

This was, of course, a thoroughly Unionist gesture, bringing Northern Ireland into line with the arrangements for Scotland and Wales. But for the crowd of 100,000 or so loyalists who assembled at Stormont on 28 March, there was no ambiguity in the defeat that had been sustained.

Why did Stormont fail? The question might well appear redundant, given the preceding narrative. In terms of proximate causes, Stormont failed because it was no longer compatible with the exigencies of British policy, and because it showed no signs of being able to cope with street violence and organized terror. In the longer term, it had been unable to represent any other than Unionist opinion, and had been at best grudging towards Catholic aspirations. But there is a danger in approaching the debacle of 22–4 March 1972 in too deterministic a fashion. Though there had certainly been contingency planning, the prorogation of Stormont was not the culmination of any deeply laid British policy: indeed, it has been frequently pointed out that the evidence for a coherent policy is hard to find. Nor, while the subsequent government of Northern Ireland unquestionably benefited by its demise, was the cryonic suspension of Stormont necessarily the best or the most obvious strategy for the British to pursue in the spring of 1972.

In fact the fate of Stormont really only assumes a deafening historical resonance if one accepts the rhetoric of O'Neillite Unionism at face value. Just as legislative independence in 1782 rendered the Union of 1801 all the more emphatic, so the increasingly devolutionist nature of Ulster Unionism meant that the suspension of Stormont seemed all the more dramatic. This is a commentary not just on the ideological development of Unionism, but also on its tactical successes. In reality Stormont was an extended form of local government, with tightly circumscribed powers and much pomp and circumstance: its elaborate structures concealed its real lack of power in such areas as taxation or foreign relations or the army. In reality the governing power within Stormont, Unionism, was not the monolithic popular movement of its own delusions and nationalist fears, but rather a highly fissile alliance which repeatedly showed signs of fragmenting. The truth was that the Ulster Unionist leadership showed very considerable tactical skill in sustaining the complicated alliance that held them in power; but in winning the battles for Protestant unity, they lost the war for their constitution. Their success lay in the fact that they clung onto power for so long, and preserved the fiction that Stormont mattered; their failure lay not only in Catholic alienation, but also in the fact that, given the limited nature of their parliament, there was so very little at stake.

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THE TWO IRELANDS, 1973–98

8.1 The Republic, 1973–98

Much of Irish public life from the early 1970s through to the mid-1990s, and indeed beyond, was profoundly influenced by three broad conditions: the oil crises of 1973 and 1979, membership of the European Economic Community (achieved in 1973), and the simmering, occasionally boiling, turmoil within Northern Ireland. It would be wrong to be over-deterministic in pursuing this case; and it would be wrong to neglect internal Irish explanations for changes in Irish public and private life. But the shock-waves from several international developments can clearly be discerned throughout the Ireland of the late twentieth century.

It has been argued with conviction that the oil crises of the 1970s – the quadrupling of the price of oil in 1973, and the further price hikes of 1979 – did not so much create devastation in the Irish economy as exacerbate an already grim situation. There were certainly already inflationary pressures within the Irish economy before the first oil crisis had an impact: the economic growth of the 1960s had stimulated an appetite for hefty wage claims, which continued despite the slow-down of the later part of the decade and the early 1970s. Moreover, the economic growth of the Lemass years had not created full employment in Ireland, for the creation of jobs in new areas was offset by the decline of traditional industries: the level of unemployment in the early 1970s was around 8 per cent. Even before the oil crisis, the Fianna Fáil Minister of Finance, George Colley, had decided to break a fundamental convention of Irish public finance in drawing up his plans for 1972 – by failing to balance the current budget of the state and permitting a projected current account deficit of around 1.3 per cent of GNP. The oil crisis smashed through the already shaky edifice of the Irish economy like a demolition ball. The projected deficits in 1972 and 1973 (1.3 per cent and 1.5 per cent, respectively) were in fact well above the real figures (0.2 per cent and 0.4 per cent); but what little comfort might have been gleaned from this was overturned in 1974 and 1975. By 1974 the current deficit

had reached £92 million, or 3.1 per cent of GNP; and in 1975, the nadir of Irish public finance, this deficit had swollen to just under £259 million, or close to 7 per cent of GNP. Some modest degree of stabilization occurred after 1975–6, together with efforts to bring the current account deficit under control; but this only served to encourage some (with the benefit of hindsight) ludicrously optimistic projections of growth and, with these, another relapse into deficit finance. The general idea, as defined by the Fianna Fáil Minister for Economic Development, Martin O'Donoghue, and by the Minister of Finance, Colley, was to prime the pump of the economy through public spending. But the pump was primed indiscriminately: local business did not respond to the challenge, and unemployment levels remained high. There was certainly a consumer boom; but it was foreign industry and the import sector which were the beneficiaries. Those who were employed contrived in effect to sustain the numbers of jobless, by seeking enormous wage hikes (peaking at some 20.5 per cent in 1980) and then spending their ill-gotten gains on foreign imports. But once again, as in 1973, it was oil which converted a dangerous situation within the public finances into cataclysm: the oil crisis of 1979 added a crucial external dimension to the home-grown inflationary pressures. By 1979 the Irish balance of payments deficit was 10.1 per cent of GNP; and, though there was a slight recovery in 1980, this figure slipped to 12.5 per cent in 1981. By December 1992 the accumulated debt of the state had reached £12 billion.

It is hard to envisage what the state of the Irish economy might have been without the crises of 1973 and 1979. It is clear that there were some home-grown problems, especially in the area of wage inflation. It also seems clear that the management of the public finances was tainted with a degree of, at worst, political opportunism, or, at best, unfettered risk-taking. In 1972, with a general election pending, George Colley took the decision to plunge into a current deficit: as Joe Lee has remarked, 'a bastardised Keynesianism provided a convenient facade to give respectability to the most opportunistic impulses'.¹ The general election of 1977, where – as Gemma Hussey has argued – the politics of the auction house reigned supreme, provided a further outlet for this 'bastardised Keynesianism'.² But it also has to be recognized that the gambling addicts in Irish government (especially among Lynch's lieutenants within Fianna Fáil) lost out as badly as they did because of the international context. In any event it was probably a misjudgement for Colley to play with deficit financing in 1972, or for him and O'Donoghue to revive the wager in 1978: but while they can be blamed for recklessness, their analysis had admittedly some contemporary logic. It was their misfortune, or rather the nation's misfortune, that they did not factor into their calculations the impact of two profound international crises.

