

*Ch. 7 - Stalemate and the  
Search for Peace, 1974-1984*

# Learning Intentions

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Political and security developments during the period 1974-1984
- The economic consequences of the Troubles
- The hunger strikes and developments in Sinn Féin
- The New Ireland Forum
- Anglo-Irish relations under Margaret Thatcher

# *Life after Sunningdale*

# Direct Rule Remains

- Following the collapse of the power-sharing executive and the Northern Ireland assembly in May 1974, the British Labour government restored direct rule through the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), headed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Merlyn Rees. Despite the collapse of the assembly and executive, Wilson's government continued the search for a political solution.
- Uniting Northern Ireland's different political groups behind one political model for the future governance of the State seemed an impossible task. Most unionists and loyalists wanted to see a return to the old Unionist-dominated Stormont parliament, without any power-sharing. The nationalist SDLP wanted power-sharing and an all-Ireland dimension. Republican and loyalist extremists threatened violent action, whichever political solution was proposed.

# The Ulster Convention

- In July 1974 the NIO published a report, The Northern Ireland Constitution, which recommended that an **Ulster Constitutional Convention** be set up to find a political consensus on the future of Northern Ireland. The proposed consensus was based on the framework of the Sunningdale Agreement, that is to create a power-sharing arrangement that would also have an Irish dimension.
- The Convention, which was simply a consultative body, was to have 78 members, elected through Northern Ireland's 12 Westminster constituencies. Unionists opposed to the NIO's intervention joined together and ran as the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC). Candidates campaigning under the UUUC banner won 46 seats, while the pro-power-sharing groups won 31.
- Anti-power-sharing unionists were in the majority once again, and in November 1975 the Convention recommended the restoration of the Stormont parliament, without a power-sharing cabinet. The British government rejected the proposal. Rees tried to have the Convention meet again to put forward further recommendations, but no Constitutional Convention Election Results, 1 May 1975 workable model was proposed. The Convention was dissolved in May 1976.
- After the failure of the Convention and the failure to win support for his Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, Faulkner quit politics in 1976. Anne Dickinson replaced him as leader of the UPNI. She was the first female political party leader in Northern Ireland's history.

Constitutional Convention Election Results, 1 May 1975

Party	Percentage of the Vote	Seats
UUP (UUUC)	25.4	19
SDLP	23.7	17
DUP (UUUC)	14.8	12
Vanguard (UUUC)	12.7	14
Alliance	9.8	8
Unionist Party of NI (UPNI)	7.7	5
NILP	1.4	1
Independent Loyalist (UUUC)	0.9	1
Independent Unionist	0.6	1

# Security in Northern Ireland

- As talks on a political solution foundered, the IRA continued its bombing campaign, aiming to force the British government to abandon Northern Ireland. To some observers it did seem that the British were growing weary of the Northern situation, and as army casualties grew, the families of soldiers, as well as the left wing of the Labour Party, pressed the government to withdraw the troops. The NIO now began a policy of '**Ulsterisation**', pushing the Ulster-based UDR and the RUC to take on the IRA and other terrorist groups rather than using the army as the frontline defence against republicans.
- Despite growing demands to withdraw their forces, the British government remained committed to Northern Ireland. However, the Troubles were costly for both the British and Irish governments. They were forced to commit large sums of money and resources into securing their borders.
- Ulsterisation did reduce the number of British soldiers killed in the Troubles, but RUC and UDR fatalities grew. Most RUC and UDR were Protestants. The IRA claimed that they were legitimate military targets in a war against the British occupation of Northern Ireland. Unionists saw their deaths as sectarian murder.
- Loyalist paramilitaries increased their attacks on Catholic civilians. From 1975 to 1979, one loyalist gang, '**The Shankill Butchers**', was responsible for kidnapping and murdering more than 25 Catholics.

