Ch. 5- DIRECT RULE COMES TO NORTHERN IRELAND

Ch. 5- Direct Rule Comes to Northern Ireland

Learning Intentions

In this chapter you will learn about:

- William Whitelaw as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
- Continuing IRA violence and the growth of loyalist paramilitaries
- Reaction to the Troubles in the Irish Republic
- The Sunningdale Agreement and the Power-Sharing Executive, 1973-4 (Case Study)

5.1 CASE STUDY THE EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS, 1932

Northern Ireland After World War II

William Whitelaw Becomes Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

When Edward Heath's Conservative Government suspended the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland in March 1972, a member of the British Cabinet known as the Secretary of State took over the running of the province. The first Secretary of State appointed under direct rule was a leading member of the Conservative Party, William Whitelaw. Along with two junior ministers, he was responsible for all the government departments at Stormont. His greatest challenge, however, was dealing with the continuing violence from both republican and loyalist sources.

Unionist fury at the abolition of Stormont led to widespread protests and an increase in loyalist violence. Three days after Whitelaw arrived to take up his position in Belfast, unionists held a huge protest rally at Stormont. A crowd of over 100,000 was addressed by Brian Faulkner and William Craig. They made defiant speeches and condemned the British Government for introducing direct rule. Some people feared that Craig would use his extreme Vanguard Movement to try to take control of Northern Ireland.

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

William Whitelaw Becomes Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

However, Faulkner urged the crowd to confine themselves to peaceful protest. Nevertheless, the new loyalist paramilitary group, the UDA, built up its strength throughout 1972. As well as engaging in bomb attacks and shooting Catholic civilians, it held marches in Belfast with its members wearing masks and paramilitary uniforms.

In an effort to regain the support of the Protestant community, Whitelaw attempted to stop the violence and sent the British Army and the RUC into Catholic 'no go' areas. These were places like the Bogside in Derry and parts of west Belfast where the security forces did not venture and which appeared to be under the control of republican paramilitaries.

To win the approval of the Catholic community, the new Secretary of State hoped to control the actions of the British Army and eventually put an end to internment Whitelaw's chances of making without trial. However, progress would ultimately depend on the reactions of the paramilitaries.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What arrangements were made for the government of Northern Ireland following the fall of Stormont?
2. How did unionists react to the introduction of direct rule?
3. What efforts did William Whitelaw make to regain the support of the Protestant community?

The IRA Campaign Continues

Although the Provisional IRA was pleased with the fall of the Stormont Government and claimed credit for bringing it about, the organisation continued with its campaign of violence. Its aim was the complete withdrawal of the British army from Northern Ireland, and direct rule from London was totally rejected by its members. Following the imposition of direct rule, leading members of the Provisional IRA met in the Irish Republic and issued a statement which declared that 'the war goes on'. They stepped up their bombing campaign and, on 14 April 1972, thirty bombs exploded in various parts of Northern Ireland.

In reaction to the rising level of violence, groups of concerned citizens pleaded for an end to the IRA campaign. These included a peace group known as Women Together and the Belfast-based Central Citizens' Defence Committee, which collected 50,000 signatures on a petition calling on both the Official and Provisional IRA to end their campaigns. Although the Provisionals flatly refused, on 29 May the Official IRA announced a ceasefire. Whitelaw then attempted to see if he could persuade the Provisional IRA to do likewise.

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

Whitelaw Meets the IRA

In preparing the ground to bring about a ceasefire by the Provisional IRA, Whitelaw had removed the ban on marches and had released hundreds of internees. He then used members of the SDLP as mediators to establish contact with the Provisionals. John Hume met leading members of the Provisional IRA to discuss the possibility of a ceasefire.

On 20 June 1972 representatives of Whitelaw met with two leading republicans, Gerry Adams and Dáithí Ó Conaill. Two days later it was announced that the Provisional IRA would begin a ceasefire on 26 June. However, shootings and bombings continued right up to the time of the agreed ceasefire.

Almost two weeks into the ceasefire, on 7 July, a number of leading members of the Provisional IRA met Whitelaw in London for negotiations. The IRA delegation, which was led by the movement's Chief of Staff, Seán Mac Stiofáin, laid down conditions that the British side found impossible to meet. Mac Stiofáin insisted that all IRA prisoners be released and that the British would promise to leave Northern Ireland by 1 January 1975. Whitelaw realised that there was no prospect of reaching an agreement with the Provisional IRA.

Two days after the talks in London, the ceasefire collapsed when fighting broke out between the Provisionals and the British Army at Andersonstown in west Belfast.

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

Bloody Friday: Belfast, 21 July 1972

One of the worst atrocities during the Troubles was to take place in Belfast on Friday, 21 July 1972. In the space of an hour during the afternoon, twenty bombs were detonated by the Provisional IRA in the city centre. There were scenes of horrific carnage and suffering. Men, women and children were victims of these indiscriminate attacks. Nine people were killed and over 130 seriously injured.

