

PRIME MINISTER

In view of the Brian Walden programme tomorrow I have prepared you the following digest of today's newspapers.

PRESS DIGEST

Northern Ireland

Neither the Daily Star nor Mirror put the story on their front page. No comment from the Star, Mirror or FT. Telegraph hostile. Sun, Express, Mail, Times and Guardian constructive.

John Hume pledges full cooperation. Labour, Liberals and SDP pledge support.

President Reagan hails the Agreement as a framework for peace.

But Haughey will ask the Dail to refuse to ratify the Agreement.

Gerry Adams says there is nothing in it which will lead the IRA to give up the violence. NORAIID says it's more to do with public relations than alleviating the plight of victims in Ulster.

One policeman killed, another seriously injured, near Crossmaglen.

Ulster Freedom Fighters threaten to kill Catholic "enemies" and Civil Servants assigned to the new Inter-Government Conference.

Telegraph, Guardian and Times print the Agreement in full and the FT a substantial summary of it.

Daily Star goes on about Ian Gow's resignation and the reaction of men of terror in Northern Ireland.

/Sun

Sun: Minister quits in fury at sell out; leader says Powell is monstrously unfair to accuse you of treachery. No Prime Minister since the days of Churchill has stood up so well for Britain and you would never enter any deal that would sell British citizens down the Liffey.

Mirror: Thatcher aide quits over pact on Ulster.

Express: page 1 lead - Reagan cash backs Ulster peace gamble. Historic deal gives Irish Republic more influence. Ian Gow's resignation relegated to a panel. Leader says anyone with the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland at heart will wish the Agreement well, but there are dangers and both you and FitzGerald are gambling.

Mail: page 1 - Maggie's man quits in Ulster protest. News report says Agreement goes far beyond what had been forecast. Leader, under heading "a brave and historic deal". Says it should be judged by whether it brings a era of stability and peace. To most people in this country it does not look like a formula for betrayal; rather a brave attempt to bury ancient concrete and unite reasonable people.

Telegraph: page 1 lead - "Ulster pact for peace" - Dublin given voice in Belfast; Unionist MPs may resign. Leader headed "Irish ambiguities". Says the Agreement does not amount to treachery but it is an extraordinarily dangerous document. FitzGerald has achieved a conspicuous success in the form of the conference which should not have been permitted. North Unionists will see this Agreement as giving the Republic an effective, though not a theoretical, veto on British policy towards Ulster and who can blame them? Whether it is to be time for disaster, or just another filled initiative, depends chiefly on the courage and imagination of FitzGerald.

Guardian: page 1 lead - Dublin gets a voice in running Ulster; most radical Irish deal since partition brings Unionists sell out gibes and protest resignation by Thatcher aide (which is treated separately down page). Leader on "a unique way to find some wider reality". Says the changes are not cosmetic but potentially full of substance. In effect the Governments have agreed on a

/power-sharing

power-sharing scheme for Northern Ireland. Legally and constitutionally Unionists are on weak ground in opposing the Agreement.

Times: page 1 lead - Thatcher aims for Ulster peace in historic deal; Minister quits in protest (a separate story). Prints exchange of resignation letters. Julian Haviland says Ian Gow's resignation is the most convincing demonstration of how far you have moved over Northern Ireland.

Times leader says risks abound and the most/defect is the absence of <sup>serious</sup> ~~resources~~ <sup>references</sup> to provincial self-government. But creeping betrayal it is not and clarity of vision on either side of the sectarian divide would identify their advantage to make it work.

Financial Times: page 1 lead - Thatcher signs deal giving Dublin a role in Northern Ireland; separate reaction story includes Ian Gow's resignation.

Malcolm Rutherford says the Agreement is no more than an opportunity to end the violence and disputes. There would never have been one had you not put it to the top of the agenda.

#### Other news

Massive coverage still of the Colombian volcano tragedy. Express fears 50,000 dead. Warnings of new danger.

#### Economy

Inflation down to its lowest level this year - 5.4%.

8,000 jobs will be available at the Wembley Job 85 Exhibition next week.

TSB sell postponed from February, next summer at the earliest because of court ruling; Mail says it may never go ahead.

