

ULSTER SAYS NO

The unionists' campaign of opposition

The unionist population was so angered by the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that it decided to try and destroy it by a series of protests and other actions. These included:

- Protest marches across Northern Ireland (which sometimes became violent).
- A rally to oppose the Agreement. Held in front of the City Hall in Belfast on 23rd November 1985, this gathering was attended by over 100,000 people.
- A 'Day of Action', held on 3rd March 1986. This event brought most of Northern Ireland to a standstill. By and large it was a peaceful protest, but in a few places the 'Day of Action' ended in violence.
- A campaign of **civil disobedience** which included unionist MPs refusing to attend the Westminster Parliament, unionist leaders refusing to meet members of the British government and unionist councils refusing to set **rates** for their area.
- The resignation - by all 15 unionist MPs - of their membership of the Westminster Parliament. This action meant that new elections had to be held for these 15 **constituencies**. The unionists' intention was to show - by the number of votes gained by their candidates - how much support they had in their campaign of opposition to the Agreement.

While these actions were mostly peaceful, loyalist paramilitaries showed their opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement by:

- Trying to frighten members of the RUC - who were seen as key to making the Agreement work - through the use of violence and **intimidation**.
- Setting up a new paramilitary organisation - Ulster Resistance - to oppose the Agreement.



Results of the campaign

So did the campaign of opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement work?

- While unionist candidates won over 420,000 votes in the **by-elections** that followed the resignation of their Westminster seats, one seat (Newry and Armagh) was won by the SDLP.
- The Westminster Parliament was so big (with 650 MPs) that the non-attendance of 14 unionist MPs was not really noticed.
- As local councils within Northern Ireland had little or no power as things stood, their refusal to use their 'powers' made no difference to how Northern Ireland was run.

By September 1987, when the unionist leaders agreed to talk to British ministers again, it was clear that the campaign to destroy the agreement had failed.



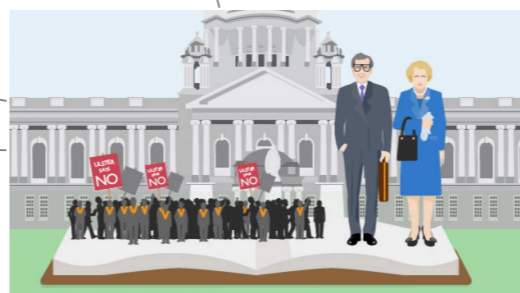
The hunger strikes and their aftermath changed the political situation in Northern Ireland massively.

The growth of Sinn Féin as a result of the adoption of the **Armilite and Ballot Box Strategy** was putting increasing pressure on the position of the **SDLP** as the main voice of nationalist voters.

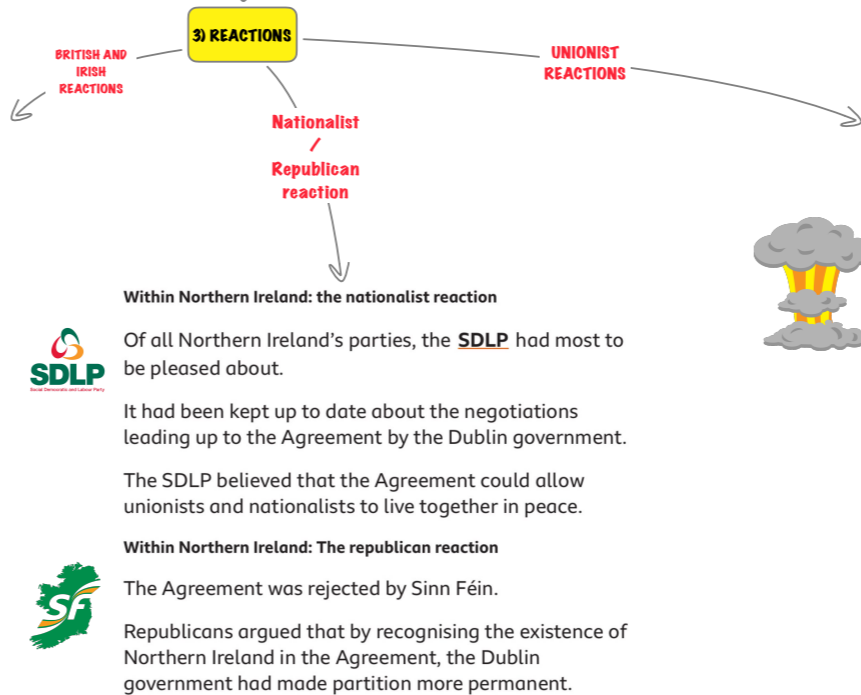
It was against this backdrop that the London and Dublin governments decided to work more closely together.

The outcome was the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

With the growth of Sinn Féin putting increasing pressure on the position of the SDLP as the main voice of nationalist voters, the London and Dublin Governments decided that it was time to act.



1985: ANGLIO IRISH AGREEMENT



Within the Republic of Ireland

While the Republic's Fine Gael/Labour government welcomed the Agreement, the main opposition party - Fianna Fáil - condemned the deal.

Its main concern was the Irish government's acceptance of Britain's right to be in Northern Ireland.

Opposition to the Agreement was also expressed by **Senator** Mary Robinson, a key member of the governing Labour Party.

She resigned from the party in support of unionist opposition to the Agreement.

Within Great Britain

While the Agreement was easily passed by the Westminster Parliament, some members of Margaret Thatcher's government were not as happy.

Chief among these was Ian Gow, a Minister in the Treasury Department.

Gow resigned from the government in protest at the Agreement - he claimed that it had only been agreed due to the pressure of paramilitary violence and argued it would only make the situation worse.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement



On 15th November 1985 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and **Taoiseach** Garrett FitzGerald signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement.



There are a number of reasons why both governments decided to do so:

- The British knew that nationalist hostility to them would have to be removed if 'the Troubles' were ever to be ended.
- The Irish believed that if this nationalist hostility towards the British was ended, support for Sinn Féin and the **PIRA** campaign would disappear.

THE AGREEMENT

The Intergovernmental Conference would also work on improving general co-operation between both parts of the island.

A permanent **secretariat** would provide the Intergovernmental Conference with administrative help. It would be staffed by **civil servants** from both Belfast and Dublin.

It was also agreed that until there was agreement on power sharing between Northern Ireland's parties there would be no further attempt to introduce **devolution**.

As with the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement, the Anglo-Irish Agreement:

- accepted that the Dublin government had to have an input into how Northern Ireland was run;
- included an acceptance by the Irish government that Irish unity would only happen in the long term and would require the support of a majority of the people from the North.

Reactions to the Agreement

To become law, the Anglo-Irish Agreement had to be passed by the Parliaments in London and Dublin.

While this did not prove to be a problem, the Agreement did face a range of reactions across the British Isles.

Within Northern Ireland: The unionist reaction

The unionist population reacted very badly to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which came as a complete shock.

They felt betrayed by Thatcher's government and felt that they would end up having to join a united Ireland.

At the same time, the pro-Union Alliance Party was more positive about the Agreement's potential to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