Police and rescue workers had to carry plastic bags to recover the scattered remains of the dead. Ambulance crews and fire brigade workers risked their lives and ignored the possible existence of further bombs in order to help the injured and to recover the remains of the dead.

As night fell on the city, prolonged gun battles took place between the Provisional IRA and the British Army. One of the immediate results of the horrific slaughter of Bloody Friday was the decision by Whitelaw to allow the British Army to enter the 'no go' areas in Northern Ireland.

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

Operation Motorman

On 31 July 1972 the British Army launched Operation Motorman, an exercise designed to put an end to 'no go' areas. Despite the fears of Prime Minister Edward Heath that there would be hundreds of casualties, the operation went very smoothly.

The army was careful to include Protestant 'no go' areas as well as Catholic ones. Huge special tanks demolished barricades without any difficulty in areas like the Bogside in Derry. Apart from the deaths of two people who were shot in Derry, Operation Motorman was a success from the British Government's point of view.

The ending of 'no go' areas was a serious blow to the Provisional IRA and to loyalist paramilitaries. With the British Army patrolling all areas, they found it more difficult to hide weapons and explosives and to organise attacks. However, both groups of paramilitaries were far from defeated and they continued their campaigns of violence in the years and months ahead.

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

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did the IRA react to the imposition of direct rule?
2. What steps were taken by William Whitelaw to bring about a ceasefire by the Provisional IRA?
3. Was the meeting between William Whitelaw and the Provisional IRA successful? Explain your answer.
4. What happened on Bloody Friday?
5. What was Operation Motorman?

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

The Threat from Loyalists

Loyalist violence continued to pose a serious challenge for the British Government. Paramilitary groups like the UVF and the UDA had begun a campaign of regular assassinations of innocent Catholics in April 1972. Regular battles took place between the British Army and loyalist gunmen in areas like the Shankill Road in west Belfast. Sometimes loyalists carried out attacks against innocent civilians across the border in republican areas such as Cavan or Donegal.

In December 1972, UVF bombs exploded in Dublin, causing the deaths of two people and injuring 127 others. As a result of the huge increase in loyalist violence, the first loyalists were interned by the British Government in March 1973.

By the end of 1972, it was clear that the year had been by far the worst since the Troubles began, with 497 dead and hundreds more injured. The increasing level of violence also had a profound impact on both government and society south of the border in the Irish Republic.

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

KEY CONCEPT: TERRORISM

Terrorism was a constant reality in the lives of people in Northern Ireland. Terrorism was associated with the **violent actions of those who were prepared to kill and maim others for political objectives without any mandate outside of their own organisations**. It frequently took the form of **indiscriminate bombings and shootings by republican and loyalist paramilitaries**. Terrorism involved the attempt to bring about or prevent political change by violent means. While terrorists failed to overthrow elected governments in the Republic of Ireland or Great Britain, their actions deepened divisions and halted political progress such as the Sunningdale Agreement and the Power-Sharing Executive, 1973-74.

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

Reaction in the Republic

The Fianna Fáil Government, under Jack Lynch, and most people in the Irish Republic supported the civil rights campaign and had been horrified by the events in Derry on Bloody Sunday. However, they were strongly opposed to the violent campaign of the Provisional IRA. Both government and people did not wish to see violence extend from Northern Ireland into the Republic.

In the Cabinet reshuffle around the time of the Arms Trial in 1970, Lynch had appointed Desmond O'Malley, an able young Fianna Fáil TD, to be the new Minister for Justice. O'Malley took a strong stand against the Provisional IRA and their political wing, Sinn Féin.

As the violence in Northern Ireland intensified in the autumn of 1972, stronger measures were taken in the Republic. On 6 October the government closed down the offices of Provisional Sinn Féin and the following month the IRA Chief of Staff, Seán Mac Stiofáin, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for membership of an illegal organisation. When an interview with Mac Stiofáin was broadcast on Irish radio, the government dismissed the RTÉ Authority, which was responsible for the state-run radio and television channels. While Dáil Éireann was discussing tough new emergency legislation to deal with the IRA, loyalists planted bombs in Dublin, killing two people and injuring 127 on 1 December 1972.

Reaction in the Republic

At the time, the main opposition party, Fine Gael, was having a heated discussion on whether to support the new law. The party leader, Liam Cosgrave, was nearly removed because he favoured supporting the law, while a majority of his followers thought it was too strict.

When the bombs went off, the party came round to Cosgrave's view; he survived as leader and went on to win a general election and become Taoiseach a few months later. When Fianna Fáil lost power in the general election of February 1973 it was replaced by a Fine Gael-Labour coalition government with Liam Cosgrave as Taoiseach. Cosgrave was strongly committed to law and order and to tough measures against the IRA. The Minister for Foreign Affairs in the new government, Dr Garret FitzGerald of Fine Gael, had a lifelong interest in Northern Ireland. His mother came from a Protestant background in Co. Down and he was committed to bringing about reconciliation between unionists and nationalists.

