the goal of a sovereign unitary state. Most nationalists believed still in the integrity of a single Irish nation. But nationalism had now accommodated itself philosophically as well as practically to partition, and to the legitimacy of the Unionist aspiration and tradition. The once central and uncomplicated notion of Irish self-determination had been redefined to allow for the self-determination of northerners within a Northern Irish state. Notions of the primacy of a Gaelic, Catholic Irishness had long gone: the Agreement of 1998 paid special attention to the role of the Irish language within Northern Ireland, but this was as part of a pluralist rather than a supremacist vision. Catholic identity within nationalism remained vitally important; but the special constitutional position of the Roman Catholic Church within the Irish state had long since been overturned (in May 1972), while formerly stringent legislation on a variety of matters affecting the Church's social teaching (marriage, divorce, contraception, abortion) had been relaxed. The publicity given to a number of paedophile priests had a profound impact on the Church's standing; less shocking, but still disturbing, was the exposure of the stern and sometimes abusive record of the Christian Brothers within Irish schools. Liberal Catholics were sometimes worried by the Church's ban on women priests. All these issues fed the currents of secularization – or, at any rate, the processes by which the long dominant, nineteenth-century, definition of Irish Catholicism has been overturned. But there remained the possibility, as Fintan O'Toole argued, 'that the [redefined] Irish Church . . . will look remarkably like what it was in 1800 – a focus for a relaxed but deep spirituality in which the broad culture rather than the devotional and behavioural rules is what matters'.[28]

The emphasis had once been on territorial imperatives. The constitution of 1937 had been not only Catholic but also territorial in its thrusts. The emphasis had once been on civic duty rather than on civil rights. Republicans in 1921–2 had argued that the Irish people, in supporting a 26-county Free State, had not the right to be wrong. Nationalists until the 1970s had often argued that Irish people – Unionists – had not the right to be British. The Agreement of 1998 gave formal expression to a more pluralist nationalism, where diversity was respected, and indeed celebrated. 'In keeping with our principles', Bertie Ahern declared in February 1995, 'it is the people of Ireland who are sovereign, not the State': but 'our principles' had evidently not been shared by his republican father, or indeed – until lately – by his own party.[29]

8.2 Northern Ireland, 1973–98

So far war and peace in Northern Ireland have been examined exclusively in the context of southern economic and political concerns. But the internal dynamics of the northern crisis remain to be examined. And the resolution of this crisis – even allowing for the encouragement and admonition of the Irish and British governments – may not be fully understood without evaluating the role of the northern parties and their respective leaders. Northern Ireland, the Good Friday and St. Andrews Agreements provide a suitably Whiggish dénouement to the volume: three themes

– the war and its protagonists, the constitutional parties and their respective leaders, and the efforts towards a settlement – light the way to the happy 'ending' traditionally called for in histories of Ireland.

Some of the origins of the conflict in Northern Ireland have been considered in an earlier chapter. The story of the war itself is still first and foremost the story of its many victims. It is an essential starting point (though in fact one that is not always chosen) for any broader discussion of Northern Ireland, not least because the peaks and troughs of violence determined the birth, growth and (often) the death of political dialogue. Political initiatives were often rooted, or fostered by, the intensification of violence (such as in 1972, or in the early 1980s, or early 1990s): but the mounting casualty lists simultaneously increased the need for a settlement while reducing the likelihood of agreement. Intense violence provoked instability, which in turn stimulated political initiative; but the growing numbers of victims within each community tended to reinforce both the loyalist and republican stake in an ultimate victory. This was perhaps particularly true for the Unionists who, surrendering a position of supremacy within the old Stormont parliament, were most inclined to see political movement as a sell-out to violence – and who were therefore most inclined to look to (British) military strategies and a (British) military victory. But republicans, too, were interested in victory (in the form of the expulsion of their enemies), and seem to have felt periodically – especially in the early 1970s – that this was within their grasp.

Leading the republican offensive on the partition settlement and upon British rule in Ireland was the Provisional IRA (PIRA), formed in December 1969 when the republican movement as a whole was inching towards more emollient – or, depending on the viewpoint, more collaborationist – policies. The Provisionals armed and recruited rapidly in 1970–1, their fortunes boosted by the hamfisted application of internment in August 1971 and by the widespread resentments that this aroused: the 'Bloody Sunday' killings in Derry in January 1972 also fired popular nationalist anger and the popularity of the PIRA. Weapons and cash came from a variety of sources: sympathizers in the South were disproportionately useful in the early months, but later supplies were independently obtained in eastern Europe (particularly Czechoslovakia) and in the United States. American financial support has always been important for the republican movement, whether during the Anglo-Irish war (1919–21) or during the 'Long War' (1969–97): there has also been a drip-feed of American arms (as with the smuggling of Thompson sub-machine guns in 1921). Libyan arms supplies were (oddly, given the importance of Irish America) vital, especially in the mid-1980s: four major shipments are believed to have been landed in Ireland in 1985–6, while a fifth – carried in the *Eksund* – was intercepted by the French in October 1987.

The purpose of this cash and weaponry was to fight for British withdrawal and for the reunification of Ireland: these were the irreducible republican goals, although there was some modulation of emphasis and of strategic design over the years. The political party linked to the PIRA, Provisional Sinn Féin (formed in 1970 after a split with 'official' Sinn Féin), advocated at first a phased British departure

from the North, together with the establishment of regional assemblies in each of the four provinces of Ireland: this was the 'Éire Nua' policy, promulgated in March 1972.[30] The party also remained abstentionist, true to the traditional republican disdain for the 'flawed' institutions of the partition settlement. However, significant strategic changes were effected in 1981–2, when the federalist agenda of the party was abandoned and when there was a move towards a more active political engagement. At the party's ard-fheis of 1981, a dual policy of electoral and military struggle was enunciated, with the director of publicity, Danny Morrison, asking 'will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in this hand, we take power in Ireland?'.[31] The party used hunger-striking PIRA prisoners as election candidates in 1981, and achieved a boost in popular support: Bobby Sands was elected as MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone in April 1981. The deaths of ten of the hunger strikers (seven of whom were Provisionals) in the summer of 1981 galvanized further nationalist support for Sinn Féin and helped the party to win 10 per cent of the popular vote at the Assembly elections held in October 1982. At the general election of 1983 Gerry Adams, one of the party's most influential strategists, was returned as MP for West Belfast, defeating the veteran nationalist Gerry Fitt.

Adams, a highly acute political intelligence, seems to have come to accept that more could be done to further republican demands through constitutional channels than through the war of attrition being fought by the Provisionals. Towards this end he sought to engage John Hume of the SDLP in dialogue, first in 1988 and again in 1993, partly with a view to exploring the common ground within the nationalist family and producing a shared statement of nationalist principles (this emerged as the Hume–Adams declaration of April 1993). Adams also seems to have been a major influence behind the IRA ceasefires in 1994 and 1997: he was, with his colleague Martin McGuinness, the leading negotiator for the republican movement in the talks that produced the Good Friday Agreement. With McGuinness, he was responsible for the major reassessment of republican tactics which fed into the Agreement; and he was responsible, too, for successfully selling this revisionist analysis to his party and the wider movement.

