

## What were the main Social and Economic changes in NI 1943-1969?

The period of 1943-1969 in NI was a time of great social and economic unrest. Tensions between Catholics and Protestants penetrated almost every aspect of life. The two PMs during this period had varying success in dealing with these problems faced. In 1945 the British began to instate the new Welfare State in NI as well as Britain. This concept of caring for citizens from the 'cradle to the grave' would have huge economic and social impact. Under the system free education, healthcare and social welfare was provided although in many cases Protestants were to benefit much more from this supposedly equal system. This would lead to further social problems. The concept of economic planning was also introduced in this period.

One huge area dealt with by the Welfare State was healthcare. While the NI prime minister of the time Brookeborough didn't directly cause the Welfare State to be brought in to NI, he did oversee the operation. A number of health acts created the National Health Service. This provided free medical, dental, pharmaceutical and eye care for all patients. A hospital's authority took over the supervision of hospitals. The Northern Ireland General Health Services board was set up to supervise the entire operation. Tuberculosis was also tackled by the NI Tuberculosis Authority with a new screening program. While all of these were huge successes, there were still certain problems such as the Catholic Mater hospital. The nuns running this hospital didn't want to be under control of the Hospital's Authority, fearful that they would

compel them to make abortion and contraception available. They refused to join the scheme and so received no building grants or state payments for its patients. This led to Catholics supporting the hospital by voluntary contributions while paying for the public health system through tax. This led to anger among Catholics and increased resentment. This did little to help the tensions between Catholics and Protestants. Brookeborough could have dealt far more effectively with this issue, by taking any sort of action to reassure the Mercy nuns. However the free healthcare system increased life expectancy dramatically, as well as leading to larger amounts of disposable income which helped the economy.

Another area where the Welfare State had enormous effect was housing. NI had huge housing problems. 53% of all houses had been destroyed in the bombing of Belfast. A survey in 1943 estimated that 200,000 houses had to be built in the city. In 1945 the Housing Act subsidised the buildings of houses which would be rented to poor tenants. Some were also built by local councils but mainly the Act created the Northern Ireland Housing Trust which cleared slums and built houses. By 1961 over 95,000 new houses had been built. Most councils and the Trust gave houses based on need. However certain councils, most notably in Derry, Dungannon and Omagh, all west of the Bann discriminated based on religion. These councils were controlled by the Unionists despite the predominantly Catholic population, due to gerrymandering. As Brookeborough had refused to get rid of the property qualification for voting, Unionist councils feared that if they gave housing to Catholics that they would not have been able to remain in control. For this reason houses were given to less needy Protestants, leading to increased tensions. Again Brookeborough failed to tackle problems which caused resentment between Catholics and Protestants. These were all enormous changes as they improved the standard of living dramatically and gave working class people

homes.

Education was perhaps one of the most important areas in which there was a huge change on this period. The Education Bill 1947 set up an entirely new system. All primary and secondary education was free. Primary school went on till the age of 11, when children then took the 11 plus exam. The 25% who passed this exam carried on to grammar school while the rest attended secondary modern schools and followed a more technical program. State school got full funding for building and maintenance. While students didn't have to pay fees they also received free books, meals, uniforms and transport to school. Numbers attending schools increased 100% by 1952. However once again the Catholics lost out, though not entirely through no fault of their own. Catholics wanted Irish history and language to be taught in schools. While Protestants did not. Catholic-owned schools refused to join the system for this reason. Their grants were raised but only to 65% compared to the 100% of state schools. However the number of young Catholics attending school still increased. The new educational system had a number of consequences. First of all it led to a far more educated workforce which would prove attractive to foreign industry and aid the economy. It also led to well-educated and articulate young Catholics who emerged in the 1960s prepared to fight for their equal rights. This both led to enormous changes as this would contribute to both Brookeborough and O'Neills economic policies. It also contributed to the civil rights movement in the 60s.

