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Ulster Weeks: “England’s Prosperity Must Be Ulster’s Opportunity”¹

Abstract: Brexit has, once again, thrown into sharp relief the uncertain relationship between Ulster unionism and their fellow citizens. Since 1948 a constant concern for unionism has been worries that British ambiguity towards Northern Ireland will eventually see the province jettisoned and abandoned, to be subsumed into the Republic of Ireland. For most of the wider British population attempts by unionism and loyalism to reaffirm their Britishness go no further than parading, flags and the crash of the Lambeg drum. However, some attempts such as unionism’s involvement in the Festival of Britain have been marked by considerable sophistication. Amongst these efforts were the Ulster Weeks campaigns in the United Kingdom. These were part of the wider “Bridge Building” project initiated by Prime Minister Terence O’Neill. Ulster Weeks are now largely forgotten beyond a few lines or footnotes and had no lasting impact; like so much, they were destroyed by the violence of the Troubles. This paper will show that notwithstanding the modernist language of the project they would often fall back on traditional imagery. It exposes a project that despite its rhetoric which wanted to promote a modern, technologically advanced Northern Ireland, it also wanted to uphold a Northern Ireland that was Protestant, British and loyal. Once again, the message would fail to expunge British disinterestedness over Northern Ireland’s place in the Union. This paper will conclude that whilst the Troubles ultimately brought about the end of the project, it had already been rejected by unionists that wanted to destroy O’Neill’s bridges and nationalists who wanted “Civil Rights not Civic Weeks”. Further, it will argue that hard-line unionism has failed to learn the lessons of the Ulster Weeks campaigns.

Keywords: unionism, nationalism, Northern Ireland, Ulster, Ulster Week, Terence O’Neill.

Résumé: Le Brexit a une nouvelle fois mis en lumière la relation incertaine entre les unionistes d’Ulster et leurs concitoyens. Depuis 1948, les unionistes craignent que l’ambiguïté britannique vis-à-vis de l’Irlande du Nord provoque l’abandon de la province et son absorption par la République d’Irlande. Pour la majeure partie de la population britannique dans son ensemble, les tentatives de l’unionisme et du loyalisme de réaffirmer leur identité britannique se résument à défiler, agiter des drapeaux et faire résonner le tambour de Lambeg. Cependant, certaines tentatives telles que la participation de l’unionisme au Festival of Britain ont été extrêmement élaborées, à travers par exemple les campagnes nommées Ulster Weeks au Royaume-Uni. Celles-ci faisaient partie du projet plus vaste de « construction de ponts » initié par le Premier ministre Terence O’Neill. Les Ulster Weeks sont maintenant largement oubliées, si ce n’est pour quelques lignes ou notes de bas de page, et n’ont eu aucun impact durable; comme beaucoup, elles ont été détruites par la violence des Troubles. Cet article montrera que, malgré le langage moderniste du projet, elles se retranchaient souvent derrière des images traditionnelles. Nous exposerons un

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1. “Speech by Senator the Rt. Hon. J. L. O. Andrews, D.L., at the Inauguration of Ulster Week in Birmingham”, 21 April 1969, Public Record Office Northern Ireland (hereafter PRONI).

projet qui, malgré une rhétorique qui visait à promouvoir une Irlande du Nord moderne et à la pointe de la technologie, voulait également défendre une Irlande du Nord à la fois protestante, britannique et loyale. Une fois encore, le message ne parvenait pas à dissiper le désintéressement britannique de la place de l'Irlande du Nord dans l'Union. Nous concluons que, si les Troubles ont finalement mis fin au projet, il avait déjà été rejeté par les unionistes qui souhaitaient détruire les ponts d'O'Neill et par les nationalistes qui souhaitaient des « droits civils et non des semaines civiques ». L'unionisme radical n'a pas réussi à tirer les leçons des Ulster Weeks.

Mots clés : unionisme, nationalisme, Irlande du Nord, Ulster, Ulster Week, Terence O'Neill.

The current debate about the United Kingdom's place and role in Europe has once again brought to the surface of British politics Ulster unionists' concerns over the constitutional position of Northern Ireland and their membership of the British "family" of nations. A survey completed by Kings College London revealed the continuing indifference of voters in Great Britain towards Northern Ireland's place in the Union². After 1922 Ireland was submerged beneath the surface of British politics. Occasionally Northern Ireland would manage to force its way into the vision of those on the government benches in Westminster. The decision by Costello to announce the withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1948 and declare Ireland a Republic forced London to turn its attention to Belfast and Dublin when its gaze was firmly fixed on the post-war reconstruction of Europe and the withdrawal from empire. In the creation of the Ireland Act (1949), Atlee and his cabinet achieved two goals, they prevented a potential crisis within the Commonwealth and returned the issue of partition to the back-benches. Whilst this did secure Northern Ireland's membership of the Union, this was a secondary consideration; saving a British enclave in Ireland was not the primary consideration for Atlee and Labour, who were far more concerned about damaging the Commonwealth.

Although Northern Ireland's position in the Union now appeared secure this did not stop unionism viewing their future with uncertainty. They began to look for an opportunity to confirm Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom. It was decided that unionism had to find a way to promote itself to the rest of the United Kingdom. The 1951 Festival of Britain was recognised as an opportunity to do this. The Festival of Britain would be a "high-profile means of confirming Northern Ireland's place in the Union" and a "rallying point for Protestant rank and file"³. The festival plans for Belfast was not without its critics. Harry Diamond MP, Nesca Robb and Sam Hannah Bell recognised the potential controversy that could result of the festival, warning that "our history, for historical reasons, is still warm in the hands of zealots"⁴. These concerns did not stop the Northern Ireland government from wanting to ensure that it was integrated as far

2. "Survey: Only Third of Britons Want Northern Ireland to Stay in UK – Brexit Pressure on Union", *Belfast Telegraph*, 3 April 2019.

