

Margaret Thatcher, the hunger strikes and the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1979–1985

Headings	Notes
MARGARET THATCHER'S NORTHERN IRELAND POLICIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In 1979, the Labour Party lost the British general election and Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative Party, became Prime Minister. Known as the <i>Iron Lady</i>, she dominated British politics until she retired in 1990.
MARGARET THATCHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On Northern Ireland she:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supported the unionists' desire to remain part of the United Kingdom• Rejected the idea that the republic should have any role in the North• Was determined to defeat terrorism• Her opposition to the IRA was strengthened in 1979 when they killed her adviser on Northern Ireland, Airey Neave. In 1984 the Provisionals almost killed her too when they set off a bomb in Brighton during the Conservative Party conference.• At first Thatcher continued the Labour government's policy towards Northern Ireland. But in 1980–1981 she had to deal with the IRA hunger strikes.
PROTESTS AT CRIMINALISATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These were due to Roy Mason's decision to treat paramilitary prisoners like ordinary criminals (criminalisation).• After being sentenced in the Diplock courts, paramilitary prisoners were put into the newly built H-Blocks in the Maze prison where they had to wear prison clothes and obey prison rules.• When IRA prisoners refused to wear prison clothes they were left in their cells with only a blanket for covering. When this failed to change anything, they refused to clean the cells, then began to smear the walls with excrement.• By 1978 over 300 prisoners were involved in the 'dirty protest'. To support them, the IRA killed prison officers.
BOBBY SANDS AND THE HUNGER STRIKES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not many people outside the republican movement were aware of these protests, although Bernadette Devlin stood in the 1979 European election to draw attention to them.• Finally the prisoners decided to go on hunger strike in October 1980, although republican leaders opposed this. The strike ended after 53 days because they thought the government had promised concessions.
Keywords	Summary

Margaret Thatcher, the hunger strikes and the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1979–1985

Headings	Notes
BOBBY SANDS AND THE HUNGER STRIKES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• But nothing changed so the IRA leader in the Maze, Bobby Sands, began a second hunger on 1 March 1981. After two weeks another prisoner joined him, then a week later a third and so on. They hoped the propaganda impact would grow as, one by one, the men approached death.• When the Nationalist MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone died suddenly, the republicans nominated Sands to replace him. No other nationalist stood and he won by 30,492 votes to 29,046. This put Bobby Sands and the hunger strike on news bulletins around the world.• Thatcher saw the hunger strikers as terrorists and was determined not to give in to them. By August, ten were dead.• In the end the strikers' families persuaded doctors to treat men who became unconscious. The strike ended in October.• The strikers believed they had failed but afterwards the government quietly granted many of their demands.
THE IMPACT OF THE HUNGER STRIKES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The hunger strikes had a huge impact on Northern Ireland.• They strengthened the Provisionals by bringing in new recruits. This let them to continue their campaign of bombing and destruction into the 1980s and 1990s.• But Sands' election victory also showed republican leaders the value of political activity. Sinn Féin began to fight elections. In the republic they got several TDs elected to the Dáil and in Northern Ireland, Adams won Gerry Fitt's Westminster seat, although he refused to enter the Commons.• The way Britain handled the hunger strikes damaged its reputation around the world.• It also appalled the Irish government, which knew that the hunger strikes would strengthen republicans at the expense of the moderate SDLP.
THATCHER LOOKS FOR POWER-SHARING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The hunger strikes made Thatcher think again about her Northern Ireland policy.• She knew that the conflict there damaged Britain's international reputation, drained its economic resources and killed its soldiers.
Keywords	Summary

Margaret Thatcher, the hunger strikes and the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1979–1985

