

*Ch. 6 - The Introduction of Direct Rule  
and the Sunningdale Agreement, 1972-  
1974*

# Learning Intentions

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Talks between the IRA and the British government
- The British government's attempts to restore law and order and end direct rule
- How the nationalist community lost faith in the British Army
- The political divisions within unionism
- The Sunningdale Agreement and its collapse (Case Study)

*Direct Rule Comes to  
Northern Ireland*

# Britain Introduces Direct Rule

- After suspending Stormont in March 1972, British Prime Minister Edward Heath appointed William Whitelaw, a senior member of the Conservative Party, as the first Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Whitelaw's appointment showed how seriously Heath treated the situation. This new post meant that Whitelaw filled the role of Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Governor of Northern Ireland and Minister for Home Affairs (that is, Minister for Justice) through a new Northern Ireland Office. Whitelaw's immediate goal was to restore law and order. He hoped to achieve this by winning Catholics' trust in the army and phasing out internment. Then he would begin to seek a lasting political solution, one in which the minority nationalist community would share power in the government of Northern Ireland.
- Just two days after Whitelaw took office, the former Northern Irish Prime Minister, Brian Faulkner, joined William Craig, leader of the new Ulster Vanguard Party, at a demonstration outside Stormont. There were up to 100,000 people present, which created fears that Craig and his party might actually attempt a coup. In the event, Faulkner urged the crowd to campaign peacefully for an end to direct rule and the re-establishment of the Stormont government. Even so, the rally illustrated the depth of unionist anger that Whitelaw faced.

# Key Concept: Power-Sharing

- **Power-sharing** means that the government contains members from both unionist and nationalist backgrounds. It prevents one group from holding too much influence on government, and instead allows both communities to have a voice in the running of the State. Power-sharing was first proposed under the terms of the **Sunningdale Agreement in 1973** and was later used as the basis of negotiations on the governance of Northern Ireland.

# Paramilitary Violence Continues

- Republican groups saw the end of Stormont as evidence that their campaign of terrorism was having an effect. The Provisional IRA now intensified its campaign by targeting British soldiers and buildings of economic value, in an effort to convince the British government that it was in their own interest to withdraw from Northern Ireland. The IRA's activities were partially sheltered by the 'no-go' areas of Belfast and Derry. These were nationalist districts which the army did not enter because their presence would more than likely be met by violent riots.
- Loyalists also increased their activity. Over an 18-month period between 1972 and 1973, loyalist murder squads killed over 200 Catholics, most of them innocent civilians. During this period the terrorist UDA began developing links with the army, leading to allegations of **collusion**. A number of UDA members also became involved with the security reserve, the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR).

# Key Term: Collusion

- This refers to secret cooperation between two or more individuals or groups. During the Troubles there were regular accusations by civil rights groups, nationalists and republicans that the British security forces were passing information to loyalist paramilitaries.

# Talks with the IRA Fail

- The activities of the various paramilitary groups led to the emergence of a number of campaigns aimed at bringing an end to the violence. The Central Citizens' Defence Committee petitioned both wings of the IRA to end their campaigns, without success. However, there was a public outcry in the spring of 1972 when a number of women and girls were killed in crossfire between the British Army and the Provisional IRA in April and May. After that, the Official IRA announced a truce. Whitelaw hoped he could convince the Provisional IRA to do likewise.
- In an effort to win over republicans, Whitelaw granted IRA prisoners 'Special Category status', meaning that they were treated as prisoners of war rather than criminals. The measure infuriated unionists, who believed that Whitelaw was attempting to appease the IRA. Nevertheless, the Northern Ireland Office opened talks with the Provisional IRA. Two members of Provisional Sinn Féin (the political wing of the Provisional IRA), Gerry Adams and Dáithí Ó Conaill, along with **Martin McGuinness** of the Provisional IRA, met with civil servants from Whitelaw's department on the afternoon of 20 June in a country house close to the Derry/Donegal border. The Provisional IRA subsequently announced a truce from midnight on the 26 June.

