

# SHEELAGH M AND THE ULSTER

‘In Northern Ireland politics, I don’t know which is the greatest obstacle: to be a woman, a Catholic or a Liberal. I am all three.’  
Sheelagh Murnaghan,  
c. 1961.<sup>1</sup>

**Constance Rynder** examines the life and political career of the Ulster Liberal Party’s most successful office holder, the only Liberal to win a seat in the Northern Ireland parliament during its fifty-year existence, Sheelagh Mary Murnaghan (1924–1993).



# MURNAGHAN R LIBERAL PARTY

**U**NTIL 1956 the Liberal Party in Northern Ireland had lain virtually dormant since the partition of Ireland in 1921.<sup>2</sup> That it re-emerged at all, first as the Ulster Liberal Association, owed much to the dynamic leadership of its co-founder, Albert McElroy. A non-subscribing Presbyterian clergyman<sup>3</sup> and former Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) activist, in 1956 he met with a small group of English Liberals interested in expanding the Liberal revival into Ulster.<sup>4</sup> The Ulster Liberal Party's (ULP) influence on developments in the early years of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles', however, derived in large measure from its most successful office holder, Sheelagh Mary Murnaghan (1924–1993). The only Liberal to win a seat in the Northern Ireland parliament (Stormont) during its fifty-year existence, Murnaghan regularly voiced the Liberal agenda there from 1961 to 1969. She hosted visits by British Liberal Party leaders Jo Grimond and Jeremy Thorpe and kept in close touch with developments at Westminster.<sup>5</sup> Following the collapse of Stormont in 1972, Northern Ireland Secretary of State William Whitelaw appointed her to his Advisory Commission

where she continued to push the ULP's programme of reform.

The Murnaghan family was no stranger to Ulster politics. Sheelagh's grandfather George Murnaghan, a 'returned Yank'<sup>6</sup> and successful dairy farmer in Omagh, had represented Mid-Tyrone at Westminster from 1895 to 1910 as the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) MP. When the Local Government Act of 1898 finally empowered the native Irish to elect their own county, urban and district councils, Murnaghan also secured a seat on the Tyrone County Council from which he wielded considerable regional influence until 1921. Allied with the British Liberal Party on the issue of Home Rule, the IPP took a constitutional approach to Irish national aspirations. Passage of the third Home Rule Bill in 1912, and its anticipated implementation as of 1914, seemed to justify the IPP's alliance with the Liberals at Westminster. Both underestimated the depth of opposition coming from Ulster's unionist majority; neither could anticipate the havoc wreaked on Ireland's political landscape by World War I and its aftermath.

Suspension of Home Rule for the duration of the war led inexorably to open rebellion by physical force nationalists, beginning with

the Easter Rising of 1916. In mid-1916 an increasingly desperate IPP leadership began negotiating with Britain's Liberal-led coalition government over a plan to partition Ireland as a mechanism for granting Home Rule immediately.<sup>7</sup> As Ulster Catholics and nationalists, the Murnaghan family vehemently opposed the exclusion of six northern counties from a unified self-governing state. In Omagh, George's solicitor son, George Jr, co-founded the Irish Nation League; he, his father and most of the large Murnaghan family subsequently transferred their allegiance to a newly reorganised Sinn Féin Party.<sup>8</sup> After the Government of Ireland Act came into full force in 1921, the Murnaghans initially refused to recognise the new Belfast regime. The Tyrone County Council, as well as other boards and councils on which George Sr sat, reported instead to the Dail Eireann in Dublin until their offices were raided by Belfast authorities.<sup>9</sup> Like most Ulster Catholics, especially those in the majority Catholic counties of Tyrone and Fermanagh, the Murnaghans never quite forgave David Lloyd George and the Liberal Party for abandoning them to a Protestant-dominated separate state.