It is scarcely an exaggeration to suggest that the economic crisis of the 1970s helped to shape some of the fundamental features of Irish politics not just at the time, but for much of the next 20 years. The disastrous handling of the country's economy by successive ministers of finance (Richie Ryan and George Colley seem to be the most culpable of the 'guilty men') involved the accumulation of massive debts, and thus a permanently enfeebled budgetary condition. Careful management by the different FitzGerald and Haughey governments in the 1980s went some way to

clawing back budgetary strength (FitzGerald boasted that when he left office in 1987 the ratio of debt to GNP was half that in 1981); but the country was still highly susceptible to an international downturn, such as occurred with the stock market tumblers of the late 1980s, or the currency crisis of 1992.³ The ministers of the 1970s mortgaged the future of the country at first for narrowly partisan reasons, but ultimately in order to avert national bankruptcy. It was their successors in the 1980s, and indeed after, who paid the price for this mixture of mis-judgement and recklessness and misplaced party loyalty. The cost involved the modification of certain fundamental attitudes and institutions within Irish political life.

There is – at the very least – a coincidence between the economic crises of the Irish state in the 1970s and 1980s and a degree of political destabilization. The electoral history of Ireland until 1972 was the history of Fianna Fáil's political hegemony: of the 50 years since independence, Fianna Fáil had been in office, untrammelled by coalition partners, for 34 years. The economic turmoil of the post-war period, especially in the 1950s, helped to encourage support for alternatives to Fianna Fáil and the construction of relatively weak coalition governments in 1948 and again in 1954. Yet in the 25 years between 1948 and 1973 there were only six changes of government; while in the 25 years between 1973 and 1998 there were 12 such changes (including major reconstructions that have involved a new Taoiseach or the acceptance of coalition partners by the governing party). In 1989, for the first time in its history, Fianna Fáil went into coalition and, all the more remarkably given the traditionally stern attitude of the party towards rebels or traitors, accepted the six Progressive Democrat deputies as partners in government (the PDs had been formed in 1985 essentially as a neo-liberal breakaway from Fianna Fáil). Between 1989 and 2008, except for very brief transitional periods, Fianna Fáil was not able to govern without the support of other parties, whether Labour or the Progressive Democrats or (after 2007) the Greens.

Clearly the economic condition of the country is not in itself sufficient to explain all this ministerial turmoil since 1973. But the crises of the 1970s, and the legacy of debt and fiscal instability which they bequeathed, have certainly been a considerable influence on the fate of successive Irish governments. The Fine Gael–Labour government of Liam Cosgrave (1973–7) was defeated at the general election of 1977 partly because voters were unimpressed by its belated fiscal rectitude, and partly because they were sweet-talked by the lavish promises of public spending offered by Jack Lynch and Fianna Fáil. However, the apparent inability of Fianna Fáil to cope with the mounting deficits of the early 1980s brought swift disillusionment, as did the turnaround within the party from the up-beat promises of the 1977 election campaign to the portentous broadcast in January 1980 by Charles Haughey, as Taoiseach, on the dire economic state of the nation. Garret FitzGerald's first government – the minority Fine Gael–Labour administration (June 1981–February 1982) – fell because it could not get its cost-cutting budget past the Dáil; and indeed voters in the general election of February 1982 were also unimpressed by the outgoing government's money-raising initiatives, and in particular its proposal to extend VAT to children's clothing and footwear. Equally, FitzGerald's second administration (a

reformulated Fine Gael–Labour coalition) started to come apart at the end of 1986 as a result of swingeing cuts in public spending which the Labour ministers were not prepared to stomach. Nor was the public persuaded by what even FitzGerald conceded was ‘an uncompromising budget’; and Charles Haughey and Fianna Fáil were returned to power at the general election of 1987.⁴

There were, of course, other factors which helped to decide the fate of Irish governments in these years. Scandal dogged the career of the charismatic Charlie Haughey, and several of his administrations were associated with what he himself described famously as ‘bizarre happenings’, ‘unprecedented situations’ and events that were ‘grotesque and unbelievable’: from these euphemisms the former Labour minister Conor Cruise O’Brien coined the acronym ‘GUBU’, which he applied in ironic and pejorative fashion to what he saw as the misdeeds of the Fianna Fáil government of February to November 1982.⁵ The ‘unprecedented situations’ of 1982 included both the discovery of a murder suspect in the flat of the attorney general and the Dowra affair (when a garda, related by marriage to the Minister for Justice, was charged with assault but walked free because the RUC had helpfully detained a key prosecution witness). Underlying these public eruptions were rumours of official phone-taps on two journalists (Bruce Arnold and Geraldine Kennedy) who were thought to have had contacts with some of Haughey’s ministerial opponents. Taken in connection with the Dowra episode, these rumours seemed to suggest that ministers were interfering dangerously with the Garda and using state security mechanisms for personal or partisan advantage: they served of course to further discredit the administration (even though the full history of the phone-tapping was not fully aired until the results of an enquiry were published in January 1984). Haughey’s later career remained controversial. In the autumn of 1991 a number of stories emerged which (as Gemma Hussey has tactfully commented) ‘cast possible doubts on the probity of government appointees to State boards, or indicated failure of control and accountability by those entrusted with running State companies.’⁶ These coincided with the opening months of a judicial investigation into possible political favouritism and malpractice in the beef industry, and created a widespread impression of corruption within the political and economic elite of the country. One of the immediate casualties of this public concern was Haughey, who – having served as Taoiseach since 1987 and having survived numerous challenges from within his party – was at last ousted in February 1992.

