

The Coleraine University Controversy.
(Resource: PDST: Coleraine University Controversy Workshop Booklet (2021))

Enquiry-based Task: Consider the key questions while you study the sources. (Note: the reference format on each source- Valuable knowledge for RSR)

Key Question: Why was the decision taken in 1965 to locate the new university in Coleraine?

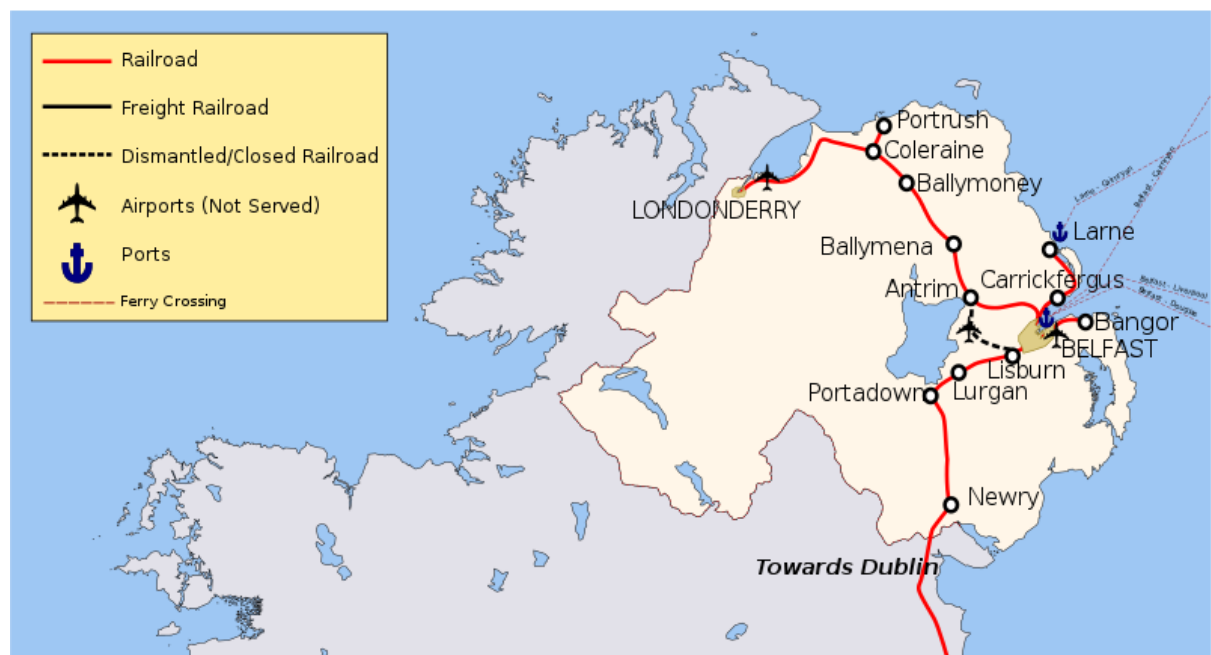
Source 2: Edited excerpt from Irish Times editorial, 'Cock o' the North'

There can be little doubt that the Lockwood committee was mainly attracted by the idea of a tabula rasa where plans could be formulated without the need to take existing buildings into account. Coleraine, too, has plenty of room for students and is sufficiently far from Belfast to develop its own character as a university. But Derry's case, which has the support of Nationalists and Unionists, is to be fought to the end and there is force in the argument that the city is often neglected when the Government has favours to dispense.

The Irish Times, 11 February 1965 © The Irish Times Irish Times archive material supplied courtesy of The Irish Times at www.irishtimes.com

Questions and points for discussion

1. From the context and/or from your research, what do you think the writer means here in saying that "the Lockwood committee was mainly attracted by the idea of a tabula rasa"?
2. What advantages of the Coleraine site does the writer identify?
3. What is the writer's assessment of "Derry's case"?



