

The Decline of Sectarianism in the Anglo-Saxon West?: A Comparison of the Orange Order in Canada and Ulster¹

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The proposed paper will examine the question of sectarianism and its decline in the Anglo-Saxon West through the prism of the Orange Order, the largest social movement among Protestants in both Ulster, and (historically), in Canada. Drawing upon interview and archival source material from Orange Lodges in Ontario and Ulster, I will delineate the striking parallels between the two societies, and attempt to draw some preliminary conclusions regarding the dynamics of Protestant ethnic identity. The paper will also briefly consider Orange/sectarian activity in Scotland, northern England, Australasia and Newfoundland. Sectarianism in these contexts will be treated as form of ethnic conflict in which religion serves as the salient ethnic boundary marker.

This paper considers three facets of ethnicity that have received scant attention in the academic literature to date. Namely, dominant-group ethnicity, Protestant ethnicity and ethnic decline. Protestant ethnicity concerns ethnic groups for which Protestantism serves as the key boundary marker.² By dominant ethnicity, I refer to the ethnic community within a nation - whether state or sub-state - that is politically hegemonic, economically and culturally advantaged, and demographically dominant. As both myself and others remark³, all of these conditions do not always hold, so it is not necessarily an easy task to delineate a clear 'majority' group, but the term 'dominant ethnicity' still serves us as a useful shorthand for empirical work. Finally, a

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the meetings of the Internal Political Science Association, Quebec City, Canada, August 2000.

² Some ethnic groups (i.e. Fijians, American blacks, Swedes) are largely Protestant, but this religious marker is not viewed as cardinal for group identity, whereas in the case of the Ulster Protestants and Anglo-Canadians, Protestantism is, or has been, central.

³ Kaufmann, Eric. 2000. 'Dominant Ethnicity,' in A. Leoussi (ed), *The Encyclopaedia of Nationalism* (London: Transaction); Handler, Richard, 'Studying Mainstreams and Minorities in North America: Some Epistemological and Ethical Dilemmas,' in Gladney, Dru (ed), *Making Majorities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), pp. 249-63.

dominant ethnic group may be said to have declined when its political power, economic and cultural hegemony, or demographic preponderance is reduced.

The Orange Order, or Loyal Orange Institution (as it is officially known) has played a pivotal organisational role for British-Protestant dominant ethnic groups in Canada, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and, to a lesser extent, northwest England. Accordingly, the Orange Order serves as a lens through which I can focus on processes of dominant ethnicity as they interact with the forces of late modernity. The Orange Order has never been the subject of primary social scientific investigation, though Ruth Dudley Edwards' *The Faithful Tribe* (1999) provides the first journalistic account and Cecil Houston & William Smyth's *The Sash Canada Wore* (1980) is an important historical-geographical work. However, the latter book concentrates on the nineteenth century rise of the Orange Order, and only speculates about the reasons why the Canadian Order declined in the late twentieth century. Other historical work on the Canadian Orange Order does not address the question of twentieth century social change (Senior 1972; Pennefather 1984). Some high-quality historical research has also taken place in Britain and Ireland, but here again, the post-1939 period remains neglected (Gray 1972; MacFarland 1990; Walker 1992, 1995; MacRaild 1998).

The chief question I seek to answer through a Canada-Ulster comparative study is whether the sharp decline of the Canadian Orange Order during 1945-75 can yield any insight into the future of the Ulster Orange Order - which has begun to lose middle-class and youth membership since the early 1970s. This paper thereby promises to shed light on the future of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland, and to broaden our understanding of how dominant ethnic groups are affected by techno-economic and cultural variants of modernisation.