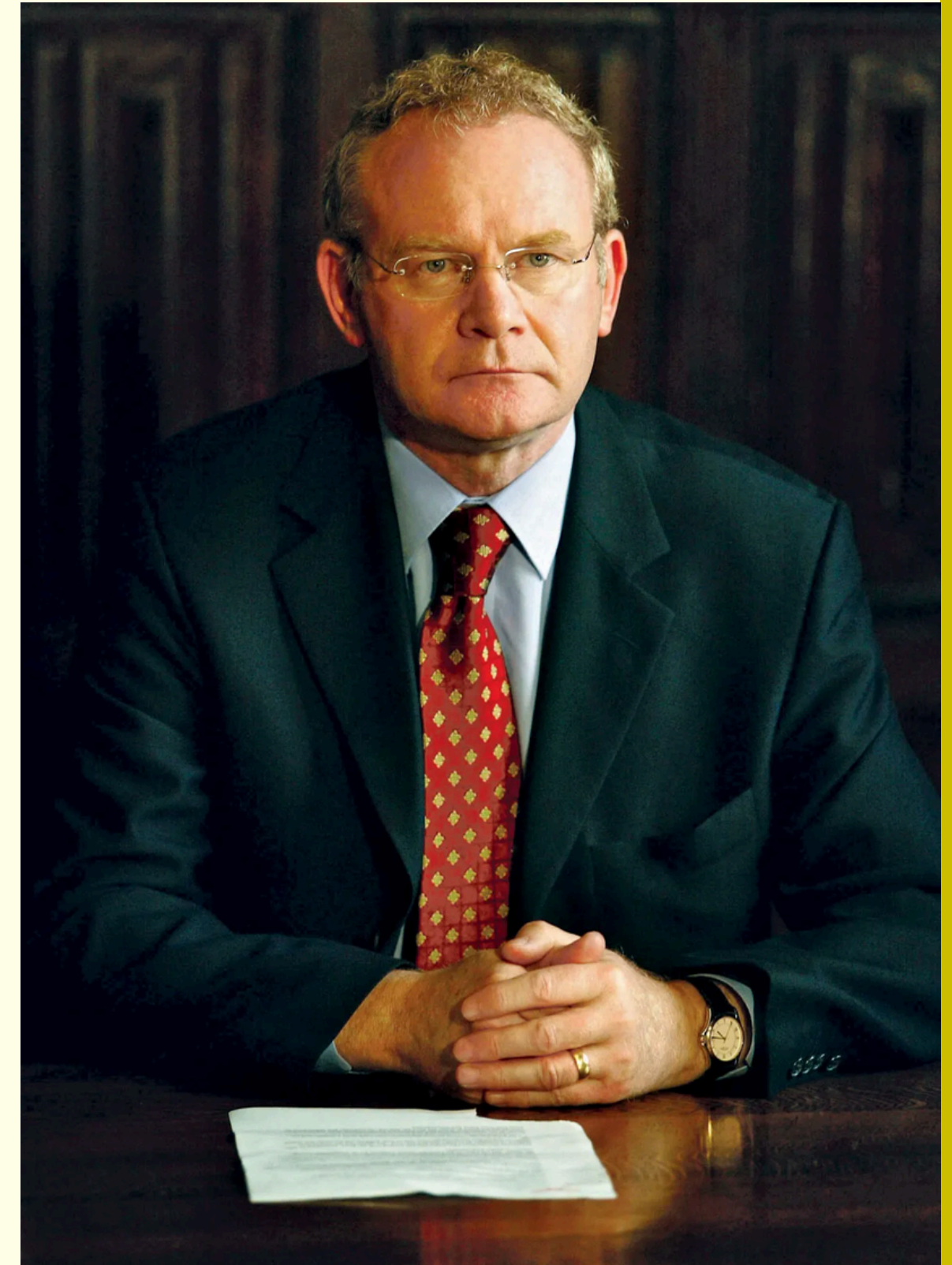


# Talks with the IRA Fail

- However, while barricades were taken down in some nationalist areas, the UDA began to fortify Protestant communities, creating their own no-go areas. On the first day of the truce, Craig announced that loyalists should storm Catholic enclaves and remove the IRA by force. Loyalist activity increased, with widespread protests and confrontations with the army.
- On 7 July a republican delegation, including Adams, travelled to London to put forward their demands for peace. They wanted:
  - an amnesty (pardon) for all prisoners arrested during the Troubles
  - the withdrawal of all British troops from Northern Ireland within three years.
- The British government could not agree to these terms and the talks reached a deadlock. Two days later the talks collapsed when violence broke out between Catholics who were being rehoused and UDA members who opposed them. As the army sought to separate the two groups they came under attack, and returned fire with CS gas and rubber bullets. At that point Provisional IRA snipers opened fire on the army and the UDA. While the talks were now over, they convinced the IRA that their strategy was working and that they could force the British out of Northern Ireland. With the truce now over, violence continued through the rest of the month and reached its climax on Friday 21 July.

# Mini-Bio: Martin McGuinness

- McGuinness joined the IRA in 1969. In 1972 at the age of 21 he was the second-in-command of the IRA in Derry. He stated that he left the IRA in 1974 and by the early 1980s he became more involved in Sinn Féin. In 1982 he was elected as a Sinn Féin MP for Derry. However, he followed Sinn Féin's abstentionist policy and refused to take his seat. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s he was accused of still having an active part in the senior leadership of the IRA. During the peace process, McGuinness played an important role acting as Sinn Féin's chief negotiator. His role included securing the decommissioning of IRA weapons. He subsequently served as the Minister for Education from 1999-2002 and the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland and the leader of Sinn Féin from 2007 until his death in 2017. He ran as a presidential candidate in the Republic of Ireland in 2011.



