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10 Downing Street and the Northern Irish Problem 1968-1985: Do Personalities Matter?

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Introduction

On 10 April 1998, after thirty years of sectarian conflict, a definite political agreement for peace in Northern Ireland was achieved by representatives from the Irish and British governments, and from Northern Irish political parties. With this, a clear-cut border solution was reached, but with the impending Brexit the Irish border has again become a centre of attention, as a no deal-solution would drastically separate the British Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland. The recent violent past is still a part of the island's collective memory, and as late as March this year, it was announced that a former British soldier is being prosecuted on murder charges from the 1972 massacre known as 'Bloody Sunday'.¹ After Irish independence in 1921, the island of Ireland was partitioned in two: the independent Republic of Ireland in the south, and the British Northern Ireland in the north. With time, it became clear how the Catholic community was systematically denied social and economic equality, and the Protestant Unionists possessed all legislative and judicial power in the Northern Irish parliament at Stormont. Between 1920 and 1967, there were no specific attempts to end the discrimination against the region's Catholics.² Terence O'Neill, then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, was aware of the rising tensions between Protestants and Catholics, but failed to adequately address the Catholic minority's growing Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The tension eventually reached a climax with the eruption of violence during a Catholic protest march in Derry on 5 October 1968. Following more riots in Derry on the 14 August 1969, British troops were deployed to Belfast to establish a peace-line between Protestant and Catholic areas of the city.³ In the course of 1969, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was preparing for armed conflict with the British authorities.⁴ They received support from the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland as a Catholic Ireland appealed more to them than the prospect of remaining a part of the Protestant United Kingdom. As a consequence of loyalist attacks during 1969, the IRA grew in popularity and gained authority as the defender of Catholic rights.⁵ The months leading up to the British election in 1970 were clouded by violence and unrest.

¹ Ed O'Loughlin "One British Ex-Soldier to Be Prosecuted in 'Bloody Sunday' Shootings" *The New York Times*, 14 March 2019, accessed 15.3.19 from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/14/world/europe/northern-ireland-bloody-sunday-decision.html?action=click&module=News&pgtype=Homepage>

² Paul Bew and John Bew, 'War and Peace in Northern Ireland: 1965-2016' in Thomas Bartlett (edit), *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) Chapter 15, 445. Kenneth Morgan, *Callaghan: A Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 345

³ Bew & Bew 2018: 445-447

⁴ The IRA was a paramilitary group fighting for a united Ireland,

⁵ Bew & Bew 2018: 451

The outbreak of violent conflict in Northern Ireland in 1968 proved how liberal democratic institutions do not make the United Kingdom immune to violent ethnic and religious unrest.⁶ This is why it is important to study the conflict and the politics surrounding it to get an understanding of the prospects of possible unrest again manifesting itself within the United Kingdom. Another aspect of the conflict is the key actors and their handling of the problems facing them. Any interpretation of the troubles has to be conducted on the basis of only partial information, and must also be subject to readjustment because of the rapidly changing evidential environment.⁷

This thesis will examine four British Prime Ministers' personal involvement in the conflict, not politics, between 1968 and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. It will introduce Edward Heath, Harold Wilson, James Callaghan and Margaret Thatcher, with the objective of answering the question: When it comes to finding definite solutions in sensitive conflicts, does personality matter? Each Prime Minister will be studied in separate chapters. As Wilson served two terms (the second cut short and eventually succeeded by Callaghan in 1976), the thesis will start with the premiership of Heath from 1970-1974, continue with Wilson's premier years from 1964-1970 and 1974-1976, followed by Callaghan's from 1976-1979, and eventually ending with Thatcher's years from 1979-1985. Thatcher served as Prime Minister until 1990, but this thesis will be limited to the years leading up to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. Callaghan's involvement in Northern Ireland is most prominent in his role as Home Secretary to Harold Wilson, and so chapter 3 will include this period in addition to his premiership. The thesis will then address the personalities' role in light of the Person-In-Situation model of social psychology in order to put the analysis into perspective. An exclusively subjective analysis without professional psychological references will not be sufficient in this genre of historical research.

There are plenty of sources and records concerning the Prime Ministers and their policies, but very few accounts for their specific policy in relation to the Northern Irish 'Troubles'. This probably stems from there being other major aspects of the different premierships that overshadow this domestic sectarian issue, such as union strikes and protests and EEC negotiations. Another reason is the dominant sensitive religious and cultural aspect of the conflict. For this reason, the thesis is an addition to the qualitative research surrounding the Prime Ministers and their personalities. The research is based on three types of sources: books

⁶ Marc Mulholland, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland's Troubled Past*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), v

⁷ Bew & Bew 2018: 443

about the Northern Irish conflict, biographies of the Prime Ministers, and online primary sources. The *Cambridge History of Ireland* was a starting point in gaining an understanding of the conflict and its main actors. In addition to this came literature focusing on the general politics of the ‘Troubles’, including Paul Dixon’s *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*,⁸ and Marc Mulholland’s *The Longest War: Northern Ireland’s Troubled Past*. Literature such as Hugo Young’s *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair*,⁹ Haakon Ikonomou’s *European enlargement across rounds and beyond borders*,¹⁰ and Brian Moynahan’s *The British Century*,¹¹ also falls under this category of sources.

The next category concerns the Prime Ministers and their personalities. The thesis bases its understanding of them on how they are portrayed in a selection of authorised biographies: Philip Ziegler’s account of Edward Heath,¹² Ben Pimlott’s portrayal of Harold Wilson,¹³ Kenneth O. Morgan’s of James Callaghan,¹⁴ and Charles Moore’s presentation of Margaret Thatcher.¹⁵ Other works such as Anthony Seldon and Kevin Hickson’s *New Labour, Old Labour: The Wilson and Callaghan Governments*,¹⁶ and Hans Olav Lahlum and Øivind Bratberg’s book of British Prime Ministers from 1900-2015,¹⁷ have also been used to gain an understanding of the personalities of the Prime Ministers. For a psychological approach, *The Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology* has been the central literature.¹⁸

As far as primary sources go, many of the agreements, reports, personal communications, statements and speeches are available online through the British National Archives (TNA), The Margaret Thatcher Foundation (MTF), and The British Newspaper Archive (BNA). The most central database of primary sources in this thesis is the Conflict Archives on the Internet (CAIN) which provides a vast collection of documents related to the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’. In the case of Wilson there are a few references to his autobiography

⁸ Paul Dixon. *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*, (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001)

⁹ Hugo Young, *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair*, (London: Macmillan, 1998)

¹⁰ Haakon Ikonomou (edit.), *European enlargement across rounds and beyond borders* (London: Routledge, 2017)

¹¹ Brian Moynahan *The British Century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997)

¹² Philip Ziegler *Edward Heath* (London: HarperPress, 2010)

¹³ Ben Pimlott *Harold Wilson*. (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993)

¹⁴ Kenneth Morgan, *Callaghan: A Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

¹⁵ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography*, Vol. 1 and 2 (London: Allen Lane, 2014-2015)

¹⁶ Anthony Seldon & Kevin Hickson, (Edit.). *New Labour, Old Labour: The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974-79*. (London: Routledge, 2004)

¹⁷ Hans Olav Lahlum & Øivind Bratsberg, *Britiske Statsministre: 1900-2015*. (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2015)

¹⁸ Kay Deaux & Mark Snyder (edit.). *The Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

A Personal Record: The Labour Government, 1964-1970,¹⁹ as well as the memoirs of Edward Heath²⁰ and the last Northern Irish Prime Minister Brian Faulkner²¹ have also been referenced. Using autobiographical literature is questionable because of personal bias, but this thesis includes it in order to use personal conversations as part of the analysis. The same problem concerns the biographies, but the selected works are mostly seen as fine accounts of the past Prime Ministers and their lives.

