

## **Taylor, Peter. Loyalists: War and Peace in Northern Ireland. New York: TV Books, 1999.**

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The Northern Irish terrorist war has by far the greatest ratio of books to casualties: there may be more books than dead. Up until the last decade there was a major gap in the coverage of the three-sided war, namely the loyalist terrorists - or paramilitaries, as they are euphemistically called in Northern Ireland along with the Republicans. Most authors concentrated on the history of "the Troubles" from other perspectives, especially accounts of the British counterinsurgency effort or histories of the Provisional IRA. The only loyalist accounts were a history of the Ulster Volunteer Force by journalist David Boulton in 1973, and an examination of political murder co-authored by two Belfast journalists.

This began to change with the publication of Belfast journalist Martin Dillon's *The Shankill Butchers* in 1989. But this account was almost more in the true crime genre than a military study of the paramilitaries. This was followed by Dillon's *Stone Cold*, the biography of Ulster Freedom Fighter (UFF - the military wing of the Ulster Defense Association) Michael Stone in 1992. That same year Scottish academic Steve Bruce published an academic analysis of the loyalist terrorists, *Red Hand: The Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland*. Bruce wrote a second, shorter work two years later which brought his account up to the loyalist ceasefire of 1994. Unfortunately for outsiders, Bruce and Dillon differed on several points and had little mutual respect. Dillon also wrote about UVF rebel Billy "King Rat" Wright in his 1997 *God and the Gun*. That same year security correspondents Henry McDonald and John Cusack published their marvelous history of the UVF. Journalist Brian Rowan wrote in 1995 an account of the two ceasefires which examined the two loyalist political parties.

Now British television journalist and author Peter Taylor writes his *Loyalists* as a bookend companion to his earlier history of the IRA/Sinn Féin. The book basically covers the same material covered by the above authors without the analytical ability of either Dillon or Bruce. Taylor's technique was to intersperse interviews with ordinary loyalist "paramilitaries" in his narrative. This works surprisingly well in his account of the breakout of the conflict in 1969 and its development through the early seventies. This adds balance to the earlier pro-Nationalist accounts by such authors as Tim Pat Coogan, J. Bowyer Bell, et al. Taylor portrays "Bloody Friday" as the loyalist equivalent of "Bloody Sunday" in terms of mobilization and radicalization. Dillon's books bear a quote from (Southern) Irish Unionist sympathizer Conor Cruise O'Brien referring to him as the leading authority on Irish terrorism. I felt that Dillon was not the leading authority on the IRA, but he probably had the best claim to be the leading authority on all sides of the conflict. Now Taylor, who has also authored books on the British army and the Stalker affair, has established a good claim to being Dillon's rival in this regard. But, unfortunately, the book does less for our understanding of loyalists than it does for Taylor's resume. Dillon and Bruce differed dramatically on such key incidents as the murders of UDA leaders Jimmy Craig and John McMichael in the late eighties, the truth of the claims by Michael Stone that he was a leading UFF assassin, and other areas. Instead of analyzing these differences and weighing in with his opinions, Taylor largely ignores them or at least the controversies.

The most interesting facet of the loyalists today is the creation of two loyalist versions of Sinn Fein. Taylor discusses this, but insufficiently in this reviewer's opinion. He fails to discuss foreign precedents for such conversions from Ireland, Israel and Latin America. He also fails to discuss the consequences of division between the two parties for their electoral potential. Taylor's book is more a history of the conflict from a loyalist perspective than an analysis of the loyalists.

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