# Bloody Friday, 21 July 1972

- In the early hours of Friday 21 July, a young Belfast Catholic man was murdered after he answered a knock on his door. As the early morning newspapers reported the attack, tension around Belfast was high. There were a number of bomb scares during the day, which caused great disruption on the streets. Then, at 2.10 pm, a Provisional IRA bomb exploded at the Smithfield bus depot, destroying a large number of buses and causing damage to many nearby buildings.
- At 2.20 pm a bomb destroyed the Brookevale Hotel and at 2.45 pm a third bomb was detonated at the York Road railway station. Another bomb three minutes later killed two soldiers and four civilians, and injured 40 others at Oxford bus station. Twelve more bombs exploded in less than half an hour.
- At 3.15 pm, a car bomb on Cavehill Road killed two women and a 14-year-old boy. The IRA had set 23 bombs that day. Nineteen exploded, three were defused by the army and one failed to go off.
- Nine people were killed and another 130 badly injured, 77 of whom were women and children. That same day there were also a series of IRA attacks elsewhere in the North, including the bombing of the RUC headquarters in Derry city and the derailing of a train in Portadown. The viciousness of these attacks united Catholics and Protestants in anger and prompted the British government to implement a military operation against the IRA and enter the no-go areas.

# Bloody Friday, 21 July 1972



Adapted from *Modern Ireland (Fourth Edition)* by Gerard Brockie and Raymond Walsh, Gill Education.

# Operation Motorman

- The British government brought in extra battalions of troops and armoured vehicles, and by Sunday 30 July there were 22,000 soldiers in Northern Ireland. The army planned to launch Operation Motorman, a coordinated raid on the Catholic no-go areas to capture IRA suspects, weapons and bomb-making material. It became the largest British military operation on the island of Ireland since the War of Independence.
- In the early hours of Monday 31 July, armoured military vehicles tore down the barricades in Derry's Bogside and the army began to occupy central buildings and blocks of flats. There were two fatalities, when there was an exchange of gunfire between the army and republicans, and a civilian and an unarmed IRA man were killed. The army met with little resistance as they occupied Belfast's Catholic areas. The army also entered Protestant no-go areas and dismantled their barricades. Once the army had seized control of the Catholic and Protestant no-go areas, they set up a number of fortified posts in preparation for a prolonged security operation.

# Operation Motorman

- During Operation Motorman the British Army killed four people, including 15-year-old Daniel Hegarty, who was shot twice in the head at close range just yards from his home in Creggan. The operation was for the most part successful in its aims, though many IRA members had quickly become aware of what was happening and avoided arrest by crossing the border.
- Later that day, the Provisional IRA detonated three car bombs in the town of Claudy on the outskirts of Derry city. The explosions killed five Protestants and four Catholics, and left many more seriously wounded. The Claudy attack greatly damaged the IRA's cause. Both nationalists and unionists criticised its severity and indiscriminate nature.
- With the Provisional IRA now discredited and the no-go areas under military control, Whitelaw made another attempt to find a political solution to the Troubles. Whitelaw was supported by the nationalist SDLP, who had come to realise that their policy of abstaining from Stormont was unproductive, and that if they wanted to effect change in Northern Ireland, they needed to participate in political developments.

*Case Study: The Sunningdale  
Agreement and the Power-Sharing  
Executive, 1973-1974*

# Attempts to find Peace

- In the midst of the sectarian violence of 1972, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw, increased his efforts to negotiate a settlement that would see order restored and the Northern Irish government re-established. Between 25 and 28 September 1972 he held **round-table talks** in Darlington, England, with the Unionist parties, the Northern Ireland Labour Party and the Alliance Party. These talks led to the publication of a discussion paper, *The Future of Northern Ireland*. The paper set out certain guarantees before any long-term agreement was reached:
  - a. Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom for as long as a majority wanted.
  - b. Any agreement would have to employ 'power-sharing', so that the minority nationalist community would have a proportion of executive power in any future government.
  - c. An 'Irish dimension' would allow the Irish government to have an input into resolving the Ulster question.
- The paper was designed to assure unionists that their position in Northern Ireland was secure and at the same time address some of the main nationalist concerns.



# Key Terms

- **Round-table talks:** These are discussions where people meet as equals, with no one person or group heading the discussion.
- A **White Paper** is a report that puts forward recommended approaches or policies that are presented to government. A White Paper is subject to debate and not a guarantee of government action.

# The Border Poll

- Before any negotiations took place, the Northern Ireland Office held a referendum on the sovereignty of Northern Ireland. The referendum, held on 8 March 1973, asked voters whether they wished Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom or to unify with the Irish Republic. The referendum was referred to as the **Border Poll** as it asked whether or not the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic should remain in place. Whitelaw's purpose was to ease unionist fears about reunification with the South. However, the majority of nationalists boycotted the referendum in protest at internment. Over 400,000 people did not vote, the majority of them Catholic. The result almost 99% in favour of having Northern Ireland remain part of the United Kingdom - was hopelessly unbalanced.
- Less than two weeks after the referendum Whitelaw produced a White Paper, Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals, which set out his proposals for resolving the Northern Irish crisis.