Given her staunchly nationalist heritage, Sheelagh Murnaghan

Sheelagh Murnaghan MP with Rev. Albert McElroy in 1963.

seemed an unlikely candidate to become the primary standard-bearer for the Ulster Liberal Party. Yet, early in 1959 she eagerly joined Albert McElroy in building an ecumenical alternative to the sectarian politics of unionism and nationalism. A Queen's University, Belfast (QUB) graduate, practising barrister and former captain of the Irish Ladies' Hockey Team, Murnaghan embodied much that typified a younger generation of educated, middle-class Catholics in Northern Ireland. She sought equal treatment *within* the existing state, rather than an end to partition. In her first foray into electoral politics, Murnaghan stood for South Belfast in the 1959 Westminster general election. 'Ulster Liberals', she told voters, 'are pledged to maintain Northern Ireland's constitutional position unless a majority of the people desire to revise it.' In addition, the ULP supported English Liberal goals of greater economic integration with Europe, full employment, profit-sharing and co-ownership in industry, and electoral reform.<sup>10</sup> Although she garnered only 7.5 per cent of the poll, the sight of a Presbyterian minister out canvassing for votes alongside a Catholic female candidate made news.<sup>11</sup>

A 1961 QUB by-election for the Northern Ireland parliament gave Murnaghan and the ULP their first electoral success. With its small, well-educated electorate, the QUB constituency afforded women and newcomers their best venue for challenging entrenched party interests at Stormont. Moreover, it was the only electoral area to retain proportional representation; Albert McElroy had nearly won one of its four seats in 1958. Murnaghan's victory over her Unionist opponent in a straight fight spurred the creation of new Liberal associations across the province.<sup>12</sup> It also guaranteed the ULP a voice at the centre of political power for over a decade. Murnaghan held her seat easily through the next two general elections, losing it only through the abolition of the university constituency in 1969.

Already accustomed to being a woman in a man's world, Murnaghan did not hesitate to take the initiative with her Stormont brethren. She brought to her parliamentary debates the aggressive no-nonsense style of a former Irish Hockey International.<sup>13</sup> Her legal

experience as the lone practising female barrister of her day and her earthy sense of humour ultimately won Murnaghan the respect of her male colleagues. She often joined them in the Members' Bar for brandy and cigars, swapping yarns and building useful relationships. Ever the individualist, she rarely stood on ceremony, regardless of the circumstances. For example, as there were yet no 'ladies' facilities' on the business floors of Stormont, Murnaghan began using the men's loo, persuading the notoriously stuffy Attorney General Basil Kelly to stand guard for her.<sup>14</sup> In Sheelagh Murnaghan the ULP had acquired both a courageous and a colourful political operator.

A firm opponent of capital punishment, Murnaghan joined in an extensive floor debate on its merits only weeks after delivering her maiden speech at Stormont.<sup>15</sup> At the time, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland Lord Brookeborough and his government refused to accept in any form the 1962 Nationalist bill to abolish capital punishment. It was clear from the debate, however, that several Unionist backbenchers resented not being allowed a free vote on the bill.<sup>16</sup> Murnaghan considered this an opportunity to garner cross-party support for penal reform, including the abolition of the death penalty. In 1963 she introduced her own private member's bill, hoping the Unionist government would eventually respond with a proposal of its own. The Homicide and Criminal Responsibility Bill dealt with various aspects of the murder statutes, but its main focus was the elimination of capital punishment.<sup>17</sup> Several Unionists spoke in favour of Murnaghan's bill, but, once again, the government refused to allow a free vote. Two years later, however, the government did introduce similar legislation, retaining the death penalty mainly for the murder of a police officer or prison warden. Murnaghan's strategy of pressuring the government to take action seemed to have paid off in this instance.

While Murnaghan's goals encompassed most of the Liberal Party agenda, the special circumstances of Northern Ireland led her to concentrate most of her efforts on introducing civil rights legislation, pressing for electoral reform, and calling for repeal of the 1922 Special Powers

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Act. By the early 1960s, long-standing minority grievances in the province had begun to draw persistent protests from Catholic professionals and social justice advocates. They cited widespread discrimination in private and public sector employment, housing allocations and the justice system. In addition, gerrymandered electoral boundaries, especially at the local level, deprived the Catholic community of political influence even in those parts of the province where they constituted a majority of the citizenry. Unionist one-party rule had left the Catholic minority at the mercy of a majoritarian regime. Murnaghan devoted her political career to trying to change this system, before it was too late to avert violence.