¹⁹ Harold Wilson, *A Personal Record: The Labour Government, 1964-1970*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971)

²⁰ Edward Heath *The Course of My Life: My Autobiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998)

²¹ Brian Faulkner *Memoirs of a Statesman*, (London: Weidenfeld And Nicolson, 1978)

Chapter 1: Focus Abroad

Edward Heath was reserved, distant and good-hearted. He grew up in a man's world but as a leader he lacked the typical 'machoness' connected to the Conservative 'Tories'.²² Still, he was seen as resolute man of decision.²³ He is mostly remembered for his EEC politics, and it is evident that his main focus lay on foreign policy and the European continent. The 'Troubles' of Northern Ireland remained a domestic issue. When Britain finally obtained EEC membership in 1973, he turned his attention westwards, and even if success of the Sunningdale Agreement is disputable, Heath's achievement lay a foundation for his successors in Northern Irish politics. Even though he only spent three and a half years as Prime Minister, Heath spent a total of 51 years in the House of Commons. He was received as a man of the people.²⁴ During his first eighteen months as Prime Minister, Britain's entry into Europe was the most important and pressing matter for Heath, but if there was any issue better described as pressing than Britain and the EEC, it would have to be Northern Ireland. The Labour government had already addressed some of the worst Catholic grievances, such as dismissing the Unionist B-Specials.²⁵ The Unionist Northern Irish government had agreed to the changes, but many were far from content with the situation as they saw this meddling as "subversion of Protestant rule".²⁶ The Unionists therefore welcomed Heath's Conservative victory in 1970. Traditionally, the Northern Irish Members of Parliament had loyally supported the Tories in the House of Commons, and normally, Unionist Members of Parliament could be counted as a part of the Conservative majority basis.²⁷

Heath's main objective was foreign policy, and so he did not devote much time nor consideration to Northern Ireland in the beginning of his premiership as the province was considered domestic. He initially delegated this responsibility to his Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, and trusted Northern Irish Prime Minister James Chichester-Clark to be a 'reasonable man'. He believed that all the violence would work as a push-factor for working together for a solution to the political issues in the region. If all else failed, Heath believed that Britain and Ireland entering the EEC would provide the opportunities to mitigate the divisions in Ireland. Philip Ziegler, Heath's authorized biographer, argues that Heath 'totally failed to

²² Moynahan 1997: 264-265

²³ Herbert Van Thal. (Edit.) *The Prime Ministers: Volume the Second: From Lord John Russell to Edward Heath*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), 402

²⁴ Young 1998: 217

²⁵ The Ulster Special Constabulary was a 'quasi-military' reserve special constable police force in Northern Ireland between 1920 and 1970

²⁶ Ziegler 2010: 298

²⁷ Lahlum & Bratsberg 2015: 494

grasp the realities' of Northern Ireland politics. He was a rational man, and Enoch Powell, then Conservative but later Unionist Member of Parliament, once said of the Prime Minister that the idea of people being prepared to be bombed and shot in order to belong to a specific nation was 'not only beyond Heath's comprehension', but even 'made Heath sick.' In addition, Powell noted how nothing made Heath angrier than an Ulster Unionist or a member of the IRA.²⁸ This rationality and disability to view the 'Troubles' from the Northern Irish perspective clearly fogged his perception of the situation.

Heath was aware that he could not rid himself entirely of the responsibility connected to the 'Troubles'. Cabinet Secretary Burke Trend saw only three possibilities to the issue: (1) spontaneous improvement, which pretty much everyone involved viewed as highly unlikely; (2) the status quo, an inevitable burden on the British government; (3) 'chaos, involving civil war and Irish intervention'. Something had to be done. Heath still did not envision major efforts to be set into action. As he believed that his new Conservative government, 'whose commitment to the integrity of Northern Ireland could not be doubted', should help calm the situation and represent a fresh start. The political situation deteriorated following the arrest of Bernadette Devlin, a young Roman Catholic militant. Chichester-Clark requested more troops to be sent from Britain to help stabilise the rapidly worsening conditions. London agreed, on the term that all sectarian marches would be banned until the end of January 1971.²⁹

The determined and calculating personality of Heath struggled to show itself in Northern Ireland in the beginning of his premiership. When asked about pressuring Lynch to do more about the paramilitary activity on the Irish side of the border, Heath commented on how 'he can't stop them, poor man'. A hope that Central Office would provide opportunities for Unionists to speak publicly on the problems of Northern Ireland earned the response of 'Let them. It's a waste of time'. Chichester-Clark hoped Heath would soon visit the region. 'I'd prefer not to get shot by a Unionist,' The Prime Minister answered.³⁰ He appeared to not know how to approach the situation, and so he focused his problem-solving and negotiating skills on the EEC. He refused to admit this in fear of appearing weak, and when James Chichester-Clark resigned in March 1971 accusing Heath's government of not doing enough in Northern Ireland, Heath challenged him to name a single initiative that he would have taken if Stormont had enjoyed greater independence. Chichester-Clark admitted the situation was not entirely rational. Heath answered how he was 'perfectly ready to consider irrational solutions if you could tell

²⁸ Ziegler 2010: 300

²⁹ Ziegler 2010: 300-301

³⁰ Ziegler 2010: 302

me what those are.’ To assert dominance Heath concluded that what needed to get across was ‘that you are two communities that have got to live together. If you want to do in the IRA you don’t do it by a lot of useless gestures.’³¹ What he wanted to get across, Chichester-Clark later noted, was that Stormont was not a sovereign parliament. This was something nobody in Northern Ireland would believe to be true.³² Chichester-Clark’s successor Brian Faulkner was a tougher and more resourceful politician than his predecessor, and if he too was to ‘fail’ the Unionist party was likely to fall into the hands of the more radical Paisleyites.³³ In knowing this he held a bargaining chip London could not ignore.³⁴

Throughout 1971 the IRA increased the ‘ferocity’ of their violence campaign,³⁵ and Heath wanted fresh initiatives to show that the British government would not succumb to sectarian military groups. Even though internment was against Heath’s own beliefs, he agreed to impose the measure in an attempt to sedate the situation whilst being preoccupied with getting the EEC Common Market legislation through the House of Commons. Coupled with the banning of political marches³⁶ it seemed possible that introducing internment could provide a desperately needed breathing space and that this would be sufficient until Britain was within the EEC. EEC membership remained his top priority, and Northern Ireland would just have to wait. Taoiseach Jack Lynch protested this policy strongly, but to no help.³⁷ On 9 August 1971 internment was reinstated in Northern Ireland, and police rounded up 337 suspects, all of them Catholics and suspected of being active members of the IRA. The arrests were made on faulty intelligence, and many of the arrested were wrongly accused. Some had not been active since the 1920s, and most of the current IRA leadership had been warned beforehand and had slipped away to the public.³⁸ Heath himself later admitted that this was unfortunate, but that it defended the operation in his autobiography as it ‘sent a plain message to the terrorists that any settlement would be reached on our terms, not on theirs.’³⁹ The level of violence rose drastically following the reinstatement of internment. In the two years leading up to ‘Operation Demetrius’ 66 people

³¹ Heath 1998: 426

³² Ziegler 2010: 303

³³ Those supporting Ian Paisley and his policies, specifically with reference to his advocacy of Protestant interests in Northern Ireland and his Unionist agenda.

³⁴ Ziegler 2010: 303

³⁵ *Report of the enquiry into allegations against the Security Forces of physical brutality in Northern Ireland arising out of events on the 9th August, 1971* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1979) Accessed 29.4.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hmsso/compton.htm>

³⁶ Brian Faulkner, *Processions*, *Extract from Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet*, (18 January 1972), Accessed 29.4.19 via CAIN from [https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/cgi-bin/PRONI/pronibase.pl?field=doctype&martin=1&title=\(18%20January%201972\)&key=PRONI](https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/cgi-bin/PRONI/pronibase.pl?field=doctype&martin=1&title=(18%20January%201972)&key=PRONI)

³⁷ The Taoiseach is the Irish name for the prime minister.

³⁸ Ziegler 2010: 304-305

³⁹ Heath 1998: 429

were killed, 11 of them soldiers. In the first 17 following months 610 were killed, including 146 soldiers.⁴⁰ Lynch strongly disagreed with the Prime Minister's handling of the situation, but he still believed something had to be done and that Heath was the man to do it with. From the outside it looked as if the Taoiseach was running the show whilst Heath was busy dealing with Europe. Unification was still Heath's main goals, but it did not look like a viable option. Power-sharing seemed the best alternative.