# The IRA Bombing Campaign in Britain

- The IRA extended its campaign to the British mainland during the 1970s. By the mid-'70s, there were as many as two attacks per week in British towns and cities. In 1974 a group of eight IRA men from Dublin known as the 'Balcombe Street Gang' carried out a series of bombings and killings in London, including an attempted assassination of the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath.
- The IRA also deliberately bombed economic targets such as hotels and commercial property in both Northern Ireland and Britain, knowing this would have a serious effect on the British government. In the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, it is estimated that the British government paid out over £600 million to repair the damage caused by almost 10,000 explosions.
- There were major IRA bombings in **Guilford** and **Birmingham** in 1974. The bombs in Birmingham were particularly devastating: 21 people were killed and almost 200 wounded. The viciousness of these attacks caused a public outcry in Britain. Protests and strikes were held, and airport staff refused to handle flights destined for Ireland. The attacks created a wave of anti-Irish sentiment. A number of homes and businesses owned by members of the Irish community were attacked while several Irish people were subjected to physical assault on the streets. In the days that followed the Birmingham bombings, loyalists in the North killed five Catholic civilians in a series of reprisals.



# Green Fields of France - The High Kings

Well how do you do, young Willie McBride  
Do you mind if I sit here down by your graveside?  
And rest for a while 'neath the warm summer sun  
I've been walking all day and I'm nearly done  
I see by your gravestone, you were only nineteen  
When you joined the great fallen in 1916,  
I hope you died well and I hope you died clean  
Or young Willie McBride, was it slow and  
obscene?

Did they beat the drum slowly, did they play the  
fife lowly?  
Did they sound the death march as they lowered  
you down?  
And did the band play the Last Post and Chorus?  
Did the pipes play 'The Flowers of the Forest'?

Did you leave 'ere a wife or a sweetheart behind?  
In some faithful heart is your memory enshrined?  
Although you died back in 1916  
In that faithful heart are you forever nineteen?  
Or are you a stranger without even a name  
Enclosed in forever, behind a glass frame?  
In an old photograph, torn, battered and stained  
And faded to yellow in a brown leather frame

Did they beat the drum slowly, did they play the  
fife lowly?  
Did they sound the death march as they lowered  
you down?  
Did the band play the Last Post and Chorus?  
And did the pipes play 'The Flowers of the Forest'?

The sun, now it shines on the green fields of  
France  
There's a warm summer breeze; it makes the red  
poppies dance  
And look how the sun shines from under the  
clouds  
There's no gas, no barbed wire, there's no gun  
firing now

But here in this graveyard, it's still no man's land  
The countless white crosses stand mute in the  
sand  
To man's blind indifference to his fellow man  
To a whole generation that were butchered and  
damned

Did they beat the drum slowly, did they play the  
fife lowly?  
Did they sound the death march as they lowered  
you down?  
And did the band play the Last Post and Chorus?  
Did the pipes play 'The Flowers of the Forest'?

Ah, young Willie McBride, I can't help wonder why:  
Do those that lie here know, why did they die?  
And did they believe when they answered the call  
Did they really believe that this war would end  
wars?

Well, the sorrow, the suffering, the glory, the pain  
The killing and dying were all done in vain  
For young Willie McBride, it all happened again  
And again and again and again and again

Did they beat the drum slowly, did they play the  
fife lowly?  
Did they sound the death march as they lowered  
you down?  
And did the band play the Last Post and Chorus?  
Did the pipes play 'The Flowers of the Forest'?

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# Green Fields of France - The High Kings

Written in **1976** by **Eric Bogle**, a **Scottish-Australian songwriter**. The **song**, also known as "**No Man's Land**" or "**Willie McBride**", is a **lament** about the **loss** and **futility of war**. It tells the **story** of a **visitor** who comes across a **grave** in a **WWI cemetery in France**. The **grave** belongs to a **young soldier** named **Willie McBride**, who **died** in **1916** at the **age of 19**. Bogle's **decision** to choose an **Irish name**, "Willie McBride", was **deliberate**. During the **time** of the **song's composition**, the **Troubles** – a **violent** and **complex political conflict** in **Northern Ireland** – was at its **height**. **Anti-Irish sentiment** was **pervasive** in parts of the **UK**, and Bogle wanted to **remind listeners** of the **sacrifices** the **Irish** had made during **WWI**, in an **attempt** to **foster understanding** and **compassion** amidst the **contemporary conflict**.

