

Northern Ireland (2012): What political attempts were made to resolve the troubles, 1969-1993?

There have been many political attempts to resolve the troubles within this timeframe, some successful, some unsuccessful. The efforts I will be covering in this essay are, The Sunningdale Agreement and Power Sharing Executive (1973), The Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), The Downing Street Declaration (1993). After the fall of Stormont, Faulkner and his government resigned in March 1972. The fall of Stormont occurred as a result of rising tensions, civil rights marches increasing violence and the late involvement of the British regarding Northern problems. After such issues arose, William Whitelaw was appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. This was the beginning of Direct Rule from Westminster. The British favoured a 'community government', one of power sharing between Protestant and Catholic. This idea was just the beginning of the political attempts made to resolve the troubles.

The **Sunningdale Agreement** was one of the earliest attempts to resolve the Troubles. It all began at the Darlington Conference held in 1972. It was chaired by William Whitelaw. The Unionist Party, the Northern Ireland Labour Party and the Alliance Party all attended. However, the SDLP refused to attend, stating there would be "no talks while internment lasts". After the conference, the British government published a paper, 'The Future of Northern Ireland'. It stated the status of Ireland as a majority wished it, it opposed the integration of Northern Ireland with Britain, but it also said that the Republic should be involved in future co-operation. The SDLP and Taoiseach Jack Lynch were pleased with this. The British government

also published a White Paper on Northern Ireland. This proposed: Self Government for the North, an assembly elected by proportional representation, a power sharing executive between Nationalists and Unionists and a Council of Ireland for co-operation. These constitutional proposals appeared to be a step in the right direction to resolve the Troubles.

This ignited the Border Poll referendum to decide whether Northern Ireland should be part of the United Kingdom or not. The poll was boycotted by Catholics, with 98% of voters in favour of union with Britain. Faulkner and the Ulster Unionist Council supported the White Paper, believing it would end violence. However, the Unionist Party was split, some were opposed to the proposals and Craig even left the party. Craig, Paisley, the Orange Order and the Ulster Defence Association wanted to restore Stormont. Some nationalists were far from happy with the proposals as they were rejected by the IRA, who demanded a united Ireland. Some other Nationalists, such as the SDLP and Fine Gael were in favour, feeling that these views were more in line with their thinking. This was just the beginning of the Sunningdale Agreement, an attempt at resolving the 'Troubles'.

1973 saw the beginning of the Assembly elections which showed that the Unionist Party was still divided. As a result of the elections, there was a good overall majority in favour of the power sharing executive but only a small amount of these were Unionists. This led to talks between the Unionist Party, the Alliance Party and the SDLP to form a power-sharing executive. They reached an agreement that the Executive would be divided into Ulster Unionist Party ministers, SDLP ministers and 1 Alliance Party minister, with Faulkner as Chief Executive. Although this seemed like progress the question of the Council of Ireland was still left for discussion. This measure however did not resolve any tension, only created it. Many Ulster

Unionists were still incredibly anti-power-sharing. A motion against it was barely rejected amongst the UUC.

This led to the Sunningdale Conference in December 1973. Representatives of the Faulkner Unionists, the SDLP, the Alliance Party and the Irish and British governments met at Sunningdale, England. British and Irish governments were invited to these talks alongside many unionists however, Loyalist opponents to power sharing such as Ian Paisley, were not invited to participate. The negotiations covered an array of subjects: the views of the SDLP who wanted an Irish Dimension and Faulkner's views to delete articles 2 and 3 and to tackle the IRA in the South. Faulkner was unsupported and the Irish felt a referendum would have to be held for such a drastic to change to possibly occur.

After four days of negotiations, an agreement was signed. The Council of Ireland would include: a council of ministers with members from the North and South, two police authorities – one from the South/North, an agreement from the Irish Government that "fully and solemnly declared" that there would be no change to the status of the North unless a majority were in favour. The British gave a similar declaration and the agreements seemed to acknowledge power to both the North and South. These steps initially seemed fair and that they would possibly decrease the tensions of the Troubles but the people's reactions were yet to be known.

Although some thought this was a great opportunity to eventually get 'a single state Ireland', Faulkner felt that many aspects of the agreement were 'necessary nonsense' to ensure co-operation. The Provisional IRA opposed it, alongside the anti-power sharing Unionists who feared this was the end of the union with Britain. This was only the beginning of such tension.

