



RACISM AND RACIST ATTITUDES

IN NORTHERN IRELAND



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At the time of writing, the spectre of racism is haunting Northern Ireland in a way that seems unprecedented in the post-conflict era. In response, and following an unacceptable seven year delay, the Office of First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has released an amended racial equality strategy for public consultation.¹ Racist attacks in Belfast are however continuing and show no sign of abating. It is a reflection of how serious the problem has become that Alliance MLA Anna Lo was reduced to tears on regional television as she recounted her own recent experience of racism and indicated that she may eventually leave her home of more than thirty years because of it.

Along with the distribution of racist leaflets in East Belfast by a shadowy organisation going by the name of the 'British Movement', Pastor James McConnell's abhorrent and ill-informed remarks about the Muslim community have arguably inflamed an already dangerous situation. Official, swift action on the part of the Executive is long overdue and necessary to prevent a rapid descent into barbarism. With a few honourable exceptions, political leadership from mainstream Unionist representatives has been slow in forthcoming. First Minister Peter Robinson has been heavily criticised for his qualified denunciations of racism and begrudging apologies to those on the receiving end of what the PSNI are treating as hate crime.² This stands in sharp contrast to the emergency anti-racism rallies held in Belfast and Derry on 31 May, which drew about 4,000 people, and the subsequent 7 June march organised by the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) in association with Amnesty International and the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM). Perhaps the most diverse gathering in the history of the northern state, certainly since 1998, this demonstration attracted a crowd of about 8,000 in spite of the teeming rain.

The same week saw the (re)emergence of a Belfast Anti-Racist Network, which has taken on the role of arranging local pickets in expression of solidarity with victims of racist attacks. These initiatives were accompanied by Love Music Hate Racism events at the Limelight music venue and Lavery's bar. It is clear that racism is not welcome by the vast majority of citizens. Perhaps what is less frequently discussed is how and why racist views have gained currency and proliferated in post-conflict Northern Ireland. In this regard, it is difficult to avoid the subjects of globalisation and immigration.

Globalisation and European integration:

The Northern Ireland experience

IN his contribution to a pioneering collection of essays on ethnic minorities and racism in Northern Ireland, Robbie McVeigh notes that, 'The contemporary location of Ireland, north and south, draws on the colonial legacy but also encourages different and newer reasons for racialisation.'³ For centuries, competing notions of Britishness and Irishness have manifested themselves in exclusive and insular forms, often to the detriment of a more hybrid and complex understanding of history and indeed identity.

It is not surprising, then, that Northern Ireland's gradual integration into the global capitalist order and its politico-legal counterpart, the EU, has presented the region with significant challenges as well as opportunities. The 'double transition' from conflict to peace and from social democracy to neoliberalism⁴ has introduced a number of new dimensions to the traditional, binary polar relationship between British-Irish/Unionist-Nationalist identities, not least a rise in the number of non-NI born residents.⁵ Ethnic minorities therefore enter the equation when the concept of foreignness or 'Otherness' raises its dangerous head.

To some degree, inward migration has been a feature of the northern state for a number of decades, leading to the establishment of vibrant Chinese and Indian communities. More recently, since around 2000, the arrival of migrant workers from Portugal, India and the Philippines brought about a rise in inward migration. This was followed in 2004 by the accession of eight (A8) central and eastern European countries into the EU, which proved to be a catalyst for a new phase of immigration.

Between 2000 and 2012, an estimated 122,000 international long-term migrants arrived in Northern Ireland, while 97,000 left. Although net migration is expected to fall to zero by 2016 and remain at that level into 2021 and beyond, Northern Ireland is currently a region of inward migration. Significantly, the vast majority of these migrants are well educated, 'underemployed' and are seeking or are in work. Along with substantial economic benefits their arrival has

¹ Northern Ireland Executive, 'Robinson and McGuinness launch racial equality strategy consultation', 19 June 2014, <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-ofm-dfm-190614-robinson-and-mcguinness> (accessed 20 June 2014).

² Adrian Rutherford, 'First Minister Peter Robinson in u-turn over "locals only" race row', Belfast Telegraph, 20 June 2014, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/first-minister-peter-robinson-in-u-turn-over-locals-only-race-row-30370144.html> (accessed 20 June 2014).

³ Robbie McVeigh, 'Racism and Anti-Racism', in Paul Hainsworth (ed.), *Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland* (London, 1998), p. 15.

⁴ Conor McCabe & Trademark Belfast, *The Double Transition: The Economic and Political Transition of Peace* (Belfast, 2012).

⁵ Paul Doherty & Michael A. Poole, 'Religion as an indicator of ethnicity in Northern Ireland: An alternative perspective', *Irish Geography*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2002), pp. 75-89.

The five main ethnic communities



Chinese
6,303



Indians
6,198



Mixed Ethnic
6,014



Other Asian
4,998



Black African
2,345

The five main immigrant communities from accession states



Polish
19,658



Lithuanian
7,341



Slovakian
2,681



Latvian
2,297



Romanian
1,094

FIGURE 1. Ethnic communities & immigrant communities in Northern Ireland (Source: Peace Monitoring Report, 2014)

also brought the cultural enrichment and diversity to Northern Ireland, particularly the western and south-western counties.⁶

Drawing on the 2011 census results, the third Peace Monitoring Report (2014) provides an interesting snapshot of how diverse and multicultural Northern Ireland has become (Figure 1).

This ought to be cause for celebration, a sign of conflict transformation and the shift towards a more multicultural society. And of course it is. Yet, as the spectacular collapse of the Celtic Tiger demonstrates, although immigration is emphatically not the cause of racism, the interaction between relatively rapid immigration, neoliberalism and Europe-wide austerity programmes generates obvious social and economic pressures, which in turn creates the space for those looking to identify scapegoats and exploit that anger and frustration for narrow right-wing and openly fascist ends. In the estimation of Michael O'Flynn and colleagues, scapegoating 'serves a dual-purpose: on the one hand it deflects blame from the government and the class interests that it is prioritising; on the other hand it serves to rationalise and normalise attacks on those that

it has been decided must bear the costs'.⁷ The evidence suggests that this is becoming a very real problem for Northern Ireland.

Racism and sectarianism

IN the context of Ireland and the North more specifically, the problem of sectarianism is one that has been given serious and in-depth scholarly attention, though it remains under-theorised. It is well established that sectarianism has its roots in colonialism, Reformation Europe, the confessionalisation of Ireland and the process of state-building that accompanied these developments.⁸ The Plantations, Cromwellian Settlements, Protestant Ascendancy and Penal Laws all had the effect of disenfranchising the native population, while the victory of William of Orange over the Catholic King James 'became a founding myth of ethnic superiority ... The Ulstermen's reward, as they saw it, was permanent ascendancy over the Catholic

⁶ John Bell, A Migration Information Portal for Northern Ireland (Belfast, 2012); Raymond Russell, 'Migration in Northern Ireland: a demographic perspective', Research and Information Service Paper NIAR 246-11 (Belfast, 2012).

⁷ Michael O'Flynn, Lee F. Monaghan & Martin J. Power, 'Scapegoating during a time of crisis: A critique of post- Celtic Tiger Ireland' (Forthcoming, Sociology, 2014), http://ulir.ul.ie/bitstream/handle/10344/3856/Monaghan_Sociology_2012.pdf?sequence=2 (accessed 18 June 2014).

⁸ Alan Ford & John McCafferty (eds.), *The Origins of Sectarianism in Early-Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2005); Stevie Nolan & Trademark Belfast, *Sectarianism, Racism and the Colonial Legacy* (Belfast, 2012).