Through its **poignant lyrics**, the **song contemplates** the **reasons Willie** might have gone to war, imagining perhaps he **loved a sweetheart**, or was it **purely for king and country**. It **ponders** the **stark contrast** between the **jubilant send-off young soldiers received** and the **tragic reality of their deaths**. The **chorus**, which talks about the "**green fields of France**", **alludes** to the **tragic irony** that the **once bloody battlefields of WWI**, where **countless young men died**, have now **returned** to **peaceful fields**.

# Green Fields of France - The High Kings

The song has been covered by numerous artists and has become an **anthem for peace** and a **poignant reminder** of the **costs of war**. It has **particular resonance** for the **Irish**, many of whom **fought in WWI under British command** and **faced complex issues of identity and loyalty**, especially during the **aftermath of the Easter Rising**. While **not exclusively about the Irish experience in WWI**, the song does resonate with the **story of many Irish soldiers**. Their **participation in the war** was for a long time a **controversial** and often **overlooked part of Irish history**, as **Ireland itself** was undergoing **significant political change** and the **struggle for independence** during the **same period**.

# The IRA Bombing Campaign in Britain

- In the immediate aftermath of the Birmingham bombings, six Irish men were detained and charged with carrying out the attack. In 1975 they were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. These men, known as the **Birmingham Six**, were exonerated in 1991, when it was found that the authorities had fabricated evidence, and suppressed other evidence, to secure the men's convictions. Similarly, four men, known as the **Guildford Four**, were fully exonerated of the Guildford bombings and were released in 1989 having served 15 years in prison.
- In response to the Birmingham pub bombings and other attacks, the British government introduced the **Prevention of Terrorism Act** in 1974. This gave the authorities greater powers, such as a seven-day period to question terrorist suspects before they had to be charged, as well as mandatory sentences for anyone found guilty of membership of a 'proscribed' (illegal) organisation. Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974, the IRA became the first proscribed organisation.

# Roy Mason Replaces Merlyn Rees

- In September 1976, **Roy Mason** took over as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Mason was determined to take charge of the security situation. He said, 'Ulster has had enough of initiatives, White Papers and legislation for the time being, and now needed to be governed firmly and fairly.' Mason's goal was to stamp out republican activity and restore respect for law and order in Northern Ireland.
- Mason's predecessor, Merlyn Rees, had withdrawn republican prisoners' Special Category Status in March 1976. IRA prisoners were no longer treated as prisoners of war and instead were treated as ordinary criminals. The prisoners began a series of protests, refusing to wear prison uniforms and instead covering themselves in blankets. In 1978 the prisoners escalated the situation by beginning a dirty protest, which involved spreading excrement on prison cell walls. Despite the protests, Mason refused to reintroduce Special Category Status.
- During his time in Northern Ireland Mason also authorised the British military, including the SAS (a special forces unit of the British Army) to take a tougher approach to the IRA. By 1978 it was clear that Mason's tough measures were having an impact on the numbers killed during the Troubles.

# Roy Mason Replaces Merlyn Rees

- Not only did Mason succeed in reducing numbers killed by taking a tough stance against the IRA, he also refused to allow loyalists and unionists to dictate events. Within a few months of Mason taking over the Northern Ireland Office, Ian Paisley established the **United Unionist Action Council** to demand that the British government follow the Ulster Convention's proposal to re-establish the Stormont parliament. If the government refused, Paisley and his supporters threatened to hold a strike.
- Mason refused to give in to Paisley's threat, and when a strike was called for 2 May 1977, he called in the army and RUC to break it up and secure the power stations. Very quickly the strike collapsed due to a combination of Mason's actions and the failure of Paisley to win support for his activities.

