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**TROUBLEMAKER OR PEACEMAKER? MARGARET
THATCHER AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF
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Abstract

The aim of my thesis is to highlight the events in Northern Ireland before; during and after Margaret Thatcher's Premiership and answer the question was Margaret Thatcher a peacemaker or a troublemaker in terms of Northern Ireland? Did she speed up or slow down the Peace Process in Northern Ireland. There will be an introduction to Thatcher before going into the first chapter. The first chapter will focus on Anglo – Irish relations before Thatcher's premiership focusing on how the troubles came about leading right up to Thatcher's election in 1979. The second chapter will look at some events in northern Ireland during her first term in office focusing on for example, the Hunger Strikes of 1980 and 1981, Bobby Sand's death and what followed in terms of support for Sinn Féin, Ireland's stance on the Falklands war and how Thatcher reacted to that, The third chapter will focus on the Brighton Bombing, the Anglo- Irish Summit and the Anglo – Irish Agreement. The final chapter will focus on The Unionist reaction to the Anglo – Irish Agreement and the situation in Northern Ireland towards the end of Thatcher's premiership and mentioning the Peace Agreements in the 1990's under John Major (Thatcher's successor) and Tony Blair's Labour government and did she influence these peace agreements? The conclusion will just be a summary of what was said in each chapter and talk about the Iron Lady's overall legacy in Northern Ireland.

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Introduction to Margaret Thatcher

She was loved and loathed in equal measure but never ignored. For a generation Margaret Thatcher defined a certain kind of leadership. Abroad she represented Britain but at home she divided the nation. In British history Margaret Thatcher will always be remembered as the first and so far only female Prime Minister, her victory in the Falklands/Malvinas war, the Miner Strikes and the Poll Tax. In Irish history she will always be remembered for her stance on the Hunger Strikes in 1981 and the Anglo – Irish Agreement in 1985. The Irish opinion on Margaret Thatcher is as divisive as the British view and it is extremely unlikely that this will ever change.

On the 8th April 2013, one of the most significant, polarising and iconic leaders of the twentieth century passed away from a stroke. Margaret Thatcher was ill for some time with multiple strokes and suffered from dementia. When the news spread of her death, the reaction was mixed in both Britain and Ireland. British Prime Minister David Cameron said, “We’ve lost a great Prime Minister, a great leader and a great Briton”. Gerry Adams said that “Margaret Thatcher did great hurt to the British people”, while former British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that she was “a great accomplishment”. In cities like London and Glasgow there were celebrations. In parts of Northern Ireland there were comments like “Rust in Peace” and “Ding Dong the Witch is Dead”. There are still a lot of people in Northern Ireland from both Unionist and Nationalist backgrounds that still have not forgiven her for her stance on the Hunger Strikes if they were Nationalist and the Anglo – Irish Agreement if they were a Unionist. To understand where this hatred came from; we have to go back to 1921, four years before Margaret Thatcher was even born when Ireland was partitioned after the signing of the

Anglo – Irish Treaty. Six counties in the North of Ireland would be kept under British rule while the rest of the country had limited independence.

Northern Ireland before Margaret Thatcher came to Power 1921 -1979

The following chapter will discuss how the troubles came about before Margaret Thatcher came to office in 1979. The time scale will be from 1921 -1979 with the main focus in the 1960's when the troubles in Northern Ireland started. On the 6 December 1921, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed by the British delegation and the Irish delegation. One of the agreements in the Anglo-Irish Treaty was that six counties in the North of Ireland would remain under British territory. Some of the six counties included, Derry, Belfast and Down. The South was established as the Irish Free State which had dominion status within the British Commonwealth. Full independence did not come about until 1937 when Bunreacht na hÉireann which was the Irish constitution was set up by the Irish Taoiseach/Prime Minister of the day Éamon De Valera. It abolished the Irish Free State and proclaimed Éire which is Irish for Ireland. However the six counties in the north still remained under British jurisdiction. There were no riots or protests in Northern Ireland; instead there was a sense of calmness for several decades due largely to the Prime Minister in Northern Ireland at the time Basil Brookeborough. Brookeborough was a staunch Unionist and his political alliance to the Ulster Unionists marginalised the Nationalist minority both socially and politically. He eventually was defeated in the 1963 General Election and was succeeded by a man named Terence O' Neill, while in London around this time Margaret Thatcher was in her fourth year as an MP for the Conservative Party having been first elected in 1959 and was slowly rising up the ranks. Terence O' Neill was a Unionist himself but he wanted to end Sectarianism which had been around for so long and wanted to bring Catholics and Protestants together for the first time. He became the first Prime Minister in Northern Ireland to visit the Republic of Ireland in 1965 and negotiate with the Irish Taoiseach/Prime Minister. This move angered the Unionists who strongly opposed the visit including Ian Paisley who rejected any dealings with the Republic in any way shape or form. Even though O' Neill tried to give Catholics as

much equality as possible, it simply was not enough. Catholics in Northern Ireland wanted “One Man, One Vote”. So in 1968 the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) began protesting on the streets over the lack of inequality between Nationalists (minority) and the Unionists (majority). The most famous march took place on 5 October 1968 when the march was met with violence from the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) who baton charged the protestors. The police violence was recorded by RTÉ and was broadcasted around the world. O’Neill and his government could not control the disturbances. British Prime Minister at the time Harold Wilson told O’Neill that he would take over if O’Neill did not sort out this problem. Wilson also told him that if he couldn’t manage it politically then they would be forced into governance by police power alone. In fact James Callaghan who was the British Home Secretary at the time and would later become British Prime Minister in 1976 pushed through a series of reforms which included the disbandment of the ‘B Specials’. O’Neill resigned as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland in 1969 due to the pressure from both Unionist and Nationalist sides.

