Northern Ireland: Socialisation into Conflict

by

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From generation to generation stable group conflicts have been perpetuated in Northern Ireland. Every generation or so conflicts about the most basic aspects of political life break out into disorder. Disorder acceptance for the realisation of the most basic political goals has become so common among the rising generation of schoolboys that it is difficult to predict anything other than future community division and bloodshed.

Political *discord* occurs when political disputes cannot be settled within a set of commonly-acknowledged rules, such as the constitution. Thus, *discord* may involve disputes about the nature and boundaries of the State as has been the case in Northern Ireland. Political *disorder* occurs when such *discord* is expressed physically in a manner that could involve bloodshed and death. There are, of course, other forms of *disorder* such as rent-strikes and taking part in banned processions, but violent illegal activity is here taken as the fairest expression of *disorder.* In what follows *disorder* will always refer to *political dicorder* except where it is clearly stated that it is not the case.[1]

FIELDWORK

The first part of the fieldwork in Northern Ireland was conducted in August 1970 when three hundred boys and girls and young people were interviewed in small groups using open-ended techniques. The purpose of such interviews was to establish what sort of questions about civic learning could best be asked. In the light of

1. For a fuller discussion of this point with reference to Northern Ireland see Richard Rose, *Governing Without Consensus,* chapter v (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

their answers, and questions which arose from more formal testing, the questionnaires were revised five times. Out of some 200 questions tested, 80 were selected for the Secondary School Survey and 60 for the Primary School Survey. The major secondary school investigation commenced early in 1971 and continued until after the Easter vacation. The primary school survey began in November 1971 when questions were tested among different age groups to discover when a child could handle the concept of government and a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. The major survey (upon which this investigation is based) involved formal questionnaire interviews with three thousand boys (almost equal numbers of Catholics and Protestants). A total of 972 interviews were in grammar schools, 946 in secondary intermediate schools (secondary modern), and 1,116 in primary schools. The sample was designed so that respondents should be drawn from areas experiencing different disorder levels; changing religious proportions in school-catchment zones; town size should vary quite considerably; and children should reside East and West of the River Bann (the prosperous and less-well-developed areas of Ulster); near to and far from the Border between Éire and Northern Ireland.

In the secondary school fieldwork an equal number of grammar and intermediate (secondary modern) schools were chosen in order to uncover differences which might exist between grammar schoolboys and others. The secondary school sample was later weighted to take account of the greater numbers in secondary modern over grammar schools in 1971. The secondary school years selected were first (aged 11-12) and fourth (aged 13-15). The primary school years chosen were primary four and primary six (ages 8 and 10). Certain school years had to be selected because it was impossible to cover every school year within the time available. Spreading the sampling framework over eight years allows time for political development. Including the fourth year in some secondary schools almost certainly involved interviewing some boys who were actively engaged, whatever their motivations, in violence.

In all, children from approximately forty schools completed a questionnaire. From the beginning of the first pilot study, through preliminary testing, to the end of the major primary school survey, approximately 3,800 children and young people were contacted. Whilst this is not a scientifically random sample it is much more representative of schoolboys in Northern Ireland than American samples have been of children there. Not only is the sample size proportionately much larger, but an effort was also made to include

middle- and working-class boys from districts which had experienced different levels of disorder and economic development.[2]

FINDINGS

In the investigation it was thought realistic to confront the boys with socially-approved goals asking how they should be attained. An abstract question—"Do you think that people have a right to fight for basic political values?"—would have been confusing. But using language which frequently crops up in Northern Ireland makes questions more understandable and answers more likely. Also, it was thought unrealistic to put the same questions about disorder to all the boys since Protestants and Catholics seldom fight for the same political goals. The questions were :

To Protestants : "Do you think that people have a right to *fight* in order to keep Ulster Protestant?"

To Catholics : "Do you think that people have a right to *fight* in order to bring about a United Ireland?"