But, aside from these increasingly important political initiatives, the central thrust of the republican movement between 1969 and 1997 was towards the violent removal of the British presence from Ireland. The central features of this campaign were bomb attacks on major military and economic targets, together with the assassination of individual soldiers, policemen or others deemed to have been inculpated in British rule. Many of these episodes remain highly sensitive and highly controversial, and in the cross-fire of charge and counter-charge it is sometimes difficult to distinguish motive from result, and conscious intention from accidental outcome. However, in the early 1970s there seems to have been a sharp push to overturn the northern state by a concerted fusillade of bombing, shooting and – in some cases – street protest: bombs in Belfast on 21 July 1972 ('Bloody Friday') claimed 11 victims, while ten days later in the sleepy village of Claudy, County Londonderry, eight more were killed in explosions. But it was soon grasped that local victims and local incidents had a relatively slight impact on British ministers; and it was also grasped

– certainly by the later 1970s – that there could be no swift and concerted charge to a final victory. Indiscriminate bomb attacks on local civilians were therefore curbed, although they by no means disappeared: the fire bombing of the La Mon Hotel in February 1978, with 16 dead, was perhaps a late example of a tactic pursued with greater vigour in earlier years, while the Enniskillen bomb (8 November 1987) killed 11 people and seems to have been sectarian in motivation (both bombs may, or may not, have been detonated accidentally and thus prematurely). Other republican assaults on perceived military targets have sometimes claimed many civilian casualties; the INLA attack on the Droppin' Well pub at Ballykelly, County Londonderry, in December 1982 killed 12 soldiers and five civilians and injured 66; while the explosion at the Shankill Road fish shop in October 1993 was designed as a PIRA thrust against the UFF, but instead killed nine local shoppers and one of the bombers. It is unclear whether the Omagh bomb of 15 August 1998, planted by dissident republicans, was intended as an assault on property or human life: 29 died in the single bloodiest episode of the 30 years of violence.

Attacks such as these provoked loyalist counter-assaults on the nationalist population, while having little visible impact on the government. Bombing missions in England, therefore, emerged early on in the 'war' as a strategic imperative: one of the most bloody and controversial of these came in Birmingham in November 1974, when 21 people died in bomb blasts (six men were wrongfully convicted of the crime, and released only in 1991). There has also been a sustained preference for 'spectaculars' – the bombing of high-profile targets in England such as the Household Cavalry barracks, Knightsbridge (in July 1982, in an episode reminiscent of an attack in May 1921 on George V's mounted escort) or the Canary Wharf complex (on 9 February 1996).

Attacks on policemen had been central to the republican struggle of 1919–21, and remained so in the 1970s and thereafter. Attacks on prominent Unionists were relatively uncommon in the early 1920s (W.J. Twaddell, a Stormont MP shot in May 1922, was a grim exception), but were pursued with greater vigour in the 1970s and 1980s: John Taylor, a junior minister at Stormont and a rising star of Unionism, was seriously wounded by Official IRA gunmen in February 1972; Robert Bradford, Unionist MP for South Belfast, was shot dead by the Provisionals in November 1981; Edgar Graham, widely tipped as a future Unionist leader, was shot dead, also by the Provisionals, in December 1983. Equally, the assassination of prominent members of the British establishment had been a goal in 1919–21, which was occasionally (though in fact not often) pressed home: the lord lieutenant, Lord French, was targeted on several occasions, but escaped; while Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson was gunned down in 1922. The republican assassins of the 'Long War' had a more grimly successful career than their heroes from the struggle for independence: Airey Neave, the Conservative spokesperson on Northern Ireland, was killed by an INLA bomb in March 1979, while Earl Mountbatten, a senior member of the British royal family, was killed by the Provisionals in August 1979. Plans were laid for the assassination, in July 1983, of Prince Charles and Princess Diana at the Dominion Theatre, London. A bomb attack on the Grand Hotel, Brighton,