The 'Troubles' were attracting a lot of attention, and Heath was advised to assign a Secretary of State responsible for the province as it was highly risky for the Prime Minister to claim sole responsibility for the region. Faulkner had no knowledge of this change being planned and kept trust and faith in his personal relationship with Heath.⁴¹ 30 January 1972, or 'Bloody Sunday', and the violence that followed made direct rule almost inevitable. Thirteen Catholic protesters were gunned down by police whilst protesting internment.⁴² Heath's plan that the Unionist government could keep the situation controlled whilst he focused on other matters, now proved non-feasible. Heath established an investigatory tribunal to get all the facts of the disaster,⁴³ and saw it as 'absolutely essential' that the tribunal would get to the bottom of it as quickly as possible. Talks of direct rule continued, and when Faulkner confronted Heath about the rumours Heath misleadingly told him that the rumours were 'pure speculation'.⁴⁴ Heath was mostly concerned with himself, and therefore valued the notion for something to be done over honesty with Faulkner, since he figured the process would be more efficient if the Northern Irish Prime Minister was kept out of it. In early February the two met in 10 Downing Street, and Faulkner warned Heath that if Stormont lost jurisdiction it would lose its credibility as a government. Heath believed that direct rule might strengthen the ties between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Faulkner believed the Protestant community would see direct rule as the first step towards an agreement between Westminster and Dublin. Despite of these warnings from Faulkner, Heath and his advisers still saw Unification as 'the only lasting solution'.⁴⁵

By the end of March 1972, in a cold and calculated move against Faulkner, Heath moved to strip Stormont of its security powers with the Northern Ireland (Temporary Provisions) Act

⁴⁰ Dixon 2001: 118

⁴¹ Ziegler 2010: 308

⁴² *Principal Conclusions and Overall Assessment of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry* (London: The Stationary Office, 2010) accessed 27.4.19 from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-of-the-bloody-sunday-inquiry>

⁴³ The Rt. Hon. Lord Widgery, *Report of the Tribunal appointed to inquire into the events on Sunday, 30 January 1972, which led to loss of life in connection with the procession in Londonderry on that day*. (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1972) accessed 29.4.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hmsowidgery.htm>

⁴⁴ Faulkner 1978: 149

⁴⁵ Ziegler 2010: 309

of 1972.⁴⁶ Bew and Bew argue that the decision was made because the British government no longer could stand the damaging international perception the situation giving Britain.⁴⁷ Brian Faulkner resigned following the implementation of direct rule, and Willie Whitelaw was appointed as new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. As the new official assigned in charge of the region, he had his work cut out for him. In late May 1972, the IRA declared a ceasefire,⁴⁸ and Whitelaw met with a few of its leaders, including Gerry Adams, in July. It did not go well. The IRA representatives made demands they knew would be unacceptable to the British government, like withdrawal of British forces from Northern Ireland and the release of political prisoners.⁴⁹

Protestant violence increased in early 1973, and the Unionist leadership at Stormont struggled to control their own extremist wing, let alone other Protestant fragmentations. Heath was uncertain of how much he was willing to accept to maintain the Conservative-Ulster Unionist relationship and was advised that the cooperation should be suspended unless the Unionists broke their formal links with the Orange Order.⁵⁰ With the Northern Irish election in June it became clear just how complex the political situation in Northern Ireland had become, and Whitelaw was tasked with finding some sort of formula for power-sharing which would be acceptable for all, or at least two, of the multiple parties involved in Northern Irish politics. Heath needed a win. He believed the key lay with the newly elected Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave, and with the drastic turn of events surrounding implementation of direct rule, Heath managed to put his talents for negotiation and determination previously proven effective in the successful EEC negotiations to good use also in Ireland. He visited Dublin in September with the main objective of discussing a creation of a Council of Ireland, in which Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland could discuss issues of common interest. The hope was for this to be a starting point for a potential united government.⁵¹

In December 1973, The Sunningdale Agreement was reached.⁵² A permanent secretariat was set up for the new Council of Ireland, an achievement seen by Heath as the first step towards Irish unity. In the Agreement the Irish Government recognised that there would be no

⁴⁶*Northern Ireland (Temporary Provisions) Act 1972* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1972) accessed 3.5.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/tpa1972.htm>

⁴⁷ Bew & Bew 2018: 455-456

⁴⁸ BBC, *On This Day: 30 May*, accessed 19.4.19 from http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/30/newsid_2973000/2973759.stm

⁴⁹ Dominic Casciani, *Adams and IRA's secret Whitehall talks* (BBC Online News, 2003) accessed 2.5.19 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/2601875.stm>

⁵⁰ Ziegler 2010: 313

⁵¹ Heath 1998: 441-442

⁵² The Sunningdale Agreement (December 1973) accessed 29.4.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/sunningdale/agreement.htm>

change to the political status of Northern Ireland without the support of a majority of Northern Irish citizens. The Sunningdale Agreement was in many ways a fundament for future agreements to rest on. In addition to the creation of a Council of Ireland, the Agreement considered major reforms to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and a review of the internment without trial policy. During the negotiations Heath was described as ‘very arrogant’,⁵³ a statement describing an efficient and confident negotiator determined to reach a settlement. The Agreement got off to a bad start, as it was clear from the beginning that neither of the paramilitary groups would support it. Only four days after it was set into action on 1 January 1974, the Ulster Unionist Party rejected the deal. The British February general election displaced the conservatives who had negotiated the Agreement, and new Secretary of Northern Ireland Merlyn Rees became in charge of a settlement his party had not been an original part of. As a result of the Ulster Worker’s Council strikes and the related violence,⁵⁴ the notion for a joint Council of Ireland eventually came to an end with his predecessor, and now successor Harold Wilson, as Prime Minister.⁵⁵

The ‘final solution’ did not last long, as the pro-Sunningdale Unionists were virtually extinguished after the elections in February 1974. In Despite this, Sunningdale had proven that an agreement was possible, and as far as the role of Prime Minister, Heath was to be followed by his predecessor Harold Wilson.

⁵³ Ziegler 2010: 317

⁵⁴ Ulster Worker’s Council called for a strike amongst Protestant workers in protest of the Sunningdale Agreement, see chapter 2

⁵⁵ Seldon & Hickson 2004: 253-254

Chapter 2: ‘It will take seven years, at least’

Short-sighted tactics were both Harold Wilson’s greatest strength and weakness as Prime Minister. He represented an optimistic image of a society where talent and hard work would build a foundation for leading positions in politics, administration and business. He had a wish, not to turn society upside-down, but to gradually improve the common conditions through hard work. In addition to this he showed an extreme work ethic, a quality which stayed with him throughout his academic and political career.⁵⁶ Like Heath, he wished to be seen as a man of the people, smoking his cigars and walking around the Isles of Scilly in his Gannex jackets. He had no problem using this aspect of his personality to please the hearts of his voters. He was a man of conventional values, and many saw him as the mirrored image to his political adversary Edward Heath, whom possessed the same qualities.⁵⁷ In Northern Ireland, he enjoyed the drama and the adventurous side of the ‘Troubles’, but still showed respect and solidarity for the people there. In 1969, he urged the British people to see this as a national problem when he in 1969 went on television stating this was not ‘just on our doorstep ... it is in our house’, adding a reminder of how the ‘United Kingdom’ means the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.⁵⁸ This sentiment differs from the views of both Heath and Thatcher; Heath considered Northern Ireland as Irish. Thatcher considered the territory British, but saw the people as Irish.⁵⁹ Harold Wilson served as British Prime Minister both prior to and following Edward Heath, firstly from 1964 to 1970, and then from 1974 to 1976. Wilson had been tasked with trying to improve productivity in Northern Ireland as a young President of the Board of Trade as early as 1947, and he soon realised that Northern Ireland’s financial dependence gave him a weapon with which to help the Northern Irish Prime Minister, Terence O’Neill, against the hard-liners in the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP).⁶⁰ Labour was more suited to deal with Northern Ireland than the Conservatives. In Northern Ireland, Conservatism was politically linked to the Unionists. Labour had no clear ties to any of the political parties.⁶¹ Before the ‘Troubles’ fully erupted with violence against a Civil Rights march in Derry in 1968, Wilson had placed his beliefs in the reformative Northern Irish Prime Minister.⁶²

⁵⁶ Lahlum & Bratsberg 2015: 461-464

⁵⁷ Lahlum & Bratsberg 2015: 472-474

⁵⁸ Morgan 1997: 693

⁵⁹ See the respective chapters

⁶⁰ Bew & Bew 2018: 446-447

⁶¹ Pimlott 1992: 548

⁶² Wilson 1971: 270

Wilson was on holiday when violence first broke out in Derry on 5 October 1968, where an illegal Catholic Civil Rights protest march was violently interrupted by the Royal Irish Constabulary (RUC). Wilson had great confidence in himself and Callaghan as problem-solvers. Instead of flying home to London, he travelled to Culdrose, near the English harbour city of Penzance, to meet with Callaghan and discuss strategies. They agreed that if there was ever made an appeal for British troops by the Northern Irish government, they would meet it in return for certain concessions. These included phasing out of the 'B-Specials', the Unionist police force in charge of patrolling the streets, and assurances of Civil Rights to the suppressed Catholic minority. The appeal came immediately.⁶³

