

Ch. 7 TOWARDS A LASTING SETTLEMENT



Learning Intentions

In this chapter you will learn about:

- The Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985)
- The IRA and Sinn Féin: New directions
- The Hume-Adams talks and the search for peace
- The Downing Street Declaration and the IRA ceasefire

5.1 CASE STUDY THE EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS,
Northern Ireland After World War II
1932

The Anglo-Irish Agreement

Despite Margaret Thatcher's public rejection of the New Ireland Forum Report in November 1984, secret talks continued between the British and Irish Governments in an attempt to break the deadlock in Northern Ireland. These talks culminated in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which was signed by both governments at Hillsborough Castle, Co. Down, on 15 November 1985.

The most important feature of the agreement was the establishment of the Inter-Governmental Conference under the leadership of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs. The conference would meet regularly and deal with cross-border co-operation on a wide range of issues. The conference provided an official forum where Irish representatives could raise grievances of concern to the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland.

The Inter-Governmental Conference was serviced by a permanent secretariat of civil servants from Northern Ireland and the Republic. The headquarters of the secretariat was at Maryfield outside Holywood, Co. Down. Margaret Thatcher hoped that the new agreement would lead to much greater security co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic. She believed that she was strengthening the Union because the Irish Government accepted that no change could come about in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement

For Garret FitzGerald, the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a major achievement. Because of the Inter-Governmental Conference, the Irish Government would have a significant role in the affairs of Northern Ireland. FitzGerald hoped that in championing the cause of the minority in Northern Ireland, he would help reduce the level of support for the IRA and Sinn Féin.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was the most important political initiative in Northern Ireland since the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973. By placing the British and Irish Governments at the centre of the process, the new agreement, unlike Sunningdale before it, could not be brought down by strikes in Northern Ireland.

Key Personality MARGARET THATCHER (1925-2013)

Margaret Thatcher was born in the town of Grantham, Lincolnshire, England, in 1925. She graduated with a degree in chemistry from Oxford University. She then studied law, qualifying as a barrister in 1953. She became active in the Conservative Party in the 1950s and was elected to the Westminster Parliament in the general election of 1959. In 1970, she was appointed Secretary of State for Education and Science; she succeeded Edward Heath as leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 and in 1979 she became Prime Minister of Great Britain, a position she held until 1990.

During her eleven years as Prime Minister, Thatcher was to have a formative influence on political and economic developments in Northern Ireland. At the outset, she declared herself a unionist and her sympathies thus lay strongly with the unionist community.

Thatcher was determined to defeat the IRA militarily and evoked much criticism within the nationalist community and further afield for her uncompromising policy towards the H Block hunger strikes in 1981. In the face of escalating violence, including the Brighton bombing in October 1984, she remained steadfast in her determination to defeat the IRA.

Key Personality MARGARET THATCHER (1925-2013)

Alongside this military strategy, Thatcher was also seeking a political solution to the difficulties in Northern Ireland. To this effect, she had two meetings with the Irish Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, in May and December 1980.

However, Anglo-Irish relations reached a low ebb when she rejected the recommendations of the New Ireland Forum in her famous 'Out, Out, Out' speech in November 1984.

Despite this setback, negotiations between the two governments continued and resulted in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. She hoped that this agreement would reassure unionists and lead to enhanced security co-operation between north and south.

She had underestimated the wrath of unionists, but remained resolute in her commitment to the agreement. The economy of Northern Ireland fared poorly during Thatcher's period as Prime Minister. While there was huge investment in the security forces during the 1980s, there were cutbacks in expenditure in the areas of health and education as part of an overall policy she was pursuing in the United Kingdom as a whole.

On the political side, however, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, together with the contacts between the British Government and Sinn Féin from the late 1980s, played an essential part in the development of the peace process.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As Prime Minister, with which community in Northern Ireland did Margaret Thatcher sympathise more?
2. What was her policy during the IRA hunger strikes?
3. With which Taoiseach did Margaret Thatcher hold two important meetings in 1980?
4. How did she react to the New Ireland Forum Report in 1984?
5. Why did she sign the Anglo-Irish Agreement with the Irish Government in 1985?
6. What were the successes and failures of Margaret Thatcher's policy in Northern Ireland?