Background

The basis for this comparative study rests upon the similarities between the British Protestant-descended 'Loyalist' dominant ethnic groups in Canada and Northern Ireland. Both Canada and Ulster were settler societies whose inhabitants identified themselves not with any particular British ethnic group (ie. Irish, Scottish, English), but as composite, *ethnic* Britons. In both societies, competition with a Catholic ethnic opponent (French-Canadian, Irish-Catholic) helped to reinforce the

Protestant accent of the Loyalist group. Likewise, competition with a Republican foe – the Americans for Canada and Catholic Nationalists in Ireland - fortified the Imperial bond. Furthermore, the connection between the Ulster-Protestants and Anglo-Canadians (or 'British Americans') extended to demography: fully 25% of Canada's British population was Irish Protestant in 1867, rendering this group the most over-represented category of the population. (Richard 1991: 44, 48, 83; Burnet 1972: 102-4; Buckner 1998: 11)

The groups also faced similar ontological and political problems, namely that of maintaining British identity in the face of neglect from the mother country and each group's lack of identifiably 'British' culture. Indeed, the English-Canadian struggle to be un-American bears a direct parallel with the Ulster-Protestant struggle against Irishness. Given the similarity between Anglo-Canadians and Ulster-Protestants, it is not surprising that the Orange Order emerged as the leading social movement within *both* groups from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Finally, the collapse of the British Empire after the 1950's was a blow which both groups have struggled to come to terms with: Anglo-Canadians have variously embraced multiculturalism and anti-establishment populism, while Ulster-Protestants have increasingly attempted to establish a more 'home-grown' sense of ethnic identity.

The Origins of Orangeism in Ireland

Though the English had dominated the south of Ireland for several hundred years, they had not succeeded in subduing the Ulster chiefs in the north of the island before the seventeenth century. Even so, connections between mainland Britain and Northern Ireland had been constantly renewed through migration and conquest flowing back and forth between Antrim, in Ulster, and the western isles of Scotland. However, with the large-scale conversion of many Scots to Presbyterianism in the late 16th century, particularly in the lowlands, the stage was set for a new cultural dynamic.

This took the form of Queen Elizabeth's settlement of Ulster in the early 1600s with Scots and English Protestant planters. The Scots were the largest contingent, and settled predominantly in the eastern areas of North Down, Antrim and Belfast. (Boal & Douglas 1982) The English, a largely Roundhead element, settled more lightly in the western sections of the province. Everywhere they went, the

Protestant settlers met resistance, which they quelled with the aid of the British government, particularly under Cromwell, who massacred and evicted many native Catholic inhabitants in the 1640s. (See 1986)

The re-establishment of the monarchy was followed by an attempt by King James Stuart to re-establish Catholic supremacy in Britain through a raid from Ireland. James' forces laid siege to Londonderry, but was held off by the local Protestant inhabitants, a number of whom ('The Apprentice Boys' of Derry) symbolically refused to grant James access to the city. James was subsequently defeated at the Battle of the Boyne in Londonderry when Protestant forces under the command of the Dutch Prince William of Orange arrived in the city. These events provide the mythical storyline behind the Orange Order's principal narrative and an important cornerstone of the Ulster-Protestants' collective memory.

The Order itself formed over a century later, in 1795, in response to a rumoured alliance between the liberal, but Protestant, United Irishmen and the Catholic Defender movement. The organisation began with a largely peasant base, but counted a number of elite figures within its ranks, the most illustrious of which was the Duke of Cumberland, heir to the throne of George IV. Its cardinal principles involved a pledge to defend the Monarchy, the British connection, and the Protestant liberties of the Reformation. As the nineteenth century progressed, the Orange Order came to ally itself with the Tories, partly due to Liberal support for Catholic Emancipation (in the 1820s), a ban on Orange incorporation (in the middle 19th century), and Irish Home Rule (by the 1880s). (Gray 1972; Edwards 1999)

The advent of Catholic Emancipation and Irish Home Rule helped to activate the Protestant 'garrison' mentality which still characterizes the Ulster Protestant psyche today. Together with Irish Catholic immigration and labour competition, these aforementioned forces similarly engendered a steadily growing support for Orangeism in the western lowlands of Scotland and the north-west of England during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus Orangeism existed within a Unionist ethnic and political environment in Northern Ireland, Scotland (particularly in the west) and areas adjacent to Liverpool in north-west England. (Gallagher 1988; MacFarland 1990; McCrone 1992; MacRaild 1998)