Irish.⁹ Relations between the two main communities on the island have ebbed and flowed since, but even despite the rapid decline of faith, 'religion still provides the dominant signifier of community membership [in Northern Ireland], more so than economics or nationalism'.¹⁰

It is reflective of the power of religion in shaping and indeed defining ethno-national identity in Northern Ireland that the subject of racism has received such scant consideration. However, following analyses of sectarianism within a colonial context, a number of authors have noted how sectarian attitudes in Ireland are so closely related to notions of ethnic supremacy that they have often been expressed as racism.¹¹ In the modern context, the coexistence of Catholic-Protestant antagonisms with anti-Semitism and the rise of Islamophobia, for example, has blurred the distinction to the extent that 'sectarianism in Ireland now looks more like other contemporary racisms than ever'.¹²

The outstanding work on race relations from the Troubles era reaches a similar conclusion, albeit from a different perspective. Starting with England's economic domination of Ireland, Moore rejects religious determinism in favour of an emphasis on industrialisation and social stratification. The repression of Catholics under English and subsequently British rule had an economic purpose, just as their disenfranchisement in the state of Northern Ireland, particularly at times of economic depression, served the interests of the ruling class – the industrialists, merchants and landed gentry of the Unionist Party. The illusion of Protestant working class privilege and superiority helped to sustain Unionist Party rule and stave off the threat of labour unity. For Moore, there are clear analogies between this form of domination and ways in which poor whites were pitted against blacks in apartheid South Africa and the southern states of the US. Hence, according to the author, sectarian relations in the North can be analysed within a race relations framework.¹³

Moore's article, though useful, is reflective of the time in which it was published. The year 1972 was the bloodiest of the Troubles, with emotions running high and the threat of sectarian carnage looming over the six

counties; fair employment legislation had not yet been introduced. History now shows that the South African and American Deep South analogies are overblown and limited in academic purpose. Of greater import is the idea that racism and sectarianism in Northern Ireland are closely related and ought to be treated accordingly by politicians, policymakers, academics and the authorities. Under current legislation, 'Hate crime is any incident perceived to have been committed against any person or property on the grounds of a particular person's ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, political opinion or disability'.¹⁴ In theory, then, all physical or verbal expressions of hatred, racism and sectarianism included, are given equivalence by the police and judiciary.

In noting their parallels and differences, John Brewer advocates a more balanced approach to racism and sectarianism and therefore avoids the risk of collapsing the two phenomena into one another. Brewer explains how they both refer to a set of beliefs that accentuate difference; they both underpin intentional and unintentional discrimination, various forms of disadvantage, structural inequality and social stratification; and they both sponsor inter- and intra-community conflict, in addition to individual forms of abuse.

Sectarianism, like racism, 'can be experienced at three levels – that of ideas, individual behaviour and social structure – in a different degree and form'. The crucial distinction relates to the social markers that are used to ascribe difference. Whereas 'religion involves stereotypical, not perceptual cues, and is a confessional label which can be discarded or avoided', race draws on 'phenotypical features' such as colour and physical appearance. When we introduce such attributes to the discussion and practice of sectarianism in Northern Ireland, we do so on the basis of stereotypes and generalisations, which are the products of socialisation. Despite the clear evidence of secularisation in Northern Ireland, confessional labels continue to show resilience, often with similar outcomes to racist behaviour. However, it would be remiss to downplay the independent existence of racism.¹⁵

Other analyses, whilst attributing a primary role to sixteenth and seventeenth century confessionalisation in explaining the emergence of 'rival and atavistic identities' as well as shaping power dynamics in Ireland, do not fall into the trap of equating sectarianism with racism.¹⁶

⁹ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (London, 1993), p. 169.

¹⁰ Claire Mitchell, *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland* (London, 2013), p. 2.

¹¹ Robbie McVeigh, 'Theorising the Racism/Sectarianism Interface', David Miller (ed.), *Rethinking Northern Ireland* (London, 1998).

¹² Robbie McVeigh & Bill Rolston, 'From Good Friday to Good Relations: Sectarianism, racism and the Northern Ireland state', *Race & Class*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2007), p. 4.

¹³ Robert Moore, 'Race Relations in the Six Counties: Colonialism, Industrialization, and Stratification in Ireland', *Race & Class*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1972), pp. 21-42.

¹⁴ PSNI, 'Advice & Legislation: Hate Crime', http://www.psni.police.uk/index/advice-and-legislation/advice_hate_crime.htm (accessed 20 June 2014).

¹⁵ John D. Brewer, 'Sectarianism and racism, and their parallels and differences', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, p. 352-364.

¹⁶ Nolan, *Sectarianism, Racism and the Colonial Legacy*, p. 6.

“It is unarguable that the native Catholic and Gaelic population suffered cultural domination and exclusion under the ‘civilizing’ influence of the English crown, but the indigenous population did not suffer the same levels of demoralization and extermination as happened to people of colour in Africa, the Americas, Australia and elsewhere. Furthermore racism of the kind that emerged as a result of slavery and indeed the anti-Semitism of mainstream European thinking did not find an opposite version of itself in the oppressed groups elsewhere. There were no black empires built on genocide and racism, there were no Jewish pogroms of Christians in Europe.”¹⁷

Nolan goes on to explain how counter-Reformation Catholic thinking and political practice was imbued with notions of racial purity and supremacy, and how an Irish Catholic elite bought into this absurd ideology. Paul Preston has detailed how this mentality was prevalent among Franco’s Nationalists and the fascistic Falange throughout and in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War,¹⁸ while one does not need to look far to find similar ideas emanating from modern Catholic Ireland.¹⁹ To put it more starkly, there is nothing essentialist about Catholicism or Protestantism; but whereas individuals in Northern Ireland are relatively free to change their religion, minority ethnic groups are unable to change what is unfortunately regarded as the defining characteristic of their identity.

Despite attempts to brand Belfast as a bright and shiny post-conflict city open for tourism and flows of transnational capital,²⁰ it is in danger of confirming its reputation as the ‘race hate capital of Europe’. Drawing on evidence that the city has witnessed a spike in racist incidents in recent years, some argue that racism is the new sectarianism.²¹

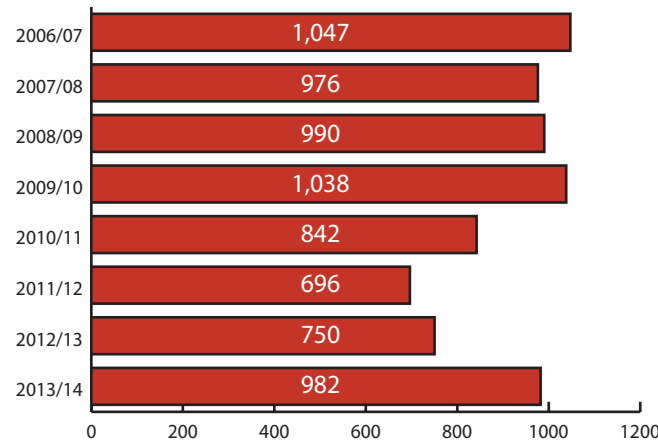
In lieu of extensive time-series data and due to the historic lack of awareness about racism in conflict-era Northern Ireland, inter-generational

comparisons are difficult – indeed impossible – to produce. What is clear from extant research is that racial prejudices are a formidable obstacle to the attainment of ‘positive’ peace²² and the move towards a ‘new’ pluralism in Northern Ireland.²³ It is noted with concern that the upward trend in racist incidents and individual prejudices has followed the belated introduction of race relations legislation (1997) and coincided with the efforts of civil society organisations – the Migrant Worker Unit of the ICTU, the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA), the Belfast Travellers’ Education and Development Group (BTEDC), the Polish Association Northern Ireland (PANI), the Belfast Migrant Centre and NICEM – to raise awareness of the problem. Most significantly, government policy responses have proven ineffective.²⁴

Key trends

THE latest figures concerning racism in Northern are deeply worrying. The annual Human Rights and Racial Equality Benchmarking Report 2013/14 notes that there were 982 racist incidents in 2013-14, while there were 750 such incidents in 2012-13.

TABLE 1. Number of incidents with a race hate motivation (Source: PSNI)



Although racist incidents have not yet surpassed their 2006/07 peak, which followed the arrival of A8 migrants, they are on the up. The 2013/14 figure averages out at three race-related incidents in Northern Ireland every day, excluding those which go unreported

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁸ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London, 2012).