Reaction to the Agreement

The reaction to the Anglo-Irish Agreement was mixed. The main opposition party in the Irish Republic, Fianna Fáil, under the leadership of Charles Haughey, condemned it as an abandonment of the principle of Irish unity. The IRA and Sinn Féin completely rejected the agreement and insisted that their armed campaign would continue. In contrast, the SDLP, under the leadership of John Hume, welcomed the agreement as a huge advance for the nationalist community in Northern Ireland.

However, unionists in Northern Ireland were outraged and set about organising a massive campaign of protest to undermine the agreement.

Ulster Says No

Throughout the talks leading to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, unionists had been kept in the dark. They accused Thatcher of a complete betrayal, especially given her strong unionist beliefs in the past. They found it difficult to believe that having refused to compromise during the hunger strikes and having survived the Brighton bombing, she would sign such an agreement. Unionists rejected out of hand any role for the Irish Government in the affairs of Northern Ireland and began a widespread and long-lasting series of protests.

On Saturday 23 November 1985 a massive unionist rally took place at the City Hall in Belfast. Using the slogan 'Ulster Says No', the leaders of the two main unionist parties, James Molyneaux and Ian Paisley, made defiant speeches pledging their complete opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Unionists withdrew all support from the British Government and unionist MPs resigned their seats and fought by-elections to demonstrate public support for their stance.

Although the unionist protest continued for a number of years, Thatcher refused to yield to violence or threats of violence against the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Loyalist Violence

As well as political opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Northern Ireland experienced widespread and repeated violent incidents as loyalists reacted with fury at their inability to destroy the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Much of the loyalist anger was vented at the RUC, because without police co-operation the agreement could not have been enforced. During the first meeting of the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield on 11 December 1985, crowds of loyalist workers battled with police in an attempt to tear down the gates. On the same day, the homes of fifteen police officers were attacked. By May 1986, 368 members of the RUC and their families had been attacked by loyalists.

Throughout 1986 the loyalist paramilitary organisations, the UDA and the UVF, continued to attack the homes of police officers. They also increased sectarian attacks against Catholics throughout Northern Ireland. Despite the violence of loyalists, by the end of 1986 it was clear that the Anglo-Irish Agreement would not be removed.

Key Personality JAMES MOLYNEAUX (1920-2015)

James Molyneaux was born in Killead, Co. Antrim, in 1920. He served in the Royal Air Force during World War II. In 1970, he was elected Ulster Unionist Member of Parliament for South Antrim and in October 1974, he became leader of the Ulster Unionists in the House of Commons. He became leader of the Ulster Unionist Party in 1979, a position he held until 1995.

Molyneaux was a strong opponent of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and in 1985 he, along with his unionist colleagues, resigned his seat in the Westminster Parliament in protest at the agreement. He was re-elected in a subsequent by-election. He joined with Ian Paisley in protesting against the Anglo-Irish Agreement and on 23 April 1986, the two men unveiled a twelve-point plan of civil disobedience.

Molyneaux opposed any political initiatives involving all-party talks or power-sharing in the north. He referred to such political initiatives as 'high-wire acts'. He was content with the continuation of direct rule and personally favoured full integration with the United Kingdom, which he believed was the best way to secure the Union.

Key Personality JAMES MOLYNEAUX (1920-2015)

After the 1992 general election, the British Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party, John Major, needed the support of the Ulster Unionist MPs to help push through his policy on Europe. Molyneaux hoped to use his new bargaining position to bring a halt to talks between the British Government and republicans. He also expected the Anglo-Irish Agreement to 'wither'. He welcomed the Downing Street Declaration of 1993 and was confident that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom was not under threat.

Molyneaux had miscalculated British intentions to continue with the peace process. Doubts began to arise within the Ulster Unionist Party concerning Molyneaux's judgement and, under increasing pressure, he resigned as leader in 1995 and was replaced by David Trimble. He was knighted in 1996 and became a life peer in 1997 with the title Baron Molyneaux of Killead. As a traditional unionist, he remained very critical of the peace process. He was openly critical of his successor David Trimble and strongly opposed the Good Friday Agreement.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When did Molyneaux become leader of the Ulster Unionist Party?
2. How did he react to the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985)?
3. In what way did he believe that the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland could be best secured?
4. Why was he in a stronger position at Westminster after 1992?
5. How did he respond to the Downing Street Declaration (1993)?
6. What contribution did James Molyneaux make to political affairs in Northern Ireland?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What did Margaret Thatcher hope to achieve by signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement?
2. What was the significance of the agreement from the Irish point of view?
3. How did unionists react to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement?
4. What efforts were made by loyalist paramilitaries to destroy the agreement?