At each administration of these questions it was clearly pointed out that *fighting* meant bloodshed, injury, with the possibility of death. Boys who answered "yes" to these questions are regarded as endorsing, but not necessarily ready to take part in political disorder *for these goals*. Boys answering "no" to these questions are regarded as rejecting disorder *for these goals*. In the table that follows, those accepting disorder will be represented by *"Violent"* and it should be clearly understood that this means *approval of disorder*. The boys rejecting violence *for these goals* will be represented in the table as *"Peaceful"* although one cannot be certain that they will reject disorder for *all goals*. They do, however, reject the use of disorder over the most basic of political issues in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, one is on safer ground when concentration is focussed upon those who accept disorder *for these goals* in any consideration of the agents and conditions most associated with disorder in Northern Ireland.

2. Insofar as school pupil samples are used to generalise to the whole population of the country concerned this sample is three times larger than one of the largest American samples. For instance, the study reported in Easton and Dennis, *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy* (McGraw-Hill, 1969).

TABLE 1: ATTITUDES TO DISCORD BY SCHOOL TYPE

	Protestants	Catholics
Grammar	(N=477)	(N=503)
Violent	54 per cent	52 per cent
Peaceful	43 per cent	45 per cent
No answer	3 per cent	3 per cent
Intermediate (Secondary Modern)	(N=478)	(N=474)
Violent	77 per cent	64 per cent
Peaceful	19 per cent	34 per cent
No answer	4 per cent	2 per cent
Primary	(N=561)	(N=548)
Violent	51 per cent	60 per cent
Peaceful	47 per cent	37 per cent
No answer	2 per cent	3 per cent

Only 3 per cent of the boys failed to answer this serious question about the nature of political discord. This is an indication of certainty and frankness in replying. On no occasion that I can recall, did any boy have to query the meaning of these questions.

Approximately 60 per cent of all the boys endorsed the use of violence for political ends. This indicates that socialisation into violent political discord is widespread and effective. It is also noteworthy that approximately 37 per cent reject the violent expression of political discord for these goals. This indicates that socialisation into disorder is far from totally successful. That only 37 per cent reject violence for these goals suggests that permanent political peace, without changes in the most basic political attitudes and strutcures, is unlikely.[3]

When survey data containing social predicators of violence approval are at hand it is necessary to go beyond purely verbal discussion of social influences upon disorder. A sense of the size of categoric groupings can be obtained by subjecting data to multi-

3. The findings of these schoolboy surveys vary, especially among Catholics where they vary considerably, from the responses to the Strathclyde loyalty adult survey (1968) when 52 per cent of Protestant and only 13 per cent of Catholic adults approved violence for political purposes. Probably the events of 1969-71 resocialised many adults, especially Catholics, away from the more peaceful outlooks of the 1960s. For *Loyalty Survey* figures see Richard Rose, *Governing Without Consensus,* Appendix (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

variate satistical analysis in order to learn how much influence each of a number of social acharacteristics has. The multivariate technique used here is Automatic Interaction Detector (A.I.D.), also known as tree analysis, because it produces a series of dichotomised groupings in a pattern that resembles the branches of a tree.[4]

The first thing we must do is to select a number of potential influences from the information coded for the groups under consideration. The computer systematically considers which of these influences divides the boys into two groups as far apart as possible in their views of discord. The potential influences included in this analysis are shown in Table 2. These influences have been grouped into broad categories together with the BSS/TSS ratio before the first split in the analysis. This highlights the "near miss" influence and is, in effect, a simple correlation type statistic. For instance, among Protestant secondary schoolboys marching/not marching with the Orange parades is the most divisive influence upon attitudes to disorder (10.8) followed by strength of nationality (8.3). Among Catholic secondary schoolboys, strength of nationality (7.3) is the most divisive influence upon attitudes to disorder, followed by national identification, friendship with Protestants, and playing Gaelic (Irish) sports. Which characteristics of these predicators cause the splits can be found by looking at the categories on each side of the split in the "trees" (see Figures 1-4). Calculating the mean variance explained within each of the broad categories in Table 2 shows that community influence (religious and national) explains most of the variance, followed in explanatory power, by local political influences. School and social class influences accounts for only a small proportion of the variance between schoolboys regarding disorder.

