





# William Whitelaw and the search for peace 1972–1974

Headings	Notes
<b>WHITELAW'S REFORMS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• He replaced the old and discredited Special Powers Act with the <b>Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act</b>. It introduced the <b>Diplock Courts</b> in which one judge, sitting without a jury, tried political cases. This was necessary as terrorist groups could easily intimidate jury members.</li></ul>
<b>TALKS WITH THE PROVISIONALS FAIL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whitelaw also made contact with the Provisionals. On 26 June they called a ceasefire and six leading Provisionals, including <b>Gerry Adams</b>, met Whitelaw secretly in London.</li><li>• They asked Whitelaw to promise that the British would leave Northern Ireland within three years. He said that was impossible because the British could not abandon the unionists against their wishes.</li><li>• Some Provisionals wanted to continue the ceasefire but others, including Adams, did not. They were afraid it would let the British army gain the upper hand.</li></ul>
<b>BLOODY FRIDAY, OPERATION MOTORMAN AND BOMBS IN CLAUDY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On 9 July, during riots in Belfast, Provisionals opened fire and violence resumed. Ten people died over the next few days.</li><li>• On the afternoon of <b>Friday 21 July</b>, as people were out shopping, the Provisionals set off 18 bombs in Belfast as well as three in Derry and 16 in other areas. They killed nine people and seriously injured hundreds of others.</li><li>• Meanwhile, five more people died during fierce gun battles between the Provisionals and the British army.</li><li>• People across Ireland were horrified at the scale of the slaughter on <b>Bloody Friday</b>.</li><li>• This allowed Whitelaw to launch <b>Operation Motorman</b> on 30 July. The army took over the 'no-go' areas in Belfast and Derry which had been largely controlled by the IRA. After this it was harder for the Provisionals to build bombs or attack the army.</li><li>• On 31 July the Provisionals retaliated by leaving three car bombs in the mixed and peaceful village of <b>Claudy</b>, near Derry. Nine people died, five Protestants and four Catholics, and thirty were horribly injured.</li><li>• July 1972, when 92 people died, was the worst month of the Troubles</li></ul>
<b>Keywords</b>	<b>Summary</b>















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<b>THE ULSTER WORKERS' COUNCIL (UWC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Although weakened by these blows, the Executive continued to work.</li><li>• This infuriated some loyalist workers who formed the <b>Ulster Workers' Council (UWC)</b>. Many of them worked in electric power stations where past discrimination against Catholics meant that almost all the workers were Protestants.</li><li>• On 15 May, after the Assembly passed a vote of confidence in the Executive, they called a strike.</li></ul>
<b>THE UWC STRIKE: MAY 1974</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The strikers controlled the power stations. Within days they had cut electricity output by 60%. As a result, people could not cook, factories closed, sewerage plants did not work and in hospitals, life support systems began to break down.</li><li>• Loyalist paramilitaries supported the strikers. They formed 'tartan gangs' who blocked roads and 'persuaded' workers not to go to work.</li><li>• They were probably also responsible for bombs that went off in Dublin and Monaghan on 17 May, killing 32 people.</li><li>• The RUC did not interfere in the strike and Rees failed to order the British army to dismantle the barricades. This was partly because it was soon clear that many Protestants supported the strikers.</li><li>• Their support grew even stronger after Wilson, in a badly judged broadcast on 25 May, accused Northern Irish people of 'sponging' on the British taxpayer.</li></ul>
<b>THE EXECUTIVE FALLS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hoping to buy time, Faulkner begged the SDLP and the Dublin government to reduce the powers of the Council of Ireland. They agreed but it was too late.</li><li>• When the strikers heard of a plan to use the army to protect petrol supplies, they cut electricity supplies even more.</li><li>• Fearing a breakdown in society, the Executive resigned.</li></ul>
<b>WHY DID THE SUNNINGDALE EXPERIMENT FAIL?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The main reason for the failure was that a clear majority of unionists opposed the Agreement and supported the UWC strike.</li></ul>

Keywords	Summary



# Sunningdale Agreement 1973

## Background

- 1972- Whitelaw (N.I. Secretary) calls a meeting for all parties
- Border Poll to ease Unionist worries: boycotted by Nationalists but Unionists vote 99% support for remaining part of the UK
- White paper from Whitelaw has 4 key components:
  - Assembly
  - Executive
  - Council of Ireland
  - Guarantee that Northern Ireland remains part of UK as long as majority want it.