Deaths as a Result of the Conflict in Northern Ireland, 1976-1979

Year	British Security	Republican Paramilitary	Loyalist Paramilitary	Irish Security	Civilian	Total
1976	61	17	9	1	207	295
1977	50	6	6	0	49	111
1978	35	7	0	0	40	82
1979	76	7	0	0	38	121

# The Peace Movement

- In 1976 two women, Protestant **Betty Williams** and Catholic **Máiread Corrigan**, along with a number of others, founded the **Community of Peace People** as a grassroots (general public) organisation to protest against the violence in Northern Ireland. Their campaign was sparked off when three of
- Mairead Corrigan's sister's children were killed by an out of control car driven by an IRA member who had been shot dead at the wheel. The purpose of the organisation was set out in one of its first public meetings:
  - *We have a simple message to the world from this movement for peace. We want to live and love and build a just and peaceful society.*
  - *We want for our children, as we want for ourselves, our lives at home, at work, and at play to be lives of joy and peace.*
  - *We reject the use of the bomb and the bullet and all the techniques of violence.*
  - *We dedicate ourselves to working with our neighbours, near and far, day in and day out, to build that peaceful society in which the tragedies we have known are a bad memory and a continuing warning.*
- Tens of thousands attended marches organised by the Peace People, demonstrating the broad desire for peace in Northern Ireland, and in the Irish Republic and abroad. Corrigan and Williams were awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** in 1977. However, the Peace People failed to win over the extremists, and the violence continued.



# The North's Economy under Mason

- In 1976 the Department of Commerce issued the Quigley Report, which stated that *"Ireland economy is in serious difficulty and if no serious measures are taken, the outlook is grim."* The report put forward a number of proposals to strengthen economic and industrial development.
- Mason based his economic policy on the Quigley Report, believing that if he could develop the North's economy, this would strengthen support for direct rule and at the same time weaken support for the paramilitaries. He offered further government spending to protect the North's industries, including the continuation of funds to Harland and Wolff to allow the company to modernise, despite the fact that it had received no orders for ships in 1975 or 1976.
- The British government also passed the **Fair Employment Act** in 1976, which made it illegal for companies to discriminate against people based on their religious or political beliefs. This was a welcome development in Northern Ireland. But despite government intervention, Mason was unable to reduce unemployment, which by the 1980s reached over 19%. As the Northern economy continued to decline, Northern Ireland's leaders came under pressure once more to find a way of ending the political stalemate, which was at the very least a brake on progress and development.

## Exam Question

- Write a paragraph on the impact of the Troubles on the economy of Northern Ireland. (2013) OL

Unemployment in Northern Ireland, 1971-1984			
	1971 %	1981 %	1983-84 %
<b>Male</b>			
<b>Catholic</b>	17.3	30.2	35
<b>Non-Catholic</b>	6.6	12.4	15
<b>AVERAGE</b>	10.3	19.1	24
<b>For comparison: GB</b>	5.5	11.3	14
<b>Female</b>			
<b>Catholic</b>	7.0	17.1	17
<b>Non-Catholic</b>	3.6	9.6	11
<b>AVERAGE</b>	4.7	12.6	10
<b>For comparison: GB</b>	4.7	7.4	10

# Political Development

- Mason's time as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, 1976-1979, was quite successful in reducing the numbers killed by the violence. However, he did not succeed in securing a political solution to the Troubles. Mason largely maintained the status quo, which contributed to a sense of stagnation through the 1970s. He cannot bear all the blame for the lack of political progress, though.
- The Conservative and Labour parties had agreed to maintain a **bi-partisan approach** on Northern Ireland, supporting one another's attempts at political reform. However, this approach ended in 1977 when the Conservative politician, **Airey Neave**, announced that his party would not support Mason's plan to establish a new power-sharing executive. Neave announced that the Conservatives were instead in favour of restoring a local government system, which was largely in keeping with the Ulster Unionist Party's demands.
- While this meant that there was no political movement on ending direct rule during the period, there were some significant developments within the unionist and nationalist parties.