The reason why the troubles began was because of inequality in the north between the Catholics and Protestants. Catholics were the minority and were not treated the same way as the Protestants who were the majority. For example Catholic people could not vote or get a good well paid job compared to the Unionists who could vote and get a decent job. In the 1960’s O’Neill brought about change and wanted to include Catholics into society and not exclude them like his predecessors. However this move ultimately backfired on him when the Unionists became angry over his sympathy to the Nationalists. As mentioned earlier, the march that took place in October 1968 when the RUC attacked the civilians taking part was the seen by many as the beginning of the troubles. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) formed the following year in 1969 as a result and as each year went passed support for the IRA grew

and grew, particularly when Internment without Trial was introduced in August of 1971 by Brian Faulkner. Catholics were lifted in pre drawn raids and imprisoned without a fair trial. The fact that this operation was only aimed at Catholics made the situation in the North a lot worse. Then came Bloody Sunday in 1972 when British Paratroopers shot dead 14 innocent civilians in the Bogside in Derry. This event increased more support for the Republican movement than any other event in history. The following years the IRA carried out bombing campaigns all over the UK. The most famous examples would be the 1974 Guildford and Birmingham Pub bombings in which many innocent people lost their lives. The British Prime Minister in the early 1970's Ted Heath was considered weak in his approach to the troubles in Northern Ireland. However Heath and the Irish Taoiseach/Prime Minister Liam Cosgrave did agree to sign the Sunningdale Agreement in 1973. This was an attempt to establish a power sharing Northern Ireland Executive and a cross-border Council of Ireland. Unfortunately this agreement did not last very long due to the Unionist opposition, the increased violence and a Loyalist general strike in May 1974. It seemed that there was no solution to growing problem in Northern Ireland. Riots and marches continued throughout 1974 into 1975. Around this time Margaret Thatcher went from being the Secretary of State for Education to being the leader of the Conservative Party. Airey Neave who was one of Margaret Thatcher's close friends was appointed Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Neave had the view that the only solution to the situation in Northern Ireland was a military solution. Fellow Tory MP Norman Tebbit said himself that Airey told him that "An army that's winning needs no recruiting".¹ This was not the attitude that anyone should have had in solving a situation in Northern Ireland. A political solution would have been much better than a military solution. As a result of this view, Airey Neave became target number one for both the IRA and the INLA. The Prime Minister of Britain during Thatcher's time in

¹ Margaret Thatcher: Ireland and the Iron Lady RTE Documentary, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foD8GMhRwFw>) 16/05/2016

opposition James Callaghan was seen by many as a weak Prime Minister not only on his stance on Northern Ireland but his handling of the economy. The Winter of Discontent caused strike after strike in Britain and as a result Northern Ireland was neglected for the moment. This was the perfect moment for Margaret Thatcher to capitalise on Callaghan's unpopularity and show that she was the right person to lead the country. In May of 1979 Margaret Thatcher's dream became a reality.

“Were there is discord, may we bring harmony”

The following chapter will focus on Margaret Thatcher’s first term in office in dealing with the situation in Northern Ireland. The two topics that will be mainly focused on will be the hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981 and also the Irish stance on the Falkland’s/Malvinas war in 1982. Margaret Thatcher came to power on the 4 May 1979. She became the first woman Prime Minister of the western world. On the day of her arrival to Number 10 Downing Street, she gave one of the most famous speeches of the 20th Century. It was a prayer from St. Francis of Assisi which said “We’re there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith and where there is despair, may we bring hope”. Looking back on it now, it is almost ironic that she would quote something like this on her arrival to Downing Street. She even admitted herself that she needed something to say and one of her advisors told her the night before her victory that she should quote Francis of Assisi’s prayer “*Make me an Instrument of your Peace*”. Margaret Thatcher knew that she had a lot of challenges ahead of her first term in office. One of those challenges was Northern Ireland. She had obviously known about the troubles going on but did not pay much attention to it because she did not believe that she would become Prime Minister and have to deal with that problem. By the time she became British Prime Minister, there was the view that she had absolutely no interest in Northern Ireland. Her first encounter with the problems in Northern Ireland came about when Airey Neave, who was shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, was assassinated by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) in the House of Commons car park on 30 March 1979. The apparent reason for his assassination was because of his military solution to Northern Ireland which angered many people in the Republican movement. Thatcher could not believe that somebody would kill one of her close confidants. So before she even started she lost her right hand man to terrorism. This tragedy made her sit up and take note of the Irish problem in Northern Ireland.

However it also gave her an antipathy towards the Irish people and the Irish government. This event strengthened her Unionist stance and her hatred towards Nationalists. She later recalled Neave's death as a "Terrible blow, because I'd never thought of anyone else for Northern Ireland..... He understood the "Irish factor", he studied it".² This was an ironic statement made by Thatcher. Airey Neave did not understand the so called "Irish factor". As mentioned in chapter one, Neave believed in a military solution to Northern Ireland. He also believed in abandoning devolution in Northern Ireland if there was no progress and concentrated on local government reform instead.

The situation in Northern Ireland at this time was that "The Troubles" were at its peak. Not only did Airey Neave get assassinated by a terrorist group but a few months later Lord Louis Mountbatten was also assassinated this time by the Irish Republican Army (IRA). He was on holiday in Co. Sligo with his family and decided to take a boat trip not knowing there was a bomb planted on the boat the night before. Mountbatten's boat went up in flames and everyone on board was killed instantly. The same day at Warrenpoint in Co. Down, two roadside bombs exploded and killed eighteen British soldiers. The IRA also claimed responsibility for this atrocity. These killings were not a good start to Margaret Thatcher's run as British Prime Minister. She now had to prove herself, more than any of her predecessors when it came to handling situations like this and dealing with terrorist. Thatcher wanted Humphrey Atkins who was the Secretary of State to take over From Airey Neave's position but he did not want the job. Just like Thatcher he knew very little to nothing about the subject on Northern Ireland. In the end though Atkins did become secretary of state of Northern Ireland (1979-181) and Mrs Thatcher would be the one to give a lead on Northern Ireland.

² Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume One*, Chapter 21 P. 587, London, 2013

People have to remember that everyone in the British government whether it was a Conservative government or a Labour government, dreaded the position of being appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It was the poisoned chalice that no one wanted. It carried so much baggage because you had to please both the Nationalists and the Unionists and put up with civil unrest every year. Even though Thatcher knew very little about the problem in Northern Ireland and had some apathy towards the situation, she did not go as far as her husband Denis Thatcher who had absolutely no time for the Irish or Northern Ireland in general. He was quoted saying that “If the Irish want to kill each other that does seem to me to be their business”.³ This kind of attitude that Denis Thatcher possessed was not going to solve the problem in Northern Ireland. Some British people and politicians had a similar view to Denis Thatcher. As long as the troubles stayed in Northern Ireland and did not get brought over to England then it was ok. The thing is that the troubles were harming England. IRA bombs were going off all over England and the IRA was seen as the representatives of Nationalists in Northern Ireland. This was the only way that Nationalists could get their message across to the British government.

