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Jamie Jeffers

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# The Northern Irish Troubles: Navigating Towards a Fragile Peace

By

Jamie Jeffers

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## **Introduction: The Convoluted Road Towards Peace**

Peace is necessary for a society to thrive as it ensures that everyone's stake, or opinion, is equally represented and respected. Yet, peace is largely unattainable in the face of definitive division. Northern Ireland is a prime example of how striving for peace can be both necessary to the sustainability of a community and an obstacle dredging up the pain of the past. For instance, achieving peace proved complicated in Northern Ireland as represented by the various peace agreements that struggled to implement the precise needs of the community at large. Essentially, there was a systemic separation between the varying cultures of Northern Ireland making peace an objective that could not satisfy everyone.

The cultural separation in Northern Ireland is drawn along religious lines, mainly that of Catholics and Protestants. Given Ireland's proximity to England, it is important to clarify that English influence is also ingrained in the Protestant and Catholic division. Essentially, the Protestant presence in Northern Ireland is a direct result of British occupation and rule over Ireland beginning with the immigration of Ulster Protestant settlers in the North as far back as 1609. Therefore, the community divide is deep, and it is difficult to ascertain the most viable solution to improve the lives of all impacted by it. Conflict over religion in Northern Ireland spans all the way back to the establishment of the Church of England; the purpose of this paper is to understand how religious conflict in the Twentieth century became too big to ignore.

Particularly in the Twentieth century, the religious divide in Northern Ireland had turned into a strict segregation between Protestant Unionist and Catholic Nationalists. For further context, Unionists supported the stance that Northern Ireland must remain under the sovereignty of British rule, while Nationalists wanted to unite with the Republic of Ireland to the South. Unionists, because of their intrinsic ties with Britain, wielded a majority of the power in the

region which proved detrimental to quality of living within the Catholic minority. In true fashion, discontent made way for public protest and calls for reformation to Northern Ireland's status quo. However, a lack of unity in the movement itself, Unionist interference, and growing utilization of violence highlighted the need for third party intervention. Ultimately, Northern Ireland was incapable of coming to solution for the greater on its own.

As a result, Britain—by the latter half of the Twentieth century had been removed from direct involvement in Northern Irish affairs—found itself responsible for redirecting Northern Ireland off of a path of violence and destruction. Unfortunately, Britain found it increasingly difficult to make any headway on the matter of Northern Ireland on its own. The discontent within the Catholic Nationalist community stemmed from their belief that Britain had no right to insert in Ireland in the first place, which resulted in more outbursts of violence, which reared itself at the British army who had come in to keep the peace.

Violence in Northern Ireland came from desperation to solve a problem that proved to be incapable of receiving feedback and solutions. At its core, violence is not sustainable or helpful towards making positive change for any community that seeks reformation and equality as a long-term solution for structural problems. However, the use of violence in Northern Ireland persisted because Nationalists felt violence was the only option they had to exemplify the impact of Unionist oppression and the subsequent refusal by Unionists to adequately instill change that improved the quality of life for Nationalists, and the Catholic community at large, in Northern Ireland. Still, because violence is inherently destructive, the notion that violence could lead to constructive change proved untenable. Instead, Nationalist struggled to receive proper representation and ultimately could not actively participate in the peace process until they ceased their own violence, which had been a direct obstacle towards peace actually taking root.

Britain quickly understood that the divide inherent in Northern Ireland needed to be dealt with in a more nuanced and balanced way. So, in a surprising move, Britain reached out to the Irish government to enlist their help in reforming Northern Ireland and containing the violence. Considering the severity of the situation, mainly with the staunch refusal of both Unionists and Nationalists to cooperate, the British and Irish governments took on a massive challenge that took decades to sort through. Britain and Ireland struggled to lay the groundwork for a fragile peace in Northern Ireland, because of the competing faction such as the Unionists, who wanted to remain with Britain, and the Nationalists, who wanted the interests of the North's Catholic minority equally represented; the increasing violence from both sides ran parallel to the Anglo-Irish agenda of peace, which greatly diminished the impact of the peace process.

### **Background: Northern Ireland's Civil Rights Movement**

In the 1960s, Northern Ireland experienced an onslaught of protest and reform. The region was rife with tension propagated by the steep divide between a Protestant majority, backed by Britain, and a Catholic minority who considered themselves second-class citizens. Arguably, the tension throughout in Northern Ireland could be described as inherently religious because of the difference in belief between the two traditions inhabiting the North. At the same time, religion was merely the structure for greater conflict to exist. British sovereignty over Northern Ireland resulted more power falling onto the shoulders of Protestant leaders who in turn leveraged against their Catholics neighbors to keep control over the region strictly Protestant.

The Societal foundation in Northern Ireland was one based on segregation. Sociologist Ronnie Munck used oral histories to capture the societal framework leading up to what became the Northern Irish Troubles. Some of Munck's interviewees highlighted the segregation in place,

stating that Catholics and Protestants were separated from an early age starting in school and through extracurricular activities like sports.<sup>1</sup> In fact, one respondent noted that they only got to know Catholics socially starting in their 30's.<sup>2</sup> The evident segregation actively discouraged interaction between Catholics and Protestants, meaning that there was an acute power imbalance between the two communities of Northern Ireland. Therefore, since Northern Ireland's tension was rooted in a power imbalance that was intensified by the ever-present segregation, bridging the gap proved to be an insurmountable task for the people of Northern Ireland alone.

Because religion was so intrinsic to daily life, the segregation between the Protestant and Catholic sects trickled into the socioeconomic fabric of people's lives. The Catholic community felt the brunt of Protestant authority, with many Catholics struggling to find work and housing for themselves. For example, Munck highlights the story of a man named Joe McKinley who, while waiting for a job interview, was asked where he went to school and immediately was told he had no chance after he stated the name of a Catholic school.<sup>3</sup> Along with that, Northern Ireland barred Catholics from owning houses. In fact, homeownership determined an individual's ability to vote meaning the Unionist party intentionally kept housing discrimination in place to protect Protestant values and their own power.<sup>4</sup> Considering that Protestant/Unionist politicians wielded the power in the region, it makes sense that they would try and keep Catholic voters out of the system to keep their power. For example, Munck states that the largest Catholic population in Derry: "voted anti-Unionist, but the council was two-thirds Unionist."<sup>5</sup> To clarify, Derry was directly impacted by gerrymandering on the part of Unionist politicians.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronnie Munck, "The Making of the Troubles in Northern Ireland," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 2 (1992): 212.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

The constant discrimination towards the Catholic community on all sides led to severe discontent within the state of Northern Ireland that prompted the birth of a Civil Rights Movement. The Catholic fight for Civil Rights primarily focused on bringing an end to housing and employment discrimination. Through the establishment of the movement, many organizations took root to lead the charge. Notably, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association—NICRA—was formed to use the law as a means to demand change. NICRA, although modeled after a British Civil liberties association, reflected American Civil Rights organizations as they intended to fight for civil rights using the law.<sup>6</sup> In fact, NICRA's similarities made sense considering that the Catholic community's own Civil Rights Movement came off the heels of the American Civil Rights Movement, kicking off in 1968.<sup>7</sup> Northern Irish citizens invested in the movement even stated that they hoped to resemble the American movement.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Northern Irish Catholics related to the plight of Black Americans in the South signifies the level of discrimination in the region. Unlike the Civil Rights Movement in America, the primary lens of focus for Northern Irish protesters was religious as opposed to racial. Racism very well could be another structural issue in Northern Ireland; yet, it did not seem to be as strongly associated with the Northern Irish Civil Rights movement because of the white Eurocentric population. However, Catholics both recognized and intimately related to the impact of segregation in their own communities and drew inspiration from the fervent determination present in America to fight for justice and a better quality of life through the law.

