

## Chapter 2: Lord Brookeborough Years, 1943-1963

### Introduction

Basil Brooke (later **Lord Brookeborough**) became **Prime Minister of Northern Ireland** in **1943** and served for **20 years**, making him the longest-serving leader in Northern Ireland's history. His tenure saw the **introduction of the Welfare State**, economic challenges, sectarian divisions, and nationalist opposition, including the **IRA Border Campaign**. While he maintained **unionist dominance**, his leadership also exposed deep-seated inequalities in **housing, employment, and politics**, which would later contribute to the civil rights movement.

### 1. The Establishment of the Welfare State in Northern Ireland

#### Background: The Beveridge Report and British Welfare Reform

- Britain's post-war Labour government (Clement Attlee) introduced the Welfare State, inspired by the **Beveridge Report (1942)**.
- Aim: To combat the **"Five Giants"** - Want (poverty), Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness.
- **Key Welfare Reforms:**
  - **NHS (1948):** Free healthcare for all.
  - **Expansion of education** with free secondary schooling.
  - **Improved housing and social welfare programs.**

#### Northern Ireland's Adoption of the Welfare State

- **Attlee and Brookeborough** reached a **1946 agreement** to extend welfare benefits to Northern Ireland.
- **Terms of the agreement:**
  - **Equal taxation** in Northern Ireland and Britain.
  - Northern Ireland submitted its budget to the **British Treasury** for approval.
  - The **British government** funded welfare programs in Northern Ireland.

#### Impact on Northern Irish Society

- **Healthcare:**
  - The **Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Service** was established.
  - **Free GP, dental, and hospital care.**
  - **Tuberculosis death rate** dropped dramatically due to investment in health services.
  - Catholic voluntary hospitals like the **Mater Hospital** refused to join the NHS, fearing loss of Catholic ethos.
- **Education:**

- **Education Act (1947):** Made school compulsory until age 15.
- **Introduction of the 11-plus exam** (determined grammar school placements).
- **Increased funding for Catholic schools (50% to 65%),** though Protestant schools received better state support.
- **Housing:**
  - The **Northern Ireland Housing Trust (1945)** built 113,000 homes over 15 years.
  - Despite efforts, **Catholics faced discrimination in housing allocations,** especially in nationalist areas like Derry and Omagh.
- **Social Welfare:**
  - **Unemployment benefits, pensions, and family allowances** were introduced.
  - **Welfare payments in Northern Ireland exceeded those in the Republic of Ireland,** reinforcing unionist claims of Northern Ireland's economic advantage.

## *2. Economic Challenges and Industrial Decline*

### *Post-War Economic Problems*

- **Northern Ireland's economy struggled compared to Britain.**
- **Decline of traditional industries:**
  - **Linen industry collapsed** due to competition from synthetic materials.
  - **Shipbuilding declined** as air travel and foreign competition (Germany and Japan) grew.
- **Government Industrial Development Acts (1945-1962):**
  - Offered grants to encourage new industries.
  - **Companies like Michelin Tyres and Goodyear** set up factories, creating 20,000 jobs by 1969.
  - Despite efforts, **unemployment remained high, particularly among Catholics.**

### *Discriminatory Economic Policies*

- **West of the Bann Policy:**
  - Government favoured **Protestant-dominated areas east of the River Bann.**
  - **Catholic areas like Derry and Armagh** received little investment.
  - Led to long-term economic imbalance and nationalist resentment.
- **Unemployment (1963 figures):**
  - **Catholic unemployment: 10%+.**
  - **Protestant unemployment: 5%.**
  - **Overall rate: 9.5% (higher than Britain's 2.6%).**

### *3. The Anti-Partition League and the Ireland Act (1949)*

#### *The Irish Anti-Partition League (1945-1951)*

- Formed by nationalist MPs, led by Eddie McAteer, to campaign for a united Ireland.
- Held rallies in Northern Ireland, Britain, and the Republic.
- Received support from Seán MacBride (Irish Foreign Minister) and Éamon de Valera.

#### **The Republic of Ireland Act (1948) and the British Response**

- In 1949, Ireland officially became a republic, cutting ties with the Commonwealth.
- In response, Britain passed the Ireland Act (1949):
  - Guaranteed Northern Ireland's status in the UK unless Stormont voted otherwise.
  - Effectively gave the Unionist government a veto over Irish unity.
  - Deepened nationalist frustration.

### *4. The IRA Border Campaign (1956-1962)*

#### *Operation Harvest (IRA Campaign)*

- IRA launched attacks on police stations and military installations in Northern Ireland.
- Led to violence along the border.
- Two IRA men, Seán South and Fergal O'Hanlon, were killed in a failed attack on an RUC barracks (1956), becoming nationalist martyrs.
- The campaign failed to gain widespread support.

#### *Unionist Response*

- Brookeborough declared a state of emergency.
- Internment without trial was introduced.
- Border roads were closed or heavily patrolled by the RUC and B-Specials.

#### *End of the Campaign*

- Republic of Ireland government (Fianna Fáil) arrested IRA members, preventing cross-border escape.
- The campaign ended in 1962 with no political gains.

### *5. Brookeborough's Leadership and Legacy*

#### *Maintaining Unionist Dominance*

- Brookeborough ensured the Unionist Party's political control.
- Gerrymandering of local elections secured Protestant majorities in nationalist areas like Derry.
- Catholics had limited access to senior public sector jobs (1951: only 12% of local authority officials were Catholic).

## *Relations with the Catholic Community*

- **Brookeborough's early career:** Strongly anti-Catholic.
  - **1934 speech:** Encouraged employers not to hire Catholics.
- **Later leadership:**
  - Recognised that **welfare benefits might increase Catholic acceptance of the state.**
  - **Banned Orange Order marches in nationalist areas to reduce tensions.**
  - Still failed to **introduce significant reforms** to address Catholic grievances.

## *Brookeborough's Resignation (1963)*

- Pressured to step down due to **economic struggles and growing support for the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP).**
- Replaced by **Terence O'Neill**, who would attempt more **progressive reforms.**

## *Conclusion*

- Brookeborough strengthened Northern Ireland's position within the UK but deepened sectarian divisions.
- The Welfare State improved living conditions but failed to address economic and political discrimination.
- Unionists maintained dominance through gerrymandering and discriminatory economic policies.
- The failure of nationalist opposition (Anti-Partition League, IRA) meant partition remained secure.
- His resignation in 1963 signalled the beginning of attempts at moderate reform under Terence O'Neill.

## *Key Terms*

- **Welfare State:** System of social benefits (NHS, education, housing).
- **West of the Bann Policy:** Economic bias favouring Protestant areas.
- **Ireland Act (1949):** Guaranteed Northern Ireland's position in the UK.
- **IRA Border Campaign (1956-1962):** Armed nationalist attempt to end partition.
- **Internment:** Imprisonment without trial of suspected IRA members.