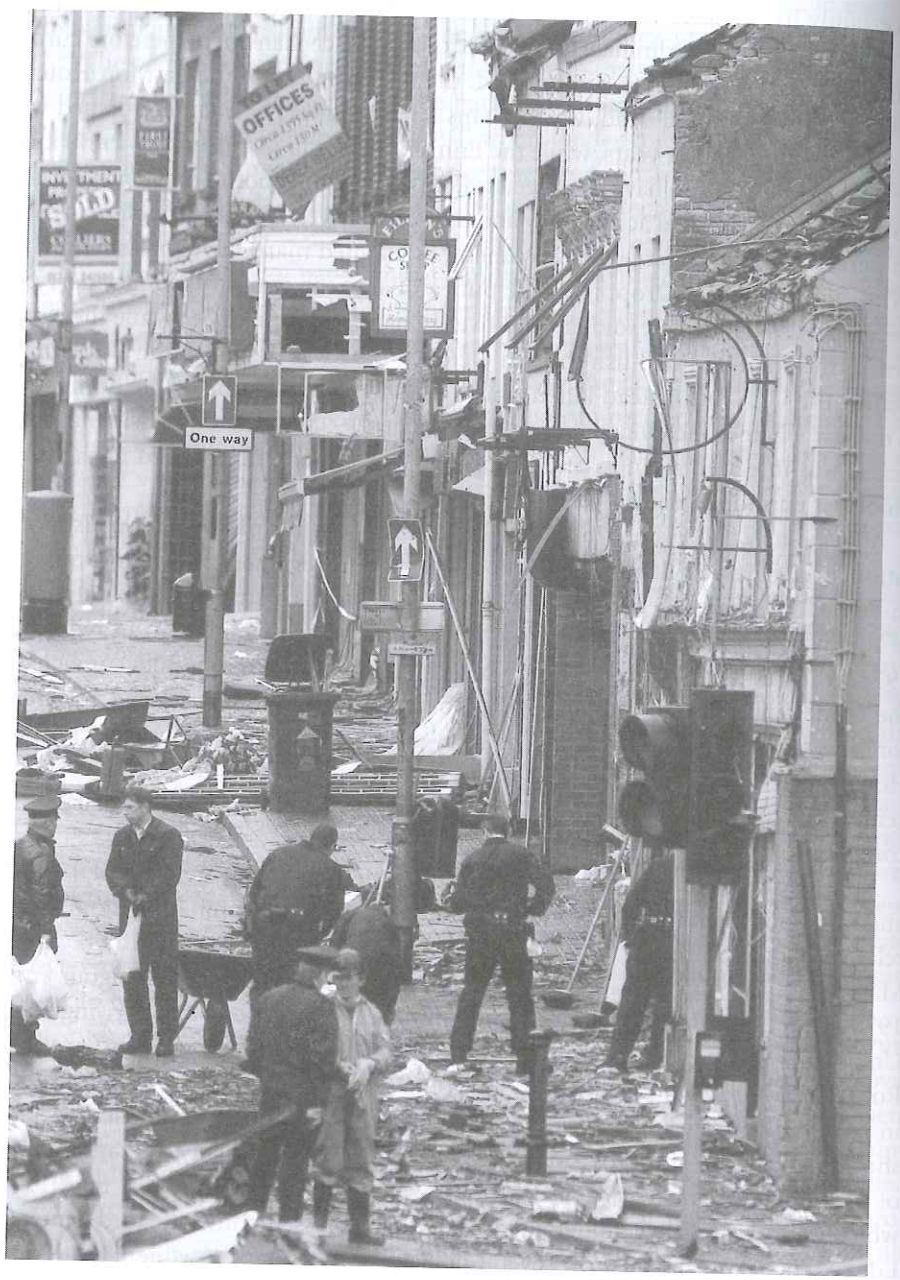

Plate 19 The aftermath of the Omagh bombing, August 1998.
Source: Popperfoto/Reuters.

in October 1984 during the Conservative Party conference very nearly eliminated the British cabinet. By this time, the hopes of the early 1970s (encouraged by the rapid overthrow of Stormont in March 1972) for a speedy victory had long been set aside, and republicans had settled down for a long war of attrition.

Facing the Provisionals was militant loyalism, organized into the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF, formed in 1966) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA, launched in September 1971): linked with these larger bodies were the smaller and more aggressive Red Hand Commandos (1972) and the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF, 1973). As with the PIRA, these bodies were armed from a variety of sources, both within Ireland and beyond. Some weapons came from sympathizers within the crown forces or from raids on crown installations: in March 1988 three men (two former soldiers in the Ulster Defence Regiment, a regular component of the British army) were convicted of participating in a UDA arms raid on a military camp in Coleraine, County Londonderry. Weapons for both the UDA and the UVF appear to have been stockpiled in Scotland and occasionally imported into Northern Ireland. In 1988 a conspiracy to import arms for the UVF from Canada was scuppered by the authorities. A highly controversial figure, Brian Nelson, a double agent working for both the UDA and the British army, seems to have forged a connection between loyalists and South African arms dealers.

The core political purpose of this arsenal was to sustain a fight for the Union, although – as exasperation with British policy mounted – this goal was in fact negotiable. Some of the ideologues within the UDA seem to have been interested in the idea of an autonomous Northern Ireland, and indeed in November 1974 a delegation arrived in Libya intent on sounding out the Gaddafi regime about possible aid in the event of independence. In 1978 the UDA established the New Ulster Political Research Group, which advocated negotiated independence and an American-style constitution: the Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party (later the Ulster Democratic Party or UDP) was founded in 1981 to evangelize a determinedly sceptical electorate (Unionist voters for long remained suspicious of parties with close paramilitary connections). The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and its aftermath hinted at the political bankruptcy of mainstream Unionism and created opportunities for some of the more unconventional thinkers within paramilitary loyalism. With the Ulster Unionists and Democratic Unionists beginning to descend into mutual recrimination as the campaign against the Agreement flagged, John McMichael of the UDA recognized a political opportunity and launched a blueprint for devolved government (*Common Sense: An Agreed Process*). McMichael had already created a stir among Unionists by suggesting in 1986 that Sinn Féin should be represented at any peace talks that might be held; and he underlined the extent to which he was trying to reposition the UDA by arguing in *Common Sense* that Northern Ireland should have a cross-community government based upon a 78-member Assembly, elected by proportional representation. The language of the document was progressive and consensual (although mounting accusations from mainstream Unionists that the UDA was selling out meant that its blueprint was defended in increasingly traditionalist terms). McMichael was assassinated by the Provisionals in December 1987 (acting in collusion with a leading loyalist racketeer), and the loyalist paramilitaries moved swiftly away from philosophical speculation towards a sectarian offensive in the early 1990s. But McMichael's combination of militancy and pragmatism was reinvigorated by his son Gary, working through the UDP, and by David Ervine

of the Progressive Unionists (a party associated with the UVF). Both represent distinctive military organizations within loyalism; and each offers an individual spin on the future of Northern Ireland government. But both seem to be indebted to John McMichael's realistic approach to the challenge of Sinn Féin, as well as to his quirkily consensual vision.

It would be utterly wrong, however, to judge loyalist paramilitarism exclusively, or even mainly, on the basis of *Common Sense*: Feargal Cochrane has recently, and rightly, tried to dampen some of the more euphoric assessments of McMichael's blueprint.[32] The UVF and the terror group associated with the UDA, the UFF, were generally more adept with guns and bombs than with policy initiatives; and generally more interested in killing Catholics than in planning to share power with them. The bombing of targets in the South has been a strategy pursued intermittently by the UVF: the Dublin and Monaghan explosions of 17 May 1974 brought a total of 33 deaths and marked the worst day of violence in the bloody history of the 'Long War'. Leading republicans have also been frequently targeted: Máire Drumm, the Vice-President of Sinn Féin and one of the most prominent northern republicans, was shot dead – possibly by the UVF – in October 1976; Dr Miriam Daly, a lecturer at Queen's University and a senior republican activist, was shot dead in June 1980; Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey was wounded by loyalist gunmen in February 1981; Gerry Adams was the victim of a UFF assassination bid in March 1984. Sinn Féin workers and councillors were targeted by the UFF, especially in the early 1990s: Sheena Campbell, a Queen's law student and Sinn Féin parliamentary candidate, was killed by loyalists in October 1992. Both the UVF and the UFF have pursued a more nakedly sectarian agenda than the PIRA, targeting Catholics on an indiscriminate basis: in February 1992 five Catholics were shot dead in a bookmaker's office on the Ormeau Road, Belfast; four Catholic workmen were shot dead by the UFF at Castlerock, County Londonderry, in March 1993; in October 1993 seven people – six Catholics and one Protestant – were killed by the UFF in the Rising Sun bar at Greysteel, County Londonderry; in June 1994 the UVF shot dead six Catholics in a pub at Loughinisland, County Down.

It has always been the republican contention that loyalist paramilitaries have had close connections with the crown forces in Northern Ireland: the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR, 1970–92), the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC, founded in 1922), the British army and the various agencies of British secret intelligence. In some ways these arguments evoke memories of the alleged collusion between the USC and loyalist death squads in Belfast in 1922, and in particular the allegations surrounding the highly controversial police officer, District Inspector J.W. Nixon. The latter-day accusations focused in particular on the locally recruited forces, the UDR and RUC, and came to a head in the late 1980s, a time of mounting loyalist violence, when official files on republican suspects fell into the possession of loyalist paramilitaries: suspicions mounted that loyalist assassinations were being conducted on the basis of the information supplied through these materials. Some light was thrown on this murky affair by the work of an official investigation, the Stevens Inquiry, although in some ways this served to raise more suspicions than it allayed. The RUC was

cleared by the Inquiry, but ten UDR soldiers were charged with complicity in the affair. In addition, numerous UDA activists were arrested and one, Tommy Lyttle, was convicted on a charge of possessing materials likely to be of use to terrorists. But, as Steve Bruce has observed, the 'result of the Stevens Inquiry was double-edged': the Inquiry uncovered the existence of an army spy within the ranks of the paramilitary UDA, Brian Nelson, who was subsequently convicted of conspiracy to murder.[33] This simultaneously raised broader republican suspicions while persuading a murderous element within the UDA that it could now act untrammelled by British spies.