Another member of the government, Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien of the Labour Party, was a stern critic of the IRA and sympathetic to the position of Northern unionists. During his term as Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, he continued to prevent members of violent organisations from appearing on Irish radio or television.

The main policy of the new government in the Republic regarding Northern Ireland was to co-operate with the British Government to end the violence and to encourage the local parties to reach an agreement on the future government of the province. At this time, the British Government was moving in the same direction.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What campaign did loyalist paramilitary groups begin in April 1972?
2. Who was appointed as Minister for Justice in the Irish Republic by Jack Lynch in 1970?
3. What measures were taken by Jack Lynch's Government to deal with the Provisional IRA?
4. What events occurred in Dublin in December 1922?
5. What policy towards Northern Ireland was pursued by the coalition government under the leadership of Liam Cosgrave?

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

CASE STUDY: The Sunningdale Agreement and the Power-Sharing Executive, 1973-74

CASE STUDY: THE SUNNINGDALE AGREEMENT AND THE POWER-SHARING EXECUTIVE, 1973-74

Preparing the Ground

In September 1972, William Whitelaw invited political parties from Northern Ireland to round-table talks in Darlington, Co. Durham, to explore the possibility of a political agreement. While the Unionist Party, Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Labour Party attended the talks, the SDLP boycotted them because of the continued existence of internment without trial.

However, both the SDLP and the Taoiseach of the Republic went to meet the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath. They were pleased when the British Government agreed that any new arrangement should be 'so far as possible, acceptable to and accepted by the Republic of Ireland'. This recognition by the British that there was 'an Irish dimension' to the problems in Northern Ireland was an important matter both for the Irish Government and for the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland.

In order to reassure unionists, the British Government's proposals included a referendum on the existence of the border. The referendum took place on 8 March 1973. With nationalists advised to boycott it, the result was 97.8 per cent in favour of keeping the Union, which represented 57 per cent of the voters. Having assured the unionist majority that their position in the United Kingdom was safe, the British Government went on to publish its detailed proposals two weeks later.

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

The Whitelaw Proposals

Published on 20 March 1973, the proposals of the British Government included the restoration of power to an assembly in Northern Ireland. An assembly would be elected using the proportional representation (PR) voting system and it in turn would elect an executive to control matters handed over by the British Government. However, the British Government would agree to this only on the basis of power-sharing between unionists and nationalists. This insistence on power-sharing was to be maintained by every British Government from that time forward.

The second key element in the proposals was a Council of Ireland. This body would allow representatives from both Northern Ireland and the Republic to meet to discuss matters of joint concern. However, not everyone was enthusiastic about this proposal (Document 1).

DOCUMENT 1: THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS

I believe that the initial British idea had been simply that there should be a coalition government in Northern Ireland, in which both unionists and nationalists would take part, in proportion to their electoral strength. But John Hume - without whose approval the idea would not have the requisite nationalist support - stipulated that there should be an All-Ireland dimension in the shape of a Council of Ireland, felt to be the precursor of a united Ireland, and cherished for that reason by those who cherished it.

When the matter came before the cabinet for discussion I warmly welcomed the idea of a bipartisan government in Northern Ireland. But I thought the Council of Ireland with the implication of progress towards a united Ireland, might be a bridge too far. On that issue, the unionist population might desert Brian Faulkner, and the Northern Ireland government would then collapse. I therefore urged that the idea of a Council of Ireland be re-examined.

C. C. O'Brien, Memoir: My Life and Themes (Dublin, 1998)

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

Reaction in Northern Ireland

Conor Cruise O'Brien's fears, as seen in Document 1, were about to be realised. While most constitutional nationalists welcomed the proposals, the Provisional IRA completely rejected them as being merely the continuation in another form of British rule in Northern Ireland. The organisation committed itself to continuing its campaign of bombing and shooting.

On the unionist side, the response was more mixed. Ian Paisley, William Craig, the Orange Order and the loyalist paramilitaries rejected the proposals completely. They called for a return to the old system of the Stormont Government, with majority rule by the unionists. Brian Faulkner and the Ulster Unionists were divided in their responses and decided to wait to see how events proceeded.

On 28 June 1973 elections were held to the new Assembly in Northern Ireland. When the results came in they showed deep divisions on the unionist side. Anti-power-sharing Unionists outnumbered Faulkner's Unionists by 26 to 24 in the 78-seat Assembly. The Alliance Party won 8 seats and the SDLP captured 19. Whitelaw underestimated the determination of the anti-agreement unionists. He had hoped to build an agreement by combining the strength of the Faulkner Unionists, the SDLP and the Alliance Party.

