Definition: Troubles from Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase and Fable

A term used for various periods of unrest in Irish history. In the 20th century the name became particularly associated with the Anglo-Irish War (War of Independence) of 1919-21 and the period of terrorism in Northern Ireland which began in the late 1960s. A novel entitled Troubles (1970), by J.G. Farrell (1935-79), uses the symbol of a rundown hotel (the ironically named 'Majestic'), to paint a vivid and tragicomic picture of events in southern Ireland in the stormy year of 1919, as British rule in southern Ireland began its final collapse. The Troubles (1996) was the title of an account of events in Northern Ireland since 1969 by Tim Pat Coogan. See also Big Fella; Bogside; Direct Rule; Free-Staters; IRA; Power-sharing; Ulster Volunteer Force.

Summary Article: Troubles

From Brewer's Dictionary of Irish Phrase and Fable

A characteristically understated term used to describe various periods of unrest in Irish history. In the 20th century the name became particularly associated with the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-21 and the Civil War that followed. (The events of 1919 form the backdrop for J.G. Farrell's novel Troubles (1970).) More recently the term 'the Troubles' has denoted the period of violence that began in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s. (One of the most useful histories of the period, published in 2000, was David McKittrick's and David McVeas's Making Sense of the Troubles, and a series of programmes by Thames Television had Troubles as its general title.)

The province had been relatively peaceful since the end of the Second World War. The IRA Border Campaign (1956-62) had had little effect, and it was not until the Civil Rights Movement took to the streets in 1968 that politics became heated. The partisan response of the RUC to various peaceful protest marches, together with the Protestant backlash in which Ian Paisley played a significant part, made sectarian violence commonplace. Continuous rioting, notably in the Bogside in Derry (see Free Derry; Bogside, Battle of the) and Nationalist areas of Belfast (see No-Go Areas; Andersonstown; Ardsyne; Bombay Street; Murph, The) led to the British army being called out in August 1969, first in Derry and then two days later in Belfast, as a short-term measure. They were to stay for more than 30 years, and became involved in Bloody Sunday 1972, one of the blackest days of the recent Troubles.

In 1970 the IRA began a campaign against the security forces and commercial targets, committed to an Armed Struggle to recover a united Ireland lost in 1921 (see Treaty, The). This in turn generated Loyalist violence from the UDA/UFF and the UVF. The result was a direct death toll by 1998 of 3289, and a total of injured people of 42,216. Direct rule by Westminster imposed in March 1972 was intended to end with the establishment of a Power-Sharing Executive under the Sunningdale Agreement (see Whitelaw, William), but it collapsed after pressure from the UWC strike. Other initiatives failed until talks in the 1990s, at first secret, led to a ‘peace process’ that led to the politicization of paramilitaries and eventually to the Good Friday Agreement and a wary peace.

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