



Online Irish History Course



From Civil Rights to Hunger Strikes 1968–1981

Thursdays 7:30 – 9 pm / February 2, 9, 16 and 23, 2023

Following the partition of Ireland in 1922 Ulster Unionists/ Loyalists were empowered to build the institutions of a new state designed to ensure their ongoing control. They marginalized the nationalist community, the progressive labor movement, and those unionists not committed to the realization of a sectarian state.

The new devolved administration controlled by the main Unionist party, the Ulster unionist Party (UUP), ensured their control through gerrymandering of constituencies; the use of Special Powers and the formation of a sectarian police force; the use of social and economic policies designed in the interest of the majority unionist population; voting rights that gave some people (mostly non Catholic) up to six votes, and gave no vote to adults who did not own or rent property (mostly Catholics); exclusion of the minority population from public service positions; and many other forms of discrimination particularly in the areas of housing, education and employment.

After World War 2 the UK government introduced reforms in education and in the provision of welfare benefits. These played an important part in radicalizing the generations of the 1950's and 1960's who sought to bring change to their communities. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement was a non-sectarian, peaceful movement that sought to reform the Unionist state. Their efforts were met with violent resistance and a refusal to consider any meaningful changes on the basis that such changes would undermine the nature of the Unionist state. Reform was not an option.

The Civil Rights campaign and the support it received from active nationalist communities was criminalized and attacked to the point that nationalist areas had to rely on self-defense against drive-by shootings; bombings and pogroms by loyalist gangs and paramilitaries; provocative and discriminatory police raids; and after 1969 from British army activity.

By the late 1960's the IRA had been weakened to the point that it had little capability to effectively defend nationalist communities. As in 1935, Nationalists realized that they had to rely solely on themselves. The British army, the Northern police forces, and the Republic of Ireland government were not going to help them. One of the main supports for the nationalist community and activists came from the examples set by the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, the anti-Apartheid movement, the Palestinian Liberation Movement, and the anti-Vietnam War Movement.

The efforts of the Unionist state and the British government and army to repress the resistance in nationalist areas and the refusal to make any meaningful reforms was the reason why yet another devastating war had to be fought against the century's old imposition of foreign rule on the people of Ireland by a foreign government and its local allies.



Course fee is \$90. To enroll please email seanmurphy630@gmail.com