



The “Holy Cross Troubles” and the impact of children on the Irish conflict

Facharbeit in English

written by
Caroline Sasse

Soest 2002

Table Of Contents

1. Prologue	page 2
2. Important events in the history of the conflict	page 3-4
3. The “Holy Cross Troubles”	page 4-8
4. The impact of children on the Irish conflict	page 8-9
5. Conclusion	page 9
6. Bibliography	page 10-11
7. Erklärung	page 12
8. Appendix	page 13-16

1. Prologue

When I decided to write the “Facharbeit” about the Northern Irish conflict, I did not know much about that topic. It is true that I knew general things about the problems between Catholics and Protestants, but there was not much more. Besides, you could read from time to time something about new riots and the progress concerning the peace process in the newspapers.

Then, in September 2001, the troubles with the pupils of the “Holy Cross School” in Ardoyne began. It preoccupied me and I was shocked that innocent children having nothing to do with the conflict got involved. I think they are not able to cope with it, being aged from four up to eleven. How can you take the responsibility for that?

So, my topic for the “Facharbeit” was certain. But at that time, I did not know that the search for material could be so difficult: Because it is such a recent development, there were no publications in the form of books, so I concentrated on the internet. After long hours of search I realized that it was not as easy as I had imagined. There were many newspaper articles – but no more additional material. I had to decide what to do. First I thought about writing to the “Holy Cross School” in order to receive reactions or up-to-date information, but I rejected this as I read that it is a Primary School with children from 4 up to 11. Besides I did not find an internet address of their school. But I came across a page of the parents of the children [www.ardoyne.com], where they briefly presented the situation. Finally, I found some other information about the impact of children on the conflict. It is true that it is not up-to-date, but I could work with it.

2. Important events in the history of the conflict [historical background]

The roots of what is today known as the “Troubles” originate in the 16th century. [But] You can follow the British-Irish conflict (and thus the conflict between Protestants and Catholics) back far into history to the invasion of king Henry II of England. He wanted to “civilize” the Irish nation. In spite of conquering only the area around Dublin, the independence of the Irish people was broken. In the 16th century, there were attempts to bring the entire country under English control (up to the 1580s, ¾ of Ireland were taken over). The only province that resisted the foreign predominance was Ulster. The chieftains could defend their land up to 1603 when they were finally defeated. The English acted fast by “planting” Anglo-Scottish Protestants into the arch-catholic province of Ulster. A profound enmity was a foregone conclusion. In 1641, the Irish rebelled against suppression. The English soldier Oliver Cromwell put down the Irish rebellion. The Catholic land was confiscated and given to his supporters. In the 18th century, the “Penal laws” against Catholics were passed. That meant oppression as well economically as politically increased. It was also a sign for the rise of Protestants in Ireland. A significant year in the process of loss of importance was the year 1801, when the Act of Union was passed. From now on, Ireland was part of Britain. But the Catholics did not give in. They fought for their rights, so that in 1829, the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed. They were now allowed to sit in the British Parliament. As a result of the “Great Hunger” of the 1840s, a majority of the one million dead people were of Catholic origin. A comprehensive land reform was determined in 1879: the “Landleague”.

The “Easter Rising” at the beginning of the 20th century, when Irish volunteers and the Citizen Army rebelled and proclaimed an independent Irish Republic, was finally put down by British forces. In 1921, Ireland became the “Irish Free State” determined in the “Anglo-Irish Treaty”.

In 1968, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association protested against anti-Catholic discrimination. They also wanted to draw attention to the housing shortage in the country. The march was brutally put down by the Royal Ulster

Constabulary (RUC, the police of Northern Ireland) even though there was no reason at all. Restless years followed up to a further sad climax in 1972: “Bloody Sunday”. An at first peaceful march against arbitrary internment turned into tumults near the barricades that the British army had set up. The situation slipped out of control until British forces again intervened and shot at unarmed and peacefully marching protestors. Thirteen people died. Massive violent riots followed that ended in the closing of the Northern-Irish Parliament. Northern Ireland was put under the control of Westminster again. The riots last until today. First peace talks between Ireland and Great Britain and the four biggest parties of Northern Ireland failed in 1992. The new Anglo-Irish peace initiative of 1993 led to the Peace Declaration and IRA ceasefire in 1994. In 1998 the “Good Friday Agreement” was passed.