Key Personality IAN PAISLEY (1926-2014)

A Protestant clergyman and unionist politician, Ian Paisley was born in Armagh in 1926. He was the son of an independent Baptist preacher and was brought up in Ballymena, Co. Antrim. He was co-founder of the Free Presbyterian Church in 1951, with himself as moderator. Even in his teens he had a reputation as a very effective preacher. He first came to prominence in the 1950s as a result of his strident opposition to Catholicism. He was a strong opponent of ecumenism and visited Rome to protest against the Second Vatican Council.

Paisley fiercely opposed the conciliatory policies towards nationalists pursued by Terence O'Neill, whom he denounced as a traitor for meeting Seán Lemass in 1965. He believed that the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was really a front for the IRA. In 1969, he was imprisoned for a short period for organising an illegal counter-demonstration against a civil rights march in Armagh.

In the 1970 general election, Paisley was elected to the Westminster Parliament as MP for the North Antrim constituency. The following year he founded a new political party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and became its leader. He opposed the fall of Stormont and the imposition of direct rule in 1972. Paisley strongly opposed the Sunningdale Agreement, which established a power-sharing executive and set up a Council of Ireland.

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Key Personality IAN PAISLEY (1926-2014)

In 1979, he was elected as a Member of the European Parliament. Paisley fiercely opposed the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and, along with the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, James Molyneaux, organised public protests against the meeting. Using the slogan 'Ulster Says No, he addressed a crowd of around 200,000 unionists who had gathered outside Belfast City Hall to protest against the agreement.

Throughout the 1990s, Paisley strongly opposed the peace process and particularly objected to any talks with Sinn Féin until full decommissioning of IRA weapons had taken place. He condemned the Good Friday Agreement (1998), which established an Assembly and power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland. In November 2003, Paisley's DUP became the largest unionist party in Northern Ireland.

After a period of much turmoil and instability, the DUP entered into a power-sharing executive with Sinn Féin in May 2007, with Ian Paisley as First Minister and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin as Deputy First Minister.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Paisley first come to prominence during the 1950s?
2. What was his attitude to the civil rights movement?
3. Name the political party which he founded in 1971.
4. How did he react to the Sunningdale Agreement, the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985) and the Good Friday Agreement (1998)?
5. What historic move did Paisley make in May 2007?
6. What were Ian Paisley's successes and failures as a political leader in Northern Ireland?

The IRA and Sinn Féin - New Directions

While the unionist opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement dominated the political scene in Northern Ireland after 1985, significant changes were taking place within Sinn Féin and the IRA.

After the failure of the hunger strikes in 1981, a number of young republicans, under the leadership of Gerry Adams, attempted to expand the political role of the republican movement. They remained committed to the continuation of the campaign of violence but also attempted to build up a political movement side by side with this.

The Role of Gerry Adams

In June 1983, Gerry Adams was elected as a Sinn Féin MP for West Belfast, and the following September he became president of the party. In local council elections in Northern Ireland in May 1985, the party won 59 council seats. At the Sinn Féin annual conference, or Ard Fheis, in November 1986 in Dublin, an important decision was reached. From now on, Sinn Féin TDs elected to Dáil Éireann would take their seats rather than abstain, as they had done in the past. This caused a split in the party when a minority under Ruairí Ó Brádaigh left and formed their own party, Republican Sinn Féin.

Under the direction of Gerry Adams and the Derry republican Martin McGuinness, Sinn Féin was committed to a twofold strategy: continuation of the armed campaign on the one hand and involvement in politics on the other. This approach was summed up in the phrase of leading republican Danny Morrison as 'an Armalite [rifle] in the one hand and a ballot box in the other'.

The IRA Campaign of Violence

During 1987, the IRA carried out a series of high-profile attacks. In April, they killed Northern Ireland's second most senior judge, Lord Justice Gibson, and his wife in a bomb attack near the border. In November, the French coastguard captured a ship, the Eksund, which was carrying huge stocks of weapons to the IRA from Libya. On 8 November, an IRA bomb killed eleven people during a Remembrance Day commemoration at Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh. One of those killed was a young nurse, whose final moments were recalled by her father, Gordon Wilson, who was present with her: 'She held my hands, tightly, and gripped me as hard as she could. She said, "Daddy, I love you very much." Those were her exact words to me, and those were the last words I ever heard her say?