NEDO to call for curb on mortgage tax relief to release resources for housing repair.

FT leader says your's has always been a pretty pragmatic

/Government

Government and the Autumn Statement is not the first time you have tried reflation (modest and thinly disguised) but we have adopted considerably tighter monetary policy which looks a good deal likelier to work.

### Industry

Speed control devices to be fitted to motor coaches to stop them exceeding 77 miles per hour.

Still no solution to International Tin Council's crisis because of difficulties over bank guarantees.

Government drops the idea of a Nationalised Industries Consolidation Bill which, the Times says, would have facilitated privatisation.

UK industry has spent twice as much on computerisation as on machine tools.

FT says Sir Nicholas Goodison has written to you to urge tougher Government action against city fraud.

### Unions

Some claims Cabinet Ministers are to study its dossier on how communists took over the TGWU and are likely to order the debate on ballot rigging.

NUM angry over Scargill's use of 'planes to switch money around Europe to avoid sequestration (Sun).

Express reports an all out war between NUM and UDM for membership.

### Education

Teachers name 35 areas for strikes next week, including Barnet.

Local government

Liverpool Council, running out of money on Thursday, finds neither teachers nor general workers will go on strike in protest against the Government.

Sun leader says that if Liverpool shuts down next week one man - Hatton - should take most of the blame because of mad-cap economic policies.

Professor of Local Government at Nottingham says left-wing councils have concentrated more than £10 million on nuclear free zones and propaganda.

Newham Council give Tottenham's Bernie Grant a new £10,000 job after admitting he can no longer fulfil his duties as District Housing Officer.

Media

Press Council says readers playing bingo in national newspapers have been misled into joining one sort of game when they thought they were playing another.

Several previews of your Miriam Stoppard interview to be broadcast on Tuesday.

Law and order

Police said to be frustrated with DPP's two months delay in dealing with cases of 32 fans arrested after Brussels soccer disaster.

Express leader, reporting Lord Scarman's opposition to the new offence of disorderly conduct, says no wonder; he is the leading propoundant of community policing which, stripped of verbiage, means turning a blind eye.

Tough new attitude to illegal parking by diplomats has paid off - big drop in cases.

Mail says there are indications that rape is a grossly under-reported crime.

People

Julia Morley's (Miss World contest) daughter, 17, dies.

Terry Waite makes contact with terror group holding four American hostages in Beirut.

Lord Matthews announces his retirement.

East-West Relations

Telegraph says British officials are encouraged by a degree of convergence and overlap in the USA and Russian arms control proposals.

35 Senators urge Reagan to stand firm on SDI.

South Africa

Expected to extend its standstill on payment of overseas debts.

BERNARD INGHAM

16 November 1985



## Daily Mail COMMENT

### A brave and historic deal

YESTERDAY, Mrs Thatcher and Eire's Prime Minister Dr Garret FitzGerald signed an agreement intended to usher in for Ulster an era of stability and peace.

It is on its success in fulfilling that aim that it ought to be judged.

Its method is to set up constitutional bodies, the main one being an inter-governmental conference, for permanent and constant Anglo-Irish co-operation.

The boon for the Irish Government is that it will have a consultative voice on the treatment of the Nationalist two-fifths of the Ulster population which will give that minority some guarantee against discrimination in jobs, housing and education.

The gain to the British Government will be increased collaboration in defeating the common enemy, the terrorists of the IRA. Security forces should be working together more closely, especially in the border area, and IRA criminals should be more readily extradited to the North or tried in mixed courts.

As icing on the cake there should be millions of dollars of American aid to boost Northern Irish employment.

To most people in this country this does not look like a formula for betrayal despite the shrill cries of the Ulster Unionists.

It is rather a brave attempt to bury an ancient conflict and to unite reasonable folk on either side of the border in the war against the IRA murderers.

It deserves all the luck that Anglo-Irish relations have for so long been denied.

# THE Sun

Saturday, November 16, 1985

18p

SPORT STARTS ON PAGE 26

## THE SUN SAYS

### Ulster's chance

EVEN before the Ulster deal was signed yesterday Enoch Powell was accusing Mrs Thatcher of treachery.

That's monstrously unfair.