Margaret Thatcher found the Irish on both sides of the border extremely irritating. She could not understand their preference for cultural politics over the more clear-cut economic debates at Westminster. “You don’t expect anything decent to come from an Irishmen”,⁴ she said in a private conversation. In another private conversation when she retired, she said that Nationalists in the North were traitors because of their wish for British withdrawal and a United Ireland. The whole point of Nationalism was for the six counties to be returned to the Republic while the Unionists wanted to remain in the United Kingdom so what did she

³ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, Chapter 21 P.587, London, 2013

⁴ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, Chapter 21 P.589, London, 2013

expect the Nationalists to support. They were hardly going to accept being controlled by a foreign power because to them their government was in the Republic. Thatcher expected the Nationalist to just deal with the fact they were British because they were apart of British jurisdiction. The atrocities of Lord Mountbatten's murder and the assassination of Airey Neave really did not help to heal her hatred for the Irish and the Nationalists in particular. Mrs Thatcher believed in her conviction of the need for stronger security measures and force greater pressure on the Irish government in the Republic to prevent terrorism. In her view the Republic was "harbouring known murderers".⁵ This might have been seen as an exaggeration by some, but there was a sense of truth to what she said. The Irish government under Jack Lynch at the time were allowing these attacks take place and not enforcing stricter security measures to prevent them. The closest the Republic got to implementing tighter security measures was back in 1976 under Liam Cosgrave's Fine Gael government after the assassination of the British Ambassador to Ireland Christopher Ewart – Biggs. Following his assassination, the government of the day introduced the Emergency Powers Bill and was supposed to be signed into law by the president of Ireland at the time Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh but he referred it to the Supreme Court instead. Mrs Thatcher felt that she had to take measures into her own hands. She would go as far as "administrative action against Irish Immigrants".⁶ This was not the way forward and Thatcher had to have known that. Ordinary Irish citizens who wanted to go to the UK for employment ended up being rejected simply because they were Irish. Some employers would stick up signs saying "no Irish apply" and it was simply degrading for any decent Irish person to make it in the UK without being ridiculed because of the IRA.

⁵ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, London, 2013

⁶ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, London, 2013

The Irish Prime Minister or Taoiseach at the time Jack Lynch agreed to a meeting with Mrs. Thatcher when he visited London for Lord Mountbatten's funeral. At this meeting, Thatcher was constantly pressing the issue of security in Northern Ireland. Lynch explained that it was very difficult and that a political solution was better. Mrs Thatcher told Lynch and his Deputies that "It would be help enormously if people would stop talking about the total unity of Ireland".⁷ She did not see a unified Ireland in the future and more importantly she didn't want it. To her Northern Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom and it would remain so. She did not care less what the Nationalists had to say on the issue. She believed that their opinion was invalid. Lynch was obviously coming into that meeting as a staunch Nationalist and was speaking on behalf of all the Nationalists in Northern Ireland while Thatcher was speaking on behalf of the Unionists. Throughout the day, conversations between Lynch and Thatcher became very heated. According to Dermot Nally, who was the then Deputy Secretary of the Department of Taoiseach said that, "One of the Minister's made a remark that you (Thatcher) may not like the idea but some people have a quantity of sympathy with the men of violence".⁸ That comment made Mrs Thatcher furious. She thumped the table, jumped up from her chair and shouted "Are you condoning murder?" while somebody held her back because she was ready to leap over the table and probably strangle the person who said the remark. Understandably she was angry because of this comment about supporting the terrorists. However the minister who said these remarks was speaking the truth. There were many Irish people both north and south of the border that supported the IRA. The meeting between Jack Lynch and Margaret Thatcher was seen as a massive failure. Both sides should have gone into that meeting and be willing to open any sort of negotiation for the sake of the people in the Northern Ireland of Unionist and Nationalist origin. Thatcher's personal

⁷ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, London ,2013

⁸ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, London ,2013

secretary Bernard Ingham said that Jack Lynch was in a word “useless” when it came to negotiating with Mrs Thatcher. There are some who would say Mrs Thatcher was useless should not have raised her voice and try to intimidate the opposition because that was not going to get anywhere either. In October of the same year Humphrey Atkins proposed an initiative which involved talks with all the parties in Northern Ireland about possible ways of bringing devolution about. The Official Unionists who were the more moderate Unionists which included Reverend Ian Paisley declined to take part in it. To them this was simply a sell out and they did not want any part in it. There was no way in hell that they were going to sell out to the Republic of Ireland.

When Jack Lynch resigned as Taoiseach on 7 December 1979 there were two people who were in the running to take over from him and they were Charles J Haughey and George Colley. In the end Haughey won and one of his first orders of business was to organise a meeting with Margaret Thatcher in Dublin for a change. She resisted requests from Haughey and Lord Carrington to discuss Northern Ireland matters at the European Council in Brussels. However, she later succumbed to Haughey and agreed to meet him for lunch at No.10 Downing Street. The meeting took place on 21 May 1980. Haughey thought he could work his Irish charm to soften her and to try and trick her into agreeing to something that she would later regret. She managed to resist most of his flattery except for one case when he gave her a teapot to which she was very grateful for. However that was still not going to soften her. During the meeting Haughey brought up the suggestion that “if Ireland were solved, the Republic of Ireland would really consider its stance on neutrality and be ready to join NATO”.⁹ The talks went well and there was a sense that Mrs Thatcher saw Haughey as a

⁹ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, London ,2013

man she could do business with just like with Mikhail Gorbachev later on. Margaret Thatcher visited Dublin for the second time in 1980. The first time being at a European Conference held in Dublin a year earlier. She had flown in for Anglo – Irish talks with Charles Haughey and others including Humphrey Atkins and Lord Carrington. By this time the first hunger strike took place. The IRA believed that if any of its men were convicted and imprisoned they should be treated like prisoners of war. For this very reason the British government had to resist the demands of these men. This was a major task for Mrs Thatcher, although not as big of a task as her later battles. Thatcher knew that she could not give into the demands. When somebody is the leader of a powerful country like Britain, they cannot whatsoever negotiate with troublemakers. None of this would have happened if the previous Labour government under Harold Wilson and James Callaghan took away “Special Category Status” from all new terrorist prisoners and putting them on par with the common of criminals of the day. So if anyone should get the blame for starting these hunger strikes it should be Wilson and Callaghan and not Thatcher. However she was Prime Minister at the moment so she got all the blame.