Gordon Wilson made it clear that he forgave his daughter's killers, and his forgiving attitude was widely admired in Northern Ireland and throughout the world. However, despite the widespread revulsion at the Enniskillen attack, the campaign of violence continued.

The IRA Campaign of Violence

The reaction of British security forces to continued IRA violence led to accusations of a 'shoot to kill' policy by the British authorities without the sanction of the Westminster Parliament. In May 1987, British troops killed eight IRA members at Loughgall, Co. Armagh. In March 1988, three IRA members were killed by security forces in the British overseas territory of Gibraltar in the south of Spain.

By continuing their campaign of violence, the IRA hoped to force the British Government to negotiate a withdrawal from Northern Ireland. In the midst of the violence, however, Sinn Féin was seeking to make contacts with both the British and Irish Governments. At the time, both governments were reluctant to have contacts with Sinn Féin while the IRA violence continued. In the event, the first steps towards political progress took place when the leaders of the two main nationalist parties in Northern Ireland met for secret talks.

The Hume-Adams Talks

The Sinn Féin President, Gerry Adams, secretly contacted the Irish Government and the SDLP through the mediation of a Redemptorist priest, Fr Alec Reid. As a result, talks began between Sinn Féin and the SDLP in January 1988 and lasted until the following September. While these talks failed to produce agreement, contacts were to be maintained between Gerry Adams and John Hume in the years ahead.

Hume attracted considerable criticism for talking to Sinn Féin while IRA violence continued in the aftermath of the Enniskillen atrocity. However, he justified these contacts as a means of moving the republican movement away from violence and towards involvement in constitutional politics. He was willing to accept that Sinn Féin had a place at the negotiating table on the basis of their support in elections in Northern Ireland.

Hume's approach carried serious risks for the standing of his own party, the SDLP, but he believed that this was a risk worth taking in order to achieve peace in Northern Ireland. Although a new IRA campaign began in Great Britain in February 1989, the search for a political solution was not abandoned. Indeed, it gained momentum with the appointment of a new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in July 1989.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What changes took place within the IRA and Sinn Féin following the failure of the hunger strikes in 1981?
2. Explain the twofold strategy adopted by Sinn Féin under the leadership of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.
3. Explain how the Hume-Adams talks were initiated.
4. Why was John Hume criticised for talking to Sinn Féin and how did he justify these contacts?

Key Personality GERRY ADAMS (1948-)

Gerry Adams was born in Belfast in 1948 into a strongly republican family. He was educated at St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School and, after leaving school, worked as a bartender. Following the Divis Street riots, he became actively involved in the republican movement, joining Sinn Féin and Fianna Éireann in 1964. He joined the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in 1967.

Following the split in the IRA in 1970, Adams joined the more militant Provisional wing and was interned for a period in 1972 under the policy of internment without trial introduced by Brian Faulkner's Government. He was released to take part in negotiations with the British Government for a truce. However, talks failed and he went on to play an organising role in the events known as Bloody Friday. He was then imprisoned in Long Prison of Sinn Féin Kesh internment camp.

Adams played a key role during the hunger strikes of 1981. He became a leading advocate of increased political activity by the republican movement. He was appointed President of Sinn Féin in 1983. In this role, he was the main architect of the strategy of pursuing the dual tactics of armed struggle and political activity - 'the Armalite in one hand and the ballot box in the other.

Key Personality GERRY ADAMS (1948-)

Adams and Sinn Féin were dismissive of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, stating that it institutionalised the British presence in Ireland and pledged Dublin's acceptance of partition. Despite the continuing violence, the beginnings of the peace process occurred when secret talks commenced between Gerry Adams and John Hume in 1988. These talks opened the door to contacts between the British Government and Sinn Féin.

While Sinn Féin under the leadership of Adams sought initial clarification of aspects of the Downing Street Declaration, the party formally rejected the Declaration in July 1994. However, Adams importantly described it as a 'step' in the peace process. The next step took place on 31 August 1994 when the IRA, after a briefing from Adams, announced a ceasefire. Adams played a key role in the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement (1998). After many difficulties relating to policing and the decommissioning of IRA weapons, Sinn Féin and the DUP entered a power-sharing arrangement on 8 May 2007. Adams had successfully brought the republican movement into the realm of constitutional politics.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Which part of the republican movement did Gerry Adams join after it split in 1970?
2. Why was he released from detention in 1972?
3. What was his main approach as from 1983 onwards?
4. What role did he play in the IRA ceasefire in August 1994?
5. How did he react to the Good Friday Agreement (1998)?
6. What role did Gerry Adams play in the search for peace in Northern Ireland?