On four separate occasions between 1964 and 1968, Murnaghan introduced human rights legislation at Stormont. In 1963 a moderate Unionist, Captain Terrence O'Neill, replaced the aging hardliner Brookeborough as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. Reform now seemed possible. In June 1964 Murnaghan submitted her first Human Rights Bill. Modelled on the law in Ontario (Canada), and no doubt inspired in part by the Civil Rights Bill recently passed by the US Congress, it represented the very first attempt at broad civil rights legislation within the UK. It banned discrimination in employment, housing and public facilities 'on the basis of race, creed, colour or political belief.' The bill recommended establishing a Human Rights Commission for Northern Ireland. Most Unionist and Nationalist MPs boycotted the debate; only the NI Labour Party showed much interest.<sup>18</sup>

In February of 1966 Murnaghan again brought essentially the same bill before the Northern Ireland House of Commons. Reflecting the British Liberal Party platform as well as recent legislation in the United States, it also included a clause on equal pay for women.<sup>19</sup> A Labour government held power at Westminster, some of whose party members now actively supported the struggle for minority rights in Northern Ireland. More Nationalist and Unionist MPs felt compelled to show up for this debate, including the Minister for Home Affairs, Brian McConnell. While no longer denying the existence

of discrimination, he argued that education was the remedy, and such 'unnecessary legislation would be largely unenforceable.'<sup>20</sup> Solid Unionist opposition doomed the bill to defeat, 26–9. Faced with the government's apparent intransigence on this issue, Murnaghan threatened to seek a remedy directly from Westminster.

Before bringing her bill forward for a third time in February 1967, Murnaghan redrafted it, removing criminal penalties for violations. Instead she placed more authority with a five-member Human Rights Commission to investigate and adjudicate a documented case of unjust discrimination.<sup>21</sup> She had hopes that Prime Minister O'Neill might accept some form of civil rights legislation this time. The intensification of political and civil unrest in Northern Ireland during the preceding year had increased Westminster's scrutiny of O'Neill's administration. Frustrated with the slow pace of reform, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson summoned O'Neill to Downing Street in January of 1967 and warned him of potential direct intervention.<sup>22</sup> O'Neill's modest attempts at rapprochement with the Catholic community, however, had produced a backlash from Unionist backbenchers as well as from the Rev. Ian Paisley and his ultra-loyalist followers. Faced with a weakened grip on the party leadership, he declined to consider Murnaghan's revised Human Rights Bill in any form, and the House voted along party lines (24–7).<sup>23</sup> When she brought the bill to the House for a fourth and final time in January 1968, the outcome was nearly the same (22–8).<sup>24</sup> It would be more than thirty years before a Bill of Rights again received such a thorough airing in a Northern Ireland legislative body.

Directly related to civil rights, the issue of local and national government electoral reform loomed large on the ULP agenda. Under the terms of the 1919 Local Government (Ireland) Act, county, urban and district councils were elected by PR. Under this system many local councils in the west of Northern Ireland returned Nationalist majorities in 1920, including those led by Sheelagh Murnaghan's forebearers in Co. Tyrone. In response, the Unionist government abolished PR for local elections in 1922, and redrew

constituency boundaries to guarantee Unionist majorities on all but a handful of small district councils.<sup>25</sup> All attempts to draw Westminster's attention to this flagrant disregard for the terms of the 1919 Act were stymied by a Speaker's ruling disallowing debate on any internal matter in Northern Ireland.