The Orange Order in Canada

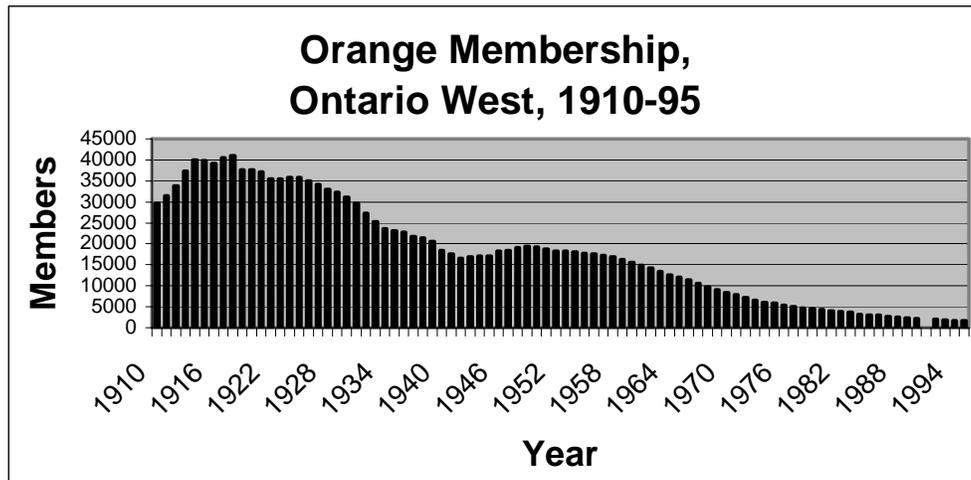
The processes which spawned the rise of the Orange Order in the British Isles operated with equal, or greater, vigour, in Canada. Few contemporary English-speaking Canadians realise that as many as one in three adult Protestant males in Canada were members of the Orange Order between 1870 and 1920 while the influential Ladies' Orange Benevolent Association (LOBA) proved that the principles of the Order were not gender-specific. The Canadian Order was not an Irish organisation, but instead brought together several ethnic components of English Canada's Protestant majority. (Houston & Smyth 1980: 84, 95-6, 104) Founded in Ontario in the early years of the nineteenth century as an association for Irish Protestant immigrants, by the 1860s, the Orange Order had become firmly 'native-born' in outlook.

Its power was centred in Ontario and New Brunswick, but the Order maintained a strong network of lodges in all provinces except Quebec. Its growth was fed by the same ontological forces of anti-Republicanism and anti-Catholicism that operated in Ulster and Scotland, though the organisation was given an initial boost by the large-scale migration of Irish Protestants in 1820-65. In the twentieth century, the Order benefited from a Loyalist political climate similar to that in Britain. This was manifested in an exuberance for Empire and the 'civilizing' mission of the British Protestant (or 'Anglo-Saxon') crusade. (Senior 1972: 62, 71, 96; Berger 1969)

Its mainstream nature and political influence as a bastion of popular toryism is attested to by the many conservative politicians who passed through its ranks, from Sir John A. Macdonald and Oliver Mowat in the mid-nineteenth century to prime minister John Diefenbaker and Toronto mayor Leslie Saunders in the mid-twentieth. (Senior 1972) In Ontario, the Order was influential both at Queen's Park and on Toronto city council, enforcing sabbatarian ordinances and temperance laws that influenced the character of 'Toronto the Good' until the Second World War. Indeed, Toronto ('the Belfast of Canada') did not get its first non-Orange councillor until the 1930s. After 1920, Order membership growth in Toronto failed to keep pace with the city's skyrocketing population. Yet it was not until the 1940's that Order membership began to decline in Toronto. (Houston & Smyth 1980: 154-7, 162-80)

The Decline of the Orange Order in Canada

After the 1950s, however, the Orange Order began to lose membership and political influence, a change symbolised by the fact that John Diefenbaker proved to be Canada's last Orange prime minister. Its male membership in 1984 stood at just over 14,000 in 616 lodges, a significant drop from the more than 58,000 members and 4000 lodges which made up Canadian Orangeism in 1955. (GOLOWret 1985; ICGW 1955) In per capita terms, however, the Order's apogee was reached as early as the First World War. Thereafter, particularly in its Ontario heartland, a slow but steady decline set in. Today, the organisation is dwindling and is viewed as an interesting survival from another age. (Houston & Smyth 1980: 162-3)



Source: GOLOW returns.