# The White Paper

- The White Paper recommended the reintroduction of self-government for Northern Ireland, with a new parliament and government. It recommended that:
  - Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom by majority consent.
  - A **new assembly** (parliament) would be elected through **proportional representation** for four-year terms.
  - The assembly would elect a power-sharing **executive** (government) made up of unionist and nationalist representatives.
  - The Belfast, Dublin and London governments would discuss matters of common interest in a **Council of Ireland**.
  - Northern Ireland would continue to elect 12 MPs to Westminster.
  - The new assembly would not be permitted to introduce any discriminatory laws.
  - The head of the executive would be known as the **Chief Executive** (Prime Minister).
- Power would only be handed over to the new assembly once the Secretary of State was satisfied that the power-sharing executive had been firmly established and accepted by the people. Westminster would remain in control of Northern Ireland's security for the time being.

# Responses to the White Paper

- While the White Paper presented a series of balanced proposals, for many unionists it was seen as being weighted in favour of nationalists. It must be remembered that Whitelaw was attempting to end IRA violence and needed to reach out to the nationalist community. Brian Faulkner, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and former Prime Minister, was lukewarm towards the proposals. 'We neither reject it totally nor do we accept it totally,' he said. His party subsequently accepted Whitelaw's initiative by a narrow margin.
- However, Paisley's DUP, Craig's Vanguard Party, the Orange Order and loyalist paramilitaries rejected the White Paper completely, knowing that Northern Ireland's position in the UK would remain secure. They were not prepared to accept power sharing and they completely rejected the creation of a Council of Ireland, which would give the Republic's government a say in Northern affairs. For them, the Council of Ireland raised the fear of a united Ireland.
- Despite their abstention from the talks in Darlington in September 1972, the SDLP and moderate nationalists welcomed the White Paper. However, republican paramilitaries rejected Whitelaw's plan because partition remained. They promised to continue their military campaign to end British rule.

# Elections to the New Assembly

- Elections for a new, 78-seat assembly were held on 28 June 1973. The election caused deep divisions in the Unionist Party between those who supported the new assembly and those who opposed it.
- The anti-assembly unionist groups won 25 seats in total. Whitelaw hoped that the pro-assembly UUP, the Alliance Party and the SDLP would offer enough support to see the assembly firmly established. He mistook the SDLP's success in securing 19 seats as a sign that they had become the voice of Northern Irish Catholics. However, there was significant support for republicanism within the Catholic community, but because Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA, had not put forward any candidates for the elections, this went somewhat unnoticed. Whitelaw also underestimated the strength of the anti-assembly unionists, believing that he could eventually win them over with the support of Faulkner and his pro-assembly UUP members.
- The election had taken place before the details of either power-sharing or, more importantly, the 'Irish dimension' had been fully worked out. This would have serious consequences for how events would unfold over the following weeks, as Faulkner sought to win popular support for his stance.

1973 Assembly Election Results		
Party	Percentage of the Vote	Seats
UUP (Pro-Assembly)	25.3	24
UUP (Anti-Assembly)	10.5	7
SDLP	22.1	19
DUP	10.8	8
Vanguard	11.5	7
Alliance	9.2	8
NILP	10.6	1
West Belfast Loyalist Coalition	2.3	3
Independent Unionists	1.9	1
Others	3.8	0

# Establishing a Power-Sharing Executive

- Throughout the summer of 1973 the members of the assembly met to discuss what steps needed to be taken to form a new government. Paisley's DUP and Craig's Vanguard attempted to prevent any progress by shouting down their opponents, but the majority of members agreed that the assembly offered the best chance of resolving the political crisis.
- Before power could be transferred from Westminster to Belfast, an agreement on who would serve in the new power-sharing executive had to be reached and the Council of Ireland had to be established.
- Following protracted talks, it was announced in November that Faulkner's UUP, the SDLP and the Alliance Party had agreed to form an executive of 11 members, with Brian Faulkner as Chief Executive and Gerry Fitt as Deputy Chief Executive. There were to be six UUP members, four SDLP and one Alliance Party member. There were violent clashes at DUP and Vanguard protests against this move.
- **1973 Assembly Election Results**

1973 Assembly Election Results			
Ministry	Minister	Party	Political Position
Chief Executive	Brian Faulker	UUP	Unionist
Deputy Chief Executive	Gerry Fitt	SDLP	Nationalist
Minister of Finance	Herbert Kirk	UUP	Unionist
Minister of Commerce	John Hume	SDLP	Nationalist
Minister of Education	Basil McIvor	UUP	Unionist
Minister of Health and Social Services	Paddy Devlin	SDLP	Nationalist
Minister of Information	John Baxter	UUP	Unionist
Minister of Housing and Local Government	Austin Currie	SDLP	Nationalist
Minister of Agriculture	Leslie Morrell	UUP	Unionist
Minister of the Environment	Roy Bradford	UUP	Unionist
Legal Minister and Head of the Office of Law Reform	Oliver Napier	Alliance Party	Non-sectarian



