



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Northern Ireland Nationalists campaign for equality, 1967–1972

February

1967

to: January

1972

Country: Northern Ireland

Goals:

- 1) One man one vote in local elections
- 2) The removal of gerrymandered boundaries
- 3) Laws against discrimination by local government, and the provision of machinery to deal with complaints
- 4) Allocation of public housing on a points system
- 5) Repeal of the Special Powers Act
- 6) Disbanding of the B Specials

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 138. Sitdown
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 138. Sitdown
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 138. Sitdown

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 138. Sitdown

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Northern Irish Nationalists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) –lead marches and sitdowns for civil rights

Partners:

The Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ); People's Democracy (PD); Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC); Derry Citizen's Action Committee (DCAC)

External allies:

Not Known

Involvement of social elites:

-Austin Currie, Nationalist MP from Sturmont – occupied Protestant house in protest

-UK Prime Minister Harold Wilson – pressured the Unionist Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O'Neill, for reform

- Home Secretary James Callaghan – pressured the Unionist Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O’Neill, for reform
- Gerry Fitt – Labour Member of Parliament from the United Kingdom who was severely beaten while present at the second civil rights march.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Austin Currie
- DHAC

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- DCAC
- Gerry Fitt
- Harold Wilson
- James Callaghan
- PD

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 10 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Unionist Party – ruling party in Northern Ireland that supported Northern Ireland’s continued membership in the United Kingdom

Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) – police force in Northern Ireland

William Craig – Unionist and opponent of the civil rights campaign

Ian Paisley – Unionist and opponent of the civil rights campaign

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Unionists staged several counter demonstrations in order to deter civil rights demonstrations.

Campaigner violence:

Not Known

Repressive Violence:

-During the second march (05/10/1968), the RUC used water cannons and batons against the peaceful marchers.

-During a PD march (04/01/1969) hundreds of loyalists ambushed marchers and attacked them with stones and cudgels.

-The British army’s Parachute Regiment killed thirteen and wounded seventeen marchers on Bloody Sunday.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign was able to achieve many of its goals in a relatively short amount of time. Just over a year into the campaign, the campaign was able to force Northern Ireland Prime Minister to announce a five-point reform plan. This plan addressed concerns regarding housing, enfranchisement, the Special Powers Act, and considerations for handling complaints about discrimination. In 1970 and 1971, the campaign achieved more goals when the B-Specials were disbanded and then when an act was passed that called for a boundary commissioner to deal with districts and wards. The campaign was not, however, able to end or even reduce the discrimination as a violent conflict would continue for almost 30 years after the civil rights campaign. The inability for the campaign to survive during this period of excessive violence severely reduced the impact of its accomplishments.

The campaign lasted five years from 1967 to 1972. This was sufficient time to see many of its goals met, but discrimination continued after 1972. The campaign could not survive once the conflict became overly violent.

The campaign grew to include several splinter groups like the DHAC and the DCAC. Demonstrations included as many as 15,000 people.

Following World War I, the United Kingdom's Parliament approved the Government of Ireland Act. Passed in 1920, the act partitioned Ireland and created two separate entities: Northern and Southern Ireland. Both Irelands had their own parliaments, and the Parliament of the United Kingdom hoped that one day the Irish parliaments would consent to unite the two Irelands into one Ireland, but any progress for unity would be halted by excessive violence.

Under the Government of Ireland Act, Northern Ireland was an autonomous entity within the United Kingdom. The majority of residents were Unionists that were Protestant and considered themselves to be British. Unionists supported Northern Ireland's membership in the United Kingdom. The remaining residents were Nationalists that were Catholics and considered themselves to be Irish. Nationalists wished to unite Northern Ireland with the rest of Ireland, essentially repealing the Government of Ireland Act. This distinct division would prove to be the origin of much violence.

Nationalists were unhappy with the partition of Ireland; in their view, Northern Ireland had been gerrymandered to contain a large Unionist majority. With limitless influence, the Unionists established a policy of covert discrimination against the Nationalists that only served to widen the divide.

On January 17, 1964, the Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ) was formed. CSJ was a minority pressure group that hoped to expose the Unionists' discriminatory policies. CSJ went on to heave powerful accusations at the Unionist establishment; it accused the government of encouraging economic development only in the eastern half of Northern Ireland, which had a large Protestant majority. It also alleged that the government tried to maintain Protestant majorities through the allocation of public housing. According to CSJ, the government awarded Catholics with public housing far more often in areas that already had an obvious Catholic majority. These allegations, among others, began to mobilize the Catholic community.