However, ideology and reality rarely reflect one another; Northern Irish did not get the chance to emulate the American Civil Rights movement as Protestant/Unionist pushback

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<sup>6</sup> Gregory Maney, *The Troubles in Northern Ireland and Theories of Social Movements* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 75.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

effectively destabilized the movement. For instance, the movement was flagged almost immediately as a ploy by the IRA to destabilize the North in favor of Irish unity and Nationalism.<sup>9</sup> Even though the Catholic community insisted they chose to protest non-violently, the negative and violent reputation of Irish Nationalism remained influential to Northern Unionists. Unionists in particular worked to deter the Northern Irish Civil Rights movement. For example, Unionists actively stifled marches by rerouting them to outright banning them for being “non-customary” as a means to dismantle the Civil Rights movement.<sup>10</sup> The Unionist party’s unwelcome response to Civil Rights came from the need to gatekeep their political power.

### **Section One: The Sunningdale Agreement**

The Sunningdale Agreement directly responded to a crescendo of violence in Northern Ireland, which the British government struggled to contain. The dismantling of the Civil Rights Movement occurred in the summer of 1969 marked by the deployment of British troops into Northern Ireland responding to an onslaught of riots. The troops acted as “peacekeepers” supporting the lackluster surveillance of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the police force.<sup>11</sup> Although the British troops were helpful initially by putting an end to violent outbursts that overwhelmed the RUC, it did not take long for old resentments to surface on the part of the Nationalist community. The army’s focus appeared to exclude the Unionist contribution to the conflict, meaning that Unionists conveniently avoided army discipline. It did not help that the British troops received orders from Stormont, home of the Northern Irish government, because

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>10</sup> Erin-Beth Turner and Gianluca De Fazio, *The Troubles in Northern Ireland and Theories of Social Movements* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 59.

<sup>11</sup> Feargal Cochrane, *Northern Ireland: The Reluctant Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 54.



of the overwhelming Unionist presence.<sup>12</sup> The following months saw a rise in sectarian violence as both Unionist and Nationalist sides organized to take on each other. With the deployment of the British army came a resurgence in the Irish Republican Army, or IRA, which sought to remove British influence from Northern Ireland, as British-backed Unionists encroached upon the very little rights of the minority Catholic community in the region.

To reiterate, the British deployed troops with the task of keeping the entire community of Northern Ireland safe. However, a right to safety proved conditional as Catholic communities remained the target of military aggression while Unionists experienced no aggression from the army. Conflict increased because not only had the concept of civil rights been shut down, it had been met with hostility on the part of the British. In hindsight, when violence inevitably exploded it should not have come as a shock. The Nationalist Catholic community, which wanted agency and equality, carried the burden of British intervention. For instance, Nationalist voices experiences silencing and would stay suppressed unless they took dire action, which left a vacancy for the IRA to occupy.

Unable to build trust with the Nationalist community, the British army utilized more brutal policies that targeted Nationalists directly. Once strategy introduced internment without trial, a policy proposed by then Northern Irish Prime Minister Brian Faulkner targeting violent actors, most notably the active members of paramilitary groups like the IRA.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the British army were specifically singling out Nationalists under Unionist command. Eventually, the tension between the British and the Nationalists fighting for Civil Rights culminated in the shooting of 13 unarmed Catholic civilians in Derry in 1972, often referred to as “Bloody

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 59.

Sunday.”<sup>14</sup> For the IRA, this atrocity was as good as a declaration of war and that violence was very much on the table.<sup>15</sup> With violence veering out of control, the British recognized that the government at Stormont was no longer equipped to handle the situation. They would have to take up the mantle through a return to direct rule in Northern Ireland much to the chagrin of Unionist groups and disillusionment of the Nationalists.

With trust broken down between already segregated communities, and the added-on brutality of the British army, the British government had no choice but to reach across the aisle in an attempt to contain the outpouring of violence. Prior to the question of Civil Rights, Britain had established their presence in Northern Ireland to loom but not be forceful. It is hard to say whether they could have ever ultimately ruled in a manner other than an authoritarian role. In turn, the governmental institution was completely controlled by British Unionists who had no desire to work with Ireland. By 1921, Britain established Partition with the purpose to keep the burgeoning Republic of Ireland out of Northern Irish, and consequently British, affairs.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, the increase in violence propagated by Irish Nationalists, such as the members of the IRA, made any attempt at peacemaking difficult. Essentially, peace had to account for Irish involvement otherwise there would never be agreement from those most closely associated to the violence.

Therefore, the British moved to involve the Republic of Ireland in a meaningful way to ensure that Nationalist concerns received representation. The responsibility to get the ball rolling fell onto the shoulders of William Whitelaw, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Whitelaw published two successive papers, The Green and White papers, regarding the current

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>16</sup> Duncan Morrow, “The Rise (and Fall?) of Reconciliation in Northern Ireland,” *Peace Research* 44, no. 1 (2012): 8.

state of Northern Ireland and what he hoped to address in talks going forward. The Green paper specifically pointed out the importance of “fairness and equality” within the institutions of Northern Ireland while also working to face the North’s problems from not only a social lens but an economic filter.<sup>17</sup> Whitelaw’s focus on “fairness and equality” aimed to respond to the lack of Nationalist political autonomy in the North. While the Green Paper was the first public discourse published by the British regarding the de-escalation of the Northern Irish Conflict, the second publication—known as the White Paper—expanded by including a proposal of an elected convention with the purpose of establishing an acceptable plan that incorporated “power-sharing and partnership” into the solution.<sup>18</sup> Power-sharing and partnership worked in conjunction with the concept of fairness and equality as a means to dismantle the imbalance of political power.

As a precursor to what would become the Sunningdale Agreement, the two papers are significant as they represented a sort of concession on the part of the British. Given the fact the British government had tried to remain separated from the political operations of Northern Ireland under the presumption that the Unionists, the majority in Northern Ireland, were fairly represented. However, the onslaught of violence made it abundantly clear that Unionist power functioned as a deterrent to the perspective of the Nationalist cause. Along with that, it showcased the British understood that in order for the Troubles to be dealt with, the Republic of Ireland had to be involved in some capacity. On the part of both governments, what would become clear would be their shared motivation of containment over all else; an understandable take especially as the progress towards peace lurched forward at such a slow pace. The Republic’s involvement was also seen as crucial by moderate groups, specifically the Social

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<sup>17</sup> William Whitelaw, “The Future of Northern Ireland, Green Paper” (public document, London, 1972), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Shaun McDaid, *Template for Peace: Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 156.

Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), because the Irish government's presence would add pressure to create a Council of Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

The Republic of Ireland's response to the British government's offer was positive but motivated by their own desires to contain the violence. Talks following Whitelaw's White Paper saw the Irish government working out the best approach to the Troubles in the North. On one hand the staunch Unionists opposed the Republic's presence in the peace process. However, the Irish government decided that entering into negotiations with Britain and Northern Ireland meant that they had to be supportive of all political leanings, which upset Nationalist representatives, particularly in the SDLP.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, Jack Lynch—the Taoiseach, Prime Minister to Ireland—publicly stated the Irish government's support of temporary British rule as the best path forward to peace in the North.<sup>21</sup> Lynch's response on the matter of a return to direct rule is interesting as it signified the Republic's wariness about their own ability to crack down on the violent sectarianism in the North. In fact, following the Sunningdale Agreement a reporter named Maurice Hayes wrote about the Irish government's ill equipment to handle the violence on their own. To clarify, Hayes noted that the Republic preferred that Northern Ireland, "go away—preferably not in their direction."<sup>22</sup> Essentially, the Republic acknowledged that they did not have the means to keep violence at bay, and if violence moved South, then the Republic could no longer be a resource to help end the conflict in the North. While the Republic was willing to join the peace process for the betterment of the North, there certainly was self-interest in their decision. The Irish recognized how affectively violence garnered a mass response from the

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<sup>19</sup> Sarah Campbell, *Gerry Fit and the SDLP* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 137.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>22</sup> McDaid, 157.

public. As a result, they sought containment through peace talks as the means to avoid reigniting the resentment of Irish citizens toward Britain and diminishing the possibility of civil war.

The Sunningdale Agreement acted as the first iteration of British and Irish cooperation aimed towards dismantling the conflict through power-sharing and deterring violence. The goal of the Sunningdale Agreement wanted to assure equal representation for both the Unionists and Nationalists. To provide some context, the Sunningdale Agreement laid out a few key objectives including: an assurance that Northern Ireland's sovereignty was dependent upon what the majority of the population wanted; a "Council of Ireland" would be established involving assemblies from the North and the South that acted on "unanimity" with a body of 60 members, of which 30 would represent the North and the other 30 the Republic, respectively; and to counteract violent criminals, regardless of their origin would be tried for their crimes on either side of the border, effectively threatening those who use the border as a means of escape.<sup>23</sup> Focusing on violence and establishing equal representation was a good starting place because it meant the two governments recognized that the Troubles resulted from unchecked power and violence. Yet, the public response to Sunningdale suggested that the Agreement did not satisfy the expectations of Unionist and Nationalist leadership. In fact, it foreshadowed how quickly Sunningdale would become obsolete.

The Sunningdale Agreement unintentionally inspired the opposite reaction it hoped for with the return to violence by the UVF. For instance, the Unionist party was upset at the Irish governmental involvement inferring it symbolized Irish Unity above Unionist power. Although the Sunningdale Agreement aimed to contain and, hopefully, end the violence, it seemed to rile up extremists on both sides. For example, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)—a Unionist

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<sup>23</sup> "The Sunningdale Agreement" (legal document, Sunningdale, 1973), 1.

paramilitary group—promptly ended a four-week truce that preceded public declaration of the Sunningdale Agreement.<sup>24</sup> According to the UVF, they refused to recognize Irish involvement out of fear that they would fight for a united Ireland where Unionists held no power; therefore, the UVF was motivated to begin terrorizing Catholic communities once again.<sup>25</sup> It showcased that the Troubles could not be patched up so easily. Also, Unionist pushback signified an immediate failure on the part of the British and Irish to successfully persuade both groups that the Sunningdale Agreement could work in each side's favor. Instead, Unionists felt betrayed by the British for accepting help from the Republic of Ireland in a strictly Northern Irish affair.

Along with fringe elements, like the UVF, Unionist leaders campaigned against the Sunningdale Agreement expressing concern that it left Protestants vulnerable. Prominent Unionist leaders had been equally against the uptick of a Civil Rights movement and stated their distrust of the Agreement. One such leader, Rev. Ian Paisley, conveyed the perspective of the Unionist reaction to the Agreement quite well characterizing it as “a capitulation of Republicanism.”<sup>26</sup> Simply put, Paisley likened the Agreement to making a concession to the Nationalist cause and ultimately Irish unity. Paisley found himself as an important mouthpiece who was able to stir up resentment and fear in the Unionist communities throughout Northern Ireland. His overarching claim held that the agreement was made to go against Unionist ideals in favor of Republicanism. Essentially, the main concern for Unionists was that inclusion of Irish officials who they felt presented an existential threat to life as they knew it. If the Unionist party was interested in the effort towards peace for Northern Ireland, they would have taken the Sunningdale Agreement in stride and championed it. However, to the party, the Sunningdale

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<sup>24</sup> “No North Ceasefire for this Christmas,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), Dec. 10, 1973, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Dominic Cunningham and Denis Lehane, “Sell-out to Republicans—Paisley,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), Dec. 10, 1973, 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Agreement represented limitation and an ultimate check on the power that they currently wielded, regardless of whether or not the Unionists were actually poised to lose any of it.

As a result, Unionists attempting to show any support for the Agreement could expect to be shunned by their own party. The most notable loss of credibility occurred when Brian Faulkner, the final Prime Minister of Northern Ireland prior to direct rule, included such support in his own rhetoric. The calls for Faulkner's removal were near instantaneous following the announcement of the intention to implement the Sunningdale Agreement upon ratification. In fact, speaking with the *Irish Independent*, one party leader pronounced that: "I think Mr. Faulkner is in big trouble—his triumph will be short lived."<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that Faulkner was also the person who called for internment without trial for Nationalist prisoners as a means to end the violence in Northern Ireland. Internment was not what turned Unionists against their own—even though it was a far more controversial strategy compared to ratifying a peace agreement that proved to further upset the Nationalist community. Internment did not interfere with the Unionist power-structure; if anything, control over prisoners strengthened that power. Therefore, if powerholding in Northern Ireland became the main concern for the Unionist cause, then it would come as an unwelcome surprise for the same man who called for internment to turn around and work alongside the very government that threatened a Unionist stronghold.

While the Unionist concern was rooted in the threat of losing power, Nationalist discontent emerged because they felt the Agreement insufficiently responded to the needs of Northern Irish Catholics. Sinn Féin, the Northern Irish Nationalist party, expressed that the agreement was merely a call to action for Northern Ireland rather than actually implementing anything effective at ending violence in the community or answering the calls that the Civil

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<sup>27</sup> James Kelly, "Recognition for the North and Council of Ireland: It's a Deal," *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), Dec. 10, 1973, 22.