Both the RUC and the UDR were the front-line troops of the British government in its fight against militant republicanism. The RUC was handicapped from the beginning of the 'troubles' by its unlovely reputation with nationalists, a reputation which hardened in 1968–9 when the force responded aggressively and with evident partiality when facing the challenge of popular protest and civil disorder. Part of the problem lay with the close official relationship between the police and Unionist government: part of the problem lay, too, in the overwhelmingly Protestant membership and ethos within the RUC. It was also the case that the force was ill-equipped, not just in terms of its political awareness or sensitivities but also in terms of numbers and training: in 1970 there were only 3,500 RUC officers, where in 1991 there were roughly 8,500 officers supported by a reserve force of 5,000 men and women. A report into policing by Lord Hunt in 1969 effected some changes and a remodelling of the force along British lines; but in a sense, while well-intentioned and progressive, the Hunt report was based on the same philosophy that underlay Mrs Thatcher's remark that Northern Ireland was 'part of the United Kingdom – as much as my constituency'. The pre-eminent tradition within the RUC remained not the British 'Dixon of Dock Green' model, but rather the essentially paramilitary legacy of the old Royal Irish Constabulary.

The RUC have been seen as both victims and aggressors in the 'Long War', and it will take time and further evidence to judge accurately where the balance lies. It was involved in some highly controversial procedures: interrogation techniques in 1971 at the Castlereagh holding centre in Belfast aroused widespread concern and were judged by the European Court of Human Rights to have been 'inhuman and degrading' (while not amounting to 'torture'). The killing of six unarmed Catholic men (including some PIRA suspects) in Armagh in 1982 gave rise to suspicions of a 'shoot to kill' policy. An inquiry into the affair stimulated further controversy, for allegations of obstruction were made by the investigating officer, John Stalker: moreover, Stalker was later replaced under somewhat suspicious circumstances. His report was completed by Colin Sampson, Chief Constable of West Yorkshire, and remains unpublished. Inquests into the deaths of the six men were abandoned in September 1994, because the results of the Stalker–Sampson investigation had not been made available to the coroner. There have been other highly charged issues. The use of plastic bullets in riot control by the police has brought serious injury, and some fatalities. More generally, allegations of harassment and of heavy-handedness were made by republicans (but not only republicans) throughout the 'troubles':

'SS: RUC' was one of the few chants or slogans in Belfast which knew no sectarian frontier.

Membership of the RUC was voluntary and, in the context of a depressed local economy, was relatively well paid. On the other hand, the officers of the RUC (like the RIC men of 1919–21) were local and accessible, and as such they bore the brunt of the republican military campaign. Off-duty officers were easy targets, and many were shot in their homes or killed by booby-traps fixed to their cars: the families of officers sometimes fell victim to these assaults, and occasionally under grim circumstances. Minor police stations were abandoned (again, as in 1919–20), and the larger barracks were elaborately fortified (the siege architecture of the 'Long War' demands investigation): but PIRA mortars were capable of breaching these defences, sometimes, as in February 1985, when nine RUC officers were killed in their barracks at Newry, County Down, with devastating results. Nor were the heavily armoured vehicles used by both the police and army proof against the massive landmines or roadside bombs favoured by the Provisionals: in July 1990 three RUC men were blown up while driving near Armagh; a nun, Sister Catherine Dunne, who was travelling in a car behind the policemen, also died in the explosion.

The RUC has been supported in its counter-insurgency effort by the British army, and in particular by the locally recruited UDR. The army was brought onto the streets of Belfast and Derry in August 1969 after the police had conceded that they were outnumbered and exhausted. British soldiers were at first welcomed by some nationalists, but the honeymoon ended abruptly in 1971–2. In March 1971 three young Royal Highland Fusiliers were lured from a pub in Ligoniel, Belfast, and subsequently shot by the Provisionals. The shooting of two men in Derry by the army in July 1971 provoked a major political crisis, for the Northern Ireland government refused to authorize an enquiry and the SDLP withdrew in protest from the Stormont parliament. The 'Bloody Sunday' killings of January 1972, when 13 Catholic men were shot dead by the army in Derry, focused nationalist hatred of what was increasingly seen as an aggressive occupying force; and recruitment to the Provisionals spiralled. 'Bloody Sunday' also set in motion an official review of security operations in Northern Ireland, which brought the Unionist government into conflict with Westminster and which led ultimately to the prorogation of, for republicans, the hated Stormont regime.

As Northern Ireland came close to anarchy in the early 1970s, the numbers of British soldiers were dramatically increased: the garrison in 1969 and before had been 2,000, but by July 1972 there were some 21,000 troops in the province. In the later 1970s the government pursued a policy of 'Ulsterization' through which the RUC (and the local UDR) were given a primacy in the policing of Northern Ireland: this helped to bring a simultaneous expansion in the RUC and a reduction in the level of troop deployment. Periods of crisis brought military reinforcement: the unrest surrounding the two loyalist strikes (in 1974 and 1977) and in the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish Agreement necessitated the strengthening of the garrison. Periods of crisis also tended to bring the deployment of the army's special forces, and primarily the Special Air Service (SAS): the SAS were introduced into Northern

Ireland in 1976 after an intensification of the Provisionals' campaign in the border area. An upsurge in violence in the later 1980s brought further and controversial SAS action: in May 1987 at Loughgall, County Armagh, SAS soldiers killed eight PIRA volunteers during a raid on a police barracks; and in March 1988 in Gibraltar they shot dead three Provisionals who were allegedly on reconnaissance duty.