After World War II Stormont created a new Northern Ireland Housing Authority to build government houses whose allocation they placed in the hands of local councils. By the late 1950s, civil rights advocates, including Murnaghan, pointed to blatant discrimination by Protestant-controlled local housing authorities, especially those in the West. Unionist councillors regularly denied Catholics access to these homes as a means of maintaining exclusive political control over majority-Catholic areas. Allocation of council housing also meant allocation of voting rights: only householders and business owners could exercise the local franchise; all other adults – many living in overcrowded Catholic ghettos – were excluded. From its inception the ULP called for the restoration of PR for local elections, universal adult suffrage at the age of eighteen, and the centralisation of public housing allocations based on a points system.<sup>26</sup>

In concert with their British Liberal colleagues, the ULP and Murnaghan also advocated PR for national elections. From the Liberal point of view, the first-past-the-post approach in Britain had led to a virtual two-party parliamentary system, excluding smaller parties from any meaningful input on government policy. In Northern Ireland the elimination of PR and multi-member districts for Stormont elections in 1929 produced a permanent Unionist Party majoritarian government. The biggest loser after 1929 turned out to be the NILP. Nevertheless, Nationalist MPs saw it as more evidence that they and their constituents had been banished to the political wilderness. The Unionist Party had, indeed, succeeded in blocking any future alliance between the Protestant and Catholic working classes, but in so doing, perpetuated the bitter sectarian divisions that plagued Northern Ireland political life thereafter.

In particular, Murnaghan argued for a Single Transferable Vote (STV)

form of PR in a multimember constituency. 'It ensures that the ordinary elector has a choice and an effective vote in any election.'<sup>27</sup> PR/STV still prevailed in the QUB Stormont constituency, and Murnaghan was well aware of its potential for representing various minorities. Since World War II, for example, QUB had returned four of only five newly elected female Stormont MPs: two Independents, one of them the first Catholic woman MP; one Liberal; and one Unionist. Elitist though the university franchise seemed, this electoral anomaly afforded female political practitioners their best vehicle for breaking into the patriarchal power structure at Stormont.

Murnaghan got the government's response to this suggested reform in March 1966. O'Neill's administration proposed to abolish the QUB constituency, since it allowed QUB graduates a plural vote. No mention was made of applying the same principle to the business and property vote in local or parliamentary elections, a system long abandoned elsewhere in the UK but still prevailing in Ulster. She suspected that the motive was not reform and a fairer distribution of seats; rather, the Unionist Party could no longer count on holding a majority of the four QUB seats. She did not necessarily oppose the abolition of her constituency, but unless the government applied this policy to all levels of plural voting, 'the Government will stand indicted as a Government which is not prepared to implement democratic principles, except where it happens to be for the convenience of the ruling party.'<sup>28</sup> Piecemeal 'reform' was no substitute for the real thing.

In the March 1966 Westminster election, Murnaghan carried the ULP banner in North Down. She entered the contest just two weeks prior to polling day in order to prevent the seat from going unchallenged. With no election address and a severe shortage of canvassers, she nonetheless took 21.4 per cent of the vote. The ULP monthly newsletter, *Northern Radical*, crowed that Murnaghan got more votes in North Down than British party leader Jo Grimond did in his Scottish constituency.<sup>29</sup>

Murnaghan and the ULP welcomed the organisation of the civil rights movement into the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association

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The Stormont Parliament

(NICRA) in January of 1967. Its thirteen-member steering committee included representation from the ULP, and its broad objectives mirrored much of the ULP agenda.<sup>30</sup> Initially, the NICRA embraced a cause especially dear to Murnaghan's heart: the plight of itinerant or 'gypsy' communities. She had already founded the cross-community Assisi Fellowship to combat abuse by local officials and to lobby for accommodations for itinerants. In speech after speech on the floor of the Commons Murnaghan chided the Unionist Government for failing to provide these families with secure caravan sites, basic facilities and protection from harassment. After leaving Stormont, she chaired the Belfast Itinerant Settlement Committee formed in 1969, and helped to establish St Paul's School for travelling children.<sup>31</sup>