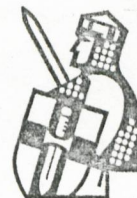
No Prime Minister since the days of Churchill has stood up so well for Britain.

She would never enter into any deal that would sell British citizens in Ulster down the Liffey.

In fact, the agreement is a sensible step to getting the two communities in the North to live peacefully together after 700 years of bitterness and bloodshed.

And it should now be easier for the security forces on both sides to work together to isolate the evil men of violence.

That's why the deal must be given a chance.



EXPRESS  OPINION

## Treaty that seeks peace

ANYONE with the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland at heart will wish the Anglo-Irish agreement well.

But there are dangers, and it would be dishonest and irresponsible to ignore them.

For instance, involving Dublin in the affairs of Northern Ireland—through the Inter-Governmental Conference and its permanent secretariat—could encourage the nationalist population to believe that their interests were being looked after by the Irish rather than the British Government.

How would that help forge the sense of community that the province so tragically lacks? It would not. It could pull the Loyalists and Republicans even further apart.

In signing the agreement both Mrs Thatcher and Dr FitzGerald are gambling.

The Irish Premier has accepted proposals that his opponents say do not give Dublin enough involvement in Ulster affairs.

The Ulster Unionists say that Mrs Thatcher has "sold out." They vow to resist what they see as a threat to their place under the British Crown.

We must hope this gamble pays off. For if it does not, the people of Northern Ireland will be the real losers.

## IRISH AMBIGUITIES

YESTERDAY'S Anglo-Irish Agreement does not amount to treachery; but it is an extraordinarily dangerous document. Its tortured language bears the marks of many months of tough negotiation which could have no other conclusion than calculated ambiguity. The merits of that quality in relation to Irish affairs are much exaggerated by British statesmen though not, it seems, by Mr IAN GOW.

Plainly, the British team knew what they wanted—an agreement based on the concept of close co-operation between the United Kingdom as a whole and the Irish Republic, purely consultative in character and tactfully including in its general embrace the future of Northern Ireland. Equally, Dr FITZGERALD knew what he wanted—an agreement which focused on Ulster and gave some sort of recognition to the Republic as the legitimate protector of the rights of the Nationalist minority in the North. Ignoring for the moment the pious platitude on the lips of both parties to the effect that neither has won or lost, one may ask "Who really has won?"

In one respect, Dr FITZGERALD has achieved a conspicuous success, which he should not have been permitted. Within the framework of the existing machinery for Anglo-Irish intergovernmental co-operation, there is to be established a special and continuing Conference, principally concerned with Northern Irish affairs, served by a small secretariat and (probably) meeting in Belfast. Its function will be purely consultative, but the range of its concerns virtually limitless. The Southern Government will be able to make recommendations on all aspects of British policy in the North; but the British Government will have no such clearly defined right in relation to the South. All the Agreement says about that is that "Some of the proposals considered in respect of Northern Ireland may also be found to have application by the Irish Government". Dr FITZGERALD would have been wiser, with his eyes on the possibility of Unionist acquiescence in the Agreement, to have allowed a clearer note of reciprocity to have been struck at this point. He was also silly to insist on a rather weak clause committing the British to consider the absurd idea of joint courts for terrorist offences: the British will not consider it, the Unionists in the North would probably fight to stop it and it is more than likely that the Southern Irish judiciary would also refuse to have anything to do with it. But Dr FITZGERALD has been concerned chiefly to prove himself to be a more effective champion of Irish unity than Mr HAUGHEY and in that respect he has chalked up several Brownie points.

★

What has he given? A clear-cut assertion (now to be embodied in a treaty deposited at the United Nations) that Northern Ireland must remain part of the United Kingdom so long as she wants to, and an admission that she at present does want to. This, it is true, is balanced by an undertaking that if a majority in Ulster should ever clearly express a wish for Irish unity, both Governments will take immediate steps to gratify that wish—a promise which, in the future, could be productive of as much confusion and misery as the Balfour Declaration on a "National Home for the Jews". It must be added, however, that Dr FITZGERALD has also declared his intention to accede to the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. In relation to extradition, that is a welcome commitment of immense importance.