The discussion has focused thus far on the military protagonists of the 'Long War': some mention has also been made of those political parties and leaders who have had strong links with the armed struggle against British imperialism or, alternatively, 'pan-nationalism'. One of the central political themes of the period has been the gradual integration of each of these armed forces, or rather their political representatives, within the political process, whether as active players (in the case of Sinn Féin, the Progressive Unionists and the Ulster Democratic Party), or items on a reform agenda (the RUC). As has been observed, Sinn Féin made energetic moves at the time of the hunger strikes to harness popular nationalist anger to their own electoral strategy; equally, there were some signs of serious political thought and re-direction in the UDA in 1986–7. On the other hand, the persistent failure of the main constitutional parties – the SDLP, the DUP and the Ulster Unionists – to reach an accommodation among themselves was driving the British government first towards side-stepping these cussed 'moderates' (during the run-up to the Anglo-Irish Agreement), and later – after 1992 – towards broadening the forum for debate to include the paramilitaries. This was clearly a politically adventurous hike; but, setting aside the difficulties of principle and emotion, it was logical in so far as the constitutionalists in the Unionist and nationalist movements had always been fearful of being out-manoeuvred by the militants, and had therefore often taken up highly defensive positions. And it was also the case that there were signs of rational, even innovative, political thought among the hardliners which were not always evident within the constitutional mainstream. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the importance of the militants at the expense of the constitutionalists, without whom no lasting settlement would have been conceivable. And it is therefore on the main constitutional parties and their leaders that the final focus of this chapter rests.

John Hume was leader of the SDLP between 1979 and 2001 and has been widely regarded as one of the main shapers of the political agenda in Northern Ireland from the early 1970s. He has also helped to sustain the constitutional nationalist tradition in the North at a time when, beset by the pressures supplied by the PIRA and sometimes by the Unionists and the British, the SDLP might well have followed Redmondism into political oblivion. Indeed, it is hard to escape the impression that the shadow of the general election of 1918 has fallen heavily on the SDLP; and it is easy to imagine that the fate of the Irish Parliamentary Party has been emblazoned on the walls of the party like a scriptural text warning of the judgement that befalls the sinful. Both Hume and Redmond were strict constitutionalists who, in a broader interest, sometimes had to negotiate with the militants. Both had a vision which transcended their respective parties: Redmond saw a Home Rule Ireland as proudly taking its place within the British Empire, while Hume has seen Northern Ireland within the broader context of a Europe of the regions. Both men achieved

a personal international celebrity and dignity, which aided their respective causes. Both were able to draw upon their individual circumstances to look in a friendly fashion towards Unionists. But beyond this point the comparisons cease to work. Redmond was the quintessential Irish parliamentarian who, despite his Parnellite ancestry, was left behind by the swift radicalization of Irish popular politics. Some, at least, of his affinities lay with the Big House; and he was essentially conservative in his outlook. Hume, on the other hand, has been fundamentally in tune with the drift of popular nationalist politics and he has frequently taken decisions on this account which, in the light of his consensual instincts, have alienated or surprised not just Unionists but also more friendly observers in Dublin. Highly energetic, he has hustled on behalf of Derry and the wider northern economy in Europe and North America. A parliamentarian, he has never been content at Westminster; and though enthusiastic about the European parliament, he has never allowed Strasbourg to divert him from his essentially local preoccupations. Moreover Hume, though he has focused almost exclusively on winning a particular form of constitutional settlement, is generally thought to be leftist in his wider orientation. His roots remain with his people in the Bogside of Derry.

The pre-history of Hume's party has been outlined in an earlier chapter. The origins of the party were as a non-sectarian, left-of-centre body, which combined a consensual nationalism with a wide variety of progressive social policies: the party, and indeed Hume's individual prominence, owed much to the successful mobilization of the civil rights campaign in the late 1960s. Critics – notably Gerry Fitt, the first leader of the party – argued that the SDLP soon moved away from its socialist ideals towards a more conventionally nationalist stance (and indeed, Fitt resigned from the leadership in 1979 holding to this conviction). Although Hume and others have rejected the Fitt critique and are irked by the 'mainly Catholic' label frequently applied by journalists to the party, it is clear that the SDLP has relied almost exclusively upon Catholic and nationalist votes. However, while individual SDLP leaders have subscribed to the ideal of a unitary state, the party as a whole has frequently declared against an immediate British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, on the pragmatic grounds that anarchy might well ensue: the party's conference of 1978 did, however, accept that an eventual British withdrawal was 'desirable and inevitable'.[34] Setting aside such aspirations, the immediate goal of the party over many years has been a constitution distinguished by a power-sharing administration and by strong cross-border institutions where nationalist ideals and practical concerns would be guaranteed by the influence of the Irish government.

There have been some variations in this formula. In 1972, with the imposition of direct rule, the party called for a form of joint British–Irish authority in Northern Ireland and a timetable for reunification. It was a major participant in the Sunningdale Agreement (December 1973), which offered a power-sharing executive and a Council of Ireland; and its members held four seats in the new government (where Fitt was Deputy Chief Executive, and where Hume had responsibility for Commerce). But the collapse of the Executive in May 1974 at the hands of the Ulster Workers' Council was a major blow to the party's morale; and in the later 1970s, in the face

of integrationist pressures from London, it became more assertively and defensively nationalist. The PIRA (and INLA) hunger strikes in 1981, and the concomitant surge in support for Sinn Féin, threatened to overturn the SDLP's command of northern Catholic opinion; and in this context it acquired a strengthened leverage in Dublin and, indirectly, in London. The New Ireland Forum (May 1983–May 1984), a broadly based constitutional nationalist conference, reflected Hume's desire for an agreed nationalist agenda (even if the direction of the Forum, and its report, owed much to the dexterous management of Garret FitzGerald). One of the three political options blessed by the Forum was for joint authority in Northern Ireland (a resurrection of the SDLP's stand in 1972); and it was this which provided both a focus for FitzGerald's diplomacy with the British and, indeed, in the opinion of Bew, Patterson and Teague, the intellectual rationale for the deal eventually struck between the two governments (the Anglo-Irish Agreement, or AIA, of November 1985).[35] The Agreement created a permanent Intergovernmental Conference wherein Irish ministers could contribute their views on the administration of Northern Ireland: there was, in addition, a secretariat for the Conference, based at Maryfield, near Belfast. The impact of the Agreement on Unionists will be considered shortly; but for the SDLP it was a godsend, in so far as it helped to cap Sinn Féin's electoral support and because it was in some ways a 'greener' interim settlement than had been previously thought possible: it offered a strong Irish dimension in the administration of Northern Ireland, without a counterbalancing Unionist-dominated executive and assembly. As Feargal Cochrane has observed, the SDLP clung in the late 1980s to the Agreement 'as a "banker" position which was unlikely to be improved through talks with a moribund unionist leadership'.[36]

It was not intended that the AIA should create a static mechanism, still less a permanent settlement. However, it bolstered Hume and the SDLP and encouraged a 'maximalist' thrust, which came to a head in the party's proposal of June 1992 when it argued that the government of Northern Ireland should be vested in a six-member commission (three of whom would be elected locally by proportional representation, with the other three being appointed by the British and Irish governments and the European Union): the new commission would be supported by a North–South council of ministers. This striking proposal reflected the SDLP's confidence in the 'banker' position supplied by the AIA: it also reflected the relative weakness of the party's opponents, the Unionists; and it embodied Hume's vision of a Northern Ireland subsumed within the European Union. But of course it also represented a hardening of the party's position, since in the past it had argued that an all-Ireland council would be accompanied by a purely northern executive, which even allowing for power-sharing and proportional representation would contain a preponderant Unionist element. The idea found little favour in London, or indeed in Dublin: it was also sharply rejected by Unionists, who were beginning slowly to regroup after years of division and marginalization, and by militant loyalists, who were asserting themselves through a bloody offensive in 1992–3. Still, a reconsideration of the initiative sheds some intriguing light on the ambitious strategic thinking of Hume and the SDLP in the early 1990s.