Before the hunger strike, there were other types of strikes carried out by the prisoners including the blanket protest in which prisoners only dressed in their bedclothes and completely refused to wear prison uniform. The second type of protest was the “dirty” protest in which the prisoners had smeared their cell walls with their own excrement which was seen as absolutely distasteful but they felt that it was the only way of getting their point across. On the 10 October 1980, the hunger strikes were announced to take place on the 27 October. Mrs Thatcher was warned that if the strikes went ahead, deaths would be expected by Christmas time. The pressure was immense on Mrs Thatcher to give in. Surprisingly she did give in

before the strikes even started which was a surprise given what was to come later on. According to Thatcher's official biographer Charles Moore, "Charlie Haughey warned her of serious repercussions for the security situation in Ireland".¹⁰ This was essential to Mrs Thatcher and she did not want to lose it. However another hunger strike was just around the corner and this time she had to toughen up and not give into terrorist's demands. During the first hunger strike, Thatcher was asked about giving into the prisoners demands but she insisted that she could not make any concessions. Pope John Paul II even got involved when he sent a private message to the Irish bishops urging them to persuade the hunger strikers to desist. The pope also met Mrs Thatcher on 24 November 1980 to inform her that there was a very good chance of the strike being called off. The meeting between Thatcher and Haughey in Dublin was in her view to try and defuse the situation up in the North and to show the Nationalists how well she was communicating with the south. The hunger strikers ended their strike on the 18 December 1980 after 53 days of hunger strike. There was a sense of relief from the Irish that it was over but unfortunately there was a more serious one just around the corner.

1981 was very turbulent year for Margaret Thatcher. Britain was hit a massive recession. High interest rates, soaring unemployment and manufacturing companies closing saw Thatcher become the most unpopular Prime Minister ever. Riots were breaking out on the streets of London and around the country, in particular Brixton which was a deprived area of England. Anglo – Irish relations were still going smoothly until the Irish Foreign Minister at the time Brian Lenihan said on BBC Radio Ulster that (2013, P.603) "As far as we are concerned, everything is on the table..... We regard them as new political ways of resolving

¹⁰ Charles Moore, Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One, London, 2013

the problem that exists between the North and South”.¹¹ When Thatcher found out about these comments she was extremely angry with Haughey. She told him that Lenihan’s remarks “might well have undone everything”¹². Haughey admitted himself that the whole thing was a mess. Dermot Nally was present again at that particular conversation and recalled Margaret Thatcher’s anger. She said “I said nothing about the constitution, nothing whatsoever was said”¹³. This really ruined her belief that she could trust Haughey and his government. Brian Lenihan Senior had absolutely no right in saying those remarks until Thatcher approved it. Mrs Thatcher was absolutely right to be annoyed but she should not have been too carried away by the whole thing. This was not looking good for any solution to the problem in Northern Ireland. At this point not only did Nationalist not like her but the Unionist also began to dislike her because they felt that she was giving into the Irish government and letting them have a say in Northern Ireland. One can understand their anger as well, if a Unionist heard that the leader of their country was letting a foreign power that they despised have a say in what goes in their jurisdiction then of course they would be angry. Margaret Thatcher had to keep that in mind as well as pleasing the Nationalists. However one event that took place the following year in 1981 would change the face of the troubles forever. This event was the Hunger Strikes of 1981.

In early 1981, Mrs Thatcher had been notified that the prisoners at the Maze Prison were organising another hunger strike. The IRA believed that because the first strike had failed miserably, a second hunger strike would definitely succeed. However they did not know what

¹¹ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, Chapter 21, P.603, London, 2013

¹² Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, Chapter 21, P.603, London, 2013

¹³ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, Chapter 21, P.603, London, 2013

they were dealing with this time. Margaret Thatcher had learned from her mistakes in the last hunger strike and vowed not to give in again. The hunger strike was led by a man called Bobby Sands. Sands was in prison for trying to blow up a furniture showroom. Not only that but he was a former recruiting officer for the IRA. On 1 March 1981 Bobby Sands began the strike himself. Sands along with nine other men who would later join him were looking for political status. In Margaret Thatcher's eye there was no way that she could give these men political status because she saw them as terrorists who were serving sentences for crimes against humanity. In one interview Mrs Thatcher said that "there is no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence".¹⁴ This comment angered a lot of Nationalists and rightly so because she was speaking so negatively of the people they believed were doing the right thing and were spokespeople for them. Not only did it anger Nationalists up the North but it also angered many Irish people in the Republic. As each day of the hunger strike passed, more and more support grew for the hunger strikers. Protests around the country took place in support of the hunger strikers and demanding Margaret Thatcher to give into their demands. One protest in particular held in Dublin was attended by 2,500 people marching from St Stephen's Green through Dublin City Centre to the Garden of Remembrance. The march was led by two men in blankets and anti H – Block demonstrators carrying placards in support of Bobby Sands and the hunger strikers. However the Iron Lady was still not giving in to the demands. "There can be no question of political status, crime is crime is crime, it is not political, it is crime"¹⁵. She would constantly dismiss the question on the hunger strikes in interviews or just give the same answer which was that the prisoners will not be getting any political status. When the Republican MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Frank Maguire died Bobby Sands became a candidate for his seat. Republicans believed that if Sands got

¹⁴ Charles Moore, Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One, Chapter 21, P.608

¹⁵ The Maze Prison Documentary- Northern Ireland, 2013, <https://youtu.be/jeixMFHtv18> , 10/05/16

elected as a member of parliament then Thatcher would have to agree to give him political status. This was a very brave my Bobby Sands but he should have known by that point that there was no way she was going to give in even if he did get elected. Also the fact that the Republicans put sands forward to replace Maguire as Fermanagh and South Tyrone MP was both a smart and desperate attempt by them to get Thatcher and the British government to give in. Sands did end up getting elected on the 9 April 1981 mainly because he was the only person from the Nationalist side running in the election. Everyone now thought that Mrs Thatcher would give in because they believed that she could not let an elected politician starve to death in a prison cell. However she was still not giving in and was a bit puzzled as to why people would vote for a man who she thought was a convicted terrorist as an MP. However to the people who voted for Sands, he was a hero and a very inspiring man. Just because he was elected as an MP did not mean that Thatcher was going to automatically give him his demand of being treated as a political prisoner. At this point riots began to spread all across the Nationalist communities in Northern Ireland. What else could they do to either persuade her or frighten her to give into the prisoners demands?