In the northwest of England, much of Canada, and Australasia, Orange decline followed the Ontario trajectory. (Edwards 1999). This decline appears to have occurred in step with a general decline in sectarian politics and attitudes in both England and Scotland, though it is difficult to ascertain which link in the causal chain transpired first. (Waller 1988; Bruce 1998: 119) Interestingly, in Ulster, the Canadian province of Newfoundland, and Scotland, the Order largely resisted decline until the 1960s. (Houston & Smyth 1980: 162-75)

In fact, the Order's presence in Northern Ireland neatly parallels its former influence in Ontario. Thus the Order maintains an influential presence in both civic and provincial politics, with many Belfast city councillors (including mayor Stoker),

and nearly all Ulster Unionist Party MPs counting themselves as members. In addition, its 200-year history, 43,000-strong Ulster membership,⁴ and its position on the Ulster Unionist Council ensure that the Orange Institution is a significant political and social player in Northern Ireland. This is highlighted annually during its more than 4,000 July Twelfth parades – including the highly controversial Garvaghy Road route at Portadown. Such a profile, though showing some evidence of decline, is still robust. This provides a definite contrast with the Canadian province of Ontario (the country's largest), where the Order's July Twelfth parades arouse little excitement, while few of those under fifty are familiar with the organisation.

Therefore, the Order's elderly Canadian alumni hold the key to a puzzle of cultural modernisation: what caused the decline of the Orange Order, a structural backbone of Anglo-Canadian dominant ethnicity? Secularisation would appear to be a promising explanation, and it is among the factors listed by Houston and Smyth in their speculations about the reasons for the Order's demise. (Houston & Smyth 1980: 170-71) Yet this can serve at best as a partial answer, since Orange decline preceded the decline in Canadian Protestant religiosity by some twenty to forty years. Value change, in a liberal-egalitarian direction, offers a competing explanation behind the decline, as does a more general decline in the prestige of British Loyatism. To some extent, this has been borne out by recent research concerning the decline of Loyatism in Canada. (Schwartz 1967: 74-6, 106-123; Cheal 1980)

On the other hand, techno-economic rationality, immigration (or some other variable) might turn out to be critical – and all are offered as competing hypotheses by Houston and Smyth. In many ways, therefore, the puzzle of Orange decline in Canada touches upon the very questions which lie at the heart of debates in social theory.

Theoretical Context

In theoretical terms, this research intersects with three major discourses: social theory, social movements theory, and ethnicity/nationalism theory. The analysis attempts to explain why a 200-year old organisation at the centre of one society can enter into sudden decline, while remaining stable in other places. It also tries to determine, more generally, which forces drive the growth and decline of a large-scale

⁴ This figure was recently suggested to me by a well-connected member of the Orange Order in

social movement over place and time. The Orange Order has been much more stable over the past two centuries than more radical Protestant organisations like the Scottish Protestant League, American Protective Association or (Canadian) Equal Rights Association.

Furthermore, the Orange Order's existence as a traditional fraternity exactly parallels that of the modern period, thereby providing an interesting window into the interplay of tradition and modernisation. A stable organisation like the Orange Order likewise provides a good yardstick for assessing the transition from industrial modernity to post-industrial or 'high' modernity (Giddens 1991). If Orange membership and political influence rose with modernisation but appear to decline with the advent of post-industrial modernity, this suggests that there may be something qualitatively different about this 'postmodern' phase.

Another implication of this project for social theory concerns the cause of fluctuations in Orange membership and power. Here, one axis of debate centres around whether the engine of social change is the techno-economic 'base' of society (the position held by orthodox Marxists and many rational choice theorists) or its cultural-symbolic 'superstructure,' the explanation favoured by many in the Durkheim-Weber tradition (Inglehart 1990). To these 'economistic' and 'culturalist' theories, one must add the more recent empirical political theories which ascribe independent causal power to institutional processes and events (i.e. March & Olsen 1984).