Like Heath, Wilson was unsure of what to do in the region. By contrast this was just as the 'Troubles' broke out, and he had no point of reference as to what could be expected next. Wilson knew that once British troops were implemented, the decision would be hard to revise. His Press Officer Joe Haines warned him that the forces would have to stay there for several months, to which the Prime Minister replied that 'they're going to be there for seven years at least'.⁶⁴ Wilson blamed the Unionist Government for the ever-growing tension and conflict. As leader of the UUP the Northern Irish Prime Minister represented the party which for decades had been responsible for the suppression of the Catholic population, and as a reformer who made steps toward equality in the region, he faced a lot of opposition within his own party. O'Neill resigned on 28 April 1969. Wilson had great respect for O'Neill and his accomplishments and appreciated the pressure he was under in at Stormont. He defended him when fellow Labour politician called him a 'prisoner of the extremists', referring to how O'Neill had carried through in the way of liberalisation in the face of very great difficulties. He even stood up for O'Neill against the Grand Master of the Orange Order.⁶⁵ This shows great integrity and respect for fellow politicians sharply contrasting Heath's later treatment of Brian Faulkner, even though he did not really have a major reason to do so other than demonstrating his power and position. O'Neill's successor was to be James Chichester-Clark.

From 12-14 August 1969 an event to be known as the 'Battle of the Bogside' took place in Derry. Ten people, including a sleeping 9-year-old boy, were killed and over a hundred injured in riots relating to an Apprentice Boys march. Since all parades of this kind was illegal, a violent confrontation occurred between the Protestant fraternity and the RUC. After the incident, Wilson summoned Chichester-Clark to London for talks. The visit resulted in the

⁶³ Morgan 1997: 548

⁶⁴ Pimlott 1992: 549

⁶⁵ Wilson 1971: 671

Downing Street Declaration of 29 August 1969. The biggest implementation of the Declaration was the fact that the British Army would take over all security responsibility in Northern Ireland.⁶⁷ In addition to this came a plan for phasing out the B-Specials, a close paramilitary ally of the UUP, the promised political reforms and a parliamentary commissioner was to be put in charge of future grievances. The declaration was welcomed by the Catholic minority who saw it as a long-awaited step towards equality. Unionists, fronted by the radical leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Ian Paisley, denounced it immediately as a surrender to the IRA.⁶⁸ Wilson himself later took close to full credit for the Declaration, and believed that: 'Had a previous United Kingdom Government thought of drafting it, and insisted on its acceptance; more, had its non-discriminatory terms been accepted a generation, or even ten years, earlier, the Tragedy of August 1969 could have been averted and Northern Ireland peacefully set on a new course.'⁶⁹

Now heavily involved, both militarily and politically, Wilson and his cabinet became occupied with the task of replacing the B-Specials with the British army controlled and non-sectarian Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR). This was by many Unionist seen as an undercut of Stormont's authority and sparked fury among the party members. Meanwhile, the IRA was preparing for war. As a consequence of Loyalist violence against the Catholic minority the IRA grew in popularity and gained legitimacy as the defender of Catholic rights.⁷⁰ IRA violence continually grew in force, and from the following summer and on, the 'Troubles' were to enter a new and horrific stage of bombings and assassinations. Even if Labour had no political ties to any of the aggressors in the conflict (the IRA or the UUP), religion remained a key aspect in the conflict. Britain was a Protestant country, and regardless of the Prime Minister's political motivations in the region, the national religion would still be a divide between the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland who felt a stronger sense of belonging to the Republic of Ireland, and thereby the IRA.

After the surprising 1970 election loss to Edward Heath, Wilson had to give up the responsibility to maintain order in Northern Ireland. He had, with great help from Callaghan, managed to bring an end to fifty years of institutional discrimination by the UUP.⁷¹ The

⁶⁷ *Text of Communiqué and Declaration Issued After a Meeting Held at 10 Downing Street on 19 August 1969.* [Press Release]. (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1969) Accessed 28.3.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hmsso/bni190869.htm>

⁶⁸ Morgan 1997: 348

⁶⁹ Wilson 1971: 696

⁷⁰ Bew & Bew 2018: 450-451

⁷¹ Seldon & Hickson 2004: 240

'Troubles' had been 'pacified, albeit temporarily', with the 1969 Downing Street Declaration.⁷² Wilson was described as having 'radical instincts' when it came to the Irish question, and did not quit on the problem even as he was out of 10 Downing Street.⁷³ In an attempt to divert attention from the internal conflicts of the Labour Party in late 1971, Wilson visited both sides of the North-South divide, followed by a speech where he announced a 15-year transition plan to join the two in a United Ireland. The proposed plan caused quite a stir and was rejected by the Heath government. On 'Bloody Sunday', 30 January 1972, thirteen civilians were killed by British soldiers following clashes between Protestant and Catholics in Derry. Even though Wilson had recently used the political situation as a means to increase his own popularity, he accepted Heath's implementation of Direct Rule as essential at that moment in time, and assured Heath that there would not be much trouble getting the decision past the Opposition Party in Parliament.⁷⁴

In spite of this Wilson did not, as one may expect, tone down his public remarks. He followed up with a speech declaring that a ceasefire could begin as soon as April, if internees who had not been brought to trial were released. He was then met with so-called 'friends of the IRA' in Dublin. In March, Wilson, together with his future Northern Ireland Secretary Merlyn Rees, began holding meetings with Dublin politicians, television broadcasts where the former Prime Minister argued his case against internment and for transferring security powers to Westminster, and urged for the IRA's terms to be taken up for discussion in the matter.⁷⁵ He was in open rebellion against Prime Minister Heath and his government, exposing a need for attention and a wish to regain his position as Prime Minister with the next election. Wilson openly used the conflict and its main parties as a platform to get his point across and advance his own political interests. Even though this offensive cannot be seen as a sole reason for his re-election, he was back in 10 Downing Street by March 1974.

Throughout his first term Wilson had showed a willingness to work on the situation in Northern Ireland but had also relied heavily on Callaghan as Home Secretary. Once he was back in 10 Downing Street in 1974, he appeared anxious to move forward in the region. His new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was Merlyn Rees. At the time, any hope for political remedy was fading in Belfast. The Heath government's attempt at power-sharing with the Sunningdale Agreement had done nothing to pacify the violence. In early April, Wilson flew

⁷² Morgan 1997: 563

⁷³ Seldon & Hickson 2004: 242

⁷⁴ Ziegler 2010: 310

⁷⁵ Morgan 1997: 593

to Northern Ireland to meet with local politicians, but this had little effect. Bombings and shootings escalated in May, and the Ulster Worker's Council (UWC) called for a strike amongst Protestants in protest of the Sunningdale Agreement,⁷⁶ which the British and Irish power-sharing politics were based in. With the backing of Protestant paramilitary groups, the UWC managed to bring the Northern Irish economy to a halt as workers pushed the industry to a standstill. Law and order broke down, and shipyards, factories, and other essential services were closed. It was clear that the situation was desperate. Wilson's temporary goal was to calm the situation so as to maintain the public opinion of him on the British mainland.⁷⁷ He cared about finding a solution to the issue, but his own political aspiration lay underneath as motivation throughout the process. On 25 May 1974 Wilson made a statement claiming otherwise, calling those running the strike thugs and bullies, and accused the Loyalists of freeloading on British taxpayers and British democracy.⁷⁸ The speech expressed the opinion of many, and not just people from the Left. The message was intended to sound exactly as it did in order to please mainland voters. In Northern Ireland on the other hand, it sparked fury among the leaders of the UWC. Locally, the speech only increased local support of the strikes.⁷⁹ His focus was on gaining popularity in the mainland, not among the people of Northern Ireland.