# Establishing a Power-Sharing Executive

- The executive also agreed to establish a Council of Ireland. There were different proposals about its role.
  - Faulkner proposed that the council would be made up of members of the Northern Irish executive and the Irish government, and facilitate cooperation on issues of common interest such as transport and tourism.
  - John Hume argued that the council should not only contain members of both governments but politicians from the wider assembly and Dáil as well. He envisaged that the council would have a real input into Northern Irish affairs, including policing.
- Whitelaw accepted Hume's proposal in the belief that SDLP success would help to weaken nationalist support for the IRA. Faulkner, somewhat reluctantly, went along with Whitelaw's decision in order to progress the handover of power. On 21 November Whitelaw announced from the steps of Stormont that an agreement in principle had been reached on a Council of Ireland, and the new members of the executive posed for photographs. This was a remarkable achievement: unionist and nationalist politicians had agreed to put aside their differences and stand together as the new government of Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, welcomed the announcement, but loyalists saw it as the ultimate betrayal.
- Republicans, for their part, accused the SDLP of selling out to the British government.
- To formally conclude the negotiations, the new executive and the British and Irish governments met to agree the finer points of the arrangements. However, before the talks got under way in **Sunningdale**, England, the British Prime Minister, Heath, in an ill-advised move, recalled the experienced Whitelaw to Westminster and replaced him as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with **Francis Pym**.

## Key Personaility: Brian Faulkner (1921-1977)

- **Brian Faulkner** was born in Co. Down in 1921. His father was the owner of the Belfast Collar Company, the largest shirt manufacturer in Northern Ireland at the time. Faulkner, unlike all other Northern Irish Prime Ministers, was educated in Ireland, and studied law at Queen's University, Belfast. He gave up his studies to work full time in the family business during World War II. The fact that he did not serve in the armed forces during the war, unlike most Unionist Party members, did not endear him to his colleagues.



## Early Political Career

- In 1949 Faulkner was elected to Stormont as MP for East Down. He was appointed Minister for Home Affairs in 1959. He was successful in tackling the IRA's Border Campaign (1956-1962) and, following the resignation of Lord Brookeborough as Prime Minister in 1963, was seen as a likely candidate to succeed him. However, he lost out to Terence O'Neill.

## Opposing O'Neill

- Faulkner served under O'Neill as Minister for Commerce, and excelled in stimulating economic growth. However, Faulkner opposed O'Neill's attempts at conciliation with the nationalist community. Unionists who opposed O'Neill's conciliatory reforms towards Catholics saw Faulkner as his replacement. Faulkner resigned from the cabinet in January 1969 in protest at O'Neill's intention to reform local government, particularly the introduction of one man, one vote. When O'Neill resigned later that year, Faulkner was defeated in his bid to become Prime Minister by Chichester-Clark, who was seen as a more moderate figure.

## Prime Minister

- Serving as Minister for Development, Faulkner finally became Prime Minister after Chichester-Clark's resignation in March 1971. During his time as Prime Minister the IRA intensified their campaign. In an effort to stem the violence, Faulkner introduced internment in August 1971. The policy was a disaster. It increased nationalist grievances and won support for the republican cause. After Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, the British government lost faith in Faulkner's ability to restore order to Northern Ireland especially when he refused to phase out internment. As a result, the British government introduced direct rule, suspending the Stormont parliament.

## From Direct Rule to Sunningdale

- Faulkner was initially critical of direct rule, but he later supported the British government's efforts to establish a new assembly with a power-sharing executive. Following the Sunningdale Agreement in December 1973, Faulkner was appointed Chief Executive in the new power-sharing government.

## Collapse of Sunningdale

- He was unable to convince the Ulster Unionist Party's governing body, the Ulster Unionist Council, to support him, and stood down as party leader in January 1974. As unionist opposition to the power-sharing executive, and the proposed Council of Ireland, grew, culminating in the Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) strike, Faulkner and the rest of the executive became unable to function. They eventually resigned in May 1974. The following September Faulkner split from the Unionist Party and founded the moderate Unionist Party of Northern Ireland. Faulkner retired from politics in 1976 and died the following year in a horse-riding accident.

