mianáin.
- 13 *Manchester Guardian*, 27 May 1921; *Daily Herald*, 2 September 1921; Kevin Morgan, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London, Haus Pub, 2006), pp. 103–4.
- 14 Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: the politics of war and peace* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 49; Aaron Edwards, 'Social democracy and partition: the British Labour Party and Northern Ireland, 1951–64', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2007, p. 604.
- 15 *Derry Journal*, 21 September 1927, 18 January 1929, 27 June 1938.
- 16 Andrew Boyd, *Fermenting elements: the Labour Colleges in Ireland 1924–1964* (Belfast, Donaldson Archives, 1999), pp. 44, 95; Agnes Finnegan, *Reaching for the fruit: growing up in Ulster* (Birmingham: Callender Press,

- 1991), pp. 101–2, 210. The Derry Labour College opened in 1926 and was run by Bob Molloy until the outbreak of the Second World War, at which point he relocated to east Belfast, continuing to work for the NCLC until 1954. It seems John De Courcy Ireland, Jack Dorricott and Tom Finnegan were regular guest speakers at the college.
- 17 Pauline McClenaghan, 'Paddy Fox: Derry socialist', unpublished paper delivered at the 5th October Commemoration Conference, Derry, 1989, p. 5. I am indebted to Pauline McClenaghan for allowing me to use her valuable research on Paddy Fox, and to Paddy Fox's son, Colm, for his help in tracking down a copy of the paper; *Derry Journal*, 4 September and 9, 11, 13 and 18 October 1939.
- 18 *Derry Journal*, 13 September and 16 October 1939; *Londonderry Sentinel*, 15 February 1940. Fox himself came from a republican family, his father having been interned as far back as the 1916 Easter Rising. Republicans who can be identified as converts to Labour include William J. Harley, who had been arrested for republican activities in 1936 (see *Derry Journal*, 8 January 1936), and Daniel Doherty, former ITGWU shipyard official, who had been a member of the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Republican Army and was a close confidant of Peadar O'Donnell during his time in Derry.
- 19 Brian Barton, *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* (Belfast, Ulster Historical Foundation, 1995), pp. 50, 123; Curran, *Derry, Countdown to Disaster*, pp. 11–12; Robert Gavin, William Kelly and Dolores O'Reilly, *Atlantic gateway: the port and city of Londonderry since 1700* (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2009), pp. 255–6.
- 20 McClenaghan, 'Paddy Fox', p. 6; Graham Walker, 'The Commonwealth Labour Party in Northern Ireland, 1942–7', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 93, May 1984, p. 73.
- 21 John De Courcy Ireland, 'Reviewing socialism in Derry and Dublin in the 1940s', correspondence, *Saothar*, vol. 17, 1993, pp. 11–12. De Courcy Ireland insists that the Derry and Londonderry Labour parties were primarily Larkinite in their politics. This is confirmed in many respects by *A Labour programme for Ireland* (Derry, Derry Labour Party, 1940), produced by the DLP with a foreword from Paddy Fox; see Public Record Office for Northern Ireland (PRONI), D2474/3/16.
- 22 Barton, *Northern Ireland in the Second World War*, pp. 52–4.
- 23 *Irish Times*, 8 January 1945; *Manchester Guardian*, 14 June 1945; McClenaghan, 'Paddy Fox', p. 6.
- 24 *Derry Journal*, 11 June 1945; *Londonderry Sentinel*, 12 June 1945; McClenaghan, 'Paddy Fox', p. 7.
- 25 Brian Barton, 'Relations between Westminster and Stormont during the Artee premiership', *Irish Political Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1992, pp. 1–20; Geoffrey Bell, *Troublesome business: the Labour Party and the Irish question* (London, Pluto, 1982), pp. 73–4; Edwards, 'Social democracy and partition', p. 596; Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson, *Northern Ireland, 1921–1994: political forces and social classes*