Wilson did not have much faith in the power-sharing and did not believe the solution would last for long, but the situation required a display of British solidarity with Northern Irish authorities. The pre-Direct Rule Northern Irish Prime Minister, Brian Faulkner, left a meeting with British authorities, including Wilson, with the impression that the Prime Minister would back his efforts for the Northern Irish to take back control of the province's oil supplies, even though this was not Wilson's intention. He was assessing the possibility of reinstating direct rule. This double-sided initiative bears a striking resemblance to Heath's treatment of Faulkner. It was exposed to the UWC, and halted the negotiations. Like Heath had done before him, Wilson seemed to struggle to find a clear tactical approach to the problem, and the lack of progress disappointed him. Wilson was remembered by Rees to have a special feel for Ireland, (a sentiment one could compare to his feel to the Labour Party), as he liked complicated political issues. Either way, Northern Ireland still remained a political sideshow, just as it had been with Heath. Wilson had other worries to tend to if Labour was to stay in power.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Lord Donaldson of Kingsbridge Speaks in the House of Lords 20 May 1974 accessed 6.5.19 from <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1974/may/20/northern-ireland-state-of-emergency>

⁷⁷ Pimlott 1993: 633

⁷⁸ CAIN, *UWC Strike - Text of broadcast made by Harold Wilson*, (25 May 1974) accessed 5.3.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/uwc/docs/hw25574.htm>

⁷⁹ Pimlott 1993: 633-634

⁸⁰ Pimlott 1993: 634

The Northern Irish general elections in 1974 had uncovered a sentiment of dissatisfaction with the Sunningdale Agreement within the Northern Irish Parliament, as votes for anti-Sunningdale candidates led to a lack of creditability in the current British government. This did not go un-noted by the newly re-elected Wilson, and he started exploring the option of withdrawing from the agreement all together. During the truce of 1974/75, he opened negotiations with the leadership of the IRA. The truce allowed for phasing out of internment, but the ambitions were soon interrupted by Irish discontent; the Irish government did not concede the right of the IRA leaders to negotiate on behalf of the Republic for Irish unity, as Wilson wanted them to.⁸¹ Paramilitary violence also rose in this period as British withdrawal seemed a viable option, and violence was used as a tool for asserting dominance expecting the power vacuum. This tendency peaked in 1976 but was subdued as a result of increased RUC efficiency.⁸²

Prime Minister Wilson never took Callaghan's role in the Northern Ireland conflict for granted. Wilson was said to be relieved that such a sensitive issue was left in such steady hands. Within the Labour Party, Callaghan was long considered to be a strong competitor to Wilson's position, and he therefore believed a task of this magnitude would help distract his colleague from his political aspirations for power. Even though this proved to be true, the public's view of Callaghan grew parallel to that of Wilson. The competition between the two men remained, but the question of Northern Ireland became a reminder that they were able to cooperate nevertheless.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Bew & Bew 2018: 457-458

⁸² Dixon 2001: 170

⁸⁴ Morgan 1997: 549-550

Chapter 3: Calm and Unwavering

James Callaghan never attended university, and so he started his political career in the trade unions in his youth and working himself up the ladder step by step until he was elected to the House of Commons in 1945, 33 years old. Heath had been 34 when elected in to Parliament. To contrast, Wilson was already President of the Board of Trade at the age of 31. He made his position in the Labour Party as an approachable man without foes. He liked people and made an effort to remain on his colleagues' good side.⁸⁵ He was known for his ability to solve problems and his pragmatic approach to a challenge. He tended to enter a role without hesitation or worry about what size of shoes he might have to fill. He would grasp the concrete questions and search for a solution to them, all the while not forgetting to pay attention to the people around him; especially the voters. His main strength was the ability to confront problems as questions of negotiation and that way push forward to find a solution.⁸⁶ The role as Wilson's first Home Secretary made the outbreak of crisis in Northern Ireland in 1968 primarily Callaghan's responsibility. He had previously visited the region in the 1950s, but then the focus lied on the need for social and economic development. Callaghan was no expert on the strained political situation, and neither him nor the labour party had made any attempts on political or constitutional reform prior to 1968. The region remained a little-regarded section of 'the other island' and was best left alone. In 1967, the international currents of change reached Northern Ireland, and a major Civil Rights movement began manifesting itself in the region. The sensitive situation called for practical action, careful language, and an imposing physical presence; all traits Callaghan possessed. Eight days after the Culdrose meeting with Wilson, he went to Northern Ireland himself and began a tour of the affected areas. He was then praised for the impression of 'calm dependability' he managed to convey.⁸⁷

As seen with Wilson, the personal agenda was first priority, and he was happy with being in a position where he could make himself useful and appear as a strong political figure. On 14 August, following the 'Battel of the Bogside', Callaghan decided to send British troops to patrol the streets of Derry for the first time since 1921. Later that evening, the Home Secretary was reportedly quite self-content. He was happy to finally be in a position where he could make some crucial and important decisions.⁸⁸ Despite this satisfaction, Callaghan saw the need for a lasting political solution to the violence other than militarily. There was a great

⁸⁵ Lahlum & Bratberg 2015: 505

⁸⁶ Lahlum & Bratberg 2015:, 511

⁸⁷ Pimlott 1993: 548- 550

⁸⁸ Morgan 1997: 348

need for political reform following demands put forward by the Civil Rights Movement and the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP). In addition to this came the need to change law enforcement policies. All this was addressed on 19 August with the 1969 Downing Street Declaration.

Callaghan went on another trip to Northern Ireland between 27 and 29 August. As a Labour representative he was escorted around the Bogside area in Derry by SDLP leader Gerry Fitt. He then paid the Northern Irish government in Belfast a visit, where an agreement was made for the Unionists to examine housing provision, job discrimination, unemployment, and general economic development. These personal visits showed the people that the government, and especially the Home Secretary, cared about the region, by asserting a physical presence. Whilst visiting the Home Secretary reassuringly and assertively made it very clear that Northern Ireland would remain a part of the United Kingdom as long as it was the wish of the Northern Irish people as well as their parliament.⁸⁹ Callaghan also had an explosive meeting with Ian Paisley, where he in an attempt to appeal to the reverend's biblical beliefs uttered: 'We are all children of God', to which Paisley retorted that 'no, we are all children of Wrath!'. Callaghan had more than enough strength of personality to confront Paisley. The Unionist emerged from their meeting 'looking pale and shaken'.⁹⁰ Callaghan took a strong stance and had a very hands-on approach to the problems facing both himself as Home Secretary, and the British government, in his handling of the tension in Derry and Belfast that August. He was calm and unwavering in his meeting with Ian Paisley and emerged from the visit as a clear authoritative figure. Callaghan confronted 'Paisleyism'⁹¹ in a speech, stating how it is 'the language of war, cast in a biblical mould. 'Fight the good fight' sung in Belfast after a night of rioting is very different when it is sung in an English country chapel in the village. That is what the Reverend Paisley either fails to appreciate or deliberately plays on.'⁹²

He wanted to keep religion out of the debate and did not play on it for support unlike the Northern Irish reverend. It was clear that the Home Secretary was in his right element in this emergency situation. He took charge, gave instructions and imposed himself on the crisis. He himself recalled it as 'a most enviable position for any politician to be in', as his Prime Minister was encouraging action, parliament was not in session, and colleagues from the

⁸⁹ *Northern Ireland: Text of Communiqué and Declaration Issued After a Meeting Held at 10 Downing Street on 19 August 1969*. [Press Release]. (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1969) Accessed 28.3.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hmsso/bni190869.htm>

⁹⁰ Morgan 1997: 349

⁹¹ See footnote 18

⁹² Wilson 1971: 718

Cabinet were scattered he was free to do as he pleased.⁹³ ‘Big Jim’ left an immense impression, appearing to stand taller and stronger than all the Unionist politicians. When Chichester-Clark claimed the conflict was too complex to know where to begin, Callaghan’s answer was to encourage him physically by removing his jacket and rolling up the sleeves of his shirt. The press praised him. After returning from the visit he wrote to Lord Mountbatten that the army was doing well but the Unionist government was being ‘inert’. He added to the statement that he was not overly optimistic about the future of the situation.⁹⁴ Had it not been for his charm and authoritative charisma the situation might have been way harder to calm. His tough approach to Ian Paisley, and his down-to-earth approach to walk-about and conversation with the common people of Northern Ireland, was to a great extent the reason for his success as Home Secretary.