¹⁹ Bryan Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester, 2002); Fearghal McGarry, Eoin O’Duffy: *A Self-Made Hero* (Oxford, 2005).

²⁰ Stephen Baker, ‘Belfast: New Battle-Lines in a Post-Conflict City’, New Left Project, 11 March 2014, http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/belfast_new_battle_lines_in_a_post_conflict_city (accessed 1 July 2014); Sarah Brouillette, ‘Northern Ireland Inc.: Branding a Region at the 2007 Smithsonian Folk Life Festival’, *Irish Review*, Vol. 40-41 (2009), pp. 114-126.

²¹ Richard Montague, ‘Racism a legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 May 2014, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/news-analysis/racism-a-legacy-of-troubles-in-northern-ireland-30296592.html> (accessed 20 June 2014); Colin Knox, ‘Tackling racism in Northern Ireland: “the race hate capital of Europe”’, *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 387-412; Jake Wallis Simons, ‘Sectarian hatred is being overtaken by xenophobic racism in Northern Ireland’, *The Telegraph*, 20 September 2012, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/jakewallisimons/100181659/sectarian-hatred-is-being-overtaken-by-xenophobic-racism-in-northern-ireland/> (accessed 20 June 2014).

²² Johan Galtung, *Peace By Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (Oslo, 1996).

²³ Chris Gilligan, Paul Hainsworth & Aidan McGarry, ‘Fractures, Foreigners and Fitting In: Exploring Attitudes towards Immigration and Integration in “Post-Conflict” Northern Ireland’, *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 253-269.

²⁴ Paul Hainsworth, ‘Cause for Concern: Racism in Northern Ireland’, *The Vacuum*, Issue 5 (n.d.), <http://www.thevacuum.org.uk/issues/issues0120/issue05/is05art-caucon.html> (accessed 21 June 2014); Knox, ‘Tackling racism in Northern Ireland’.

due to fear of recriminations or a lack of faith in the justice system. Nor, it appears, is this lack of faith unfounded: only twelve out of a reported 14,000 race hate crimes in Northern Ireland over the last five years have resulted in successful prosecutions, while the PSNI has a clearance rate of only 8 percent between January and April 2014.²⁵

As far as up-to-date figures are concerned, information garnered from the PSNI through a freedom of information request shows that racist incidents between January and June 2014 are in their hundreds. This year alone to date, the PSNI has recorded 229 crimes with a racist motivation in the Belfast area. The breakdown is as follows: seventy-one crimes with a racist motivation in East Belfast, seventy-six in North Belfast, seventy-three in South Belfast and eighteen in West Belfast.

An accompanying PSNI statement notes that East Belfast is showing its highest level of crime in the last 10 years while South Belfast is showing its highest level of crime in the last seven years. Levels in North Belfast have not shown much change over the last ten years, although they have increased slightly in each of the last two years. In West Belfast crime levels have been fairly stable over the last five years, showing only a slight increase between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

It must also be pointed out that of total 229 racist offences, 101 were violent in nature. In other words, almost half of the victims this year have been subject to a physical assault or a death threat. The 'chill factors' affecting minority ethnic groups in Belfast are therefore considerable and in need of immediate redress.²⁶

Whilst sectarian harassment and 'chill factors' in the workplace remains a serious problem, particularly in segregated and territorialised 'catchment areas',²⁷ a report by NICEM supports the idea that racist harassment and intimidation in the workplace has seen a sharp rise. In the last five years, 75 percent of all complaints about harassment received by the Equality Commission were related to racial abuse or intimidation. Even this figure discounts those working in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the private sector, which tend to afford minorities inadequate protection and which are not subject to equal opportunities monitoring. In local schools, 75

percent of children from minority ethnic backgrounds can expect to suffer derogatory name-calling; 42 percent of minority ethnic sixteen-year-old students had been 'a victim of racist bullying or harassment in their school'.²⁸ More broadly, only four out of ten minority ethnic respondents to the 2013 Northern Ireland Life & Times (NILT) Survey are recorded as feeling a sense of belonging to the region, which leaves six out of ten experiencing some form of alienation.²⁹ The gravity of the problem can be summed up as a tale of two graphs:

FIGURE 2. Racist incidents (Source: The Mirror)

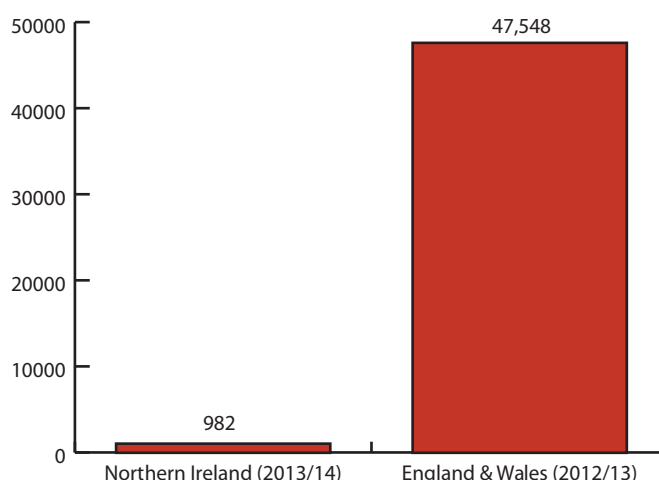
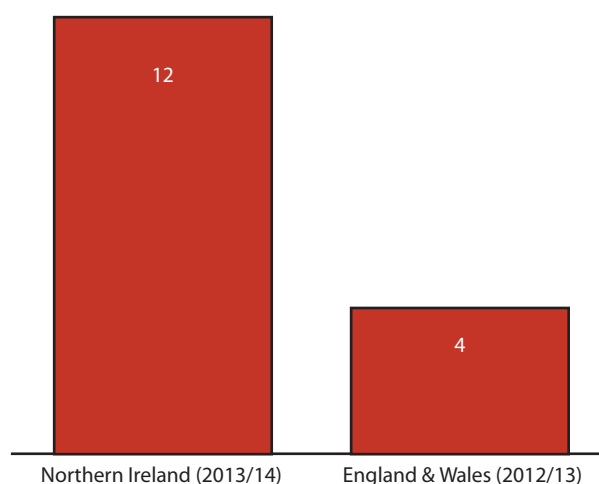


FIGURE 3. Racist incidents per 1,000 non-white or foreign people (Source: The Mirror)



When compared to England & Wales (81%) or Scotland (73%), the incidence of race hate crime in Northern Ireland (30%) is lower as a proportion of all hate crimes.³⁰ However what separates Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK is its relatively small, albeit

²⁵ Henry McDonald, 'Racism in Northern Ireland: Up to three race-related incidents reported daily', *Guardian*, 17 June 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jun/17/racism-northern-ireland-race-related-incidents-reported-daily> (accessed 22 June 2014).

²⁶ Jason Murdock, 'Crimes in Belfast with racist or sectarian motivation revealed (Jan-June 2014)', *Off the Record*, 16 July 2014, <http://offtherecordni.com/crimes-in-belfast-with-racist-or-sectarian-motivation-revealed-jan-june-2014/> (accessed 4 August 2014).

²⁷ Stevie Nolan & Trademark Belfast, *Sectarianism in the Workplace* (Belfast, 2012).

²⁸ McDonald, 'Racism in Northern Ireland'.

²⁹ Katy Hayward, Lizanne Dowds & Colin Shaw, 'Belonging and Alienation in the new Northern Ireland', ARK Research Update No. 93, June 2014.

