

THE GLOBAL REVOLT OF 1968 AND NORTHERN IRELAND

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ABSTRACT. *The year 1968 witnessed a global revolt against imperialism, capitalism, and bureaucracy. It was not – as has long been claimed – the start of a cultural revolution that produced greater personal freedom, but the end of the post-war attempt to define a new left. This reinterpretation of '68 as a global revolt rather than the the baby-boom generation's coming-of-age party is based upon recent research at the local level. An examination of Ireland's radical left during the 'long '68' is an important contribution to this work, as it was significant as well as small. Contact at congresses and through the media with other leftists enabled Northern Ireland's 'sixty-eighters' to conceive of themselves as part of an imagined community of global revolt. They shared similar goals and tactics. Like their comrades on the continent and across the Atlantic, the region's sixty-eighters tried to attract attention and support by provoking the authorities into an overreaction. In a country dominated by the sectarian divide, however, clashes between Catholic protesters and Protestant police officers were always more likely to lead to communal conflict than class struggle. The Troubles is perhaps the most tragic outcome of the interaction of global and local politics that occurred during '68.*

In 1988, the street protests staged in Western cities during 1968 were commemorated as the post-war generation's coming of age.¹ When they reached maturity, the baby boomers had supposedly found themselves in conflict with an adult world where conservative values and institutions had not kept pace with economic modernization.² Sixty-eight was presented as the beginning of a cultural revolution that had delivered personal freedom. This view was championed by the handful of former activists who had established themselves as spokesmen for the '68 generation.³ By the thirtieth anniversary, historians had begun to challenge this dominant reading. The media's favourite sixty-eighters had retrospectively claimed that the movement's ultra-left rhetoric should be ignored: activists resorted to outdated Marxist terminology to describe the fledgling struggle for individual autonomy as nothing else was available. Historians have

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¹ Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its afterlives* (London, 2002), p. 204.

² Alan Brinkley, '1968 and the unraveling of Liberal America', in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: the world transformed* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 222.

³ Pierre Nora, 'Generation', in Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory*, 1 (New York, 1996), p. 500.

preferred to research the political language of '68 for themselves rather than rely upon the self-appointed translators.⁴ As the fortieth anniversary nears, this approach has led to what is becoming the new consensus on '68. Examining speeches, pamphlets, and news-sheets written in the late 1960s, it becomes obvious that political change mattered more than experimenting with new lifestyles. Sixty-eighters were not turning away from politics in the pursuit of pleasure: isolated individuals found happiness in collective action. They believed that they were part of a global struggle to emancipate, not the individual from outdated ways of living, but humanity from imperialism, capitalism, and bureaucracy. Instead of a fleeting festival of liberation, '68 emerges as the culmination of the post-war revision of Marxism and socialism as a whole.

The experience of Ireland's radical left lends itself well to a case study of this 'long '68'. Although it encompassed groups based in the emigrant community in Britain as well as the island's two partitioned states, Ireland's radical left was significantly smaller than its counterparts in France, West Germany, Italy, and the United States. Tracing the development of Ireland's would-be revolutionaries from the middle of the 1950s till the end of the 1960s is therefore more manageable than that of their continental and American comrades. It also requires covering ground that has been neglected by previous studies of Northern Ireland on the eve of the Troubles. The intensity of this conflict has encouraged the assumption that communal violence was inevitable. The creation of a Protestant-dominated state with a sizeable Catholic minority in the years following the First World War did not solve the Irish question so much as rephrase the problem. According to the official story, when the first generation of Catholics to benefit from the education reforms of the mid-1940s came of age in the late 1960s, the minority population started to protest in the streets against the injustices of the Protestant supremacist state.⁵ Northern Ireland had a civil rights generation, not a '68 generation. Indeed, Roy Foster's history of modern Ireland warns against making 'analogies with student movements' of the late 1960s. The 'absence of a distinct youth culture in Ulster society' has led Foster and others to conclude that Northern Ireland was not part of the international festival of liberation and therefore not part of '68.⁶

However, the principal organizer of the march that sparked the Troubles, Eamonn McCann, has always maintained that 'we were part of that'.⁷ Writing in 1998, he recalled that the motto of '68 was 'One world, One struggle'. The opening months of the Troubles were linked to 'the black struggle in the US, the workers' fight in France, the resistance of the Vietnamese, [and] the

⁴ Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert and Detlef Junker, 'Introduction', in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., *1968*, pp. 1 and 2.

⁵ See, for instance, Thomas Hennessey, *A history of Northern Ireland, 1920–1996* (London, 1997), p. 127.

⁶ Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London, 1988), p. 587.

⁷ Margot Gayle Backus, "'Not quite Philadelphia, is it?': an interview with Eamonn McCann", *Éire-Ireland*, 36 (2001), pp. 178–191, at pp. 185 and 186.

uprising against Stalinism in Czechoslovakia'.⁸ Unlike the proponents of the cultural revolution thesis, the middle-aged McCann repeats rather than reinterprets his younger self's calls for a global revolt against imperialism, capitalism, and bureaucracy. In the late 1960s, McCann's newspaper, the *Irish Militant*, supported Vietnam's guerrilla fighters, advocated 'Workers' Power', and condemned Soviet Communism's bureaucratic socialism.⁹ Nevertheless, while McCann has remained loyal to the aims of '68, he almost immediately abandoned its tactics. As early as April 1969, McCann was conceding that the short cut to socialism had failed.¹⁰ Like their comrades on the continent and across the Atlantic, Northern Ireland's leftists had attempted to expose the state's hidden brutality, escape isolation, and stimulate a movement by adopting a strategy of provoking an overreaction from the authorities. This was a decision that owed as much to desperation as to inexperience. Although one of the American New Left's founding statements opened with the subheading 'Agenda for a Generation', a few lines later came the admission 'we are a minority'.¹¹ Even after growing rapidly throughout the decade, only around 1 per cent of American college students were activists in the spring of 1968.¹² As one West German radical observed, 'Without provocation we wouldn't be noticed at all.'¹³ An escalating cycle of provocation and police repression did succeed in bringing tens of thousands of people on to the streets in Northern Ireland and other Western countries. However, the leftist assumption that 'Street fighting leads to political struggle' proved to be flawed.¹⁴ In Northern Ireland, the struggle that the sixty-eighters provoked was between communities rather than classes. As McCann told the *New Left Review*, 'The consciousness of the people who are fighting in the streets at the moment is sectarian and bigoted.'¹⁵

Northern Ireland was not exceptional in finding historic divisions asserting themselves at the close of the 'long '68'. In the United States, for instance, the malignant heritage of slavery can be detected in the ghetto riots and the 'white backlash'.¹⁶ What was different about Northern Ireland was the extent and duration of the violence: '68 marked the beginning of decades of virtual civil

⁸ Eamonn McCann, 'Preface', in Eamonn McCann, *McCann: War & Peace in Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), p. 4.

⁹ *Irish Militant*, Oct. 1967.

¹⁰ Anthony Barnett, 'People's Democracy: a discussion on strategy', *New Left Review*, May–June 1969, pp. 3–19, at p. 5.

¹¹ The Port Huron Statement, in James Miller, *Democracy is in the streets: from Port Huron to the siege of Chicago* (New York, 1987), pp. 329 and 330.

¹² Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Introduction: students and politics in comparative perspective', in Seymour Martin Lipset and Philip G. Altbach, eds., *Students in revolt* (Boston, 1969), p. xvii.

¹³ David Caute, *Sixty-eight: the year of the barricades* (London, 1988), p. 78.

¹⁴ 'Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Jean Pierre Duteuil', in Hervé Bourges, ed., *The student revolt: the activists speak* (London, 1968), p. 69.

¹⁵ Barnett, 'People's Democracy', p. 5.

¹⁶ Manfred Berg, '1968: A turning point in American race relations?', in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., 1968, pp. 399 and 400.

war. As in other Western countries, the vast majority of the Northern Irish public wanted order to return.¹⁷ But the communal divide ensured that the centre could not hold. The option of restoring order by force was also unavailable to the Northern Irish authorities. Although French President Charles de Gaulle had to make concessions to his generals to secure their support, the army was constitutionally his to command.¹⁸ Political control of the military units based in Northern Ireland rested in London, not Belfast. During the early stages of the crisis, the British government's main priority was to avoid any military involvement.¹⁹ When the army finally was called upon to replace the overstretched police force in August 1969, the arrival of soldiers in Belfast and Derry was seen as a defeat for the Northern Irish government.²⁰ Anyway, the chance of securing a quick end to the crisis had already passed. While the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) officially came into being at the end of 1969, the revival of militant Republicanism had begun at the start of the year.²¹ Terrorist attacks also occurred in West Germany and Italy in the years after 1968, but fascism had discredited the concept of armed struggle in these countries.²² The Provisionals were able to draw upon a tradition that stretched back to the nineteenth century. Republican violence and its loyalist counterpart – based upon a similar history of armed resistance – undermined every attempt to achieve an agreement. Leftists living in the affluent West of the 1960s seized upon Che Guevara's argument that a revolution could be made even without a revolutionary situation.²³ When Northern Ireland's sixty-eighters tried to make a socialist revolution, they not only found that conditions were vital but that everything was in place for a communal conflagration.