In order to investigate what affects schoolboys' attitudes towards conflict we must do separate tree analysis by religion. This is because Protestants were asked whether or not they endorsed fighting to keep Ulster Protestant, whereas Catholics were asked whether or not they would favour fighting for a United Ireland.

The most important influence upon primary school Protestants' attitudes towards violence relates to age. Boys in primary six are

4. J. A. Sonquist and J. N. Morgan, *The Detection of Interaction Effects,* Monograph No. 35, Survey Research Centre, Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, 1964.
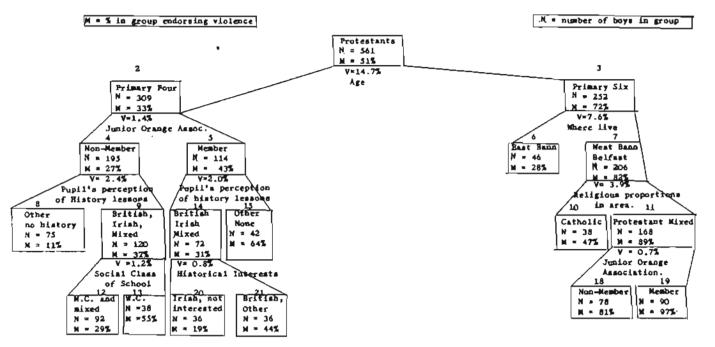
TABLE 2: BSS/TSS RATIO BEFORE SPLIT IN AID ANALYSIS

| PREDICATORS | VIOLENCE APPROVAL | | | |
| | Protestants | | Catholics | |
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
(1) *Religious and National Community*				
Church Attendance/P*	0.5	1.3	—	—
Mass Attendance/C*	—	—	2.9	0.9
Respect for Minister/P	1.0	0.8	—	—
Respect for Priests/C	—	—	1.4	1.2
Religion				
Strength of Religion/P	3.0	9.8	—	—
Strength of Religion/C	—	—	3.5	2.3
Friendship across religious lines/P ...	0.6	8.ff	—	—
Freindship across religious lines/C ...	—	—	8.9	4.4
Membership of Junior Orange/P ...	4.7	4.8	—	—
Marching with Orange bands/P	5.2	10.8	—	—
Playing Gaelic sports/C	—	—	2.0	4.3
Irish Language/C	—	—	3.0	1.5
Nationality	3.4	5.8	10.9	6.1
Strength of Nationality	6.1	8.3	12.4	7.3
(2) *School and Peer Group*				
Respect for Teachers	3.6	3.0	3.7	4.1
Teacher perception of history course	0.6	2.6	2.2	1.7
Pupil perception of history course ...	3.2	1.4	5.0	0.6
Pupil interest in history	1.8	1.3	7.7	4.3
Social Class in School	5.0	6.2	2.0	2.6
Social Class in School Group (Class)	4.8	4.6	4.5	4.2
School Year	14.6	0.3	4.8	0.8
Schools Stream	—	0.4	—	2.2
Grammar or Intermediate	—	5.7	—	0.9
Position in Peer Group	0.1	0.6	1.4	1.0
(3) *Local Influences*				
Subjective Assessment of level of				
trouble in area ....,	1.7	1.7	10.2	2.0
Religious proportions in area	2.8	0.4	12.2	3.6
Geographical area	12.2	0.5	12.0	3.8
(4) *Social Class*				
Socio-economic Group	1.0	3.5	1.5	1.6
Social Class	0.4	3.8	0.2	0.9

*Where questions concern one religion only this has been indicated by P=Protestant and C=Catholic.
**Classes in "Civics" were not included in the analysis because earlier cross-tabulation showed that they make little, or no, difference to the political attitudes of those who take them.

FIGURE I   Primary School Protestant Readiness to Endorse Violence

M = % in group endorsing violence

N = number of boys in group

Protestants
N = 561
M = 51%
V=14.7%
Age

2

Primary Four
N = 309
M = 33%
V=1.4%
Junior Orange Assoc.