3. Gillian McIntosh, *The Force of Culture: Unionist Identities in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1999, p. 103.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 112-113.

as possible with the wider festival⁵. Unionists in Northern Ireland intended to use the festival to show the rest of the United Kingdom that it was a loyal, Protestant member of the British nation and the United Kingdom⁶.

After the Conservative election victory in 1951, unionists in Northern Ireland had little to fear from British politics. The Conservative Party remained in power for over a decade and had no interest in anything that would disturb the constitutional settlement. However, despite the years of Conservative dominance, technological advances, global economic growth and generational differences were to have consequences in both the United Kingdom and Ireland. Globally, during the second half of the 1950s the older pre-war world would encounter a new generation that viewed older traditions, politicians and ideologies as the pillars of stagnation.

In the UK and Ireland this produced three leaders, each believing in their own version of the modernisation thesis. Harold Wilson wanted to create a Britain forged in the "White Heat" of technology⁷. Sean Lemass wanted to show the world that Ireland was not a small nation of the periphery of Europe. Lemass hoped that this transformation would show unionists in Northern Ireland that should reunification take place, they would be joining a state opening up to a modern world and peeling away the previous layers of protectionism⁸. In Northern Ireland Prime Minister Terence O'Neill was also looking to use his own interpretation of modernisation. He wanted to "change the face of Ulster"⁹. O'Neill believed that he if could promote an image of Northern Ireland that dovetailed with Wilson's then this would have two consequences; firstly, increasing the economic and industrial development of Northern Ireland and secondly, to ensure Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom¹⁰. Loughlin argues that for this to work O'Neill had to convince three groups of his intentions. He had to persuade his fellow unionists to modernise their own political and religious views. There was the need to cajole nationalists to accept the argument that modernisation would bring equality, social justice and remove the need for reunification. The final group he had to win over were the remaining British. He had to show them that Northern Ireland was a bona fide, modern part of the British nation¹¹. In a speech he made in 1966, O'Neill told his audience that there were those in Britain "who listen too readily to our enemies, and who ignore the evidence of Ulster's loyalty"¹². To demonstrate this, the Northern Ireland government would launch a charm offensive in Britain. This

5. James Loughlin, *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885*, London, F. Pinter, 1995, p. 155.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 155-160.

7. Harold Wilson, *Labour's Plan for Science: Reprint of Speech by the Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson, MP, Leader of the Labour Party, at the Annual Conference, Scarborough, Tuesday October 1, 1963*, London, Victoria House Printing Company, 1963.

8. Bryce Evans, *Seán Lemass, Democratic Dictator*, Cork, The Collins Press, 2011, p. 212-229.

9. "Ulster Week Greeted You in Leeds", *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 24 April 1967.

10. James Loughlin, *Ulster Unionism...*, p. 155-160 and p. 175-176.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

12. Margaret O'Callaghan, Catherine O'Donnell, "The Northern Ireland Government, the 'Paisleyite Movement' and Ulster Unionism in 1966", *Irish Political Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2006, p. 204.

would be a series of “Ulster Weeks” to convince their fellow citizens that Northern Ireland was as authentically modern as the rest of the British¹³. It was decided that “England’s Prosperity must be Ulster’s Opportunity”¹⁴.

O’Neill wanted to use Ulster Weeks to reach out to the other British regions to encourage “friendship and better knowledge” about Northern Ireland¹⁵. They would be a mix of propaganda, trade initiatives and colourful ceremonial. The reasons for focusing on British regional cities were made clear by O’Neill before the official launch of the first Ulster Week in Nottingham. O’Neill invited to Stormont the lord mayor of Nottingham and the chairman of Nottinghamshire County Council. In a speech to his guests, he revealed more of the motivation behind Ulster Weeks. He and his ministers had recognised the growing economic strength of London and the Greater South East. The British economy was shifting from the older northern industrial cities. The economic performance of the Greater South East and the economic imbalance that was being created was an increasing concern for regional politicians. O’Neill recognised that this economic shift would have consequences for Northern Ireland. He wanted to show the officials from Nottingham that they had a common goal, to ensure their relative economic prosperity.

When the first Ulster Week in Nottingham was launched it was accompanied by a glossy magazine *Industrial Nottingham: Ulster Week in Nottingham*¹⁶. Features were also covered in multiple local newspapers, local television and later, British Pathé covered Ulster Week in Manchester¹⁷.

The material produced to publicise Ulster Week in Sheffield was typical of the amount and type of literature produced to publicise other Ulster Weeks (see table).

The promotional material for Ulster Week in Leeds included 12 large “Ulster” banners, 2,000 smaller banners, 5,000 red hands, 5,000 lapel badges and 50,000 leaflets¹⁸. For Ulster Week in Birmingham, the *Birmingham Post* carried a special supplement “Ulster in Birmingham” which told its readership that Ulster was the place “Where whiskey began” and now made everything from “From carpet sweepers to guided missiles”¹⁹. A full sized replica 18th-century cottage was displayed at Rackhams Department Store. Its primary purpose was to illustrate Northern Ireland’s claim to have links with ten United States presidents²⁰. At the same time Birmingham businesses were being encouraged to invest in Northern Ireland’s “bright new future” and the “21st century city”, Craigavon²¹.

13. James Loughlin, *Ulster Unionism...*, p. 176.

14. “Speech by Senator the Rt. Hon. J. L. O. Andrews, D.L., at the Inauguration of Ulster Week in Birmingham”, 21 April 1969, PRONI.

15. Government of Northern Ireland Information Service, “Extract of Speech by the Prime Minister”, 23 September 1964, PRONI.

16. *Industrial Nottingham: Ulster Week in Nottingham*, September 1964, PRONI.