Together with Chichester-Clark the disarmament of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was confirmed, as well as the disbanding of the B-Specials. A new part-time Ulster Defence Regiment was implemented under British command. Further proposals about investment grants, improved housing, and development of economic infrastructure was put forward.⁹⁵ Despite continued violence, optimism remained high in the following period. The Home Secretary’s philosophy of getting the job done as efficiently as possible in many ways contributed to a new phase of problem-solving in the British and Northern Irish governments in face of mass upheaval and sectarian violence between its own people. Callaghan was aware of the porous peace and the possible problems to come as he left the Home Office in 1970. He came up with a proposition for an all-Irish Council which was initially rejected by the Heath government but eventually reached in the Sunningdale Agreement. He was deeply saddened by the Heath government failing to follow up on his initiatives to improve the social and economic state of the province and continued to call for an end to the religious hostility.⁹⁶

When Labour regained power in 1974, Callaghan was handed the position of Foreign Secretary. In his new position Callaghan had little influence over the matters in Northern Ireland. When Harold Wilson resigned as Prime Minister in 1976 Callaghan was elected in his place.⁹⁷ His intention as Prime Minister was to focus more on international affairs,⁹⁸ this despite

⁹³ Morgan 1997: 349

⁹⁴ Morgan 1997: 349

⁹⁵ *Northern Ireland: Text of a Communiqué issued following discussions between the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Northern Ireland Government in Belfast on 9th and 10th October 1969* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1969) accessed 6.3.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hmso/bni101069.htm>

⁹⁶ Morgan 1997: 355

⁹⁷ Lahlum & Bratberg 2015: 510-512

⁹⁸ Morgan 1997: 524

the ever-growing unrest and tensions in Northern Ireland.⁹⁹ His Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Roy Mason was the one who would have the most to do with the ‘Troubles’ from that time on, even though Callaghan without a doubt was the one in the party with the most experience with the region. The Prime Minister had been the most central Cabinet figure in Northern Ireland as Home Secretary, and chose the same strategy as Wilson in handing the main tasks of the problems over to Mason as Home Secretary.

In the beginning of 1977, there were talks between Mason and the Ulster Unionists to try and enhance Northern Irish representation in Westminster as well as reform of local government in the region. In the spirit of the Labour Party, Westminster decided to take an industrial approach to try and improve the social situation on the region by creating more jobs. In the beginning of 1978 the political situation was as tense as ever, and a state of emergency was declared by Mason as strikes and unrest related to unemployment and equal pay caused uncertainty in the region.¹⁰⁰ With the situation in Northern Ireland continuing to seem unreconcilable, Margaret Thatcher moved to vote for no confidence in the government and challenged Callaghan’s seat as Prime Minister by the end of March 1978. In the last days before the vote Mason finalised the decision to increase Northern Irish representation in the House of Commons. He only negotiated with the Unionist Parliament Members, resulting in strong protests from Gerry Fitt. Not even Callaghan’s calm and authoritative negotiation skills managed to persuade Fitt to remain supportive of the Labour government in the upcoming vote. Fitt read the situation as Callaghan seeing Northern Ireland as a ‘one-party-state’, much to the fury of the SDLP leader who saw this as direct favouring of the Unionists by Prime Minister Callaghan. In addition to this, the Prime Minister chose not to support the initiative for a new gas line connecting Northern Ireland to the British mainland, an expression of his morals, as he did not want to start such a comprehensive process without having the proper research and preparations in place. The initiative was popular on both sides of the political spectrum in the province and Callaghan’s decision triggered further dissatisfaction with the British government. This was a fault in judgement, as it did not gain him any more votes at a time when he sorely needed them. Callaghan eventually lost by one vote, 310 to 311, with most of the Northern Irish representatives voting against him.¹⁰¹

In his handling of Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1970, Home Secretary Callaghan appeared as a great deliverer to supporters of civil rights in Northern Ireland. There were no

⁹⁹ Bartlett 2018, 458

¹⁰⁰ Morgan 1997: 653-660

¹⁰¹ Morgan 1997: 684-685

policy briefings or memos to guide him on Northern Ireland, but he is remembered to have handled the outbreak of the ‘Troubles’ masterfully. By the end of 1969, *The Guardian* named him “Politician of the Year”¹⁰². Wilson notes in ‘The Labour Governments 1964-1970’ how there was ‘no doubt that in the strengthening of the Labour Government’s political position and standing during the second half of 1969, Jim Callaghan’s handling of the Ulster situation played an important part.’¹⁰³ As Prime Minister on the other hand, he was more detached from the conflict, and as his predecessors Wilson and Heath focused most of his attention elsewhere. He left 10 Downing Street in 1979 after losing the election to Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Party. In 1981 Callaghan announced his belief that Britain never would be capable of reaching a settlement which would please both sides.¹⁰⁴

Morgan concludes that all in all, Callaghan was a creative force in promoting ‘new forces for change in Northern Ireland’.¹⁰⁵ He was seen as a man of plain common sense: stable and dependable. Both internment and withdrawal were non-viable options in dealing with the continued terror of the IRA in the following years, and the new Prime Minister was to have her hands full because of it.

¹⁰² Morgan 1997: 347-355

¹⁰³ Wilson 1971: 697

¹⁰⁴ Dixon 2001: 161

¹⁰⁵ Morgan 1997: 749

Chapter 4: ‘Business as usual’

Throughout her political career two points stand out as important to Thatcher’s success: a strong belief in her own abilities and a strong sense of knowing what it was like to be an outsider.¹⁰⁶ She was a workaholic and worked from early morning to the final glass of scotch in the evening.¹⁰⁷ With Northern Ireland however, she was taught how stubbornness and policy of no compromise was not always the best strategy. She was early on convinced that the appearance of a willingness to negotiate on Northern Ireland was important ‘not only for domestic reasons but also because of the international reaction, e.g. in the United States’, as she told Ian Paisley in a meeting on 14 November 1979.¹⁰⁸ She never hid her enthusiasm nor made an effort to conceal emotion in political matters. Thatcher was the leader of Conservative and Unionist Party, and unlike Heath, who believed a united Ireland to be the best solution to the ‘Troubles’, she was dedicated to keep the United Kingdom of Britain and Northern Ireland intact. There was also a sentiment connected to one of her friends and mentors, shadow spokesperson on Northern Ireland, Airey Neave, whom instructed her in the Unionist perspective before he was assassinated by the IRA shortly before the 1979 general election. Her Unionist sentiments were not the driving force in her aspirations for Northern Ireland, as much as the general wish for change any new Prime Minister is bound to pursue.¹⁰⁹ Thatcher felt as if she did not have enough power or influence as Education Secretary under Heath,¹¹⁰ but his did not stop her from voicing her opinions and demanding to be heard. As Education Secretary Thatcher took note of the ‘thriftiness’ of the region and was impressed by the educational standards, but she had little influence as education fell under the responsibility of Stormont.¹¹² The same goes for Northern Ireland politics in general: She had been exposed to the challenges concerning the region as a Parliament and Cabinet member, but she had no experience in dealing with Northern Ireland before becoming Prime Minister in 1979.

She saw the ‘Troubles’ as any other political challenge of hers: The region would have to submit. From Callaghan she inherited a political landscape coloured by violence and reluctance to change, and as she entered 10 Downing Street in 1979 she lacked a clear strategy

¹⁰⁶ Lahlum & Bratberg 2015: 524-527

¹⁰⁷ Moynahan 1997: 276-294

¹⁰⁸ *Record of conversation between the Prime Minister and Dr. Ian Paisley at the House of Commons 14 November 1979* (15 November 1979) accessed 11.4.19 via MTF <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/117903>

¹⁰⁹ Hugo Young, *One of Us: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 2013), 456

¹¹⁰ Moore 2014: 241

¹¹² Moore 2014: 587

for the province, just like Heath, Wilson and Callaghan before her.¹¹³ The assassination of Airey Neave greatly shaped Thatcher's view on the IRA as a terrorist organisation, and sparked anger and hatred which would colour her views on the political situation for the years to come. She handed the position to Humphrey Atkins, who knew little about the matter and, as most British officials, did not want the responsibility. In light of this, Thatcher herself became the one to give the lead on Northern Ireland. With ongoing IRA terrorist attacks, she claimed that the Republic was knowingly 'harbouring known murderers' and threatened with 'administrative action against Irish immigrants' to get extradition of suspects over to Britain.¹¹⁴ Her tactics were to take a strong stance early on.