## Exam Questions

- Would you agree Brian Faulkner failed as a political leader? Argue your case. (2018)  
HL
- What were Brian Faulkner's strengths and weaknesses as a political leader? (2013)  
HL

# The Sunningdale Agreement

- The Sunningdale talks began on 6 December and continued for four days. During the meetings it became clear that Heath was inclined to support the SDLP's demands for the Council of Ireland to have a significant consultative role in the affairs of Northern Ireland. This would make it harder for Faulkner to convince the wider unionist community to accept the terms of the agreement, but Heath ignored this fact.
- Faulkner asked the Irish government to remove Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution, which claimed Northern Ireland as part of the Irish nation. Faulkner felt that this would put unionist fears at ease about the Irish government's involvement in the Council of Ireland. However, while some members of the Irish delegation, including the Labour Party's **Conor Cruise O'Brien**, agreed with Faulkner, they said that removing the articles would require a referendum, which was likely to fail. Therefore, the Irish government refused Faulkner's request.
- Faulkner's failure to get concessions from the Irish government and limit the role of the Council of Ireland gave his unionist opponents plenty of ammunition to criticise him. Nevertheless, on 9 December all sides signed what was known as the **Sunningdale Agreement**. Among the terms of the agreement were the following:
  - The people of the Republic, together with a minority in Northern Ireland as represented by the SDLP delegation, continued to uphold the aspiration towards a united Ireland. Any such unity could only be established by consent.

# The Sunningdale Agreement

- The Irish government solemnly declared that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland desired such a change. The Council of Ireland would be confined to representatives of the two parts of Ireland, with appropriate safeguards for the British government's financial and other interests. The Council of Ireland would be made up of two parts:
  - 1. A Council of Ministers, comprising seven members of the Northern Ireland executive and seven members of the Dáil. It would have a consultative role on developments in Northern Ireland and would work towards harmonising areas of common concern such as agriculture, industry, tourism and transport.
  - 2. A Consultative Assembly, with 30 members of the Dáil and 30 members of the assembly. This would review and advise on issues, but did not have the authority to make laws.
- Both the SDLP and Southern Irish politicians viewed the Council of Ireland as a way of achieving reunification through peaceful, democratic means. However, the Council of Ireland was to meet stiff unionist opposition.

# Opposition to Sunningdale

- Just one day after the Sunningdale Agreement was signed, loyalists announced the formation of the **Ulster Army Council** in opposition to it. The Provisional IRA also signalled its opposition to the agreement by detonating a series of bombs in London and Northern Ireland in the days and months following the agreement. For unionists there appeared to be no reason to support power-sharing if IRA violence was going to continue.



# Faulkner Resigns as Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party

- The executive met as the new government of Northern Ireland on 1 January 1974. It was immediately faced with strong and coordinated resistance from unionists, who refused to accept its existence. The **Ulster Unionist Council**, the policy-making body of the Ulster Unionist Party, voted against the Council of Ireland by 427 votes to 374. As a result of the vote, Faulkner resigned as leader of the UUP, but remained on as Chief Executive of the assembly.
- The assembly met for the first time on 22 January. The DUP obstructed the proceedings by occupying the seats designated for the members of the executive. The RUC had to forcibly remove the DUP members, including Paisley, from the chamber.

# The British General Election, February 1974

- In the run-up to the British general election in February, a number of unionist and loyalist groups formed the **United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC)**. Their candidates campaigned under the slogan 'Dublin is just a Sunningdale away'. The UUUC won 11 of the North's 12 Westminster seats. The SDLP's Gerry Fitt took the remaining seat. Pro-Faulkner Unionist candidates who supported the Sunningdale Agreement failed to win any seats. In effect, the election showed that unionist voters had completely rejected the agreement.
- Heath's Conservative Party lost the general election and the Labour Party led by **Harold Wilson** came to power. Wilson appointed **Merlyn Rees** as the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He was ill-prepared for handling the difficulties he would face. A month after being appointed as the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rees lifted the ban on the UVF as a means of encouraging its members to participate peacefully in the democratic running of Northern Ireland. However, he was forced to ban them once again when they were implicated in the Dublin and Monaghan bombings on 17 May 1974.
- The election completely undermined Faulkner's leadership, and the assembly. Faulkner attempted to keep the assembly running by delaying the implementation of the contentious Council of Ireland. He again demanded that the Irish government repeal Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution, but Cosgrave again refused. Wilson visited Northern Ireland to offer Faulkner support, and warned that there was no alternative to the Sunningdale Agreement.

# The Ulster Workers' Council Strike

- Opposition Unionists proposed a motion of no confidence in the assembly on 14 May. By now, however, events were moving beyond the political sphere. The **Ulster Workers' Council (UWC)** gave notice that if the motion was defeated, they had organised an immediate strike by Protestant workers that would shut down Northern Ireland. When the Northern Irish assembly voted in favour of supporting the power-sharing executive, the UWC sprang into action.
- The UWC had been established in 1973 as a means of protesting against the internment of loyalists. By 1974 it had gathered widespread support from Protestant workers, and while it was independent of the UDA and other loyalist groups, it often cooperated with them. The strike was the idea of **Hugh Petrie** and other members of the UWC. They meant to force the collapse of the power-sharing executive by withdrawing workers from key industries, particularly from the power stations.
- On the morning of 15 May, the first full day of the strike, many workers went to work and it was only at lunchtime that they began to walk out. As the day progressed the strike became more effective, and on the following day unionist workers successfully managed to block ships from entering or leaving the port of Lame.