17. *Ulster Week in Manchester*, British Pathé, 1968, on line: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/manchester-ulster-week/query/Ulster+week>.

18. Government of Northern Ireland, press release, 3 April 1967, PRONI.

19. “Ulster in Birmingham: A Birmingham Post Special Supplement”, *Birmingham Post*, 18 April 1968.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

Ulster Week Sheffield Publicity Material

Material	Number
Showcards	4,000
Hanging signs	750
Window stickers	2,250
Display banners	1,000
Counter cards	1,000
Display strips	800
Swing tickets	2,000
Posters	500
Lapel badges	3,000
Ulster hands	3,000
Display brochures	3,000
Give-away leaflets	50,000

Source: "Ulster Week in Sheffield", 2 May 1966, PRONI.

Sport was also used to promote the aims of Ulster Weeks. In Edinburgh there was a football match between Hearts and Coleraine²². Another match was arranged for Ulster Week in Newcastle where Newcastle United would play Linfield (who were the Irish League champions) and the Senior Services Golf Tournament would take place at Northumberland Golf Club²³.

An innovative promotional feature of Ulster Week in Southampton was the location of the launch event. This took place on the S.A. Oranje, a South African liner that had been built by Harland and Wolff in 1947²⁴. Despite the growing international condemnation of the apartheid regime, no concern was shown about using a South African flagged ship to begin Ulster Week in Southampton. There was one small drama that was played out just before the start of events. At the same time as Ulster Week in Southampton, the Northern Ireland government had also been promoting Northern Ireland fabric and fashion at London Fashion Week. The event was attended by Princess Margaret, who delayed O'Neill's departure for Southampton, resulting in a dash through London traffic with a police escort to get him to Southampton on time for the official launch²⁵. Kensington Palace would later send a letter to O'Neill to tell him of the Princess's "pleasure" at attending the show²⁶.

22. Government of Northern Ireland, press release, 11 August 1965, PRONI.

23. Government of Northern Ireland, press release: "Ulster Week Newcastle Upon Tyne", 16 September 1966, PRONI.

24. "Ulster Week Event in Liner", *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 October 1967.

25. "Princess Kept the PM Late", *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 October 1967.

26. "Letter to Captain the Rt. Hon. Terence O'Neill, DL, MP, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, by Private Secretary to the Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon", 30 October 1967, PRONI.

The organisers also reached out to their supporters in Britain to ensure the success of events. In Sheffield they received support from the local Ulster Society²⁷. The president of the Ulster Society in Sheffield was William James Lytle who was born in Maghera, County Londonderry and was Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons²⁸. When he arrived in Manchester, O'Neill was welcomed by Winifred Austin, the Secretary of the Manchester Ulster Society²⁹. Prior to the Ulster Week in Bristol O'Neill had dinner with the Reading Ulster Association³⁰. The Birmingham Ulster Society also hosted a dinner for their guests from Northern Ireland.

There were also more subtle markers of Ulster Weeks. For each event, special slogan postmarks were used. Each postmark would have the name of the city where the campaign was taking place, the date and the six-pointed star.

Another important part of Ulster Weeks was the pomp and ceremony of military spectacle. During Ulster Week in Bristol the band of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers beat retreat and marched through the city. The Royal Navy was represented by HMS Russell (a Type 14 second-rate frigate), which had previously been part of the Londonderry Squadron. Throughout Ulster Week, the Red Hand of Ulster would be on prominent display from the ship's funnel³¹. In Newcastle-Upon-Tyne the Royal Ulster Rifles would be on parade. In Leeds it was the turn of the Drums and Pipes of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Whilst in Leeds, Terrence O'Neill had a personal surprise waiting for him when he was unexpectedly reunited with his former batman from his service with the Irish Guards³². In Manchester, the most popular element of Ulster Week was the presence of three Royal Navy submarines. Their cruise into Manchester along the ship canal was covered extensively by the media and they received 10,000 visitors³³. The intent was for the submarines to reinforce the role played by the Royal Navy in Northern Ireland during the Second World War. However, the future of the submarine squadron in Northern Ireland was already being questioned and the submarines themselves were approaching obsolescence in a world dominated by nuclear weapons. The link with the Royal Navy was already in decline. The Londonderry Squadron was disbanded in 1966 and the Submarine school would close in 1970. The Royal Navy's connection to Northern Ireland was passing into history.

This all carried an important political message from the unionist government. They wanted to convince their fellow citizens that they were British and an integral part of the United Kingdom. In Edinburgh O'Neill combined technological and

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27. M. Smith, "Letter to Terrence O'Neill by The Ulster Society of Sheffield", 28 March 1966, PRONI.

28. N. S. Sivarajasingham, A. Kingsnorth, "William James Lytle: A Historical Review", *Hernia*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2002, p. 198-203.

29. Michael Herbert, *The Wearing of the Green: A Political History of the Irish in Manchester*, London, Irish in Britain Representation Group, 2001, p. 146.

30. "Capt. O'Neill not Meeting Mr. Wilson", *Birmingham Post*, 20 March 1965.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Government of Northern Ireland, press release, 24 April 1967, PRONI. A batman is an orderly or personal servant assigned to a commissioned officer.

33. "10,000 visitors for submarines", *The Guardian*, 4 March 1968.

economic modernity with older, historical links with Scotland. In a speech to mark the inauguration of the Edinburgh Ulster Week he told the audience that "our peoples are closely related in blood, in traditions and in character. It was no accident that when Ulstermen wished to subscribe to the most solemn declaration they could imagine, they styled it in the Covenant"³⁴. In his keynote address in Newcastle, O'Neill combined identity with the theme of regional prosperity. He told those gathered, "the Tyne and the Lagan had given to the life of Britain before, we knew also that the nation could not afford to waste human resources such as these"³⁵. It was a speech that was full of the rhetoric of self-help, regional spirit and desire for Belfast and Newcastle to become modern British regional capitals. He hoped Ulster Week in Newcastle would result in "continuing friendship between our people and our compatriots under the British flag"³⁶.