Economic pressures, together with other international influences, had an ideological impact within Irish politics. Coping with debt meant tax increases and reduced public spending. The middle classes suffered, especially those who were taxed at source: so did those poor whose quality of life depended upon welfare provision and other forms of state expenditure. Unemployment levels remained very high throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, with some 300,000 (or 21 per cent of the workforce) still jobless in 1993. These different features of the Irish economy, combined with other pressures, were associated with an apparent growth in class politics in the 1980s. As has been mentioned, the Progressive Democrats were formed in December 1985 as a party which advocated the neo-liberal economic strategies

favoured by right-wing administrations in the United Kingdom and the United States. To some extent their function and support were undermined by the increasingly stern fiscal rectitude of the two main parties, and particularly of Fianna Fáil: but the Progressive Democrats (though highly vulnerable and sometimes disoriented) remained an influential force in Irish politics throughout the 1990s. The party won 11.9 per cent of the vote and 14 seats in 1987, and joined the government in July 1989 in order to keep Fianna Fáil on the paths of fiscal righteousness. In 1992, as a result of some effective gamesmanship as well as the quirks of the electoral system, the party captured ten seats on only 4.7 per cent of the vote.

If the PDs seemed to represent the growth of a radical conservative challenge, then there was also some consolidation of support in the late 1980s for the parties of the left. The Workers’ Party (WP) gained seven seats in 1989, though – partly as a result of a split within WP ranks in February 1992 – the showing of its main successor, the Democratic Left, in the general election of 1992 was poor (only four seats). On the other hand, the main party of the left, Labour, strengthened its representation from 16 seats in 1989 to a remarkable 33 seats in 1992, a result that reflected widespread social and economic concerns, but also unquestionably the personal popularity of the new Labour-backed President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, as well as of the party leader, Dick Spring.

The economic crisis of the late 1980s was rooted in the legacy of debt from earlier years, as well as in the collapse of the international stock markets that occurred in 1987 and after. These pressures brought not only the creation of a radical conservative party in the form of the Progressive Democrats, but also some realignments within the mainstream Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael traditions. In the late 1980s Fianna Fáil abandoned some of the political opportunism that had characterized its handling of the economy in the 1970s, and came increasingly to accept the neo-liberal disciplines that were being practised in other troubled economies. Equally, Fine Gael had moved from its social democratic emphases in the 1960s to occupy a broadly similar position to Fianna Fáil regarding the management of the Irish economy. This was crisply illustrated when FitzGerald, conceding defeat in the 1987 general election, promised his support for the incoming minority Fianna Fáil government – provided that it applied the rigorous budgetary constraints that he deemed necessary. This approach was confirmed when Alan Dukes, who succeeded FitzGerald as Fine Gael leader in March 1987, enunciated the Tallaght strategy – a strategy of supporting Fianna Fáil in its pursuit of spending cuts and economic growth. The Tallaght doctrine remained in place until 1990, when in the light of gradual economic recovery as well as the flagging popularity of the party, Fine Gael dumped both Dukes and his experiment in constructive opposition. But FitzGerald for one saw a victory of sorts for his party in the fact that Fianna Fáil had accepted the stringent cost-cutting strategies advocated by Fine Gael in 1987, and had deployed them in the budgets of 1988 and 1989.

Yet the fact that there was so much shared ground in Irish politics in the 1980s was obscured by the apparently very different personalities and styles of the two main party leaders of the period: Haughey and FitzGerald. Each man dominated his party

for well over a decade. FitzGerald inherited the leadership of Fine Gael from the gruff old Free Stater, Liam Cosgrave, after his party's election defeat in 1977: he was Taoiseach in the minority Fine Gael–Labour administration of June 1981 to February 1982, and in the coalition that survived from December 1982 to February 1987. Haughey's pre-eminence covered a similar, if slightly longer, period. In December 1979 he fought off a strong challenge from George Colley to succeed Jack Lynch both as Fianna Fáil party leader and Taoiseach. He led a reconstructed Fianna Fáil government until June 1981, and again between February and November 1982. He clung onto power within a minority Fianna Fáil administration between February 1987 and 1989, when he was compelled to accept the PDs as partners: he survived at the head of this coalition until January 1992.

The two leaders presented an apparently sharp contrast. Haughey has been described (by Joe Lee) as a kind of renaissance potentate: Dermot Keogh has lauded him as 'a political fixer and good ward politician'.⁷ Both assessments emphasize Haughey as boss: both stress the theme of clientilism. Haughey looked and sounded like a leader: his appearance hinted at a reptilian menace, and he was curt or laconic. In public he was often highly cautious; in private he could be genially abusive or, sometimes, ungenially abusive. He had great charm; but equally his anger sent a frisson of terror among those ministers or civil servants who were deemed to have erred. He conducted cabinets as a chief rather than as a chairman; and business was transacted briskly and without philosophical exegesis. He had a feel for populist politics, and a feel, too, for eye-catching policy initiatives. His roots were in the republican wing of his party, and with the arms trial affair of 1970 he seemed to have made a personal sacrifice for the holy cause. But, like Parnell, Haughey had the great gift of seeming like a visionary without ever presenting any coherent vision to his people. Like Parnell, Haughey was a technician of power; like Parnell, he was something of a tragic hero – an immensely gifted man, finally brought down by fatal weaknesses.