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

Reaction in Northern Ireland

Faulkner and his followers were willing to co-operate with the Secretary of State at this stage, but they would come under strong pressure from anti-agreement unionists in the months ahead. Agreement was finally reached in November 1973 between the Faulkner Unionists, the Alliance Party and the SDLP to form a power-sharing executive.

There were to be six unionists, four SDLP members and one Alliance member in the new executive. Faulkner was to be Chief Minister, with the leader of the SDLP, Gerry Fitt, as his deputy. There were violent scenes in the Assembly as Vanguard and DUP members attacked unionists who supported power-sharing. Nevertheless, the new partners set about making the Assembly work (Document 2).

DOCUMENT 2: HOPE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Brian Faulkner and Gerry Fitt were known as men who believed in getting things done and they were widely regarded as people who would keep the game going. Such was the local folklore about these two party stalwarts who in the summer of 1973 began to move towards a partnership without precedent in Ulster politics.

Oddly enough, when the association was finalised, it received rapid and widespread acceptance. A few years earlier such a combination would have seemed impossible; by 1973 there was a touch of inevitability about it. The time for the idea had come.

But more than anything else, the merger between Faulkner and Fitt was a symbolic partnership between two people which made possible the greater partnership between two communities. From that point onwards the unspoken question was increasingly evident throughout Ulster: 'If lifelong opponents like Gerry Fitt and Brian Faulkner get together, why not the rest of us?"

D. Bleakley, Faulkner: Conflict and Consent in Irish Politics (London, 1974)

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

The Sunningdale Agreement

On 6 December, talks began at Sunningdale in England between the British and Irish Governments and the power-sharing parties from Northern Ireland. The British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, and the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, were both in attendance. After four days of negotiation, consensus was finally reached, and on 9 December 1973 the Sunningdale Agreement was signed. The agreement incorporated the positions of the various parties (Document 3).

DOCUMENT 3: EXTRACTS FROM THE SUNNINGDALE AGREEMENT

The people of the Republic together with a minority in Northern Ireland as represented by the SDLP delegation, continue to uphold the aspiration towards a united Ireland. The only united Ireland they wanted to see was unity established by consent.

The desire of the majority to remain part of the United Kingdom, as represented by the unionist and Alliance delegations, remained firm.

The Irish Government fully accepted and solemnly declared that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland desired a change in status.

The British Government solemnly declared that it was, and would remain, their policy to support the wishes of the majority of people in Northern Ireland. The present status of Northern Ireland is that it is part of the United Kingdom. If in the future the majority of the people of Northern Ireland should indicate a wish to become part of a united Ireland, the British Government would support that wish.

Sunningdale Agreement, 9 December 1973.

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

KEY CONCEPT: POWER-SHARING

Power-sharing involved **joint participation by unionists and nationalists in the government of Northern Ireland**. Because of the deep sectarian divisions and the history of hostility between both communities since the foundation of Northern Ireland in 1921, many nationalists called for a power-sharing administration after the Fall of Stormont and the imposition of Direct Rule from London in 1972. Whereas constitutional nationalists like the SDLP were prepared to take part in a shared arrangement within Northern Ireland, most unionists were completely opposed to power-sharing. **After 1972 successive British governments made it clear that they would only set up an executive in Belfast again on the basis of power-sharing**. Generally over the following decades most unionists came to accept the reality that power-sharing would have to be accepted. It was a central part of the failed Sunningdale Agreement and Executive of 1973-74. Thirty years later even Ian Paisley and the DUP and Sinn Féin under Gerry Adams agreed to participate in a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland.

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

Differences over the Council of Ireland

Although the Irish and British Governments had high hopes for the success of the power-sharing arrangement, it was deeply unpopular among large sections of the unionist population.

While the element of power-sharing was contentious, the Council of Ireland was to prove even more controversial. Realising this, Brian Faulkner had tried to reduce its powers during the Sunningdale negotiations. He later attempted to play down its significance (Document 4).

In contrast to Faulkner, the SDLP tried to emphasise the significance of the Council of Ireland (Document 5).

DOCUMENT 4: BRIAN FAULKNER'S VIEW ON THE COUNCIL OF IRELAND

The Council of Ministers had a valuable practical role in formalising co-operation on security and social and economic matters. In a very real sense getting the Dublin Government to treat Northern Ireland representatives as equals on an inter-governmental body underlined the acceptance of partition...

The other appendages of the Council - the Consultative Assembly, the Permanent Secretariat, the executive functions of the Council of Ministers - fell in my mind into the 'necessary nonsense' category. They were necessary to get the co-operation of the SDLP and the Dublin Government. But nothing agreed at Sunningdale infringed on the powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly by which everything would have to be approved and delegated. Given the overwhelmingly unionist composition of the body and the unanimity rule in the Council of Ministers we were satisfied that the constitutional integrity of Northern Ireland was secure.

