Northern Ireland, Peace People of.

In 1976, there were 314 political deaths in Northern Ireland, a figure surpassed only by the 497 deaths suffered in 1972 (Fay et al. 1999, 137). As proportions of the relatively small population, such annual figures were significant. During this peak of ethnopolitical conflict, a cross-community movement of Protestants and Catholics emerged, demanding an end to violence, advocating the power of nonviolence, and envisioning a communitarian vision of the future. The first participants were primarily women, and the movement was initially referred to as the "women's' movement," although the more inclusive name, "Movement of the Peace People," was adopted. (A formal organization was later democratically constituted as "Community of the Peace People.") A declaration of purpose was adopted, and tens of thousands of people across Northern Ireland attended rallies to protest violence. Branch organizations pursued programs of social uplift until the movement declined in 1978.

Tragedy and Mobilization

On 10 August 1976, Anne Maguire went for a stroll along Finaghy Road North in Belfast with her three children, Joanna (eight years old), Andrew (six weeks old), and John (two years old). Pat O'Connor, Anne's sister, and Pat's children accompanied them. As they walked, a car careened out of the road, striking the Maguire family. The impact killed Andrew and Joanna instantly and seriously injured Mrs. Maguire and her son John, who died the following day. The car that struck the Maguire family was driven by two IRA volunteers escaping after a drive-by attack on a British Army patrol. Soldiers in pursuit fired on the car, killing the driver, Danny Lennon, and causing the car to veer out of control and strike the family.

The following day, fifty women in the Republican neighborhoods of Andersonstown and Stewartstown in Belfast protested Republican violence by marching with baby carriages and petitioning for an end to the violence. Later that evening, an aunt of the dead children, Mairead Corrigan, appeared on television pleading for an end to the violence. (Five years later, Mairead Corrigan married her sister's widower, and thus she is often referred to in more recent literature as Mairead Corrigan Maguire.) Betty Williams, who lived near the site of the tragedy, also became a passionate voice calling for an end to violence. By Friday, 13 August 1976, the tragedy and the ensuing funeral had attracted international media attention, and Ciaran McKeown, a well-known Northern Ireland journalist and nonviolent activist, told Corrigan and Williams that he thought a sustainable peace movement could be organized. On the day following the funeral, 10,000–15,000 people, both Protestant and Catholic, attended a rally in Andersonstown, a Republican neighborhood of Belfast (McKeown 1984, 142–143). Along the way, Republicans taunted and attacked the marchers, but the fact that Protestants and Catholics had gathered together seemed a significant victory in a region so deeply riven by violent ethnopolitical conflict.

Rallies

The first phase of movement activity stretched from the first rally in West Belfast on 14 August 1976 through a rally in Drogheda on 5 December 1976 near the historically and politically charged seventeenth-century sites of a bloody massacre by Cromwell's forces and the Battle of the Boyne. At least twenty-six marches or rallies took place in Northern Ireland, Britain, and the Republic of Ireland, attracting intense international media attention and financial and political support. Peace groups (110 by one count) were established through the bussing of marchers from various areas. A modest central office was established in Belfast to facilitate communication between local peace groups, and an ad hoc committee assisted the three leaders.

A rally on 21 August in Protestant East Belfast involved more than 20,000 people, and the rallies on Belfast's Shankill Road and in Derry/Londonderry each

attracted around 25,000 people. One large march through Republican West Belfast came under sustained attack but fortunately ended with no serious injuries. Northern Ireland's rallies were generally the largest, but other events across Britain and the Republic of Ireland also involved thousands. Northern Ireland in 1976 was deeply divided in terms of politics, culture, and geography. Yet, the schedule of marches brought Protestants and Catholics from even the most politically entrenched areas together for a common purpose. Groups created banners identifying themselves by neighborhood, mingled with participants from other neighborhoods, and often cooperated by chartering buses together. The events represented an unusual experience from the habitual segregation along religious and political lines with which participants were familiar.

The movement also attracted international media attention as camera crews arrived from the United States and European countries. McKeown, Williams, and Corrigan traveled to the United States for television interviews and meetings with Congresspeople, including Senator Edward Kennedy. The Norwegian People's Peace Prize, organized by Norwegian media, raised more than £200,000 ($361,010 in 1976 dollars) for the movement by December 1976, and Corrigan and Williams received the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. However, between rallies, press interviews, and invitations abroad, the leadership struggled to keep the movement organized at home while sustaining external support.