Debates in social theory have their correlates in social movements theory, particularly in the work of Robert Putnam. Putnam's recent research, using American data, attempts to explain the decline in 'social capital,' or voluntary association, in the United States. Fraternal societies like the Orange Order or Freemasons, Putnam notes, are amongst the hardest hit by recent developments. Putnam surmises that the rise of television accounts for much of the change, and that a significant difference in attitudes toward civic engagement exists between pre and post-World War II generations (Putnam 1995). This techno-economic explanation is challenged by 'culturalists,' who contend that attitude changes are the significant factor, and by empirical political theorists who point to the causal impact of events like the First World War or institutional forces like the federal government.

My future research will attempt to weigh cultural, techno-economic and institutionalist explanations for changes in patterns of Orange membership over time and place. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, I should thereby be able to assess the relative effect of techno-economic (i.e. television and automobile penetration, urbanisation, class), cultural (i.e. religious composition and change, education, media coverage, attitudes) and political factors (i.e. events, political violence, public sector growth) on Orange membership. Accordingly, this study attempts to test high-level theories with empirically grounded research, thereby bridging an important divide in social science.

At a more middle-range level of analysis, ethnicity/nationalism theorists are concerned with the question of whether ethnicity, dominant or otherwise, tends to decline in high modernity. One school of thought, modernisation theory, holds that this is precisely the case (Durkheim 1893, Parsons 1951, Deutsch 1953, Kerr 1960). To some degree, Steve Bruce, a leading authority on comparative Protestant politics, subscribes to this viewpoint, claiming that Protestant hegemony in Britain and North America has declined due to the combined impact of secularisation, Protestant schism and structural differentiation (Bruce 1998). This paper will attempt to assess which of these forces, if any, are significant in accounting for changes in Orange membership and power.

Since the 1970s, modernisation theory has been eclipsed as the main paradigm in ethnicity and nationalism theory by more conflict-based approaches (Smith 1981; Horowitz 1985). These advance the notion that ethnic groups either resist decline or increase their social importance in post-industrial modernity. This is prompted by improved methods of communication, which facilitate greater group consciousness. This occurs because ethnic media and education networks become both more intensive and more extensive, all within an atmosphere of increased awareness of other groups. This paradigm would construe Orange decline as either temporary, or as an aspect of the 'translation' of Protestant tradition from the Orange Order to new social constellations like football teams or independent marching bands (Bell 1990; Bairner 1997). Here again, the proposed analysis will try and assess the relative merits of these two main approaches. In summary, the research will provide a compelling test of some of the major approaches in social theory, social movements theory and ethnicity/nationalism theory.

Sources

Research which I have conducted in Ontario and Northern Ireland has focused upon several major sources of data, including lodge reports, national and county returns, newsletters, and interviews. It should be noted that Orange data is not generally accessible to non-members, and gaining access often requires a considerable period of trust-building. In Northern Ireland, Orange Lodge information is contained in annual county reports in an archive at Orange Headquarters, Belfast. In Canada, county returns are available for both Ontario and Newfoundland from provincial grand secretaries, which list membership by county, year on year. *Qualitative* data is no less vital for this study's purposes. Orange qualitative material consists of interviews, lodge reports, and newsletters. These often contain addresses or articles by Orange officials which discuss ideological positions or problems pertaining to the organisation. Finally, interviews, with members, officials, ex-members and the children of members, are a useful source of information regarding lodge decline.

Methodology

The quantitative portion of my future research will involve an examination of Orange Order membership trends for all years available since 1890,⁵ broken down geographically (nationally, and by province, county, and district). This data, derived from lodge reports and returns, will be compared, using statistical techniques, with numbers from the census, family expenditure surveys, police records and attitude surveys. The aim will be to determine the relationship between Orange Order membership per Protestant population (y) and a number of independent variables (x_1, x_2, \dots) as these vary over time and by geographic district.