B. Faulkner, *Memoirs of a Statesman* (London, 1978)

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

DOCUMENT 5: THE SDLP VIEW ON THE COUNCIL OF IRELAND

[The general approach of the SDLP to the talks] was to get all-Ireland institutions established which, with adequate safeguards, would produce the dynamic that could ultimately lead to an agreed single State for Ireland. That meant, of course, that SDLP representatives would concentrate their entire efforts on building up a set of tangible executive powers for the Council which in the fullness of time would create and sustain an evolutionary process. All other issues were governed by that approach and were aimed generally at reducing loyalist resistance to the concepts of a Council of Ireland and a power-sharing executive.

P. Devlin, The Fall of the N.I. Executive (Belfast, 1975)

Opposition to the Sunningdale Agreement

On 1 January 1974, the new power-sharing executive began to function in Belfast. Three days later, the Ulster Unionist Council, the governing body of the Unionist Party, met and voted against 'the proposed all-Ireland Council settlement' by a majority of eighty votes. Faulkner had to resign immediately as leader and he and his followers withdrew from the party. He was replaced as leader of the Ulster Unionists by Harry West.

When Edward Heath called a British general election for 28 February 1974, the unionist parties opposed to Sunningdale joined together to form the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC). Having fought the election with the slogan 'Dublin is just a Sunningdale away', the UUUC candidates won eleven out of twelve of Northern Ireland's Westminster seats. The other seat in West Belfast was won by Gerry Fitt of the SDLP. Just over half the electorate voted for candidates who opposed Sunningdale. Although the executive still continued to function, it was now clear that it did not have the support of a majority of the voters.

The Sunningdale Agreement was strongly opposed by the IRA who saw it as a continuation of British rule in Northern Ireland. As one commentator observed:

“There was widespread agreement within the Republican movement that the IRA had better move to kill of Sunningdale before Sunningdale killed it. As a key strategist of the time recalled: 'Our objective was to ensure that the Sunningdale Agreement would not succeed. Daithí Ó Conaill [an IRA leader] was pushing us to blow up Stormont with a massive bomb and the Belfast leadership was trying to devise a method of getting a bomb onto a ship and blow it up in order to block the main channel in Belfast harbour. We wanted to make our presence felt as a force without which there could be no solution that was not to our liking!”

E. Moloney, A Secret History of the IRA (London, 2002)

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

The Ulster Workers' Council Strike, May 1974

As a result of the general election of February 1974, Heath's Conservative Government lost power and was replaced by the Labour Party under the leadership of Harold Wilson. Merlyn Rees was appointed as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. On 18 April Wilson visited Belfast and declared that the Sunningdale Agreement was the only way forward.

Having failed to destroy the Sunningdale Agreement by political pressure, leaders of the unionist parties opposed to the settlement entered into talks with loyalist paramilitaries such as the UVF and the UDA. A group of loyalist workers then formed the Ulster Workers' Council with the intention of using strikes to bring Northern Ireland to a standstill in an effort to destroy the agreement (Document 6).

The Ulster Workers' Council strike began on 14 May 1974. Control of electricity and oil supplies was to be a powerful weapon in the hands of the strikers. The UDA commander, Andy Tyrie, later recalled plans to use power supplies as a strike weapon (Document 7).

Road blocks were set up and manned by paramilitary groups to control the movement of goods. Widespread intimidation was used to ensure that workers complied with the strike. The strike gradually brought the economy of Northern Ireland to a halt. At the end of its first week, on Friday 17 May, loyalist paramilitaries planted bombs in Dublin and Monaghan, causing the greatest loss of life on a single day in the whole history of the Troubles.

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

DOCUMENT 6: THE ULSTER WORKERS' STRIKE

At eight minutes past six on Tuesday evening, 14 May 1974, a small man ... walked self-consciously into the press room at the Stormont parliament building and announced that the Ulster Workers' Council was calling a strike. The room was filled with journalists but few of them paid any immediate attention to the newcomer. Most had heard, of course, that a group of Protestant power workers were planning some kind of stoppage...

The talk of a strike to protest at Faulkner's success in the Assembly seemed unlikely to worry the British Government in London. Nor was the press particularly concerned. Several London papers gave front-page treatment to the UWC threat, but they were more interested in Portugal's new government and Labour's current relations with the Confederation of British Industry.

Nevertheless after a few minutes a small knot of journalists began to gather around the UWC man who introduced himself as Harry Murray, spokesman and chairman of the organisation's co-ordinating committee. He began by demanding immediate elections in Northern Ireland so that voters could express their views on Sunningdale, adding that Faulkner's unionists had betrayed the pledges they made before the Assembly election in the summer of 1973 that they would not take part in power-sharing government with men who wanted a united Ireland. Murray went on to say that it is a grave responsibility but it is not ours. It is Brian Faulkner's. He and his friends are ignoring the wishes of 400,000 people who voted against them in the general election and in doing so they must take responsibility for this strike'.