Rights movement put forth.<sup>28</sup> Once again, distrust remained at the center of the issue. On the part of the Nationalist community, the concern was that Sunningdale would not do enough, meaning people would continue to be subject to violence. Interestingly, Sinn Féin was an important player in the political game as they were considered the representatives for the IRA on a political stage. However, Sinn Féin not being involved in the Sunningdale Agreement discussions ultimately meant without proper representation, the IRA—and Nationalists in general—had no stake in the Agreement. The IRA response supported Sinn Féin’s notion about the continued campaign regardless of a piece of paper with a nice sentiment about peace.

To the IRA, the Sunningdale Agreement represented a bandage on a bullet hole; the sentiment supported peace, but it did not adequately establish a framework that answered Nationalist concerns. Their official statement made it clear that the recent development “would make no difference to its campaign.”<sup>29</sup> Together, the statements provided by Sinn Féin and the IRA highlight the low expectations of the minority in actually seeing concrete action being taken. The IRA’s use of violence is not from a place of power like the Unionist campaign to remove Brian Faulkner. In fact, their commitment to violence results from a lack of power and influence over the place they call home. Sinn Féin recognized this too and reasoned that because the Sunningdale Agreement did not provide any actual supports for the Catholic minority, the IRA was not going to give up what little voice they had, even in the face of major consequences to themselves and the Catholic community at large. If anything, the Sinn Féin response combined with the IRA and Unionist own unfavorable reaction signified the unlikelihood that the Sunningdale Agreement could actually make valuable changes for Northern Ireland as the distrust was far more palpable than confidence in the two governments.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1.



Ultimately, the Sunningdale Agreement could not deliver on its own promise of peace in Northern Ireland because of the overwhelming pressure of Unionist power. By the end of May 1974, less than a year after Sunningdale's signing, the Agreement fell apart in spectacular fashion. A Convention was to be held where the British weighed the possibility of pulling out of Northern Ireland. This riled up the Unionist community as it signified that the Republic was gaining influence over the North. In retaliation, loyalist paramilitaries set off bombs in the Republic.<sup>30</sup> In addition the Ulster Worker's Council strike in Belfast blocked off oil, gas, and electricity from the city.<sup>31</sup> Initial responses to the Sunningdale Agreement highlighted each side's stance in opposition to the cooperation between the British and Irish governments. The loyalist bombings and subsequent UWC strike signified not only the struggle that the peace process faced in instilling trust in two sides of a conflict entrenched in systematic division, but how that division propelled forward by the vested interests of the Unionist community to keep their power by any means necessary.

As the Unionists achieved their objective, the Nationalist and Catholic community in Northern Ireland paid the price. Interestingly, loyalist paramilitaries started the actual downward spiral for the Sunningdale Agreement, but the resulting anti-violence rhetoric targeted the IRA—regardless of their lack of involvement.<sup>32</sup> Further provoking the conflict, when Belfast lost power during the UWC strike, the Catholic community that did not receive support because the British government failed to provide supplies and the Unionist party ensured that Protestants received special treatment.<sup>33</sup> The Catholic community remained unprotected leaving them vulnerable.

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<sup>30</sup> McDaid, 155.

<sup>31</sup> James Kelly, "Power Drunk: The Men who are pushing all-out strike," *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), May 28, 1974, 1.

<sup>32</sup> McDaid, 155.

<sup>33</sup> Peter McKenna, "Catholic Anger is Growing," *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), May 28, 1974, 1.

Based on the prejudice built around the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland, an uphill battle commenced to see sufficient change that gave everyone in the North autonomy. The Catholics remained at the mercy of Unionist power, exemplified by their lack of protection and support during the UWC strike. Violence's intrinsic ties to the Nationalist/Catholic image barred the Nationalist voice from being involved in proceedings. As a result, with a reputation for violence and no sufficient means to speak on the needs of the Catholic community, those desperate to be heard would succumb to violence as an outlet, creating a cycle.

## **Section Two: The Anglo-Irish Agreement**

Following the Sunningdale Agreement, and its fallout, the 1970s and early 1980s saw an uptake in sectarian violence that impacted the Northern Irish community at large. On top of that, the failure of the Sunningdale Agreement led to a lapse in cooperation between the British and Irish governments on what to do about the continuing conflict occurring in Northern Ireland. While the peace process experienced a respite, that did not mean the British had removed their military presence. The British army remained in Northern Ireland with the orders to continue to act as mediators, or peacekeepers, between the two volatile sects. As a result, IRA violence persisted with the ultimate goal to drive the British out of Ireland, and Unionist violence—like that of the Ulster Volunteer Force—emerged to actively target the IRA. If anything, looking at the direct impact of the violence itself can reveal underlying motivations.

By the 1980s violence ran rampant in Northern Ireland driven forth by sectarianism, which is highlighted by the statistical data of fatalities occurring in the early years of the Troubles. The data available can provide a better understanding of the perpetrators and why they targeted their subsequent victims. To compare, between the years of 1969-1980 about 2,062

fatalities occurred in relation to the Northern Irish Troubles.<sup>34</sup> Of those fatalities, 53.5% (1,103) were committed by IRA paramilitaries while 28.5% (587) were the result of Loyalist/Unionist paramilitaries.<sup>35</sup> Now numbers do not tell much of a story without context, and regarding the deaths that occurred, IRA paramilitaries were primarily responsible for the deaths of security force personnel—such as members of the RUC and the British army.<sup>36</sup> IRA violence primarily targeted British affiliates which showcases that violence functioned as their means to remove British influence. Loyalist paramilitaries had targeted Catholic civilians, as three-fourths of the total percentage accounted for the deaths of community members of the minority.<sup>37</sup> Highlighting Unionist violence also reveals the level of distrust towards the Nationalist community as Unionist extremists, like the UVF, targeted the Catholic minority.

Since the IRA were privy to violence, it communicates a greater issue at hand, notably that communal suppression resulted in the desire to remove British influence. While it is also important to note that IRA violence impacted civilians too, the majority of premeditated violence directly opposed the British army's presence in the North. Robert White, the author who assembled all of the data above, stated as such noticing that the scope of violence related to the IRA represented of a desire to dispel British influence and reunite with the Republic of Ireland.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, as mentioned above, Loyalist/Unionist targets primarily targeted people from the Catholic community. This signifies a few key aspects to the state of Northern Ireland at the time. For example, the IRA wanted agency for themselves and the Catholic community who had experienced the brunt of discrimination, while the Unionists used violence as a means to

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<sup>34</sup> Robert W. White, "On Measuring Political Violence: Northern Ireland, 1969 to 1980," *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 4 (1993): 577.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 577.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 577.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 578.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 576.

continue to suppress Catholic citizens to keep control of Northern Ireland in their hands. Certainly, the sustainability of violence is questionable because what it usually causes is the destabilization of a region and destroys the morale of a community rather than uplifting it. However, for those who feel powerless in creating change, violence is an incredibly effective tool. At the same time, violence disrupted the safety of Northern Ireland and acted in opposition towards peace.