Headings	Notes
THATCHER LOOKS FOR POWER-SHARING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • William Whitelaw persuaded her that power-sharing was the best way to achieve peace, but she knew that would not be possible if the hunger strikes destroyed the moderate SDLP. • She encouraged her Northern Ireland Secretaries to look for agreement among the Northern parties. But various attempts ended in failure as unionists refused to accept power-sharing and demanded a return of Stormont.
AGREEMENT WITH THE SOUTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thatcher also changed her attitude towards the republic because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She hoped that this would improve security along the border and make it easier to control the • IRA. • US President Reagan, influenced by important Irish-Americans like Edward Kennedy, urged her to talk to the Dublin government. • Soon after Thatcher came to power she met Taoiseach Charles Haughey. They got on well but relations grew frosty when he announced that a united Ireland was coming soon. • She got on better with the next Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald, who led a Fine Gael/Labour Coalition between 1982 and 1987.
TOWARDS THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT OF 1985	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FitzGerald feared the hunger strike would undermine support for the SDLP. To help nationalists decide on their aims, he set up the New Ireland Forum in 1983.
GARRET FITZGERALD AND THE NEW IRELAND FORUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives of all the Dáil parties met in Dublin Castle and interviewed many people including Catholic bishops, Protestant clergymen and individual unionists about the future of Ireland. • The discussions at the Forum encouraged nationalists to re-examine their attitudes to the northern conflict.
THE 1985 ANGLO-IRISH ('HILLSBOROUGH') AGREEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thatcher rejected the Forum's proposal for a united Ireland but soon afterwards talks began between the two governments. • There were several reasons for this: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thatcher liked and trusted Garret FitzGerald. He convinced her that only co-operation between the two governments would make northern Catholics trust the RUC and the British army.
Keywords	Summary

Margaret Thatcher, the hunger strikes and the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1979–1985

Headings	Notes
THE 1985 ANGLO-IRISH ('HILLSBOROUGH') AGREEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• She hoped that he would do more to control the border and extradite IRA people to Northern Ireland to stand trial.• In the European Union, Irish and British politicians and civil servants had worked together and had learned to trust each other.• The talks led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which the two leaders signed at Hillsborough, Co. Down on 15 November 1985. It contained several important parts:<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To reassure unionists, the Irish government accepted that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom and that could only change with the consent of the majority of people in Northern Ireland. (This is called <i>the principle of consent</i>.)2. But to protect nationalists, an Inter-Governmental Conference was set up.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It would meet regularly and be jointly chaired by the Northern Ireland Secretary and the Irish Foreign Minister.• It would discuss issues that concerned the Catholic community such as job discrimination or the teaching of Irish. A 'determined effort' would be made to sort out differences.• To support the Conference, civil servants from London and Dublin would be permanently based in Maryfield, near Belfast.
NATIONALIST REACTIONS TO THE AGREEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The IRA and Sinn Féin denounced the Agreement.• So did Charles Haughey, saying it 'copper-fastened partition'. He later amended this attitude when it became clear that a majority of people in the republic supported the Agreement.
UNIONISTS RESIST THE AGREEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unionists were caught off guard by the Agreement. The UUP leader, James Molyneaux, had refused to join in the talks because he was sure Thatcher would not do a deal with Dublin.• They were horrified to realise that officials and ministers from the republic would be at the heart of Northern Ireland's government. They felt the British had betrayed them.• Molyneaux and Paisley led a huge '<i>Ulster says no</i>' rally in central Belfast. Loyalist workers called a one-day strike and loyalist paramilitaries threatened to kill the civil servants and ministers at Maryfield.
Keywords	Summary

Margaret Thatcher, the hunger strikes and the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1979–1985

Headings	Notes
<p>UNIONISTS RESIST THE AGREEMENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fifteen Unionist MPs resigned their Westminster seats and stood again in the by-elections as anti-Agreement candidates. Their aim was to stage a kind of referendum on the Agreement but they lost one of the seats to the SDLP. • In the end, unionist resistance proved futile. Margaret Thatcher again lived up to her reputation and refused to bend.
<p>MARGARET THATCHER (1925–2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Margaret Thatcher joined the Conservative Party while a student in Oxford and was elected an MP in 1959. • In 1970 Edward Heath appointed her Education Secretary. After the Conservatives lost to Labour in 1974, she was elected party leader in 1975. She won the 1979 general election, mainly because of Britain's economic decline under the Labour government. • Thatcher supported the unionists' place in the United Kingdom and was committed to defeating the IRA, which had assassinated her Northern Ireland adviser, Airey Neave, shortly before the election. • She refused to negotiate with the republican hunger strikers, ignoring pleas from the Dublin government. • But her friend, William Whitelaw, persuaded her that power-sharing between Protestants and Catholics was the best way to get peace. She allowed her Northern Ireland Secretaries to organise talks between the leaders of the two communities. But she did little to encourage them and was not too surprised when they failed. • She hoped that better relations with the republic would improve security by sealing the border and extraditing republicans to Northern Ireland for trial. • She got on well with Charles Haughey at first but that changed after he claimed a united Ireland was near. • She had a better relationship with Garret FitzGerald, whom she trusted, but she bluntly rejected the proposals of his New Ireland Forum. • In spite of that, talks continued, leading to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement at Hillsborough, Co. Down in November 1985.
<p>Keywords</p>	<p>Summary</p>