Of immediate concern to Murnaghan, her QUB constituents and the NICRA, however, was the Unionist government's use of the Special Powers Act to curtail dissent. Created in 1922 as a temporary weapon against the IRA, the Special Powers Act became permanent in 1933. It granted the Minister of Home Affairs authority to ban meetings, parades, publications and organisations whenever he deemed it necessary. Sinn Fein had long been proscribed, but, beginning early in 1967, O'Neill's Home Affairs Minister, William Craig, also banned all republican clubs. Like the ULP, republican clubs had representation on the NICRA steering committee as well as at QUB. Murnaghan objected to the ban on both Sinn Fein and republican clubs on the grounds

that there was no evidence that either was engaging in unlawful activities. 'The Minister in taking this step,' she told the House, 'has been actuated more by concern for the peace and good order of his own party than for the peace, order and good government of Northern Ireland as a whole.'<sup>32</sup>

Worse still in Murnaghan's estimation was the provision in the Special Powers Act allowing for arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of individuals without trial or judicial oversight. This, together with entry into private homes without a warrant, constituted 'a direct infringement on personal liberty' that was 'unjustifiable in any circumstances.'<sup>33</sup> The fact that historically the government had applied the act exclusively to one segment of the population only served to bring Northern Ireland into disrepute. Indeed, as recently as 1956–1961, then-Home Affairs Minister Brian Faulkner had used it to combat the IRA during its so-called 'border campaign',<sup>34</sup> and he continued to believe that internment, rather than lack of support from the wider Catholic community, had ended that campaign. Against such a background, Murnaghan, the ULP and the British Liberal Party demanded the repeal of the Special Powers Act.<sup>35</sup>

As the NICRA and the radical student movement at Queen's University grew more confrontational in their protests after 1967, the old Nationalist Party slowly disintegrated, unable to find a viable alternative to street level civil rights activism.<sup>36</sup> Pressed by Paisley's sectarian loyalists, the Unionist Party underwent further internal dissent

that threatened O'Neill's hold on political power. He called a snap election for 24 February 1969, hoping to capitalise on popular support outside the party rank and file. Instead, it split the party into pro- and anti-O'Neill factions across the province, and failed to provide the mandate he had hoped for. Her QUB seat now gone, Murnaghan contested the North Down seat, but lost decisively to her Unionist opponent. Murnaghan's career as an elected official came to an end, but not her service to the ULP or to the struggle to guarantee individual and civil rights to all of Ulster's citizens.

In May 1969 James Chichester-Clark replaced O'Neill as prime minister. The summer 'marching season' plunged dozens of Northern Ireland communities into uncontrolled mob violence and the Wilson government was forced to send in troops to restore order. Northern Ireland had now clearly entered a new phase of what came to be known as the 'Troubles'. To avoid further erosion of its prerogatives, Stormont hastily created a new Ministry of Community Relations with the vague remit of reducing tensions between Protestant and Catholic working-class neighbourhoods. Murnaghan served on its Community Relations Commission (CRC) from 1969 until the collapse of Stormont in 1972. CRC chair Maurice Hayes remembered her as 'one of the few truly liberal voices around,' and one of the best-informed members of the commission. 'Had she been heeded to at any time in the sixties,' he later reflected, 'most of the demands of the civil rights movement



would have been anticipated and dealt with, and much conflict and destruction and death might have been avoided.<sup>37</sup>

Murnaghan continued to write position statements for the *Northern Radical*, the ULP's monthly newspaper. She spoke publicly against both paramilitary violence and Unionist government policies. Her ongoing high profile made her a target: in February of 1970 her South Belfast home was bombed, a hole blasted in the front wall and most of the windows shattered. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) never identified the perpetrators. Murnaghan herself speculated that the attack could have been staged by either republican or loyalist paramilitaries. In any case, she told reporters, 'nobody is going to force me out of my house.'<sup>38</sup>

The election of a Conservative government in Britain under Edward Heath in 1970 lessened Westminster's reform pressure on Stormont. At the same time, it inadvertently enabled the newly organised Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) to assert greater control over the civil rights struggle. The following spring, hard-liner Brian Faulkner succeeded Chichester-Clark as Northern Ireland prime minister. Security concerns now trumped political reform as a solution to the escalating violence. Backed by the Conservative government, Faulkner imposed internment without trial, beginning in August 1971. Relying on flawed RUC intelligence, the British army 'lifted' hundreds of suspected republican terrorists, many of them civil rights activists with no connection to the PIRA. These included key members of the NICRA. Despite widespread loyalist paramilitary violence, no Protestant was interned before 1973. Near-total alienation of the Catholic community predictably followed, as did increased recruitment for the PIRA.