The Northern Unionists will see this Agreement as giving the Republic an effective, though not a theoretical veto on British policy towards Ulster—and who can blame them? If, however, Dr FITZGERALD had the imagination to follow it up by some dramatic action—an agreement with Britain, for instance, to do something effective to suppress Sinn Fein—the exercise might not end in disaster. Let us remember one of the chief aims: it is to convince the world (particularly the United States and our European allies) that London and Dublin are equally opposed to the IRA and that what is going on in Ulster is not just the death agony of British imperialism. To plant that conviction is a worthy object, for which some risks are justified. Whether it is to be triumph or disaster, or just another failed initiative, now depends chiefly on the courage and imagination of Dr FITZGERALD.



## SHIP OF HOPE

On board are the British government, the Irish government, the SDLP representing non-violent Irish nationalism in Ulster, and the opposition parties at Westminster. Waving dollar bills from the quay are the occupants of the White House, and members of the US Congress. Half overboard is Mr Haughey, who is more than likely to be prime minister of Ireland in two years' time. Not on board are Provisional IRA/Sinn Fein, today's vehicle for the tradition of Irish insurrectionary violence, and the Ulster unionist parties, which have over half of the active voters in the province - two groups that between them do most to make the political condition of Ulster what it is. Will she sail or sink?

The accord signed yesterday has been made possible because the FitzGerald Irish know that unification of Ireland is not on unless Ulster Protestants become reconciled to the thing, and that the only (far distant or illusory) hope of that is via reconciliation between unionist and nationalist within Northern Ireland. Meanwhile they want to improve the position of the Catholic community in the North, not least in order to save non-violent nationalism from being eaten away by Sinn Fein; and they are alarmed at what North-generated violence is doing to society south of the border.

And the accord has been made possible because the British believe that the Provisional movement subsists in the disaffection of a significant part of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland. It is argued that it cannot be seen off, under constraints imposed by liberal democracy, without redressing the civil balance in favour of the Catholic minority, and without proper backing from that community for the agencies of law enforcement, which it is hoped these arrangements will help to secure.

The novel element in the agreement is the recruitment, or admission, of Dublin as a second guarantor, and the formal endorsement by both governments of the validity and right to recognition of the two competing traditions in Ulster, unionist and nationalist. Never since partition in 1922 has Dublin's interest in the condition of Northern Ireland been so explicitly provided for; and never since that time has an Irish government placed, by such close implication, its seal of authenticity on the province of Northern Ireland as now constituted.

Risks abound. On Dr FitzGerald's side is his exposure to Mr Haughey's taunts that he is betraying the "national aspiration" by underwriting partition; and the longer-term risk that the Irish government will be found to have put itself in a position of responsibility without power vis-à-vis the minority in the North, with disenchantment all round.

The risk Mrs Thatcher is taking is of Ulster Protestants being stirred to one of their grand refusals, as in 1913 with the Ulster Volunteers and in 1974 with the strike against the Sunningdale agreement. That would bring in a longish period of political turbulence in the province, intensified paramilitary activity, and likely recrimination between London and

Dublin. These are politicians' risks. At higher hazard are the lives and fortunes of the Ulster people.

The two prime ministers addressed their audiences, which need different kinds of reassurance, through a joint press conference yesterday. They held together well - better than last year when they performed separately. But will it last when the pressures mount and the other's eye is not upon them? What will become of the "determined efforts to resolve differences" clause, which governs proceedings of the joint ministerial meetings? It suits the Irish maximalist position, but modifies - in a way to make a unionist jump - the line hitherto taken in Whitehall that the thing is merely consultative? And have we reached a new position, or are we beginning a process, as Mr John Hume will insist? The agreement engenders contrary fears and hopes, a cause of fragility.

Why court these risks? Ulster jogs along, just, under a dispensation that suits most parties second best. Political crime is held down to an almost tolerable level. The economy is stirring. Social life is nearer to normal now especially where, as in central Belfast, it was farthest from it. Time may achieve an equilibrium. Why turn up the temperature?

Neither government sees a policy of leave-well-alone as serving for long. The new framework has been designed to cope with a society divided 60:40 at the deepest of all political levels, at the roots of loyalty and allegiance. Left to their own devices societies in that predicament resort to the arbitrament of civil war followed sometimes by secession. Ulster is restrained from that by superior British force and British statecraft, fully justified in respect of casualties, expense and weariness by the horrors of the alternative.