3. The “Holy Cross Troubles”

The “Holy Cross School” is a Catholic primary school for girls from four up to eleven years. While at its opening 656 pupils attended it, the number diminished until today to 216. It was built in 1969 in the Protestant neighbourhood of Glenbryn at times before the “Troubles”. ¹ And this is the reason for the current conflict:

Everything began on June 19th 2001, when the pupils and their parents entering the Catholic Holy Cross Girls’ Primary School were attacked by Loyalist people throwing stones at them. The Royal Ulster Constabulary officers had to protect them on their way. The next day the school was forced to close when Loyalists blocked the entrance. The Royal Ulster Constabulary officers advised children and parents not to attempt to enter the school. During the evening there were serious disturbances in the area around the “Holy Cross School”, as hundreds of Loyalists and Nationalists were involved in riots with the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The blockades lasted until June 29th 2001, the last day of the school term. Within this period of time the RUC officers prevented the Catholics

¹ www.ardoyne.com

from attempting to enter the school through the front gate day by day. During the holiday break, talks between community leaders failed.

The protests were resumed when school started again on September 3rd 2001. This time, not only the RUC protected the Catholic children and their parents; British Army soldiers were called in as well. They set up crash barriers. Loyalists jeered and shouted sectarian abuse as the children passed. They also threw bottles and stones. The next day abuses and barricades went on. On September 5th 2001, attacks on the school children got worse: Loyalists even threw a blast bomb towards the girls. There was a panic afterwards. The "Red Hand Defenders", a splinter group of the "Ulster Defence Association" confessed to be responsible for the attack. One day later, protests got more peaceful. Protestants wanted to frighten the children with enormous noise of air horns, whistles, and metal bin lids. On September 10th 2001, protesters changed their tactics: When the children made their way to school, they stood at the street quietly. But, as the parents returned from the school, the protest turned noisy and more abusive. Richard Haas, a United States special envoy, held a meeting with John Reid, the Secretary of State of Northern Ireland in London. Among other things, they also discussed the protests at the Holy Cross Girls' Primary School. For three days, protesters kept up the same tactics as before. Within this period of time, another meeting took place: Aidan Troy, the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the "Holy Cross School" came together with Protestant representatives of the Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne. John Reid appointed them, too. As a sign of respect for the terror attacks in the USA, Loyalists repealed protest on Friday, September 14th. But on Tuesday protest continued in the same pattern as before. There was another meeting between the Catholic parents and John Reid. On 19th September (three weeks after the beginning of the current "troubles"), the RUC arrested eight men for public order offences related to the school protest. The next day, Loyalists returned to earlier tactics by making a lot of noise as the girls passed. On Wednesday, September 26th, Protestants even threw fireworks at the children and their parents and on October 1st they threw balloons, filled with urine!! Protest continued the following days. Because protesters wanted to hide their