Peter Brooke Becomes Secretary of State

In July 1989 Margaret Thatcher appointed Peter Brooke as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He set about encouraging Sinn Féin to engage in talks while at the same time he tried to avoid alienating unionists. In November 1989, he made a speech admitting that the IRA could not be defeated militarily and that talks with Sinn Féin were inevitable.

In a speech in November 1990, Brooke declared that Britain had 'no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland'. In other words, the British Government only remained in Northern Ireland because around one million unionists wished to remain part of the United Kingdom. This contradicted the IRA belief that Britain was occupying Northern Ireland for imperialist reasons.

Brooke's view supported John Hume's argument in his talks with Gerry Adams that it was divisions between the Irish people themselves and not the British Government that stood in the way of Irish unity.

When Margaret Thatcher resigned in November 1990 and was replaced as Prime Minister by John Major, Peter Brooke remained Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. During 1991 he chaired talks between political parties in Northern Ireland. Although these discussions ended without agreement, Brooke made a significant contribution to the establishment of a peace process in Northern Ireland.

The British Government and Sinn Féin

While Sinn Féin was excluded from formal negotiations with the British Government due to continuing IRA violence, secret contacts were taking place behind the scenes. These were initiated by Peter Brooke when Margaret Thatcher was still in office and were continued when John Major succeeded her as Prime Minister. These contacts continued for three years between 1990 and 1993.

While these contacts were ongoing, Sir Patrick Mayhew, who succeeded Peter Brooke as Secretary of State in April 1992, engaged in talks with political parties in Northern Ireland except Sinn Féin. The British Government, however, through its secret contacts, kept Sinn Féin informed of the progress of the Mayhew talks, which ended without agreement in November 1992.

While Sinn Féin continued its secret contacts with the British Government, the IRA had no intention of calling off its campaign as long as Sinn Féin was excluded from talks and the British refused to withdraw from Northern Ireland. Indeed, while Sinn Féin was engaged in contacts with both John Hume and the British Government, the IRA, in a show of strength, intensified its bombing campaign.

In March 1992, a series of IRA bombings took place at railway stations in London. A month later a massive bomb destroyed the Baltic Exchange in London, causing around £1 billion worth of damage. In April 1993, an IRA bomb at Bishopsgate in London caused millions of pounds' worth of damage. At the same time, the IRA bombing campaign continued in Northern Ireland itself. Side by side with the IRA's continuing campaign of violence, efforts were being made in Ireland and England to bring about a political settlement in Northern Ireland.

Key Personality JOHN HUME (1937-2020)

John Hume was born in the city of Derry in 1937. He was educated at St Columb's College, Derry, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, and Queen's University, Belfast. He was a founder member of the credit union movement in Derry in the 1960s and was President of the Credit Union League of Ireland from 1964 to 1968. Having been involved in the campaign to have a university located in Derry, he became a leading member of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s. As a pacifist and nationalist, he was co-founder of the Derry Citizens' Action Committee, which was set up to campaign peacefully for an end to discrimination against the nationalist population in Derry.

Hume was elected to the Stormont Parliament as an independent member in 1969 and played a leading role in the prevention of rioting in Derry on 16 November 1969. He was a founding member of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and was elected to the short-lived Northern Ireland Assembly in 1973. For a brief period in 1974 he served as Minister of Commerce in the power-sharing executive which had been enacted under the Sunningdale Agreement.

He succeeded Gerry Fitt as leader of the SDLP in 1979 and in the same year was elected as a Member of the European Parliament. He was elected to the Westminster Parliament in 1983.

Key Personality JOHN HUME (1937-2020)

The New Ireland Forum, which opened in Dublin in May 1983 and was essentially Hume's for peace in Northern idea, was a gathering of constitutional nationalists with the aim of exploring ways of achieving nationalist aspirations by peaceful means. Hume was a strong supporter of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), which he believed was capable, 'without changing a word of it, of major developments along the road to peace. He had underestimated the strength of unionist opposition to the agreement.

Hume is widely credited as one of the main architects of the peace process in Northern Ireland. The Hume-Adams talks, which commenced in 1988, were instrumental in eventually bringing Sinn Féin to the negotiating table. He played a major role in the negotiations which led to the Good Friday Agreement (1998).

