

# NORTHERN IRELAND: PROBLEM OF POWER

*We publish below an excerpt from yesterday's annual Christmas lecture by Richard Rose, professor of politics at Strathclyde University. The organisers, the Workers' Education Association, invited senior school pupils from the West of Scotland, but children in Glasgow Corporation schools were banned from attending.*

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NORTHERN IRELAND is a small land, but it has a sufficiency of problems to occupy a whole faculty of social scientists. Yet the arrival of an inter-disciplinary team of scholars in Ulster might only add to the confusion if they disagreed about the fundamental nature of the Northern Ireland problem.

Searching for an answer is of more than academic interest, for without a diagnosis of the cause of the difficulty it is hard to achieve any kind of durable settlement there.

A geographer could argue that the problem is one of boundaries: where should the Border fall between this kingdom and the Republic of Ireland? The Republican answer assumes that an island ought to be an undivided state.

The idea of one island one folk is unlikely to be endorsed without qualification by Scots and Welshmen. A Dutch geographer, M. W. Heslinga, has demonstrated that until very recently water provided the chief means of linking people because land routes were difficult to traverse. He found propinquity to follow such familiar routes as Belfast to Glasgow, Dublin to Liverpool, and even Galway to Boston.

## Partition

Because Protestants and Catholics live in all parts of Northern Ireland there is no natural line for repartition. The easy work of political geography was accomplished in 1921. We inherit the intractable problem of deciding how two peoples who occupy one territory may live with each other within their Six Counties.

A sociologist could argue that the absence of social solidarity results from infrequent social contact between Protestants and Catholics. His comment presupposes that if people meet each other more often they will become more friendly. This assumption has for decades guided much race relations activity in America.

Streets and housing estates that mix Protestants and Catholics probably provide the best opportunity for people to meet as neighbours and friends. One of the saddest features of the past three years is the disruption of such areas within Ulster, particularly in Belfast.

Catholic and Protestant minorities have been intimidated from their homes in order to create segregated, and therefore more secure, areas within the city. In extreme instances Protestants and Catholics have joined in burning a street of houses in order to define a "no-man's-land" between warring camps.

Even where forced migration has

## By RICHARD ROSE



Professor Rose

not occurred people may find they no longer wish to talk to neighbours as friends because they know that they are on opposite sides of the political divide.

A psychologist might hypothesise that the continuing violence in Northern Ireland reflects aggressive character traits among Irish people. In the nineteenth century primitive anthropologists went even further: they argued that the condition of Irishmen showed the inherited character traits of a lower species of mankind.

One shortcoming of this analysis is that it does not explain the readiness to resort to political violence among Ulster people who do not think of themselves as Irish. A second objection is that the Irish are not prone to political violence after migration to Britain or America.

Moreover, until the troubles broke out three years ago Ulster was a relatively tranquil place according to crime statistics. Conceivably the reputation of the Irish for aggressiveness might be the consequence of 800 years of unhappiness about the state of Anglo-Irish relations rather than the cause. An Irishman might even argue that this history demonstrates the aggressive character of English people!

## Economics

On rational economic grounds an economist might assert that the whole of Northern Ireland should be written off as a bad investment involving high costs for few economic benefits. If the Treasury is not to continue subsidising Scottish shipbuilding why should it subsidise the Belfast yards?

The actions of successive British Governments, and for that matter of the IRA, show that economic calculations are not necessarily pre-eminent in the minds of politicians. Moreover, any Ulsterman who decides to remain in the province rather than emigrate to

lands with higher standards of living has put love of his home ahead of most pecuniary calculations.

There are also limitations in arguing that Ulster politics is today the politics of class conflict. The majority of Protestants and Catholics are working-class. Survey evidence shows that about the same proportion of Catholics and Protestants enjoy council housing.

While cases of discrimination in employment can be inferred from patterns of promotion and non-promotion in local authorities there remain substantial numbers of well-off Catholics as well as poor Protestants.

The proponents of political division along class lines have found their political support greatly eroded by events since August, 1969. This is true of the Marxist-orientated official IRA as well as of the non-violent People's Democracy movement. Revolutionary nationalism takes precedence over mere economic revolution.