Internment outraged Murnaghan. Reports, later verified, soon emerged of gross mistreatment of some detainees. In addition to severe beatings, interrogators employed the so-called 'five techniques' to extract confessions and information. They included wall standing, hooding, sleep deprivation, white noise and the withholding of food and drink.<sup>39</sup> Such a

wholesale violation of human rights ran counter to everything Murnaghan stood for, both as a Liberal and as a practising barrister. In a small personal gesture, she foreswore her two favourite vices, brandy and cigars, for the duration.<sup>40</sup> Over the next several months anti-internment rallies, many organised by the NICRA, brought increased confrontation with authorities. The tragic climax came in Derry City on 30 January 1972 when British paratroopers fired on a largely peaceful group of protesters, killing thirteen unarmed people. 'Bloody Sunday' brought to an end the now largely dysfunctional Stormont government.

After the imposition of direct rule from London in March 1972, William Whitelaw, the new Northern Ireland Secretary, appointed Murnaghan to his Advisory Commission. In many respects, this presented her with her best opportunity sell the ULP's reform program. A Unionist government at Stormont could – and did – reject ULP recommendations out of hand; London dared not, if it hoped for a workable political solution to the Troubles and an expeditious exit from the province. Whitelaw invited ideas from across the political spectrum. This included three new political parties organised in 1970–71 as well as the rump of the UP. The Social Democrat and Labour Party (SDLP) in essence replaced the Nationalists and the NILP. The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), a cross-community centrist group, drew initially from people with little previous history of party affiliation, except for long-time ULP member Oliver Napier.<sup>41</sup> Ian Paisley's ultra-loyalist Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), however, refused to participate. These new groupings signalled a fundamental realignment of party politics in Northern Ireland.

Whitelaw's government White Paper on Northern Ireland published in March 1973 embodied much of what Murnaghan had lobbied for on the Commission and throughout the preceding decade: a standing Commission for Human Rights, and a Fair Employment Agency; a PR/STV electoral system for a broader provincial legislature, with an eighteen-year-old voting age; and a power-sharing executive. In addition, Whitelaw

indicated a willingness to phase out internment once the power-sharing executive was established.<sup>42</sup>

At the SDLP's insistence, the plan also called for an ill-defined 'Irish Dimension' in the form of a North/South Council of Ireland. Details of its role were to be hammered out by the power-sharing executive headed by Brian Faulkner and SDLP leader Gerry Fitt, which came together in the wake of the December 1973 Sunningdale Agreement. The Council of Ireland provision reflected ULP President McElroy's long-cherished dream of a future united Ireland within the British Commonwealth.<sup>43</sup> Murnaghan, however, saw in it little more than some possibilities for economic and security coordination with the Republic. She rightly feared that raising the old border issue at this time could undermine unionist support for power sharing. She did not even mention it in her subsequent campaign literature.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, elections for the new Northern Ireland Assembly took place in June 1973. Murnaghan contested one of the South Belfast seats, but neither she nor the only other ULP candidate, Berkley Farr, fared well.<sup>45</sup> By this time, much of their middle-class and liberal unionist support had migrated to the APNI, which took eight seats in the 78-member Assembly.<sup>46</sup> To all intents and purposes, the APNI had replaced the ULP as the cross-community, centrist party of choice in Northern Ireland. The collapse of the power-sharing executive less than a year later rendered moot even the role of the APNI for the time being. It also dashed Murnaghan's hopes for an early resolution to the Troubles. Her vision of a just society in which Protestants and Catholics could live together in peace would not be realised in her lifetime. Of her years as a ULP politician dedicated to constitutional reform, she later remarked: 'Nobody could have a greater sense of failure than I have.'<sup>47</sup>