John Hume was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998 along with the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, David Trimble, for the contribution both men had made to the achievement of peace in Northern Ireland. He retired from the leadership of the SDLP in 2001 and completely from politics in 2004.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name two areas in which John Hume became involved in Derry in the 1960s.
2. What political party did he help to found in 1970?
3. What position did he hold as part of the Sunningdale Agreement?
4. How did he react to the Anglo-Irish Agreement?
5. What were the Hume-Adams talks?
6. What contribution was made by John Hume to the search Ireland?

Towards Agreement

From an early stage, the Irish Government was supportive of the Hume-Adams contacts. John Hume believed that both the British and Irish Governments should make a joint declaration that could provide the basis for an IRA ceasefire. In October 1991, Hume drew up a document entitled 'A Strategy for Peace and Justice in Northern Ireland'. He presented it to the Irish Government, which amended it. The document envisaged a declaration by the British Government that it had no 'selfish, strategic, political or economic interest in Northern Ireland'. It also required the Irish Government to accept that a change in the status of Northern Ireland depended on the will of the majority there.

The Irish Government, as well as John Hume and Gerry Adams, hoped to convince the British to persuade the unionists to accept a united Ireland. This approach was also followed by Albert Reynolds, who succeeded Charles Haughey as Taoiseach in January 1992. However, the British Prime Minister, John Major, absolutely refused to accept this, as he believed it to be unrealistic and undemocratic.

Towards Agreement

When news of the Hume-Adams talks became public, unionists were alarmed. Their suspicions of a nationalist conspiracy were further confirmed when statements by the Irish Government closely resembled those made by the SDLP and Sinn Féin leaders. The UDA referred to this as a 'Pan-Nationalist Front' and stepped up the levels of paramilitary violence.

In October 1993, amid increasing violence, the IRA killed nine Protestants on the Shankill Road in west Belfast in an unsuccessful attempt to blow up the UDA leadership. A week later, loyalist gunmen shot dead seven Catholics and one Protestant in the Rising Sun bar at Greysteel, Co. Derry. It was the highest number of deaths in a single month since October 1976. These atrocities convinced both John Major and Albert Reynolds of the need to intensify their efforts to achieve peace.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. State two important developments contained in speeches by Peter Brooke.
2. How did his views match those of John Hume on Irish unity?
3. What type of contact took place between Sinn Féin and the British Government?
4. What was the view of unionists concerning the Hume-Adams talks?

The Downing Street Declaration, December 1993

At a European conference in Brussels in December 1993, the two Prime Ministers met and decided to drive the peace process forward themselves. Discussions began between the two governments and led to an agreed statement known as the Joint Declaration or the Downing Street Declaration of 15 December 1993.

This declaration consisted of a set of principles regarding the future of Northern Ireland agreed by both governments. The British Government formally declared that it had no 'selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland? This was an attempt to remove the principal republican justification for violence, namely the existence of British imperial rule in Northern Ireland.

The declaration stated that the primary interest of the British Government was 'to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island'. Their role would be 'to encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of such agreement over a period through a process of dialogue and co-operation based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland'. While the British Government did not see its role as a persuader for Irish unity, it accepted in the declaration that agreement within the island of Ireland might eventually lead to such an outcome.

The Downing Street Declaration, December 1993

The Taoiseach, on behalf of the Irish Government, accepted that it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland without the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. Reynolds also stated that 'every effort must be made to build a new sense of trust' between the two traditions on the island. As part of this process, the Taoiseach also agreed to examine any aspects of life in the Irish Republic that might be a threat to the unionist ethos and way of life.

Both governments accepted that 'Irish unity would be achieved only by those who favour this outcome, persuading those who do not, peacefully and without coercion or violence, and that, if in future a majority of people in Northern Ireland are so persuaded, both governments will support and give legislative effect to their wish?

In the declaration, both governments repeated that the achievement of peace would come about only with the permanent end of paramilitary violence. Any political party wishing to participate in talks regarding the future of Northern Ireland would have to demonstrate 'a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods'

The Significance of the Downing Street Declaration

The Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 was an important milestone on the road to peace. It made it clear that Irish unity would only be possible with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. While the tone of the document was quite nationalist, with references to Irish unity and self-determination, many unionists welcomed the principle of consent that was enshrined in the document.

While Sinn Féin accepted that the British had no 'selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland', they were very critical of the Downing Street Declaration. They objected to the principle of consent based on two parts of the island rather than on the island as a whole. They were also disappointed that the British Government did not become a persuader for Irish unity.