³⁰ Paul Nolan, *Peace Monitoring Report No. 3* (Belfast, 2014), p. 33.

growing, minority ethnic population, which census data puts at around 1 percent of the total. Thus, as Figures 2 & 3 above strongly indicate, the level of race hate incidents in Northern Ireland is abnormally high. It is often the case that the true horror of racism only really hits home when one is confronted with personalised, case study evidence. To take some of the incidents that have occurred in 2014:

28 JANUARY 2014: Cars belonging to Polish, Slovakian and Afghan nationals are burned out in the Whitewell Road area of North Belfast, forcing two of the families affected to move flee their homes.³¹

6 MARCH 2014: A sympathy card containing a bullet is sent to Tobermore Primary School in Magherafelt, County Derry, as a warning over an elder sibling of a foreign national child at the school. The elder sibling is believed to attend a Catholic school in the Mid Ulster area, and may have been seen in school uniform outside Tobermore primary. The threat is thought to be racially motivated and is being treated as a hate crime by the PSNI.³²

6 MARCH 2014: A swastika, gun and message reading 'Polish out!' is daubed on a wall in East Belfast.³³

30 April 2014: A Romanian man has faeces thrown at him as he cycles along the Lower Newtownards Road in East Belfast.³⁴

1 JUNE 2014: Following Pastor James McConnell's description of Islam as 'heathen' and 'Satanic' and depiction of Muslims as untrustworthy, the home of Pakistani man Muhammad Asif Khattak is targeted in a race attack. Later that day, Mr Khattak is subjected to racist abuse by a group of people before being chased into his Parkmount Street home in North Belfast and assaulted.³⁵

³¹ Chris Kilpatrick, 'Hate crime: Child's woolly hat lies amid the charred aftermath of a racist arson attack on family', Belfast Telegraph, 20 January 2014, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/hate-crime-childs-woolly-hat-lies-amid-the-charred-aftermath-of-a-racist-arson-attack-on-family-29963830.html> (accessed 22 June 2014).

³² Gerard Stewart, 'Spotlight on racial violence: Northern Ireland', Institute of Race Relations, 10 April 2014, <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/spotlight-on-racial-violence-northern-ireland/> (accessed 22 June 2014).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ David Whelan, 'Yob throws faeces at Romanian man cycling through east Belfast', Belfast Telegraph, 1 May 2014, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/yob-throws-faeces-at-romanian-man-cycling-through-east-belfast-30232506.html> (accessed 22 June 2014).

³⁵ John Mulgrew, 'Pakistani man in hospital after being assaulted at Belfast home hours after house targeted in race attack', Belfast Telegraph, 2 June 2014, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/pakistani-man-in-hospital-after-being-assaulted-at-belfast-home-hours-after-house-targeted-in-race-attack-30320300.html> (accessed 22 June 2014).

9 JUNE 2014: A Nigerian man is verbally and physically assaulted close to his home in the Sliabh Dubh estate, West Belfast. After telling him to 'go home to your own country' and threatening to burn his house down as well as run his daughter over with a car, the gang knocked the man to the ground and proceeded in beating him around the head with a bottle. In response, the West Against Racism Network staged a public display of support outside the victim's home.³⁶

17 JUNE 2014: Michael Abiona, a Nigerian man active with anti-racist and minority ethnic groups in Belfast, is greeted with 'Local Houses 4 Local People' banners outside a Housing Executive home earmarked for him and his family in Glenuce Drive, Knocknagoney. Mr Abiona has now been forced to look elsewhere for a property in Belfast, his home for four years.³⁷

30 JUNE 2014: A Ku Klux Klan flag is erected on a lamppost off Island Street in Ballymacarrett and is subsequently removed following discussions between the PSNI and community representatives. The appearance of the flag is described variously by political representatives as 'sinister', 'insulting and disgusting', 'blatantly racist', and condemned by First Minister Peter Robinson as the work of 'idiots'.³⁸ To the surprise and shock of many, a KKK spokesperson was later interviewed on Good Morning Ulster, claiming that he had been in contact with supporters in Northern Ireland. This prompted Unite official Jackie Pollock to criticise the BBC Radio Ulster for giving a platform to an organisation that 'promotes a destructive and reactionary ideology'.³⁹ Belfast Trades Council and ICTU Youth organised a protest outside BBC Broadcasting House to call for an apology and a pledge that such views will be given no coverage on BBC Northern Ireland programmes in future.

28 JUNE 2014: BNP and 'Enoch Powell was right' flags appear on lampposts close to the site of the Lanark Way bonfire on the Shankill Road.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ciara Quinn, 'Community unites to reject racist thugs', Andersonstown News, 23 June 2014, <http://belfastmediagroup.com/community-unites-to-reject-racist-thugs/> (accessed 23 June 2014).

³⁷ John Mulgrew, 'Nigerian man too afraid to move into east Belfast house after "blatantly racist" banners erected', Belfast Telegraph, 18 June 2014, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/nigerian-man-too-afraid-to-move-into-east-belfast-house-after-blatantly-racist-banners-erected-30365923.html> (accessed 23 June 2014).

³⁸ Amanda Ferguson, 'First Minister condemns "idiot" after Ku Klux Klan flag appears in east Belfast', Belfast Telegraph, 2 July 2014 (accessed 2 July 2014).

³⁹ Henry McDonald, 'BBC Radio Ulster criticised for KKK interview', Guardian, 2 July 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jul/02/bbc-radio-ulster-ku-klux-klan-interview> (accessed 2 July 2014).

⁴⁰ Connla Young, 'BNP and Enoch Powell banners on bonfire', Irish News, 28 June 2014, <http://www.irishnews.com/news/bnp-and-enoch-powell-banners-on-bonfire>

29 JUNE 2014: Racist graffiti appears on a wall in Moygashel, Dungannon. It reads 'Attention landlords: Leasing property to foreign nationals will not be tolerated.' All local political representatives roundly condemn the graffiti.⁴¹

11 JULY 2014: A bonfire in East Belfast carries a sign that reads 'Anna Lo ate my dog'.⁴²

28 JULY 2014: East Belfast is hit by a series of racist attacks involving graffiti and criminal damage to property. The windows of two houses in Bloomfield Avenue and Chobham Street off the Upper Newtownards Road are smashed; paint is thrown over the second house. Two cars are damaged in Rosebury Street and Ravenscroft Street. The words 'Romanians out' and 'C18!' appear on gable walls near Chobham Street and at a junction of Elmdale Street and Bately Street. The vehicle attacked in Rosebury Street is covered in paint and has all of its windows shattered. Superintendent Mark McEwan said the attacks were 'orchestrated' and 'clearly designed to intimidate' the Slovakian and Romanian victims.⁴³

In support of this anecdotal evidence, existing studies suggest that the majority of racist attacks have taken place in areas that are Protestant and working class. However it is also the case that that recent migrants tend to live in predominantly Protestant residential areas.⁴⁴ The persistent shortage of social and affordable housing stock in Catholic working-class⁴⁵ areas has created a situation whereby new migrants, refugees and asylum seekers tend to move into the more readily available private accommodation in Protestant inner-city Belfast, for example. Following decades of segregation and living in relatively homogenous

neighbourhoods, members of these communities are now faced with the challenge of integrating ethnic minorities and foreign nationals. A localised study that draws on 'white flight' experience of Chicago, Baltimore, Detroit and other US cities may be useful in explaining the hostile reactions triggered by the arrival of migrants to these areas.⁴⁶ Research conducted by Poole and Doherty suggests that Protestants adjust to the threatened implications of increased residential mixing or 'Catholicisation' of their area 'by moving house just enough to ensure that they continue to live in the same kind of local environment as before ... the average Protestant is trying to maintain the same degree of isolation as he or she enjoyed previously'.⁴⁷

Undoubtedly, the legacy of the conflict, patterns of deindustrialisation, social decline and educational underachievement have played a part in fuelling Protestant working-class alienation, a sense of grievance and therefore resentment towards the 'Other', perhaps causing communities to close ranks.⁴⁸ The perception that Protestants have lost out in the peace process is further exacerbated by the dearth of Unionist working-class political representation, which contrasts sharply with Sinn Féin's dominance of Catholic working-class politics. These factors, along with ongoing cultural and constitutional disputes, neoliberalism and austerity, provide a backdrop to discussions of racism in these locales. However, this should not and cannot lead to the conclusion that such sentiments are justifiable.