identity, they were wearing ghoul masks. Dr Michael Tan, a General Practitioner in Ardoyne, stated that some of the families were at “breaking point” and parents and children were in need of professional psychological care.² On October 11th, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland appealed to Loyalists to end the protests. A meeting between Catholic parents and residents from the neighbouring Protestant Glenbryn estate was interrupted by the news that Loyalist residents protested on the Ardoyne Road again. On Wednesday, October 17th, Loyalist paramilitaries exploded a bomb close to where parents and children were returning from school. One week later, Loyalists blocked again the main road to prevent the children from getting home. Nationalists tried to get up Crumlin Road to escort their children home and the Royal Ulster Constabulary moved between the two groups. Bricks and bottles were thrown by both groups. The Crumlin Road is the “alternative” route that Loyalists want the children to use when going to and leaving “Holy Cross school” on the nearby Ardoyne Road (see appendix). On November 1st there was again a meeting between David Trimble and members of the “Loyalist Commission” and Jane Kennedy (Security Minister at the Northern Ireland Office), the Protestant church and community representatives from North Belfast. On November 7th, the mother of a child attending the Holy Cross school began legal proceedings in the High Court against John Reid (Secretary of State of Northern Ireland) and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. In her opinion, the police “had not given adequate protection to her daughter and had failed to identify, arrest, or prosecute protesters”.³ On Monday November 12th there was a change in the policing tactics. Instead of escorting Catholic children and their parents as a group to the school, the police specified a time period in which parents could walk to the school. About 400 police officers were present to ensure that the children were able to get to school. The day’s operation cost an estimated £ 100.000. On Tuesday 20th, the Belfast Education and Library Board provided two busses for the children. However, most of the parents and children made

² Jim Cusack, “Counselling crisis at Holy Cross school”, October 11th 2001, www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/2001/1011/north4.htm

³ DR. MELAUGH, MARTIN: A Draft Chronology of the Conflict – 2001 <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch01.htm>

their way to school by foot. Two days later, David Trimble, First Minister and Mark Durkan, Deputy First Minister met with residents from the Glenbryn area to discuss the "Holy Cross Dispute". On Monday, November 26th, there was no Loyalist protest outside the "Holy Cross School". Catholic children and their parents were able to make their way to the school with a very much reduced security force presence.

After the Christmas holidays, protests got worse: In the nights there were disturbances and serious rioting in Ardoyne. One night, a Loyalist gang entered another Catholic girls' school and attacked and damaged 17 cars of the teachers. Protestant pupils at the Boys' Model and Girls' Model Secondary schools were driven home in police Land Rovers, because of the on-going violence. Police officers decided it would be unsafe for the pupils to walk past the large crowd of Nationalists gathered at the Ardoyne shops. There was rioting between Loyalist and Nationalists in Ardoyne Road during the afternoon. Nationalists petrol-bombed police in Brompton Park, Ardoyne, and also hijacked and burnt several cars. The Holy Cross School was closed for the day following the disturbances the previous day. Officials had been asked to arrange an urgent meeting between community activists and local Northern Ireland Assembly members to try to facilitate cross-community dialogue. Representatives of teachers threatened with strike action in protest at the sectarian attacks. On January 11th, the "Red Hand Defenders" issued a death threat against all Catholic teachers and all other staff working in Catholic schools in North Belfast. There was no Loyalist protest at the school way of the Holy Cross girls this day. The Northern Ireland Office announced that cameras would be installed on the Ardoyne road. Finally, on February 10th, the pupils from the "Holy Cross school" travelled to County Galway to begin a holiday as guests of Peacock's Hotel which made the offer of a free holiday following the incidents during 2001, when the school was blocked by Loyalist protestors.

Protests are over now and the girls attending "Holy Cross Primary School" may have switched back to everyday life. But the psychological damage can not be recovered so fast – if at all. How can the Protestants take the

responsibility for destroying the childhood of a four-year-old girl? While the physical hurts are worse enough (they threw bottles, stones and even balloons filled with urine!!), the much more horrible injuries are the psychic attacks. Loyalists abused the pupils and also tried to intimidate the girls by making extreme noise using air horns, whistles and metal bin lids. As 6-year-old Aina Booth said "...the worst is the bad words."⁴

I will never understand what goes on in the heads of these people! In spite of that, radical Protestants worsened the situation by throwing a blast bomb towards the girls. Full of panic, they ran apart. The General Practitioner Michael Tan described the incident as a "nightmare scenario". In his opinion, it would lead to "deep emotional scars and potential drug problems". He even prescribed sedatives and tranquillisers to cope with the trauma of the Loyalist protest. The children are unable to sleep, experience nightmares, flashbacks and bed-wetting.⁵ I think this leads to psychological damage that you can never repair!