# The Ulster Workers' Council Strike

- The UDA set up roadblocks to prevent supplies reaching businesses. As the strike continued over the following days, the UDA, led by **Andy Tyrrie**, and other loyalist groups set up barricades, intimidating workers trying to go to work. They also went into factories and offices and forced workers to leave. The economy was quickly damaged due to power and supply shortages. The supply of electricity was
- reduced by as much as 60% during the strike.
- On 17 May the loyalist **Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)** detonated bombs in Dublin and Monaghan, killing 33 civilians in what became the bloodiest day of the Troubles. In the wake of the attacks, Sammy Smyth, a founding member of the UDA and a prominent figure in the UWC strike, said that, *'I am very happy about the bombings in Dublin. There is a war with the Free State and now we are laughing at them.'* (Operation Banner: The British Army in Northern Ireland 1969-2007 by *Nick van der Bijl*)
- In the midst of the UWC strike, the Irish Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, delivered the following statement in the Dáil.
- Responsibility for maintaining law and order lay with Merlyn Rees: Faulkner was effectively unable to take any action. Rees was reluctant to permit the army to move against the UWC and their loyalist supporters as he feared that the situation would quickly get out of control. Matters were not helped, in nationalists' eyes, when British soldiers were seen fraternising with members of the UDA as they patrolled barricades. Rees also refused to meet with the leaders of the UWC and listen to their demands. As a result, a stalemate emerged between the UWC and the government, and the strike continued.

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- Wilson broadcast a response to the UWC strike on 25 May, ten days after the strike had started. He accused the loyalists of being anti-democratic, defying not just the assembly but also the Westminster government. He called them 'spongers' - a reference to the huge subvention Britain paid to support the North's social welfare budget. His remarks inflamed the situation further and offered no solution to the crisis.

# The Collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement

- Faulkner, desperate to secure the power-sharing executive, succeeded in convincing the SDLP and the Irish government to delay the implementation of the Council of Ireland, but it came too late. By now the UWC strike had been in action for two weeks, and Northern Ireland had ground to a standstill. When the British Army attempted to take control of petrol supplies, the UWC responded by further reducing the electricity supply, causing more chaos.
- Faced with an unsustainable situation, Faulkner and the power-sharing executive resigned on 28 May, bringing an end to the Sunningdale Agreement. The executive had been in existence for just five months. In his final statement to the Executive, Faulkner stated: *'After five months of being able to work together, Catholic and Protestant, I hope that one thing can remain - that we do not attack each other on a sectarian basis ever again'*. The day after Faulkner's resignation, the assembly was suspended. Following the collapse of the executive, the UWC called an end to the strike and most people went back to work as normal the following day.

## Reacting to the Collapse of the Power-sharing Executive

- The end of the power-sharing executive was met with widespread celebrations among the anti-agreement unionist community. They had brought down the Sunningdale Agreement and demonstrated that no political settlement could be achieved without their backing. The success of the strike put unionists in a very strong political position over the coming decades. Though fresh attempts were made to formulate a political resolution to the Troubles, nothing could be agreed without their consent.
- Nationalists were hugely disappointed. Sunningdale had offered them their first opportunity to have a real input into the running of Northern Ireland and to be treated as political equals to the unionist majority. Many nationalists and moderate unionists were critical of Rees's failure to use the army against the UWC and UDA. *'In justification of his inaction during the UWC strike, Merlyn Rees would later claim that he was faced with the naked force of Protestant nationalism, something which could not be dealt with simply by security measures'* (The Ulster Question since 1945 by James Loughlin). However, the British government's ability, and willingness, to press for a meaningful solution to the Troubles was greatly discredited in nationalists' eyes.



# *Assessing the Sunningdale Agreement*

# Reasons for Failure

- The collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement demonstrated that the unionists, led by political extremists such as Paisley and Craig and paramilitaries like the UDA, held enormous influence over developments in Northern Ireland. These unionist groups were unwilling to accept anything less than the old Stormont parliament that they knew. For them, the most contentious issue was the Council of Ireland and the Irish dimension that it promised. Their fears were reinforced by statements from Irish TDs as well as by nationalist politicians, including the SDLP's Hugh Logue when he said to a Dublin audience that the Council of Ireland was 'the vehicle that would trundle Unionists into a united Ireland.' This raised the spectre of reunification, notwithstanding the fact that the Irish and British governments had confirmed that unification could only be reached by consent.
- Meanwhile, the new Labour government had demonstrated their unwillingness to secure the progress made at Sunningdale by intervening in the UWC strike by ordering the use of force to break it up. This in turn fuelled the republican view that the Northern State was incapable of reform and that it needed to be abolished completely.
- The fact that the Sunningdale Agreement was opposed by the majority of the unionist community was an issue that was too large to overcome. With the majority of unionists opposing the Agreement, the Executive had little-to-no legitimacy and was bound to collapse.