The Brighton bombing occurred in October 1984 and catalyzed the drafting of the Anglo-Irish Agreement—signed and released to the public on November 15, 1985—as it exemplified the persistent use of violence in Northern Ireland. To clarify, the IRA committed the bombing intending to take down Margaret Thatcher and her conservative government because of their continued support of the Unionist cause.<sup>39</sup> Targeting Thatcher had consequences, as she intended to use the Anglo-Irish Agreement to stifle Sinn Féin because of their ties to the IRA meaning Nationalists had no input once again.<sup>40</sup> The Brighton bombing served as one of many terrorist attacks by the IRA to force Britain to pull out of Northern Ireland in favor of Irish independence. However, it matters because it did end up pushing Britain towards working with the Republic and the SDLP towards drafting and signing the Anglo-Irish agreement, which was the next big attempt in the Northern Irish peace process. Unfortunately, it also gave credence to the actions of the IRA itself and their use of violence to get their point across, so violence remained standard practice for the IRA as long as their agenda continued to be ignored. Therefore, as important as it was to end violence for peace became much harder because the IRA knew just how powerful of a statement it could make.

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Hennessey, *The Northern Ireland Peace Process* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 22.

<sup>40</sup> Cochrane, 118.

In comparison to the failed Sunningdale Agreement, the Anglo-Irish agreement aimed to be more specific in its intentions to contain violence and instill peace. For instance, the Anglo-Irish agreement was drafted with the “Irish dimension” in mind. Meaning, that there would be a push to introduce an intergovernmental conference between the British and Irish governments committed to discussing concerns over the state of Northern Ireland.<sup>41</sup> While the Sunningdale agreement had a similar idea in the Council of Ireland, which hoped to bring together delegates from the Republic and the North itself, it ceased to exist due to the collapse of the agreement after the UWC strike. On top of that, a key difference proposed in the Anglo-Irish agreement was that there was a formal conference for Britain and Ireland to meet, which was an enhancement because even if the two governments had met previously, they had no consistent contact with each other, especially after the fall of Sunningdale. So, the Anglo-Irish Agreement provided a more solid through-line which had not existed previously.

At the same time, the Anglo-Irish Agreement contained similarities with its predecessor as it kept key components regarding autonomy of the state and ending violence which indicated the British and Irish knew to keep focus on these factors. Notably, the commitment that Northern Ireland would have the ability to decide to stay with Britain or seek independence based on the interests of the majority of the population. Yet an update to this included the importance in reconciling the contrasted desires between the Unionist and Nationalist causes.<sup>42</sup> Along with that, the Anglo-Irish agreement committed to ending violence as a means of political action: “any attempt to promote political objectives by violence or the threat of violence and [British and Irish] determination to work together to ensure that those who adopt or support such methods do

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<sup>41</sup> Melinda Sutton, “Anglo-Irish diplomatic relations and the British Labour Party, 1981-94,” *The British Labour Party and twentieth-century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 220.

<sup>42</sup> “Anglo-Irish Agreement,” CAIN Web Service, Accessed August 23, 2021.  
<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/aia/aiadoc.htm>.

not succeed.”<sup>43</sup> The pursuit to eradicate violence endured because leadership recognized that so long as violence continued peace could not flourish. Yet, ending violence did not seem to be utilized as a means to expand the perspectives at the table. The Anglo-Irish Agreement’s similarities to the Sunningdale Agreement regarding the importance of autonomy and security in Northern Ireland as the foundation for peace conveyed that the British and Irish governments were aware of what the North needed. However, the existence of the Anglo-Irish Agreement signified that the process of instilling autonomy and security was easier said than done.

In terms of intergovernmental commitment, the Anglo-Irish agreement was a far stronger document than Sunningdale as it recognized the sectarian reality present in Northern Ireland but was not exempt from criticism. Certainly, the use of hindsight played a role in the British and Irish governments ability to make definitive statements about the foundational cause of the Troubles. For example, the deep division between Unionist and Nationalist traditions and expectations for the North. However, recognizing the cause of the issue is not the same as determining the correct solution to fix the issue. If the deep sectarian roots were bolstering the problem, then it should not come as a surprise that they would rear their outrage back at the Anglo-Irish agreement.

While the Anglo-Irish agreement made important strides, Unionist backlash highlighted the continued struggle embedded in the search for a solution to the Troubles. The Unionist response, more than anything, exemplified a perceived betrayal. As mentioned previously, Margaret Thatcher—the prime minister during the time—had acutely expressed her alignment with the plight of the Unionist cause, and that she was willing to support Anglo-Irish relations, and the resulting agreement, to support the Unionist determination to stay in Britain.<sup>44</sup> So, when

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/aia/aiadoc.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Hennessey, 22.

Unionists saw the contents of the Anglo-Irish agreement, they reacted bitterly and took an accusatory approach. In fact, on November 23, a week following the signing, a Unionist protest against the agreement broke out in Belfast. Unionist leaders declared at the protest that people would “have the opportunity to express their unyielding opposition to the accord, which we believe is designed to take Northern Ireland out of the UK.”<sup>45</sup> Considering Unionists had interfered with Nationalist protests not even two decades earlier, suffice to say the outlet for their outrage appeared hypocritical. On top of that, Unionist comfortability with protesting signified their power let them confidently profess political grievances, an action not allotted to Nationalists. The only group that comes to mind that could stand against the Unionist cause in an effective manner was the British government, and—once again—Britain would not do that considering they wanted to keep the Unionist community content and supported.

Besides the protests, the Unionists also had the advantage of legitimate governmental representation to bolster their perspective. For example, Unionist leaders in the British Parliament used the public backlash to their advantage. An article in the *Belfast Telegraph* even stated that Unionist leaders planned to meet with Thatcher personally to present her with a referendum to revise the Anglo-Irish agreement to better serve, and protect, the interests of the Unionist community.<sup>46</sup> Even though Thatcher had made it abundantly clear that she had no intention of making changes to the agreement in retrospect, she still met with leaders as a courtesy of listening to their concerns.<sup>47</sup> For a group that utilized fearmongering to rile up their supporters in Northern Ireland, the Unionist ability to get in contact with the British Prime Minister directly to voice concerns severely contrasts the image they want to conjure of a

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<sup>45</sup> Ken Devlin, “Belfast’s Big Day of Protest,” *Belfast Telegraph* (Belfast, Northern Ireland), Nov. 23, 1985, 3.

<sup>46</sup> David Watson, “Loyalists to ask Thatcher once again for a referendum,” *Belfast Telegraph* (Belfast, Northern Ireland), Nov. 23, 1985, 1.

<sup>47</sup> “Thatcher in ‘Peace’ move,” *Belfast Telegraph* (Belfast, Northern Ireland), Nov. 23, 1985, 3.

tradition, and a people, in danger of being eradicated from their home. Instead, the Unionist backlash represented the sheer amount of power and influence they still wielded despite being under direct rule from Britain since 1972.