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Northern_Ireland_rail_network_sb.svg

1. Consider locations on this map that may have influenced the committee's choice for the new university.

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Secondary Source 2 Historian Gerard O'Brien on the deliberations of the Lockwood Committee at their eleventh meeting, 5-6 June 1964

The Committee was, it emerged in discussion, not entirely convinced of the adequacy of either of the two sites suggested by the Coleraine representatives, but felt that an appropriate site 'could probably be found'. More enthusiasm was expressed for the availability of lodgings at Portrush and Portstewart. In what would in retrospect be a moment of great fatuity the Committee opined that Coleraine's 'proximity to Derry would soothe hurt feelings and attract support, while easing the demise of Magee'.

Gerard O'Brien (1998), 'Our Magee Problem: Stormont and the Second University' in Gerard O'Brien (ed.), Derry and Londonderry: History and Society. Dublin: Geography Publications, p. 670.

Questions and points for discussion

1. What was the Lockwood Committee's view of the availability of an appropriate site for the building of the university at Coleraine, according to the writer?
2. What element of the Coleraine application was the Committee more enthusiastic about, according to the writer?
3. (a) The writer identifies a moment of "great fatuity" [foolishness] on the part of the Committee. What view held by the Committee does the writer believe to have been foolish?
(b) Given what you know about the reaction in Derry to the Committee's report, do you have evidence to support or contradict the writer's view? Explain your answer.

Key Question: Why did the decision cause controversy?

Secondary Source 2

The O'Neill administration's programme of 'modernisation' included a proposal for a new university. The natural and obvious choice would have been to locate the new college in Derry. The city already had the nucleus of a university in Magee College, which had a long tradition of higher education, a fine library and a sizeable campus. The city also had a teaching hospital in Altnagelvin.

Seán Farren (ed.) (2018) John Hume: In his own words. Dublin: Four Courts Press, p.26

Questions and points for discussion

1. Of what wider programme was the proposal for a new university a part, according to the writer? Explain your answer.
2. How does the writer justify his claim that "The natural and obvious choice would have been to locate the new college in Derry"? Explain your answer.

Source 6: The following is an edited excerpt from an Irish Times report, 9 February 1965:

Derry
has
been

done down again. A long-held feeling of neglect by Northern Ireland's second city is finding vociferous expression in these words to-night – on the eve of the publication of the findings of a committee on higher education, which is to recommend the site for our second university. A university-for-Derry committee, which has extracted a truce from the parties in this traditionally-marked Orange and Green community, has been set up to spearhead the campaign of the city's demand. The committee comprises practically every business, social and professional organisation in

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the Maiden City and transcends the political and religious cleavage among its 50,000-odd inhabitants. The committee has been remarkably active in the past fortnight and to-night it organised the biggest and most representative demonstration Derry has seen since the war. And if the unofficial forecasts about Coleraine are proved correct, more such demonstrations are certain, because there is bound to be an outcry in this city which has Mr. John Hume, of the University-for-Derry committee, said: "We are determined to let the Government know that there will be bitter resentment here and in the North-West generally if Coleraine or any other centre is chosen for the university."

The Irish Times, 9 February, 1965 © The Irish Times Irish Times archive material supplied courtesy of The Irish Times at www.irishtimes.com

Questions and points for discussion

1. Discuss why the writer – on the day before the Lockwood Committee's report was published – makes reference to Derry being "done down again". (You will need to look at the third paragraph as well as the first.)
2. The writer says that, "The committee has been remarkably active in the past fortnight". What evidence is there in the report that would seem to support this assertion by the writer?
3. On what basis does the writer consider that further demonstrations are likely?
4. Explain the comments made by John Hume on behalf of the University for Derry Committee.