# The Importance of the Agreement

- The Sunningdale Agreement was the first time political representatives of the nationalist and unionist communities had agreed to share power and run Northern Ireland together.
- Even though the Sunningdale Agreement failed to secure a solution to the Troubles, it established a framework for all future negotiations. This included the concept of power sharing and the inclusion of an Irish dimension in any political agreement.
- Sunningdale also helped to discredit loyalist and republican paramilitaries, which had been excluded from the negotiations, while moderates such as the SDLP and the pro-agreement unionists successfully formulated a way forward.
- The failure to secure the support of the majority of unionists meant that a future agreement would need to have all sides supporting it. Securing unionist support would become the biggest stumbling block to finding a peaceful outcome to the Troubles over the next 20 years.
- In September 1974 Faulkner and fellow supporters of the Sunningdale Agreement split from the Unionist Party and founded the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland (UPNI). The UPNI was largely unsuccessful as a political party and by the end of the 1970s it had ceased to exist. However, once Faulkner and other moderate unionists had departed, the Unionist Party became more hard-line; its remaining members were determined to prevent the establishment of a power-sharing arrangement in the future. In the meantime, until a lasting agreement could be reached between unionists and nationalists, Westminster maintained its direct rule of Northern Ireland.

# Exam Questions

- What was the importance of the Sunningdale Agreement (1973)? (2019) HL
- What were the terms of the Sunningdale Agreement and why did it come to an end? (2018) OL (similar 2017 OL)

# Recap

You should now be able to:

- Describe the attempts made to find a lasting political solution in Northern Ireland and explain why the violence resumed after a short truce
- Understand the aims of William Whitelaw's proposal for a round-table political solution
- Explain why Whitelaw's proposal of a power-sharing executive received a positive response from moderate nationalists and unionists, but was strongly opposed by the majority of unionists and loyalists
- Discuss why unionists wanted a return to Stormont and were particularly critical of the proposed Council of Ireland
- Appreciate the significance of the Sunningdale Agreement, and explain why it was brought down by the Ulster Workers' Council and Unionist politicians
- Assess the impact of the Sunningdale Agreement

# Questions: Revision

1. Who was appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in March 1972?
2. What is meant by power-sharing?
3. Why did the Official IRA call a truce in 1972 and what impact did it have?
4. What demands did Provisional Sinn Féin make during their secret talks with the British government?
5. What impact did Operation Motorman have on the relationship between the Catholic community and the British Army?
6. What guarantees were given in the paper The Future of Northern Ireland?
7. What are round-table talks?
8. What recommendations did Whitelaw's White Paper make for the future governance of Northern Ireland?
9. How did unionist groups react to the White Paper?
10. What was the Council of Ireland and why did many unionists object to it?
11. Why did Brian Faulkner resign as leader of the Unionist Party in January 1974?
12. What impact did the British general election of February 1974 have on the Sunningdale Agreement?
13. Briefly explain what the UWC strike was and the impact that it had.
14. What was the nationalist reaction to the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement?

# Higher Level Questions

1. Why was there an escalation of violence in the period up to 1972 and what was the response from the British security forces?
2. What were Brian Faulkner's strengths and weaknesses as a political leader?
3. What was power-sharing and why were a large number of unionists opposed to it?
4. What was proposed at Sunningdale and was it a complete failure?

# Ordinary Level Questions

The Sunningdale agreement and all it represents is threatened by violent men on both sides. These men play into one another's hands; both their actions are increasingly similar, said Taoiseach, Mr Cosgrave.

"They are trying to keep hate and fear alive in this country because they feed on hate and fear. They are likely to seek, in the months to come, to wear down the patience and the nerve of those who reached agreement at Sunningdale."

"I am confident they will not succeed in this desperate enterprise. They will not succeed because there is, at last, coming into being on a firm basis a working understanding of the centre, representing the united strength of the sensible elements in this island drawn from both communities and both traditions of allegiance," he said.

Source: Irish Press, December 13, 1973

1. This is an extract from the Irish Press in which Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave comments on the strong opposition of unionists and nationalists to the Sunningdale Agreement. Read it and answer the questions that follow.
  - a. According to Cosgrave, what threatens the Sunningdale Agreement?
  - b. What do those who oppose the agreement feed on?
  - c. What are those people who oppose the agreement likely to do?
  - d. Does Cosgrave believe that those who oppose the agreement will succeed?
  - e. Why did the Sunningdale Agreement fail?
2. Write a short paragraph on one of the following:
  - a. William Whitelaw
  - b. Brian Faulkner
  - c. Paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland in the period 1969-1974
  - d. Power-sharing.
3. What were the difficulties associated with implementing the Sunningdale Agreement?
4. What efforts did Brian Faulkner make to bring peace to Northern Ireland?