



The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace

Tim Pat Coogan

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An up-to-date, engaging chronicle of the causes, effects, and many dimensions of 30 years of violent struggle in Ireland. In this widely acclaimed study of the complex conflicts in contemporary Northern Ireland, Tim Pat Coogan offers a clear, balanced, and reflective assessment of that struggle -- and a new epilogue to address the recent breakdown of the 1994 cease-fire.

An authoritative observer of the nationalist cause with strong political contacts on both sides of the border, Coogan sets the historical context for the resurgence of centuries-old tensions that led to the civil protest and pogroms of 1969. He examines the reasons for -- and the snowballing reactions to -- the introduction of British forces to the streets of Derry and Belfast. Photos bring the events and personalities sharply into focus as he insightfully probes the spread of IRA violence to key locations in Britain, and the responses of the British government, its troops, and various Union organizations.

In this new edition, Coogan discusses the continuing argument over weapons, the resumed IRA bombings in February 1996, and the significance of recent elections. Having gained the confidence of the combatants, he presents exclusive interviews and examines the prospects for peace.

"Coogan fills this book with quotes, personal reportage, and wry wit.... This title should be part of any history or current events collection". -- Library Journal Starred Review

The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace Details

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From Reader Review The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace for online ebook

Patrick says

Far too sympathetic to the IRA terrorists, rather than the SDLP and other civil rights campaigners, but still a very worthwhile book. Just make sure you read other authors on the topic.

James Curran says

So thorough. Not exactly balanced, although it does take both sides to task.
But so thorough, it's remarkable.

Dr. Michael Galvin says

I thorough and very detailed history of the Irish Troubles 1966 to 1996. However, it is a difficult read and not for the casual reader looking for a brief synopsis of the Troubles.

Joolie says

I read this a long time ago in college and it is extremely dense and filled with every little minutiae of the modern history of Ireland - who drove the car to where for why and who was there to stop them, help them, arrest them...etc.

Really great way to get a in depth look at the history of the troubles. I've found personal accounts and narratives more intriguing and compelling though.

Mills College Library says

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Martin Mcananey says

If you want the true unbiased history of the conflict in northern Ireland then this is the book to read

Virginia says

Very detailed. Intro gives history of all of Ireland's 'wars'.

Eóin Brown says

A really insightful, nuanced look at the causes of 'the Troubles' in the north of Ireland and the effects of the conflict. Interesting to learn about all of the players in the conflict, the impact on people's lives and the factors that influenced public opinion.

Towards the end of the book, the detail became excruciating. An account of every phone call made and an in-depth, sentence-by-sentence analysis of every government/paramilitary communiqué made the last two chapters fairly tedious.

Would recommend to anyone with a deep interest in politics, but the level of detail, as well as Coogan's writing style, makes it hard going at times.

Colin Ryan says

At times the volume of detail can overwhelm in this comprehensive coverage of the troubles, however the meticulous recording of events is important. Coogan manages to hold interest for the most part, his writing style is engaging and the fact that he is open about his biases aids the narrative. The book is sharply critical of the British role in stalling progress, and the intransigence and resulting missed opportunities are tragic and infuriating. The book is a worthwhile read, although perhaps holding off on publishing for two years would have helped with adding a happier ending!

Jeremiah Jones-goldstein says

I bought this book while I was on my honeymoon in a used book store on the Hill of Tara. When I got it home and started to read it I plowed through it.

I know very little of Irish history. While we were visiting Ireland we went to quite a few historical landmarks and learned a little about what we were seeing. Seeing all these things really piqued my interest.

So when I saw this in a book, the cover of mine is the version published in Ireland and is a bit more shocking, I picked it up. The salesman said too my that if I wanted to learn anything about Irish history then Tim Pat Coogan was the man to read.

I found the book well written, extremely informative and when I was finished I felt like I had really learned something. I will be reading more of his books for sure.

Ray Richard says

Very detailed story of the Troubles from beginning to the final stages of negotiations. Sadly, due to the publishing date, the Good Friday agreement is not discussed. It's my second Coogan book and it won't be the last; he's a fine writer who was in the middle of the action.

David Przybylinski says

Great history on the troubles and all that went on. It's a long slow read but worth the time.

Sam says

A clear concise account of the Northern Ireland Troubles although the author does have some bias toward the Republican/Catholic side of the debate and this does come through as you read the book but he obviously tried very hard to be impartial. On the whole a good read and a must for anyone with an interest in or a wish to understand the situation in Northern Ireland, past and present.

Patrick says

Wide in scope, although perhaps a bit too wide in scope. Coogan benefits from first hand evidence and his own presence for these events. But there is probably a better history to be written on The Troubles, especially considering that The Troubles had not been concluded when this book was published.

Jesse says

A bit disappointed in the way this one is constructed, but that admittedly has a lot to do with my desire for a thorough primer on the events of this strangely staggered civil war, rather than an exhaustive, blow-by-blow rundown of details predicated on an odd selection of thematic cross-currents. Unremittingly thorough, at least, although I guess I'm also a tad spoiled by the narrativizing efforts of many contemporary history tomes. Often reminded me of Alan Clarke's "Elephant", in which the tit-for-tat revanchism between IRA and UDF adherents is boiled down to an unintelligible series of formulaically constructed, pointlessly conducted murder tableaux.

Joshua Treviño says

One of the curiosities of **western Europe's longest-running armed conflict** is how sparse its literature is -- and how we must therefore rely on what we have, rather than what we wish to have, when we read about it. The low-grade civil war in Northern Ireland is at an ebb thanks to the peace process of the past fifteen years, but it does continue -- as the on-again, off-again nature of the local executive, and the persistence of paramilitary organizations like the Real IRA and the various Loyalist guerrillas demonstrate. The province -- call it Ulster or not as you prefer -- has dropped off the world's radar since the bombs and shootings mostly stopped, and the New York Times now runs the occasional piece on what a lovely spot Belfast has become.