The exercise of that responsibility calls for policies to contain and exhaust hostility generated by contradictory loyalties. That is what this agreement seeks to do. It deserves to be supported, even though its benefits will be slow to appear, and even though it carries no guarantee of success.

One defect of the agreement is the secrecy with which it has been negotiated, necessary to its conclusion no doubt but ruinous of unionist confidence.

Another defect is that articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution remain in place. They lay juridical claim to the territory of Northern Ireland, which the Provos cite in justification of their atrocities and which colour with suspicion the unionist view of all the Republic's acts of state. It has to be accepted that Dr FitzGerald cannot be reasonably sure of carrying the appropriate constitutional amendment by referendum, not with Fianna Fail 19 per cent ahead of his coalition in the opinion polls. That is a flaw in the Republic's sense of political reality which has communicated itself to this agreement.

The most serious defect is the absence of reference to provincial self-government. Not only would that give Ulster politicians something constructive to do, now lacking. It would

compensate unionists a bit, the evident losers in status from the new arrangements. Mrs Thatcher placed emphasis yesterday on the provision that as and when responsibilities are devolved on a provincial administration they will be withdrawn from the purview of the joint ministerial conference.

She held that out as an incentive to unionists to agree a scheme of devolved government. By the same token it looks like a disincentive to the nationalists, who may not want to see the scope of the conference reduced. In exchange for the visible Dublin role that the SDLP was looking for and is given, the price should have been exacted from them of participation in provincial government on terms short of executive power sharing which is quite unrealistic. The agreement is unbalanced to the disfavour of unionists.

It was evidently difficult to shape the details of the agreement. It will be even more difficult to make it stick. Firmness and patience will be required of both governments, also tact - a quality not conspicuous in the choice of Hillsborough, seat of the governors of Northern Ireland before the office was abolished to the dismay of unionists, now made the place for signature of the instrument of creeping betrayal, as Mr Paisley would put it.

Creeping betrayal it is not. If clarity of political vision were higher among the many public virtues of Ulstermen, unionists would see that whereas their former paramountcy is not to be available again, their liberties, the practice of their religion, their culture and their place as full citizens of the United Kingdom are made secure on the terms of self-determination. They would notice that security is first business for the new machinery and that yesterday the Irish government announced its intention to ratify the European Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, which blocks the "political" bolt-hole in extradition proceedings. That is an earnest of the benefits in security to be had from a more co-operative attitude on the part of Dublin, and - a condition essential to the survival of the agreement - on the part of Northern nationalists too. Unionists would also be aware of the unwisdom of their setting out, as a small, loyal part of the body politic of the kingdom, to wreck an agreement that will be endorsed by the parliament at Westminster.

A matching clarity of political vision on the part of nationalists would bring the SDLP to the view that their interest lies in working to the agreement in a spirit of co-operation and compromise, not in using it as a ratchet to win one concession after another. It would also cause republicans to see, some even in the Ballymurphy and Creggan estates, that a British province, concerning the affairs of which Irish ministers are afforded a regular opportunity to put forward their views and warn, is a better place to belong to, and take some responsibility for, than a battlefield dedicated to the impossibility of beating Protestant Ulster into submission by the bullet and the bomb.

## A unique way to find some wider reality

Henceforward Britain will take the Irish Republic fully into its confidence in the government of Northern Ireland. That is the effect of the accord signed yesterday after more than a year of preparation. The risks accepted by both parties are obvious and serious: on the British side that Unionists will try to rubbish the accord in the courts, the councils, and the streets; on the Republic's side that it will both be accused of accepting partition and held responsible for future events in the North which are outside its control.

The accord is a wholly novel departure in the relations between states. There is no reciprocity in it, as there is when allies sign treaties or was when the Benelux or Scandinavian countries formed associations between them. Certainly the final executive power remains with the UK if agreement cannot be reached in the Inter-Governmental Conference now to be created, but the influence which the Republic acquires in that conference is real, wide-ranging, and institutionalised. It allows the Irish Government to propose measures affecting the politics, economy, and security policy of the North and to review jointly with the British such sensitive matters as the administration of justice. These changes are not superficial or cosmetic. They are potentially full of substance. The aim may now, indeed, be achieved of giving to Nationalists without taking away from Unionists. If so the Anglo-Irish agreement will be something of a constitutional landmark.