Richard Reed and colleagues have noted that 'the UDA and UVF are complex organisations often united by little other than their opposition to Irish republicanism and a fragmented and loose series of alliances, structures, and political convictions'.⁴⁹ However, following a spate of racist incidents in South and East Belfast early this year, Assistant Chief Constable Will Kerr laid the blame squarely at the door at the UVF, which he said 'has been actively involved in orchestrating these attacks'.⁵⁰ There is little reason to doubt this assertion. Meanwhile the PUP, historically the political wing of the UVF, has been

bonfire-1364007 (accessed 14 July 2014).

41 Shauna Corr, 'More Dungannon graffiti warns landlords – "leasing to foreign nationals will not be tolerated"', *Mid-Ulster Mail*, 2 July 2014, <http://www.midulstermail.co.uk/news/local-news/exclusive-more-dungannon-graffiti-warns-landlords-leasing-to-foreign-nationals-will-not-be-tolerated-1-6154491> (accessed 7 July 2014).

42 'Adams hung in effigy', *Irish Republican News*, 12 July 2014, http://republican-news.org/current/news/2014/07/adams_hung_in_effigy.html#.U8OW_fldXdY (accessed 14 July 2014).

43 'Racist attacks "designed to scare"', *Belfast Telegraph*, 29 July 2014, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/racist-attacks-designed-to-scare-30468012.html> (accessed 3 August 2014).

44 Ronit Lentin & Robbie McVeigh, *After Optimism? Ireland, Racism and Globalisation* (Dublin, 2006); Bill Rolston, 'Legacy of intolerance: Racism and Unionism in South Belfast', 10 February 2004, <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/legacy-of-intolerance-racism-and-unionism-in-south-belfast/> (accessed 23 June 2014).

45 Barry McCaffrey, 'McCausland challenged over special housing preference for loyalist areas', *The Detail*, 18 June 2012, <http://www.thedetail.tv/issues/102/mc-causland-challenged-over-fast-tracking-for-loyalist-areas/mc-causland-challenged-over-special-housing-preference-for-loyalist-areas> (accessed 2 July 2014).

46 Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* (Chicago, 2010); Dave Ravitch, 'The "White Flight" Controversy', *The Public Interest*, Vol. 51 (Spring 1978), pp. 135–149; Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago, 2005).

47 Michael A. Poole & Paul Doherty, *Ethnic Residential Segregation in Northern Ireland* (Coleraine, 1996).

48 Gareth Mulvenna, 'The Protestant working class in Belfast: Education and civic erosion – An alternative analysis', *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2012), pp. 427–446.

49 E. Rosemary McKeever, Richard Reed, Samuel Pehrson, Lesley Storey & J. Christopher Cohns, 'How Racist Violence Becomes a Virtue: A Discourse Analysis', *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, Vol. 7 (1) (2013), p. 111.

50 'Dramatic rise in racism attacks in NI', *UTV News*, 15 April 2014, <http://www.u.tv/News/Dramatic-rise-in-racism-attacks-in-NI/7d3f7b94-61df-40e8-b8bf-d564a9584703> (accessed 24 June 2014).

found wanting in addressing specific incidents in the east of the city, its traditional stronghold. The presence of newly-elected councillor Julie-Anne Corr and other senior PUP figures at anti-racism rallies is significant and thoroughly welcome. Likewise, William Ennis' forthright criticisms of racism in the name of 'loyalism' is brave and refreshing.⁵¹

Another positive development is Billy Hutchinson's long overdue public intervention – a message of solidarity to the Hungarian woman whose home was attacked in the Woodvale area of North Belfast.

However, there is ostensibly a reluctance on the part of the leadership to address the elephant in the room. Councillor John Kyle's rather bizarre contribution to Eamonn Mallie's website perfectly encapsulates this type of populism. Noting with justification that the majority of residents in Protestant working-class areas have a 'remarkable capacity' for welcoming migrants, Kyle proceeds in labelling Will Kerr's remarks 'unhelpful' and delivering an equivocal condemnation of racist attacks in his East Belfast constituency.⁵² It is more than problematic that political representatives such as Kyle and Peter Robinson feel compelled to combine denunciations of racism with populist appeasement of those responsible for such abhorrent acts. This inability or refusal to decouple socialised racist views from genuine material concerns leads to a situation whereby the appeal and threat of a potentially lethal 'form of racial-nationalist class politics' becomes heightened.⁵³

Arguably the greatest exponent of this type of populist thinking is East Belfast community worker Jim Wilson, who on BBC Newsline authoritatively denied the involvement of paramilitaries in the 28 July racist attacks. Even more disconcerting is his refusal to acknowledge the racist content of these incidents. Instead, his focus is on what he regards as a flawed social housing system and unequal access for local people. Again, this reeks of equivocation on racism and represents a dereliction of duty on the part of someone whose responsibility is to promote integration and community cohesion. What is more is that his allusion to migrants receiving preferable treatment in the allocation of social housing is entirely without foundation. A leaflet produced by the Housing Executive in June of this year has debunked a number

of the most prevalent myths about migrants and access to both social housing and welfare services. One pertinent detail is that 76 percent of migrants reside in privately rented accommodation, 5 percent in housing association accommodation and only 3 percent in Housing Executive accommodation. There is no evidence whatsoever that migrants or asylum seekers enjoy greater access to social housing or benefits. Although the housing system is clearly under pressure, these inconvenient truths undermine the ill-informed attempts of Wilson and others to 'explain' racism in their communities.⁵⁴

When the main focus of the discussion is shifted from racism per se and onto attitudes towards immigration and ethnic minorities, we begin to gain an understanding of why Unionist political leaders have attempted to ride two horses. A survey conducted by Gilligan, Hainsworth and McGarry reveals that, when compared to their Sinn Féin, SDLP and Alliance Party counterparts, supporters of the DUP and UUP are less likely to agree that migrant workers are generally good for Northern Ireland's economy or that they make Northern Ireland open to new ideas and cultures. Likewise, only a small minority of DUP and UUP supporters and elected representatives agreed with the government's decision not to place restrictions on the arrival of A8 migrants in 2004. On this question, the divergence between the Nationalist and Unionist blocs is marked. Finally, although DUP and Sinn Féin supporters are most likely to support minority ethnic participation in both existing and their own institutions, a small but nonetheless worrying minority of DUP supporters (6%) prefer the complete exclusion of ethnic minorities from public life.⁵⁵ It is strange, or perhaps most revealing, that Jon Tonge et al.'s unprecedented survey of the DUP membership only skirts around the questions of race and racism as part of a broader discussion of British identity and multiculturalism.⁵⁶ In spite of this, one possible conclusion to be drawn from Gilligan, Hainsworth and McGarry's research is that there are racist-inclined views within Robinson's party and support base that he feels must be appeased in the interest of political expediency.

More recent attitude surveys support the claim that members of the awkwardly coined 'PUL' community are more likely to admit to prejudice against ethnic minorities and therefore 'present the most significant barrier to a "new" pluralism developing'.⁵⁷ For example,

⁵¹ William Ennis, 'There is Nothing Loyal About Racism', Long Kesh Inside Out, 31 March 2014, <http://www.longkeshinsideout.co.uk/?p=2658> (accessed 2 July 2014).

⁵² Dr John Kyle, 'Let's have a serious conversation about racism', 6 April 2014, <http://eamonnmallie.com/2014/04/mansion-tax-or-water-tax-to-bolster-education-challenges-by-dr-john-kyle/> (accessed 24 June 2014).

⁵³ Richard Seymour, 'In an era of austerity, Northern Ireland looks more fragile than ever', *Guardian*, 29 December 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/29/northern-ireland-more-fragile-than-ever> (accessed 23 June 2014).

⁵⁴ Housing Executive, *Housing Myths and Migrants* (Belfast, 2014).