The independent variables will include the following: religious composition, religiosity, residential segregation, political violence, education, occupational class, intermarriage rate, urbanisation, television and automobile ownership, party support and social attitudes. Strict care will be taken to go beyond mere correlation by employing statistical strategies that screen for both multicollinearity and time-lagged

⁵ Data is most complete for the post-1930 period.

effects in these variables over time, thereby establishing a stronger basis for causal inference.

The quantitative analysis will complement qualitative examination of interview transcripts, lodge reports, lodge newsletters and city newspapers. The goal being to grasp some of the more complex influences on Orange membership as well as to provide a subjective perspective on the dynamics of Orange political power. Some of the information which interviews and textual sources will yield include changes in the quality of media coverage (i.e. increasingly negative or non-existent) or the impact of events (i.e. Irish Home Rule) and personalities.

Shifts in ideological positions or critical analyses regarding patterns of membership or political influence can often be gleaned from the Grand Master's annual address (contained in lodge reports) or from articles in newsletters. Meanwhile, interviews can illuminate some of the forces (i.e. financial, political, recreational) that either attracted members or repulsed them over time. Such accounts will also expose the role of internal factors like membership drives, alterations to membership categories and enumeration rules, the development of insurance schemes, or factional splits. Overall, the efficacy of this project will depend crucially upon the productive synergy between qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Preliminary Findings

To date, research has focused upon interviews, returns and lodge reports in Canada, and county returns in Northern Ireland, so it is difficult, as yet, to make ready comparisons. Data from Northern Ireland indicates that membership has been declining steadily since the 1970s, a trend which has become a torrent recently, with membership dropping by nearly 1,000 per year. This has been suggested by interviews, and is borne out by trends evident in county returns. (GOLI; BFST-2000)

Losses are particularly severe among the middle class lodges, such as Eldon # 7, Belfast, the former lodge for Stormont ministers. (Edwards 1999: 64-6) Indeed, a host of recent analyses point to a general withdrawal of the middle class from ethnic Unionism. (Coulter 1997: 134; O'Dowd 1991: 153-5) This has accentuated the rural and working-class nature of Orangeism in the province – the historical norm in periods of Orange decline. The Presbyterian clergy has also largely withdrawn from the organisation, something which is evident from examining the decline of instances

of the title 'Rev.' from local executive committee lists in Canada, Ulster and Scotland. (GOLI 1950-99, GOLS) Any visitor to the headquarters of the Presbyterian church in Belfast is immediately struck by the primacy of the ecumenist posture in the church's image. This evidence appears to support a culturalist hypothesis, but only weakly so – hence the need for further research.

Canadian respondents, by contrast, appear to put the accent on socioeconomic, as opposed to political or cultural, changes which modern lifestyles wrought upon daily life. A number of respondents suggested an increase in shift work and labour mobility after 1945 was a source of decline. 'Half our membership used to live around here,' remarked one middle-aged Torontonion, 'Now, they're all over the place.' Others pointed to the increase in alternative avenues of recreation, particularly on Sundays, as a source of competition: 'After the war, there were just so many more things on the go. Before that there was nothing,' noted an elderly gentleman from suburban Toronto. His daughter added that she simply 'drifted away [from the Junior LOBA]...I started curling instead.' Ladies of the Birchcliff L.O.B.A. in Scarborough likewise agreed that recreational competition among youth held the key to explaining decline, while political or cultural shifts were not significant. (TO-1999)

Grand Master's addresses in the period 1945-70 appear to reiterate the theme of socioeconomic change affecting membership. Hence as early as 1958, Grand Master Leslie Saunders, also the mayor of Toronto, flagged recruitment problems in the Junior Lodges as an area of weakness. In his 1959 address, he reiterated the problem, and its new (hoped for) solution:

Our programme for Juveniles has not been as successful in recent years. It has not been easy to secure and retain guardians, and, in several instances it has been difficult to secure boys of the proper age as members. There are many reasons for this, and one has only to look about and witness the many boys' activities carried on in every community to realize what a problem it is to add yet another to the large list of time-absorbing activities. We have, however, made a definite change which we believe will be for the best. Grand Lodge last year approved alterations in the J.O.A. whereby mixed lodges would come under the supervision of the L.O.B.A., the whole (boys, girls, and mixed) remaining under our jurisdiction. (Saunders CGL1959: 15)