The power sharing executive was finally installed in 1974. The Executive struggles to govern the North with the widespread violence and riots. The UUC rejected the Council of Ireland and an impatient Faulkner chose to resign. This was the beginning of the resistance and tension caused by Sunningdale, something they hoped would resolve the Troubles.

Many factors influenced the downfall of the power sharing Executive. One of these was the Boland Case. Kevin Boland, former Fianna Fail, challenged the legality of the Sunningdale Agreement in court. Although his case was defeated, the Irish Government felt challenged by such a response. As well as this, a British general election was held. Anti-power-sharing Unionists used the slogan, 'Dublin is just a Sunningdale away'. The UUC won 11 of the 12 seats and 51% of the vote. After the election, the Northern Ireland Executive did not reflect the wishes of the majority of the North. This was yet another reason to create tension within the North.

By March 1974, a new Unionist group the Ulster Workers Council threatened civil disobedience unless Assembly elections were held. They mockingly described the republic as being communist and aimed to preserve the union between Ulster and Britain and oppose to the merging of Ulster with the Republic. This party really challenged the motions of the Executive and their determination seemed as if this would ignite further conflict. The UWC called a Loyalist strike supported by the Ulster Defence Association. They used intimidation to force businesses to close, barricades were built, power cuts and road blocks encircled Belfast. The North was in upheaval with shortages of food and the power outages. Tension was increased as a result of the numerous car bombs placed in the South of Ireland. The British army failed to help as they felt the strike was too big for them to break. The British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson made a TV broadcast with his sponger speech which angered Loyalists. He felt that

Northerners benefited from Britain while 'viciously defying' them. He said that people were "sponging on Westminster" and angrily remarked, "who do these people think they are". Once Faulkner resigned that May, loyalists celebrated, the power sharing executive had finally collapsed. This proved that this did not remotely resolve the Troubles, it only ignited them further.

Another peace initiative was the **Anglo-Irish Agreement** of 1985. This began during talks between Thatcher and Charles Haughey and Garret Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald organised the New Ireland Forum to bring together Southern and Northern parties to suggest solutions for peace in the North. The governments were greatly concerned about the level of violence and the increased support for Sinn Féin. Thatcher believed the solution had to involve the Republic, this worried many Unionists. This led to their signing of the Anglo Irish Agreement in 1985. The terms of this agreement were: an intergovernmental conference was set up, it would have its own civil service drawn from both North and South, the Northern Irish secretary and the Republic's foreign affairs minister would meet regularly, there would be cross border cooperation, the British government would accept the future possibility of a united Ireland and the Irish would accept the partition. This appeared to be a more thought out initiative in order to resolve the Troubles in the North.

The agreement was well received in the South of Ireland and Britain. The Alliance Party and the SDLP supported it in the North; however Sinn Fein and IRA rejected it because it accepted the partition. Unionists and Loyalists were also outraged because they weren't consulted. This led to the huge 'Ulster says no' campaign. The IRA and loyalists continued violent protests, meaning that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was yet another effort that didn't resolve the Troubles in the North.

Another peace initiative was established in 1993, the **Downing Street Declaration**. There was a demand for peace in the North which led to talks between Hume and Adams. Hume wanted to persuade the IRA that their view was wrong and to decrease violence although this initially failed it was the start of the desire for change. The Downing Street Declaration was agreed between John Major (British Prime Minister) and Reynolds (Taoiseach). The terms of this agreement were to decide on a new government for the North. This government would respect all traditions of the North, only parties that rejected violence could take part in talks, the British could have no benefit economically, the British had to accept that Irish unity was an issue, the Irish government accepted the principle of consent for unity and the Irish accepted they would have to drop certain articles in the constitution which claimed jurisdiction over the North. This was hoped to be the final initiative and one that would finally create peace.

The Alliance Party and SDLP welcomed the Declaration alongside the Ulster Unionists.

However, Sinn Fein completely rejected it. Some felt the declaration was vague and they needed clarification. Despite some rejection and confusion the declaration helped move on the peace process. It did not end the Troubles but it did lead to the IRA and Loyalist ceasefires.

To conclude, I think the Sunningdale Agreement, The Anglo Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration all had many positive ideas and aims. They all attempted to resolve the Troubles in the North. Although none of them fully achieved this, the Downing Street Declaration certainly encouraged peace within the North, thus becoming a successful attempt at resolving the Troubles.