3

Primary Six
N = 252
M = 72%
V=7.6%
Where live

4

Non-Member
N = 195
M = 27%
V= 2.4%
Pupil's perception
of History lessons

5

Member
N = 114
M = 43%
V=2.0%
Pupil's perception
of history lessons

6

East Bann
N = 46
M = 28%

7

West Bann
Belfast
N = 206
M = 82%
V= 3.9%
Religious proportions
in area.

8

Other
no history
N = 75
M = 11%

9

**British,
Irish,
Mixed**
M = 120
M = 37%
V =1.2%
Social Class
of School

14

**British
Irish
Mixed**
N = 72
M = 31%
V= 0.8%
Historical Interests

15

**Other
None**
N = 42
M = 64%

10

Catholic
N = 38
M = 47%

11

Protestant Mixed
N = 168
M = 89%
V = 0.7%
Junior Orange
Association.

12

**W.C. and
mixed**
N = 92
M = 29%

13

W.C.
N =38
M =55%

20

**Irish, not
interested**
N = 36
M = 19%

21

**British,
Other**
N = 36
M = 44%

18

Non-Member
N = 78
M = 81%

19

Member
N = 90
M = 97%

Variance Explained = 34.7%

much readier to accept political violence as justified than their
younger co-religionists (see Figure 1). This suggests that the years
between seven or eight and ten or eleven are important for learning
about violent means of conflict. If schools were important for
reducing violence endorsement then those in primary six might be
expected to be less violent than those exposed to fewer years of
school influence. Boys in primary six will also be influenced in
accepting violence according to where they live. Those who live in
Belfast, or West of the River Bann (less-economically-developed
area) are more likely to accept violence especially when they live in
a Protestant, or mixed religious area, and are members of the
Junior Orange Association. Boys in primary four are least likely to
accept violence when they are *not* members of the Junior Orange
Association and believe they have no history lessons, or lessons
drawn from outside the history of Britain or Ireland.

Here again it is important to note what does *not* influence atti-
tudes towards violence. Among those most ready to accept violence
no educational influences appear. Among those least ready to
accept fighting as justified semi-educational influences appear only
after boys have been divided in their attitudes by the Junior
Orange Association. Again, it is the pupils' perceptions of their
history lessons, rather than the teacher's view of them, that influ-
ences boys.

When we look at the end groups among Protestant boys we see
that in the largest group (15 per cent) boys in primary six, living in
Belfast or West of the Bann, in a mixed or Protestant area, and
who are members of the Junior Orange, almost all endorse the use
of violence for a Protestant Ulster. But the second largest group
(14 per cent) is found at the peaceful extreme where only 29 per
cent of boys endorse the use of violence : these boys in primary
four, who are not members of the Junior Orange Association, who
perceive a British, Irish, or mixed content in their school history
lessons, and attend middle class or mixed social class schools.

Among secondary school Protestant boys the most important
influence upon disorder approval is marching with the Orange
Order. Boys who march in religious/political parades are much
more likely to approve of fighting to keep Ulster Protestant and
they comprise the majority of boys interviewed : the difference
between the two groups is 31 per cent (see Figure 2). Among
marchers boys will be influenced in rejecting violence if they have
Catholic friends/friend, whilst 93 per cent of religiously estranged
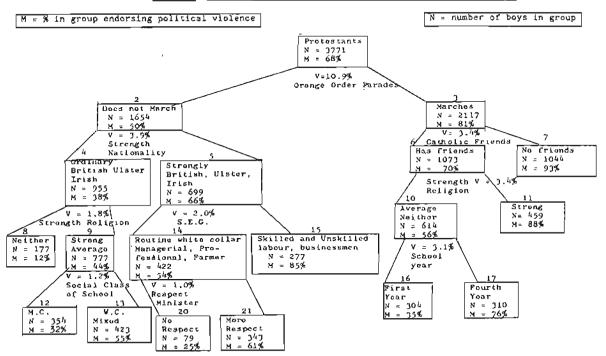marchers favour political violence.