On February 1, 1967, a group of middle class Catholics founded the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). The organization was modeled after the National Council for Civil Liberties in England. Many historians regard NICRA's founding as the beginning of the civil rights campaign. NICRA had a long list of demands that included: one man-one vote, the redrawing

of the electoral boundaries, the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation, a reformed housing allocation process based on a points system, the repeal of the Special Powers Act, and the disbanding of the B Specials. One man-one vote referred to the rule that prevented subtenants and those who lived with their parents from voting in county elections. As the slogan suggested, NICRA wanted those left out to be able to vote. Unionists accused NICRA of being a mask for the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The IRA was an illegal militant group with a well-documented history of violence. A commission would later exonerate NICRA from such claims, while pointing out that there were members of the IRA who were also nonviolent members of NICRA.

The civil rights campaign's first highly publicized incident occurred the following year on June 20. Austin Currie, a Nationalist Member of Parliament, protested discriminatory housing policies by squatting in a house in County Tyrone. The house had been allocated to a nineteen-year-old Protestant girl by the local Unionist councilor who had given the young Protestant woman priority over two Catholic families. In reaction to the councilor's actions, Currie essentially reclaimed the house and occupied it until the Royal Ulster Constabulary evicted him some hours later. Following his eviction, Currie asked NICRA to lead a march from Coalisland to Dungannon in protest of the recent series of events.

Prior to NICRA's march, another activist group decided to take action. The Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC), an activist group formed in 1967, organized a sitdown protest at the opening of the extension of the Craigavon Bridge in Derry on July 3. The sitdown was just one of many recent protests the DHAC had staged against the housing conditions in Derry. Building on the recent actions of the DHAC, NICRA initiated its march on August 24. Reports suggest that between 2,500 and 4,000 people participated in what was the first march of the civil rights campaign. A survey of those in attendance revealed many radical students from nearby Queen's University as well as ten members of the IRA. The march culminated with Currie and others delivering speeches to the marchers. A rally was planned to follow, but it was banned because of a counter-demonstration put on by Unionists.

Three days after NICRA's march, the DHAC staged its second protest at the Guildhall's council chamber. Immediately after the protest came to a conclusion, the DHAC contacted NICRA about co-organizing a second civil rights march. The second march was set to take place on the 5th of October and once again Unionists used nonviolent tactics to try to deter a civil rights march. On October 1, a Unionist group known as the Apprentice Boys of Derry announced its plans for a march on the exact same time and location. Consequently, Home Affairs Minister William Craig, a dedicated Unionist, placed a ban on another of NICRA's planned activities.

Despite the ban, the Nationalist march began as planned on October 5. Between 200 and 400 people met at the Waterside area of Derry to begin the march when the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) met them and made attempts to disband the peaceful marchers with water cannons and batons. Some of the marchers staged a sitdown and sang "We Shall Overcome." There were also many Members of Parliament present and several were beat with batons, including Gerry Fitt. Fitt was a MP from the United Kingdom. A member of the Labour party, Fitt had taken three other Labour MPs with him to the march. Fitt's beating was one of the most violent; two RUC officers held him down while another bashed his head repeatedly, leaving Fitt's head leaking blood onto his shirt. To the benefit of the campaign, a Dublin cameraman was present and recorded the incident on tape. The footage was then immediately broadcasted for the entire world to see.

The footage rallied the Catholic community and threatened the support for the Unionist Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O'Neill. 2,000 students from Queens University staged their own march on October 9 to protest the police brutality that occurred during the second march. The march was blocked by a counter demonstration led by Ian Paisley, a prominent Unionist. In response to the counter demonstration, the marchers organized an impromptu sitdown that lasted three hours. Following the sitdown, some marchers formed the People's Democracy (PD). Other activists formed the Derry Citizen's Action Committee (DCAC). Both the PD and DCAC would continue to organize marches and sitdowns throughout 1968. On October 16, the PD organized a march from Queens University to City Hall; 1,300 students participated. On the 16th of November, the DCAC organized a march to the Diamond area of Derry, which was followed by a sitdown demonstration that involved 15,000 participants.