This article traces the course of the long '68 – with the experience of Ireland's radical left providing the constant thread. Section I covers the background to '68: the survival of authoritarianism into the post-war era and the attempt to define a new left. Section II describes how American student groups pioneered the forms of protest that characterized '68. Section III looks at the influence of the transnational campaigns against nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War. Section IV examines the personal and imagined connections that existed between sixty-eighters. Section V details how provocation enabled small bands of leftists to trigger the creation of mass movements.

¹⁷ *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 Dec. 1968.

¹⁸ Keith A. Reader and Khurshed Wadia, *The May 1968 events in France: reproductions and interpretations* (New York, 1995), p. 16.

¹⁹ Military aid to the civil authority in Northern Ireland, 13 Dec. 1968, London, National Archives, PREM/13/2841. ²⁰ Eamonn McCann, *War and an Irish town* (London, 1993 edn), p. 117.

²¹ Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 211 and 218.

²² Konrad H. Jarausch, '1968 and 1989: caesuras, comparisons and connections', in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., *1968*, p. 472.

²³ Che Guevara, 'Guerrilla warfare: a method', in Jay Mallin, ed., *Che Guevara on revolution* (Coral Gables, 1969), p. 89.

I

The 'Protestant state' that had grown up in Northern Ireland between partition and 1939 survived largely intact into the post-war era.²⁴ Some concessions were made in recognition of the greater international scrutiny that now existed. As the ruling Unionist party explained to its supporters in February 1951, the 'Convention on Human Rights compelled us to be fair'.²⁵ For the most extreme Protestants, however, the allocation of homes by the region's housing trust on a non-sectarian basis and increases in the state subsidy given to Catholic schools were evidence of appeasement rather than fairness. Anxious not to lose their support, the devolved government abandoned the attempt to pursue a more liberal line. Legislation was passed in 1954 that required the police to protect the display of the Union flag and authorized the removal of the Irish tricolour when flourishing it threatened a breach of the peace.²⁶

Although the Flags and Emblems Act has often been cited as evidence that Northern Ireland was a police state, a virtually identical law had been added to the West German penal code a few years earlier.²⁷ Indeed, the Federal Republic shared many of Northern Ireland's supposedly undemocratic features. The Christian Democrats remained in sole power in Bonn from the creation of West Germany until 1966, while the Unionist party's political hegemony lasted from partition until 1972.²⁸ Such 'dominant party systems' were sufficiently common in Western Europe for French sociologist Raymond Aron to lecture on the phenomenon. 'It is not a one-party system', he explained. 'Opposition parties exist, and intellectual and personal freedoms are respected. But one party has an overwhelming majority, and ... no-one can see any possibility of [it] being replaced in power.'²⁹ In France, the Communist party – which was supported by one quarter of the electorate – was actively excluded from even a share of power. This was not surprising given that the Communists were committed to revolutionary change, albeit after taking control through the ballot box rather than insurrection.³⁰ Moreover, as the Socialist leader Léon Blum highlighted, the Communists were a 'foreign nationalist party' – their ultimate allegiance lay with the Soviet Union, not France.³¹ Northern Ireland's Catholic parties occupied a comparable position: effectively barred from power, supported by

²⁴ Ross, *May '68*, p. 8.

²⁵ Henry Patterson, 'Party versus order', *Contemporary British History*, 13 (1999), pp. 105–29, at p. 113.

²⁶ Patterson, *Ireland*, pp. 121–5.

²⁷ Michael Farrell, *Arming the Protestants* (London, 1983), pp. 268 and 269; A. D. Moses, 'The state and the student movement in West Germany, 1967–1977', in Gerard J. DeGroot, ed., *Student protest: the sixties and after* (London, 1998), p. 141.

²⁸ Stuart J. Hilwig, 'The revolt against the establishment: students versus the press in West Germany and Italy', in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., *1968*, p. 323.

²⁹ Raymond Aron, *The elusive revolution: anatomy of a student revolt* (New York, 1969), p. 117.

³⁰ Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing revolution: the intellectual left in postwar France* (London, 1993), pp. 17 and 24.

³¹ Tony Judt, *The burden of responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French twentieth century* (Chicago, 1998), p. 23.

a substantial minority of the population, pledged to overthrow the constitution, and loyal to a political entity beyond the territorial boundaries of the state.³² That there was an ethnic dimension to Northern Ireland's divided society, of course, cannot be ignored. Even the liberal Unionist Terence O'Neill, prime minister from 1963 to 1969, was prejudiced against the minority, referring to 'papes' in a private discussion.³³ Nevertheless, almost every Unionist seems to have expected that rising standards of living would convince the Catholic community to abandon Irish nationalism and accept the constitutional settlement.³⁴

The year 1956 revealed the degree to which the Cold War had woven together international politics and domestic matters. In every Western country, the Soviet invasion of Hungary stimulated the revision of Marxism and socialism as a whole. Although this process was occurring within different countries, common themes were being discussed. The sense of shared endeavour that this generated among the West's radical left encouraged the spread of information across national frontiers. The mechanisms for these exchanges were personal contact and the mass media – both of which had grown rapidly in the post-war era.³⁵ Given the complexity of adopting an idea from one context and adapting it to another, this process did not unfold smoothly over time.³⁶

France may have been at the vanguard of the post-war revision, but the ideas were being continually modified both inside the hexagon and beyond its borders. Following the Liberation, existentialism emerged as a serious intellectual rival to Marxism-Leninism. Jean-Paul Sartre maintained that meaning could only be given to meaninglessness and alienation overcome through action and commitment. Sartre increasingly regarded such engagement as being political and revolutionary. This prompted him to move closer to the Communists and provoked criticism from intellectuals like Aron, Albert Camus, and Claude Lefort. The latter together with another ex-Trotskyite, Cornelius Castoriadis, were the driving force behind the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. They argued that the Russian Revolution had erected a state where the bureaucracy had replaced the bourgeoisie as the exploiters of the proletariat.³⁷ This interpretation only gained influence after the suppression of the Hungarian revolt. Edgar Morin, a disaffected party intellectual, accompanied Lefort on his tour of the Eastern European upheavals. Upon his return, Morin brought together other former

³² *Derry Journal*, 25 June 1968.

³³ Handwritten note of discussion, 19 Feb. 1965, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, CAB/9D/31/2.

³⁴ Terence O'Neill, *Ulster at the crossroads* (London, 1969), p. 48.

³⁵ Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht, 'The cross-national diffusion of movement ideas', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 528 (1993), pp. 56–74, at pp. 59, 60, and 66.

³⁶ Sean Chabot and Jan Willem Duyvendak, 'Globalization and the transnational diffusion between social movements: reconceptualizing the dissemination of the Gandhian repertoire and the "Coming out" routine', *Theory and Society*, 31 (2002), pp. 697–740, at pp. 699, 701, 706, 727, and 728.

³⁷ Khilnani, *Arguing revolution*, pp. 50, 51, 67, 68, and 129.

Communists to found the journal *Arguments*. Although the editors abandoned the party and Stalinism, their work continued to reference the Communist canon. Western Marxist thinkers, notably Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, and Antonio Gramsci, and the early Karl Marx were enlisted in support of their revisionism. A humanist Marx, very different from the determinist of the later writings, emerged from his recently published notes on political economy and Hegelianism. The so-called *Paris Manuscripts* revealed the continuity that existed between Marx's thought and Hegelianism, helping alienation take the place of exploitation as the key Marxist concept.³⁸

The *Paris Manuscripts* crossed the channel in 1958. The Oxford delegation to an international socialist conference met French intellectuals seeking to define a *nouvelle gauche* and adopted the term for its own political project.³⁹ The youthful Oxford clique, in turn, introduced these continental European ideas to the British New Left's second tendency, dissident Communists. When news of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 speech condemning Stalin reached Britain, Communist intellectuals E. P. Thompson and John Saville orchestrated a campaign to replace democratic-centralism with open debate. After Moscow moved against Budapest, the prospect of renewing Communism from within the party disappeared for many members. The pair resigned and eventually joined with the Oxford group to produce the *New Left Review*.⁴⁰

Like the majority of intellectuals within the British Communist party, C. Desmond Greaves preferred to remain a card-carrying member. Nevertheless, the executor of his literary estate, Anthony Coughlan, claims that the party's Irish expert should not be dismissed as a 'Stalinist': 'one could scarcely meet a less dogmatic person or a mind more open to alternative explanations'.⁴¹ Roy Johnston, another admirer of Greaves, similarly recalled that his mentor came to the conclusion that 'the simplistic "class struggle" formulations of the CP in Britain were quite remote from the Irish reality'.⁴² This more creative interpretation of Marxism-Leninism could be reconciled with continued loyalty because the Communist party cared little about Northern Ireland. Greaves encountered no opposition as he transformed a front organization targeting Irish

³⁸ Arthur Hirsh, *The French New Left: an intellectual history from Sartre to Gorz* (Boston, 1981), pp. 4, 5, 9, 16, 80, 91, 93, 110, and 112; Karl Marx, 'The economic and philosophical manuscripts', in David McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: selected writings* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 75, 76, 77, 87, 88, 89, 96, 97, 108, 109, and 111.