R. Fisk, The Point of No Return: The Strike which Broke the British in Ulster (London, 1975)

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

DOCUMENT 7: USE OF POWER SUPPLIES AS A STRIKE WEAPON

What happened that particular night was this. Billy Kelly said power could be brought right down within a couple of hours and I replied, 'Why not say that power could be brought down within twelve hours, giving yourself some room to move?"

I had been listening to him [Kelly] earlier on saying that ... you have to be very careful in case you destroy the machinery... If you took the power too low, it could destroy the coils and put the machinery out of action for three months, or even a year.

Some said 'What about the hospitals? The public will kick up.' I said they won't. They'll blame it on the government because that's the way their minds are thinking. They'll say everything that's happening is the government's fault.

A. Tyrie, cited in D. Anderson, Fourteen May Days: The Inside Story of the Loyalist Strike of 1974 (Dublin, 1994)

The Collapse of the Power-Sharing Executive

Faced with massive civil disobedience and a clear challenge to its authority, Harold Wilson's British Government failed to take decisive action. The Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees, and the British Army commanders in Northern Ireland stood aside as paramilitaries imposed their will on society. Wilson did, however, denounce the strike in a famous television broadcast on 25 May (Document 8).

Wilson's comments caused outrage in Northern Ireland, where people deeply resented his use of the word 'sponging'. Despite the widespread intimidation, the strike was supported by most people in the unionist community, including members of the RUC who were on friendly terms with the strikers.

In the absence of support from the British Government and given the deep-seated opposition within the unionist community, the ministers in the power-sharing executive, including Brian Faulkner, resigned within a fortnight of the start of the strike.

This signified the end of the power-sharing arrangement and a return to direct rule from London. Unionists were jubilant at this outcome and there were bonfires in Protestant districts in celebration of the end of the Sunningdale Agreement.

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

DOCUMENT 8: WILSON DENOUNCES THE STRIKERS

It is a deliberate and calculated attempt to use every undemocratic and unparliamentary means for the purpose of bringing down the whole constitution of Northern Ireland so as to set up there a sectarian and undemocratic state... British taxpayers have seen the taxes they have poured out, almost without regard to cost Yet people who benefit from all this now viciously defy Westminster, purporting to act as though they were an elected government; people who spend their lives sponging on Westminster and British democracy and then systematically assault democratic methods. Who do these people think they are?

H. Wilson, television broadcast, 25 May 1974

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

Nationalist Responses to End of the Sunningdale Agreement

In contrast to unionist celebrations, nationalists were outraged at the success of the Ulster Workers' Council strike. It reinforced their belief that the Northern Ireland state was still based on unionist domination. They were shocked at the failure of the British Government to confront the strikers and looked on with disbelief at the weak response of the Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees.

The response of the Irish Government was one of deep disappointment, as they believed that Sunningdale was a missed opportunity to bring peace to Northern Ireland. The Irish Foreign Minister, Dr Garret FitzGerald, later recalled his reaction to these events (Document 9).

DOCUMENT 9: GARRET FITZGERALD RECALLS THE END OF SUNNINGDALE

The end came on Tuesday 28 May. The failure of the British government to give adequate support to the Executive that it had caused to be established by a democratic process, and its incapacity to maintain essential services, led to a complete collapse of self confidence amongst the pro-Assembly unionists.

At this time Faulkner felt obliged as a result of pressure from his unionist colleagues to propose the appointment of a mediator to negotiate with the political-cum-paramilitary leadership of the UWC. This was more even than the British government was prepared to concede at that point. Faulkner, together with his unionist colleagues, then resigned, following which Merlyn Rees announced that there was no longer any statutory basis for the Executive, and reinstalled direct rule.

Irish nationalists, North and South, believed at the time that had the British army been willing to take prompt action against road blocks, barricades and overt intimidation when these features first made their appearance, the strike could have been broken.

Nationalists also believed that it had been totally irresponsible and indefensible to have allowed, through tolerating discrimination in public employment, a situation to develop and to persist that put control of power supplies into the hands of extremists from one section of the community.

G. FitzGerald, All in a Life (Dublin, 1991)

The Significance of Sunningdale

Although the Sunningdale Agreement ended in failure, it was a historic attempt to bring the two communities together. For the first time, unionists and nationalists were to share power in the government of Northern Ireland. The concept of power-sharing at the heart of the Sunningdale Agreement was to be an essential element in all future attempts to reach a settlement in Northern Ireland. It was also possible to learn from its weaknesses (Document 10).

The Sunningdale Agreement was signed by both the British and Irish Governments in recognition of the central role played by the Irish Republic in negotiating a settlement in Northern Ireland. Acceptance of the 'Irish dimension' by the British Government was to remain a key feature in later attempts to reach agreement on the future of Northern Ireland.