4. The impact of the children on the Irish conflict

The current "Troubles" have lasted for about thirty years now. Within this period of time, Protestants fought against Catholics, putting forward religious reasons, instead of the actual reason: the legitimacy of the state. Since August 1969 until March 24th 1998, 3601 people have been killed and over 40.000 were injured.⁶ Nevertheless, the main sufferers of the entire conflict are the children. They have not got ANYTHING to do with the "Troubles" between the adults. However, they are involved from an early age: Two-year old children are already able to distinguish "Catholics" from "Protestants", Dr. Paul Connolly, professor of the University of Ulster, found out. And from the age of three, they can develop negative attitudes about the opponent. While a three-year-old may have quite simplistic prejudices, they can form the base for sectarian hate when the child gets older.⁷

⁴ Brian Lavery, "Panic as bomb explodes near Belfast Catholic School", September 5th 2001, <http://college4.nytimes.com/guests/articles/2001/09/05/866235>

⁵ Liz Trainor, "15 Holy Cross pupils on sedatives says GP", Irish news

⁶ The Cost of the Troubles Study, 1998

⁷ Dr Paul Connolly, University of Ulster, <http://www.ulst.ac.uk/news/releases/1999/152.html>

Besides, the Northern Irish society is deeply divided. The Protestants and Catholics are segregated in educational as well, as in residential terms. That makes people feel safer in their community, but it also evokes prejudices towards the other community.

Also, the level of unemployment is - compared with the United Kingdom - among the highest. The number of people depending on social security as well as the rates of congenital abnormalities and incidence of long term handicap conditions are very high. Health in general is poor and income is relatively low.⁸ Young people have no perspective, so that the suicide rate among them is rising. Sometimes even the adults can not cope with the traumatic experiences they made, so that they have no time to take care of their children. Moreover, a number of woman who can not get along with it become addicted to alcohol and medication.

5. Conclusion:

At the moment, it seems to be relatively peaceful in Northern Ireland. The country is no more in the limelight of the world press, because there are no struggles between the two religious groups these days. But nobody knows when they will restart. Nobody knows who will be the next victim. And nobody knows when the enmity will end.

But one thing we know: The war has caused too much damage over the centuries. It has been a huge price to pay for the inability of the people of Northern Ireland to resolve their differences peacefully. The people have to do some rethinking! It is not acceptable that they are hostile to each other, only because they have a different confession. In fact they do not know anything about the people of the other community. They only live among their own and have their prejudices about the others. In spite of these, they have to overcome hostilities and learn to live next to each other peacefully.

⁸ Marie Smyth and Mark Scott. The Youthquest 2000 Survey: A Report on Young People's Views and Experiences of Life in Northern Ireland. Derry Londonderry, INCORE.
http://www.conflictresearch.org.uk/publications/ccicpubs/youth_quest.pdf

6. Bibliography:

- cover: AP: Holy Cross: Children in the spotlight
http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk/northern_ireland/newsid_1531000/1531033.stm. 29.01.2002 (19.58 h)
- author: unknown, update: unknown <http://www.ardoyne.com/school.htm>.
19.02.02 (21.37 h)
- CASCANI, DOMINIC: Ardoyne Stories: Peace lines and division (online).03.09.2001, update:
unknown.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk/northern_ireland/newsid_1522000/1522743.stm. 29.01.2002 (19.57 h)
- DR. CONNOLLY, PAUL, University of Ulster: Two Year Olds With Sectarian Attitudes (online). update: 10.11.1999.
<http://www.ulst.ac.uk/news/releases/1999/152.html>.
- PROF. FITZDUFF, MARI AND O'HAGAN, LIAM: The Northern Ireland Troubles: INCORE background paper (online). update: 07.01.2002 11:49:08.
<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/incorepaper.htm>.
- DR. GILL, GERD M.A. (Redaktionelle Ltg.), Meyers neues Lexikon in zehn Bänden, Mannheim, Meyers Lexikonverlag, 1993
- HARENBERG, BODO (Hrsg.), Harenberg Kompaktlexikon in drei Bänden, Dortmund: Harenberg Lexikon Verlag, 1996
- DR. MELAUGH, MARTIN: A Draft Chronology of the Conflict – 2001 (online) update: 12.02.2002 <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch01.htm>.
- DR. MELAUGH, MARTIN: update: 02.02.2002.
<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch02.htm#latest> 23.2.02 (17.05 h)
- SMYTH, MARIE AND SCOTT, MARK: The Youthquest 2000 Survey: A Report on Young People's Views and Experiences of Life in Northern Ireland. Derry Londonderry, INCORE. (online). update: unknown
http://www.conflictresearch.org.uk/publications/ccicpubs/youth_quest.pdf.
23.02.2002 (15.44 h)