³⁹ Stuart Hall, 'The "first" New Left: life and times', in Robin Archer, Diemut Bubeck, Hanjo Glock, Lesley Jacobs, Seth Moglen, Adam Steinhouse, and Daniel Weinstock, eds., *Out of apathy: voices of the New Left thirty years on* (London, 1989), pp. 14, 15, 23, and 24.

⁴⁰ Michael Kenny, *The first New Left: British intellectuals after Stalin* (London, 1995), pp. 15–18 and 54.

⁴¹ Anthony Coughlan, 'C. Desmond Greaves, 1913–1988: an obituary essay', in *Saothar*, 14 (1989), pp. 5–15, at pp. 6 and 12.

⁴² Roy Johnston, *Century of endeavour: a biographical and autobiographical view of the 20th century in Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 123.

emigrants, the Connolly Association, into a pressure group campaigning for a united, socialist Ireland.

From the mid-1950s onwards, the Connolly Association was committed to a 'three-pronged attack against British imperialism' in both parts of Ireland and Britain.⁴³ The organization contended that Unionist dominance in Northern Ireland was founded upon a sectarian political system. The association consequently believed that if full civil rights could be secured Catholic and Protestant 'would learn to respect each other'. The unification of the working class would invariably lead to 'an anti-Unionist Government' being elected. Britain, where power ultimately rested, would attempt 'to enforce imperialism'.⁴⁴ 'The keystone of the Connolly Association plan', stated its newspaper, 'is therefore to enlist the services of British democracy in the struggle for Irish freedom.'⁴⁵ By highlighting the discriminatory and authoritarian aspects of the regime, the Connolly Association maintained that Unionism could be compelled to concede previously denied civil liberties.⁴⁶ When a progressive coalition was voted into power in Belfast, as the strategy assumed would happen, the British Labour movement's support would be the deciding factor in the fledgling government's struggle with imperialism.⁴⁷ Further help would be provided by an anti-imperialist government in Dublin, which would simultaneously be casting off the restraints imposed by British finance capitalism. The common interest of North and South would bring unification, enabling 'a native government to plan and direct the whole economic life of the country'.⁴⁸ 'Although such a programme does not spell socialism', the Connolly Association newspaper asserted, 'its direction is as unmistakable as Castro's Cuba.'⁴⁹

While Greaves deviated from the orthodox line in his approach to Irish politics, he still adhered to the principle that progress could only come through the island's Communist parties and trade unions. By contrast, Coughlan and Johnston decided in the mid-1960s that the militant Irish nationalist Republican movement would be the agent of change – although only Johnston went so far as to join the IRA and Sinn Féin. Following the failure of the IRA's 1956–62 military campaign, the movement was receptive to the pair's ideas. When Greaves castigated Coughlan for pursuing socialism outside the 'working-class movement', the younger man retorted that the traditional left-wing parties 'would never do anything'. In common with many left-wing intellectuals throughout the West, Johnston believed that an alternative to social democratic parties and Communism was needed. He aspired to 'develop the republican movement into an all-Ireland democratic Marxist party having broad-based support from workers, working management, working owner-managers, and self-employed'.⁵⁰

Although Coughlan and Johnston shared a common goal, the latter recalled there being a 'clear mismatch' over the correct tactics to employ in the North.

⁴³ *Irish Democrat*, July 1960.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Aug. 1968.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, June 1962.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Jan. 1965.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, July 1964.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, July 1961.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, July 1960.

⁵⁰ Johnston, *Century*, pp. 123, 153, 167, 170, 171, 228, and 235.

The dispute centred on Coughlan's continued commitment to Greaves's civil rights approach.⁵¹ British imperialism, according to Coughlan's reasoning, was attempting to retain its influence over Ireland by promoting an economic union with the South and reconciliation within the British Isles. He argued that this should be exploited to launch a popular movement that would agitate for comprehensive civil rights reform. The dismantling of the political and social foundations of sectarianism would enable the Protestant working class to recognize that its interests were best served by a socialist republic not British imperialism.⁵²

The Republican movement's proposals for a civil rights campaign appealed to other opposition groups. In January 1967, an umbrella body called the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was formed. The creation of a civil rights coalition almost invariably entailed making concessions to more moderate voices. Indeed, the civil rights campaign developed into a pressure group along the lines of Britain's National Council for Civil Liberties rather than Coughlan's vision of a popular movement.⁵³ The initiative therefore began to pass to the next generation of left-wing activists.

II

American student radicals, who came to prominence earlier than their Western European counterparts because the ranks of adult activists had been decimated by Communist witch-hunts, bridged the New Lefts of 1956 and 1968. In 1960, this social group was 'annointed' by C. Wright Mills, to quote an interview Tom Hayden – America's star sixty-eighter – gave two decades later.⁵⁴ The Texan sociologist was friends with leading figures in the British New Left: he had tried to get Thompson a job in Castro's Cuba and had toured Eastern Europe with Marxist intellectual Ralph Miliband in 1957.⁵⁵ Indeed, it was in the *New Left Review* that Mills famously wrote that the 'young intelligentsia', contrary to 'Victorian Marxism', was now the 'possible, immediate, radical agency of change'.⁵⁶ Hayden's Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) listed Mills's article alongside *Out of Apathy* – a collection of essays from the British New Left – and the *Paris Manuscripts* as recommended reading in 1961.⁵⁷ Existentialism also informed the early SDS's thinking. Hayden later claimed in his autobiography that Camus exerted the same influence upon the group as Mills.⁵⁸

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 155, 156, 171, 175, 176, 177, 179, 185, 198, 228, 229, and 231.

⁵² Henry Patterson, *The politics of illusion* (London, 1997 edn), pp. 105, 110, 111 and 112; Richard English, *Armed struggle* (London, 2003), pp. 88 and 89.

⁵³ Johnston, *Century*, pp. 215, 216 and 236; Government of Northern Ireland, *Disturbances in Northern Ireland: report of the commission appointed by the governor of Northern Ireland* (Cameron report) (Belfast, 1969), p. 22.

⁵⁴ Miller, *Democracy*, p. 86.

⁵⁵ Kathryn Mills and Pamela Mills, eds., *C. Wright Mills: letters and autobiographical writings* (Berkeley, 2000), pp. 241, 243, and 316.

⁵⁶ C. Wright Mills, 'Letter to the New Left', *New Left Review*, Sept.–Oct. 1960, pp. 18–23.

⁵⁷ Miller, *Democracy*, pp. 86 and 87. ⁵⁸ Tom Hayden, *Reunion: a memoir* (London, 1989), p. 76.

This commitment to existentialism was shared by the student wing of the civil rights movement and helped to bring the two groups together. Indeed, when Hayden married civil rights worker Sandra Cason, passages from Camus were read at the wedding ceremony.⁵⁹ Like many young people alienated from 1950s America, Cason had got involved in the direct action campaign against segregated lunch counters. The spontaneous wave of sit-ins, which began in Greensboro during the first months of 1960, grew into the Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC).⁶⁰ Northern student radicals were in awe of this new civil rights group. 'SNCC had suffered,' SDS activist Todd Gitlin recalled, 'SNCC was there, bodies on the line, moral authority incarnate.'⁶¹

The preoccupation of white Northern students with the civil rights movement reached its apogee during the summer of 1964. SNCC's projects in Mississippi had repeatedly succumbed to state-sanctioned intimidation.⁶² The group believed that the solution was to get hundreds of white Ivy League students to help register Black voters. This would bring the media down to the Deep South, which meant national attention and federal involvement.⁶³ Doug McAdam concludes – based on the systematic interviews conducted at the time – that most volunteers were 'liberals, not radicals; reformers rather than revolutionaries'.⁶⁴ These liberal values, which had mainly been acquired from their parents, complemented the existentialist motives many volunteers had for going to Mississippi.⁶⁵ However, as the summer progressed, liberalism was exposed as an inadequate political vehicle for the existentialist drive to combat injustice.⁶⁶ The North's political and economic investment in the region proved more important to Washington than the constitutional rights of Black Mississippians. A season of perceived liberal betrayals culminated in the 1964 Democratic convention seating the regular segregationist party over the integrated Mississippi Freedom Democratic party.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, for the Northern volunteers, the experience of working with SNCC in Mississippi had been a revelation rather than a disappointment. Referring to Camus's *La Peste*, the project leader had told the training camp that America 'isn't willing yet to admit it has the plague, but it pervades the whole society'. Many volunteers seem to have identified with Camus's heroic doctor

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ Harvard Sitkoff, *The struggle for Black equality, 1954–1992* (New York, 1992 edn), pp. 94 and 95.

⁶¹ Todd Gitlin, *The sixties: years of hope, days of rage* (New York, 1993 edn), pp. 128 and 129.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶³ Clayborne Carson, *In struggle: S.N.C.C. and the Black awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA, 1995 edn), pp. 96, 97, and 98.

⁶⁴ Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (Oxford, 1988), p. 5.

⁶⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The sixties: cultural revolution in Britain, France Italy and the United States, c. 1958–1974* (New York, 1998), p. 565.

⁶⁶ Doug Rossinow, *The politics of authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity and the New Left in America* (New York, 1998), pp. 86 and 165.