FitzGerald, by contrast, was (at least for the spin-doctors) Garret the Good: with his shock of untidy, wavy hair and his generally smiling countenance, he seemed unthreatening and approachable. His earlier career as an academic economist, combined with his evident mental dexterity, meant that he was often (and sympathetically) viewed as a kindly, if slightly batty, professor. His cabinet meetings were lengthy and discursive: FitzGerald was interested in ideas, and he tended to reward those whom he regarded as bright (his memoirs often record judgements on the intellectual equipment of colleagues). It is difficult to envisage the Fianna Fáil leadership (which contained some unquestionably gifted figures – not least Haughey himself) making as many concessions to brain power in the matter of patronage as did FitzGerald. He was talkative (the sobriquet 'Garrulous FitzGerald' gained currency), and he probably made more gaffes than Haughey.⁸ He was as rooted in the Treatyite tradition as was Haughey in republicanism: but FitzGerald's visionary zeal came from his social democratic principles, which he had advocated since the 1960s, rather than from the skirmishes of the civil war or the conflict with the British or Ulster Unionists. On the whole (and paradoxically), Haughey may well be judged as a more

pragmatic politician than FitzGerald: both men shared a desire to rectify the economy and to seek an accommodation with the British over Northern Ireland, but it was FitzGerald who pursued these objects with an unblinking ferocity. It is hard to escape the impression that Haughey's principal object was the pursuit of power.

And yet, setting aside these differences of style and emphasis, the degree of alignment between these two leaders and their respective parties that had been achieved by the late 1980s (if not before) perhaps hints at some more fundamental congruities within Irish political culture. Both men benefited from the strong family links that they had with the revolutionary elite of 1916–21: Haughey's father, Seán, was second-in-command of the Northern Division of the IRA, and his father-in-law was Seán Lemass; FitzGerald's father, Desmond, was 'out' in 1916 and was later Minister of Foreign Affairs in the executive council of the Irish Free State. Each man had a family connection with Northern Ireland: Haughey's roots were in the republican village of Swatragh, County Londonderry, while FitzGerald's mother was a Presbyterian nationalist from Belfast. Both Haughey and FitzGerald attended University College Dublin, the intellectual forcing house of the Irish political elite. Each, though populist, was strongly anti-communist. Both came to prominence within their respective parties very much as technocrats and modernizers. Each had an appropriate degree of political ruthlessness: in 1981, on becoming Taoiseach, FitzGerald cut a scythe through the Fine Gael elders, passing over many of Cosgrave's former ministers in selecting his own team for government. Both were wilful rulers: Conor Cruise O'Brien has observed that FitzGerald 'lived in the sunny confidence that he was invariably acting for the common good, which ... often coincided with his own good'.⁹ Though each man had connections in the North, and though FitzGerald has emphasized his ties with northern Unionism, in truth many of these connections seem to have had little fundamental (as opposed to symbolic) value: both men were basically as detached from the visceral realities of northern politics as most of the political elite in Dublin. Both cared about the North, sometimes passionately; but, for example, FitzGerald's apparently good lines of communication with Ulster Unionism seem to have given him little insight into that movement's likely actions and reactions. The cerebral and generous social democrat seems to have been liked by northern Unionists – for whom he must have seemed generous but also untouchably exotic. It was unfortunate that Haughey was evidently too tainted by the arms trial to be trusted by Unionism: for Fianna Fáilers – populist, localist, clientilist, partisan – were in some respects on a closer wavelength to Ulster Unionists than the Fine Gael leadership. On the other hand, if even a tentative détente was out of the question in the Haughey era, some of the very real potential for meaningful communication between Fianna Fáil and Ulster Unionism was realized in the late 1990s under Bertie Ahern and David Trimble.

A further key determinant of the shape of Irish politics and society in the last quarter of the twentieth century was the recruitment of Ireland to the EEC in 1973. Once again, just as the oil crises of the 1970s and the fragile condition of the Irish economy in the 1970s and 1980s had broad implications for the government of the country, as well as day-to-day life, so, too, much sprang from Ireland's involvement

in Europe. And again, just as it would be an overly blunt argument which ascribed political and social change simply and solely to economic development, so, too, it would be wrong to exaggerate the consequences of membership of the EEC, or European Union. On the other hand, Ireland's close relationship with its European partners has been seen both as a consequence and a cause of some fundamental political and social shifts in the domestic scene.

Ireland's interest in membership of the EEC was rooted in the crisis of confidence that afflicted the country in the post-war era, and especially in the troubled 1950s: it was rooted in the ideological shifts which culminated in the work of Whitaker and Lemass, and which involved a movement away from the old culturally xenophobic and economically protectionist verities of the Sinn Féin tradition. Some euphoric celebrants of Ireland's European identity have sought a more ancient lineage, looking back to the long history of Irish patriotic, military, commercial or ecclesiastical involvement in continental Europe and seeing membership of the Community as a seamless extension of these traditions. In more immediate and prosaic terms, membership was logical and attractive because it promised the Ireland of the early 1960s, and especially Irish agriculture, immediate cash benefits (the Common Agricultural Policy was formulated in 1963): membership also chimed with the wider economic as well as political vision of Lemass (his scaling down of tariffs and his 'technocratic' approach to partition). But Ireland's initial application (in 1963) was turned down, as was that of the British: both were stymied by French suspicions that, in recruiting these two nations, the Community would have been ushering an American Trojan horse into the fortress of European civilization. General de Gaulle's retirement from the French Presidency in 1969 removed one of the key opponents of Irish and British membership: negotiations were duly revived, and culminated in a referendum, held on 10 May 1972, which overwhelmingly approved Ireland's admission (83 per cent voted 'yes' in a 71 per cent turnout of the electorate). Irish membership was formalized on 1 January 1973. It was unfortunate that Lemass, who was the architect of the original Irish application, and for whom membership had been a fundamental goal, had died scarcely 18 months before the realization of his dream.

At one level, the impact of the European Union on Ireland is not hard to calculate. Subventions from Brussels to Ireland through the medium of the Regional and other funds totalled £14 billion in the period from 1973 to 1991. Access to the Common Agricultural Policy, with its subsidy mechanisms, brought enormous benefits to Irish farmers, whose income doubled in the first five years of Irish membership: £10.3 billion of the £14 billion given to Ireland by Europe before 1991 went to the agricultural sector. Nor should it be forgotten that, although there was a great growth and diversification of the economy in the later 1990s, at the beginning of the decade Ireland still depended 'to an almost unnerving extent' upon agriculture, with just under a quarter of total export value coming from this sector.¹⁰ It is unquestionably the case that these direct subventions mitigated the impact of the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s and helped to sustain Irish living standards: it might even be ventured (at the risk of exaggeration) that this investment helped

to bolster the state itself at a time when it was being buffeted by numerous destabilizing currents.