Source 9 The following is the first of two excerpts from an Irish Times report:

A protest procession of 2,000 cars arrived in Belfast yesterday carrying representatives of every section of opinion in Derry. They were objecting to the Northern Ireland Government's decision to establish the second university of the area in Coleraine instead of Derry. The Mayor of Derry, Councillor Anderson, Mr. Edward McAteer (Nat. M.P.) and office bearers of the "University for Derry Committee" walked from the Carson statue at the head of a long procession to Parliament buildings. They formed part of a small party who entered Stormont and were met by the Attorney-General, Mr. E.W. Jones, Unionist M.P. for Derry. Mr. Jones conducted them to the private room of the Prime Minister, Captain O'Neill, where the deputation handed over documents and maps showing possible sites for the new university at Derry. The Prime Minister thanked the deputation and assured them that he would consider their representations, and they withdrew. The motorcade, which included a number of lorries, bread and furniture vans in the long line of cars, then left Stormont and made the return trip to Derry. There was some traffic dislocation as the procession passed through part of Belfast and other towns. Derry had a Sunday-morning-like appearance yesterday. Shops and public houses were closed and most of the larger businesses carried on with reduced staff. Every organisation was represented in the motorcade which travelled in sections. The largest contingent was a procession of about 500 cars which followed the official fleet. When the Mayor was handing the city's claim to the Prime Minister at Stormont, people in Derry stood in the street in silence, and cars pulled into the kerb. Traffic was very light in the city throughout the day. Car-parks were half empty and bus queues were very short.

The Irish Times, 19 February, 1965 © The Irish Times Irish Times archive material supplied courtesy of The Irish Times at www.irishtimes.com

Questions and points for discussion

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1. What points are made in the first paragraph about the nature and purpose of the 'protest procession' to Belfast on 18 February 1965?
2. Of the Derry representatives who led a 'long procession' to Parliament buildings, two are named. Suggest reasons why these two are named.
3. What happened at the meeting between the Derry representatives and the prime minister, according to the report?
4. What details does the report give of the motorcade's return to Derry?
5. The report gives details of how Derry was affected on the day by the protest. Make a list of the details that are given.

Audio-Visual Source

A BBC documentary on John Hume. The clip refers to the University for Derry campaign. The documentary is currently available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2blCqrgjLo>

The relevant section of the documentary can be found at **7.07-7.55**.

Hume helped set up credit unions across Northern Ireland – and, for a time, Unionists in Derry welcomed his leadership abilities as he led a campaign to bring Northern Ireland's second university to the city.

[Pat Hume (wife): *"The one wonderful thing about the University for Derry campaign was that it brought all the citizens of the city together. There was a huge motorcade to Stormont to protest against the decision to place the university in Coleraine. He was the chairman of that committee and that ... kind of catapulted him into being the spokesperson for the city."*

Source 12 The following is an edited excerpt from an Irish Times report, 8 May 1965.

Captain Terence O'Neill, Northern Ireland Prime Minister, last night took the unprecedented step of contradicting, in a statement from Stormont Castle, allegations made by one of his own Unionist M.P.s, Dr. Robert S. Nixon, in a speech in Derry on Thursday night. Captain O'Neill stated: "Dr. Robert Nixon made certain statements which purport to be facts. Dr. Nixon claimed that he was told by a Cabinet Minister - 'not Mr. Faulkner or Mr. O'Neill' – that the Cabinet had directed Sir John Lockwood to site the new university at Coleraine. The Cabinet issued no such directive. Dr. Nixon is at liberty to confirm this either with Sir John Lockwood or with any other member of his committee. All my Cabinet colleagues, without exception, categorically deny ever having made any such statement to Dr. Nixon." Referring to Dr. Nixon's allegation that "nameless and faceless men from Londonderry city" influenced the Government against siting the new university and the new city in Derry, Captain O'Neill said that the decisions in both cases were made on the advice of independent experts. Sir John Lockwood, chairman of the committee which recommended that Ulster's second university should be at Coleraine, is in hospital, but he issued a statement yesterday denying Dr. Nixon's allegations that his committee's choice had been directed by the government.