# Unionist Politics

- The political parties involved in the UUUC had the largest political influence in Northern Ireland. Craig's Vanguard Party largely disbanded in 1977 and he and some of his supporters re-joined the UUP. This left the DUP and the UUP as the two largest unionist parties.
- Paisley's DUP won support from unionists who wished to see Stormont re-established. They were completely opposed to power-sharing. The UUP, led by **Harry West**, was divided; some members wanted to keep direct rule while others wanted to see Stormont restored. The divisions in the UUP allowed the DUP to overshadow it as the strongest unionist party in Northern Ireland. In 1979 Paisley won the most votes of any candidate in the European Parliament elections. The two other seats available were filled by John Hume of the SDLP and John Taylor of the UUP.
- **James Molyneaux** became the new leader of the UUP in 1979. Molyneaux favoured an **integrationist** approach-that is, he favoured the idea of Northern Ireland continuing to be directly ruled by Westminster.
- **James Callaghan** had taken over as British Prime Minister following the resignation of Harold Wilson in 1976. Callaghan's Labour government had just a slight majority, and in an effort to secure unionist politicians' support, he promised to increase Northern Ireland's representation in Westminster from 12 MPs to 17. Beyond this, he was reluctant to get involved in Northern Irish affairs because he was preoccupied by Britain's economic difficulties.

# Developments in the Republican Movement

- By 1978 members of the republican movement were beginning to accept that their military campaign was not going to succeed in the short term and that direct rule was going to remain in place for the foreseeable future. One of the key figures responsible for expanding republican tactics **was Gerry Adams** of Sinn Féin. He had been interned from 1973 to 1976. During this time he argued that the republican movement needed to become more involved in political developments.
- By 1976 the Provisional IRA had begun to reorganise itself under a new Northern Command, separate from Dublin. IRA volunteers were organised in three- to five-person 'cells' - small units of men and women who carried out the IRA's paramilitary activities. These cells amounted to approximately 300 members, who were supported by around 3,000 active sympathisers. The Provisional IRA had developed a new strategy known as the '**Long War**', a war of attrition with the goal of getting the British public to put pressure on their government to withdraw from Northern Ireland. The Long War remained the tactic pursued by the IRA for the duration of the Troubles. During this time the IRA tried to ensure their control of Catholic areas through a mixture of community activism and fear - they issued punishment beatings and murdered those they claimed were collaborating with the British authorities.

# Developments in the Republican Movement

- At the same time as the Provisional IRA was reorganising, Adams was promoting the idea of Sinn Féin getting more involved in economic and social issues that concerned working-class Catholics. Adams was elected vice-president of Sinn Féin in 1978. He proposed that it was not enough for the Provisional IRA to continue its terrorist campaign without having a strong political party to help legitimise the republican cause and put political pressure on the British government.
- *'The tactic of armed struggle is of primary importance because it provides a vital cutting edge. Without it, the issue of Ireland would not even be an issue. So, in effect, the armed struggle becomes armed propaganda.'* (Free Ireland: Towards a Lasting Peace by Gerry Adams)

# Hume Becomes Leader of the SDLP

- In 1979 Gerry Fitt resigned as leader of the SDLP. He had become frustrated with the party's growing nationalist outlook. A dedicated socialist, he believed that the SDLP had become detached from its original purpose, even though the party had always had nationalist and socialist members. John Hume took over as party leader and later that year was elected a Member of the European Parliament (MEP). As an MEP he joined the Social Democrat bloc in the European Parliament, developing links with influential politicians to gain support for a political solution in Northern Ireland.

# Margaret Thatcher Becomes British Prime Minister

- In May 1979 the Conservative Party led by Margaret Thatcher won the British general election with a majority of 44 seats. Thatcher and her new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, **Humphrey Atkins**, pursued the same policies as her predecessor. Thatcher's tough stance on the IRA was understandable, given that the **Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)** had assassinated the Conservative Party spokesman on Northern Ireland, Airey Neave, just a few weeks before the election. Neave was a personal friend of Thatcher and both had stated that their sympathies lay with the unionists.