After meeting with British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and British Home Secretary James Callaghan, Northern Ireland Prime Minister Terence O'Neill announced a five-point reform plan on November 22. The plan called for: a development commission to assume control of Londonderry Corporation, an ombudsman to investigate complaints against the government, the allocation of houses based on need, the Special Powers Act to be abolished when deemed safe to do so and reform of the local government franchise, which ended company votes.

Not completely satisfied with the reform plan, the Nationalists continued their campaign. The PD became more active; on January 1, 1969, the People's Democracy began a four day march that was to be modeled after Martin Luther King's march from Selma to Montgomery. The march did not have the support of NICRA. The number of marchers grew from 40 to over 100 before Unionists and off duty B-Specials ambushed the march at the Burntollet Bridge. The RUC was present, but inactive. The marchers believed that the RUC allowed the ambush and did little to protect them. As the violence continued to escalate, Prime Minister O'Neill decided to resign. James Chichester-Clark replaced O'Neill and would serve for two years before resigning. Brian Faulkner would then defeat William Craig in a Unionist Party election to replace Chichester-Clark.

When Faulkner took over, the civil rights campaign was already beginning to be overshadowed by the excessive violence. The IRA was particularly active, waging war against Protestants and the RUC. The IRA engaged in countless battles, which killed many civilians. It eventually split into two groups: the official IRA and the Provisional IRA (PIRA). The PIRA was more violent than the original IRA. Faulkner, feeling desperate, imposed an internment policy on the communities of Northern Ireland. Determined to disband the IRAs, Faulkner interned an overwhelming amount of Catholics.

On January 30, 1972 NICRA organized a large march to protest internment. Reports suggest that there were about 10,000 participants in the march. The march culminated with a rally and following the rally, some thirteen unarmed marchers were shot dead. The British army's Parachute Regiment had killed thirteen marchers and wounded seventeen more. It remains a mystery as to who shot first. The army claimed that it was fired at, while bystanders swear that the marchers did not fire at the army. A separate report speculated that the official IRA might have fired at the army. The day would forever be known as "Bloody Sunday."

Indiscriminate violence would follow after Bloody Sunday. This marked the end of the civil rights campaign. The violence became overbearing as the IRAs continued their war against Protestants and the British army as well. Before Bloody Sunday, the campaign experienced some great successes; in addition to the five-point reform plan, the B-Specials were disbanded in 1970 and an act in 1971 called for a boundary commissioner to deal with districts and wards. Afterwards, however, Northern Ireland fell into a violent era that would later be called simply, "The Troubles."

Research Notes

Influences:

The African-American civil rights movement of the United States had a huge impact on what methods and rhetoric were used in the Northern Ireland civil rights campaign (1).

Sources:

Bew, Paul and Gordon Gillespie. Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1993. Ireland: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 1993

Hennessey, Thomas. A History of Northern Ireland 1922-1996 New York: St Martin's Press, 1997

London Sunday Times Insight Team. Northern Ireland: A Report on the Conflict. New York: Random House, Inc, 1972

McCluskey, Conn. Up Off Their Knees. Ireland: Conn McCluskey and Associates, 1989.

McKittrick, David and David McVea. Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict In Northern Ireland. Chicago:

New Amsterdam Books, c/o Ivan R.Deer, 2002.

Melaugh, Martin. "The Civil Rights Campaign – Summary of Main Events" Conflict Archive on the Internet. The University of Ulster, n.d. Web 8 October 2010.

Sharp, Gene. *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*. Boston: Porter Argent Publishers, Inc, 2005.

Additional Notes:

There were minor activities prior to 1967, however, most historians agree that the civil rights campaign began in either 1967, with the formation of the NICRA, or in 1968, with the first official civil rights march. On a separate note, one could argue that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) could be considered an ally to NICRA because it too was waging a campaign, in part, against discrimination. In reality, the IRA had separate, more radical beliefs and contributed to the excessive violence that eventually brought the nonviolent civil rights campaign to a premature end.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (30/05/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Julio Alicea, 10/10/2010

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>.

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/16/2020 - 10:46): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/northern-ireland-nationalists-campaign-equality-1967-1972>

Links:

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-indigenous-participants>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/example-paradox-repression>