Up until this point the Sinn Féin IRA had shunned the electoral process but at the point when an IRA man (Sands) could win a seat in the House of Commons gave them a huge propaganda gain. This was bad news for both Mrs Thatcher and the Irish government under Charles Haughey. Haughey did not want to see Sinn Féin gain any more seats because he saw them as a threat and so did Mrs Thatcher. This kind of boost in support for Sinn Féin was not seen since the aftermath of Bloody Sunday in 1972. This brought enormous pressure on Thatcher but she showed no signs of it in public and vowed to carry on her resistance to the hunger strikers demands. The Unionists and some British people were supporting Mrs Thatcher on her resistance to the hunger strikers while other British people including former

Mayor of London Ken Livingstone supported the hunger strikers. The British media in particular were less sympathetic to the hunger strikers with one newspaper article written by John Junor of the Sunday Express saying “I will shed no tears when Sands dies”¹⁶. To Junor and other British journalists, these men were seen as criminals who do not deserve any sort of political status. On the other hand, the Irish press praised the men who took part in the hunger strikes and sympathised with them. They believed in what they were fighting for and applauded them for their courage and determination to be treated as political prisoners. However, the support unfortunately did not help and in the end Bobby Sands died on 5 May 1981 after 66 days of hunger strike. Northern Ireland Secretary of State Humphrey Atkins desecrated his death as “needless and pointless”¹⁷. He could not see why someone would starve themselves to death to achieve something that was denied to them. Some British newspapers were a lot crueller in their remarks about Bobby Sands death. For example, the Daily Mail said that Sands was guilty of “a moral fraud”. The Daily Telegraph said that he had courage but of a “ruthless and corrupted sort”. It goes to show how little support there was for Sands and the other hunger strikers in Britain. It is expected that they would have this sort of reaction because they did not understand properly why these men wanted their demands. They just simply saw them as troublemakers looking for attention. However back in West Belfast and the rest of Ireland there was huge surprise from the Irish people. On the day of Sand’s death, the local community in West Belfast began a ritual called “the republican call” which was banging dustbin lids on the roadside to alert other of the news. Riots escalated to unthinkable levels as a result of Bobby Sands’s death. Teenagers built barricades in the streets and Belfast Black flags were hoisted in honour of Bobby Sands. They could not believe that Margaret Thatcher could allow an elected MP die in prison under disgusting

¹⁶ *Sunday Express*, 1981

¹⁷ <http://www.rte.ie/archives/2016/0504/786070-death-of-bobby-sands/>

circumstances. There was almost a sense that people thought that she did not have a heart and that this problem could have been avoided without people dying. In the aftermath of his death Bobby Sands became a Republican martyr and Thatcher became the number one enemy for most Irish people both North and South of the border. Sands funeral was attended by over 100,000 people which at the time was one of the biggest turnouts for a funeral in the history of Ireland and in the end the hunger strike was called off after ten other prisoners died including Francis Hughes and Patsy O' Hara to name but a few. Thatcher agreed to finally give into the demands but it was too late. Why couldn't she have given in earlier and avoided all of the deaths, protests and unrest that the hunger strikes caused. She would have been considered as a troublemaker during these hunger strikes. As a result of Thatcher's stance on the hunger strikes the IRA movement was really radicalised and there was a huge increase in support for Sinn Féin. This was not seen since the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1972. The Armalite and Ballot Box Strategy came about after the hunger strikes as a response to Bobby Sands in the April 1981. Elections in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were now contested by Sinn Féin while the IRA continued to pursue an armed struggle against the British Army. Thatcher became second only to General John Maxwell when it came to increasing support for a Republican movement like the IRA. She also became target number one for the IRA and they tended on seeking revenge for the deaths of their friends.

There are two ways to look at this. One side says that Margaret Thatcher was absolutely right to not give into these terrorists demands. On the other hand a lot of Irish people still to this day believed that she starved the hunger strikers. The prisoners obviously believed that because she was a woman that she would give into their demands easily and sympathise with them but as was mentioned earlier they did not know who they were dealing with. She was not called the Iron Lady for nothing. She knew that there were solutions to this problem but

chose to ignore it. How could she let ten men die under disgusting circumstances including a man who was elected as an MP? No one deserves to be treated that way and Margaret Thatcher should have known better. The fact that she later agreed to the demands just goes to show how this situation could have been avoided and nobody would have suffered as a result. After the hunger strikes, Anglo – Irish relations became very sour and Thatcher only had herself to blame. It was later revealed that she had secret dealings with the hunger strike prisoners. She actually felt sorry for the hunger strikers according to her official biographer Charles Moore. She did admire their courage and determination, “You have to hand it to some of these IRA boys” and described them as “Poor Devils” who knew that “If they didn’t go on strike they’d be shot..... What a waste! What a terrible waste of a human life”¹⁸. Thatcher was actually trying to negotiate with them and work out a deal but they wanted full political status. She told them to not let anybody know that she was making any sort of contact with them. She thought that if this communication got out then it would look bad on her and a lot of the Unionists in Northern Ireland would have been outraged if they found out that Thatcher was negotiating with terrorists. On the other hand, if the communication was leaked at the time it would have showed the Nationalists up the North and the Irish down South that Thatcher was at least making an effort to negotiate with the prisoners. As a result of her handling of the hunger strikes, neither Charlie Haughey nor Garrett Fitzgerald who was also Taoiseach at that time could build any relationship with Margaret Thatcher. Margaret Thatcher became a hate figure in the Republic and in Nationalist areas up the North. More trouble was looming on the horizon for Margaret Thatcher not just in Northern Ireland but also in the South Pacific in the following year 1982.