FIGURE 2   Secondary School Protestant Readiness to Endorse Violence

M = % in group endorsing political violence

N = number of boys in group

Protestants
N = 3771
M = 68%

V=10.9%
Orange Order Parades

2
Does not March
N = 1654
M = 50%
V = 3.9%
Strength
Nationality

3
Marches
N = 2117
M = 81%
V = 3.4%

6 Catholic Friends
Has friends
N = 1073
M = 70%

7
No friends
N = 1044
M = 93%

Strength V = 3.4%
Religion

4
Ordinary
British Ulster
Irish
N = 955
M = 38%

5
Strongly
British, Ulster,
Irish
N = 699
M = 66%

10
Average
Neither
N = 614
M = 56%

11
Strong
N= 459
M= 88%

V = 1.8%
Strength Religion

V = 2.0%
S.E.G.

V = 3.1%
School
year

8
Neither
N = 177
M = 12%

9
Strong
Average
N = 777
M = 44%

14
Routine white collar
Managerial, Pro-
fessional, Farmer
N = 422
M = 54%

15
Skilled and Unskilled
labour, businessmen
N = 277
M = 85%

16
First
Year
N = 304
M = 35%

17
Fourth
Year
N = 310
M = 76%

V = 1.2%
Social Class
of School

V = 1.0%
Respect
Minister

12
M.C.
N = 354
M = 32%

13
W.C.
Mixed
N = 423
M = 55%

20
No
Respect
N = 79
M = 25%

21
More
Respect
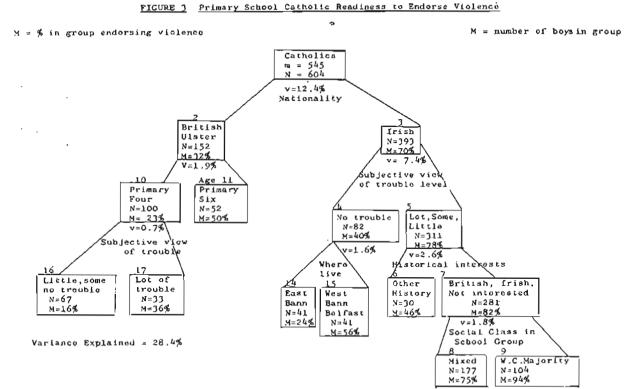N = 343
M = 61%

Variance Explained = 30.7%

Among those who do not march with the Orange Order, the strength of national identification appears to have some influence upon attitudes. Those who are strong national identifiers constitute 18 per cent of the Protestant secondary boys among whom 66 per cent favour political disorder. Among less intense national iden tifiers those who refuse to call themselves Protestants (although they appear to belong to the Protestant community) are least likely to accept violent relations.

Again it is important to note what does *not* influence attitudes towards violence. Interest in history, perception of historical con tent or lessons, history curriculum according to the official view, school civics, do not appear influential enough to divide boys in their outlooks upon political disorder.

The largest end group among Protestant secondary boys contains 27 per cent of boys of whom 93 per cent endorse violence. That this group cannot be further divided indicates a hard "no surrender" attitude among Orange marchers who are socially estranged from Catholics. At the other extreme are 5 per cent of boys of whom only 12 per cent endorse the use of violence for a Protestant Ulster, they are boys who do not march with the Orange Order, have ordinary national outlooks, and do not confess Protestantism.

Among primary school Catholics nationality is the chief influ ence upon attitudes to violence. The majority who identify with Ireland, are 38 per cent readier to endorse violence for a united Ireland than those who feel either British or Ulster (see Figure 3). Among the "Irish" Catholics, how boys feel about trouble in their home district shows up as an important influence identifying a group who sense trouble in their area of whom 78 per cent endorse violence themselves. Among the minority of "Irish" Catholics who sense *no* trouble in their local environment only 40 per cent endorse violence. When they live in such places as Ballymena or Antrim (quieter provincial towns) violence approval falls to only 24 per cent in favour. Among those with a British or Ulster national identification age is important for attitudes to violence : 23 per cent of such boys in primary four accept violent conflict to 50 per cent in primary six. Once again, sensing trouble in the local district causes more boys to favour fighting for a united Ireland.