In stark contrast, Nationalist voices—specifically those in the Catholic minority—remained underrepresented. As mentioned previously, Thatcher’s stipulation with moving forward on peace talks was Sinn Féin’s exclusion from the proceedings. For context, Sinn Féin had grown in popularity entering the 1980. Noticing the newfound support, Sinn Féin felt emboldened to make political strides and counter the SDLP, which had been the main voice for Nationalist concern.<sup>48</sup> At the time, excluding Sinn Féin purposely left the Nationalist perspective not fully realized even though it appeared as a sidelining of violence. Therefore, the British and Irish governments faced difficulty reconciling the oath against violence made in the agreement itself if Sinn Féin participated in the process because of their reputation as a mouthpiece for the IRA. However, an oath against violence is hollow without real action taken to understand why it continued to persist in the IRA’s mission to drive Britain out of Northern Ireland.

Concurrently, refusing to acknowledge the crucial role the IRA played in the destabilization of prior attempts at the peace process is dangerous. Yes, the IRA’s voice was important in the grand scheme of peace, because they are as much a part of the fabric of Northern Ireland as the Unionists protesting against the Anglo-Irish agreement. Yet, as SDLP chairman Alban Maginness stated: “the intervention of the Provisional IRA succeeded in destroying the momentum for change, the benefit of reforms, relations between two communities and of public opinion and goodwill in Britain, the Republic, and abroad.”<sup>49</sup> Violence may be

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<sup>48</sup> Cochrane, 116.

<sup>49</sup> “Change Through Slaughter ‘is a Monstrous Lie by the IRA,’” *Belfast Telegraph* (Belfast, Northern Ireland), Nov. 9, 1985, 3.



effective at drawing attention, but it is not a replacement for peace. Violence and peace are diametrically opposed because violence subsists on fear, while peace requires a sense of security. Unfortunately for the IRA, their use of violence could never bring about change. The exclusion of IRA affiliates harkens back to the concept of refusing to negotiate with terrorists. To be specific, the British and Irish rationalized that keeping the instigators out would show strength on an international stage and reassure spectators that not only could the Troubles in Northern Ireland be resolved but that violence had no sway on the process. Of course, wanting to display the situation as under control is not the same as actually *having* the situation under control.

While the British and Irish considered an anti-violence oath as a useful tool to dissuade violence, others—like the SDLP—thought that an oath would be merely performative rather than constructive. The SDLP, the moderate voice on the behalf of the Nationalist cause, were adamantly against an anti-violence oath on the grounds that its existence was purely artificial and mainly for the sake of political theater. One member of the SDLP, Seamus Mallon, stated: “such an attempt would be not only an assault on the democratic process but would be utterly counter-productive and beneficial only to those who espouse violence.”<sup>50</sup> The SDLP’s stance was not that a transparent message of anti-violence was necessarily wrong, but it was contrived. To reiterate, the oath appeared to be political jargon to conjure the idea of anti-violence without having to create foundational strategies meant to deconstruct and dissuade Nationalists who felt that violence was their only outlet. Ultimately, while a pleasant sentiment, if the British and Irish government could not create something more substantial, then they ran the risk of watching violence persist in a cyclical pattern.

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<sup>50</sup> Tim Cooke, “Party Stance on violence oath is studied,” *Belfast Telegraph* (Belfast, Northern Ireland), Nov. 9, 1985, 1.

For the SDLP, taking an anti-violence oath as a requirement of Anglo-Irish agreement felt surface level because it did not serve as a genuine attempt to understand why the IRA resorted to violence. Nationalists did not have the same reach that Unionists did. It should be mentioned, throughout the coverage of Unionist dissatisfaction, there was little to no mention of the Nationalist perspective on the Anglo-Irish agreement. Once again, the Nationalist voice remained an afterthought, which meant that any agreement without proper input from community who were the instigators in an eventual peace process could not be sufficient. Although, an oath of anti-violence was added to the Anglo-Irish agreement, the SDLP's concern over its inclusion was valid. Violence cannot be eradicated through sheer force, if anything the approach had already been attempted with the deployment of British troops and it led to more violence. Not only did the British and Irish government continue to see violence in Northern Ireland without a real strategy in place, they struggled forward without the proper inclusion of the Nationalist perspective to round out the ways in which the current peace process fell short.

### **Section Three: The Road to the Good Friday Agreement, Peace Process of the 1990s**

While the Anglo-Irish agreement made progress for both sides of the conflict, the Troubles raged on well into the 1990s. Particularly, the IRA made no effort to enforce a ceasefire amongst their ranks meaning that violence was still a major obstacle for the British and Irish governments as both sides worked towards a viable solution. The IRA's absence in the peace process was a result of two factors. First, the IRA were not keen on the idea of compromise, especially with the heightened presence of Britain in Northern Ireland. Instead, the IRA kept to their own agenda, which included ramping up attacks targeted at the British army as a violent statement of discontent. Secondly, as the peace process found its footing, the nationalist

perspective—most notably from the political party Sinn Féin—was acutely barred from being included in talks of any kind. If the British and Irish governments were going to have any kind of success, then they would need to discern how to include nationalist representatives who would fight for the civil rights of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland.

Convincing the IRA and members of Sinn Féin that the British government's involvement would cease was the most workable option for gaining the Nationalist perspective. Leading up to what would become the Good Friday agreement, leadership within the SDLP, most notably John Hume, recognized the importance of involving Sinn Féin to round out the represented parties in the peace process. However, Hume knew that for the Nationalist cause, Britain's presence remained unsatisfactory. Therefore, Hume expressed the need for a joint declaration that established that Britain had "no selfish, strategic, political or economic interest in Northern Ireland."<sup>51</sup> Framing Britain's involvement as altruistic drove home the notion that Northern Ireland's autonomy was paramount. Clearly the divisions of the past have created a situation where trust was not inherent and had to be earned. So, the British bringing an earnest statement of separation from Northern Ireland was the best way to instill confidence in Sinn Féin. Eventually, Hume's declaration would be repurposed into the Downing Street Declaration of 1993. The primary purpose of the declaration was to ensure that violence could come to a decisive end so that any peace talks going forward would not be countered by ongoing guerilla warfare on the part of the IRA.

Compared to the prior agreements, the Downing Street Declaration had the advantage of hindsight meaning that it strived to take all perspectives into account. While the Downing Street Declaration echoed familiar sentiments about the importance of allowing the people of Northern

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<sup>51</sup> Hennessey, 75.

Ireland to be in control of the North's future, whether that be with the United Kingdom or the Republic, it was also clear that both the British and Irish governments could recognize the necessity for transparent and decisive action that included all voices impacted by the Troubles. Most notably, the Declaration spoke to the importance of building trust between the Unionist and Nationalist communities of Northern Ireland going forward: "the future of the island depends on the nature of the relationship between the two main traditions that inhabit it. Every effort must be made to build a new series of trust between those communities."<sup>52</sup> Until the Downing Street Declaration there had not been such a definitive focus in the peace process's legal literature surrounding the importance of bridging the gap between the separated traditions of the Protestant Unionists and the Catholic Nationalists. Along with that, the Declaration took a harder line against violence for the pursuit of peace in Northern Ireland.