¹⁸ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One*, Chapter 21 P.617

By 1982 Margaret Thatcher was in her fourth year in office. The economy in Britain was slowly but surely improving under her Thatcherite policies. She was still the most unpopular Prime Minister ever as voted in a newspaper poll. Her popularity in Northern Ireland was still very divisive and Anglo – Irish Relations in general were quite poor. The troubles continued up in Northern Ireland while in the Republic there was a revolving door of line up changes for a new government. One minute Charlie Haughey's Fianna Fáil party were in power and the next minute Garrett Fitzgerald's Fine Gael party were in power. Margaret Thatcher knew that she could work with Fitzgerald more than Haughey. Fitzgerald was more open minded compared to Haughey and would go into talks with Mrs Thatcher and be willing to compromise for the benefit of the people on both of the two islands. However Fitzgerald's election victory in 1982 was short lived and Charlie Haughey was once again elected.

On 2 April 1982, the Argentinean Junta invaded the Falkland Islands/Malvinas which were a British Colony. The Argentinean forces raised the Argentinean flag over Port Stanley. Margaret Thatcher was furious that British Sovereign territory had been invaded by a foreign power. This was another huge task for her and she really had to prove herself here and show that she was a great leader. What a better way to do it than to go to war to reclaim the islands. She realised that if she sent a large task force to the Falkland Islands/Malvinas and won the war then she would most certainly win the next election. So on the 5 April 1982 a large task force set sail from Portsmouth harbour. Most European powers voiced support for her but the Irish government led under Haughey did not support Thatcher and her actions to reclaim land. The Irish could relate to the Argentineans. For many years Ireland was a British Colony and had to fight for their independence. However, part of the country was partitioned and ever since then there has been endless riots over giving back the six counties in Northern

Ireland to the Republic of Ireland. A lot of the Unionists in Ireland could relate to the Falkland Islanders because they both wanted to stay under British rule.

The Falklands/Malvinas also had the effect of freezing Anglo – Irish relations at a time when there really should have been more focus on it. There was still bitterness between Haughey and Thatcher over the hunger strikes. He believed that she cost him the summer election in 1981. When he was returned to power in March of 1982, he was out to seek revenge on Thatcher for her stance on the hunger strikes. He decided to take an Anti- Thatcher line on the Falklands/Malvinas issue. Ireland had a seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council for the years 1981 and 1982. Noel Dorr was the representative for the Republic of Ireland. Ireland had abstained from the EEC sanctions issue after the sinking of the General Belgrano which was an Argentinean Navy light cruiser. Thatcher had given the orders to sink the Belgrano but Mr Haughey did not agree with the attack because it was outside of the exclusion zone. He told the Republic’s Minister for Defence, Patrick Power to make a speech regarding the British as the “aggressors” in this whole conflict. Understandably the British were absolutely outraged by these comments. If Haughey had supported the British in this war maybe there would have been a really good deal on Northern Ireland waiting at the end of it just like Winston Churchill’s persuasion of giving back Northern Ireland to Éamon De Valera and the Republic if they joined the Second World War. Mrs Thatcher and the British people expected their closest neighbours to support them in war. The fact that they didn’t support them in their hour of need really angered the British government and showed how bad Anglo-Irish relations were. British Labour Foreign Minister said that “Ireland has behaved with great impertinence throughout the Falklands War”.¹⁹ In fact a government leak showed that the British government had told the Irish Ambassador to the UK that they were

¹⁹ Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland’s Ordeal 1966-1995 and the Search for Peace*, London, 1995

not going to consult with the Republic about Northern Ireland as a result of their stance on the Falklands/Malvinas war. The *Irish Times* even reported that James Prior said that Haughey's relations with The British government "are pretty awful at the moment".²⁰ Haughey was damaging the country's national interests. *The Sun* newspaper released the headline saying "*Stick it up your Punt-A*" on the 19 May 1982. The article focused on how Ireland stabbed their close neighbours in the back. One line read, "As we stand at the brink of shooting war, the Irish stab us in the back".²¹ This constant bickering from both sides was not going to solve the problem in Northern Ireland any quicker. There was no side that was in the right or in the wrong but it was a shame that the situations in Northern Ireland were put to the side during the Falklands/Malvinas war.

The Malvinas crisis caused a serious decline in Anglo – Irish relations. Just when people thought that the relations could not get any worse they did. Mrs Thatcher and the British government should have expected Haughey to do something like this to them. They should have known that Haughey would not support them in this war because of their stance on the hunger strikes. Some would consider it as Thatcher's karma for not giving into the prisoners demands for political status. Mrs Thatcher knew from that point on that she could never trust Haughey again and that he was not a friend of Britain.

²⁰ Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1995 and the Search for Peace*, Lodon, 1995

²¹ *The Sun* 1982

War or Peace?

The following chapter will focus on Margaret Thatcher's second term in office and the events that took place during her second term in Northern Ireland. The three events focused on for this chapter are the Brighton Bombing, the Anglo – Irish Summit and the eventual Anglo-Irish Agreement. Margaret Thatcher won her second General Election in June 1983. The Falklands victory proved to play a massive part in her re election along with the fact that the Labour opposition under Michael Foot were unelectable due to the divisiveness within the party. The 1983 election also saw Gerry Adams from Sinn Féin get elected as an MP for West Belfast which was a predominately nationalist area. The seat he claimed was of former leader of the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) Gerry Fitt. The fact that Adams defeated Fitt showed the strong support that Sinn Féin had in West Belfast. The main reason why Fitt lost his seat was because of his support of the British government's stance on the hunger strikes. This election win for Gerry Adams also showed the huge support for Sinn Féin. Gerry Adams said himself in his book *"Hope and History: Making Peace in Ireland"* that "the fact that people of West Belfast chose me to represent them was seen as and was in reality another significant breakthrough for Sinn Féin".²² The topic of Northern Ireland was still a massive issue for Mrs Thatcher. She made a vow to one of cabinet members David Goodall that if she got re elected, she would like to do something about Ireland and Northern Ireland. When she did get re elected, her advisors started the push for progress with Dublin in relation to Northern Ireland.