Despite its failure, the principles enshrined in the Sunningdale Agreement, such as consent, power-sharing and the Irish dimension, were to remain central to the quest for peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

DOCUMENT 10: THE WEAKNESSES OF THE SUNNINGDALE AGREEMENT - THE VIEWS OF HISTORIANS

The flaw in the Sunningdale Agreement was that those involved in it had completely different views of what it entailed. Faulkner saw the Council of Ireland as an advisory body and raised few objections to its dealing with the harmonisation of cross-border issues such as tourism, transport, agriculture and electricity, which he believed was 'necessary nonsense'.

Some members of the SDLP had a different opinion of what the Council of Ireland would mean. The general approach of the SDLP to the talks was to get all-Ireland institutions established which, with adequate safeguards, would produce the dynamic that could lead ultimately to an agreed single state for Ireland.

The British Government was also partly responsible for creating this situation. By failing to define clearly those areas that the Council of Ireland would control and those that it would not, it succeeded in inflating nationalist aspirations while at the same time raising loyalist fears of the Council as the means of forcing them into a united Ireland.

P. Bew and G. Gillespie, Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999 (Dublin, 1999)

Case Study: REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Preparations for an Agreement

a. Why did the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw, invite political parties for talks in 1972?
b. Explain why representatives of the SDLP boycotted these talks.
c. What assurance did the British Prime Minister Edward Heath give to the Irish Government?
d. Why did the British Government hold a referendum in Northern Ireland on the existence of the border?
e. Outline the results of this referendum.

2. The Whitelaw Proposals

a. According to the British Government's proposals, what voting system would be used to elect an assembly in Northern Ireland?
b. What powers would the executive elected by the Assembly have?
c. What essential condition did the British Government set out regarding the composition of any future executive?
d. What was the Council of Ireland?

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

Case Study: REVIEW QUESTIONS

3. Reaction in Northern Ireland

a. How did most nationalists react to the Whitelaw proposals?
b. How did the Provisional IRA respond?
c. Which sections of the unionist community totally rejected the proposals?
d. What were the results of the assembly elections held in June 1973?

4. The Sunningdale Agreement

a. Name the three political parties that agreed to form a power-sharing executive
b. Which positions were Brian Faulkner and Gerry Fitt to hold in the executive?
c. What assurance did the Irish Government give the unionist community in the Sunningdale Agreement?
d. What position did the British Government adopt concerning the possibility of a united Ireland?

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

Case Study: REVIEW QUESTIONS

5. Opposition to the Sunningdale Agreement

a. What action did the Ulster Unionist Council take in January 1974?
b. What implication did this have for Brian Faulkner?
c. Explain the Northern Ireland results in the British general election of February 1974.

6. **The Ulster Workers' Council Strike**

a. Who replaced Edward Heath as British Prime Minister in March 1974 and what was his attitude to the Sunningdale Agreement?
b. What was the main aim of the Ulster Workers' Council?
c. How did its members plan to use a strike at electricity generating plants to forward their aims?
d. What action did loyalist paramilitaries take in Dublin and Monaghan on 17 May 1974?

7. **The Collapse of the Power-Sharing Executive**

a. Describe the response of the British Government to the Ulster Workers' Council strike.
b. How did the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, describe the strikers in a television broadcast?
c. What action did members of the power-sharing executive take as a result of the strike?
d. How did most unionists react to the end of the Sunningdale Agreement?
e. What were the reactions of nationalists in Northern Ireland and of the Irish Government?

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

Case Study: Documents-Based Questions

1. **Comprehension**
   a. According to Document 3, what was 'the only united Ireland' which would be acceptable to the SDLP?
   b. According to Garret FitzGerald, what led to the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement (Document 9)?
2. **Comparison**
   a. Compare the views on the Council of Ireland expressed in Documents 4 and 5.
   b. Were the views of unionists as expressed in Document 4 reflected in the Sunningdale Agreement (Document 3)?
3. **Criticism**
   a. Does the author of Document 1 attempt to understand the unionist point of view? Explain your answer.
   b. In your view, does Document 9 present a balanced account of the fall of the Northern Ireland executive? Explain your answer.
4. **Contextualisation**
   a. How did nationalists and unionists differ in their reactions to the Sunningdale Agreement?
   b. Why did the Northern Ireland power-sharing executive collapse in 1974?

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

Key Personality BRIAN FAULKNER (1921-77)

Brian Faulkner was born in Co. Antrim in 1921. After receiving his early education in Northern Ireland, he attended St Columba's College at Rathfarnham in Dublin. In 1939, he entered Queen's University to study law but returned to work in the family shirt-making business when World War II broke out.

In 1949, he was elected unionist MP for East Down in the Stormont Parliament. He was appointed Minister of Home Affairs in the Brookeborough Government in 1959 and was subsequently appointed Minister of Commerce by Terence O'Neill in 1963. As a traditional unionist, he opposed O'Neill's conciliatory politics and resigned from the Cabinet in protest at the decision to appoint the Cameron Commission to investigate police conduct during the People's Democracy march in 1969. He returned to serve as Minister for Development under James Chichester-Clark, who succeeded O'Neill as Prime Minister in May 1969. Faulkner stated that he now favoured a policy of reform.