An old-fashioned theologian might claim that he could explain Ulster's difficulties better than any social scientist by relying upon concepts derived from the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. In these terms the problem is that some people are saved, whereas others are going to hell because they follow the anti-Christ.

## Theology

There is, however, some disagreement among Ulster theologians about who is the current representative of the anti-Christ in the province.

Northern Ireland is one of the last bastions of old-time doctrinal beliefs. Its citizens, unlike English ecumenicists, really do believe that there are important differences between the Christian Churches.

A majority of Protestants regard ecumenicism as undesirable in principle and impossible in practice. Catholics endorse Church unity on the assumption that locally it would secure the supremacy of the Catholic Church in Ireland, one of the most conservative branches of the Catholic Church in the whole of the Western world.

A law professor might regard disorder in the streets as evidence of defects in the law. This belief lay behind much of the reform legislation introduced by the Stormont Government following its 1969 agreement with Downing Street. Many reform measures have now been enacted into law.

But legislation has not stopped protest, because the way in which

new laws have been administered has led to further grievances, especially in the appointment of minority representatives by Unionists.

The Republican reaction to internment, a measure carried out under existing statutory authority, demonstrates that enforcing legislation is a much greater problem than passing it.

A student of military affairs could perceive Northern Ireland simply as a battleground between a well-equipped British Army and a small and desperate Republican guerrilla force. If the advantage in such a combat rests with the army this analysis holds out hope to some. If the advantage rests with the urban guerrillas this holds out hope to others.

## Military

Both constitutional theory and military prudence argue that force should be a means, not an end. This is true whether victory is achieved at a low cost or takes a Pyrrhic form. The British Army can only create the pre-conditions for a political settlement; soldiers with guns at the ready cannot themselves constitute civil administration.

At the moment internal war shields both sides from facing up to the crucial question: how will the Protestants and Catholics of Northern Ireland live together once the shooting stops?

Northern Ireland is pre-eminent-ly a political problem, that is, a problem of power. Who shall govern there? Successive British Home Secretaries have made it clear that London does not wish to rule directly.

Successive Prime Ministers in the Republic of Ireland have symbolically affirmed traditional claims to authority in the Six Counties. But they have adapted neither their Constitution nor their army to pursue such a goal.

At the end of the day some means must be found that recognises the presence of both Protestants and Catholics in Ulster. There are three broad possibilities: a Protestant majority exercises political power; a Catholic minority exercises political power, or power is shared between a majority coalition or representative Protestants and Catholics.

Each of these has as its corollary that some group will lose out in the struggle for power — and lose much that it holds dear.

The possibilities are rarely stated so starkly. Perhaps it is time that we faced them for what they are. Only by facing the facts of a harsh and brutal power struggle can one begin to move toward a viable instrument of civil government in this troubled land.

## Lecture censored

THE BANNING of young people from attending instruction on a controversial political subject is the sort of effort normally associated with extremist regimes — or backwoods school boards in the more reactionary States of the Deep South. This, the most indefensible form of censorship, has now occurred in Glasgow. By 17 votes to 8 the corporation education committee have ordained that a lecture entitled "Conflict in Ulster — what are the right questions?" is dangerously strong meat for the children of Glasgow. The paternalistic concern, it is to be noted, is for pupils who are legally old enough to earn their own living and marry. Some are old enough to vote. Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire, and Stirlingshire are giving their school children the chance to listen as mature adults.

Nowadays, children far younger are shielded from practically none of the facts of life, biological or political, but Ulster is apparently something quite different. The education convener,

Dr Daniel Docherty, is obviously motivated by concern that nothing should stir up feelings between Protestants and Catholics in Glasgow. But, by picking up any newspaper or tuning into any television newsreel, these same young people daily witness the happenings across the Irish Sea and in their own lives hear prejudiced and ill-informed comment. Surely, it is just because Glasgow has her own problems, that young minds should be given every opportunity to hear a reasoned view of the situation in an academic atmosphere where questioning will be allowed.

Moreover, it would have been difficult for the Workers' Educational Association to find anyone better suited to give such a lecture than Professor Richard Rose — a rational, reasonable and respected figure who has the outstanding advantage, in this situation, of not being British. It is hardly to be expected that pupils who have, in any case, had the intelligence to reach the fifth or sixth form, will rush from his lecture room to burn effigies of the Pope or Mr Paisley.