## The Warrenpoint Ambush and the Killing of Lord Mountbatten

- On 27 August 1979 the Provisional IRA detonated a roadside bomb at Warrenpoint in Co. Down as a British Army convoy passed by. Six soldiers were killed instantly. When reinforcements arrived to secure the area, a second bomb was detonated, killing 12 more soldiers, bringing the death toll to 18. It was the deadliest attack on British forces during the Troubles.
- On the same day, the Provisional IRA set of a bomb on a fishing boat carrying **Lord Louis Mountbatten**, who was on holiday in Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo. Four people, including a 15-year- old Irish boy, were killed in the explosion. Mountbatten, a cousin to Queen Elizabeth II and uncle to Prince Philip, was the only member of the British royal family to be murdered during the Troubles.
- The attacks of 27 August were seen as a huge propaganda victory for the IRA, but led to more sectarian violence in the North as loyalists attacked Catholics in revenge. The British government responded by increasing the numbers in the RUC and reorganising their intelligence network. Thatcher also came under pressure to reintroduce internment, but she refused.



# Pope John Paul II Appeals for Peace

- In September 1979 **Pope John Paul II** visited the Irish Republic. At a Mass in Drogheda attended by thousands of Northern Irish Catholics, he addressed the congregation, appealing for peace. 'On my knees I beg you to turn away from the paths of violence and return to the ways of peace.' The Irish people welcomed the Pope's sentiments, but the Provisional IRA refused to call a halt to its campaign.

# Haughey Meets with Thatcher

- In May 1980 the Taoiseach, Charles J. Haughey, travelled to London to hold talks with Prime Minister Thatcher. Haughey, who had been linked with the 'Arms Crisis' in 1970, was strongly opposed to partition. This early meeting with Thatcher was quite productive. Haughey convinced Thatcher that any resolution on Northern Ireland would require agreement between the British and Irish governments. The following December the two leaders met again in Dublin for further talks.
- After this second round of talks, Haughey claimed that Thatcher had agreed to discuss ending partition, but she was quick to deny these claims. More than that, Haughey's comments badly damaged Thatcher's trust in him, and further progress was delayed. Anglo-Irish relations came under more strain when the IRA prisoners in the Maze Prison began a hunger strike.
- In 1976 Merlyn Rees announced the phasing out of **Special Criminal Status (SCS)**. SCS had allowed IRA prisoners special privileges such as not having to wear prison uniforms. The ending of SCS led to a series of protests by IRA prisoners. The IRA regarded themselves as political prisoners and wanted to be treated as such.

# Haughey Meets with Thatcher

- They wanted to be allowed wear their own clothes.
- They did not want to be made to do regular prison work.
- They did not want to be required to empty their own toilets -known as slopping out.
- As a result of losing SCS, the IRA held the following protests:
  - **Blanket protest** - they refused to wear their prison uniforms and as a result had all their items confiscated from their cells except their blankets.
  - **Dirty protest** - they refused to clean themselves or their cells. They also smeared their cell walls with their faeces. Up to 300 prisoners were involved in this protest.
  - **Hunger Strike** - in October 1980 a number of prisoners went on hunger strike demanding the restoration of a number of SCS measures, including the right to wear their own clothes. The strike ended after 53 days when their demands were met.
- Thatcher's government continued to ignore the IRA prisoners' demands for political status.

# The H-Block Hunger Strikes

- Thatcher's government continued to ignore the IRA prison protests, which had begun in 1976. In March 1981, led by **Bobby Sands**, the prisoners embarked on a second hunger strike demanding Special Category, or political, status. The prisoners knew that they might die on hunger strike, and decided to stagger the protest for maximum impact. A new prisoner went on hunger strike every two weeks, starting on 1 March.
- When the MP for Fermanagh-Tyrone died on 6 March, Sinn Féin asked Sands to contest the seat so as to publicise the protest. Sands won the election on 9 April, demonstrating to nationalists that a unified approach could be successful. Now a Westminster MP, Sands maintained his hunger strike and died on 5 May. His death served as a huge **propaganda** victory for the republican cause by highlighting the 'inhumanity' of the British government. Over 100,000 people attended his funeral.
- The hunger strikes caused a huge public outcry at home and abroad and led to widespread unrest in the North. The period of the hunger strikes was one of the bloodiest of the Troubles, with 61 people killed, including 34 civilians. Many political and religious figures, including Pope John Paul II, called for the strike to end. Ten IRA prisoners died during the seven-month-long campaign, including Ciaran Doherty, who was elected to the Dáil in June 1981. The hunger strikes were called off in October 1981.