In effect the governments have agreed on a power-sharing system for Northern Ireland in which they, rather than the local parties, share the power, though with Britain remaining the final arbiter. The system falls short of the joint authority which was proposed by the New Ireland Forum report in Dublin but it goes further towards granting Ireland's legitimate interest in the North than any government has been inclined to go hitherto. The aim of both governments, as stated in yesterday's communique, is to reintroduce devolved government on terms acceptable to both Nationalists and Unionists. When that happens a new Stormont will take over functions from the Inter-Governmental Conference. A strong inducement is therefore offered to Unionists to work out a devolution settlement which the minority finds attractive enough to join: i.e., one with an element of power-sharing. But it seems likely that whatever functions the devolved government takes over, some will remain. They will include security and the courts. The Irish Government therefore has a permanent interest in those aspects of public policy, North of the Border.

For its part the Irish Government makes two important moves. It acknowledges that the consent of the majority is needed for Irish unity to come about and that the consent is missing. Unity remains an aspiration but it is not on the foreseeable agenda. That, of course, is not enough for Republicans. The majority in the North is, in the Republican view, a contrived majority and its wishes cannot override the rest of the country's. Dr FitzGerald, not for the first time, has rejected that extreme proposition and thus put himself at the mercy of Fianna Fail in the Dail. By Mr Charles Haughey's definition, the North is a "failed political entity," and to shore up such a ruin will be seen by him as what Mr Powell might call an act of treachery. Nevertheless there are those in Ireland who see that piecemeal improvement is better than none and it is to such people that yesterday's communique ought to be dedicated. It is a monument to Irish realism rather than to the Irish mythology in which some of the island's political leaders, North and South, have their being.

The second Irish concession is to agree to sign the European Convention Against Terrorism. Mr Prior, during his term, used to appeal to Dublin to do this, as it ostentatiously failed to do in 1976. But this promise also will be open to challenge. Dr FitzGerald maintains that the courts have removed the constitutional bar on extradition (which the convention makes obligatory) in cases where the alleged crime is political. That is unlikely, however, to prevent a constitutional test case by the Opposition.

Legally and constitutionally the Unionists are on weak ground in opposing the agreement. Only one authority in the state can make agreements with another state and that power rests at Westminster. Both the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach made clear at their press conference that the North's status within the UK remains unquestioned. It is wholly within the power of Parliament to decide what administrative methods are appropriate to any part of the country. The context must be set, for any part of the United Kingdom, at Westminster, the elected heart of that Kingdom. But it cannot be denied that the agreement is a body blow, not to anything Unionists legitimately hold dear but to a series of assumptions they have made about the seclusion of their Province from the realities of Irish nationalism, assumptions which cannot be sustained.

POLITICS TODAY: THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

## Hands across the Irish Sea

By Malcolm Rutherford

**T**HE agreement reached between Mrs Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, and Dr Garret FitzGerald, her Irish counterpart, yesterday is an opportunity to end the violence and disputes that have intermittently divided the British and Irish peoples for decades and, if one takes the historical view, for centuries.

It is no more than that: an opportunity. It is also no less. The agreement leaves a great deal open. All sorts of matters have still to be settled. And it is not quite the agreement that had been widely leaked in advance in both the British and the Irish press.

The two countries have not yet remotely agreed on the establishment of mixed courts in Ulster, whereby judges from the Republic would be able to have a say in the justice administered in the north.

It is by no means certain that the political parties in Northern Ireland will agree to work together in an Assembly that respects the rights of the Catholic or nationalist minority: which ever word you choose to describe the 40 per cent or so of Northern Irish who, in varying degrees, have no love for the present Ulster set-up.

