

The troubles

Were the Troubles in Northern Ireland only due to religion?

The Troubles, also called Northern Ireland Conflict, took place during the second half of the 20th century, from 1968 to 1998 in Northern Ireland, aka Ulster.

The main factions were protestant unionists, who desired the Ulster province to remain part of the United Kingdom, and the mostly catholic nationalists, who wanted Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland.

The other major actors in the conflict were the British army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and their objective was to play a peacekeeping role, especially between the nationalist Irish Republican Army (IRA) and other armed factions.

The conflict was seen as a guerrilla for national independence and the unionist paramilitary forces characterized the IRA's aggression as terrorism.

Historically the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland was politically, economically and socially excluded by the Protestant majority. Catholics were discriminated against in employment, education and housing. For years, despite the domination of the protestants, Northern Ireland remained calm. It all started on December 21, 1921, when Ireland ratified a Treaty with England, formalizing the creation of an Irish Free State.

The conflict known as the "Troubles" began in the late 1960s following the civil rights movement against denominational segregation, loyalist violence and the uprising of Catholic ghettos. The origin of the conflict is the social, political and economic discrimination affecting the catholic minority. Very quickly violence increased and paramilitary groups multiplied on both sides. England deployed its army to try to cool things down. But it was a failure because the attacks against Catholics by the Ulster Volunteer Force, a loyalist paramilitary group kept terrorizing them to put an end to their claims.

Many events took place during the conflict such as the start of the IRA's military campaign in 1970. Indeed, on the Republican side, part of the Irish Republican Army, the Official Irish Republican Army (IRA) carried out attacks mainly between 1969 and 1972. The action of IRA are considered as terrorism but also as a revolution by British forces.

Following the 1972 Bloody Sunday tragedy, Direct Rule by British government was decided to lead Northern Irish politics.

In the 1970s, groupings multiplied in Belfast and Derry. Barbed wires were put in place by British soldiers to separate communities.



In 1980, new attempts raised awareness about the conflict. Hunger strikes were organized in prisons by IRA members asking for political prisoner status. Elected MP Bobby Sands went on a hunger strike to death in 1981 and became a true symbol of this conflict.

The conflict caused international concern but the other countries did not succeed in calming the situation. The Troubles were marked by street fighting, sensational bombings, sniper attacks, roadblocks, and internment without trial. The confrontation had the characteristics of a civil war.

In the 90s, negotiations to resolve the conflict began and a peace process started. Northern Ireland and England reached an agreement to calm the situation. On April 10, 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was signed, forcing the paramilitary armies to gradually lay down their arms. This is the official end of "The Troubles" conflict. Since this agreement the government has been autonomous in Northern Ireland.

This conflict had many political and religious consequences. The human toll amounts to more than 3,480 dead (civilian and military) and 47,500 wounded. In total, this conflict resulted in 19,600 prisoners and there were 37,000 shootings and 16,200 attacks. There has also been a negative economic impact on Northern Ireland, leading to reduced economic growth and reduced investment.



The Troubles is a complex conflict with different origins and multiple actors and issues. It included different ideologies (unionism, loyalism, Irish republicanism, Irish nationalism and parties that tried to overcome these traditional divisions). This period of 30 years of violence created a break between old Ireland and modern Ireland. Today, the violence is still present but has subsided. There is still a divide between the Northern Irish and the

English and there are still religious and political tensions. The topics of national identity, minority rights and relations with Britain remain controversial.

The Troubles were not only a religious conflict. Religion was a main cause but political, social and economic reasons made it difficult to resolve.

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