## Splits in Unionism

- Split in Unionists: Faulkner and moderate Unionists agree to White Paper and pledge their support - called "Pledged" Unionists"
- Those Unionist against: Paisley and DUP, Craig and his Vanguard Party, Orange Order and the "Unpledged" Unionists led by Harry West.
  - The SDLP welcome White Paper with cautious support
  - Republicans reject it as it reinforces partition
  - Election 64% in favour of Power-Sharing, 36% against
  - All factions of Unionists results: 26 seats for anti-White Paper 24 seats for pro-White Paper
  - Faulkner in difficulty trying to unite Unionists within his own party and the more extreme Unionists.

## Talks Begin

- Whitelaw has great skill and patience as a negotiator
- Faulkner wants a Unionist majority in the Executive
- Council of Ireland agreed on and would have influence on policing and representatives from the Dail.
- SDLP agree to end rate strike against internment
- During Talks Whitelaw called back to London and replaced by Francis Pym (no experience)

## The Agreement

- 6th Dec. meet in Sunningdale, Berkshire
- Liam Cosgrave, Taoiseach along with Garret Fitzgerald and Conor Cruise O'Brien attend
- John Hume from SDLP chief negotiator for Nationalists - gets real power for the Council of Ireland which could open doors for a United Ireland at a later date
- Prime Minister Heath chairs the meeting and quickly gets impatient with Unionists.
- Irish Government agrees to give a verbal agreement on Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK as long as the majority wanted it.
- Conference ends 9th Dec with Sunningdale Agreement

## Power-Sharing Executive

- 1st Jan 1974, Faulkner as Chief Minister and Gerry Fitt (SDLP) as Deputy, Power-Sharing Executive begins
- Orange Order, DUP, Vanguard and Unpledged Unionists led by Harry West unite to form the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC)
- UUUC is created to resist power-sharing and a Council of Ireland.
- Faulkner resigns as leader of the Unionist party after a motion on the Council of Ireland fails to pass at a meeting. He is replaced as leader by Harry West.
- Faulkner sets up the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland
- Unionists now deeply split and Faulkner becoming isolated
- IRA and Loyalist attacks continue

## British General Election

- Election called by Heath against the advice of the Executive who said it was bad timing
- UUUC use election as a referendum on Sunningdale and put forward one anti-Agreement candidate in each constituency
- UUUC win 11 out of 12 of the Westminster seats (Paisley, Craig and West all win)
- Gerry Fitt the only pro-agreement candidate to win a seat.
- In Britain, Heath (Conservative) loses the election and Wilson becomes PM (Labour )
- Pym replaced by Meryln Rees as Northern Ireland Secretary (indecisive and not as committed a party)
- Assembly remained despite violent and abusive behaviour from anti-agreement members

## Ulster Workers Council Strike

- Many Northern Ireland industries employed predominantly Protestant workers.
- The Ulster Workers' Council was a group of loyalist workers who worked in shipbuilding, engineering and electricity generation.
- 15th May 1974, the UWC called a strike
- Loyalist paramilitaries became involved and workers were 'persuaded' not to return to work.
- Road blockades were established and youths armed with clubs turned back lorries delivering milk, groceries or petrol.
- Strikers managed to cut electricity out-put by 60% and more factories were forced to close.
- The British Army and Police stood by and did nothing.
- Many Protestants supported the strike.
- The UWC made sure needed supplies got through to Protestant areas in order to keep support for the strike in Protestant areas.
- Loyalists were strongly suspected of bomb attacks in Dublin and Monaghan in May.
- The Executive was isolated and had no control.
- Rees the Northern Ireland Secretary failed to stop the strikes.
- Faulkner tried to get the Dublin government to reduce the powers of the Council of Ireland and despite them agreeing to hold off implementing it was too late.
- Hospitals were about to close and the Executive resigned.
- The Power-Sharing Executive had ended in failure.

## Why Did The Sunningdale Agreement Fail?

- Northern Ireland Secretary Rees was unwilling to use the police and army to stop the strike.
- The Labour party under Wilson who were in power were not as keen as the Conservatives about the Agreement.
- The UWC strike brought the North to a halt.
- The Council of Ireland was greatly feared by the Unionists as they believed it would lead to a United Ireland.