The Irish Times, 8 May 1965 © The Irish Times Irish Times archive material supplied courtesy of The Irish Times at www.irishtimes.com

Questions and points for discussion

1. What claims had Dr Nixon made in a speech in Derry, according to the report?

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2. Explain how Captain O'Neill sought to disprove the accusations made by Dr Nixon, according to the report?
3. How did the chairman of the Lockwood Commission respond to the accusations, according to the report?

Key Question: What is the historical significance of this controversy?

Source 16B The following is an edited excerpt from an Irish Times editorial, 26 May 1965:

The Government of Northern Ireland has, after all, found an alternative to the proposal to abolish Magee contained in the Lockwood Committee's report. It has caused a minor parliamentary revolt, and the extraordinary sight, in Derry, of Nationalists and Unionists making common cause to defend their city; and yet it has been devastatingly simple. Instead of sending students, after lecturing them for two years, to Trinity College, Dublin, or Queen's University, Belfast, to complete their degrees, Magee is to become a constituent member of the University of Coleraine, and offer four-year Honours degree courses in a "reasonable range of arts subjects, including economics and geography." The compromise cannot be expected to satisfy the people of Derry fully.

The Irish Times, 26 May 1965 © The Irish Times Irish Times archive material supplied courtesy of The Irish Times at www.irishtimes.com.

Questions and points for discussion

1. Source 16B reports that the government had found an alternative to the proposal made in the report for Magee College. Explain what that alternative was.
2. Explain the reference in Source 16B to "the extraordinary sight, in Derry, of Nationalists and Unionists making common cause to defend their city".
3. The writer of Source 16B says, "The compromise cannot be expected to satisfy the people of Derry fully". Suggest reasons for this.

Source 18 (edited)

In his maiden speech to the Northern Ireland House of Commons on 5 March 1969, John Hume made clear what he saw as the significance of the Coleraine University controversy.

Fear and suspicions have been mounting ever since the Matthew Report was published in 1961. That report and subsequent government statements showed that in population terms, west of the Bann was going to lose 32,000 people in a two-year period. The 1966 census has already demonstrated that this movement is taking place.

Suspensions were strengthened by the foundation of the new town of Craigavon and by the resignation of its chief planner on grounds that he felt it should have been in Derry.

Then there was the despicable criminal story of the second university. To me that is where all the present trouble started because that brought the awakening of the public conscience.

Northern Ireland House of Commons, Debates, 5 March 1969, cited in Seán Farren (ed.) (2018) John Hume: In his own words. Dublin: Four Courts Press, p.43.

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1. In his opening remarks, John Hume (who began his career as a teacher of history) gives some historical context to the government decision on the siting of the second university. Explain what is meant here by 'historical context'.
2. In relation to the development of the new town of Craigavon, Mr Hume refers to "the resignation of its chief planner". What reasons are given, here in Source 18, as to why the chief planner in question resigned?
3. Discuss Mr Hume's reference to "the despicable criminal story of the second university". For example, is the use of the word "criminal" an indication of the weight of evidence that the government had broken the law in making their decision on Coleraine, or is it an indication of the depth of feeling held by Mr Hume on the issue?
4. Explain Mr Hume's view of the Coleraine University controversy that, "that is where all the present trouble started ...".

Extension tasks:

Research the following positions at the time.

Position held in February 1965	Name of person
Chairman of the University for Derry Committee	
Mayor of Derry	
Northern Ireland prime minister	
Nationalist MP for Derry	
Taoiseach	
Coleraine site Chairman committee	

Match the role and person correctly.

1. Member of the Lockwood Committee	A. Eddie McAteer
2. Mayor of Derry at the time of the motorcade to Stormont, February 1965	B. Edmond Warnock
3. Unionist Party critic of Terence O'Neill in 1965 who had previously been Attorney General	C. Patrick Gormley
4. Nationalist MP who co-led motorcade to Stormont	D. Sir Peter Venables
5. Nationalist MP who supported the 'nameless faceless men' allegations and gave details in parliament	E. Robert Nixon
6. Dublin-born Unionist MP who made original 'nameless faceless men' allegations	F. Albert Anderson