An ultimately more important thrust in these years came with the dialogue between Hume and Gerry Adams, and later between other members of their respective parties. This began, at any rate in a serious and intensive fashion, in 1988, and was resumed in 1993, in the aftermath of the failure of the Mayhew talks process. This initiative (which was fraught with difficulty for Hume, not least as a result of anger within elements of his own party) was again linked to his analysis of the impact of the AIA: it rested on his belief that the British were moving towards a position of neutrality on the northern question, and that the Unionists were now crippled by internal division and recrimination. Republican violence was mounting in the late 1980s; but it was also clear that Adams and Sinn Féin were increasingly interested in the possibility of a political strategy. The Hume–Adams détente culminated in a joint statement in April 1993: later, in October, Hume handed to Albert Reynolds and Dick Spring an agreed document which evidently proposed that the British should become 'persuaders for unity'. But the significance of the Hume–Adams dialogue lay perhaps less with its immediate and tangible results than with its indirect impact. It helped to bring Adams and Sinn Féin into the political process, and thus to prepare the way for the PIRA ceasefire in August 1994. It also stimulated the British and Irish governments into action, for, though both were dissatisfied

Plate 20 John Hume and David Trimble with Bono from U2, Belfast, May 1998.
Source: Popperfoto/Reuters.

with the October document, it seems clear that the influential Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 owed something to the earlier initiative. In this way the Hume–Adams process, though highly skewed, can be seen as one of the points of origin for the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998. It may well be the case that the Hume–Adams declaration will come to have a significance within the history of Irish nationalism, and indeed the wider history of Ireland, no less conspicuous than the New Departure of 1879.[37]

Hume's deputy, Séamus Mallon, once quipped that the Good Friday Agreement amounts to 'Sunningdale for slow learners'. From this perspective, the slowest of the slow learners have been the Democratic Unionists and their leader between 1971 and 2008, Dr Ian Paisley (though Paisley would presumably argue that the learning curve that began with Sunningdale ascends towards a united Ireland). Some of Paisley's personal origins and political lineage have been traced in an earlier chapter, and need not be rehearsed at length once again: he appealed to an evangelical and popular Protestant constituency desperately afraid of Satan, Rome, Dublin, London and propertied Unionism (in roughly that order of priority). Garret FitzGerald has rightly observed that the hallmark of Unionist politics is fear; and this applies with particular force to the Paisleyite tradition where anger and bitter rhetoric reflect profound anxieties about ungodliness, the machinations of the Catholic Church, the wiles of Irish and British diplomats, and the weak-kneed trimming of secularized Unionists.[38] The potency of Paisley's personal appeal is undisputed and remains – after virtually 40 years – astonishingly consistent. He regularly topped the poll at the elections for the European parliament held in the Northern Ireland constituency: in the contests of 1994 and 1999 Hume and he ran a close race for the prime position, but Hume was twice beaten into second place (albeit by a margin of only 0.3 per cent of the poll). Frequently results like this have constituted a thorn in the flesh of official Unionism, whose leaders have been either genially punctured by the Big Man, or (sometimes) whipped off the political stage. The basic electoral problem of the party for long remained, however, its inability to permanently transcend the Ulster Unionists: the style of the party was presidential, and prominent and charismatic figures polled well, but only once before 2005 (in the 1981 council elections) was the whole party able to outpace its main Unionist rival. This meant that Paisley and the DUP were able to function as thought police within the Unionist family; but it also meant that they were only able belatedly to achieve command of Unionism, and of Northern Ireland. Put another way, Paisley and the DUP had sufficient strength to wreck the ambitions of their rivals, but for years were not strong enough to impose their own vision within the North. Partly on this basis, and also because of his uncompromisingly localist agenda, some critics of Paisley (Enoch Powell, David Trimble, David Ervine) have seen him as one of the most formidable enemies of the wider Unionist cause.

The core policy of the DUP is support for the Union: at the time of its foundation in 1971, one of its leaders insisted that the party would be 'right wing in the sense of being strong on the Constitution, but to the left on social policies'.[39] The party has shown some progressive tendencies on some social issues, but equally its

fierce evangelical Protestant ethos has shone through on questions such as abortion or reform of the law relating to homosexuality (the party launched its memorable 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' campaign in 1982, at a time of belated legal reform). The party has been strongly against the European Union, where Paisley saw the hand of the Vatican at work: as has been noted, this has not prevented him consistently topping the poll in local elections for the Strasbourg parliament. The party was also strongly opposed to formal political connections between Northern Ireland and the Republic, seeing these as merely unification by increments.

The Unionist principles of the party have never been in doubt, though the proposed application of this Unionism has changed somewhat over the years. In 1971–2 Paisley seemed to take up an integrationist stand, and happily predicted the toppling of the Stormont government. Later experiments with devolved government have also caused problems for Paisley and the DUP, even though they eventually accommodated themselves to the principle of devolution. He and his party were strongly opposed to the Sunningdale Agreement (December 1973), and to the power-sharing Executive: this stand was based on an abhorrence for the Council of Ireland idea, as well as for the prescriptive power-sharing arrangement. He was the predominant figure within the Unionist coalition (the United Ulster Unionist Council), which was formed in January 1974 to campaign against Sunningdale; and he was an active supporter of the Ulster Workers' Council strike which brought down the Executive in May 1974. The creation of the British–Irish Intergovernmental Council through the Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 1985 was also an anathema to Paisley; and he overshadowed the determinedly unflamboyant Ulster Unionist leader, James Molyneaux, in the united loyalist campaign to topple the Agreement. The ultimate collapse of this campaign (David Trimble has talked about tactical successes but a strategic failure) seems to have brought some electoral damage to Paisley.[40] And this political pressure, combined with growing tensions between the DUP and their temporary allies, the Ulster Unionists, led to a markedly more bitter rejection of the Downing Street Declaration (December 1993) than that offered by Molyneaux. Though both parties shared a hostility to the Framework Documents (January 1995), Paisley and the DUP were recognizably more emphatic than the modulated negativism of the Ulster Unionists. Paisley's boycott of the talks of 1997–8 which produced the Good Friday Agreement was based on his unwillingness to negotiate with Sinn Féin; and his rejection of the Agreement recalled the DUP approach to Sunningdale in so far as cross-border institutions remained a central problem. But the contentiousness of the Agreement, for Paisley, stretched beyond that of Sunningdale in that it broached the issue of prisoner releases and a Sinn Féin presence in government. The Good Friday deal was thus, for Paisley, not so much 'Sunningdale for slow learners' as a completely different and altogether more fraught curriculum.