The theme of being a member of a family under one flag continued. In 1967, Brian Faulkner reminded guests from Leeds at a civic reception in Stormont about Northern Ireland's contribution during the Second World War and promised that, if called, would do so again. Faulkner also emphasised the modernity of local industry proudly stating that Northern Ireland exported "linen, whiskey, ships and missiles, optical lenses and oil drills". This mix of older, traditional industry and new technology would in Faulkner's words play a full part in the "economic struggle for prosperity which is to-day so vital to every citizen of Britain"³⁷. During Ulster Week in Leeds, the mayor of Leeds, Alderman Walsh, took his counterpart from Belfast, William Geddis on a tour of clothing and textiles produced in Leeds, emphasising the links both cities had with the fabric and garment trades³⁸. Speaking to the Leeds Federation Townswomen's Guilds, Sir Francis Evans (chairman of the Ulster Weeks Committee) said that "the future looked bright and hopeful"³⁹.

In 1968 the Ulster Week campaign arrived in Manchester. The format of inviting civic leaders to Belfast before the event continued. At a lunch at Stormont the shared industrial commonalities between the two were underscored. The guests from Manchester were told of the historical industrial heritage of Manchester and

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34. Government of Northern Ireland, press release: "Speech by the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Captain the RT. HON. Terence O'Neill, D.L., M.P., At a Dinner to Mark the Inauguration of the Ulster Week campaign by the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council of the City of Edinburgh, North British Hotel", 27 September 1965, PRONI.

35. Government of Northern Ireland, press release: "Speech by the Prime Minister (Captain the RT. HON. Terence O'Neill, D.L., M.P.) at a luncheon in Parliament Buildings, Stormont, at 1.00 P.M. on Friday 3rd June, 1966, for a party from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne visiting Northern Ireland in connection with Ulster Week", 3 June 1966, PRONI.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Government of Northern Ireland, press release: "Speech by Minister of Commerce, RT. Hon. Brian Faulkner, DL, M.P. At a Luncheon for a Civic Party from Leeds at Stormont on Monday, 21st November 1966, In Connection with the forthcoming Ulster Week", 21 November 1966, PRONI.

38. "Ulster Week Greets You in Leeds", *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 24 April 1967.

39. Government of Northern Ireland, press release: "Extracts from an Address on the Development of Northern Ireland given by Sir Francis Evans, Chairman of the Ulster Weeks Committee, at a rally organised by the Leeds Federation of Townswomen's Guilds and held in the town hall, Leeds", 4 May 1967, PRONI.

Northern Ireland and that “Manchester was not just another provincial city” but was a “great capital of the north”⁴⁰. In what was part speech, part lecture they were told that “to show people who you are, you must show them what you can do”⁴¹. When the event was launched the *Manchester Evening News* reported that the city had been “taken over by the Red Hand” and with no sense of irony reported that it was a “drum thumping show and parade of Northern Ireland”⁴².

In Birmingham, the Minister in the Senate of the government in Northern Ireland, John Andrews, told his audience that “we are not here as foreigners, but as fellow citizens of the United Kingdom”. He continued, “we want it to *remain* united” and that “we believe we have a contribution to make to the life of this nation, *our* nation”⁴³. This message was regarded as so important even the press release of Andrews’ speech literally underlined unionist’s desire to remain within the United Kingdom. In the attempt to reinforce their Britishness they even arranged for the cast and writers of that most British of institutions, *The Archers*, to promote Ulster bacon⁴⁴.

In his biography, O’Neill would remember the first Ulster Week in Nottingham “plastered with Red Hands” and as a “roaring success”⁴⁵. Despite O’Neill’s enthusiasm the report on the effectiveness of the Ulster Week in Nottingham highlighted some concerns. The *Belfast Telegraph* reported that sales had been “spasmodic” and locals told the organisers that “you don’t know how to project your image over here”⁴⁶. Whilst the Red Hand remained a crucial symbol of unionist identity, they found that it meant little outside Northern Ireland. The use of the Red Hand as the most significant market image was found to mean “nothing to the average Englishman” and that it would need “elaborate explanation”⁴⁷. There had been concerns about the use of the “Red Hand” during the planning stages for the event but after a brief discussion its use had been passed unanimously⁴⁸.

It had previously been decided to avoid any rural or stereotypical images and to concentrate on scientific and technological progress. There was also another reason for the reluctance to emphasise rural images, the organising committee did not want to risk anything that may portray the event as Irish. Anything that had the potential to express anything other than a British Ulster would be prohibited, there would be no “jaunting cars, Irish dancing, colleens, leprechauns, etc.”⁴⁹. Despite

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40. Government of Northern Ireland, press release: “Lunch for Manchester Civic Party”, 12 February 1968, PRONI.

41. *Ibid.*

42. “It’s a take-over by the Red Hand”, *Manchester Evening News*, 4 March 1968.

43. Government of Northern Ireland, press release: “Speech by Senator The Rt. Hon. J. L. O. Andrews, D.L., At The Inauguration of Ulster Week in Birmingham”, 21 July 1969, PRONI. Please note the underlined sections of the original document, reproduced here in italics.

44. *Birmingham Post*, 29 January 1969. *The Archers* is a long running radio drama, first broadcast in 1951. It still retains one of the largest radio audiences in the UK.

45. Terence O’Neill, *The Autobiography of Terence O’Neill*, London, Hart-Davis, 1972, p. 64.

46. G. McEvoy, “Nottingham and the Bridge We Built in 6 Days”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 2 November 1964.