In the period of 1943-1969 poverty was a huge problem. The Welfare State was extremely effective in transforming this area as it brought in a new system of social welfare, which was extremely generous. Not only were houses provided but there were a number of different payment schemes. For example cash payments were made to the old, the sick, the

unemployed and the widowed. Children's allowance was 5 shillings a week, in comparison to 2 shillings in the south. Unemployment pay for a single man was 24 shillings, significantly more than the 15 in the south, and 40 shillings a week for a married couple, almost twice the weekly 22 shillings in the south. Clearly this social welfare was a lot better than in the republic and this did something to help the problem of the reluctant northern Catholics. As the poorest in society they had the most to gain from this welfare scheme. In this way it helped somewhat to appease the Catholic minority, as well as tackling the problem of poverty. This was a huge change in society, for the very poorest to be taken care of although many wealthy unionists were reluctant to pay higher taxes to do so.

An enormous problem of NI in 1948 was a poorly structured economy. The main industries of NI had traditionally been shipbuilding and linen. These industries were in decline once again as the end of the war brought a reduction in demand for both of these industries. Unemployment levels were at an unbelievable high, 30% among the general population and 50% among Catholic men. To address this problem the government took action to attract foreign industry to NI. In 1945 the Industries Development Act gave factory sites, loans and grants to new industries. They also invested in better infrastructure to make NI more appealing to foreign companies. In 1956 the Northern Ireland Development Company was set up to further attract these firms. These policies had some success as multinational clothing firms located in NI, attracted by the pool of skilled weavers. However between 1961 and 1964 11,500 ship building jobs were lost due to lack of demand. Overall Brookeborough's economic policy was marginally successful. Industrial production rose by 50% between 1950 and 1962. However unemployment still remained between 6% and 10%, twice the British average. As well as this infrastructure was mainly developed east of the Bann around Derry, which attracted

more companies, leaving a worse east/west divide, raising once again Catholic and Protestant tensions.

Brookeborough's successor O'Neill also worked to improve the economy. O'Neill believed in economic planning. He set up a number of committees, which presented reports, regarding various economically related problems. The Benson report in 1963 recommended improving transport. The Matthew Report, 1964 recommended that the government encourage 'growth centres' in places other than Belfast. The Wilson Report in 1965 urged the government to encourage foreign industries in NI, similar to Brookeborough's policy, with the aim of creating 65,000 new jobs by 1970. It also referred to the problem of the lack of infrastructure west of the Bann. O'Neill also set up an economic council to put these policies in place, led by Brian Faulkner. Faulkner was successful in attracting foreign companies such as ICI, Dupont, Grundig and Courtauld. By 1965 unemployment levels were at their lowest in 10 years. However the east/west divide continued to present a problem. Derry as NI's second largest city with a high rate of unemployment failed to receive 'growth centre' status. Nationalists believed that the west, with 60% Catholic population was being discriminated against based on this. However it was likely that the government simply viewed the area as too remote. O'Neill was mainly successful in dealing with the problem of structural unemployment and in this way transformed the NI economy. As the first PM to use economic planning he took necessary measures to ensure the attraction of foreign industry, as Brookeborough had failed to entirely do so. However in leaving Derry out as a growth center and choosing the Portadown/Kesh area and further naming it Craigavon, he further alienated the eastern nationalists, leading once again to increased tensions.

Overall I think both governments had varying success in dealing with social and economic

problems in this period and that a huge number of changes were brought into the country. While Brookeborough oversaw positive social changes in NI this was little to do with his own successes as this was the British Labor Party's idea and they took care of the bill. Both PMs failed to integrate the Catholic minority and many of their actions raised tensions. The Welfare state helped somewhat to appease the Catholic nationalists. I think that O'Neill's economic planning was a huge change as it greatly helped the economy while also failing to address the segregation which caused problems in everyday life and would eventually lead to enormous social unrest and much violence.