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## An introduction to the Northern Ireland problem

Peter Mair verzorgt dit jaar namens de vakgroep Politicologie de cursus Grote Mogendheden voor bestuurskundestudenten in hun basisdoctoraal. Eenieder die deze collegereeks volgt zal duidelijk zijn dat hij zich zeer betrokken voelt bij de toestand in Noord-Ierland. Mair is dan ook zelf van Ierse afkomst. Onder begeleiding van professor Daalder schreef hij het proefschrift 'Changing the Irish Party System'. Peter Mair geeft hier een eerste schets van de problemen.

Peter Mair

A few days ago, a woman in Northern Ireland drove her car to a local garage and asked the garage owner to check it over. She was having problems with the exhaust, she said, and was worried that a new exhaust might have to be fitted. The owner got into the car and reversed it into the work bay. The woman walked away. The car exploded. The garage owner was killed instantly. Police are now trying to trace the woman.

This wasn't a random killing. The bomb had been deliberately placed in the car by the IRA, the Irish Republican Army, and the garage owner had actually been the intended victim. He was, in the IRA's terms, a 'legitimate target'. As well as running the garage, he had also been a part-time member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, a locally-recruited reserve regiment of the British Army, which plays a major role within the security forces in Northern Ireland. Indeed, as far as the IRA is concerned, there are a lot of 'legitimate targets' in Northern Ireland. These include all members of the police force, the RUC; all members of the full-time British Army, which has been deployed on the streets of Northern Ireland since 1969; all members of the part-time UDR; and, indeed, all those civilians who are in any way involved in supplying services to the security forces, be they cooks who prepare food for the army; shopkeepers who sell

goods to army personnel; or construction workers who help to build, or repair, army barracks. These all add up to a lot of targets; and in Northern Ireland, there is a lot of killing.

Since the present wave of 'the troubles' began more than twenty years ago, almost 3,000 people, including 2,000 civilians, have died as a result of political violence in Northern Ireland. This may not seem a lot, especially for those who, confronted by problems in South Africa, the Middle East and India, have become innured to political tragedies. But this is to neglect the fact that Northern Ireland has a population of just 1,5 million, roughly one-tenth of that of the Netherlands, and that its killings are occurring more or less on our doorstep. Nor is it just the death rate itself which is striking: in this same twenty-year period, this small, isolated and largely forgotten community has also witnessed some 8,000 bombings, some 11,000 armed robberies, and some 30,000 shooting incidents.

The problem in Northern Ireland is a simple one; it is only its resolution that is difficult. Two communities exist side by side, neither of which can trust nor accommodate the other. The majority community, roughly one million people, is Protestant; the minority community, roughly 500,000 people, is Catholic. But while they are divided by religion, their

conflict is not about religion. Indeed, it would be highly unlikely that such an intense and pervasive conflict could have persisted had it concerned only such questions as whether the communion host really embodied or just represented the body of Christ, or whether the Pope was really infallible, or whether Mary should be venerated in her own right. Rather, the conflict concerns something much more fundamental, and that is the question of national identity.

The majority Protestant community regards itself as British, and wishes to see Northern Ireland retain its present constitutional status as an integral part of the United Kingdom. The minority Catholic community, on the other hand, regards itself as Irish, and would like to see Northern Ireland being severed from the UK and becoming part of the Republic of Ireland. This latter position is also shared, at least formally, by the government of the Republic itself. Indeed, the constitution of the Republic formally claims *de jure* jurisdiction over Northern Ireland, recognising the rights of the British government only as a *de facto* necessity.

Hence Northern Ireland is not just a 'minority' problem; rather, it is also a 'double minority' problem. The Catholics in Northern Ireland are in a minority vis-à-vis the Protestants in Northern Ireland and, as such, feel threatened; but, in relation to the island of Ireland as a whole, the Protestants also feel themselves in a minority situation, and also feel threatened. The population of the Republic, some 3,5 million, is almost uniformly Catholic, and the social policy of the state there has enshrined much of Catholic moral teaching. Divorce is not permitted in the Irish Republic, for example; abortion is actually unconstitutional; and access to contraception was legalised only in the late 1970s. To join with the Republic is therefore, for Protestants, to be ruled by

the Vatican. Hence their desire to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland is as much part of the United Kingdom as is Scotland, Wales, or even England, and is subject to the same laws, policies, and taxes. Unfortunately, however, voters in Northern Ireland do not enjoy the same democratic opportunities as voters in Scotland, Wales and England, and they are unable to hold their government accountable for those laws, policies and taxes which are imposed upon them. The explanation for this lack of democratic accountability is simple: neither of the two main British parties, the Conservatives and the Labour Party, nominates candidates for election in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the Labour Party will not even open its membership to people who live in Northern Ireland. Thus while voters elsewhere in the UK have a choice between the two parties which are contending for the right to govern them, Northern Irish voters are given no role at all in choosing their government, and must content themselves with choosing between local Northern Irish candidates who, inevitably, will have no executive voice.

Northern Ireland was created in 1922, emerging by default when the rest of the island of Ireland became independent from the UK, and, until 1972, it enjoyed its own internal system of self-government within the UK, with its own local parliament and government. This was a period when Protestant domination over the Catholic minority was experienced most acutely. The Protestant party, the Unionists, won a clear majority at each election to the local Northern Irish parliament, with the Catholic party, the Nationalists, never winning much more than 30 per cent of the seats. The Unionists were always the governing party; the Nationalists were always the opposition. Unionist rule extended much further than this, however, in that the party also controlled most of the

local district councils, as well as the senior civil service, the police and the judiciary. It was, in the phrase of one Unionist, a Protestant state for a Protestant people, and was one in which the Catholics, perceived by the Protestants as traitors, were wholly excluded.