²² Gerry Adams, *Hope and History: Making Peace in Ireland*, (Australia, 2003)

In Dublin, Garret Fitzgerald was once again elected as Taoiseach in December of 1982. He was as nervous as Margaret Thatcher at the growth of support for Sinn Féin both north and south of the border. Fitzgerald was eager, despite the difficulties to resume progress towards a settlement between Britain and the Republic of Ireland over the question of Northern Ireland. One of Fitzgerald's officials believed that a security-led approach to the problem in Northern Ireland was the right approach. The Irish government "should strike hard at the terrorists – tougher action would be welcome to the British government and would help to lay the basis for a resumption of an Anglo – Irish Process".²³ Mrs Thatcher had a similar view to this one. She wanted the Irish to help sort out the security problem in Northern Ireland and the only way it could be achieved is if the Irish and British governments worked together to stop and defeat terrorism. Thatcher would sometimes make the suggestion of making a fence, built along the border with what she called an "access corridor",²⁴ however a lot of her colleagues did not agree with this and neither did the Irish government. This was some kind of fantasy solution to the problem by Thatcher.

It is important to note that in private, Margaret Thatcher would bring up the issue of Northern Ireland and compare it to the Sudetenland when Czechoslovakia was carved out in the Treaty of Versailles; a very large chunk of it was the Sudetenland. One meeting in particular that she had with Fitzgerald; she brought up the topic of the Sudetenland. The Sudeten Germans were a group of people in a minority in a country where another larger tribe was dominant which was similar to the Nationalists in the North. Thatcher believed that the Republics claim to

²³ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume Two: Everything She Wants*, Chapter 10 (London, 2013)

²⁴ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume Two: Everything She Wants*, Chapter 10 (London, 2013)

Northern Ireland was like Hitler's claim on the Sudetenland. This was a strange comparison by Thatcher and it just goes to show how little she understood about the problem. The fact that she compared the Irish claim on Northern Ireland like Hitler's claim on the Sudetenland was ludicrous. Margaret Thatcher decided to meet with Garret Fitzgerald again and she recognised quite early that he was genuinely interested in better relations between Britain and Ireland and for peace in Northern Ireland. Later on in the Anglo – Irish Agreement, Robert Armstrong who led the British side said “She liked Garrett Fitzgerald and thought he was honest decent man”.²⁵ Mrs Thatcher believed that she owed Fitzgerald a hearing. She did not want to be seen by people around the globe particularly America as a person who was hostile to the peace process. Fitzgerald himself felt a meeting for peace and reconciliation was more urgent than how Thatcher saw it. They both agreed on one thing though and that was to stop Sinn Féin from getting any more support because obviously Sinn Féin were linked to the IRA and Fitzgerald did not want them overtaking John Hume and the SDLP party while Thatcher wanted to stop the IRA attacks. Fitzgerald believed that if Sinn Féin overtook the more moderate nationalists SDLP, then it would “destabilize” not only Northern Ireland but also the Republic. However, Fitzgerald did want to bring the nationalist parties together to work out a common approach to the situation in Northern Ireland. In the end Fitzgerald set up a New Ireland Forum in May 1983 without support from Thatcher. The Forum was valid for a year between May 1983 and May 1984 without any official Unionist or British representation. The New Ireland Forum report considered three possible frameworks for a future Ireland which included joint authority, a federal/ confederal state. These three frameworks were way too much for the Unionists to handle. It gave a highly unflattering account of the British role in Northern Ireland. Joint Authority meant that both Britain and the Republic of Ireland would rule Northern Ireland together. Many Unionists believed that if

²⁵ Charles Moore, Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: Volume One, London, 2013

Mrs Thatcher agreed to this then she would be selling them out to the Republic. While all of this was going, more severe incidents were taking place throughout Northern Ireland. For example, the assassination of a rising young Unionist politician Edgar Graham, the killing of the two members of the Irish security members by the IRA and not to mention the IRA bombing of Harrods's store killing six people. All of these incidents had something in common and that was they were all carried out by the IRA during this New Ireland Forum in 1983. They were also showing both Mrs Thatcher and Garrett Fitzgerald that the IRA was going nowhere and that something had to be done soon in relation the problem in Northern Ireland.

As mentioned in chapter two, the IRA had Margaret Thatcher on the top of their to do list after her stance on the hunger strikes allowing ten people to die under those circumstances. Thatcher knew that she was an IRA target ever since the aftermath of the hunger strikes. She knew eventually that they would get her when she least expected but she did not want to hand herself on a plate to them. Her expectation became a reality on 12 October 1984. An IRA member named Patrick Magee planted a bomb under a bath in the Grand Hotel in Brighton a couple of weeks before Margaret Thatcher arrived in Brighton for the annual Tory Conference. Five people were killed and thirty one were injured. Margaret Thatcher narrowly escaped death. Some of the injured included Thatcher's Cabinet Minister and friend Norman Tebbit and his wife. She felt horrible for the people who died and were injured. She knew perfectly well that that bomb was placed there in order to kill her and nobody else. Gerry Adams himself mentioned the fact that it was regrettable that other people lost their lives and Thatcher survived. However this attack was not going to weaken Margaret Thatcher. She told

BBC's John Cole straight after the bombing that "the conference will go on as usual"²⁶ and kept emphasising the last two words. This was a very brave thing for Thatcher to do. Most politicians in her shoes would have cancelled the whole conference but she soldiered on as if nothing had happened. This move enhanced greater respect from the British and the Unionist community in Northern Ireland. The timing of the bombing could not have come at a worse time with the Anglo-Irish Summit just a month away. The Summit was to take place in Ireland a few weeks later but for security reasons, the British government invited the Irish to travel to England for the talks instead.

The Anglo-Irish Summit took place at the Prime Minister's retreat called Chequers. Margaret Thatcher did not want to be seen as giving into the Irish so easily because of the Brighton bombing a month earlier. The bombing if anything made her more sceptical on the Irish proposals to the solution in Northern Ireland. At the Summit Margaret Thatcher gave her famous "Out, Out, Out" speech. She rejected all three options that were proposed by Fitzgerald. "I have made it quite clear..... that a unified Ireland was one solution. That is out. A second solution was a confederation of two states. That is out. A third solution was joint authority. That is out. That is a derogation of sovereignty".²⁷ Thatcher's dismissive attitude to the Forum proposals angered a lot of the Irish delegation. Fitzgerald only found out what she said at a press conference afterwards when a journalist brought it up with him. He was not too surprised because at the end of the day to him this was typical Thatcher dismissing anything that gave the Republic of Ireland a greater say in Northern Ireland. Fitzgerald brought up the Anglo-Irish Summit in the Dáil on 20 November 1984. He explained how upset he was that no agreement could be reached but "that it must be if our two governments are to be seen to

²⁶ Kieran Hughes, *Terror Attack Brighton: Blowing up the Iron Lady*, (Yorkshire, 2014)

²⁷ Michael Cunningham, *British government policy in Northern Ireland, 1969-2000*, P.48 (Manchester, 2001)

carry out their duty to the people of Ireland.....”²⁸ The leader of the opposition Charles Haughey believed that Fitzgerald had betrayed the Nationalists. However deep down Haughey knew that Fitzgerald could not have gotten a fair deal when it came to Margaret Thatcher after previous dealings he had her.