⁶⁷ Sitkoff, *Struggle*, pp. 171, 177, 178, 179, 184, and 185; Carson, *In struggle*, pp. 108, 126, 127, 128, 236, 241, and 242; McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, pp. 49, 53, and 118.

waging an exhausting fight against pestilence.⁶⁸ One of the participants later told McAdam that the 'whole experience was such a high'. The students arrived back at their campuses determined to recapture this freedom high. They also carried north the radical political outlook and training in civil disobedience that they had acquired. Consequently, when the authorities at Berkeley ended the practice of allowing political groups to set up card tables, the Freedom Summer veterans applied what they had learnt in Mississippi.⁶⁹ The 'Berkeley model' was in turn adopted and adapted by Western European students.⁷⁰

The American civil rights movement's foreign impact was probably greatest in Northern Ireland, where the Black struggle received considerable media coverage and comparisons were easy to draw. When young Catholic mothers from the town of Dungannon protested at the lack of public housing in May 1963, they carried placards bearing slogans like 'Racial Discrimination In Alabama Hits Dungannon'.⁷¹ The African-American analogy, however, was not being invoked to provide a new gloss to traditional strategies. Instead, it helped to shift politics towards reform within the system and tactics of publicity-seeking civil disobedience and non-violent mass protests.⁷²

A few months later, however, the influence of the African-American model had waned. Instead of becoming a civil disobedience movement, the middle-aged leaders of the Dungannon protests opted to set up a civil liberties pressure group.⁷³ These middle-class campaigners later helped found NICRA and carried their ideas into the new body. It was five years after the initial Dungannon protests before another attempt was made to adapt American strategies to a different setting. The pressure group approach had failed to deliver results: the Unionists were not prepared to make serious concessions and neither the Westminster parliament nor the London press were interested in pressing for major changes. NICRA treasurer Fred Heatley later recalled that 'the tactics of Martin Luther King in America had been absorbed inasmuch that it was felt by some that only public marches could draw wide attention to what we were trying to achieve'.⁷⁴ In the summer of 1968, a series of squatting incidents and a civil rights parade took place in the Dungannon area. Key aspects of the African-American model were not adopted and the desired breakthrough was not achieved.⁷⁵ Police reported that a large meeting of local Catholics concluded that 'the march was a failure'.⁷⁶ Film of seemingly peaceful protesters being attacked was the only way

⁶⁸ Hayden, *Reunion*, pp. 76, 77, and 117; Mark Kurlansky, *1968: the year that rocked the world* (London, 2004), p. 91.

⁶⁹ McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, pp. 67, 68, 11, 117, 132, 137, 138, 163, 166, 168, 169, and 235.

⁷⁰ Gabriel Cohn-Bendit and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: the left-wing alternative* (London, 1969), p. 24. ⁷¹ *Dungannon Observer*, 18 May 1963. ⁷² Berg, '1968', pp. 400 and 401.

⁷³ Conn McCluskey, *Up off their knees: a commentary on the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 10, 11, 12, and 129. ⁷⁴ Fred Heatley, 'The early marches', *Fortnight*, 5 Apr. 1974.

⁷⁵ Austin Currie, *All hell will break loose* (Dublin, 2004), pp. 96, 97, 98, and 106; Sitkoff, *Struggle*, pp. 126, 127, and 128.

⁷⁶ Civil Rights March from Coalisland to Dungannon, 29 Aug. 1968, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, CAB/9B/1205/7.

to inspire mass support, attract media interest, and force the British government to intervene. Further experimentation and creative reinvention would be required to bring success.

III

The international pacifist community was an important precursor of 1968's protest movements. The American peace movement, for example, played a crucial role in diffusing Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent direct action. For these radical pacifists, Satyagraha provided a 'post-Soviet, post-H-bomb expression of the needs of today'.⁷⁷ The Satyagrahi, while strictly adhering to a stance of non-violence, refuses to co-operate with unjust laws, and willingly accepts the sacrifices this brings. By avoiding an escalating cycle of violence, communication with the opponent remains possible. The Satyagrahi seeks to demonstrate the pointlessness of coercion and the desirability of reconciliation.⁷⁸ America's leading pacifist A. J. Muste helped stimulate Martin Luther King's interest in Gandhi's ideas.⁷⁹ Although the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott initially followed the pattern of previous Black protests, the unexpected length of the campaign encouraged King to develop a new strategy based on Satyagraha.⁸⁰ 'Christ furnished the spirit and the motivation', he later wrote, 'while Gandhi furnished the method.'⁸¹ Radical pacifists also operated as movement consultants for the embryonic SNCC. In the late 1950s, Muste's Fellowship of Reconciliation organized non-violence workshops throughout the South. When sit-in activists gathered to agree SNCC's founding statement, it was the radical pacifist James Lawson rather than King who dominated the process of drafting the text.⁸²

The universalism inherent in Satyagraha, the shared threat of nuclear war, and the common Quaker background helped American pacifists to develop links with their British counterparts. As Richard Taylor observes, 'Muste [was] second only in importance to Gandhi.' Although Britain possessed its own direct action tradition, the incorporation of Satyagraha radicalized pacifism. In November 1957, the Direct Action Committee (DAC) decided to organize a four-day Easter protest march to the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment

⁷⁷ Gregory Nevala Calvert, *Democracy from the heart: spiritual values, decentralism and democratic idealism in the movement of the 1960s* (Eugene, 1991), pp. 43 and 46.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Schell, *The unconquerable world* (London, 2004), pp. 117, 118, and 119.

⁷⁹ James Farmer, 'The march on Washington: the zenith of the Southern Movement', in Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan, eds., *New directions in civil rights studies* (London, 1991), pp. 30 and 31.

⁸⁰ Chabot and Duyvendak, 'Globalization', pp. 719, 720, 723, and 724.

⁸¹ Charles Marsh, 'The civil rights movement as a theological drama', in Ted Ownby, ed., *The role of ideas in the civil rights South* (Jackson, 2002), p. 31.

⁸² Francesca Poletta, 'Strategy and democracy in the New Left', in John McMillan and Paul Buhle, eds., *The New Left revisited* (Philadelphia, 2003), p. 160; Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee Founding Statement, in Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, eds., *'Takin' it to the streets': a sixties reader* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 24 and 25.

at Aldermaston. While the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the New Left's Oxford tendency also contributed to this project, the first Aldermaston march was firmly within the Gandhian tradition of non-violent direct action.⁸³

'The DAC anticipated key aspects of 1968.'⁸⁴ As the minutes for the 1957 foundation meeting reveal, the activists felt that 'Widespread material contentment and a feeling of impotence' 'made dramatic unorthodox means of spreading of ideas more and more necessary'. The ultimate goal of the DAC and other radical pacifists around the world was a non-violent society. This internationalism manifested itself in such activities as the Sahara project. In conjunction with Western European and American pacifists, the DAC attempted to disrupt French nuclear testing and spread the message of non-violence to Ghana.⁸⁵ While the DAC's priorities were probably at variance with those of the Third World independence movements, greater affinities existed with the West's non-violent groups. In West Germany, around 200 protesters marched to the Bergen nuclear missile base on Good Friday 1960. The British influence upon the Easter March movement was underlined by the presence of CND leaders Bertrand Russell and Canon John Collins on its board of trustees.⁸⁶ Ireland's CND groups went one step further, effectively subsuming themselves within the British movement. The main public activity undertaken each year by the two Irish campaigns was to send representatives on the Aldermaston march.⁸⁷ Irish emigrants also participated on an individual basis in this annual demonstration. McCann marched with CND in 1965 and in the process moved further to the left. He met Gerry Lawless, a former IRA quartermaster, along the route and was recruited into his Trotskyite Irish Workers' Group (IWG).⁸⁸ The peace movement was an important stage in the political education of many other Northern Irish radicals. Indeed, even though the movement was in serious decline by 1968, CND banners were carried on the first civil rights marches.⁸⁹

By the second half of the 1960s, as CND's Peggy Duff later observed, 'the war in Vietnam superseded the Bomb in public interest and concern'.⁹⁰ When the Northern Irish CND applied to march in late 1966, this was part of a campaign against British support for the American war effort rather than in favour of

⁸³ Richard Taylor, *Against the bomb: the British peace movement, 1958-1965* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 121, 122, 123, 167, 168, 178, and 188.

⁸⁴ Geoff Eley, *Forging democracy: the history of the left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford, 2000), p. 356.

⁸⁵ Taylor, *Bomb*, pp. 121 and 167.

⁸⁶ Rob Burns and Wilfried van der Will, *Protest and democracy in West Germany: extra-parliamentary opposition and the democratic agenda* (London, 1988), pp. 89, 92, and 93; Lawrence S. Wittner, 'The nuclear threat ignored: how and why the campaign against the bomb disintegrated in the late 1960s', in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., 1968, pp. 441 and 442.

⁸⁷ *Irish Democrat*, May 1960, Apr. 1961, June 1961, July 1961, Nov. 1961.

⁸⁸ Bob Purdie, *Politics in the streets: the origins of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1990), p. 229.

⁸⁹ Cameron report, p. 29.