Membership of the EEC also underpinned the attractiveness of Ireland to American investors. As a relatively low-wage economy (at least until the mid-1990s), Ireland served as a useful location for American firms seeking entry to other European markets. It should be emphasized, however, that this has not been a sustained or, indeed, an unmixed blessing. The accession of other relatively poor countries to the Community – Greece, Portugal and Spain – undermined the attractiveness of Ireland. Moreover, many of the new industries that found an Irish home in the 1970s and 1980s 'were typically satellites carrying out a few of the stages in a more complicated manufacturing process'.¹¹ Profits were in most cases repatriated. New jobs were created, but, as has been noted, unemployment remained high because of the withering of traditional areas of manufacturing employment. Equally, however, it would be a mistake to ignore the significance of these investment trends. It can only be assumed that, whatever the liabilities, Ireland was better with these companies than without them: they may not have represented a long-term source of strength to the country, but they did provide much-needed employment. Moreover, this influx of foreign, especially American, capital in the 1970s and 1980s also had a profound impact on the overall pattern of Ireland's trading relationships: the historic commercial intimacy between Ireland and Britain was gradually being replaced by a more diverse web of economic partners.

Membership of the EEC and of the European Union has also had a direct impact on civil rights, and in particular the issue of women's rights. Again, it would be wrong to imagine that there was no movement on these issues before 1973 and that the process of change flowed simply and wholly from Brussels. Many of the legislative barriers on women's rights which had been enacted in the 1920s (the prohibition of divorce, the ban on contraception) remained in place in the 1960s: as late as 1965 a wife might be totally disinherited by her husband. There was, however, some movement in the early 1970s with the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women (1970), with its far-reaching report (published in December 1972), and with the emergence thereafter of a Council for the Status of Women. Acknowledging these home-grown developments, it has also been the case that EEC membership has forced the pace on a variety of social issues, and particularly women's rights in the workplace and the home. Occasionally, as with the European Equal Pay Directive of 1975, Irish governments have initially sought to resist the pressure for reform. However, here a combination of domestic protest and external admonition produced an Employment Equality Act, and with it an Employment Equality Agency (1977). Gemma Hussey, reverting to a somewhat problematic metaphor, has described the EEC's intervention within the field of women's rights as being 'like a knight on a white charger': Europe has guaranteed to Irish women equal pay and equal opportunity in the workplace, and has (through a directive signed in October 1992) confirmed a statutory right to maternity leave and other benefits.¹² It would be wrong to pretend that these legal requirements have changed mind-sets, any more than, for example, Catholic emancipation in 1829 created an immediate and effective religious

equality. Nor would it be entirely reasonable to see Brussels as the ultimate source of this liberalization, given the international mobilization of women from at least the 1960s, and given some limited movement by Irish governments before 1973. The extent to which Irish women have been responsible for their own empowerment also should not be missed: Mary Robinson, President of Ireland (1990–7), was a beneficiary of the enlivened political aspirations of Irish women, and served in turn as a beacon to the women's movement. But, as with some of the economic issues examined, it may be fairly argued that Europe has been the proximate source of benefits for many women; and that, without European intervention, progress towards full sexual equality might well have come, but more slowly and more painfully than in fact has been the case.

Europe has brought profound change, not only in the Irish economy and with the rights of Irish women and Irish workers generally, but also in less tangible matters. It is arguable that Europe has wrought some changes in the political culture of the country. Before 1932 the energy and skills of Irish diplomats had won a disproportionately great influence for the Irish Free State within the Commonwealth: until 1939 the same persistence and dexterity was applied within the League of Nations. Irish membership of the United Nations came relatively late (in December 1955): but here again the country quickly established itself as one of the most influential of the smaller nations, prominent amongst the non-aligned and a relatively great contributor to UN peace-keeping and aid programmes. Since 1973 the same feat has been repeated within the EEC. Although the Irish public has sometimes taken a genially piratical attitude to Brussels, many of their politicians and civil servants have impressed their European peers by sharp negotiating skills and by a general intellectual quality. Garret FitzGerald is worth mentioning in this context, and – even allowing for some understandable self-aggrandizement – it is clear from his autobiography that he established a peculiarly effective rapport with European leaders both as Minister for Foreign Affairs (1973–7) and as Taoiseach (1982–7): he seems, for example, to have been influential in nudging Jacques Delors towards the Presidency of the European Commission and – as an evident trade-off – to have persuaded Delors to appoint an Irishman, Peter Sutherland, to the strategically vital Commissionership for Competition.¹³ The Irish Presidencies of the European Council (in 1975, 1979, 1984, 1990) were widely judged to have been successful; and indeed in 1998, a new recruit to the European Union, Austria, turned to their Irish partners for detailed guidance concerning the conduct of the Presidency and the strategic role of the smaller nations within the EU. Ireland, it was clear by the later 1990s, was punching above its weight as a champion of the small European nations.

Europe provided a new forum and a new direction for Irish political ambition. It permitted Irish politicians and civil servants to work on equal terms with their counterparts from bigger and more powerful European states. There has been a mutual learning process. But on the whole, the success of the European experience has reinforced national self-confidence; and it contributed in the 1990s – along with furious economic growth, and the international recognition won by figures like Séamus Heaney or Mary Robinson – to a reaffirmation of Irish identity.