Murnaghan returned to her career as a barrister. She went on to chair the National Insurance and Industrial Relations Tribunals. Still an unabashed individualist, she regularly brought her mixed-breed dog Brandy to hearings, slipping him treats under the table to guarantee his silence.<sup>48</sup> In 1983 Murnaghan adjudicated the very first case

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of sexual harassment heard in the UK. Her decision in that landmark case set a precedent that other labour courts and tribunals in Ireland and the UK would subsequently follow.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, she continued her crusade for the humane treatment of itinerants. In 1988 she was awarded an OBE for her outstanding service to the people of Northern Ireland. Sadly, Sheelagh Murnaghan died of lung cancer in 1993, too soon to witness the 1998 Peace Accord that finally brought an end to the bloody mayhem she had fought so hard to prevent.

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- 1 Quoted by Jeremy Thorpe in his letter to the editor of *The Times*, 22 September 1993.
- 2 In 1929 a briefly revived Liberal Association put up candidates in both the Westminster and Stormont elections, but faded from view soon after. Berkley Farr, 'Liberalism in Unionist Northern Ireland', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*, 33 (Winter 2001–2), pp. 29–30.
- 3 Members of this Irish denomination refuse to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and take a distinctly liberal and tolerant approach to Christianity.
- 4 Gordon Gillespie, *Albert McElroy: The Radical Minister, 1915–1975* (Albert McElroy Memorial Fund, 1983), p. 17. McElroy led the ULP until his death in 1975.
- 5 Both Grimond and Thorpe were stationed in Northern Ireland during their army service; Thorpe's grandfather had been a Church of Ireland archdeacon and rector of Dundalk. See *Northern Radical* (NI Young Liberal Newsletter), February 1967, ULP Papers, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). They visited Northern Ireland during the 1960s, and Murnaghan attended the annual Liberal Party Conference in Britain.
- 6 Part of an impoverished County Down family, in 1867 George

emigrated to the US at the age of twenty, where he established several successful businesses in St Louis, Missouri and became a US citizen. He returned to Ireland with his young family in 1887, making him part of a tiny cadre of former Irish émigrés known then as 'returned Yanks'.

- 7 Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2005), p. 453.
- 8 See the *Ulster Herald*, 5 and 19 August, 9 September, 16 September 1916; 16 September, 17 October 1917.
- 9 *Ulster Herald*, 10 and 17 December 1921.
- 10 Open letter to the Electors of South Belfast, 1959, ULP Papers, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).
- 11 Gillespie, *McElroy*, p. 19.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 13 Maurice Hayes, *Minority Verdict: Experiences of a Catholic Public Servant* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995), p. 81.
- 14 So relates Anne Dickson, Murnaghan's close friend and the only female MP in the last Stormont parliament. See Constance B. Rynder, 'Sheelagh Murnaghan and the Struggle for Human Rights in Northern Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, 14, no. 4 (November 2006), esp. p. 457 and n. 76.
- 15 In keeping with tradition, Murnaghan gave her maiden speech on a non-controversial subject: rate relief for amateur sports clubs. She had continued to play hockey until 1958 and thereafter refereed hockey matches when time permitted. Hansard, Northern Ireland House of Commons Debates (NIHC), vol. 50, col. 153–156 (7 December 1962).
- 16 NIHC, vol. 50, especially cols. 1397–1416 (6 February 1962).
- 17 *Ibid.*, vol. 55, cols. 960–1006 (19 November 1963).
- 18 *Ibid.*, vol. 57, cols. 1990–1996 (16 June 1964).
- 19 Peter Barberis, 'The 1964 General Election and the Liberals' False Dawn', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 21 (September 2007), p. 379.
- 20 NIHC, vol. 62, col. 740 (8 February 1966).
- 21 *Northern Radical*, February 1967, ULP Papers, PRONI.
- 22 Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads: Ulster*

*Unionism in the O'Neill Years, 1960–9* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 147–148.