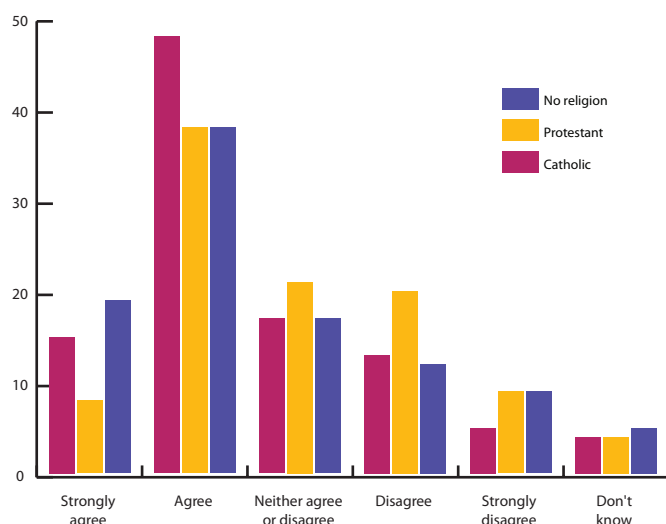
⁵⁵ Gilligan, Hainsworth & McGarry, 'Fractures, Foreigners and Fitting In', pp. 261-265.

⁵⁶ Jon Tonge, Máire Braniff, Thomas Hennessey, James W. McAuley & Sophie Whiting, *The Democratic Unionist Party: From Protest to Power* (Oxford, 2014).

⁵⁷ Gilligan, Hainsworth & McGarry, 'Fractures, Foreigners and Fitting In', p. 262.

according to the latest NILT Survey, 30 percent of Protestants and 21 percent of Catholics agree with the proposition that they prefer to stick with people of their own colour or ethnicity. Protestants also remain more reluctant to accentuate the positive contribution of migrant workers to the economy of Northern Ireland.

Figure 4. 'Migrant workers are generally good for Northern Ireland's economy' (Source: Ark)



On almost every question relating to individual minority ethnic groups, Protestant respondents have given answers that can only be described as more prejudiced and insular than their Catholic counterparts. For example, 62 percent of Protestants would not be willing to accept an Irish Traveller living as a resident in their local area. This compares unfavourably with a still unacceptably high 39 percent of Catholics. When 'Eastern European' is substituted for 'Irish Traveller', the respective figures are 35 percent and 20 percent. Finally, bearing in mind that this survey was conducted between 30 September 2013 and 28 December 2013, before Pastor McConnell's inflammatory remarks became public, an alarming 50 percent of Protestants stated that they not be willing to accept a Muslim as a resident in their local area; the corresponding figure for Catholics is 27 percent. Racial prejudice is clearly a problem right across the ethno-national divide, but there does appear to be a greater urgency to challenge such views in the Protestant community. Nor is this problem of racial prejudice exclusive to the working class. To the contrary, since the minority ethnic section of NILT Survey does not differentiate between different socio-economic groups, it is reasonable to assume that 'golf club' racism is alive and well in Northern Ireland.

Writing in the Belfast Telegraph in the aftermath of the shameful Michael Abiona affair, Fionnuala Meredith warned against dismissing whole 'loyalist' or Protestant working-class communities as 'work-shy and illiterate xenophobes and knuckle-draggers'. Meredith's article,

if somewhat facetious, is right to highlight instances of local solidarity with victims of racist abuse in East Belfast and elsewhere.⁵⁸ To highlight the plurality of views within Ulster loyalism, we can draw upon countless examples of loyalist-led anti-racist practice. For example, the South Belfast Roundtable on Racism, established in 2004, involves various groups from Protestant working-class areas such as Donegall Pass and The Village, including community representatives with loyalist paramilitary backgrounds. Each year, the loyalist peacebuilding organisation Charter NI contributes to positive community relations by hosting an anti-hate/anti-racism seven-a-side football festival, at which teams from African, Polish and other minority ethnic backgrounds are represented. Under the radar, individuals linked to the UDA/UPRG are believed to have responded to racist attacks in these areas by standing guard outside the victims' homes for successive nights. Another case study demonstration of loyalist thinking in some quarters is the Springmartin bonfire, which has bucked the trend of burning sectarian effigies and Polish flags by adopting a swastika as its main symbol of resentment.⁵⁹ Finally, ex-paramilitaries have attempted to counter the negative, xenophobic image of loyalism through education, specifically by detailing the role of the Polish air force during the Second World War.⁶⁰

Whilst it is clear that there is great potential in supporting strong progressive and anti-racist voices from within the Protestant section of the working class, it is also evident that there are dangerous trends pointing in another direction. What is less obvious and less discussed is the subject of how and to what extent populist and far right ideologies have gained traction in Northern Ireland.

The populist and far right in Northern Ireland

ACCORDING to Andrew Higgins of the New York Times, 'Four days of balloting across 28 countries [in May 2014] elected scores of rebellious outsiders, including a clutch of xenophobes, racists and even neo-Nazis'.⁶¹ In Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Hungary

⁵⁸ Fionnuala Meredith, 'It's prejudiced to dismiss every loyalist as racist', Belfast Telegraph, 20 June 2014, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/debateni/blogs/fionnuala-meredith/its-prejudiced-to-dismiss-every-loyalist-as-racist-30368893.html> (accessed 24 June 2014).

⁵⁹ John Duncan, Bonfires (Belfast, 2008).

⁶⁰ McKeever et al., 'How Racist Violence Becomes a Virtue: A Discourse Analysis', p. 118.

⁶¹ Andrew Higgins, 'Populists' Rise in Europe Vote Shakes Leaders', New York

and France, the performance of populist and far right parties in the EU elections has shaken the political establishment to its core, undermining the assumptions of the European project and pointing towards the unravelling of the post-war settlement. Only in Greece, where the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party secured 9.4 percent of the popular vote, has a radical left formation emerged as the clear victor. With a 26.4 percent share of the vote, Syriza has pledged to carry its anti-austerity programme into the country's next general elections and into government.⁶² Elsewhere, in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia, austerity-critical and anti-capitalist parties made modest gains, while in Ireland Sinn Féin recorded the best local and European election results in its history at the expense of the Labour Party. With global capitalism in crisis and Europe in the midst of its worst economic depression for seventy years, readers might be led to think that the left would be on the march across Europe. Instead, aside from the aforementioned exceptions, it is the parties of the centre and far right that are benefiting. Given the severity of the economic crisis and the fact the blame lies clearly at the feet of the architects of neoliberalism, what has happened to politics? For the socialist activist and journalist Eamonn McCann, these elections are the clearest sign yet that 'the retreat [of social democracy] has become a rout'.⁶³ The European left, in jettisoning not only socialism but indeed social democracy, has lost touch with its working-class voters, significant numbers of whom are voting for populist parties of the centre and far right. The question is whether these are simply protest votes or signal a further, more fundamental shift to the right.

In Britain, the consolidation of the two main parties has failed to prevent the anti-immigrant UKIP from making serious inroads. Although these elections have seen the departure of Nick Griffin from the European political arena and signalled the death knell of the BNP, Nigel Farage's party has gained eleven MEPs, bringing its tally to twenty-four, and secured 163 council seats in England, an increase of 161 on the last election. But despite Farage's visit to Belfast, where staff at the Crown bar refused him the opportunity to film his trademark publicity pint,⁶⁴ the party signally

failed to replicate its success in Northern Ireland. Winning just three council seats and falling well short of a European seat, UKIP appears to pose no threat to the main Unionist parties in the short-to-medium term. Plausibly, this is due to traditional voting habits and, more worryingly, because in various ways the DUP, UUP, PUP and TUV have occasionally occupied the political space that populist and far right parties intend to target.

As a preamble to any discussion of the right in the North, it is important to note that the only time fascistic politics have gained serious traction in modern Ireland was in the 1930s, when Eoin O'Duffy's Blueshirts emerged to fight land reforms, uphold 'Faith and Fatherland' and, later, to support Franco in Spain.⁶⁵ Contemporaneous groups such as Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists were much less prominent, though the Irish League Against Imperialism's annual Poppy Day protests in Dublin did involve clashes with the Blackshirts.⁶⁶ In Belfast, the militant Ulster Protestant League (UPL) emerged in 1931 to launch a 'jobs for Protestants' campaign. The UPL was anti-Catholic, ideologically supremacist, if not fascist, and counted attacks on the Northern Ireland Labour Party and the Communist Party of Ireland among its main activities. But although the organisation had concrete links with senior Unionist Party figures, there was never any question of it becoming a serious political force.⁶⁷ The fact remains that Fine Gael is the only inheritor of a numerically significant fascistic tradition in modern Irish history.

