

with his back to a raucous crowd and solemnly swears on the Bible that he has not previously voted in the election. In the foreground, a broadly smiling man “holds his glass up to be filled with hard cider—a favorite tool for attracting voters to a candidate’s side. Liquor seems to have completely overwhelmed another man, who is literally dragged to the polls to cast a ballot.” Another, seemingly battered man sits on a bench, his condition perhaps indicating “physical coercion or a political argument that has taken a violent turn. The power of both money and chance is symbolized by the toss of a coin directly below the swearing-in [of the voter].” Front and center,

two small boys play mumblety-peg—symbolizing, for one critic, the “trivial but rough game” of politics.

Yet *The County Election’s* “comic elements” do not undermine its “coherence and sense of calm,” Weinberg maintains. The painting “incorporates the signs of corruption without allowing the voting, or the composition, to spin into disorder. [Bingham] seems to regard cheating as inherent to the process, no less than is the oath on the Bible. Yet these two contradictory aspects of the voting . . . do not undermine the validity of the process.” For Bingham, Weinberg says, politics *is* a game—but “a game worth playing.”

OTHER NATIONS

Why the Troubles Came

“Are the Troubles Over?” by Fintan O’Toole, in *The New York Review of Books* (Oct. 5, 2000), 1755 Broadway, 5th floor, New York, N.Y. 10019-3780.

In the eyes of many pessimistic observers, Northern Ireland’s “Troubles,” which have claimed more than 3,600 lives, were a product of atavistic Catholic-Protestant antagonism.

But “sectarian prejudice did not cause the violence,” argues O’Toole, a columnist for the *Irish Times*. “It was, to a great extent, the violence that caused the prejudice.”

When the Troubles began in 1968, he says, prejudice generally “was neither very strong nor very active” in the minds of most. Mixed marriages and neighborhoods were becoming common, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was dying, and Loyalist paramilitarism was found only among “a lunatic fringe.” Decades later, surveys showed that prejudice was far less evident in people who grew up before the Troubles began than among younger folk.

What changed the situation, O’Toole says, was “organized violence”—of the IRA, Loyalist paramilitaries, and the state. Protesting Catholics initially demanded merely “that the emerging social realities be recognized” and Catholics be given equal civil rights. Many Catholics welcomed the British army’s arrival in 1969 to keep the peace, but the army’s “crude and arrogant behavior” destroyed that support. Catholic alienation became complete in 1972 when British paratroopers massacred 14 unarmed civil rights demon-



Who is being threatened? An IRA sign in the Catholic area of Crossmaglen last February did not identify its target.

strators in Derry. The IRA then launched an armed campaign. Yet, O'Toole points out, *mass* violence between Protestants and Catholics “did not take hold.”

Statistics on the killings from the recent *Lost Lives* by three journalists and an academic, as well as another independent study, belie claims that the paramilitary groups were acting defensively. Of the 1,771 people slain by the IRA, little more than half belonged to the British armed forces, the local police, or military auxiliaries. And of the more than 1,000 killed by Loyalist paramilitaries, only 29 had IRA ties. “The overwhelming majority of their victims were innocent Catholics chosen purely on the basis of their religion,” O'Toole says.

The paramilitaries on both sides had to use brutality to enforce their authority. The IRA killed 198 members of the broader Catholic community—compared with 138 killed by the British army. The IRA also was responsible for the deaths, accidental or deliberate, of 149 of

its own members—34 more than the British army and police killed. The Loyalist paramilitaries similarly killed twice as many of their own as the IRA managed to slay.

Surveys conducted in Northern Ireland between 1989 and 1995 showed that almost 40 percent of the population—half Catholics, half Protestants—refused to identify themselves as either unionist or nationalist. “Their quiet, even silent, refusal to get involved,” O'Toole says, “thwarted the aims of the paramilitaries. The IRA could never win enough active support, particularly in the Republic of Ireland, where most Irish Catholic nationalists live, to have a realistic prospect of forcing the British to withdraw.” This reality finally sank in.

With the 1998 Belfast Agreement being implemented and all the main sources of violence “now decisively committed to the peace process,” O'Toole says, the Troubles seem over. “Ordinary people . . . finally defeated all attempts to reduce them to unflinching bigots.”

Will Russians Sober Up?

“First Steps: AA and Alcoholism in Russia” by Patricia Critchlow, in *Current History* (Oct. 2000), 4225 Main St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19127.

Some 20 million Russians are much too fond of their vodka. That's the estimated number of alcoholics in Russia, a nation of only 145 million. Russians consume, on average, a staggering 3.5 to four gallons of pure alcohol a year—well above the World Health Organization's “safe level” of two gallons per year. Among the adverse consequences: between 25,000 and 40,000 deaths annually from alcohol poisoning, and shortened life expectancy. For various reasons, Russian males born in 1999 have a life expectancy of only 59.8 years, four years less than for those born in 1990.

Excessive drinking has long been “a scourge of Russian society,” notes Critchlow, who did fieldwork on the subject for a master's degree from Harvard University. But, she reports, a ray of hope has appeared, in the form of *Anonimnye Alkogoliki* (Alcoholics Anonymous, or AA) self-help groups.

Such organizations were not allowed during most of the Soviet era. Before Mikhail Gorbachev rose to power in the 1980s, Soviet leaders welcomed alcohol sales as a source of

state revenue and did not view heavy drinking as a significant social problem. Gorbachev, however, launched an “anti-alcohol campaign,” which proved ineffective. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Critchlow says, “economic insecurity, low morale, and a sense of disillusionment have contributed to an increase in excessive drinking.” President Boris Yeltsin was “a poor role model.” His successor, Vladimir Putin, has criticized excessive drinking by officials. He also has hiked taxes on retail sales of alcohol, but this apparently prompted a turn to bootleg liquor, some of it deadly. In the first five months of 2000, a total of 15,823 Russians died of alcohol poisoning—a 45 percent increase over the toll during the same period in 1999.

Under Gorbachev, restrictions on AA groups were eased, and by the end of his regime, the self-help organizations could be found in 12 cities. By late 1999, there were 180 AA groups in 90 cities and towns. Physicians (whose income is threatened) and Russian Orthodox clergymen (who see