- (London, Sherif, 1995), pp. 101–2; Enda Staunton, *The nationalists of Northern Ireland, 1918–1973* (Blackrock, Dublin, Columba Press, 2001), pp. 158–9.
- 26 *Derry Journal*, 14 January 1946. A similar visit had been planned by future Labour minister and peer, Lord Longford, Frank Pakenham, when a prospective parliamentary candidate for Oxford City in 1939, though at the invitation of local Nationalist Party members rather than the Derry Labour Party; see *Manchester Guardian*, 11 April 1939.
- 27 Bob Purdie, 'The Friends of Ireland: British Labour and Irish nationalism, 1945–49', in Tom Gallagher and James O'Connell (eds), *Contemporary Irish studies* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 83, 88.
- 28 McClenaghan, 'Paddy Fox', p. 8; *Derry Journal*, 16 September and 2, 9, 14 and 16 October 1946.
- 29 *Derry Journal*, 23 and 26 August 1946.
- 30 McClenaghan, 'Paddy Fox', p. 7; *Derry Journal*, 27 and 30 April 1945.
- 31 *Manchester Guardian*, 18 September 1946.
- 32 *Manchester Guardian*, 30 September 1946; James Hinton, 'Self-help and socialism: the squatters' movement of 1946', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1988, pp. 100–26.
- 33 *Derry Journal*, 30 August and 18 September 1946.
- 34 *Irish Times*, 14 February 1947; *Londonderry Sentinel*, 18 February 1947.
- 35 Willie Deery, *Springtown camp: from the inside* (Derry, Guildhall Press, 2010); *Derry Journal*, 6 June 2008.
- 36 *Derry Journal*, 9 and 20 June 1947.
- 37 Christopher Norton, 'The Irish Labour Party in Northern Ireland, 1949–1958', *Saothar*, 21, 1996, pp. 48–9; Geoffrey Bing, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 16 May 1949, vol. 465, 65–71.
- 38 Purdie, 'The Friends of Ireland', p. 90.
- 39 E. Rumpf and A. C. Hepburn, *Nationalism and socialism in twentieth-century Ireland* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1977), p. 208.
- 40 Edwards, 'Social democracy and partition', p. 598.
- 41 C. R. Artlee, *As it happened* (London, William Heinemann, 1954), p. 185. Herbert Morrison had also visited Brooke after a similar holiday over the border in 1946; see *Manchester Guardian*, 3 September 1946.
- 42 *Irish Times*, 2 December 1949.
- 43 Roman Fanning, 'Small states, large neighbours: Ireland and the United Kingdom', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 9, 1998, pp. 26–7; Graham Walker, 'Northern Ireland, British-Irish relations, and American concerns, 1942–56', *Twentieth-Century British History*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2007, pp. 194–218. In some ways this is less the case with Russell Reece's *Labour and the Northern Ireland Problem, 1945–1951: the missed opportunity* (Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2009), p. 24.
- 44 *Irish Times*, 9 April 1949; *Londonderry Sentinel*, 1 March 2012.
- 45 Francis Devine, 'Reminiscence: navigating a lone channel: Stephen McGonagle, trade unionism and labour politics in Derry, 1914–1997', *Saothar*, vol. 22, 1997, pp. 143–4; *Derry Journal*, 9 April 1952.

- 46 McClenaghan, 'Paddy Fox', p. 9; *Derry Journal*, 11 October 1954; *Londonderry Sentinel*, 12 October 1954.
- 47 *Irish Times*, 1 April 1949.
- 48 People's History Museum (PHM), Labour Party Archive (LPA), Box 12 of General Secretary Morgan Phillips's papers, GS/NI/55iv, resolution no. 20 (September 1949 conference), GS/NI/100iii, v and vi (September 1950 conference), William Irwin and J. Leonard were the 1949 delegates.
- 49 *Irish Times*, 4 November 1954 and 2 January 1959; *Derry Journal*, 8 January 1959.
- 50 Desmond Fennell, 'The Northern Catholic, part four: friends and neighbours', *Irish Times*, 8 May 1958, 'The Northern Catholic, part five: people and politics', *Irish Times*, 9 May 1958, and 'The Northern Catholic, part six: putting politics on a new basis', *Irish Times*, 10 May 1958.
- 51 Interview with Keith Lindley, 6 October 2007.
- 52 According to Keith Lindley, the LLP was effectively moribund by the early 1960s, and it was not until its reorganisation in 1965 and the injection of a new energy and activism, as well as the adoption of the 'Derry Labour Party' name (though officially it remained the LLP), that it began to show growth and focus. He also noted how the Belfast leadership of the NILP and its secretary, Douglas McIldoon, was very suspicious of the Derry Labour Party and felt it to be quite republican or nationalist; interview with Keith Lindley, 6 October 2007.

9

Reflections on aspects of Labour's policy towards Northern Ireland, 1966–70: a personal narrative¹

Kevin McNamara

After my victory in the North Hull by-election on 27 January 1966, I took my seat in the House of Commons three days later. The first letter I received on the Message Board in the Members' Lobby was from Paddy Byrne, the secretary of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster (CDU), inviting me to join. I immediately accepted. The only mention of Ireland, north or south of the border, in the by-election campaign had come in the candidate's customary letter from the prime minister, Harold Wilson, a reference to the recently negotiated trade treaty with the Irish Republic. It obviously meant a great deal to Wilson, but throughout the campaign, I never once heard it referred to by my opponents or by any of my prospective constituents. By June 1970, at the end of the next parliament, the riot-ridden six counties of Northern Ireland had dominated the headlines for nearly two years. Again, the Irish situation played little part in the June 1970 election campaign, although the streets of Belfast and Derry had seen major riots, with the British Army deployed to establish order and to preserve peace by separating the two warring communities, nationalist and unionist. Nobody asked why the government had apparently been caught so unaware by the developments in Northern Ireland, whether it should have been aware and whether there was any effective action that it could have taken to prevent the escalation of violence. With a view to addressing those questions, this chapter contains my reflections on the growing crisis in Northern Ireland, as someone who was at that time an idealistic, newly elected backbencher, confident in the ability of a Labour majority government using the democratic process within the United Kingdom to remedy perceived and obvious political and social grievances efficiently and with generosity.

The Wilson administration during the 1960s was, without a doubt, culpable for failing to prevent what was to be a running sore in the politics of these islands for over three decades. It is necessary, therefore, to begin by examining how such an intellectually brilliant cabinet, the most outstanding of the twentieth century, could sleepwalk these islands into what are now euphemistically called 'The Troubles' – such a