47. “Report: Ulster Week in Nottingham”, 30 November 1964, PRONI.

48. Ulster Weeks Committee, “Minutes of Meeting held at Stormont Castle”, 6 July 1964, PRONI.

49. *Ibid.*

their initial concerns, it was decided that a strictly modernist approach limited the type of window displays and marketing material that could be used. It was agreed that the best approach would be to combine modernity with established images used by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, to show that Northern Ireland was a "progressive industrial centre" and a place which could provide "the Englishman a quiet holiday such as he cannot get in his own country"⁵⁰. It was decided that there needed to be a broader approach to Ulster Weeks and that if there was a failure to promote all aspects of Northern Ireland then it would become little more than an exercise in "hard selling"⁵¹. It was clear that they were going to have to do considerable work to show they were a genuine member of the British family. Further, it was concluded that the over-concentration on technology had proved to be something of a hinderance. The result of this was that going forward Ulster Weeks would contain a rather clumsy mix of the modern and traditional.

Any concerns about the content and direction of Ulster Weeks were put aside and the initial week in Nottingham was regarded as a success. There were window and in-store displays in almost two hundred stores. The local newspapers and trade journals had all produced supplements covering the event and it was widely reported by local television and radio. In Northern Ireland the results of Ulster Week in Nottingham were published in *The Ulster Yearbook*. It was announced that "It proved extremely successful and clearly indicated that there was scope for a series of Ulster Weeks in Great Britain"⁵².

For all the pomp and circumstances of military parades and the positive spin portrayed by *The Ulster Yearbook*, there were already indications that all was not as it seemed. The opening of Ulster Week in Nottingham received just one mention of a mere thirteen words on page 19 of *The Guardian*⁵³. The sales of eggs in Cheshire, a retiring midwife and a fire at a scrap rubber dump in Shropshire were all given greater prominence.

Behind the scenes, cracks were appearing between O'Neill and those resistant to any attempt at change such as Northern Ireland Senator John Barnhill⁵⁴. In cabinet, by 1966, Brian Faulkner was openly opposing Ulster Weeks and much of O'Neill's other initiatives⁵⁵. In Stormont, Dr. Robert Nixon MP (Ulster Unionist North Down), questioned O'Neill about the use of the word Ulster in "Ulster Weeks" as it was a "misnomer" and "incorrect politically and geographically"⁵⁶. Dr. Nixon had previously been a thorn in the side of O'Neill and the Ulster Unionists over the siting of the New University of Ulster in Coleraine, not

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50. "Ulster Week in Nottingham", report, 30 November 1964, PRONI.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, *The Ulster Yearbook: The Official Handbook of Northern Ireland 1963-1965*, Belfast, HMSO, 1965.

53. "News in Brief", *The Guardian*, 26 October 1964.

54. "Conservative Stand Annoys Nationalists", *The Irish Times*, 17 January 1964.

55. Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads: Ulster Unionism in the O'Neill Years, 1960-1969*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 76.

56. Parliamentary questions, no. 9, 16 October 1966, PRONI.

Londonderry⁵⁷. Despite placing full page advertisements in *The Sunday Times* and *The Financial Times*, the British press were far more interested in the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising and the growing presence of Ian Paisley⁵⁸.

Whilst they were trying to promote a modern Northern Ireland, worries continued over the separation of "Ulster" from the Republic of Ireland. Older concerns about the British public's inability to differentiate between the two persisted. When products from the Republic of Ireland were being promoted at Harrods, the potential of either a joint promotion or confusion between "Ulster" and "Irish" products caused tensions in Stormont. Concerns included any impact that any joint promotion would have on the success of the Ulster Weeks campaign. Considerable funds had already been spent on promoting Ulster Weeks and they did not welcome any potential distractions. It was acknowledged that the Ulster linen manufacturers had used the term "Irish" for several years, but it was felt that they were so well established, that consumers would recognise the difference. After considerable discussion, any joint participation was rejected and it was decided that "there must be no blurring of Northern Ireland's separate identity within Ireland or of her links with Northern Ireland"⁵⁹. Rejecting the idea of a joint trade promotion at Harrods, the Northern Ireland government decided to proceed with its own pitch to London's consumers with a marketing push at Selfridges⁶⁰. However, the blurring of the modern and traditional in the Ulster Weeks campaigns continued.

O'Neill hoped to transfer some of the ideas from Ulster Weeks into politics at home. This was to be called the Programme to Enlist the People or PEP for short. It was hoped that it would encourage a true form of civic society in Northern Ireland⁶¹. However, despite O'Neill's public attempts at reconciliation and the PEP initiative little was achieved. He was offering too little to gain any credit with the burgeoning civil rights movement. It was a veneer. As argued by Marianne Elliott these efforts were too slow and crippled by constant, blundering insensitivity such as the naming of Craigavon and the siting of the new university at Coleraine⁶². It was already too late for O'Neill's PEP campaign as nationalists and civil rights activists were already creating and becoming embedded in their own community projects. The PEP campaign was rejected by all sides. The growing civil rights movement

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57. Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads...*, p. 53-60. "Capt. O'Neill Denies He Influenced Lockwood", *The Irish Times*, 8 May 1965; "Neglect of the West Is Charged", *The Irish Times*, 17 January 1964; "In the Grip of History", *The Times*, 12 April 1965.

58. "John Bull's Political Slum", *The Sunday Times*, 3 July 1966; "Advertisers Announcement", *The Times*, 28 November 1966; Kathy Branham, "We Love Living in Northern Ireland", *The Financial Times*, 14 July 1965.

59. "Extracts from Cabinet Conclusions: Irish Trade Promotion Campaign at Harrods", 12 February 1965, PRONI.

60. Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, *The Ulster Yearbook: The Official Handbook of Northern Ireland 1963-1965*.

61. Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, *The Ulster Yearbook: The Official Handbook of Northern Ireland 1966-1968*, Belfast, HMSO, 1967.

62. Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A History*, London, Penguin, 2000, p. 409.

wanted "Civil Rights not Civic Weeks"⁶³ and Ian Paisley had already determined to tear down the bridges O'Neill was "in his stupidity and folly" attempting to build⁶⁴.

Although O'Neill would continue to use the language of modernisation, the British press were turning their interest away from Ulster Weeks to the growing civil rights campaign. Whilst he wanted to be promoting his PEP campaign and Ulster Weeks, O'Neill had to defend himself and his government as *The Times* reported on resignation of Professor Geoffrey Copcutt and that Catholics were "Ulster's Second-Class Citizens"⁶⁵. *The Times* painted a grim picture of life in Northern Ireland far removed from the social liberalisation taking place in the rest of the United Kingdom. It was presented as a province far removed from the modernism that O'Neill was keen to promote. The message of Ulster Weeks was failing.

Ulster Weeks soon became entangled with the protests and violence that was emerging in Northern Ireland. Manchester retained one of the most politically active Irish communities in Britain and whilst Michael Herbert records that there were no public protests about Ulster Week or O'Neill in Manchester, some were willing to make their views known. Manchester retained one of the largest first-generation Irish populations outside of London. Manchester Ardwick (10.5%), Manchester Moss Side (8.08%) and Manchester Exchange (6.55%) were amongst the few constituencies outside the Midlands or the Greater South East with Irish populations greater than 5%⁶⁶. In contrast Harold Wilson's Huyton constituency only had a first-generation Irish population of 1.14%⁶⁷. Manchester also retained an active branch of the Connolly Association. When Desmond Greaves visited in 1964, he concluded that the local branch was "in a position to raise the Irish question unaided" and that Manchester contained "the most advanced and politically intelligent workers of Britain, the direct descendants of the chartists"⁶⁸.

Not content with lobbying a local MP, Paul Rose, letter writers in Manchester used Ulster Week to send their concerns to O'Neill. One individual from Sale was magnanimous enough to offer O'Neill every success for Ulster Week in Manchester but wanted him to "ensure progress towards full social justice to the whole community"⁶⁹. O'Neill in his polite, patrician style, dismissed concerns over discrimination as nothing more than the "product of fertile political imaginations", further he blamed the policy of nationalist abstentionism for the failure of Catholics to gain greater political representation.

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63. David Gordon, *The O'Neill Years: Unionist Politics 1963-1969*, Belfast, Athol Books, 1989, p. 33 and ammend Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads...*, p. 146.

64. Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads...*, p. 128-133; Roy Wallis, Steve Bruce, David Taylor, "Ethnicity and Evangelicalism: Ian Paisley and Protestant Politics in Ulster", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1987, p. 293-313.

65. "Ulster's Second-Class Citizens", *The Times*, 24 April 1967.

66. *Census 1966 United Kingdom General and Parliamentary Constituency Tables*, London, HMSO, 1969.

67. *Ibid.*

68. "What the Irish in Britain Are Doing about the Election", *The Irish Democrat*, October 1964.

69. A. Havekin, "Letter to Captain Terence O'Neill", 3 March 1968, PRONI.

The façade of O'Neill's reformism was increasingly exposed. In Leicester he was heckled by students who were among the crowds at the launch of Ulster Week⁷⁰. Instead of launching Ulster Week and promoting Ulster to the shoppers and traders of Leicester he found himself surrounded by hordes of reporters. They were demanding an explanation as to why television reports and newspapers were full of pictures of Gerry Fitt MP, with "blood streaming down his head"⁷¹.

In common with Manchester, Birmingham had retained an economic pull for Irish migrants. Birmingham Sparkbrook had long been a receiving area and in 1966 7.42% of its population were from the Republic of Ireland⁷². Further, between 1940 and 1960 the population of Coventry grew by 31%. In 1951 the Irish represented 3% of the population of Coventry and had grown to 5% by 1961⁷³. Despite this, Desmond Greaves was not encouraged by the activity of the Connolly Association. In 1964 he was withering in his criticism of the Irish population in Birmingham. Writing in *The Irish Democrat* he told them that "they really should be ashamed of themselves" and that "nowhere is the Irish community so weak and ineffectual". He noted that only a few individuals were trying to keep the Connolly Association, the United Ireland Association and Clan na hÉireann alive⁷⁴. Greaves' feelings towards Birmingham fluctuated over time. In many ways, these mirrored the saliency of Ireland as an issue in British politics. By 1978 Greaves took a much softer and more nostalgic view of the Irish in Birmingham, particularly the period of middle 1950s⁷⁵.

The events in Northern Ireland were now clearly overshadowing coverage of Ulster Week in Birmingham, with the local newspapers such as the *Birmingham Post* giving far more column inches to Northern Ireland than Ulster Week. Whilst Greaves had been criticising Irish political activity in Birmingham, the violence in Northern Ireland did result in an upsurge in activity. In Birmingham, John Andrews, the Northern Ireland Deputy Prime Minister, attending a dinner given by the Birmingham Ulster Society, told reporters that Northern Ireland was thankful for the use of troops to guard key installations. As he was making this claim, protests in Birmingham were becoming more and more visible⁷⁶. Civil rights demonstrations had been steadily growing and in response the police felt it necessary to increase the number of both uniformed and plain-clothes officers on duty⁷⁷. At a reception to thank all those from Birmingham involved in Ulster Week, guests were care-

70. "Wilson Orders Report Derry Riots", *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 7 October 1968.

71. Terence O'Neill, *The Autobiography of Terence O'Neill*, p. 102.

72. *Census 1966 United Kingdom General and Parliamentary Constituency Tables*.