⁹⁰ Wittner, 'Nuclear threat', p. 449.

nuclear disarmament.⁹¹ As America's military intervention expanded and grew more militant, so did the New Left in almost every Western state.⁹² Elements within the New Left increasingly came to identify with the Communist National Liberation Front (NLF). This was the culmination of an interest in the Third World independence movements that had begun with the radical left's post-war reappraisal. Colonial struggles aided Western radicalism's attempt to escape exhausted orthodoxies by offering variations upon European theories and practices of revolution.⁹³ Guerrilla fighters also represented a romantic alternative to Eastern Europe's *apparatchiks*. Their courageous stand against apparently invincible forces was a source of inspiration for embattled Western radicals. Castro's small party of insurgents were almost annihilated soon after landing in 1956, but were to enter Havana as Cuba's masters two years later.⁹⁴ The new government subscribed to the faith that any guerrilla campaign could generate the means to its own success. As Guevara proselytized, 'it is not always necessary to wait for all the conditions for revolution to exist – the insurrectionary focal point can at times create them'.⁹⁵ This was in direct contrast to the other main theorists of guerrilla war and to Marxism-Leninism in general. Nevertheless, as Northern Irish activists made clear, the Cuban reading held the greatest fascination for Westerners.⁹⁶ The idea that revolution fundamentally depended upon an act of will rather than favourable conditions appealed to the existentialist instincts of the New Left.⁹⁷

The interest in Third World conflicts also stemmed from the belief that, again contrary to classical Marxism, revolution in the periphery provided the best chance of revolution in the centre.⁹⁸ The most comprehensive explanation of this position was presented by the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS)* in May 1966. The imperialist powers, in its opinion, were inflicting exemplary punishment upon Vietnam to caution other Third World countries from embarking upon their own liberation struggles and seriously disrupting the capitalist system. The fears of America and its allies mirrored *SDS*'s hopes. If the Vietnamese continued to resist and guerrilla campaigns were launched elsewhere, then the drain on resources would undermine the consumer culture that had supposedly neutralized the revolutionary potential of the West's working

⁹¹ *Irish Democrat*, Nov. 1966.

⁹² Gitlin, *Sixties*, pp. 179, 183, 187, 188, 189, and 261; Ingo Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegungen in den Vereinigten Staaten und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland der sechziger Jahre: Eine Untersuchung hinsichtlich ihrer Beeinflussung durch Befreiungsbewegungen und –theorien aus der Dritten Welt* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 16, 17, 391, and 392.

⁹³ Kenny, *New Left*, p. 179; Rudi Dutschke, *Jeder hat sein Leben ganz zu leben: Die Tagebücher, 1963–1979* (Cologne, 2003), pp. 51 and 52. ⁹⁴ Rossinow, *Authenticity*, pp. 272 and 273; Gitlin, *Sixties*, p. 279.

⁹⁵ Guevara, 'Guerrilla warfare', p. 89.

⁹⁶ Barnett, 'People's democracy', p. 14; Michael Farrell, 'Introduction', in Michael Farrell, ed., *Twenty years on* (Dingle, 1988), pp. 11, 12, and 21; Jay Mallin, 'Introduction', in Mallin, ed., *Che Guevara on revolution*, pp. 22, 23, 30, 31, 41, 42, and 43.

⁹⁷ Juchler, *Studentenbewegungen*, p. 398.

⁹⁸ Gianni Statera, *Death of a utopia: the development and decline of student movements in Europe* (Oxford, 1975), p. 189.

class.⁹⁹ Given that the leftists believed they were confronting fundamentally the same enemy, actions in the First World were regarded as a useful contribution to Communist North Vietnam's war effort. The *Irish Militant* declared that one of the 'duties to Vietnam' owed by 'socialists in Western Europe' was to provide a 'diversion of [American] attention'.¹⁰⁰

IV

In February 1968, activists from North America and Europe travelled to West Berlin for the International Vietnam Congress. *SDS* called upon its comrades to 'commence the coordinated battle against imperialism on European soil'.¹⁰¹ This solidarity was to be forged through words and actions. The main hall was decorated with a huge North Vietnamese flag bearing Guevara's famous dictum: 'The duty of a revolutionary is to make a revolution.' *SDS* provided political literature, including translations of Guevara's *Message to Tricontinental Magazine* in which he proposed the creation of 'two, three, many Vietnams'.¹⁰² Twenty thousand people marched through the city, carrying red flags and giant portraits of Guevara, Mao Tse-tung, and Ho Chi Minh.¹⁰³

SDS was more militant than the other groups were because West German activists and authorities had become locked into an escalating cycle of violence that was driven in part by contrasting interpretations of the nation's Nazi past. The main political parties who had formed the grand coalition in 1966, responded to what was viewed as a renewed totalitarian challenge by voting themselves coercive powers to defend the state during emergencies.¹⁰⁴ *SDS*, who understood fascism as a form of bourgeois dictatorship imposed by society's dominant classes at times of crisis, believed such developments indicated that 'the postfascist system has become a prefascist system'.¹⁰⁵ *SDS* members were also determined not to be party to what they regarded as the 'second silence' surrounding 'Auschwitz-Vietnam' – the air war that was killing thousands each week.¹⁰⁶ Although *SDS*'s ideas were significantly influenced by this specific cultural context, the foreign delegations nonetheless chose to adopt and adapt much

⁹⁹ Wilfried Mausbach, 'Auschwitz and Vietnam: West Germany's protest against America's war during the 1960s', in Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, and Wilfried Mausbach, eds., *America, the Vietnam War, and the world: comparative and international perspectives* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 288 and 289; Juchler, *Studentenbewegungen*, pp. 396, 397, and 398.

¹⁰⁰ *Irish Militant*, Oct. 1967.

¹⁰¹ Mausbach, 'Vietnam', p. 297.

¹⁰² Ingo Cornils, "'The struggle continues'": Rudi Dutschke's long march', in DeGroot, ed., *Student protest*, p. 106.

¹⁰³ *Avant-Garde Jeunesse*, Feb.–Mar. 1968, in Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, eds., *The French student uprising November 1967–June 1968: an analytical record* (Boston, 1971), pp. 74–9; Kurlansky, *1968*, pp. 149, 150, and 152.

¹⁰⁴ Kay Schiller, 'Political militancy and generation conflict in West Germany during the "Red Decade"', *Debatte*, 11 (2003), pp. 19–38, at pp. 23, 28, 29, and 34.

¹⁰⁵ Donatella Della Porta, *Social movements and political violence and the state* (London, 1995), pp. 159 and 160.

¹⁰⁶ Mausbach, 'Vietnam', pp. 287, 288, and 295; Juchler, *Studentenbewegungen*, pp. 396 and 397.

of what they had learnt in West Berlin. Less than a week after the congress, French leftists sought to replicate its militancy by occupying the heart of the Latin Quarter. A contemporary account of the 'Heroic Vietnam Quarter' demonstration highlighted how the marshals were 'particularly "well seasoned" since Berlin' and the chants were 'imported from Berlin'.¹⁰⁷ In April 1968, shortly after the attempted murder of SDS leader Rudi Dutschke, French Trotskyites were calling for 'two, three, many Berlins'.¹⁰⁸

'Belfast', Bob Purdie observes, 'was one step beyond London, the farthest outreach of the revolutionary network.' Nevertheless, the province's foremost leftists – McCann, Michael Farrell, and Cyril Toman – were present in the metropolis for periods during the 1960s.¹⁰⁹ This clique, which had formed at Queen's University Belfast earlier in the decade, was recruited through McCann's contact with Lawless into the London-based IWG.¹¹⁰ While living in the British capital, McCann attended the July 1967 Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation. 'Groups all over the world are doing much the same as some of us are doing here in London', David Cooper, who was part of the planning committee, told the congress, 'and we want to get this transnational network established.'¹¹¹ The speakers included the critical theorist Herbert Marcuse, who was a major influence upon Dutschke, and the then chair of SNCC, Stokely Carmichael.¹¹² McCann listened to the latter proclaim that SNCC militants were 'going to extend our fight internationally and hook up with the Third World'.¹¹³ The clique was also linked to the transnational networks of rebellion through Farrell's involvement in student politics. As chair of the Irish Association of Labour Student Organizations, Farrell attended foreign conferences such as the International Union of Socialist Youth's 1966 Congress in Vienna.¹¹⁴ Farrell later claimed that the Maoists he encountered at these events particularly influenced his thinking. A slightly younger set of Northern Irish activists belonged to a British group created to imitate the French student movement – the Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation (RSSF).¹¹⁵ Its inaugural June 1968 conference was attended by leading foreign radicals like Cohn-Bendit, all of whom had been invited to London by the BBC for a television programme on the global revolt.¹¹⁶ The Queen's University branch of the RSSF was established by students who had encountered the group while attending the Grosvenor Square Vietnam Solidarity

¹⁰⁷ *Avant-Garde Jeunesse*, Feb.–Mar. 1968, pp. 74–9.

¹⁰⁸ Schnapp and Vidal-Naquet, eds., *French student uprising*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁹ Purdie, *Politics*, pp. 229 and 235.

¹¹⁰ W. H. Van Voris, *Violence in Ulster: an oral documentary* (Amhurst, 1975), pp. 60 and 61.