- SMYTH, MARIE: Half the Battle: Understanding the impact of 'the Troubles' on children and young people - Chapter 3: Deaths of children and young people in the Troubles (online). update: 07.01.2002 12:11:19.
<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/cts/smyth1.htm#34>. 16.02.02 (15.10 h)
- SMYTH, MARIE: Understanding the impact of the Troubles on children and young people (online).
http://www.conflictresearch.org.uk/publications/cotts_half.html#background. 31.01.2002 (16.08 h)
- STAEMMLER, MORITZ: Nordirland - Troubled Times (online). update: unknown
http://freenet.meome.de/app/fn/artcont_portal_news_article.jsp/47941.html.
- TRAINOR, LIZ: HOLY CROSS: A mother's lament (online). update: unknown
<http://www.g21.net/irish31.htm>. 29.01.2002 (19.26 h)
- World and Press Special, Northern Ireland Background to the „Troubles“ and the conflict today, Bremen: Eilers & Schünemann Verlag, (no year of publication)

7. Erklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbstständig und ohne fremde Hilfe verfasst und keine anderen als die im Literaturverzeichnis angegebenen Hilfsmittel verwendet habe.

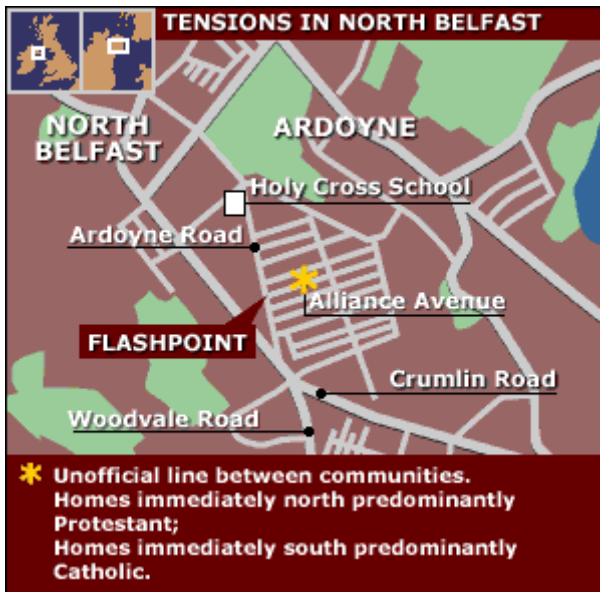
Insbesondere versichere ich, dass ich alle wörtlichen und sinngemäßen Übernahmen aus anderen Werken als solche kenntlich gemacht habe.

Ort, Datum

Unterschrift

8. APPENDIX

All photos of this „Facharbeit“ are from
<http://news.bbc.co.uk>



1. map of the flashpoint of the conflict in Ardoyne



2. Security forces escort the children and their parents to school.



3. Panic and confusion after the pipe bomb blasted.



4. The parents try to protect their children.



5. A child is swept up by her mother.



6. Banner at a house of Loyalist protesters.



7. UNDER FIRE: Police and soldiers under attack from loyalists in the Glenbryn area near Holy Cross primary school.



8. Burnt out car: Disturbances pervade Ardoyne