The full reactions from some of the main parties affected by the agreement have still to come: from the Official and Democratic Unionists in the north, from the mainly Catholic Social and Democratic Labour Party led by Mr John Hume which had so far declined to participate in the workings of the Northern Ireland Assembly, from the Provisional IRA and its offshoots, from some British politicians, and not least from Mr Charles Haughey, the leader of the opposition in the Irish Parliament.

What matters, however, is that the principals have acted. They are Dr FitzGerald and Mrs Thatcher. It is tempting to give special praise to Dr FitzGerald, but Mrs Thatcher must come first.

Without a British Prime Minister putting the Irish question at the top of the political agenda, there was never the slightest chance of a settlement. Mrs Thatcher has done it. Others have tried before her: Mr Edward Heath with the attempted Sunningdale deal in 1973, or you can go back to Gladstone and Asquith. But always something else got in the way, whether it was the outbreak of the First World War or the miners' strike and Mr Heath's premature general election in 1974.

Mrs Thatcher had no obvious incentives to try anything very much. As a politician she does not believe in miracles and tends to steer clear of high-risk areas which might be regarded as peripheral. She burnt her fingers with Mr Haughey when he was Irish Prime Minister during her first administration. She might very well have stayed out of it as one Northern Ireland Secretary succeeded another: Mr James Prior, Mr Douglas Hurd, and now Mr Tom King. Who even remembers Sir



Dr Garret FitzGerald and Mrs Margaret Thatcher exchange documents after signing the Anglo-Irish agreement at Hillsborough House, Northern Ireland, yesterday. Behind them are Mr Tom King (centre) and Sir Geoffrey Howe

Humphrey Atkins, her first appointment, who came away from the province saying that nothing could be done for a generation? Other Conservatives, like the late Reginald Maudling, had reached similar conclusions along the lines that the situation was insoluble.

Yet Mrs Thatcher did have some personal motivations. Ireland very nearly killed her. Mr Airey Neave, one of her closest advisers and the man who had most to do with her campaign for the Tory Party leadership in 1975, was assassinated by an Irish bomb in the precincts of Westminster just before the 1979 general election. She herself was very nearly destroyed by the explosion at the Conservative Party Conference in Brighton last year.

It was the persistence of Irish terrorism that helped to persuade her that something might and could be done. It was also the relentlessly uncompromising attitude of some of the Ulster Unionists, some of whom would have no truck with the Irish Republic and proclaimed themselves more British than the British, though not in a very British way. Perhaps above all, there was her growing trust in Dr FitzGerald and his readiness to reach an accommodation that falls far short of Irish unity, at least for the foreseeable future, probably until the next century.

"Dr FitzGerald and I" became one of her stock phrases, to be used in the United States as well as Britain, and was repeated again in their joint Press conference in Northern Ireland yesterday.

The moment when one became absolutely convinced of

Mrs Thatcher's seriousness and determination came in the House of Commons on Thursday afternoon.

There had already been some Tory and Ulster Unionist sniping about the idea of an Irish settlement or "sell-out." The protesters were firmly put down by Mr King. Then, during questions to the Prime Minister, Mr Enoch Powell intervened: "Does the Right Hon Lady understand—if she does not yet understand she soon will—that the penalty for treachery is to fall into public contempt?"

It was reminiscent of a previous intervention by Mr Powell when Britain was going to war to recover the Falklands. He had said then the metal of the "Iron Lady" was being tested, and congratulated her afterwards for having come through.

In 1981 Mrs Thatcher listened to him with the greatest respect and admiration. On Thursday she was crushing: "I think that the Right Hon Gentleman will understand that I find his remarks deeply offensive."

One of the side effects of the Irish agreement may be that Mr Powell has ceased to be a serious parliamentary figure. He is expected to make a devastating speech when the agreement is debated in about two weeks' time, but that, says a senior Cabinet Minister, should be his last great swan song. It will be the end of a House of Commons epoch and of the curious influence which Mr Powell has exerted over the Tory Party.

At the same time, Mr Neil Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party, gave the Prime Minister his basic support. "Twice in the last 20 minutes,"

he said, "we have heard talk of treachery. Will the Right Hon Lady accept from me and the Labour Benches that such talk is inflammatory, irresponsible and should have no place in this democratic Assembly."