Community Politics

The second phase of the movement began in early January 1977. The excitement of the early days died down, and the leadership worked to organize for the maintenance of the movement and set out long-term goals. Community peace groups had formed during the rally phase, and the leadership planned to undermine the culture of fear that reinforced ethnopolitical division through "community politics" and a shared "Northern Irish" identity that would transcend polarized political identities (McKeown 1976, 24–25; 1994, 1, 4). In McKeown's words:*Our more immediate concern was with the low-level application of these ideas in the wake of "hot war," when neighbors were afraid to talk to each other… Our purpose was to encourage such neighbors to take an active interest in the quality of life of their own streets and districts, to feel that they had friends in other communities busy in the same genuine patriotism, and that together they would defeat the deepest law of repression, "whatever you say, say nothing." (1984, 189)*To support this program of grassroots transformation, a nonprofit company and trust fund were set up to disburse funds to community improvement programs and small businesses. An "escape route" was established to relocate those who wanted to defect from paramilitary organizations. At the same time, effort was directed toward establishing a sustainable organization.

International support remained high, but over time the movement began to experience difficulties among the leadership and community groups, many of which faltered after the rally phase. There was some concern over the use of funds, including the Nobel Peace Prize. Controversy also developed over McKeown's prominence in decision-making and the organization's fiscal strategy as limited funds ran short and loans were written off. More generally, the ambitious and principled commitment to a philosophy of nonviolence, a "peace culture," and "nothing less than the creation of a new civilization" among the movement's leadership outpaced the scope and commitment of the membership as well as the ability of the organization to deliver on such an ambitious program (McKeown 1976, 28; Fairmichael 1987, 5).

Continuing Work

Nonetheless, the emergence of the Peace People, at a minimum, marked a precipitous decline in the violence of The Troubles. One could also argue that the movement contributed to the curtailing of violence by challenging common sectarian and political scripts, undermining support for paramilitarism, and creating space for creative thought and opportunities for inclusive dialogue. Although the mass movement declined from 1978, the Peace People organization has continued to promote nonviolence and community activism. After the breakdown of the Executive in 1980, several initiatives, including youth employment, a residential center, and prison reform continued to operate as legacies of the movement.

The Peace People's newspaper was originally titled *Peace by Peace* and was renamed *The Citizen* in 1995. A selection of twenty-four issues from 1992 to 1997 shows that, during the 1990s, the organization experienced a renewal. It critiqued Northern Ireland's peace process, encouraged important grassroots political dialogue through the People's Peace Talks, and went on raising awareness around a sizeable raft of global peace and human rights issues including other regions of violent conflict, poverty, the arms trade, landmines, genocide, and state repression of dissidents.

Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Betty Williams have continued to promote human rights and nonviolence in their capacities as Nobel Peace laureates. Mrs. Corrigan Maguire has campaigned extensively around the world, enduring arrest in the United States in 1998 in support of the jailed peace activist Philip Berrigan. In 2007, while demonstrating in the Middle East, she was struck with a rubber bullet fired by the Israeli Defense Forces. The Peace People and Mairead Corrigan Maguire maintain an office on the Lisburn Road in Belfast and focus on global issues of human rights, war, and peace, including nuclear weapons of mass destruction, the detention of Mordecai Vanunu in Israel, and conflict in Israel and Palestine.

Declaration of the Peace People

We have a simple message to the world from this movement for peace.
We want to live and love and build a just and peaceful society.

We want for our children, as we want for ourselves, our lives at home, at work and at play to be lives of joy and peace.

We recognize that to build such a life demands of all of us, dedication, hard work, and courage.

We recognize that there are many problems in our society which are a source of conflict and violence.

We recognize that every bullet fired and every exploding bomb makes that work more difficult.

We reject the use of the bomb and the bullet and all the techniques of violence.

We dedicate ourselves to working with our neighbors, near and far, day in and day out, to building that peaceful society in which the tragedies we have known are a bad memory and a continuing warning.

("Declaration of the Peace People" 1976, 12)

[See also GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT; NORTHERN IRELAND; and NORTHERN IRELAND, CIVIL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION OF]

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