At various stages of the conflict, a number of far right groups identified certain strands of British/Ulster loyalism as the best entry point for establishing a presence in Northern Ireland.⁶⁸ One example of a post-ceasefire attempt at organisation is Combat 18's contact with the LVF, fortified by the former's annual pilgrimage to Drumcree and memorial events for Billy Wright. Another is the connections made between the National Front and elements of the UDA through their common association with the rogue UFF leader

Times, 26 May 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/world/europe/established-parties-rocked-by-anti-europe-vote.html?_r=0 (accessed 24 June 2014).

⁶² Helena Smyth, 'Leftwing Syriza party triumphs in European elections in Greece', *Guardian*, 26 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/26/syriza-european-elections-greece> (accessed 24 June 2014).

⁶³ Eamonn McCann, 'Labour's disastrous election reflects the crisis in European social democracy', *Irish Times*, 30 May 2014, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/labour-s-disastrous-election-reflects-the-crisis-in-european-social-democracy-1.1812776?page=2> (accessed 25 June 2014).

⁶⁴ Henry McDonald, 'Crown Bar in Belfast says "odd man, out" to Nigel Farage', *Guardian*, 14 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/14/>

[crown-bar-belfast-odd-man-out-nigel-farage-ukip](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/14/crown-bar-belfast-odd-man-out-nigel-farage-ukip) (accessed 25 June 2014).

⁶⁵ Mike Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish Politics* (Dublin, 1997); Fearghal McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork, 1999); McGarry, Eoin O'Duffy.

⁶⁶ Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 71-76.

⁶⁷ Graham Walker, "'Protestantism before Party!'" *The Ulster Protestant League in the 1930s*, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (1985), pp. 961-967.

⁶⁸ Chris Anderson, *The Billy Boy: The Life and Death of LVF Leader Billy Wright* (Edinburgh, 2002); Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: 1992); Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York, 2002); Henry McDonald & Jim Cusack, *UDA: Inside the Heart of Loyalist Terror* (Dublin, 2004); Henry McDonald & Jim Cusack, *UVF* (Dublin, 1997).

Johnny Adair.⁶⁹ Following an April 2008 attack on Cosgrove's bar in West Belfast, in which a man had his throat cut, police confirmed that they were investigating the suspected involvement of English fascists. UVF sources and the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* deemed this unlikely, but warned that 'as paramilitary groups become less active because of the peace process, there was a nucleus of younger loyalists who wished to emulate Combat 18 and its hooligan offshoots'.⁷⁰ As demonstrated by the desecration of republican graves at Milltown cemetery and the threats made to Roma families in South Belfast,⁷¹ there is clearly a grain of truth in this analysis. What is lacking is a comprehensive study that goes beyond anecdotal evidence.

In contrast to tabloid stereotypes of loyalism and journalistic exaggerations of its organisational and ideological links with the British far right, academic studies such as Tony Novosel's *Northern Ireland's Lost Opportunity* have shed light on a rich vein of progressive political thought emanating from within the UVF, UDA and their political wings. At different points in the trajectory of Ulster loyalism, the socially liberal and leftist economic orientation of policy documents and publications, not to mention their lateral thinking on the constitutional question, could not have been more at odds with the views of the British right.⁷² Equally significant is Matthew Collins' memoir *Hate*, which documents his time in the National Front and the BNP. Now an anti-fascist activist closely involved with the Hope Not Hate campaign, Collins reveals that individuals such as Frank Portinari and Eddie Whicker of the UDA were ideologically at home with British far right organisations and that the latter viewed Ulster loyalist circles as a breeding ground for their ideas. Common political threads, for example support for empire, monarchy and the armed forces, Orange Order membership, and opposition to Irish republicanism, presented opportunities for limited cooperation. Crucially, however, Collins stresses that links between the National front, BNP and C18 on the one hand, and the two main loyalist paramilitary groups on other, were

largely instrumental, not institutional, and ultimately more useful to the intelligence services than the parties involved. As time progressed and the ceasefires approached, the UDA and UVF leaderships began to put clear distance between their organisations and the disparate British far right. These historical connections had quickly become a source of intense embarrassment for David Ervine and political thinkers of his calibre.⁷³

Searchlight has continued to monitor the attempts of the British far right to organise in Northern Ireland. Hope Not Hate has also chronicled the rapid decline of the BNP in the North, how it ran into financial difficulties and came under suspicion of questionable business practices before closing its main call centre in Belfast. Having been put out of the Steeple Estate in Antrim by the PUP in April 2012, Nick Griffin is persona non grata in certain loyalist areas.⁷⁴ Griffin was expected to make an appearance in Larne for the centenary of the 1914 UVF gun-running operation and had planned a BNP social event for afterwards. However, these plans were given short shrift by the organisers, who labelled the British fascist leader a 'parasite' and made it plain that he is 'no longer welcome to take advantage of our patriotism'.⁷⁵ It is not surprising, then, that the party's two candidates for the Mid and East Antrim super council performed so disastrously in the local elections, polling just 174 votes between them. Local activists such as Stephen Moore, the BNP's Ulster organiser and one of its two unsuccessful election candidates, are nothing if not persistent, but evidently clutching at straws nonetheless.⁷⁶

As well as tracing Griffin's ignominious downfall and the effective collapse of his party, Hope Not Hate researchers have been quick to identify trends emerging out of the ashes of both the BNP and the English Defence League (EDL). The most dangerous of these new groups is Britain First, an anti-immigration and anti-Islam movement with ties to Protestant fundamentalist extremists and militant loyalist traditions. The prominent involvement of Paul Golding, an ex-BNP councillor and publicity officer with connections to Northern Ireland, ensures that Britain First carries considerable racist, anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi baggage. However, the organisation's *raison d'être*

⁶⁹ Pat C, 'Loyalists and Fascists', *Indymedia Ireland*, 9 December 2002, http://www.indymedia.ie/article/21033?userlanguage=ga&save_prefs=true (accessed 25 June 2014).

⁷⁰ Henry McDonald, 'Police check neo-Nazi link to Belfast attack', *Guardian*, 2 April 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/apr/02/northernireland.ukcrime> (accessed 25 June 2014).

⁷¹ 'Combat 18 slogans daubed on plot', *BBC News*, 18 June 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8107807.stm (accessed 25 June 2014); Henry McDonald, *The Observer*, 21 June 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/21/race-northern-ireland-romanian-gypsies> (accessed 25 June 2014).

⁷² Tony Novosel, *Northern Ireland's Lost Opportunity: The Frustrated Promise of Political Loyalism* (London, 2013). See also Aaron Edwards, 'Democratic Socialism and Sectarianism: The Northern Ireland Labour Party and Progressive Unionist Party Compared', *Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2007), pp. 24-31.

⁷³ Matthew Collins, *Hate: My Life in the British Far Right* (London, 2012).

⁷⁴ Matthew Collins, 'Griffin "put out" of Antrim', *Hope Not Hate*, 17 April 2012, <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/blog/insider/griffin-put-out-of-antrim-1769> (accessed 26 June 2014).

⁷⁵ Matthew Collins, 'Will Griffin face Larne fury?', *Hope Not Hate*, 25 April 2014, <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/blog/insider/will-griffin-face-larne-fury-3613> (accessed 26 June 2014).

⁷⁶ Matthew Collins, 'Idiot returns to the ballot for Northern Ireland', *Hope Not Hate*, 6 May 2014, <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/blog/insider/idiot-returns-to-the-ballot-for-northern-ireland-bnp-3682> (accessed 26 June 2014).

is to prepare for and incite a religious war between Christians and Muslims. These preparations have involved circulating anti-Muslim propaganda, training and drilling uniformed 'Crusaders', attacking mosques and antagonising Muslim communities. In short, Britain First has skilfully stepped into the ideological breach left by the EDL while at the same time recruiting useful idiots from the BNP.