One of IRA's main objectives was for their imprisoned members in prison to attain a 'Prisoner of War' status. There had been so-called blanket protest, where prisoners refused to wear clothes other than their bedclothes, and the dirty protest in which the prisoners smeared their cells with excrement.¹¹⁵ In October 1980 a hunger strike was announced. Calculatingly the Prime Minister made concessions even before the strike began on 27 October 1980 allowing the prisoners to wear 'civilian-type clothes', as she wanted to get in to the most reasonable position early on. She toughened up once the strike began, agreeing with her advisers that no further concessions were to be made. The hunger strike was called off on 18 December 1980.¹¹⁶ That December, she flew to Dublin for the planned Anglo-Irish Summit. Both Thatcher and the Taoiseach's aim was to reconcile the British Irish relations and encourage future co-operation, this included discussions regarding the situation in Northern Ireland. The following communiqué stated that their next meeting would be devoted to the 'totality of relationships within these islands'¹¹⁷ which was interpreted by Unionists as an approval of Irish claim to a say in matters concerning Northern Ireland. Disagreement surrounding the meaning behind the phrasing followed, with the Prime Minister herself being vocally unsatisfied, but the summit laid a base for future negotiation on judicial responsibility and cooperation. Thatcher was known for her neat and thorough focus on wording in all policy, a quality which played an important and proactive part in her dealing with the conflict.

¹¹³ Report on meeting with Taoiseach Jack Lynch (10 May 1979) Accessed 15.4.19 via MTF from <https://www.margareththatcher.org/document/117830>

¹¹⁴ Moore 2014: 587-591

¹¹⁵ "Birmingham Daily Post", *Blanket Protest IRA Man Freed*, 27 April 1979, p.21, downloaded 18.4.19 via BNA from <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002135/19790427/483/0021>

¹¹⁶ "The Irish Times" *Hunger Strike Over*, 19 December 1980, accessed 22.4.19 from <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/from-the-archive-hunger-strike-over-1.2468720>

¹¹⁷ Stephen Kelly. "'The Totality of Relationships': The Haughey-Thatcher Relationship and the Anglo-Irish Summit Meeting, 8 December 1980." *Éire-Ireland* 51, no. 3 (2016): 244-273. accessed 22.4.19 from <https://muse.jhu.edu/>

In early January 1981, Thatcher was informed of another planned hunger strike to begin in Maze Prison on 1 March, as the IRA prisoners complained that the government had failed to instate the previously promised concessions. Their objective was a special-category status, and they were prepared for deaths if necessary. After an elected Member of Parliament died that spring the hunger strike leader Bobby Sands was elected in his place whilst participating in the strike. His death on 5 May 1981 attracted major international attention. Thatcher had spoken in Belfast during a visit on 5 March 1981 condemning the protesters and promising no compromises.¹¹⁸ She was more concerned with doing what was right for her Northern Ireland policy than to try and satisfy international critics. With more and more strikers dying she ‘sat tight, unmoved, as they dropped.’¹¹⁹ The local reactions and violence in connection to the dying protesters were slowly weakening. The IRA had misjudged her stubbornness, and Thatcher emerged from the strike with her reputation intact. Had she been more open to compromise the prisoners would not have had to die, but she saw the no-compromise strategy as the best way of asserting dominance over the IRA.

As she shuffled her cabinet in September 1981, Jim Prior replaced Humphrey Atkins as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. As opposed to Atkins, whom had had a more indirect approach to the issue leaving the Prime Minister in charge, Prior was given more responsibility and power regarding the future of the region. Prior was more positive to making concessions, and as a result of this IRA prisoners were to get more freedom of association, choice of work and clothing, and better recovery of remission. Prior also decided to try and shift the province halfway back to self-government, and thereby taking the pressure off the Direct Rule from London.¹²¹ None of this could have been decided without the Prime Minister’s approval. She was realising that she needed to soften her approach in order to find a solution.

Her choices of policy, as well as attitude in regard to Northern Ireland had seriously damaged her relationship with Taoiseach Charles Haughey, which became a problem when she decided to go to war on Argentina over the Falkland Islands in 1982. Haughey opposed any resolution made by the FitzGerald government when he regained power in February 1982 and partially blamed her handling of Northern Ireland for his loss in the 1981 Irish general

¹¹⁸ Transcript of speech in Belfast 5 March 1981 accessed 22.4.19 via MTF from <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/104589>

¹¹⁹ Young 2013: 567

¹²¹ Young 2013: 567

election.¹²² He also publicly voiced how the Republic of Ireland did not support the war.¹²³ The Irish initially supported the British out of solidarity in the EEC, but when the British wanted the Community to request economic sanctions on Argentina from third party countries Ireland refused to participate. As the war intensified Haughey underlined the Irish tradition of neutrality and rowed back the Irish support for sanctions.¹²⁴ Thatcher did not care about the lack of support in Northern Irish affairs as she felt that she had no obligation to please the Irish in her domestic policy, but the lack of support in the Falklands matter on the other hand, disappointed her. The 1982 Northern Irish general election in October showed growing support to Sinn Féin and the Nationalists. All the issues surrounding the negotiations were getting under her skin, but she promised herself that if re-elected for another term in 1983, she would do something about Ireland.¹²⁵ Re-elected she was.

The Prime Minister was continually disappointed with the Irish efforts in the negotiations, and felt as if the neighbours were not being tough enough on the IRA. The (then again re-elected¹²⁶) Taoiseach FitzGerald felt the urgency of the situation and feared the growing support of Sinn Féin in the north.¹²⁷ During the negotiations that fall the possibility of the Irish removing Articles 2 and 3, where they laid claim to the northern territory, from the Irish constitution as a favour of good will towards the British government. On 2 November, Thatcher received a report claiming that FitzGerald believed the difficulties stemmed from the Prime Minister, and not from constitutional matters. Thatcher wanted to protect British sovereignty in the region, but at the same time prevent the loss of life.¹²⁹ The year ended with the IRA bombing the Harrod's department store in London on 17 December, killing six people and injuring 90. However, Thatcher observed that the overall situation was calm and casualty figures for 1983 were lower than the previous year.¹³⁰ Security was the most important thing,

¹²² Moore 2014: 621

¹²³ William Borders, "New York Times", *Falkland Crisis Is Staining British-Irish Relations*, 12 May 1982, accessed 22.4.19 from <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/12/world/falkland-crisis-is-staining-british-irish-relations.html>

¹²⁴ Geary, Michael J. 'Irish Foreign Policy and European Political Cooperation from membership to Maastricht: Navigating Neutrality' in Haakon Ikononou (edit.), *European enlargement across rounds and beyond borders*, (London: Routledge, 2017) chapter 5., 107-108

¹²⁵ Moore 2014: 621

¹²⁶ Between June 1981 and November 1982 there were three General Elections in Ireland, resulting in FitzGerald as Taoiseach from June 1981 to February 1982, Haughey as Taoiseach from February to November 1982, and from then on FitzGerald again

¹²⁷ Moore 2015: 298-301

¹²⁹ Moore 2015: 303-304

¹³⁰ 112 deaths in 1982, 84 deaths in 1983, (Malcolm Sutton Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland), statistics accessed 22.4.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/chron/1982.html> and <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/chron/1983.html>

and this is where she felt Anglo-Irish cooperation was most important.¹³² Anglo-Irish relations were central if there ever was to be agreement in Northern Ireland, and an unstable political landscape in the south made it difficult for the Prime Minister.

The New Ireland Forum Report from 2 May 1984 concerning the constitutional territorial claims, also included proposals concerning joint British and Irish authority, courts and criminal justice system in the region.¹³³ This was all unacceptable to Thatcher, but in public she presented herself as vaguely positive. She now clearly saw the need to tone down her usual hard-line persona for the benefit of the negotiations. Re-elected she seemed to have learned from past mistakes. The following autumn the British government were preparing to offer the Irish a ‘means of exercising direct influence over the affairs of the province through institutionalised consultative arrangements about police and security matters.’¹³⁴ Thatcher did not support this, but accepted it in exchange for the territory claiming articles in the Irish constitution.¹³⁵

As a result of her determined policy of no compromise Thatcher now found herself on the top of IRA’s death list. In her own view she had been personally affected by their terrorism with the assassination of Airey Neave, and she always made a point of sharing her views of their actions as unacceptable and unlawful, and wanted to ‘eradicate terrorism’ all together.¹³⁶ In public, she continued to present herself as fearless. On 12 October 1984 an assassination attempt directed at the Prime Minister herself took place in relation to the 1984 Conservative Party Conference in Brighton. After the bombing she made it an objective to go on with the conference as planned. In her opening speech she condemned the attack, thanked the rescue workers and expressed her sympathies with those injured or killed by the bomb. She then continued with her prepared speech, underlining how ‘now, it must be business as usual.’¹³⁷