Margaret Thatcher, the hunger strikes and the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1979–1985

Headings	Notes
MARGARET THATCHER (1925–2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To the fury of unionists, the Agreement gave the Irish government a say in Northern Ireland affairs and created a permanent Secretariat of civil servants from both governments in Maryfield near Belfast.• Thatcher withstood the unionist 'Ulster says no' campaign but grew disillusioned with the Agreement because it failed to deliver the better security she had hoped for.• In 1990 she resigned as Conservative leader. Later she expressed doubts about the 'peace process' and criticised the 1998 Good Friday Agreement for allowing the early release of paramilitary prisoners.• She died in 2013.
EXAM QUESTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What was the impact of Republican and Loyalist terrorism on Northern Ireland? (HL 2013)• Why was Direct Rule (from London) introduced in 1972 and why did it last so long? (HL 2006)
Keywords	Summary

IRA and the Hunger Strikes

IRA Splits

1. IRA splits in 1969 into Provisional IRA and Official IRA over ideology and how to defend Catholic areas.
2. Both factions engage in paramilitary violence
3. Official IRA on ceasefire in 1972 but sporadic violence afterwards.
4. INLA split from Official IRA in 1974
5. Currie is evicted by RUC
6. Thousands attend protest over issue

Provos

1. Believe British can be driven out in short timeframe
2. Commence bombing campaign of 'soft targets' – strategy to disrupt the economy.
3. NI Government introduce interment
4. Creates more recruits for IRA
5. Bloody Sunday killings in Derry in 1972 leads to large numbers of recruits
6. From mid-1970s The Long War. War of attrition and make the North ungovernable
7. IRA call off campaign in 1962
8. 12 IRA men and 6 RUC men killed

Leadership Changes

1. Adams and McGuinness take over leadership of the IRA from older Dublin based leadership.
2. Long War with continuing violence
3. International pressure especially USA
4. Attacks on targets in Britain
5. Wider list of targets including prison officers, judges and anyone part of the 'British War Machine'

H-Block Campaign

1. 1972 Whitelaw introduces 'special category status' for paramilitary prisoners
2. Merlyn Rees removes 'special category status' in 1976
3. IRA prisoners refuse to wear prison uniforms
4. Prison authorities remove all furniture and clothing from prisoners leaving only a blanket
5. By 1978 over 300 prisoners were 'on the Blanket' protest
6. O'Neill introduced an official policy of Protestant-Catholic reconciliation.

Dirty Protest

1. Prisoners complain of being beaten by prison officers
2. Prisoners refuse to leave cells, refuse to wash and refuse to 'slop-out'
3. Prisoners smear their excrement on the walls of their cells
4. Conditions receive worldwide publicity following a visit to the prison by Cardinal Thomas Ó Fiaich
5. British government were outraged as giving in to the prisoners would be a major victory for the IRA

Hunger Strikes

1. First Hunger Strike October 1980 – called off believing that the British had accepted their demands
2. Second Hunger Strike March 1981
3. Staggered hunger strikes – Bobby Sands starts
4. Bobby Sands elected in by-election but later dies on hunger strike – sparks widespread rioting
5. Owen Carron wins subsequent by-election
6. Ten prisoners die before the Hunger Strikes are called off after prisoners families being to intervene. The British Government slowly changed the regime in the prisons
7. Pyrrhic victory for British Government – increased IRA recruitment

Five Demands

1. No prison uniform
 2. No prison work
 3. Free association
 4. Full remission
 5. Visits, parcels, and recreational/educational facilities.
- Prisoners demand that these rights should be implemented for all prisoners

Change of Strategy

1. Sinn Fein moves into electoral politics after Hunger Strikes
2. 'The armalite in one hand and the ballot box in the other'
3. Two pronged strategy – continue the 'armed struggle' while attempting to build support in elections
4. Sinn Fein wins five seats in 1982 Stormont Assembly elections
5. Gerry Adams wins seat in West Belfast in 1983 General Election
6. Sinn Fein drops its abstentionist policy to taking Dail seats in 1986 leading to a split in Sinn Fein
7. Support for Sinn Fein increases and stabilises at around 10% until the IRA ceasefire in 1995. Rising Sinn Fein support leads to it becoming that largest Nationalist party in Northern Ireland