Teaching this curriculum to loyalists in 1998 was the crisply Gradgrindian David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionists. The political legacy which Trimble inherited in 1995 from his predecessor, James Molyneaux, was unenviable – a party racked by division, by distrust of its perceived allies and demoralization. Memories of the

party's travail in the early 1970s remained all too alive and resonant in the later 1990s. The legacy of the AIA and of the failed united loyalist campaign of opposition (1985–8) was one of broken Unionist confidence and internal recrimination. Long-term trends within the political and social structure of Northern Ireland, and of the island as a whole, tended to reinforce this pervasive sense of doom.

The Ulster Unionists had traditionally been not only the biggest party within Northern Ireland, but also the power-wielders within the provincial government and parliament at Stormont. The stand of the party in the Home Rule era, at any rate until 1913, had been integrationist: it had supported the idea of the constitutional union between Britain and Ireland unsullied by any partitionist notions, still less by the idea of a parliament for Unionist Ulster. The party's acceptance of the Government of Ireland Act (1920) brought some philosophical readjustments; and the practice of uninterrupted power within Northern Ireland between 1920 and 1972 turned its integrationists into devolutionists. There were thus two utterly different, and venerable, strains of thought on the party's fundamental concern: the nature of the relationship with Britain. There was, in addition, a wealth of social and cultural diversity among the Ulster Unionists, despite the common, but overly simplistic, view of the party as a monolith: as Feargal Cochrane has quipped, 'far from singing from the same hymn sheet, many [Unionists] do not actually believe in the same God'.[41]

Stormont came to matter to the Ulster Unionists not because it exercised wide powers (for it did not possess wide powers in many key areas), but because it provided excessive ministerial and senatorial dignity and a very considerable influence over all forms of local patronage. Stormont was an ego-trip for Unionists; and it bolstered a self-confident and highly provincial political culture. The removal of Stormont in 1972 damaged this self-regarding Unionist provincialism and flagged the beginning of the party's retreat from its local ascendancy. But this period (between 1972 and 1974) was more broadly decisive in forging Unionist beliefs and strategies. The summary removal of the Stormont parliament by Edward Heath's Conservative government after a dispute with Faulkner over security strategy underlined the vulnerability of Unionists to the whims of British policy: and it underlined the capacity for 'treachery' even from the traditional Tory allies of the Unionists at Westminster. Faulkner attempted to relaunch a devolved government in Northern Ireland through a deal struck at Stormont in November 1973 between the local parties and through the Sunningdale agreement of December 1973 (which applied a cross-border dimension to the internal arrangements); but this was rejected by his own party in January 1974, and later by Unionist workers and paramilitaries, whose combined action in May 1974 served to topple the experiment. Faulkner tried to rally his supporters through creating the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland (or UPNI) in September 1974; but in essence his political influence had been abruptly terminated and his formal retirement from politics (at the age of only 55) followed swiftly in 1976. His political scalp was claimed by Paisley, the most vocal of his opponents; and like other trophies of war it has served as a warning – in this case to those Unionist leaders who have been tempted to stray from the paths of orthodoxy.

Faulkner has been compared to Trimble.[42] There is some interest in the comparison, although it serves to highlight as many contrasts between the two men and their positions as it does similarities. The similarities, of course, are striking: both men sought to tie their party to a deal which provided a devolved government with a power-sharing arrangement and with a cross-border dimension. Both have been intellectually impressive performers, in terms of expounding and defending their political and strategic vision. Both men were rooted in the right wing of the party and moved swiftly towards more pragmatic positions. Both men faced opposition from within the ranks of their own party, as well as from other forms of hardline Unionism: both have been hate-figures for Ian Paisley. But in some ways Faulkner faced a more striking challenge than that encountered by Trimble (though it would of course be foolish to underestimate the latter's difficulties). Faulkner had the task of selling an institutionalized power-sharing arrangement as well as intricate cross-border bodies to a party which had only just – scarcely two years earlier – recovered from the surrender of its local parliament. Moreover, this hustling was taking place against the backdrop of intense paramilitary violence. And Faulkner was given little outside aid in terms of selling the deal to his followers: on the contrary, despite his warm personal relationship with Liam Cosgrave, events in the Republic served to undermine his sales pitch rather than the reverse. It is hard to imagine who, if anyone, in contemporary British politics could have profitably come to Faulkner's aid in early 1974.

The second crucial formative influence on the Ulster Unionist Party was the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985). Some of the background to this measure has already been highlighted in an earlier chapter, but the Ulster Unionist dimension remains in the shade. The collapse of the Sunningdale settlement in May 1974 gave a temporary boost to militant, majoritarian Unionism, but in a sense this was disastrous for the Unionist tradition, and indeed for the wider Irish political arena. For the Ulster Unionist Party had been taught that popular loyalist mobilization could serve as a substitute for difficult or dangerous concessions; and its leaders had been taught that the articulation of a simple Unionist faith was an easier and – in the short term – a more popular strategy than complicated and potentially disastrous cross-party dialogue. Out of the wreckage of Sunningdale sprang a number of unhelpful consequences: the 'greening' of the SDLP and an upsurge in paramilitary violence (in 1975–6). But perhaps the chief of these was an Ulster Unionist Party characterized by a political minimalism (or, alternatively, 'masterly inactivity'), as well as by a tendency towards sporadic all-out gambles on the strength of popular loyalist protest.[43] Ulster Unionism shifted towards a low-key integrationist stand, and particularly under the leadership of James Molyneaux (1979–95). The poverty of this erratic minimalism was exposed in the run-up to the AIA, when the Ulster Unionists (who had relied on their access to the decision-makers at Westminster) were utterly disoriented by the rapid evolution of British policy: the Unionists seem to have been deliberately kept in the dark, but it was certainly also the case (as Trimble later conceded) that they 'did not work hard enough, and did not have their finger on the pulse of the British government to an adequate extent'.[44]