The most violent group among primary Catholics consist of 20 per cent of schoolboys of whom nine out of ten approve of political violence : these are boys who have an Irish national identity, sense trouble in the local district, are interested in Irish or British history, or have no historical interests, and belong to a school group (class)

FIGURE 3 Primary School Catholic Readiness to Endorse Violence

M = % in group endorsing violence

M = number of boys in group

which has a working-class majority. At the other extreme are 13 per cent of primary school Catholics of whom only 16 per cent endorse violence. These are those possessing a British or Ulster national identity, who are in primary four as opposed to primary six, and who feel that there is less than a "lot of trouble" in their local environment.
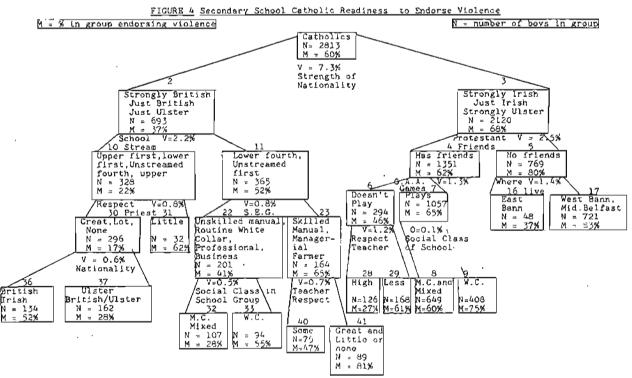
The most important single semi-school influence upon violent attitudes among primary Catholics is interest in history. This influence, however, explains only a small part of the variance out of the variance explained. Once again, civic education appears of little importance. It is also worth noting that the teaching of Irish language has little influence even though it might be considered a means of educating boys into United Ireland aspirations.

Among secondary school Catholic boys the first division in the tree again divides boys by national outlook. The Irish and strongly Ulster Catholics (the majority of whom are Irish) constitute 70 per cent of the secondary Catholic sample of whom 68 per cent favour violence compared to only 37 per cent of the British and "ordinary" Ulster identifiers (see Figure 4). Among the Catholic "Irish" and strong Ulster identifiers those without Protestant friends constitute 27 per cent of the secondary Catholic sample of whom 80 per cent favour violence. But even among the more violent boys, the minority who live East of the River Bann (outside Belfast) are much less violent than those in Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland.

Among the Irish and strongly Ulster group the possession of Protestant friends and non-participation in Gaelic sports games identifies a group of 10 per cent of the secondary Catholic sample of whom 46 per cent approve of violence. Among the Irish and strongly Ulster group, playing GAA games and belonging to a predominantly working-class school is associated with higher levels of violence approval among those with Protestant friends.

Among British and "just Ulster" boys a multiplicity of school streams and lack of streaming appears to divide more clearly than nationality. But because the division is difficult to structure the interpretation of the remaining branches on this side of the tree is confusing.

Once again, no direct school influences appear in the analysis. Interest in history, Irish language, and "civics" fail to divide boys by attitudes to violence. The proportion against violence was actually 3 per cent higher among those without formal classes in "civics" than among those who received such instruction.