- 23 NIHC, vol. 65, col. 937 (7 February 1967).
- 24 *Ibid.*, vol. 68, cols 573–592, *passim* (30 January 1968).
- 25 Thomas Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland, 1920–1996* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1997), pp. 44–50.
- 26 Murnaghan letter to Electors of South Belfast, 1959, ULP Papers, PRONI. See also NIHC for various speeches on this subject.
- 27 NIHC, vol. 62, col. 1499 (1 March 1966). In this electoral system, voters rank the candidates in order of preference. When a candidate receives sufficient first-preference ballots to win the first seat, any additional votes for that candidate are transferred to the voter's second preference on a percentage basis, and a new round of counting is done. This process continues until all seats are filled.
- 28 NIHC, vol. 62, col. 2019 (15 March 1966).
- 29 *Northern Radical*, March–April 1966, ULP Papers, PRONI; Farr, 'Liberalism', p. 31.
- 30 Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1990), Ch. 4. Posted on the CAIN (Conflict Archives on the Internet) Web Service: cain.ulst.ac.uk
- 31 According to fellow itinerant advocate Father Alex Reid, her tireless lobbying forced local authorities to begin addressing the problem. Nick McGinley (nephew of Sheelagh Murnaghan), DVD interview with Father Reid. No date.
- 32 NIHC, vol. 66, col. 184 (16 March 1967).
- 33 *Ibid.*, vol. 64, cols. 72–73 (7 June 1966).
- 34 Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 73.
- 35 *Belfast Telegraph*, 7 February 1969; *Newsletter*, 17 February 1969.
- 36 Among Murnaghan's QUB constituents was Bernadette Devlin, a NICRA activist and co-founder of the leftist People's Democracy. In an odd twist of fate, Devlin won a 1969 by-election for the Westminster seat once held by Murnaghan's grandfather George. Seeing in Devlin much potential, she tried to persuade her to tone down her militancy, clearly to no avail. McGinley, DVD interview with Fr Reid.
- 37 Hayes, *Minority Verdict*, p. 81.
- 38 *Newsletter*, 10 February 1970; author's interview with Colette Murnaghan (Sheelagh's sister), 14 May 2006, London, U.K.
- 39 In 1972 the Irish government brought the issue before the European Commission of Human Rights. For an analysis of the case and its outcome, see R. J. Spjut, 'Torture Under the European Convention on Human Rights', *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 73, no. 2 (April 1979), pp. 267–272.
- 40 Author's interview with Anne Dickson, 10 July 2000, Greenisland, Co. Antrim.
- 41 Sydney Elliot and W. D. Flackes, *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999), pp. 156–157. Napier had supported McElroy's bid for a QUB seat in 1958, and joined the ULP shortly thereafter. See Oliver J. Napier to Albert McElroy, 12 March 1958, in McElroy Papers, PRONI. He led the APNI 1972–1984.
- 42 Ian McAllister, 'The Legitimacy of Opposition: The Collapse of the 1974 Northern Ireland Executive', *Eire-Ireland*, 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1977), p. 34.
- 43 Gillespie, *McElroy*, p. 18.
- 44 Sheelagh Murnaghan, 'The White Paper', *Northern Radical*, February 1973, ULP Papers, PRONI.
- 45 Each garnered about 1 per cent of the vote. Farr, 'Liberalism', p. 32, n. 26.
- 46 35 per cent of the ULP membership was Catholic, and a few of them may have joined the SDLP. However, an analysis of the transfer votes from the 1973 Assembly elections makes it clear that the bulk of former Liberal backers were now voting for the APNI. *Northern Radical*, June 1969, ULP Papers, PRONI; Gillespie, *McElroy*, p. 35.
- 47 McGinley, notes on his DVD.
- 48 *Telegraph* obituary, 14 September 1993.
- 49 See Rynder, 'Murnaghan', pp. 454–457 for details of this precedent-setting case.