In the time following the attack, she doubted the use of further negotiations, and during the November summit she was ‘aggressively negative’.¹⁴⁰ She was paranoid and negative to any form of Irish intervention as she feared IRA infiltration if the Republic gained any responsibility and power. She unyieldingly continued to push forward for an agreement, and

¹³² Letter from Thatcher to James H. Molyneux (16 February 1981) accessed 14.4.19 via MTF from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/130201>

¹³³ *New Ireland Forum Report*, (Dublin: The Stationary Office, 1984) Accessed 11.4.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/nifr.htm#joint>

¹³⁴ Moore 2015: 307-309

¹³⁵ Moore 2015: 307-309

¹³⁶ Letter from Thatcher to Ian Paisley (20 June 1980) accessed 16.4.19 via MTF from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/source/prem19/prem19-0501> (p 48)

¹³⁷ Margaret Thatcher Speech to Conservative Party Conference (12 October 1984) accessed 16.4.19 via MTF from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105763>

¹⁴⁰ Moore 2015: 318-319

this persistence is no doubt one of the reasons why a deal was eventually reached. Thatcher was the one to remind the parties of how the structure of the Northern Irish government should be agreed upon by the Northern Irish, not through Anglo-Irish negotiations.¹⁴¹ The two parties wanted progress but could not agree on anything, as the following summit was dominated by a report put together by the New Ireland Forum. The main trait of this document was the proposal of three possible solutions to the ‘Irish Problem’: unification, confederation or a joint authority to run the province.¹⁴² She dismissed each curtly with ‘that’s out’ in the following press conference,¹⁴³ and expressed no concern of the Taoiseach’s delicate political position. In spite of her outburst, movement towards a new deal continued. Neither FitzGerald nor Thatcher let the disagreement halt further negotiations, but by the end of 1984 everyone knew that it would all depend on her personal commitment. In the end, the main question was whether she would be willing to take on the Unionists. With the growing prospect of a definite agreement, Thatcher began to involve herself more personally in the matter, and for a period she gave Northern Ireland more attention than any British Prime Minister had ever done.¹⁴⁴ In addition to this, her trust in and admiration of FitzGerald grew, and the personal relationship between Thatcher and FitzGerald played a significant part in keeping the negotiations going. The year leading up to the Agreement was tense, dominated by fear of leaks, backsliding and sabotage at the hands of the Unionists. All the while, Thatcher was extremely focused on the wording of the text. On 31 October 1985 the cabinet agreed on the principal of the Agreement. After this, accusation of her ‘treachery’ could be heard amongst the Unionists.¹⁴⁵

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed 15 November 1985 and was widely accepted in the House of Commons, where it was voted in favour by 473 to 42.¹⁴⁷ The agreement sparked immense Unionist disapproval, and Ian Paisley vocally and publicly objected to it.¹⁴⁸ Thatcher said in a Cabinet meeting on the Agreement on 31 October 1985 that the British government had ‘conceded nothing significant, apart from the establishment of a framework in which the Irish Republic would have the opportunity to advance views and proposals on various aspects

¹⁴¹ Moore 2015: 320

¹⁴² *New Ireland Forum Report*, (May 1984) (Dublin: The Stationary Office, 1984) accessed 26.4.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/nifr.htm>

¹⁴³ Extracts from Transcript of Press Conference with Margaret Thatcher following an Anglo-Irish Summit, London, (19 November 1984) accessed 15.4.19 via CAIN from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/pmo/mt191184.htm>

¹⁴⁴ Young 2013: 469-471

¹⁴⁵ Moore 2015: 322-333

¹⁴⁷ Alan Morton for CAIN, *Anglo-Irish Agreement - Reaction to the Agreement* accessed 15.4.19 from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/aia/reaction.htm>

¹⁴⁸ Ian Paisley addresses Agreement protesters in Donemana, Tyrone 8 March 1986, accessed 20.4.19 via RTÉ Archives from <https://www.rte.ie/archives/collections/news/21213430-anglo-irish-agreement-protest/>

of Northern Ireland affairs.¹⁴⁹ She later stated that she regretted to signing the agreement, ‘as it failed to deliver on improved security cooperation.’¹⁵⁰

Thatcher saw Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom territorially and constitutionally, not culturally. Unlike Heath she was a Unionist, and unlike Wilson she always referred to the people of Northern Ireland as ‘they’ or ‘them’ and did not consider them a part of ‘us’. She treated Northern Ireland with care, attention and determination, as with all her policy, but unlike other political matters she wished this problem would go away. She found the Irish, on both sides, irritating because of their preference for cultural politics over a more clear-cut economic focus. Unlike Heath, Thatcher made a point out of refusing to negotiate with IRA, but she did authorize others to do so as representatives of her government. Northern Ireland proved to her how cultural and religious unrest is not something one can bend to ones will.

¹⁴⁹ *Cabinet meeting 31 October 1985* downloaded 19.4.19 via TNA

¹⁵⁰ Bew & Bew 2018: 464

Conclusions:

The notion that a leader's personality differs from normal people, and that they possess certain personality traits the rest of us do not, seems intuitively appealing. The traditional approach of analysing and categorising specific personality traits has proven to be quite unsuccessful, and so many modern theories emphasise situational influence on leadership. The Person-in-Situation perspective focuses on the external influences, such as the characteristics of a task and organisational context.¹⁵¹ This is a key element as this thesis explores the opposite approach, namely how the actors' personalities played a part in their Northern Ireland policy.

Heath's and Thatcher's commitment to the politics and core beliefs of the Conservative and Unionist Party became evident in relation to Northern Ireland. Heath never made a point of keeping the province within the United Kingdom since he believed a reunification of the Irelands to be the best solution to the conflict. Thatcher played on her Unionist beliefs, not only with her reservations to judicially involving the Republic in Northern Ireland, but also to the extreme of going to war on Argentina over the Falklands. Wilson shared Heath's objective of a united Ireland, but still emphasised the collectiveness of the United Kingdom when attempting to raise public support. One could argue that the inclusive spirit of Labour was evident in Prime Minister Wilson approach to Northern Ireland, as well as in Home Secretary Callaghan. Prime Minister Callaghan on the other hand, directed his focus elsewhere during his short premiership, even though he can be considered the candidate most equipped to deal with Northern Ireland because of his prominent experience as Home Secretary. The Prime Ministers were all skilled negotiator driven to find solutions and pushing forward until one was reached. As is very evident in the cases of Home Secretary Callaghan and his handling of the crisis in 1968, Wilson with the Downing Street Declaration of 1969, Heath with the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 and Thatcher with the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. Out of the four, Thatcher was the only woman. This thesis has chosen not to focus on this, as even if the fact is central in her political background and personality, it concludes that it did not affect her views on or involvement in Northern Ireland.

Just as situational circumstances affect a leader, this thesis argues that a leader also affects a situation. There is no doubt that if the different Prime Ministers had acted differently in relation to Northern Ireland and its actors, things may have turned out differently. Historical

¹⁵¹ Daan Van Knippenberg, 'The Social Psychology of Personality and Leadership: A Person-in-Situation Perspective' in Kay Deaux & Mark Snyder (edit.). *The Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), Chapter 31, 777-798

research is no stranger to the concept of a contrafactual perspective. This thesis presents how the Prime Ministers, their personality and behaviour, manifested themselves in the decisions made, strategies chosen, and politics followed in relation to the 'Troubles'. They all had the same objective; to calm the sectarian violence of the region. They also possessed different personality traits and past experiences which shaped their policy, and in turn shaped the course of history; Willingness or unwillingness to negotiate with certain parties, view of the political situation and how to best solve it, and personal involvement. Likewise, the Prime Ministers were subjects to different phases of the conflict, as for instance Wilson and Callaghan were faced with the first explosive outbreak of violence in 1968, Heath with the disaster of Bloody Sunday and its aftermath, and Thatcher with her own attempted assassination as well as the political challenge of the hunger strikes and Bobby Sands. This can therefore not be considered a just comparison of the four, but the thesis gives a glimpse into the Prime Ministers motivations and objectives and puts them in perspective.

The Person-in-Situation model and this type of research is applicable to the other central actors of the Northern Irish 'Troubles', but the scope of this thesis is not wide enough to bring in any other personalities. Analysing personality and the personal involvement of past political leaders gives a different perspective of the past and contributes to an understanding beyond mere policy. It can be used with other historical actors and processes, as well as in Northern Ireland. One could apply it to the Taoiseachs of the South, or the Northern Irish Prime Ministers prior to Direct Rule. This thesis therefore stands as an example for future research.

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