Part of this cultural and political affirmation has sprung from the maturing of Ireland's relationship with Britain, historically the country's most intimate and embittered tie. Membership of the EEC, or European Union, has decisively changed the nature of this relationship. In 1973, even allowing for the years of economic growth and diversification under Lemass, Britain remained overwhelmingly the single most important Irish export market. The difference in per capita GDP between the two countries emphasized the relative poverty of the Irish. Disparities in power and wealth, combined with intimate cultural and economic bonds, made for a political relationship charged with British condescension and Irish defensiveness. Shared membership of the Community brought some oxygen into this fetid atmosphere: Ireland's economic links with Britain have grown more tenuous, while at the same time Irish interests within the European Union have often brought a strategic unity with the British. Ireland joined the European Monetary System in 1979, well ahead of Britain, and thereby broke a connection with sterling that dated back to 1826. Irish trade with continental Europe has grown at the expense of the connection with Britain: in 1973 56 per cent of Irish exports went to Britain, while in 1991 the comparable figure was 32 per cent. Irish exports to continental Europe grew from 17.6 per cent to 42 per cent in the same period. Massive, if patchy, economic growth in Ireland, aided by subventions from Europe, has brought a turnaround in the per capita wealth of the two countries: Irish GDP per head overtook that of the British in 1997. At the same time, and partly as a consequence of this process of economic release and equalization, the political relationship between Ireland and Britain inside the European Union has improved: Irish civil servants and ministers who had no particular reason to deal with their British counterparts before 1973 found, because of the mechanisms of the Community, that they were now frequently thrown together. This has brought a keener degree of mutual understanding and sympathy than hitherto, though it would be useless to pretend that suspicions do not linger (FitzGerald tells in his memoirs of a pantomimic incident at the Stuttgart European Council meeting of 1983, when he was alarmed to discover a British diplomat lurking outside his rooms: the Briton was evidently looking for a whiskey bottle rather than secret intelligence).¹⁴ However, FitzGerald provides evidence not just of lingering tensions, but also of some fundamental strategic congruities between the British and Irish stands inside Europe: in 1976 he spelt out an aspect of this to the British Foreign Secretary, Tony Crosland, arguing that Irish interests lay in an equilibrium between the three major powers of the EEC, and that a more active British role suited the Irish since it mitigated the threat of Franco-German domination.¹⁵ Close British and Irish communication, stimulated largely by European contacts, lay behind the radical initiative on Northern Ireland which began tentatively in 1981 and which culminated in the Anglo-Irish Agreement (November 1985).

This leads naturally to a consideration of the third of the key influences on the modern Irish state mentioned earlier: the crisis in Northern Ireland. Violence in the North has ricocheted into the Republic. There have been several high-profile assassinations, including that of the Fine Gael Senator Billy Fox by the IRA on 11 March 1974 (Senator Fox was the first member of the Oireachtas to be killed

since Kevin O'Higgins in 1927): the British ambassador to Ireland, Christopher Ewart-Biggs, was killed by an IRA landmine at Sandyford, County Dublin, on 21 July 1976. The IRA also assassinated Earl Mountbatten of Burma (at Mullaghmore, County Sligo, on 27 August 1979). The Ulster Volunteer Force detonated a series of bombs in Dublin and Monaghan, killing a total of 33 people and injuring over 100: 17 May 1974 has the grim distinction of being the bloodiest day in the history of the Irish troubles. Several gardaí have been killed by the IRA over the years since 1969, often during or after bank raids: in one such bloody episode in July 1980 two gardaí were shot dead at Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon.

The impact of this sporadic, but painful and bloody, overspill from the North in terms of the Irish economy is harder to calculate than the casualty lists. It is probable that some potential investors have been deterred by the prospect of political instability. It is clear that the tourist trade has been stifled, if not suffocated; and it is equally clear that the cost of enhanced security measures in the 1970s and 1980s imposed an unwonted burden on an already stretched public purse.

Tough security legislation has also impinged upon civil liberties. The re-establishment of the Special Criminal Court by Desmond O'Malley in May 1972 brought juryless trials back into the judicial process. The Offences against the State (Amendment) Act of December 1972 allowed the summary conviction (on the word of a senior garda) of those suspected of belonging to illegal organizations. After the assassination of Christopher Ewart-Biggs the Fine Gael-led coalition government promoted an Emergency Powers Bill, which permitted the detention for seven days of those suspected of crimes under the Offences Against the State Act. The impact of this measure was in fact more far-reaching than could have been imagined by its authors, or indeed the killers of Ewart-Biggs, though it usefully illustrates the knock-on effects of terror. The President of Ireland, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh, a distinguished lawyer, exercised his right to refer the bill to the Supreme Court in order to test its constitutionality: the Court duly confirmed the legality of the measure. But the Minister of Defence, Patrick Donegan, was angered by what he saw as academic quibbling in the face of a national emergency, and condemned Ó Dálaigh as 'a thundering disgrace'. The Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, stood by his minister; and Ó Dálaigh resigned on 23 October 1976 'in order to protect the dignity and independence of the Presidency'.¹⁶ True to his Free State roots, Cosgrave acted selflessly and in the interests of national stability, and turned to a respected Fianna Fáiler, Patrick Hillery, as an agreed successor to Ó Dálaigh (an irredeemably sceptical observer might indeed see a subtle piece of partisanship here, as with earlier acts of Treatyite statesmanship, but such scepticism would probably be misplaced). Hillery was duly inaugurated as President on 3 December 1976.

Northern violence has also supplied some painful lessons in practical politics. Mainstream nationalist conviction in the Republic has been shifting at least from the era of Lemass, with his 'technocratic' and economic approach to the challenge of partition. The war in Northern Ireland reinforced this modernization of the centre-ground, albeit at a terrible cost. Loyalist violence underlined the existence of a ferocious and armed section of northern Unionist opinion which could not

easily be accommodated by the traditional advocates of Irish unity in the South. The popularity of fundamentalist Protestants like the Reverend Ian Paisley among Unionists posed problems for those in the South who sought a liberal and secular Ireland. Equally, the growth of militant republicanism exposed some of the elisions and evasions within traditional anti-partitionist thought. Many constitutional nationalists in the Republic revered the heroes of the struggle of 1916–21; many were sympathetic towards the ideal of reunification as well as towards the embattled nationalists of Northern Ireland. But, at least from their own perspective, the gunmen from the nationalist ghettos of the North were continuing the anti-imperialist struggle begun in 1916, and which was so central to the official mythology of the Irish state: these gunmen were, again in their own estimation, merely trying to realize the legitimate aspirations of the Irish constitution as well as of mainstream southern opinion.