# The H-Block Hunger Strikes

- Unionists were happy that Thatcher had refused to negotiate with the hunger strikers, and accused moderate nationalists who called on the government to intervene of being republican sympathisers. Thatcher became a hate figure for republicans, and the IRA would later try to assassinate her when they bombed the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the Conservative Party conference in 1984.
- In the days following the hunger strikes the authorities offered IRA prisoners a number of the concessions they had been demanding, including the right to wear their own clothes instead of prison uniforms. By 1983 IRA prisoners had been informally granted all their original demands, but the British government never formally acknowledged them as political prisoners.
- In the aftermath of the hunger strikes, Sinn Féin and the IRA adopted a more politicised strategy, commonly referred to as the '**Armalite and ballot box strategy**'. The tactic was to increase Sinn Féin's political representation in both the North and South, while the IRA continued its campaign of violent attacks on the State.
- Hunger strike candidates secured two seats in the 1981 general election in the South. In the North the strikes won new support for Sinn Féin at the cost of the SDLP. In the May 1983 local elections, Provisional Sinn Féin won 35% of the nationalist vote, threatening to overtake the SDLP as the largest nationalist party in the North.
- The Provisional IRA became more active, shattering the progress that had been made under Roy Mason. In 1980, 80 people were killed in the Troubles. In 1981 and 1982 this figure rose to over 110 each year.
- The hunger strikes also put pressure on the British government's bi-partisan approach. The Labour Party announced that it favoured a united Ireland with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.
- The strikes also put pressure on the Irish government to ensure that nationalists in the North won fairer treatment.

# Key Concept: Propaganda

- **Propaganda** is the distribution of information in such a way as to influence the public towards a cause or view. For example, propaganda might seek to highlight the failings of a rival political party, or even exaggerate them. Alternatively, it might seek to strengthen a party by highlighting or exaggerating its successes.
- Propaganda played a large part in Northern Ireland as political, religious and terrorist groups sought to influence public opinion.

# Re-establishing the Assembly

- New plans for an assembly were put on hold during the hunger strikes, but in 1982 the new Secretary of State, **James Prior**, published a White Paper called Northern Ireland: A Framework for Devolution. The paper proposed to establish a 78-seat assembly headed by a 13-member executive that would initially act as a consultative body on behalf of the Secretary of State. It was envisaged that more powers would be given to the assembly over time, a process referred to as 'rolling devolution'.
- Elections for the new assembly were held in October 1982. The UUP and DUP won 47 seats between them. Sinn Féin ran for the first time and won five seats, while the SDLP won 14 and the Alliance Party ten. Due to subsequent developments, including the **1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement**, the assembly never proved effective and no further power was handed over to it. For the most part the SDLP and Sinn Féin refused to take their seats in protest at the assembly's continuing failure to make any progress. The assembly was finally dissolved in 1986. In the meantime, the growth of Sinn Féin prompted the Irish government to pursue a new political strategy aimed at demonstrating that constitutional politics could generate results.

# The New Ireland Forum

- The Republic's new Taoiseach, Fine Gael's **Garret FitzGerald**, launched an initiative, the **New Ireland Forum (NIF)**, in early 1983. The purpose of the Forum was to open talks between constitutional political parties (those who did not promote the use of violence) to find a way forward politically. The Forum was also open to the British and Northern Irish parties, and to the public. However, the Unionist Party and Sinn Féin did not take part in the discussions, which they dismissed as a *'talking shop'*.
- The first round of talks took place in Dublin with a meeting between the three largest parties, Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Labour, along with the SDLP. FitzGerald worked closely with **John Hume**. The Forum met almost 100 times in public and private. It considered a large range of recommendations, including some by individual unionists who attended the meetings.
- These recommendations formed the basis of a final report, which outlined a number of possible political solutions. Launched on 2 May 1984, the Forum report acknowledged both the unionist identity and the fears unionists had in relation to a united Ireland. With this understanding, the report recommended three options:
  - 1. The creation of a **Unitary State**, which would include all 32 counties.
  - 2. The establishment of a **Federal/Confederal State**, in which North and South had their own political and administrative powers. Both States would be linked by an all-Ireland framework (constitution). This would be non-denominational and would safeguard individual and minority rights'.
  - 3. A **Joint Authority**, in which the British and Irish governments would share the responsibility of governing Northern Ireland and represent the divided allegiances of the people of the North. This would allow for a local assembly, but it would be under the direct control of the British and Irish governments.