Amid mounting violence, Chichester-Clarke resigned as Prime Minister and was succeeded by Brian Faulkner on 23 March 1971. In response to the worsening security situation, Faulkner introduced internment without trial on 9 August 1971. This policy proved to be a disaster and, instead of reducing the violence, it led to an escalation of violence.

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

Key Personality BRIAN FAULKNER (1921-77)

During an anti-internment march in Derry in January 1972, British paratroopers shot and killed thirteen civilians. The events of Bloody Sunday were to mark the end of Faulkner's Government. When the British Government decided to take over responsibility for security in Northern Ireland, Faulkner and his Cabinet resigned. The Stormont Parliament was dissolved and direct rule was imposed. Faulkner supported the power-sharing arrangement established under the Sunningdale Agreement and became Chief Minister in a power-sharing executive with the SDLP and the moderate Alliance Party.

Unionist opposition to the Sunningdale Agreement resulted in the loyalist strike in May 1974 which brought down the power-sharing executive. In 1974, Faulkner lost the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party and was succeeded by Harry West. He established a new party, the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, but this fared badly in the convention election of 1975. In 1976, Faulkner retired from politics. In 1977, he was appointed a life peer and acquired the title Baron Faulkner of Downpatrick. He died as a result of a horse-riding accident in 1977 at the age of fifty-six.

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

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was Faulkner's reaction to the reforms introduced by Terence O'Neill?
2. As Prime Minister what initiative did he take in August 1971?
3. What event led to the end of his government in March 1972?
4. Do you think that Brian Faulkner was a success or a failure as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland?
5. What role did he occupy as part of the Sunningdale Agreement?
6. Why did he lose power in 1974?

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

AN ASSESSMENT OF BRIAN FAULKNER

SUCCESSES

- A willingness to move away from hardline unionist views and to consider compromises in order to end the Troubles
- The negotiation of the Sunningdale Agreement (1973) and the establishment of the power-sharing executive
- Close working relationship in the executive with his deputy leader, Gerry Fitt of the SDLP
- Willingness to co-operate with the government of the Irish Republic in matters like agriculture, trade and fisheries

FAILURES

- The introduction of internment without trial in August 1971, which greatly worsened the security situation
- The refusal to accept the transfer of law and order issues to the British Government and to remain in office at Stormont, thereby avoiding Direct Rule
- The failure to convince a majority of unionists to accept the Sunningdale Agreement
- Failure to confront the Ulster Workers' strike in May 1974

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

PREPARING AN ANSWER

Question

What were the strengths and weaknesses of Brian Faulkner as a political leader? (LC 2016)

General Guidelines

1. The focus of this essay is on a political personality, the unionist leader Brian Faulkner, and on his contribution to key political developments in Northern Ireland.
2. When assessing Faulkner as a political leader, you need to consider the various roles he played in the government of Northern Ireland.
3. In answering this question you are required to assess his strengths and weaknesses as a political leader, and to avoid a descriptive account of his life.

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

PREPARING AN ANSWER

ANSWER THE QUESTION, using the following structure as a guide:

Paragraph 1 (Introduction): Briefly comment on Brian Faulkner's background and his staunch unionist views. Identify here the various political roles he was to play in Northern Ireland's affairs. Following a chronological approach, set down the structure of your answer.

Paragraph 2: Here you should discuss the various ministries he held prior to becoming Prime Minister in 1971. Comment on his opposition to the reforms introduced by Terence O'Neill, and assess whether this stance was an example of strength or weakness.

Paragraph 3: Describe the security problems faced by Faulkner on becoming Prime Minister in 1971 and assess the decision to introduce internment without trial in Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 4: Comment on Faulkner's response to the events on Bloody Sunday in Derry in January 1972 and the subsequent demand of the British Government to take control of law and order in Northern Ireland. Consider the role of Faulkner in the fall of Stormont and whether his actions were a sign of strength or weakness, success or failure.

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

PREPARING AN ANSWER

ANSWER THE QUESTION, using the following structure as a guide:

Paragraph 5: The focus here is on the Sunningdale Agreement and Faulkner's central role in it. Comment here on the evolution of his unionist views and his willingness to compromise, with particular emphasis on whether these constitute a strength or weakness.

Paragraph 6: Outline Faulkner's role as Chief Executive in the power-sharing executive. Consider his response to the deep-seated opposition within the unionist community to Sunningdale and whether his role in the fall of the executive may be described as a strength or weakness.

Paragraph 7 (Conclusion): Give an overview here of Faulkner's achievements and failures throughout his political career. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of his contribution to Northern Ireland's affairs during the troubled period of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

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