The Downing Street Declaration also served as an important building block towards what would become the Good Friday agreement as it urged, or advocated for, an IRA ceasefire to help bring the nationalist perspective into peace talks. If past events displayed anything, it was the effectiveness of violence as a destabilizing force in the peace process. Therefore, to make headway on an action plan, the British and Irish governments had to be confident that the IRA was willing to cease their terrorist campaigns in favor of deliberation and problem-solving.<sup>53</sup> Progress could not be made if all party's involved were waiting for the proverbial shoe to drop. It was clear from the beginning that violence was going to be a massive obstacle towards an impactful peace, so it was imperative that the call to include the nationalists was preceded by a

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<sup>52</sup> "The Downing Street Declaration," CAIN Web Service, Accessed October 20, 2021. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/dsd151293.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> Dominic Cunningham and Chris Glennon, "Hopes raised on North as leaders seal deal," *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), Dec. 15, 1993, 1.

distinct and unwavering refusal to kowtow to terrorism. If the nationalists were to be included, then they had to showcase their willingness to participate.

Equally, The Downing Street Declaration was drafted with the understanding that it was up to the IRA to cease their violent campaign against the British army, otherwise any hope for peace would not be fruitful. The response from the Taoiseach (Prime Minister of Ireland), Albert Reynolds towards the IRA. Brian Dowling and Peter McKenna of the *Irish Independent* reported that Reynolds sent “a clear warning to the IRA that tougher security measures will be adopted by Dublin and London if the latest peace offer is rejected.”<sup>54</sup> Clearly, the concern that IRA would not end their campaign was legitimate because if the British and Irish governments were confident that the IRA would step aside to allow Sinn Féin into the room, then there would be no need to articulate the possible consequences upon a refusal to back down. It should also be mentioned that the British were using the removal of 19,000 troops—more than half of the army stationed in the North—as leverage to pad their offer.<sup>55</sup> The British and the Irish are utilizing two different strategies at once. The two governments wanted to establish a genuine sense of authority to ensure that the IRA understand they cannot play coy and reinstate their campaign without derailing any progress made to their benefit during the ceasefire. Which is why the British are also coming with the opportunity to remove the exact entity that the IRA have been in direct conflict with since the return to direct rule and deployment of British troops.

Although the British and Irish held concerns with the fickle nature of the IRA, they also knew that tides were turning within the organization itself as the decades of violence took its toll internally. For example, as reported by Dominic Cunningham in the *Irish Independent*, “many

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<sup>54</sup> Brian Dowling and Peter McKenna, “Govt will ‘take’ IRA if deal fails,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland, 1993), Dec. 20, 1993, 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

senior figures within Sinn Féin and the IRA who have been heavily involved for the last 20 years now see their sons and daughters approaching an age where they too could be sucked into the violence.”<sup>56</sup> While violence had its advantages in creating an unavoidable display of discontent, its “effectiveness” rarely resulted in meaningful change for those who resorted to it. Instead, violence becomes cyclical especially as time went on and nothing was done to resolve why violence erupted in the first place. In this case, ignoring the issues resulting from inequality between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland and sending the symbol of imperialist control—the British army—in an attempt to keep the peace. It makes sense that those who were entrenched in the violent campaigns from the beginning would become fatigued by the constant destruction and would recognize that negotiation was the only viable way to keep violence at bay before the next generation felt obligated to take on the charge.

Unionist support proved essential, too, for talks to move forward, and while the mistakes of the past were helpful in preventing Unionist upheaval, the apprehension would remain difficult to overcome. Notably, the Anglo-Irish agreement received significant backlash from Unionists after being left in the dark until it had officially been signed. Once again, the peace process of the 1990s had the ability to learn from the previous mistakes made regarding how to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland. As a result, the Unionist leader James Molyneaux was informed of the content of the Declaration before it was introduced to the public.<sup>57</sup>

Unfortunately, careful planning cannot remedy the systemic dysfunction that drove the conflict forward. To be specific, working with Unionist leadership did not mean that Unionist party

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<sup>56</sup> Dominic Cunningham, “Peace is in sight if the IRA can deliver,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), Dec. 15, 1993, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Gene McKenna and Bernard Purcell, “Spring and unionists in secret talks on peace pact,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), Dec. 15, 1993, 1.

members—especially Loyalist paramilitary units—would suddenly be open to cooperation.<sup>58</sup> In fact, anger and distrust over Irish involvement persisted as the main reason that Unionists would again to refuse to participate.<sup>59</sup> Irish nationalist involvement, signified to the Unionists that their fears of losing power were genuine even though the Nationalists were continuously left out of previous talks. Overall, the culmination of the Northern Irish peace process started to move in a promising direction yet was still met with uncertainty and apprehension into the 1990s.

The Downing Street Declaration successfully brought about an IRA ceasefire that brought hope for the future of the peace process; however, the threat of return to violence was not completely gone. Notably, in an article from August 1994, reporter Chris Glennon stated, “Republican movement sources suggested the ceasefire declaration could include a ‘defence clause’ retaining the right to retaliate in the event of an upsurge in loyalist violence.”<sup>60</sup> While Sinn Féin and senior members of the IRA were changing their tactics to fight for peace and autonomy of the Northern Irish people through collaboration, there was still a sense of necessity to utilize violence in the event of Unionist/Loyalist attack. Just because the more controversial players were coming around does not mean that the underlying division, rooted in sectarianism, would not fill the vacancy left behind by the removal of British troops. Considering the Unionist distrust not only towards the Sunningdale agreement and the Anglo-Irish agreement but the Downing Street Declaration as well, the need to protect the interest of Irish Nationalists in the Unionist majority of Northern Ireland was unsurprising. Still, a return to violence would only bring Nationalists back to square one as the IRA’s violent campaigns had been destructive rather than constructive.

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<sup>58</sup> Alan Murray, “Unionists apprehensive over pledge,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland) Dec. 15, 1993, 7.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Chris Glennon, “‘Poised for peace’ as truce agreed,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland) Aug. 31, 1994, 1.

Impatience with the peace process resorted in a return to violence by the IRA because of its attention-seeking nature, even at the cost of a seat at the table. On one hand, the 1990s saw a rise in cooperation and pursuit towards making a sustainable peace treaty for Northern Ireland; however, learning from the mistakes of the past was no guarantee that the use of violence was suddenly going to become moot for the IRA, who had relied on it for so long. If anything, the IRA kept the threat of violence as their “plan B” depending on if the post-ceasefire peace talks would work in their favor. Their promise to reignite violence came true in February 1996 when a bomb was set off in London ending the 17-month ceasefire.<sup>61</sup> The IRA put out a statement underlining their reasoning for a return to terrorist tactics: “Time and time again over the last eighteen months selfish party political and sectional interest in the London Parliament have been placed before the rights of the people of Ireland.”<sup>62</sup> Suffice to say, old habits die hard and the IRA’s overt discontent with the British government proved to be more difficult to overcome even though it was imperative that each group could respect each other to keep the process moving in the right direction. The IRA’s end to their ceasefire showcased that even though perspectives were shifting in favor of peace, resentful sentiments were far from being eradicated.