73. Henrietta Ewart, "'Coventry Irish': Community, Class, Culture and Narrative in the Formation of a Migrant Identity, 1940-1970", *Midland History*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2011, p. 225-244.

74. "What the Irish in Britain Are Doing about the Election".

75. C. Desmond Greaves, *Reminiscences of the Connolly Association. An Emerald Jubilee Pamphlet*, London, Connolly Association, 1978, p. 26.

76. "Andrews Thankful for Use of Troops", *Belfast Telegraph*, 21 April 1969.

77. "Ulster Troubles Stop Leaders' Trip", *Birmingham Post*, 21 April 1969; B. Vertigen, "Critical Phase Faces Ulster Tourist Industry-Holidays Chief", *Birmingham Post*, 22 April 1969.

fully vetted by the police. As they arrived, they were met by forty members of the Birmingham Campaign for Social Justice in Northern Ireland (CSJNI) demanding "new houses not thatched slums" and for the government to "Abolish Tyranny in Northern Ireland"⁷⁸. Jeremy Thorpe, leader of the Liberal Party, attended a meeting organised by the CSJNI Birmingham and told a crowd of six hundred that "Unionists had now received a clear warning that the oppressed were no longer sunk in apathy"⁷⁹. Others in Birmingham decided to go beyond attending demonstrations. The building that was being used to provide offices for the Ulster Week campaign in Birmingham was daubed with graffiti calling for "One Man, One Vote"⁸⁰. Soon this would escalate. A petrol bomb was thrown at the same office, however it missed and hit the offices of an auctioneers on the floor below⁸¹. The Ulster Week display in Rackhams department store experienced a bomb scare as a hoax device was found hidden in the replica of the Irish (Ulster) cottage⁸².

Protests over events in Northern Ireland were not confined to those from the left or the centre of British politics. Robert Walter (who would later become Conservative MP for North Dorset from 1997 to 2015) was chairman of the Aston University Conservative Association. He made his views known in a letter published in the *Birmingham Post*. In his letter he recognised that "There is social injustice in Northern Ireland and in many areas the basic principles are denied". He continued that "we have the Rev. Ian Paisley, the Orange Order and too many Ulstermen perpetuating the present situation in the name of God and the Queen". He called for continued support for Prime Minister O'Neill and that

The time has come for the Protestant Church and the Conservative Party to make it clear to the people of Ulster that they do not support, and find totally repugnant, the movements being carried out in their name. The citizens of Birmingham who are Protestants or Conservative have a duty during Ulster Week to make it clear to their leaders that they and the people of Great Britain support the struggle of the people of Ulster for social justice and totally reject the reactionary movements in the Protestant Church and the Unionist Party⁸³.

Ulster Week in Birmingham was the last to take place. It was overwhelmed by the violence that had erupted in Northern Ireland. However, it was already facing multiple hurdles. Although wanting to be seen as a moderniser, this did not fit with O'Neill's patrician-like character. This was exposed when he attempted to use elements of Ulster Weeks as a foundation for his PEP campaign. It was old-fashioned, ignored and out of step when placed side by side with the civil rights movement.

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78. "Police Check on Ulster Guests at Reception", *Birmingham Post*, 25 April 1969.

79. "Andrews Thankful for Use of Troops".

80. "Saboteurs Had Wrong Target", *Birmingham Post*, 25 April 1969.

81. *Ibid.*

82. "Store Evacuated, Experts Called, but Bomb Scare Was Big Hoax", *Birmingham Post*, 23 April 1969.

83. Robert J. Walter, "Ulster and Democracy", "Letters to the Editor", *Birmingham Post*, 22 April 1969.

Ulster Weeks were part of a larger response to shifting political themes. This included the gradual abandoning of autarky in the Republic of Ireland, the move by the governments in Dublin and London towards joining the Common Market and the changing nature and direction of the British economy. O'Neill's opponents failed to recognise that despite his attempts at pragmatic response to these events, he would not jeopardise Northern Ireland's place within the Union. However, his political opponents, always dutifully examining unionism for signs of fracture were concerned. Those within unionism that opposed him did not want to take any chances. They were worried that any economic, political and social reform, no matter how slow, would threaten their political control and dominance. Further, they did not want their position eroded to the point that would allow Ian Paisley to exploit any divisions. O'Neill was now facing a direct challenge from that portion of unionism which objected to any attempts at reform. His opponents from within unionism were now constantly looking for any remonstrance which could threaten their political ascendancy or further expose the fact that unionism is far from monolithic⁸⁴. Unionist politicians turned away from attempting to convince their fellow citizens that Northern Ireland was a modern, integral part of the United Kingdom. Instead they concentrated on ensuring the drum beat of loyalty was used to rally their supporters at home.

Drum and flag unionism of the sort that brought down O'Neill and played a considerable role in the outbreak of political violence also had consequences for how they were viewed outside Northern Ireland. The uber-unionism of some in Northern Ireland and elements of which would later mutate into Ulster Loyalism were beginning to be regarded as a dysfunctional element, a regional abnormality⁸⁵. In Britain the multiple identities within unionism would never escape caricature as the unthinking follower of the "tumour" of the Lambeg drum in everything from newspaper cartoons to the poetry of Seamus Heaney⁸⁶.