In this way militant republicanism applied pressure to the ideological imperatives of southern politics. This is not to say that the Provisional IRA was primarily responsible for initiating change within mainstream southern nationalist thought: but it is to say that pressures from the North helped to expose or to reinforce certain ideological shifts which had their origins at the very least in the Lemass years. Lemass's creative redefinition of anti-partitionist strategy to some extent laid the foundations for the goals pursued in 1973, at the time of Sunningdale, and in 1984–5 with the New Ireland Forum and the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The challenge of violence in the North provided the context for the initiatives of these years, but their intellectual origins were deeply rooted within the processes of modernization in the Irish state. The Sunningdale Agreement, signed in December 1973 by the British and Irish governments together with the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, created a Council of Ireland with 'executive and harmonising functions and a consultative role' which was designed to unite ministers and parliamentarians from Belfast and Dublin: provision was made for cross-border security coordination. Significantly, under the terms of article five, the Irish government 'fully and solemnly declared that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland desired a change in that status'.¹⁷ This was seen by the Ulster Unionist leader Brian Faulkner as a significant modification of the official Irish approach to partition; and indeed it may also be seen as the logical corollary of the strategies being pursued by Lemass less than ten years before. The practical significance of the Agreement was of course undermined both by a legal challenge from the republican Kevin Boland and, more decisively, by the Ulster Workers' Council strike of May 1974. But its significance in terms of the development of mainstream southern attitudes towards partition should not be missed.

It was developments in the North which again, in the early 1980s, precipitated a further effort to establish a generous and consensual approach to Northern Ireland, which at the same time remained essentially nationalist in its construction. This was the New Ireland Forum, which was promoted by Garret FitzGerald as Taoiseach and which met in Dublin Castle between May 1983 and May 1984. The context was the hunger strikes by PIRA prisoners in Belfast in the summer of 1981 and the consequent hardening of the Sinn Féin vote in Northern Ireland: FitzGerald was



Plate 18 Liam Cosgrave, Brian Faulkner, and ministers from the Belfast Executive and the Dublin coalition government, Hillsborough, February 1974.

Source: Victor Patterson/Linenhall Library.

seeking to rally constitutional nationalism in both the North and the South behind an agreed statement of conviction which, in turn, might be used as a basis for negotiation with the British. Much of the final report, especially its historical section (which seems to have embarrassed FitzGerald), was a reiteration of traditional patriotic verities: but it also contained the first broadly based nationalist recognition of the complexities, and the Britishness, of Ulster Unionist identity. The ultimate thrust of FitzGerald's strategies was towards the achievement of a form of joint British–Irish authority within Northern Ireland, which could bolster constitutional nationalism there and divert support from Sinn Féin. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, signed at Hillsborough in November 1985, bore the imprint of FitzGerald's analysis, even though the deal that was struck in fact fell short of joint authority: it embodied a half-way house between the loose consultative procedures that were in place between 1980 and 1985 and FitzGerald's more ambitious goals. Once again, an Anglo-Irish Agreement affirmed that 'any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland' (article 1a); though the Hillsborough deal seemed to inch a little further than this by recognizing 'that the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland

is for no change in the status of Northern Ireland' (article 1b).¹⁸ This was seen by Unionists (who largely opposed the Agreement) as simply a statement of reality; but in truth even limpid statements of reality have not always come naturally to the main political traditions on the island.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement did not uniformly live up to the expectations of those on the Irish side who had helped in its construction. The Agreement did not, in fact, undermine support for Sinn Féin, as FitzGerald had hoped and predicted; it did, however, bolster constitutional politics, though again not quite in the manner which had been expected. Bew, Patterson and Teague have argued that not only did the Agreement fail to marginalize Sinn Féin, in some senses it helped to bolster republicanism.¹⁹ Sinn Féin had already peaked before the signing of the Agreement in November 1985, while in certain key areas it subsequently actually gained ground: in (for example) the pivotal West Belfast constituency, Protestants – who in some cases had offered tactical votes to the SDLP – now returned to Unionism, thereby permitting the seat to fall to Gerry Adams, the Sinn Féin leader. The Agreement demonstrated to nationalists of all hues that the British government was willing to circumvent Unionist opposition in the pursuit of a deal: it encouraged the call that the British should set aside the Unionist 'veto' and become 'persuaders for unity'.²⁰ It demonstrated, in a general sense, that there were gains to be made through the exploration of constitutional avenues. The Agreement encouraged, though it certainly did not satisfy, northern nationalist expectations: it has been argued that, in conjunction with the evident disarray of the Unionists, it fuelled a nationalist maximalism, as evidenced by the cautious détente between Adams and John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, which began in 1988. Sinn Féin leaders seem to have begun to think in terms of a broad patriotic front of constitutional nationalists, militant republicans and Irish Americans which, given British hesitation and Unionist demoralization, could press forward to an ultimate victory.