Grand Master George Warren, a former cabinet minister in Joey Smallwood's Liberal Newfoundland administration, continued to make similar observations several years later, speaking of a 'speed up' in social life which affected younger people:

The school curriculum covers a much broader area than the teaching of the three R's. It has been extended to take in such activities as organized sport, physical education, and as many cultural activities as is possible to work into an already full programme. More and more demands are being made on their time and energy. The social aspect has changed too. The days when children and young people, were to be seen and not heard, have long since eased to exist. We encourage them to express themselves, by joining in various programmes, especially those involving competition. The church programme, too, has been extended from one hour of church school on Sunday afternoon, to a through-the-week programme. The bringing of entertainment into our living rooms, through the medium of television, has affected the lives of our young people. By this means, they come under influences, and ideas and propaganda from which we ourselves were protected. All those influences can be confusing to a growing mind. In fact, it very often leads to difficulty in making a choice between the competing groups. Hence my concern. (Warren CGL1963: 23)

Grand Master Gordon Keyes complained of related socioeconomic challenges at the 1964 meetings of the Imperial Grand Council of the World. 'Native born Canadians,' declared Keyes, 'and indeed new Canadians from the British Isles...find difficulty in devoting time to lodge affairs. Perhaps the ever increasing attitude of materialism, or selfish attainment contributes to neglect of our heritage....' (Keyes IGCW1964: 30)

While socioeconomic concerns loomed large in the minds of many contemporary respondents and writers, it likewise remains true that socioeconomic factors exerted pressures on other organisations like the churches, Masons or Service Clubs. Why, therefore, was Orange decline so much more severe? One possibility might be the influence of cultural or political factors. Secularization was mentioned by a minority of both respondents and grand masters as a contributing factor to membership decline, but this does not provide a good fit with national trends. After all, Orange decline preceded the decline in church attendance by some twenty to forty years, and was far more severe in nature. (Bibby 1987)

This begs the question of shifts in cultural attitudes and political forces. While many respondents downplayed these, this could very well be a consequence of social desirability bias or the operation of what R.K. Merton referred to as latent (as opposed to manifest) functional causes. It should also be noted that most respondents

mentioned that cultural and political changes were evident. One middle-aged Toronto member, for example, remarked that his ex-wife refused to go on parade with him and his daughters in the 1970s, while many members were 'ashamed of being in the Orange.'

Another elderly member claims that where once there was a 'nucleus of [Protestant] ministers that weren't ashamed to be associated with it,' the clergy began to turn against the Order after the 1950s because it was not, in his terms, 'politically correct' any more. In a similar vein, the ecumenical movement within mainline Protestantism was singled out by both executive and rank-and-file respondents in Canada, Scotland and Northern Ireland as a negative, if minor, influence on the organisation. (Keyes IGCW1970: 12; TO-1999; GLASG- 2000; BFST-2000) One pamphlet on sale at the organisation's Glasgow headquarters denounced Ecumenism as 'The Great Mid-century Myth,' while another ascribed its spread to the influence of Rome. (Webber 1990; De Semlyen 1993)

Ecumenism certainly did emerge as a factor in some of the responses of those few ex-members (and non-joining children of members) I was able to track down. Thus one middle-aged Canadian individual whom I interviewed, whose father was an Orangeman, broke from the family tradition in the late 1950s under the influence of ecumenism. He later became a socialist at university and joined the Anglican ministry as a Modernist – all of which led to repeated arguments with his father. Overall, while respondents acknowledged that a minority of Protestants had always been inclined to view the Orange as a 'bigoted' organisation, this tendency appeared to gain force some time during the 1950s. Indeed, some Glaswegian and Toronto papers, as part of their community reporting, regularly carried uncritical photo-spreads of 'happy' Orange gatherings as late as the 1960s and early 1970s. By the early 1970s, this format had been relegated to the past as 'Protestant' papers went defunct or were taken over while media outlets multiplied. (TO-1999; GLASG-2000; GOLOW; GOLS)