When the oppressed Catholics eventually took to the streets in protest in 1969, the system broke down. Protest was met by repression, which led to more protest, and more repression, until, within the escalating wave of political violence, the Northern Irish parliament was abolished, and political rule was imposed directly from London. This has done little to ease the tension, however, and violence and political polarisation have persisted.

British policy towards Northern Ireland is now one of reluctant responsibility: London must govern Northern Ireland, since it is part of the UK, but it doesn't really want to have that responsibility. As far as London is concerned, the best thing that could happen would be if Northern Ireland, with all its problems, would become part of the Republic. But as long as two-thirds of the population of the province wish to remain part of the UK, then London must put up with the problem. Hence, the second best solution is the restoration of a limited form of self-government, and this is what is currently being attempted. This at least would take some of the heat off London, and enable it to pass the problem off as simply a local Irish difficulty.

The problem here is that self-government cannot be restored on the same basis as before, with the Protestants in total control, and with the Catholics wholly excluded. Both communities will have to share executive power, if that power is to be devolved, and it is this which has created the real stumbling block. The Catholics would like to share power with the Protestants, but will do so only if the govern-

ment of the Republic can also be involved as a sort of constitutional chaperone. The Protestants also seem willing, even if reluctantly, to share power with the Catholics, but will do so only if the government of the Republic, which denies constitutional recognition to Northern Ireland, is not involved.

This is real zero-sum politics, and a compromise seems impossible to achieve. The likelihood, therefore, is that London will continue to govern Northern Ireland directly; that the lack of democratic accountability will remain; and that the killings will continue. In short, even in these heady days of popular democratic revolutions, it seems that the people of Northern Ireland are still being left to their own cruel devices.



## De Irwin-problematiek

De eerstejaars kennen hem nog niet: de tweedejaars daarentegen maar al te goed! Dhr. Irwin is de man die voor opschudding zorgde op de vakgroep bestuurskunde en onder studenten bestuurskunde die het tentamen Methoden & Technieken (kortweg M&T) nog moeten afleggen.

Angelique Brummans

Het onderwerp van gesprek was een tentamen M&T in december of januari aanstaande. Wat bleek: dhr. Irwin was niet bereid een tentamen te maken voor de honderd mensen die M&T nog moeten maken. Dat terwijl velen daarmee nog net op tijd hun propedeuse zouden kunnen halen. Immers, het behalen van de propedeuse is een ingangsvoorwaarde voor een vak uit het DI jaar. Als al deze mensen niet aan deze ingangsvoorwaarde kunnen voldoen, mogen zij Vaardigheden I niet volgen en lopen ze, wat betreft dit vak, een studie-achterstand op van één jaar.

Als de gevolgen zo groot zijn dan is het toch normaal dat dhr. Irwin een tentamen maakt? Helaas weigert hij naar de belangen van de studenten te kijken. Eén van de redeneringen van dhr. Irwin gaat in de trant van 'als je dit tentamen niet in twee keer kunt halen, hoor je niet thuis bij bestuurskunde'. Dit geeft impliciet aan dat voor hem het vak M&T het enige selectie criterium bij bestuurskunde zou zijn. Dit is natuurlijk nonsens, want Inleiding Bestuurskunde en Bestuurskunde Thema's zijn de twee andere hoofdvakken uit het eerste jaar. Deze vakken behoren dus net zo goed tot het pakket van selectiecriteria. Bovendien kunnen er zich onverwachte gebeurtenissen (buiten de studie) voordoen, zodat je je voor een (M&T)tentamen niet goed kunt voorbereiden. Zeker mensen in het eerste jaar hebben te maken met oponthoud (bijvoorbeeld omdat de omschakeling van middelbare school naar universiteit groot is voor sommigen).

Een ander probleem met dhr. Irwin ligt in de tentamenvorm. Mij valt op dat bij een tentamen M&T zowel de vragen als de antwoorden daarop discutabel kunnen zijn. De aard van het vak brengt namelijk met zich mee, dat niet alle vragen zodanig gemaakt kunnen worden, dat er maar één nauwkeurig gedefinieerd antwoord op mogelijk is. Nuanceverschillen, ja zelfs heel andere benaderingen zijn mogelijk bij het beantwoorden van vragen. Waarom? Omdat de vragen multi-interpretabel zijn. Dhr. Irwin ziet dit niet en hij verwacht dat de student zijn gedachten kan lezen en voor het 'juiste' antwoord kiest. Doet de student dit laatste niet (maar is zijn antwoord wel correct) dan heeft hij pech. Want dhr. Irwin duldt geen tegenspraak of discussie. Zelfs niet van zijn eigen medewerkers. Hij vertoont dus niet alleen student-onvriendelijk-gedrag, doch ook medewerker-onvriendelijk-gedrag.

De vakgroep bestuurskunde heeft voor dit probleem zo zijn eigen oplossing: we maken zelf wel een tentamen als dhr. Irwin het niet doet.

Wat schetst nu mijn verbazing? Dhr. Irwin, die eerst een maand lang bij bestuurskunde ruzie heeft lopen zoeken, maakt toch een tentamen. Denkt hij opeens wel aan het belang van de student? Wil hij de vakgroep bestuurskunde werkelijk van dienst zijn? Leuk dat er een tentamen van Irwin komt, maar er blijft sprake van student- en medewerker-onvriendelijk-gedrag, doordat Irwin de spanningen veel te hoog op heeft laten lopen.