The failure of the constitutional parties to reach a deal, combined with the possibilities opened up by the Hume–Adams initiative, drove both the Irish and British governments towards a settlement which incorporated not just the contentious middle-ground of Ulster politics, but also the militant periphery. This redirection was spurred on by the failure of the inter-party talks sponsored by the successive Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke (1989–92) and Sir Patrick Mayhew (1992–7): with the collapse of the Brooke–Mayhew process in late 1992, Hume returned in 1993 to his still highly controversial dialogue with Adams. To some extent, however, this initiative was simultaneously gagged as well as kidnapped by the Irish and British governments: in late 1993 the two administrations agreed that (in the words of Albert Reynolds, Taoiseach between 1992 and 1994) 'Hume/Adams was being declared dead in order to keep it alive'.²¹ Squabbling between the constitutional parties, face-to-face dialogue between the leaders of the two main nationalist traditions in the North, some tentative communication between the British and republicans – these were the contexts against which the Downing Street Declaration was affirmed by Reynolds and John Major (British Prime Minister, 1990–7) in December 1993: this looked forward to an inclusivist talks process for all those who 'permanently'

rejected armed force. For their part the British formally disavowed any 'selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland' and promised to act as facilitators for an agreement which might 'embrace the totality of relationships'.²² This stance, and particularly the crucial fourth paragraph of the Declaration, contained some concessions to the language, if not always the substance, of the Hume–Adams dialogue (it has been said that the Irish and British were 'negotiating around a highly diluted version' of the agreement reached between Hume and Adams).²³ The Irish government, for its part, now moved beyond the affirmations of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in its bid to assuage Unionist sensitivities: Reynolds ruled out the imposition of a united Ireland against the wishes of a majority in Northern Ireland, repeating the assurances given by Irish governments (though, significantly, not Fianna Fáil-led governments) in 1973 and in 1985. But he also undertook – as part of a broader talks process – to examine those aspects of life in the Republic which offended Unionists or otherwise fell short of his government's pluralist vision. In this context, he underlined that contentious aspects of the Irish constitution might be altered as part of a broader settlement in Northern Ireland. Such alterations had been mooted at both Sunningdale and in the run-up to Hillsborough, but the obstacles had seemed overwhelming, and the issue had not been pursued.

Privately, Reynolds threatened that, if the Declaration as a whole did not bring a permanent IRA ceasefire, he would proceed hand in hand with Major and leave the republicans behind.²⁴ This tough-minded approach may have been one of the clinching forces behind the announcement by the Provisionals, on 31 August 1994, of a complete cessation of hostilities. Moreover, the 'green-tinted' Frameworks Documents, published in February 1995, seems to have been designed in part to give further encouragement to those nervous doves within the republican movement. Three strands for discussion between the Northern Irish parties were defined, including a proposed North–South body with apparently sweeping powers ('a bureaucratic fantasia designed to appeal to [the] Sinn Féin leadership').²⁵

There were subsequent setbacks. The first IRA ceasefire ended in February 1996, with the detonation of a bomb in Canary Wharf, London. Elections in May 1996 for a constitutional Forum underlined the political polarization of Northern Ireland, and produced a bear-pit. Changes in administration in both London (with the election of Tony Blair and Labour in May 1997) and Dublin (with a succession of Taoisigh – Reynolds, Bruton, Ahern – in the period between 1994 and 1997) brought some distinct alterations of emphasis, and much relearning. But much of the delicate pattern of a settlement was in fact already either in place or being put in place in 1996–7. The accession of Bertie Ahern, in charge of a Fianna Fáil–Progressive Democrat coalition, brought to the Taoiseach's office a man renowned for his steely affability as well as his diplomatic skills: the structure of his coalition was helpful in that it represented both mainstream republican feeling and neo-liberals who were relatively 'soft' on Ulster Unionism. The Irish had repeatedly confirmed the importance of majority consent within Northern Ireland before any reunification could take place: there were now promises of constitutional revision. On the other hand, the Labour victory in Britain might have caused the Ulster Unionists to bolt: but in

fact the electoral landslide was helpful to the prospects for a settlement in that Unionist backbenchers – and therefore Unionist passivity – could no longer decide the fate and direction of government (as had been apparently the case, certainly from the nationalist viewpoint, in the last years of the vulnerable Major administration). Blair's massive majority gave him an authority to pursue a settlement, while his broadly Unionist sympathies were a comfort to those in Glengall Street not blinded by sectarian fears concerning his Anglo-Catholicism or the Roman Catholicism of his wife. The British had repeatedly acknowledged their lack of any 'selfish' interest in Northern Ireland, and they had explicitly acknowledged the legitimacy and dignity of nationalist aspirations. John Hume had remained committed to the involvement of his Sinn Féin rivals in any final settlement. The Sinn Féin leadership (as opposed to some other sections of the republican movement) seems throughout to have remained interested in the idea of peace. The Ulster Unionists had recently (September 1995) acquired as leader David Trimble, a high-voltage pragmatist whose combination of public defiance and private realism had Carsonite overtones. The loyalist militants, with the significant exception of the Loyalist Volunteer Force, had maintained a (sometimes shaky) ceasefire since October 1994, and indeed had produced a political leadership distinguished not only by (some) criminal records but also by a relatively generous and imaginative strategic analysis.

The document which the Irish government signed at Stormont on 10 April 1998 incorporated some significant changes in mainstream nationalist thought over the preceding 30 years. The government had certainly won concessions from both the British and the Ulster Unionists: the Unionist signatories, for example, had now formally abandoned a crude majoritarianism and had accepted the reality of cross-border institutions. The British had recognized that 'it is for the people of Ireland alone' to decide on the issue of unification: they had earlier – from the time of Peter Brooke's Whitbread speech of November 1990 – disavowed any 'selfish strategic or economic interest in Ireland'.²⁶ On the other hand, the Good Friday Agreement acknowledged (as did the Anglo-Irish Agreement) that a majority in Northern Ireland wanted the maintenance of the Union: more than this, the deal explicitly underlined for the first time the legitimacy of this Unionist position. The Agreement bound the Irish government to initiate some highly charged revisions in the constitution of 1937. It tied the government into a new British–Irish Council, meeting in different formats at least twice a year in order to pursue cooperation across a range of mutual interests. A new British–Irish Inter-governmental Conference was created to replace the precursor institutions created in the 1980s. The Irish government was now formally committed (as was the new Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive) to a sweeping review of human rights issues within their respective jurisdictions; and the government reaffirmed an intention 'to take further active steps to demonstrate its respect for the different traditions in the island of Ireland'.²⁷

Northern Ireland had changed dramatically since 1969, and the Irish government had had a role in pursuing much of this change. But the process was reciprocal, for Ireland as a whole was in flux and some at least of the change may be traced back to the northern crisis. The fundamental nationalist ideal remained in place in 1998:

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