FIGURE 4 Secondary School Catholic Readiness to Endorse Violence

M = % in group endorsing violence

N = number of boys in group

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Catholics
N= 2813
M = 60%

V = 7.3%
Strength of
Nationality

2
Strongly British
Just British
Just Ulster
N = 693
M = 37%

School   V=2.2%

3
Strongly Irish
Just Irish
Strongly Ulster
N = 2120
M = 68%

Protestant   V = 2.5%

10 Stream
Upper first, lower
first, Unstreamed
fourth, upper
N = 328
M = 22%

11
Lower fourth,
Unstreamed
first
N = 365
M = 52%

4 Friends
Has friends
N = 1351
M = 62%

5
No friends
N = 769
M = 80%

Where V=1.4%

Respect   V=0.8%

V=0.8%

A.A.   V=1.3%

16 live

17

30 Priest 31
Great, Lot,
None
N = 296
M = 17%

Little
N = 32
M = 62%

22   S.E.G.

Games 7

6
Doesn't
Play
N = 294
M = 46%

Plays
N = 1057
M = 65%

East
Bann
N = 48
M = 37%

West Bann,
Mid.Belfast
N = 721
M = 53%

23
Unskilled manual,
Routine White
Collar,
Professional,
Business
N = 201
M = 41%

Skilled
Manual,
Manager-
ial
Farmer
N = 164
M = 65%

V = 0.6%
Nationality

V=1.2%
Respect
Teacher

O=0.1%
Social Class
of School

36
British
Irish
N = 134
M = 52%

37
Ulster
British/Ulster
N = 162
M = 28%

V=0.5%
Social Class in
School Group

V=0.7%
Teacher
Respect

28
High
N=126
M=27%

29
Less
N=168
M=61%

8
M.C.and
Mixed
N=649
M=60%

9
W.C.
N=408
M=75%

32
M.C.
Mixed
N = 107
M = 28%

33
W.C.
N = 94
M = 55%

40
Some
N=75
M=47%

41
Great and
Little or
none
N = 89
M = 81%

Variance Explained = 19.4%

DISCUSSION

What an Ulster boy learns about politics has greater significance than how he acquires his orientation. In Northern Ireland, a history of partially-legitimate government makes the process emphasise both support for, and opposition to authority, as well as stressing discordant political assumptions about the nature and boundaries of the regime. Thus, Protestant and Catholic schoolboys know little other than taking opposite sides in conflicts about the most basic aspects of political life.

The community, rather than the school, is the chief socialiser of divisive political content. Divisions between Protestants and Catholics in the North of Ireland existed prior to the introduction of compulsory education and the setting up of the Stormont regime. Furthermore, since one's religion is acquired prior to schooling (ascribed at birth) religious schools only reinforce what is already there and do not create community differences. Also, many of the disputes over education in Ulster began during a time of political discord and disorder over Home Rule and the partition of Ireland. Thus political differences between educators, and those interested in education, created discordant attitudes to the Stormong regime rather than education creating loyalists and republicans.

Outside of the school-family, social class, national community, religion, local political influences, peer groups, adult-created youth movements, para-military organisations, and violent events continue to shape the civic character of Ulster schoolboys. Some educationalists maintain that teachers should start knowing the social experience of the pupils, recognise this as something vital and significant, and reflect it back to the pupils.[5] From this view one should expect schools to reinforce discordant views of national community. Thus, it is unrealistic to expect schools to create attitudes in pupils which are conducive to common allegiance in Northern Ireland in the absence of support from the adult community and the existence of a political institution which is generally accepted as fair and impartial.

These generalisations would appear to fit with American and British political socialisation literature also. They certainly stress the importance of agreement on basic political norms between parents and children rather than between school teachers and

5. See, for instance, Basil Bernstein, "Education and Society", *New Society* (20 February 1970).

pupils. The schools teach best what they have a monopoly upon : Greek, physics, etc. They certainly have no monopoly on political or religious education in Ulster.

Since 1971-72 when these surveys were carried out schoolboys have lived through another three years of violence. Thus, if the socialising effect of violent times is taken into account one should expect disorder approval among schoolboys to be higher in 1975 than in 1971-72. A survey which I have just completed (1975) confirms this.[6] Out of the one thousand secondary schoolboys interviewed in Northern Ireland 80 per cent now approve or condone disorder for a Protestant Ulster or a United Ireland. The fault lines of the political system in Northern Ireland have run deeply into the coming generation. The schoolboys of today anticipate another round of violence. Segregated education in Northern Ireland may be continued not simply for religious or political reasons, but for the security of those being educated.

6. A survey which I have recently completed (January-March 1975) for the Centre for Environmental Studies, London, reveals that out of 1,000 boys, between the ages of thirteen and seventeen years, approximately 80 per cent approve or condone disorder for political goals.