While Sinn Féin formally rejected the declaration in July 1994, Gerry Adams nevertheless described it as a step in the peace process. He stated that Sinn Féin was now looking forward to the next steps.

The IRA Ceasefire

On 31 August 1994 the IRA decided to call 'a complete cessation of military operations' in the belief that an opportunity existed to create a 'just and lasting settlement. They believed that this was an opportunity to create a strong nationalist consensus embracing Sinn Féin and the SDLP in Northern Ireland, the Irish Government and supportive Americans, including US President Bill Clinton.

Although nationalists regarded the IRA ceasefire as a great opportunity for political progress, the British Government and unionists were much more cautious. They demanded to know whether the ceasefire was permanent and spoke of the need to hand over weapons. This issue was to be one of the main obstacles in the peace process over the following years.

Although the IRA ceasefire later broke down for a short period with the detonation of a massive bomb at Canary Wharf in London in February 1996, it created the circumstances for the development of a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Towards a Lasting Peace

By the first anniversary of the IRA ceasefire in August 1995, republicans were furious that they had not been invited to participate in talks. In an effort to advance the peace process, US President Bill Clinton visited Belfast in November 1995 and endorsed US Senator George Mitchell, who had been appointed to head an international body to resolve the decommissioning issue. Decommissioning referred to the process of putting paramilitary weapons beyond use. Mitchell recommended that decommissioning and all-party talks should proceed at the same time.

However, progress was slow until the Conservative Government in Great Britain was succeeded by a Labour Government in May 1997 under the leadership of Tony Blair. In the following month, a new Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, was elected in the Irish Republic. Both leaders were to personally invest huge amounts of time and energy in advancing the peace process.

In April 1998, a historic agreement was signed in Belfast. Known as the Good Friday Agreement (or Belfast Agreement), it established a power-sharing executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland. It also set up a body to oversee the decommissioning of weapons and provided for a referendum north and south of the border in order to ratify the agreement. David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, became First Minister and Seamus Mallon, deputy leader of the SDLP, was appointed Deputy First Minister. While this agreement was supported by the Ulster Unionists, the Alliance Party, the SDLP and Sinn Féin, it was opposed by the Democratic Unionist Party under the leadership of Ian Paisley.

While obstacles still remained in the peace process, the Good Friday Agreement was to provide the basis for a lasting settlement in Northern Ireland.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was Sinn Féin's reaction to the Downing Street Declaration?
2. What announcement was made by the IRA on 31 August 1994 and what were the reactions to it?
3. Why did President Clinton visit Northern Ireland in November 1995?
4. What were the main provisions of the Good Friday Agreement (1998)?
5. What part did Senator George Mitchell play in the peace process?

POLITICAL MOVES TOWARDS A SETTLEMENT, 1973-93

1. After the abolition of the Parliament at Stormont in 1972 and the start of Direct Rule from London, British governments made it clear that they would only restore power to Northern Ireland politicians if a power-sharing arrangement between unionists and nationalists was in place.
2. The Sunningdale Agreement was reached in 1973 between the British and Irish Governments and certain political parties in Northern Ireland. Under it, a power-sharing executive was set up in Northern Ireland and a Council of Ireland was established to co-ordinate co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic in areas such as the economy and agriculture.
3. After the fall of the executive in 1974 during the Ulster Workers' Strike, direct rule returned and British governments made various attempts to restore power-sharing during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the continuation of paramilitary violence and the opposition of many unionists to power-sharing prevented the restoration of power to Northern Ireland's politicians.
4. During the 1980s the commitment of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Taoiseach Charles Haughey to examine the 'totality of relationships' between both countries began a process of deeper involvement by the Irish Government in the process of reaching a solution in Northern Ireland.

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5. The Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), although bitterly opposed by most unionists, was an important stage on the road to a peaceful settlement. It reassured nationalists by giving the Irish Government a role and offered unionists an incentive to agree to power-sharing.
6. Secret talks between John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, and Gerry Adams, the Sinn Féin leader, took place in 1988. Hume's aim was to persuade the IRA to abandon violence and to concentrate completely on political activity.
7. In 1990 the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, declared that 'Britain had no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland'.
8. In December 1993, British Prime Minister, John Major, and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds issued the Downing Street Declaration which stated the principle of consent: only the people of Northern Ireland themselves should peacefully decide their own future.