In a related way, others complained that Orangemen began to be portrayed in a more negative manner by the media. Whilst acknowledging that the press had never been friends of the Orange, one senior member added that negative opinion was minor in the 1940s and 50s. This, however, began to change, as coverage of the July Twelfth parade was reduced, and 'as the population changed its opinions, we got less good press in newspapers.' (TO-1999) This is supported by evidence from 1960s Grand Masters' addresses where dismay is expressed at the negative attitude of 'so-called

“Protestant” papers’ toward the Orange Order. G.M. Keyes later lamented the fact that ‘Some news columnists have written us off and gloat over what they term “our demise.” Even one church paper joined in the glee.’ (Smith CGL1969: 23; Keyes IGCW 1970: 11)

In summary, while socioeconomic factors appear to be fingered as most significant explanation for Orange decline in Canada, nearly all sources mention the operation of broader shifts in the cultural and political climate. Indeed, the gradual change in the ideological position of the Orange Order - toward defending ever more limited traditional redoubts – demonstrates this pattern. Lodge reports of the 40s and early 50s warned against the erosion of the British connection and urged increased British immigration. In the next decade, attention shifted to federal bilingualism and the preservation of the Union Jack or Red Ensign as the national flag. Having faced defeat on all fronts by 1970, the Order instead focused on provincial bilingualism, Quebec separation and the withdrawal of state aid for Roman Catholic separate schools. (CGL 1946; 1947; 1951; 1964; 1970)

The above certainly sets the broad outlines of the causal factors behind Orange decline in Canada and Ulster. However, in order to make definitive statements regarding the relative strength of cultural, political and socioeconomic variables, more research is required. In particular, a quantitative factor analysis of Orange membership trends in Ontario, Newfoundland, Northern Ireland and Scotland should help to better illuminate the most promising explanation.

Conclusion

The similarities between two British Protestant ethnic groups, the Anglo-Canadian and the Ulster-Protestants, are striking. Unsurprisingly, both of these Loyalist Protestant groups provided fertile ground for the rise of the Orange Order, a voluntary association dedicated to defending the British Crown and Protestantism. Among both groups, the Orange Order formed the associational backbone of the dominant ethnies. Yet in much of Canada, after the First World War, the Orange Order went into steep decline, much as it did in England and Australasia. This decline was resisted in Newfoundland, Scotland and Northern Ireland until the 1960s, suggesting an interesting variance with which to test current theories in sociology, social movements research and ethnicity/nationalism.

Preliminary findings suggest that the Orange Order is entering into a decline in Northern Ireland that is at least as rapid as that which took place in Canada some fifty years ago. The causes of this decline remain obscure, though the liberalisation of Protestant attitudes among the bourgeoisie, particularly the urban middle classes, appears to be one driver of change. Canadian grand lodge reports and interview-based research suggests that the differentiation of Canadian society – manifested by a proliferation of social and recreational activities – figured centrally in Orange decline. On the other hand, references to increasingly adverse media coverage and charges of ‘bigotry’ directed at Orangemen suggest that politico-cultural factors were also important. To a large extent, therefore, firm conclusions regarding the decline of the Orange Order must await further results – particularly in the quantitative domain.

Should research demonstrate that Orange decline (and a broader decline of sectarian conflicts) is a feature of post-industrial social organisation in the Anglo-Saxon West, this would be of tremendous significance. After all, as the recent upsurge of dominant ethnicity in Fiji, India and Austria highlight, much more remains to be learned regarding the interaction between processes of high modernity, religion and dominant-group ethnicity.

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GLAS-2000 - Interviews conducted at Glasgow, Scotland, September 2000.

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CGL – Canadian Grand Lodge reports

GOLOW - Grand Lodge of Ontario West reports and media files

GOLOWret - Grand Lodge of Ontario West provincial returns

GOLS - Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland reports and media files

ICGW – Imperial Grand Council of the World reports

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