¹¹¹ David Cooper, 'Beyond words', in David Cooper, ed., *The dialectics of liberation* (London 1967), pp. 201 and 202.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 7 and 9; Dutschke, *Leben*, p. 46.

¹¹³ Stokely Carmichael, 'Black power', in Cooper, ed., *Dialectics*, p. 168; Brian Dooley, *Black and green: the fight for civil rights in Northern Ireland and Black America* (London, 1998), p. 46.

¹¹⁴ Paul Arthur, *People's Democracy* (Belfast, 1974), pp. 23 and 24; *Irish Democrat*, July 1966.

¹¹⁵ John Callaghan, *British Trotskyism: theory and practice* (Oxford, 1984), p. 133.

¹¹⁶ Colin Crouch, *The student revolt* (London, 1970), pp. 70 and 116.

march on 27 October 1968.¹¹⁷ Northern Ireland was not under quarantine while the revolutionary contagion raged throughout the West.

The emergence of media with worldwide reach was crucial to giving 1968 its global character. Although face-to-face contact was possible at congresses, the overwhelming majority of activists were never to meet their foreign counterparts. It was through the media that radicals around the world were able to conceive of themselves as belonging to the imagined community of global revolt.¹¹⁸ The feeling of international solidarity was generated not only by the mainstream media but also by the print ephemera published by the radical groups themselves. The IWG, as a member of the Fourth International, had access to material from other Trotskyite organizations.¹¹⁹ Farrell has frequently admitted that he was 'heavily influenced' by a pamphlet written by the American Trotskyite George Breitman about how the mobilization of oppressed social groups could radicalize the whole working class.¹²⁰ Although the media helped diffuse ideas around the globe, the ideas were more often in a fragmentary form removed from the original context.¹²¹ When barricades were thrown up in the Latin Quarter during May 1968, the protesters seem to have been consciously appealing to public memory of France's revolution tradition.¹²² Foreign observers of the *événements* missed this historic allusion. For activists at New York's Columbia University, who were watching on television, the construction of barricades was seen as a means of confronting the police.¹²³

The desire for coverage required Western activists to fulfil the media's insatiable need for spectacle, novelty, and progression.¹²⁴ In Derry, where left-wingers from the Labour party and the Republican movement had entered into an unofficial alliance, activists like the newly returned McCann spent the first half of 1968 chasing attention.¹²⁵ A city with a clear Catholic majority had a Unionist council because the electoral boundaries had been gerrymandered. Most Catholic families were crammed into a single ward, creating appalling overcrowding and an opportunity for the leftists. On 2 April 1968, the Irish nationalist *Derry Journal's* main news story was that a 'dozen men and girls' had created 'uproar' at the council's March meeting.¹²⁶ The radicals were also present at the April meeting, but on this occasion they failed to make the front page of the local newspaper.¹²⁷ To become the lead story in the city's media again, they deposited

¹¹⁷ Jean-François Lévy, 'La People's Democracy', *Les Temps Modernes*, 20 (1972), pp. 2009–47, at p. 2011; Purdie, *Politics*, pp. 211, 228–31, 233, 235, and 236.

¹¹⁸ Fink, Gassert, and Junker, 'Introduction', pp. 2, 3, 9, and 10. ¹¹⁹ *Irish Militant*, Sept. 1967.

¹²⁰ Dooley, *Black*, pp. 50 and 55; Purdie, *Politics*, pp. 227, 230, 231, and 232.

¹²¹ Wilfried Mausbach, 'Historicising "1968"', *Contemporary European History*, 2 (2002), pp. 178–88, at p. 181.

¹²² Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, 'May 1968 in France', in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., *1968*, p. 261; Reader and Wadia, *May 1968*, p. 11.

¹²³ Todd Gitlin, *The whole world is watching: mass media in the making and unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 194 and 195.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹²⁵ *Derry Journal*, 2 July 1968; McCann, *War*, p. 86.

¹²⁶ *Derry Journal*, 2 Apr. 1968.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 May 1968.

a caravan on the main road of the Catholic Bogside district.¹²⁸ Activists in all Western countries found themselves caught up in this state of almost constant protest. 'Inside the movement', Gitlin later remembered, 'one had a sense of being hurled ... from event to event without the time to learn from experience.'¹²⁹ McCann concurred that careful planning was impossible under such conditions: 'we became involved willy-nilly, just surfing along on it and really making things up as we went along'.¹³⁰

V

At the end of 1967, Carmichael succinctly described SNCC's strategy: 'You create disturbances, you keep pushing the system ... until they have to hit back; once your enemy hits back then your revolution starts.'¹³¹ This tempting short cut out of the political margins was taken by almost every New Left group. As Cohn-Bendit recalled in his instant history, a crackdown by the authorities 'opened the eyes of many previously uncommitted students' and inspired them 'to express their passive discontent'.¹³² Despite the long-term growth of tolerance, Western police forces were only too willing to play the role assigned them by the leftists. The Parisian police had acquired both personnel and practices from a military that had spent most of the post-war era fighting colonial wars. On 17 October 1961, almost 40,000 Algerian men, women, and children assembled to protest against the curfew imposed upon their community. Prefect of Police Maurice Papon had reportedly toured barracks in the weeks before the demonstration hinting to the officers that brutality would be condoned. The police fired upon the protest almost immediately, charged the crowd, closed off the surrounding side streets, isolated the routed demonstrators into small groups, and clubbed them. An estimated 200 people were killed. Although Papon had moved on by May 1968, the demonstrators in the Latin Quarter were still facing the force he had formed to combat opponents of the state.¹³³

The Royal Ulster Constabulary's (RUC) masters also believed that the police should serve as aggressive defenders of the political status quo. With this in mind, Derry's radicals decided in the summer of 1968 that 'the one certain way' 'to provoke the police into overreaction and thus spark off mass reaction' was 'to organise a non-Unionist march through the [Protestant] city centre'.¹³⁴ As the *Derry Journal* reminded its readers, during 'the past twenty years several attempts have been made by the Nationalist Party ... to demonstrate in ... the main thoroughfares of the city. They were met by police batons.'¹³⁵ The city's moderate Catholic politicians remembered these beatings and were not prepared

¹²⁸ Ibid., 25 June 1968.

¹²⁹ Gitlin, *Whole world*, p. 234.

¹³⁰ Backus, 'Philadelphia', pp. 184 and 185.

¹³¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Rebellion in the university: a history of student activism in America* (London, 1972), p. xxi.

¹³² Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism*, pp. 54 and 55.

¹³³ Ross, *May '68*, pp. 42, 43, 44, 48, 49, 51, 52, and 53.

¹³⁴ McCann, *War*, pp. 91, 92, and 93.

¹³⁵ *Derry Journal*, 23 July 1968.

to endorse a march into the walled city. Sponsorship for a march on 5 October 1968 came instead from the Belfast-based NICRA, which was anxious to underscore its claim to be non-sectarian. The Unionist government, however, remained unconvinced and banned the march from Protestant areas.¹³⁶ The government was also concerned about the involvement of Derry's radicals in the planned march. The home affairs minister stated shortly after the march that 'a revolutionary socialist group' 'sought and planned for riot'. Indeed, although NICRA agreed to give its name and support to the march, almost all organizational matters were left to the Derry activists. The march therefore was a deliberately chaotic affair: stewarding was inadequate, the front rank of marchers was pushed up against the police line, and missiles and abuse were hurled at RUC officers. As the sixty-eighters had hoped, this provocation led to the police indiscriminately using their batons in front of the television cameras.¹³⁷ The city's former mayor declared that Northern Ireland was now part of the '68 revolt: 'We have seen these sort of people at work lately ... all over the globe and much nearer home, at Grosvenor Square ..., in Paris, Dublin, and now in Londonderry.'¹³⁸

'By 1968, there was very little indication that Belfast undergraduates were part of the world-wide wave of student protest.'¹³⁹ There was nothing unusual about this: the events of May in Paris also had humble beginnings. As Cohn-Bendit recalled, 'when a minority of students takes conscious advantage of their freedom to attack the established order, they can become a catalyst activating a larger section of the student population'.¹⁴⁰ Following the arrest in March 1968 of four students from Nanterre for demonstrating in support of the NLF and against American imperialism, over 100 others gathered to protest against this violation of free expression. From this meeting emerged the 22 March movement – a reference to Castro's 26 July movement.¹⁴¹ Within the space of a few months, the cycle of provocation and repression initiated at Nanterre had brought tens of thousands of students on to Parisian streets.¹⁴²

In Northern Ireland, the violence surrounding the Derry civil rights march inaugurated an almost identical process. After the initial Derry disturbances, Queen's University lecturer Seamus Heaney noticed 'embarrassed, indignant young Ulstermen and women whose deep-grained conservatism of behaviour was outweighed by a reluctant recognition of injustice'.¹⁴³ Close to 3,000 students assembled on 9 October 1968 to march in protest on city

¹³⁶ Greeves to Woods, Belfast, Public Record Office Northern Ireland, CAB/9B/1205/7.

¹³⁷ Cameron report pp. 32, 33, and 80.

¹³⁸ *Parliament of Northern Ireland House of Commons Debates*, vol. 170, cols. 1014–22 and 1025, 16 Oct. 1968.