The IRA’s use of violence quickly led to the removal of the Nationalist perspective from party talks, but it was necessary to work towards another ceasefire once it became clear that the process could not move forward without Sinn Féin. By the summer of 1997 an IRA ceasefire had been reinstated which had put the peace process back on track.<sup>63</sup> Between the IRA’s return to violence and the subsequent reinstated ceasefire, it was clear that talks regarding the peace process were heavily stagnant because of the removal of Sinn Féin and the Nationalist

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<sup>61</sup> Tom Brady, Dominic Cunningham and Bernard Purcell, “Ceasefire shattered: Bombs rock London and the peace process,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland) Feb. 10, 1996, 1.

<sup>62</sup> “IRA Statement that ended peace,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland) Feb. 10, 1996, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Morrow, 20.



perspective from the proceeding.<sup>64</sup> Losing out on Sinn Féin led to an obvious hole in the proceedings following the IRA's return to their violent campaign against Britain. Initially, it seemed like the right call to separate the Nationalist perspective once again as a signifier that both governments refused to give credence to violence as an outlet of frustration. However, a return to form wherein Sinn Féin had no representation meant that multi-party talks could not adequately account for the needs of Nationalist Catholics in Northern Ireland and ran the risk of ending back at square one.

The joint work between the British and Irish governments, with the inclusion of Unionist and Nationalist voices, culminated in the Good Friday Agreement that established the parameters towards maintaining the process of peace in Northern Ireland. First, the Good Friday Agreement built upon the consistent messaging from the British and Irish governments that, regarding sovereignty, it was Northern Ireland's decision based on the wishes of the majority.<sup>65</sup> The Good Friday Agreement also introduced a Northern Ireland Assembly whose duty was to function as a legislative and executive body to replace direct rule from Britain; "safeguards" were applied to the Assembly to ensure equal representation regarding the varying traditions and beliefs in Northern Ireland.<sup>66</sup> The ability to establish a Northern Irish democratic institution, like the Assembly introduced in the Agreement, would not have happened without the participation of Unionists and Nationalists in the peace process. The British and Irish governments knew that peace could not come from force, especially if said peace was devised from a detached third party. Therefore, sustaining peace for the betterment of all Northern Irish citizens required the inclusion of the two groups at odds with each other. Overall, change would only occur in

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<sup>64</sup> Cochrane, 171.

<sup>65</sup> "The Good Friday Agreement," CAIN Web Service, Accessed October 20, 2021, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>.

Northern Ireland if the Unionists and the Nationalists worked together to envision long lasting peace.

While the signing of the Good Friday Agreement is often considered the definitive ending of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, it was scrutinized by both Unionists and Nationalists. A reporter named David McKittrick noted that, “the greatest threat to a new agreement will come not from Republicanism but from the further shores of Loyalism.”<sup>67</sup> In fact, four out of the ten members of Parliament refused to participate in the final talks leading to the signing with their party leader David Trimble.<sup>68</sup> Sinn Féin’s standing on the Good Friday Agreement was cautious but optimistic; Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams stated: “[the huge gap of distrust between Nationalists and Unionists] must be bridged on the basis of equality. No process which excludes any section of opinion can hope to be successful.”<sup>69</sup> Ultimately, the division between the Unionist and Nationalist response was rooted in how each party expected that the Good Friday Agreement would impact them and the communities they represented. Keeping with their beliefs in the past, Unionist were displeased with the outcome of the Good Friday Agreement as it signified a gateway for Nationalists to succeed in their campaign to unite Ireland and strip Unionists of their power. Yet, the Nationalist response was ready to confront the Agreement if it could not execute its promises adequately, but there was a newfound optimism that because of the focus on equality and true power-sharing that Northern Ireland was poised to turn over a new leaf.

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<sup>67</sup> David McKittrick, “Loyalist spectre of Sunningdale,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), Apr. 10, 1998, 15.

<sup>68</sup> “Trimble faces rebellion by dissident MPs,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), Apr. 10, 1998, 13.

<sup>69</sup> Gerry Adams quoted in John Hicks, “Sinn Féin leader vows to reach elusive conflict-free zone,” *Irish Independent* (Dublin, Ireland), Apr. 10, 1998, 14.

**Conclusion: A Conflict Contained but not Forgotten**

The peace process in Northern Ireland proved to be arduous and complex. In hindsight, the importance of representing all perspective feels overt; however, trying to overcome the deeply rooted sectarianism between the Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists appeared insurmountable. The pain and distrust between the two traditions culminated in discrimination and suppression, particularly impacting the Catholic Nationalist minority community. While the Catholic community attempted to challenge the status quo in the North, the domineering influence of the Unionist party succeeded in dismantling the fight for Civil Rights. With the constant reminder of British oppression, it is unsurprising that Nationalists, in this case the IRA, would take up a campaign of violence and terrorism to be heard. Violence in no way, shape, or form should be condoned, but—without it—it is hard to say that anything would have changed for Northern Ireland.

Violence is both destructive and difficult to ignore, which is why people who feel silenced turn to it as an outlet for their frustration and hope that they will be heard. At the same time, violence is inherently unsafe and does not evoke confidence; rather, it breeds fear that severely impacts the quality of life for everyone and cannot result in peace. Essentially, by resorting to violence Irish Nationalists created a Catch 22 wherein if they ceased their campaign the status quo was more than likely to return to its original state with Catholics living as second class citizens in their Native land. Yet, by continuing the violence Nationalists remained on the fringes where their overall message got lost amongst the growing list of casualties and fatalities. Violence effectively drew attention, which resulted in the pursuit of the British government to take responsibility for the dysfunction in Northern Ireland, and reach out to an unlikely ally, the Republic of Ireland.

From 1973 to 1998, the British and Irish governments worked together with the intention to end the rampant violence present in Northern Ireland and replace with peaceful reconciliation. However, their pursuit proved to be a complex process that neither side had expected would take decades of trial and error before they could reach an agreement that best served Unionists and Nationalist alike. All the same, the peace that the two governments brokered was fragile in nature. To specify, the Good Friday agreement brought an end to the violence, but it could not remedy the impact of segregation socially. In fact, as the peace process lurched forward it was clear to the British and Irish governments that peace could be achieved but not necessarily guaranteed. Ultimately, peace could be maintained in Northern Ireland if the people living in North made the effort to sustain it.

The most pressing issue the British and Irish governments faced was how to convince the Northern Irish population that peace and equity were within reach. Considering that the division between Unionist and Nationalist, Catholic and Protestant was intrinsic to how people in Northern Ireland experienced daily life, resolving conflict quickly became an uphill battle. On one hand the Unionist party saw any attempt at peace to be an attempt to subvert their power in favor Irish Unity, while Nationalists adamantly denied cooperating the British as they perceived the British to be the proprietors of the oppression in Northern Ireland. To this day, the Catholic and Protestant divide in Northern Ireland remains. However, the fragile peace in the region was a result of inclusion rather than division, wherein in Unionists could not reign supreme and Nationalist could be an asset to the safety of the region despite their violent past. It took time, for the British and the Irish to recognize that the only way forward for Northern Ireland was to promote the importance of the two traditions coming together.

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