# The New Ireland Forum

- After the report was published, Fianna Fáil's Charles Haughey announced that his party would only support the first option: a 32-county unitary state. Fine Gael and the Labour Party were more in favour of pursuing the federal option.
- The North's unionist majority were quick to condemn the New Ireland Forum's proposals. They saw the Forum as a means of creating a united Ireland, and they were hostile towards giving the Irish government a role in the governance of Northern Ireland. The republican response to the New Ireland Forum was made clear on 12 October 1984 when the IRA detonated a bomb at the Grand Hotel in Brighton, where the Conservative Party conference was being held. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher narrowly avoided injury. Five people, including two Conservative Party members, were killed and a further 31 were injured.
- Despite being the target of an IRA attack, Thatcher continued to hold talks with the Irish government. However, following a meeting between the British and Irish governments in November 1984, a journalist asked Thatcher if she had ruled out the Forum report's proposals. In what became known as the 'Out, Out, Out' speech, Thatcher replied:
  - *I have made it quite clear ... a unified Ireland was one solution. That is out. A second solution was confederation of two States. That is out. A third solution was joint authority. That is out. That is a derogation from sovereignty. We made that quite clear when the report was published.*
  - *Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. She is part of the United Kingdom because that is the wish of the majority of her citizens. The majority wish to stay part of the United Kingdom.*
  - *The Forum Report indicated that they realised that any change in the status of Northern Ireland could only come about by the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, so we are dealing with a situation where Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom because the majority of her people wish to be part of the United Kingdom, and we have a minority community. That is the situation we are presented with.*

# Recap

You should now be able to:

- Appreciate that political developments in Northern Ireland reached an impasse when the Sunningdale Agreement was defeated
- Recognise that one of the most significant developments of this time was the British government's crackdown on the IRA
- Understand how changing attitudes among British, Irish and moderate nationalist parties in the North led to talks aimed at resolving the Troubles
- Explain how improved Anglo-Irish relations led to the recommendations of the New Ireland Forum
- Understand that, despite Thatcher's apparent rejection of the Forum's recommendations, both governments remained dedicated to finding a political solution in Northern Ireland, and continued to hold private talks

# Questions: Revision

1. What was the Ulster Convention?
2. What were the successes and failures of the Ulster Convention?
3. What was Ulsterisation?
4. What impact did Roy Mason's period as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have on the activity of the IRA?
5. Who were the Peace People?
6. Briefly outline the economic consequences of the Troubles.
7. What steps did Roy Mason take to improve Northern Ireland's economy?
8. What idea did James Molyneaux favour as a solution to the Troubles?
9. What was the Long War?
10. Why did Gerry Adams want Sinn Féin to become more involved in politics in the late 1970s?
11. Why is 27 August 1979 regarded as one of the bloodiest days of the Troubles?
12. Why did IRA prisoners go on hunger strike in 1981?
13. What was the New Ireland Forum and what was Margaret Thatcher's response to it?

# Higher Level Questions

1. What contribution did Roy Mason make to Northern Irish affairs?
2. What internal and external factors affected Northern Ireland's economy during the 1970s?
3. Why were unionists opposed to power-sharing, and what developments took place in unionism in the period 1974-1984?
4. What impact did Margaret Thatcher's election as Prime Minister have on Anglo-Irish relations during the period 1979-1984?

# Ordinary Level Questions

1. Write a short paragraph on one of the following:
  - a. The Ulster convention
  - b. The Community of Peace People
  - c. The New Ireland Forum
  - d. The H-Block Hunger Strikes.
2. Discuss the IRA bombing campaign in Britain and its consequences.
3. What were the causes and consequences of the hunger strikes?