A minister in the Northern Ireland Office said yesterday that the number of Tories voting against the agreement would be no more than 20. It could be less, for what has happened is that there is a widespread feeling — extending across political parties and across the Irish Sea — that the situation in Ulster cannot be allowed to go on as it has. Enough is enough. There is no point in the endless violence. Nobody wins.

One wonders, however, if events would have moved as quickly had the Irish politicians not come together to produce the report of the New Ireland Forum in May last year. That was the fundamental turning point. It should be remembered that it was signed not only by Dr FitzGerald, but also by Mr Haughey for the Irish opposition and by Mr Hume and some of his less moderate supporters for the SDLP in the north.

It was that document which laid down that Irish unity was more of a distant aspiration than an immediate objective. It also acknowledged that there would have to be some reconciliation between the communities in the north before there could be full reconciliation between the two parts of Ireland.

It went out of its way to accept the obstacles in the way of unification. A key paragraph went as follows: "The unionist identity and ethos comprise a

sense of Britishness, allied to their particular sense of Irishness and a set of values comprising a Protestant ethos which they believe to be under threat from a Catholic ethos, perceived as reflecting different and often opposing values."

The report went on to say: "Agreement means that the political arrangements for a new and sovereign Ireland would have to be freely negotiated to and agreed to by the people of the North and by the people of the South." That describes almost exactly the British position and certainly the one that has been held by Mrs Thatcher throughout.

What the participants in the Forum wanted was a new momentum. "Britain has a duty to respond *now*," they wrote, "in order to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland are not condemned to yet another generation of violence and sterility."

"The parties in the Forum by their participation in its work have already committed themselves to join in a process directed towards that end."

That last sentence will be in many people's minds as the full reaction of Mr Haughey to the agreement is awaited.

The first real evidence that something was up at the British end came in the House of Commons debate on the Forum report on July 2 1984. Mr Prior was making almost his last appearance as Secretary of State. The Prime Minister sat by his side and everyone knew that there had not been a happy relationship between them.

Yet, particularly in retrospect, he made a dominant contribution. "I have to tell the House," he said in the debate,

"that I have changed my view over the years. At one time, I felt that a major, strong and effective political response would in itself prevent terror. Now I am of the belief that in the short run political progress may increase terrorism, for a short time before things improve."

That fear of an increase in violence is ever-present in Northern Ireland Secretaries of State. Mr Hurd said when he took over from Mr Prior that he could hardly bring himself to believe that the IRA had become so sophisticated in its methods, and the warning about an upsurge in terrorism is probably prescient now that a settlement has been reached.

The essence of Mr Prior's statement, however, was still to come. "The dangers for the people of Northern Ireland of sitting back and doing nothing are greater than the obvious risks of seeking to make some political advance." Mrs Thatcher firmly nodded her assent in a gesture that revealed her own change of attitude.

Some of the other speeches in that debate are worth recalling, too. For instance, Mr Ian Paisley said: "There is a real desire for peace . . . Ulster is saying to the South: 'Please let us alone and let us remain within the United Kingdom. Let us develop in the way that we wish and you can develop in the way that you wish.'"

"I believe that if both parts of Ireland took that road the time would come again when Government Departments in both North and South could get together as they did in the old Stormont days on matters from which both could benefit."

Mr Paisley's tone was distinctly conciliatory, as was that of Mr James Molyneux, the leader of the Official Unionists, who said that the people of Northern Ireland were in the mood to begin the work of repair.

Those words should not be forgotten in the heat of the moment now that an agreement has been reached.

Dublin has been frequently disappointed by the way British interest in the Irish question has gone up and down. It was especially upset—at least briefly—by the way Mr Hurd was succeeded as Secretary of State by Mr King after having held the office for barely a year.

Yet there is perhaps something new in British politics. There is a group of senior ministers from Mrs Thatcher downwards who know and care about the subject and who are determined to deal with it. They include Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Foreign Secretary, as well as those who serve or have served in Ulster.

The agreement signed yesterday is only a framework, but it has come at the right time. If the British Government keeps Ireland high on the agenda, it should be able to show that, along with the government in Dublin, it is more powerful than the IRA and any Unionist extremists who want to take to the streets or worse. It is a matter, as the joint communiqué says, of determination and imagination.