

*Brothers* (p. 23); Patrick McGilligan's father was a Westminster M.P. from 1892 to 1895, not 1892 to 1995 (p. 23); the Control of Manufacturing Acts (p. 36) should read Control of Manufactures Acts, and the legislation was not initiated by Patrick McGilligan.

MARY E. DALY

*School of History and Archives, University College Dublin*

THE END OF ULSTER LOYALISM? By Peter Shirlow. Pp xii, 230. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2012. £16.99.

Peter Shirlow's valuable book has a clear purpose, a purpose pursued with passionate intensity. It is to challenge the stereotype of the Ulster loyalist as incorrigibly and homogeneously sectarian, the brutal example of a brutalising culture, morally degenerate as well as socially and politically dysfunctional. What the book succeeds in portraying is a much more complex truth, which the author presents as a struggle between regressive and progressive elements. On the one side, the 'tattooed and muscular men with a dog in a T-shirt' and Johnny Adair is frequently invoked as the iconic expression of this regressive tendency; on the other side, those committed to 'social justice-driven principles' and the late, ex-Ulster Volunteer Force member, Billy Mitchell, is often the referent in this case (p. 199). A distinguishing feature of the book is its use of personal, mainly anonymous, testimonies by members of paramilitary organisations. These are generally frank and provide the reader with authentic insights into the mood of those who were either directly involved in political violence or closely associated with those who were. The sceptic, of course, may say that to convey the authentic mood of individuals is not necessarily to convey an accurate report of either historical events or political reality. That is a general problem of interview-based social science and there are always doubts about the reliability of the memoirs and confessions of justified sinners. However, Shirlow is familiar enough with the history, sensitive enough to the evidence and critical enough of the claims to be a useful interpreter of their recollections and opinions. Testimony is usually correlated with statistical data.

In particular, the collective witness regarding the limits of collusion is compelling. Allegations of systematic collusion between loyalists and the security forces reflect two related strands in the republican narrative of the Troubles. The first may be called the common front, or pro-state, proposition. It argues that the loyalist murder of innocent Catholics – and as Shirlow shows that is what the so-called combatants mainly did, only 5.6 per cent of their victims being active republicans – directly served the repressive strategy of the 'British state'. The interviews recorded in the book, along with the statistics which Shirlow provides about detection and conviction rates, show the fallacy of that proposition. The second republican assertion may be called the marionette theory. It assumes that loyalists were incapable, either intellectually or organisationally, of autonomous military action and therefore had to be consistently manipulated from above by police and army agents. Here loyalists acted as South American-style 'death squads'. Again, the evidence presented here argues firmly against that interpretation. It is not denied that there were instances of collusion, only that agents like Brian Nelson acted mainly to subvert paramilitary activity rather than to assist it and that republican claims of systematic collusion are either paranoid or propagandist. However, if collusion of this type goes out by the front door it actually returns by the back door. The interviewees argue consistently that a hostile unionist establishment as well as an ill-disposed police command used 'wreckers and spoilers' (p. 108) – Johnny Adair is named once more – to frustrate the emergence of a radically alternative form of loyalist politics in the years following the Belfast Agreement of 1998. Or as one respondent put it (p. 83) those loyalists 'who were linked in with the security forces were trouble makers at the end of

the day'. What is the positive style of loyalism which the trouble makers within and those hostile without were trying to frustrate?

The book identifies the prophylactic role of ex-prisoners especially, the engagement to deter young males in working class Protestant communities from becoming involved in violence. This is put by some as preventing the recruitment of a 'fifth generation' (p. 137) of volunteers. The evidence that such youth may be tempted has been demonstrated in 2012–13 by public disruptions which resulted from the dispute over flying the Union flag at Belfast City Hall. Once the genie is let out of the bottle, it is easy for a particular grievance to transform itself into an undifferentiated rage against the system. Indeed other research has revealed a feeling amongst some youths that they missed out on the Troubles and the supposed excitement and purpose of the old days. A more positive complement to that preventative role is the commitment to build social capacity in Protestant districts as an alternative to the lure of drug dealing or petty criminality (though Shirlow points out that crime rates in loyalist areas are often lower than elsewhere). Moreover, there has been an effort, publicly funded, to 're-image' loyalist areas, replacing sectarian murals with ones promoting positive community identity. If that sounds a bit like a loyalist version of David Cameron's 'big society' why has there been so little evidence, historically or presently, of the ability to mobilise electoral support for an alternative to mainstream unionist politics? The leader of the Progressive Unionist Party, Billy Hutchinson, once claimed that the mandate for political loyalism was the silence of the guns. At important moments in the history of the last fifteen years that mandate was critical. The book points out the significance of loyalist leaders in maintaining that silence, despite provocation by dissident republicans; their influential role in the multi-party talks process; and their crucial defence of the Belfast Agreement against considerable unionist opposition to it. However, that mandate could only deliver diminishing returns especially when silence of the guns became taken for granted as the peace process endured. To blame others for an inability to give popular voice to a constituency and to develop a persuasive political platform, as many respondents do, is surely naive. The final chapter sets out a programme for change and makes an appeal for transformation. Shirlow believes (p. 206) that we are not witnessing the end of Ulster loyalism but its leading figures need to address 'de-stabilising elements and actions within'. Only then can one envisage the possibility of a new beginning. This seems as far off as it ever did.

This book certainly succeeds in challenging much of the received wisdom about its subject without ignoring its pathological characteristics. As the fruit of years of research, Shirlow's book will become a major source of scholarly reference. It provides not only a rich source of empirical material for those studying Ulster loyalism but also a pioneering framework of analysis.

ARTHUR AUGHEY

*School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy, University of Ulster*

A POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE TWO IRELANDS: FROM PARTITION TO PEACE. By Brian M. Walker. Pp xiv, 254. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2012. No price given.

For many years Brian Walker has been a sane, fair-minded and humane advocate of political accommodation, respect for cultural differences and an acceptance of plural identities, within Northern Ireland and in the wider archipelago. He is also an impressively productive historian and political scientist, whose main publications, over more than three decades, have ranged from the compilation of data on Irish parliamentary elections during the union era, Ulster politics during the period 1868–86, and identity politics and public history in both parts of Ireland in the twentieth century.