¹³⁹ Arthur, *People's Democracy*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁰ Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism*, p. 47.

¹⁴¹ 'Resolution adopted by 142 students occupying the Nanterre administrative buildings at night 22 March 1968', in Vladimir Fišera, ed., *Writing on the wall – May 1968: a documentary anthology* (London, 1978), p. 76 and 77.

¹⁴² Kurlansky, *1968*, p. 221.

¹⁴³ Seamus Heaney, 'Old Derry's walls', in *The Listener*, 24 Oct. 1968.

hall.¹⁴⁴ After being halted short of their destination by the RUC, the protesters returned to Queen's University to discuss the day's events. This developed into what participants later characterized as an intensely emotional debate about the problems afflicting Northern Ireland. The meeting decided to establish a permanent protest group, the People's Democracy, to agitate for social and political change.¹⁴⁵ From this moment, as the university's newspaper claimed, 'Student Power had come to Belfast.'¹⁴⁶

For most New Left groups, their first objective was to stimulate a movement. At Nanterre, left-wing sects overcame doctrinal differences to form the 22 March movement.¹⁴⁷ In Belfast a similar coalition was forged.¹⁴⁸ The most important faction was led by McCann, Farrell, and Toman – beneficiaries of the decision not to limit membership to students.¹⁴⁹ Another prominent tendency was the university's RSSF branch.¹⁵⁰ Its news-sheet, *Defamator*, employed the same ideas and terminology as their 'comrades in France'. In the early December issue, it was stated that 'relations of domination ... are made apparent only when the bureaucracy is provoked into showing its true dictatorial nature'.¹⁵¹ In keeping with this belief, the RSSF regularly used People's Democracy protests to disrupt the smooth running of the university.¹⁵²

The 'innocents' – the label used by Kevin Boyle in a 1972 interview – outnumbered the 'politicos' within People's Democracy. Boyle, who lectured at the university during the late 1960s and regarded himself as 'three parts innocence', made the 'existential choice' to stand for election to the 'Faceless Committee'. The left-wing cliques and the university's moderate political societies still succeeded in getting members on to the committee. Boyle and another three-parts innocent, Bernadette Devlin, tried to resist factionalism and act in the interests of People's Democracy as a whole. As Devlin later recalled, the pair were 'referees'.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, as time progressed, many innocents were converted to revolutionary socialism. Indeed, Boyle and Devlin also found themselves 'moving towards a radical position'.¹⁵⁴

Assembly meetings in Belfast – as they had in Berkeley, West Berlin, Turin, New York, and Paris – functioned as a school of revolt.¹⁵⁵ A nationalist politician

¹⁴⁴ Belfast Telegraph, 9 Oct. 1968.

¹⁴⁵ *Billy Liar*, Nov. 1968, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3219/3; Cameron report, pp. 32, 33 and 80; Arthur, *People's Democracy*, pp. 29 and 30; Bernadette Devlin, *The price of my soul* (London, 1969), p. 101.

¹⁴⁶ *Gown*, 22 Oct. 1968, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3297/2.

¹⁴⁷ *Bulletin du mouvement du 22 mars*, no. 5494 in Fišera, ed., *Writing on the wall*, p. 80.

¹⁴⁸ Arthur, *People's Democracy*, pp. 22 and 23; Lévy, 'People's democracy', p. 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Purdie, *Politics*, pp. 232 and 233. ¹⁵⁰ Cameron report, p. 81.

¹⁵¹ *Defamator*, no. 3, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3219/3.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, no. 2, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3219/3.

¹⁵³ Arthur, *People's Democracy*, p. 39. ¹⁵⁴ Van Voris, *Violence*, pp. 73, 74, 75, and 81.

¹⁵⁵ Wini Breines, *Community and organisation in the New Left, 1962–1968: the great refusal* (New York, 1982), p. 27, 37, and 38; Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism*, pp. 24 and 53; Statera, *Utopia*, p. 174.

who attended some of these assemblies found 'Enthusiasm was high, commitment was strong and idealism pervasive.'¹⁵⁶ Many participants, intoxicated by this experience, found themselves being swept in previously unimaginable directions. Devlin recalled in her 1969 autobiography that the group 'educated ourselves into socialism' because 'the most effective solutions to the problems we discussed always turned out to be the solutions offered by the left'.¹⁵⁷ Most of the region's youthful intellectuals shared their diverse opinions and together developed new perspectives. McCann gave a series of speeches, Farrell drafted political programmes, and Toman, who repeatedly drew comparisons with the Sorbonne assembly, chaired a number of debates.¹⁵⁸ Other significant contributions seem to have been made by marginal figures. John Johnston, as his private papers demonstrate, was familiar with international radical politics: he owned a translation of Camus's *Neither Victims nor Executioners*, material published by the American peace movement and literature printed by the International Union of Students.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, an article in the People's Democracy news-sheet *Billy Liar* argued that 'Non-Violent Direct Action' 'should receive much more serious consideration at meetings'.¹⁶⁰

Defamator sought to instil socialist beliefs by explaining how the problems facing students, police brutality in Derry, and even American imperialism were all connected. The strategy of showing the 'path from the examination-room to the paddy fields of Vietnam', to quote a British pamphlet in Boyle's possession, was employed by a number of New Left groups.¹⁶¹ The Columbia branch of SDS, which had sent a representative to RSSF's inaugural conference, had investigated the links between research being conducted at the university and the military.¹⁶² Similarly, *Defamator* printed allegations that the biochemistry department was receiving funding from the CIA.¹⁶³ Although this approach appears to have converted some, a significant section of the student population remained hostile. One such student wrote to the *Belfast Telegraph* on behalf of the 'majority' to condemn People's Democracy as 'a very small minority'.¹⁶⁴ *Defamator* replied to their criticism with a spoof letter from the 'decent hardworking subservient snivellers' who regarded their university education as merely an 'admission ticket' to the 'grown-up world of Business and Politics'.¹⁶⁵ The characterization of the university as a knowledge factory was a familiar New Left trope. Indeed, the suggestion that the university should be tailored to the needs of students, not

¹⁵⁶ Michael McKeown, *The greening of a nationalist* (Lucan, 1986), pp. 47 and 48.

¹⁵⁷ Devlin, *Price*, p. 117.

¹⁵⁸ *Derry Journal*, 15 Nov. 1968, 13 Dec. 1968; Van Voris, *Violence*, p. 75; Cameron report, p. 180.

¹⁵⁹ Albert Camus, *Neither victims nor executioners*, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3219/3; International Union of Students News Service, 1968, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3219/3.

¹⁶⁰ *Billy Liar*, Nov. 1968, Belfast, PRONI, D/3219/3.
¹⁶¹ Tom Fawthrop, *Education or examination*, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3297/8.

¹⁶² Ronald Fraser, *1968: a student generation in revolt* (New York, 1988), p. 20; Kurlansky, *1968*, p. 197.

¹⁶³ *Defamator*, no. 4, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3219/3.

¹⁶⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 Nov. 1968.

¹⁶⁵ *Defamator*, no. 2, PRONI, D/3219/3.

government and commerce, proved popular on Western campuses. *Defamator* demanded greater freedom of expression, equal representation for students on governing bodies, the end of the concept of *in loco parentis*, and cheaper accommodation.¹⁶⁶ This was, however, a ‘transitional reform programme’. Echoing SDS’s slogan ‘A free university in a free society’, *Defamator* maintained that ‘there cannot be a free university without a free society’.¹⁶⁷

Political education and a feeling of solidarity also came through action. On 4 November 1968, the police blocked a march to city hall after People’s Democracy refused to accept the proposed re-routing. Participants therefore had to improvise, adapting tactics to suit the changing situation. Some marchers filtered past the police cordon, provoking several RUC officers to break ranks and physically restrain them. When the police regrouped to form a stronger cordon, the marchers responded with a sit-down protest before voting to disperse and meet again at city hall. When they arrived in the centre of Belfast, the decision was taken to block traffic. The police forcibly removed many of those sitting in the streets and loyalists assaulted several students. The day’s events were considered sufficiently momentous for the student newspaper to rush out a supplement. Unnamed students of both sexes were quoted criticizing police brutality and loyalist violence. A ‘staunch believer in the principles of Unionism’ informed the newspaper that his ‘faith in the RUC’ was at ‘a rather low ebb’.¹⁶⁸

Although many People’s Democracy members were moving ‘inexorably left’, the majority of the movement retained a broadly reformist outlook.¹⁶⁹ This tension between moderates and extremists showed signs of becoming an open split after O’Neill made a televised appeal on 9 December 1968 for an end to demonstrations. McCann told the university debating society that ‘radicals ... should say to Terence O’Neill ... “not nearly good enough. We want the lot, we want it now – and that’s not fast enough.”’¹⁷⁰ This ‘abrupt rebuttal’ of ‘the appeal by the Prime Minister’, according to a ‘former support of PD’, was ‘irresponsible’ and placed the left in a ‘suspect position’.¹⁷¹ Other students were also persuaded by O’Neill’s Gaullist strategy, but preferred to work within People’s Democracy to secure his desired breathing space.¹⁷²

While the overwhelming majority of the population was anxious to avoid a serious confrontation between protesters and loyalists, this was exactly what Farrell wanted to provoke. ‘I believed,’ he told an interviewer two decades later, ‘that if you attacked on a number of fronts the whole thing would

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 1, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3219/3.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 3, PRONI, D/3219/3; Columbia Strike Co-ordinating Committee, in Bloom and Breines, eds., ‘*Takin’ it to the streets*’, pp. 388, 389, and 390.