The overtly religious nature of Britain First activities can be explained with reference to the key personalities involved. Research conducted by Hope Not Hate has revealed that, at its inception, the leading figure of Britain's new far right movement was Jim Dowson, a former BNP fundraiser and founding member of the Protestant Coalition. Dowson came to prominence as one of the architects of Nick Griffin's brief foray into European politics, before falling foul of and making an acrimonious departure from the party. He has been establishing links with loyalists and evangelical Christians in Northern Ireland for decades, and is credited with encouraging Golding's conversion to religious fundamentalism. It is not surprising that both men are closely linked to anti-abortion campaigners – Dowson has shared platforms with a number of Catholic social activists – or that they have attended the Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle in Belfast to hear Pastor McConnell's controversial sermons. Dowson and his followers appear keen to exploit any sign of Christian extremism rearing its ugly head in Northern Ireland.

The decision by Belfast City Council on 3 December 2012 to restrict the flying of the Union flag over City Hall presented an opportunity for Dowson to latch onto a single issue and leave his imprint on the politics of the North. In this endeavour he found allies in the victims' campaigner Willie Frazer and loyalist activists Robert McKee, Bill Hill and Davy Nicholl. The Protestant Coalition was launched in April 2013 as an 'anti-politics political party'. Although it claimed to have 500 members, rumours of infighting plagued the project from the outset and several key figures are believed to have fallen away as time progressed. Dowson and Golding were heavily involved in the flag protests at an early stage, becoming less active as protest numbers have dwindled and Britain First has begun to take precedence. They then switched their attention to displacing the BNP and EDL as the vanguard of the British far right, leaving Frazer and McKee to take up the reins. The Protestant Coalition failed to present candidates for the May 2014 local elections, which suggests that the party will be

allowed to expire.

Announcing his sudden resignation from Britain First on 27 July, Dowson told the newspapers that he could no longer be associated with the group's 'provocative and counterproductive' mosque invasions, which he described as 'unacceptable and unchristian'.⁷⁷ Whatever the real reasons behind his acrimonious departure, it has thrown the organisation's future into doubt. It remains to be seen whether Britain First will survive the loss of its figurehead and the vast resources he brings to its cause. Likewise, it is unclear whether the organisation has, or intends to, establish roots in Northern Ireland. Historically, far right groups espousing anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and fascism have signally failed to find fertile ground where such abhorrent ideas sit uncomfortably with a community for which defeating Hitler and Nazism remains a proud tradition.

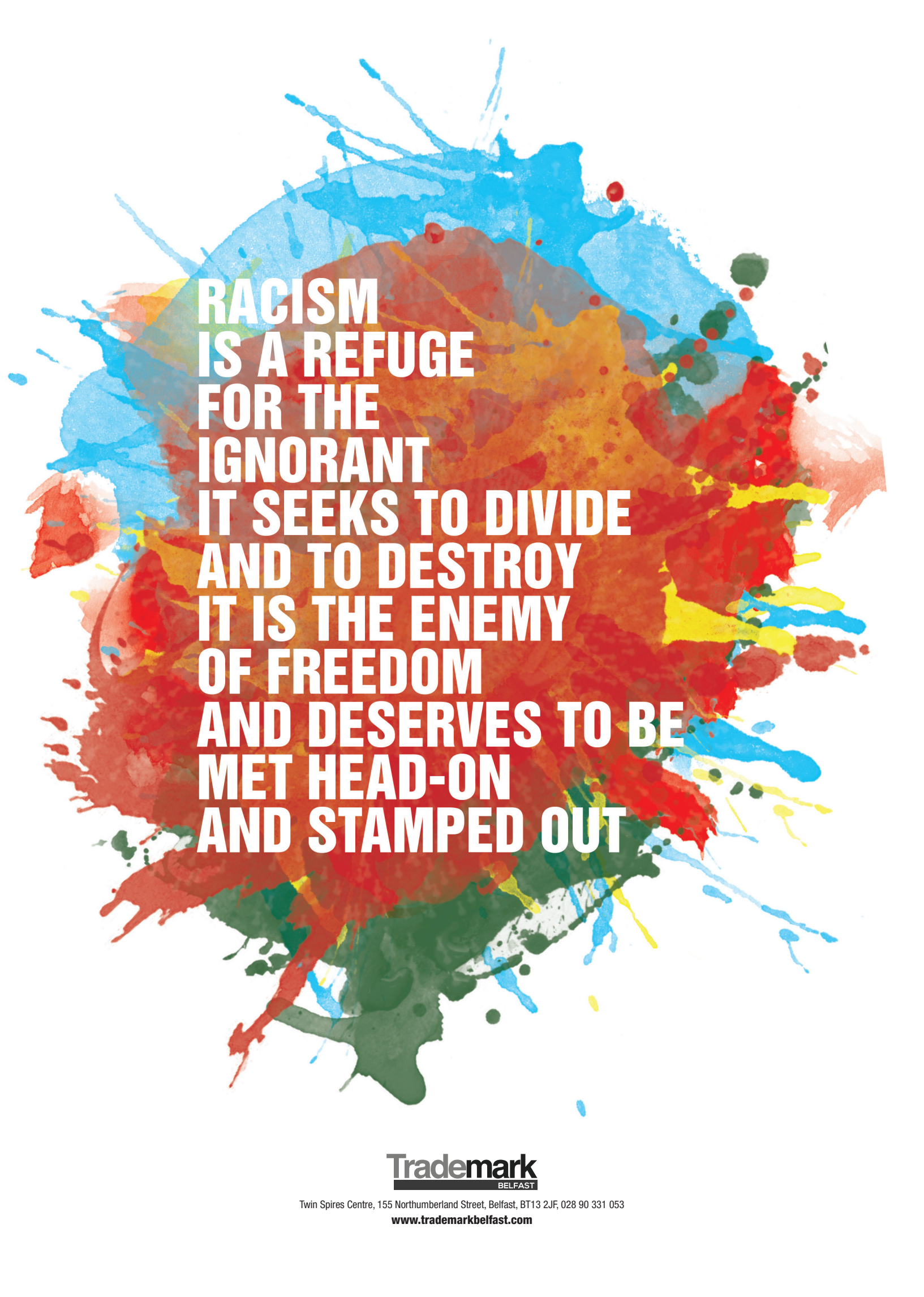
Doubtless Hope Not Hate researchers and the trade union movement will be among the first to document such attempts to organise should they materialise. In the meantime, there is a strong case for conducting more extensive research on racism and shining a spotlight on existing far right connections this side of the Irish Sea. Antifa Ireland fulfils this role to a certain extent, though it is a Dublin-centric organisation with limited reach in the North. The timely re-launch of Unite Against Hate by the Centre for Democracy and Peacebuilding in partnership with Victim Support NI offers the prospect of a hub for raising awareness of hate crime and sharing research on the subject.

Significant also is the launch of the Common Platform paper, a detailed response to the draft racial equality strategy that enjoys the support of ICTU, the Community Relations Council and a number of organisations working for and on behalf of BME groups in Northern Ireland.

The delay in state intervention means that further work is necessary to understand the recent rise in racist incidents and to challenge it in our communities and workplaces. This will involve the unenviable task of identifying those responsible and exposing the role of far right organisations and ideologies where they are at play.

⁷⁷ Lizzie Dearden, 'Britain First founder Jim Dowson quits over mosque invasions and "racists and extremists"', *Independent*, 28 July 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/britain-first-founder-jim-dowson-quits-over-mosque-invasions-and-racists-and-extremists-9632770.html> (accessed 3 August 2014).

Notes



**RACISM
IS A REFUGE
FOR THE
IGNORANT
IT SEEKS TO DIVIDE
AND TO DESTROY
IT IS THE ENEMY
OF FREEDOM
AND DESERVES TO BE
MET HEAD-ON
AND STAMPED OUT**

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