The interpretation which the Ulster Unionists placed on the AIA was, at least in the short term, the least challenging of those available: the Agreement was the latest exemplar of British treachery in a tradition which dated back beyond 1972 to the attempts at a sell-out in 1940 and 1921. Their response to the Agreement also followed a familiar and undemanding logic: the Unionist parties joined, as they had done in 1974 (or indeed at the time of the third Home Rule Bill), to organize days of action and coordinated election campaigns. A mass demonstration at Belfast City Hall on 23 November 1985 recalled the Ulster Day protest at the same location in September 1912. The Unionists forced a series of by-elections in Northern Ireland in January 1986 and fought on a united rejectionist platform (just as they had fought two general elections in 1974 in opposition to Sunningdale). A variant strain of protest was developed in the local councils, where the Unionists sought to create disruption through a strategy of adjournment. But the campaign against the AIA, though fought according to successful earlier formulae, was – from the perspective of its leaders – a disaster which had profound repercussions. The impressive day of protest in November 1985 led nowhere: the by-elections were characterized by an element of farce and brought the loss of a seat in Newry and Armagh to the SDLP. The local council adjournment tactic was characterized from the start by confusion and division. Street protests were dealt with efficiently by the RUC, and soon faded away (although for a time police families living in loyalist areas became the victims of intimidation and violence). The campaign as a whole rapidly lost momentum; and by 1988 it had stalled. Firmness from the Thatcher government, and from the police, provide part of the explanation for the failure. But it was also the case that the demonstrators lacked any clear target (beyond the drab and well-guarded offices of the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield, County Down); and their Ulster Unionist and Democratic Unionist leaders were soon bitterly divided over strategy. Molyneaux was predictably much more cautious and much more pacific in his leanings than some of the Democratic Unionists (though even Paisley had become renowned – as the 'Grand Old Duke of York' – for ineffectual posturing).[45] But the Ulster Unionist leader also lacked a radical alternative vision to the AIA; and, given that the Agreement offered so little tangible focus for its opponents, the absence of an attractive substitute was possibly of disproportionate significance in the campaign's ultimate collapse.

Molyneaux clung to his integrationist Unionism, a strategy which suited the quietists among the Protestant middle classes but which offered little appeal to the DUP and popular loyalism, and still less – needless to say – to the SDLP (some of whom, led by Hume, turned to Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin in 1988). Unionists for long stuck cussedly to the principle that the AIA would have to be suspended before they would engage in further debate: predictably, this masochistic stand was at last set aside in order to permit 'talks about talks' in early 1990. But the problem was not simply that Molyneaux lacked 'the vision thing', or that Unionists had once again backed themselves into a tactical dead-end in order to demonstrate the intensity of their convictions. It was also the case that the AIA had reinforced the ambitions of Hume and the SDLP, and that some limited Ulster Unionist movement went

unrewarded (Ulster Unionists defied loyalist convention by journeying to Dublin to debate with Irish ministers during the course of the Brooke–Mayhew talks in 1992; and on 9 November 1992 they delivered a discussion document containing some progressive suggestions). But the Brooke–Mayhew initiative failed to bring the constitutional parties together in agreement, and the dialogue between Hume and Sinn Féin was resumed in 1993 to explore the possibilities for progress which had evidently been lacking in the broad middle-ground of northern politics. As has been chronicled, the Hume–Adams process led indirectly to a re-energized British–Irish détente, expressed in the Downing Street Declaration (November 1993) and the Framework Documents (February 1995). The political configuration bore, for some Ulster Unionists, some resemblance to the early and mid-1980s, when an Irish-driven initiative had marginalized Unionists and produced a green-tinged document. Molyneaux, his minimalist style and integrationist convictions had managed to survive the humiliation of 1985: all three were jettisoned in the aftermath of the Framework Documents. In September 1995 the Ulster Unionists acquired as their leader David Trimble, a choleric and energetic devolutionist.

It is too early to offer lapidary judgements on Trimble's vision, still less of his political achievement (after 2007 he left Ulster Unionism, and reinvented himself as a Conservative peer). However, it seems fair (on the basis of the available evidence) to argue that, much more directly than his predecessors, he tried to address the causes and symptoms of decline within his own party and within the wider movement. In terms of political strategy, it seems that, bucking Unionist tradition, he was prepared to make careful judgements on the fundamental requirements of his party, and then to haggle and trade over non-essentials. Trimble was a pragmatist who was not afraid of Faustian deals: his Unionist opponents, on the other hand, were conviction politicians who preserved their consciences at the expense of their political standing, and who perhaps misread the 'not an inch' traditions of their own movement.

It seems that the legacy of 1972 and of 1985 – of the suspension of Stormont and of the AIA – weighed heavily: Trimble was keen to recognize that in the past Unionist tardiness and negativism had led inexorably towards marginalization and humiliation. Thus in June 1996, when a multi-party talks process once again staggered into life, he accepted as chairperson George Mitchell, a former United States senator and majority leader who happened to have Irish Catholic family connections: other Unionist party leaders were appalled, but Trimble made a judgement on the basis of Mitchell's professionalism. In 1997, when the talks were relaunched and when Sinn Féin was admitted for the first time, Trimble's Ulster Unionists together with the representatives of the loyalist paramilitaries dithered, but eventually joined the process (this despite the comparatively recent restoration of the Provisionals' ceasefire). Again, other Unionist leaders offered a more traditional response, boycotting the new and (as it transpired) crucial round of negotiations.

The broken self-confidence of his community was a recurrent theme in Trimble's interviews; and it seems that much of his work was directed towards empowering Unionists through a restored local assembly and executive. These local institutions

re-emerged as a central component of the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998: a 108-strong legislative assembly, together with a ministerial council. The importance of what the Ulster Unionists saw as British identity in Ireland was further enhanced through the creation of a British–Irish council. There was, of course, a price to be paid for these trophies. A significant cross-border dimension was contained within the Agreement, focusing on a North–South ministerial council: this echoed the proposals of the Sunningdale deal (although in fact Sunningdale also called for an all-Ireland Consultative Assembly, whereas the Good Friday Agreement only alluded to the future possibility of such a body). More painful, but essential to hardline republicans and loyalists, was the call for the accelerated release of prisoners belonging to paramilitary bodies on ceasefire. Brian Faulkner never had to sell the issue of prisoner releases to suburban Unionism, and yet still failed. But Faulkner did not benefit from a prolonged paramilitary ceasefire, and he was hampered rather than supported by British and Irish ministers. Trimble, on the other hand, was assisted by the sensitive attitudes of Irish ministers, and in particular by the likeable Bertie Ahern; and he benefited from the super-charge of charisma supplied by Tony Blair and Bill Clinton. Whether this political arsenal was enough to bolster Unionist confidence and stave off the defeat inflicted on Faulkner for long remained unclear; but Paisley, the scourge of trimmers, and as enthusiastic an opponent of heresy as any Jesuit inquisitor, certainly promised to deliver to his followers 'the death of Trimbleism' and nothing less than the 'hide' of Tony Blair.

In 1997 Feargal Cochrane suggested that 'where David Trimble can lead the Unionist community rather than where he can follow them will be his ultimate test as leader of the Ulster Unionist party'.[46] By the summer of 1998 Trimble had (just about) passed the initial tests of his leadership – the referendum on the Agreement and the elections to the new Assembly: he had skilfully masked decisive leadership with the traditional rhetoric (and sometimes the traditional gestures) of his movement. However, the Good Friday venture proved to be not merely the ultimate test of Trimble's leadership, but also – given the recent history of decline and demoralization – the ultimate test of his people. Paul Bew said provocatively of the Agreement that 'the Unionists have won – they just don't know it'.[47] If this was in any way true, then it should have been remembered that Ulster Unionism was always capable of plucking defeat from the jaws of victory.