¹⁶⁸ *Gown – March Supplement*, 5 Nov. 1968, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3219/3. ¹⁶⁹ Devlin, *Price*, p. 117. ¹⁷⁰ *Derry Journal*, 13 Dec. 1968.

¹⁷¹ ‘A former supporter of PD’ to Boyle, 10 Dec. 1968, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3297/1.

¹⁷² *QUBIST*, 12 Dec. 1968, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/3297/3; Cameron report, p. 44; Arthur, *People’s Democracy*, pp. 36 and 37.

collapse ... the state might dissolve – and then the demands you'd been making could be achieved.¹⁷³ Although a large People's Democracy meeting voted for a moratorium on street protests, Farrell remained determined to lead a march across Northern Ireland. Exploiting the movement's commitment to participatory democracy, the leftists won a vote in favour of Farrell's plan at a sparsely attended meeting held a few days before Christmas.¹⁷⁴

Farrell modelled the parade from Belfast to Derry on King's Selma-Montgomery march, which had re-started the stalled American civil rights movement by sparking racist violence and thus engineering a federal intervention.¹⁷⁵ Farrell hoped to provoke a similar reaction: 'Either the government would face up to the extreme right ... and protect the march ... or it would be exposed as impotent in the face of sectarian thuggery, and Westminster would be forced to intervene.'¹⁷⁶ Although Farrell wrongly thought that Selma was where King was heading, he made no such mistakes when selecting the itinerary for the four-day march from Belfast to Derry. 'A lot of the route was through my home area of South Derry', he later remembered, 'so I knew ... the likely reaction.'¹⁷⁷ Few others among the eighty or so people who began the march were prepared for the reception awaiting them in the Protestant heartland.¹⁷⁸ Paul Bew, a Cambridge student who took part while home for the holidays, later commented upon this naïveté:

If one had been more attuned to the society itself, one would have said, 'Well can one march between here and Derry 70 miles in these little Protestant villages, is this a wise thing to do?' In fact what we said was, 'We are socialists. We are progressive. Trying to stop us marching through your villages is ridiculous because we are carrying a banner of enlightenment.'¹⁷⁹

The march would dispel these illusions about the significance of Northern Ireland's communal divide. The marchers were not only harried and hindered by a loyalist group, but were also met by local counter-demonstrations along the route. On the Catholic side, there was an initial lack of enthusiasm for the People's Democracy march that in some cases verged upon outright hostility.¹⁸⁰ However, as the marchers struggled towards Derry, the minority population began to offer support.¹⁸¹

The RUC, which at times had one sixth of its officers protecting the march, lacked the resources to bring People's Democracy safely from Belfast to Derry.¹⁸²

¹⁷³ Fraser, 1968, p. 210.

¹⁷⁴ Arthur, *People's Democracy*, p. 39; Cameron report, pp. 44 and 82; Van Voris, *Violence*, p. 82; Devlin, *Price*, p. 121. ¹⁷⁵ Farrell, 'Long march to freedom', in Farrell, ed., *Twenty years on*, p. 57.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: the Orange state* (London, 1975), p. 249.

¹⁷⁷ Farrell, 'Long march', p. 57. ¹⁷⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 Jan. 1969.

¹⁷⁹ Witness seminar on British policy in Northern Ireland 1964–1970, 14 Jan. 1992, London, Institute of Contemporary British History. ¹⁸⁰ *Derry Journal*, 27 Dec. 1968.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3 Jan. 1969, Bowes Egan and Vincent McCormack, *Burntollet* (London, 1969), pp. 2, 3, 11, and 48.

¹⁸² Northern Ireland Information Service press release, 5 Jan. 1969, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, CAB/9B/205/8.

The police accepted that the marchers would occasionally be involved in scuffles and stone-throwing incidents. Consequently, as the marchers began the final day of the journey, the RUC was relatively unconcerned by reports that a small band of loyalists had assembled down the road. At Burntollet, however, an organized ambush rather than a counter-demonstration met the march.¹⁸³ At a meeting of leftists in December 1968, Farrell had predicted that a serious loyalist attack on the march would provoke an uprising in Derry.¹⁸⁴ Following the ambush, the second city was alive with rumours that some marchers had made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of civil rights.¹⁸⁵ When the thousands who had gathered to greet the marchers started to disperse, clashes between Catholic youths and the police broke out in the side streets. Running battles were fought in the city centre until the early hours of the morning.¹⁸⁶ After the riot, gangs of RUC officers seeking revenge penetrated into the Catholic Bogside.¹⁸⁷ To defend their district against any further incursions, the Bogside's men threw up barricades and armed themselves with cudgels the morning after the attack.¹⁸⁸ This, however, was an insurrection launched by the Catholic community, not the city's working class. The sixty-eighters lined up behind the barricades, but their moment had passed.¹⁸⁹ The old conflict over national and communal identities had been renewed.¹⁹⁰ Northern Ireland's '68 had ended.

Although the leftists were rapidly eclipsed by constitutional nationalists and militant Republicans, the upheavals of '68 nonetheless marked a sea-change in Northern Irish politics. In June 1968, the Nationalist leader, Eddie McAteer, warned his party that he had detected 'a dangerous groundswell of resentment among our people'. McAteer, however, was not prophesising the Troubles, but worrying that growing frustration would 'set the clock back' to the end of the 1950s.¹⁹¹ At the start of the post-war era, McAteer had witnessed the Anti-Partition League raise expectations of change to unrealistic levels and then had watched helplessly as traditional Republicans exploited the resulting disenchantment to launch another pointless military campaign. In 1956, McAteer had confided to the Irish government his fears that the 'present outbreak would be quelled for a time only to recur again in five or ten years'. Six years after the IRA called off its offensive, it seemed that this cycle was about to be repeated.¹⁹² Instead, the violence provoked by the sixty-eighters swept away the familiar pattern of politics: the Catholic community abandoned apathy; Unionism split over how to respond to the crisis; the world's media arrived to cover another struggle for freedom; London and Dublin were forced into action; and traditional

¹⁸³ *Derry Journal*, 7 Jan. 1969; Van Voris, *Violence*, pp. 87, 88, and 89; Devlin, *Price*, pp. 139, 140, and 141; Egan and McCormack, *Burntollet*, pp. 12, 13, 14, 26–40, and 56. ¹⁸⁴ Patterson, *Ireland*, p. 209.

¹⁸⁵ Frank Curran, *Derry: countdown to disaster* (Dublin, 1986), p. 107.

¹⁸⁶ Egan and McCormack, *Burntollet*, pp. 46, 47, 48, 57, and 58.

¹⁸⁷ McCann, *War*, pp. 108, 109, and 110; Van Voris, *Violence*, pp. 92, 93, and 97.

¹⁸⁸ *Derry Journal*, 7 Jan. 1969.

¹⁸⁹ Cameron report, pp. 73 and 83.

¹⁹⁰ Patterson, *Ireland*, pp. 209, 210, and 211.

¹⁹¹ *Derry Journal*, 28 June 1968.

¹⁹² Enda Staunton, *The Nationalists of Northern Ireland, 1918–1973* (Blackrock, 2001), pp. 212 and 213.

Republicans were transformed from a shrinking sect of zealots into defenders of hearth and home. Five decades of frozen politics had finished.

VI

Sixty-eight has come to stand for the half-way marker between the fall of Berlin and the fall of the Berlin wall. Reinterpreting '68 as a global revolt against imperialism, capitalism, and bureaucracy therefore disrupts the grand narrative of post-war Western history. In particular, taking the festival of personal liberation out of the story demands a more complex reading of the rise of individualism than that provided by the glib cultural revolution thesis. The retreat of many activists into Leninism after the failure of their short cut to socialism, for example, seems to undermine claims that sixty-eighters spearheaded the liberalization of culture and society. Putting the politics back into '68 suggests that its legacy was more one of civil strife than of civil liberties. This was certainly the case in Northern Ireland. The region's leftists had believed that by initiating an escalating cycle of provocation and repression the dictatorial face of the O'Neill government would be unmasked. The divided working class would then unite against the 'Orange Tories' in pursuit of a socialist vision that transcended both social democracy and Soviet Communism. Like the nineteenth-century French revolutionary Auguste Blanqui, Northern Ireland's sixty-eighters had thought 'Why discuss what it is like on the other side of the river? Let us cross over and see.'¹⁹³ When they marched over the River Foyle into the centre of Derry, they hoped to discover a society polarized along class lines. Instead, they found that sectarianism had gained in strength. Sixty-eight was a global revolt, but across the Western world it took place in national and local contexts. The Troubles are perhaps the most tragic result of this coming together of transnational trends and historic divisions.

¹⁹³ Robert Tombs, *France, 1814–1914* (London, 1996), p. 7.