This is good news, of course, but observers of the region understand that it is all quite fragile. Among the malign developments of the recent past is the fate of the "mainstream" of Northern Ireland politics in the

wake of peace: contrary to hopes and expectations, the moderate (of sorts) Catholic and Protestant parties -- the **SDLP** and the **UUP** respectively -- have been pushed aside by their more historically radical cousins. (Readers may recall that the leaders of those parties shared the **1998 Nobel Peace Prize**.) The latest Northern Ireland executive is led by the **DUP** and **Sinn Fein**, which is a bit like a cohabitation of Malcolm X and George Wallace. In fairness, it's not been the catastrophe that one might have reasonably expected -- and there is a case to be made that the old hard-line parties have reformed toward the mainstream, rather than the mainstream having gone hard-line. Still, the fact remains that the motive forces in the war *on both sides* are now in the driver's seat -- or rather, the drivers' seat.

It is in the light of these outcomes that **Tim Pat Coogan's *The Troubles*** must be read, both to understand how Northern Ireland got here, and to understand how extraordinary it is that Northern Ireland is here at all. The book covers a discrete 30-year period, from 1966 to 1996, and though that may seem inadequate -- the Good Friday Agreement that yielded the present peace settlement was signed in 1998 -- a late-edition epilogue covers the developments up to just prior to Tony Blair's ascent to the UK Prime Ministership in 1997. Inasmuch as what exists now is mostly an outcome of pre-1996 events, it remains the best single-volume history of the Irish war in print.

Being the best, though, does not mean that it is as good as it ought to be. Coogan is probably the single most comprehensive author on modern Ireland, with a prolific output that focuses upon the island's political development in the 20th century. As the son of an IRA man, and a noted journalist throughout the tumult of the past generation, he is uniquely placed to make sense of the interaction of ballot and bullet that drives his country's society and politics. It is a pity, then, that he brings his massive knowledge and extraordinary access to bear in a manner that veers stylistically from dense, to turgid, to compelling -- and back. The major flaw of *The Troubles* (shared with the other book of his I've read, his biography of Michael Collins), is his propensity for taking a rich and tragic subject, and relating it as a journalist would. Perhaps this seems an unfair critique, as Coogan is, after all, a journalist. Nonetheless, in reading *The Troubles*, one is struck by how badly Coogan needs an editor. Perhaps an editor's hand was present in the writing; if so, one shudders to think of the state of the original manuscript. Opaque narrative digressions and baffling assumptions of readers' prior knowledge mar the text, and misspellings -- especially of American politicians' names -- jar the eye to distressing degree.

For a purported history, *The Troubles* is not much of one: roughly one-third of the way through the book, historical narrative is abandoned for a series of subject-specific chapters. (For example, a whole chapter on "The Media War" covers nearly 25 years.) A reader looking for a structure of the progress and regress of the situation in Northern Ireland is left to make sense of it all on his own, correlating the events of one chapter with the situation in another. This is aggravated by Coogan's practice of referencing his own work, even within the book at hand. Often, the reader is asked to return to a previous chapter, or flip to a forthcoming one, for an explanation of a subject under discussion. The reader yearns for a strong editor who would have put a stop to this, and imposed a narrative flow on what should be the definitive work on its topic.

If nothing else, one walks away from *The Troubles* certain that Tim Pat Coogan has a grasp of the Northern Irish conundrum that exceeds even its most involved partisans. He has a bias, to be sure -- he's an Irish Catholic, after all -- and it shows through at points where perhaps it ought not. A glaring omission in *The Troubles* is a moral examination of Republican atrocities. British and Unionist evils receive no such reprieve. Perhaps this seems an absurd complaint, especially given Coogan's convincing case that Catholic resentment in Northern Ireland -- as opposed to IRA terrorism -- was thoroughly justified. Nonetheless, one expects a history to be as evenhanded as possible. Coogan does not write propaganda, but the reader ought to be aware of his decided perspective.

Is *The Troubles* worth reading? If you're a fan of engrossing history that thrills and informs, no. The pity of Coogan's work is his reduction of a generation of blood, strife, war, and romance to a dry and factual work. Irish history and Ireland itself demand more. If you wish to research either, you'll probably end up at Coogan's oeuvre anyway -- and, in fairness, you'll doubtless learn a great deal from him. But you will not, alas, be entertained.

Daniel says

A compelling, detailed analysis of the conflict. Very interesting read.

Erica says

An excellent, comprehensive source on the Troubles in the second half of the twentieth century. This isn't light reading, however, and not for the faint of heart. But if you are interested in this period, I'd find you hard pressed to identify a better and more exhaustive look at the diverse elements of the conflict and attempts to come to an accord. Coogan often uses his experiences and interactions with players to describe the situation, which counters my preferences in writing as an historian, but he does not become overly sentimental or devolve into distracting name-dropping. There were parts that I skimmed over, as they related less to my personal interests (namely "legal weaponry"), but each section gets adequate treatment and those interested in any one facet will not be disappointed.

It would be interesting to read Coogan's perspective on what has happened in the dozen years since the second edition (and the afterword) were published. Just as it was interesting to read what his thoughts for the future were at the time the book was written. From a decade out, the last chapter seems somewhat truncated, cut short, even hastily completed. Would his thoughts or perspectives change based on what has happened in Northern Ireland in subsequent years?
