

After winning the May 1997 UK general election, the new Labour government – led by Tony Blair – attempted to get the peace process moving again.

Blair announced that if the **PIRA** renewed its ceasefire, Sinn Féin could enter talks.

The PIRA ceasefire was duly renewed on 20 July 1997 and Sinn Féin entered the talks in September 1997, having also signed up to the Mitchell Principles of non-violence.

It was important that Sinn Féin could negotiate without the PIRA beginning its campaign again.

A General Army Convention therefore agreed that the PIRA's Army Council (which the Sinn Féin leadership allegedly controlled) could decide on possible concessions.

Sinn Féin's entry led to the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP) leaving the talks.

Both parties refused even to consider proximity negotiations (meaning they would not have to meet face to face), a position that was not shared by the Ulster Unionist Party or the loyalist parties.

### All party talks?



Tony Blair celebrates becoming Prime Minister in Downing Street in May 1997

### BACKGROUND

### Negotiations

The negotiations were based around three strands:

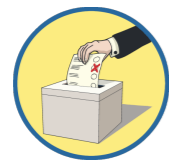
- Strand One** would focus on a new governmental structure for Northern Ireland.
- Strand Two** would be concerned with relationships between the two parts of Ireland.
- Strand Three** would deal with British-Irish relations.



An Independent International Commission on Decommissioning was also set up under the chairmanship of Canadian General John de Chastelain.

On the evening of Friday 10 April 1998, Good Friday, it was announced that agreement had been reached.

In the final stages not only did Blair and the **Taoiseach**, Bertie Ahern, join the negotiations, but US President Bill Clinton played his part by telephone.



### 4) REFERENDUMS

#### The referendums

Referendums were held on both sides of the border on 22 May 1998 to discover the electorate's support for the Agreement.

Within Northern Ireland, 71.12 per cent of those who voted indicated their support for the Agreement.

The overall turnout was 80.98 per cent, a figure significantly higher than that produced at most elections.

It seemed that close to 97 per cent of nationalists supported the Agreement while the comparable figure for unionists was about 52 per cent.

The figures in the Republic were even clearer.

There, 94.4 per cent agreed with the government's plans to amend Articles II and III of the Irish Constitution.

### 1) ALL PARTY TALKS

### THE STRANDS

### Key terms of the Good Friday Agreement



A 108-member Assembly would sit at Parliament Buildings, Stormont

### 2) KEY TERMS

### Other elements of the Good Friday Agreement

- The Irish government agreed to renounce its constitutional claims to Northern Ireland as contained within Articles II and III of the 1937 Irish Constitution.
- The British Government agreed to replace the 1920 Government of Ireland Act.
- There were also to be prisoner releases, alongside paramilitary decommissioning.



The Agreement also established an Independent Commission on Policing, to create a police force that could attract the support of both communities.



### 1998: GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

### 3) RESPONSES TO GFA



### The responses to the Good Friday Agreement

The DUP and UKUP's opposition to any deal was already known, however now divisions started to emerge within the UUP.

The first sense of this came when Jeffrey Donaldson – one of the members of the UUP negotiating team – walked out of the talks just as the deal was nearing completion.

In the event, six of the UUP's ten MPs opposed the Agreement.

In May 1998, anti-Agreement unionists – including these anti-Agreement UUP MPs – set up the United Unionist Campaign to co-ordinate their opposition.

Their slogan was 'It's right to say no.'

On 30 April 1998, the **PIRA** announced that the Agreement fell somewhat 'short of presenting a solid basis for a lasting settlement', and added that it would not decommission its weapons.

However, a few days later, Sinn Féin leaders told their supporters to back the Agreement.

At the party conference (Ard Fheis), members voted to allow members to take seats in the new Assembly.