The flag of loyalty comprehensively covered those unionists that chose to stand on a different point on the political compass. Few in Britain know that members of the Protestant working class during the 1930s rejected sectarianism and some even volunteered to fight against Franco in Spain. Harry Midgley who during his own controversial political journey opposed Franco, only to be rejected by both unionists and nationalists, is largely unknown outside Northern

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84. Arthur Aughey, Cathy Gormley-Heenan, "The Conservative Party and Ulster Unionism: A Case of Elective Affinity", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2016, p. 430-450; Graham Spencer, "The Decline of Ulster Unionism: The Problem of Identity, Image and Change", *Contemporary Politics*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2006, p. 45-63; Pierre Joannon, "The Unionist Fig Leaf or the Dilemma of the Modern Ulster Protestant", *Études irlandaises*, no. 16-2, 1991, p. 147-155; Jennifer Todd, "Two Traditions in Unionist Political Culture", *Irish Political Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1987, p. 1-26; Peter Shirlow, *The End of Ulster Loyalism?*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2012.

85. Peter Shirlow, *The End of Ulster Loyalism?*, p. 1.

86. Seamus Heaney, "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966", in *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*, London, Faber and Faber, 1998, p. 139.

Ireland⁸⁷. Further to this, also largely unknown in Britain remains Geoffrey Dudgeon, following his successful battle to decriminalise homosexuality in Northern Ireland, now who sits as a unionist Councillor. Even fewer are aware of Harford Montgomery Hyde MP (Belfast North). He was amongst the most prominent and vocal MPs speaking in support of homosexual law reform in Britain and the Wolfenden Report⁸⁸. This stance would ultimately cost him his seat. Many unionists, as argued by Connal Parr, have deliberately forgotten that unionism also contains a labour tradition and finds itself comfortable on the left of the political compass⁸⁹. Tom Paulin has also called into question Ulster unionists' own historical memory⁹⁰. This has not been without consequences. Alistair Cooke (Lord Lexden) would later recognise that Ulster unionism had a problem; the rest of the United Kingdom. He concluded that Ulster unionists are part of "a nation which is reluctant to recognise them" and that "grave exception is taken in Britain to the manner in which Unionists defend their case"⁹¹. He was not alone in this, Ferdinand Mount, who was responsible for authorising that section of the 1983 Conservative manifesto came to the conclusion that the rest of the British simply viewed Ulster unionism as "irredeemably foreign"⁹².

Despite attempts such as Ulster Weeks and previously the Festival of Britain to show the rest of the United Kingdom that Northern Ireland was an integral part of the British family of nations, regressive elements within unionism in Northern Ireland continue to drown out those progressive voices who want to move away from sectarian politics and to focus on issues of social justice. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and its rejection of equal marriage and hard-line on reproductive rights ensures that it is viewed as a dysfunctional element within the UK. This has resulted in, at best, an ambiguous attitude by the rest of the British to the retention of Northern Ireland as part of the Union. Much of the perceptions regarding Ulster unionism remains a stereotype, which, although frequently challenged by progressive unionists, is quickly submerged once again under the wave of celebrations for the Battle of the Boyne. Although much about Ulster Weeks and O'Neill's claims of reform were a veneer, they did offer an opportunity to show Britain that other forms of unionism existed in Northern Ireland.

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87. Graham S. Walker, *The Politics of Frustration: Harry Midgley and the Failure of Labour in Northern Ireland*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985, p. 85-110.

88. R. B. McDowell, "Hyde, Harford Montgomery [H. Montgomery Hyde] (1907-1989), Politician and Historian", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, on line: <https://www.oxforddnb.com>.

89. Connal Parr, "Honouring Belfast Men Who Died for Democracy of Spain", *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 November 2015; Connal Parr, "From Stereotypes to Solidarity: The British Left and the Protestant Working Class", *Renewal*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2019, p. 55-63.

90. Tom Paulin, *Ireland and the English Crisis*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe books, 1984, p. 16-17.

91. Alistair Basil Cooke, *Ulster: The Origins of the Problem*, London, Conservative Political Centre, 1988.

92. Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s*, London, Simon & Schuster, 2009, p. 215-216.

Ulster Weeks are now largely forgotten⁹³. Regressive actors within unionism continue to dominate and ensure that some in Northern Ireland remain socially excluded. Poverty, quality and social justice do not recognise sectarian boundaries. The DUP's track record on these issues has allowed parts of the British left to demonise unionism in Northern Ireland without making any effort to understand it. Consequently, the monolithic negative labelling of unionism remains. This means, those unionists who are working hard for social justice in Northern Ireland will remain hidden from view.

In her latest attempts to defend the DUP position on Brexit, Arlene Foster used rhetoric that would not have been out of place during the Ulster Weeks campaigns:

I firmly believe the United Kingdom is economically better together than apart, but alongside the enrichment of our business life we must look at the cultural, sporting, intellectual and historical contributions which bind us together as a nation⁹⁴.

These words are regarded by many in Britain as thin gruel. Tom Paulin regarded hard-line unionism as “a snarl of superficial or negative attitudes” and “A provincialism of the most disabling kind”⁹⁵. It is a view that many outside Northern Ireland share, “they don't like what they see”⁹⁶. As Brexit widens the fractures in British society, this provincialism may find it yet pays the ultimate price.

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93. In a currently unpublished study by the co-author focusing on Irish experiences of migration to Leeds during this period, none of the narrators in oral history interviews had any recollection of Ulster Weeks. This could be because, as Irish-identifying migrants, these were not the key demographic that the Ulster Weeks celebrations were aimed at. There is also, however, a distinct lack of recognition of the Ulster Weeks events in the city's cultural institutions – photographs on the city library's Leodis website fail to provide any explanation of events, while articles in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* do little other than regurgitate the Ulster Week press releases verbatim. There was a resounding failure to capture public imagination with events in the city.
94. Suzanne Breen, “Brexit: Maintaining Union More Important than any Political Cause, DUP Tells Tories”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 26 June 2019.
95. Tom Paulin, *Ireland and the English Crisis*, p. 17.
96. Caitlin de Jode, “I Grew up in a Safe DUP Seat – Britain Is in for a Shock”, *The Independent*, 11 June 2017.

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