Back in London, Margaret Thatcher came under pressure from the US President Ronald Reagan to sort something out in relation to the troubles in Northern Ireland. Reagan believed that Thatcher should allow the Irish government to have an involvement in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Ronald Reagan himself was under pressure from the Irish lobby in Washington at that time. Reagan’s interest in Northern Ireland came from behind the scenes diplomacy with the Irish Ambassador to the USA Séan Donlon. Tipp O’ Neill who was the Irish American speaker in the House of Representatives was another man who made sure that Reagan acted on Irish affairs. When Margaret Thatcher planned to visit Reagan in December 1984 and February 1985, O’ Neill wrote to Reagan to ask him to raise the question on Northern Ireland again with Mrs Thatcher. O’ Neill believed that Northern Ireland would be in serious jeopardy as a result of Mrs Thatcher’s public statements. He wanted Reagan to encourage Mrs. Thatcher to renew Anglo-Irish dialogue because the problems in Northern Ireland were not going away in fact they were getting worse as time went on and Mrs Thatcher simply did not care. There was the view that if Reagan told Thatcher to act on Northern Ireland then she would because Reagan and Thatcher were political soul mates who believed in the same thing so maybe if a man she trusted asked her to do something about Northern Ireland then she would finally act upon it. However if it wasn’t for Tipp O’ Neill and the other members of the Irish lobby in Washington, Reagan would not have brought the issue up with Thatcher at all. At home the British army told Thatcher that defeating the IRA

²⁸ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, Vol.354 No.1 P.20 of 87 (20 Nov. 1984)

was not a winnable war. After much discussion with Reagan and other representatives of the British forces Thatcher began to consider negotiations with the Irish and was willing to an agreement. This agreement was called the Anglo-Irish Agreement. This agreement would change the course of history in Northern Ireland forever.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement took place in Hillsborough Castle in Co. Down on the 15 November 1985. However before Margaret Thatcher even touched down in Hillsborough, she was met with opposition by Conservative MP and staunch Unionist Ian Gow who would later be killed in an IRA bomb attack in 1990. Gow believed that Mrs Thatcher should not sign the agreement because it meant that Unionists would be sold out to the Irish government. However, Margaret Thatcher and Irish Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald signed the agreement which became one of the first official documents that acknowledged the Nationalists who were the minority wish in Northern Ireland for a United Ireland. The agreement also gave the Irish government an advisory role in the Northern Ireland politics. However Thatcher made it quite clear at the conference that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland. It was voted in by the largest parliamentary majority Thatcher enjoyed during her three terms as Prime Minister. Thatcher believed that this agreement would automatically bring peace to Northern Ireland and stop the troubles. She could not have been more wrong with that belief. The Agreement was largely rejected by both Unionist and Republicans. Not only did the Republicans hate her but now the Unionists in Northern Ireland also despised her.

Traitor

The following chapter will focus on Margaret Thatcher's relationship with the Unionists following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. When Margaret Thatcher signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement she did expect a bit of backlash from the Unionist side, however she did not expect the scale of the backlash. On the 23 November 1985 over 100,000 people gathered in Belfast to hear speeches of protest from people like Ian Paisley who was the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and James Molyneux who was the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). There were signs and banners around saying "Dublin Out, Out, Out!", "Ulster is British" and "Ulster says no" to name but a few. A caricature of Mrs Thatcher was burned and so was the Irish flag to make a statement to both the British and Irish government that the Unionists were not happy with this decision at all. To the Unionists Margaret Thatcher was a traitor and a disgrace. They saw the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement as damaging the Union and selling them out to the Republic. There was mass civil disobedience which was encouraged by both Paisley and Molyneux to try and defeat the agreement. However this agreement was not going to be brought down so easily unlike the Sunningdale Agreement a decade earlier. Margaret Thatcher made sure that a repeat of Sunningdale would not happen again. The British government were serious in not allowing the Unionist majority run Northern Ireland. Thatcher resented bitterly what the Unionists did to the Sunningdale Agreement. She made sure that the Anglo-Irish Agreement could only be dismantled by the people who constructed it. Margaret Thatcher believed that this was the only way to bring peace to Northern Ireland. She wanted to try and please both the Unionists and the Nationalists.

Even though this agreement was dismissed by many people in both the Unionists and Nationalists side, it was seen as the stepping stone to total peace which came about later on in the 1990's. Thatcher did admit later on that she regretted signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement and when asked by a Conservative colleague Alistair McAlpine on why she signed the agreement she simply said "It was the pressure from the Americans who made me sign the Agreement".²⁹ The Agreement and handing back Hong Kong were her biggest regrets. During this time, the men in grey suits were after her and her political career was slowly coming to an end.

Margaret Thatcher won her third consecutive election victory in 1987 but it would be her last one. Towards the end of her premiership the conflicts in Northern Ireland were still quite bad with the death toll rising dramatically. The IRA and Loyalist Paramilitaries were re armed and continued fighting each other. One incident in particular in Co. Tyrone in 1988 saw eight soldiers die when an IRA bomb exploded on their bus. More and more IRA and Loyalist attacks were being carried out throughout the late 80's including the infamous bombing by Loyalist Michael Stone which took place at a Cemetery for a funeral for an IRA man. This event was known as the Milltown Massacre. Thatcher had to do something to calm both sides because she realised the agreement was not working very easily. She began to develop secret channels with the IRA to try and make progress. She had already opened secret channels with the IRA during the hunger strikes as is mentioned in chapter 2. Martin McGuinness a former IRA commander told Ryan Tubridy in an interview on RTÉ's The Late Late Show that the first time he met with a British representative was one month before Margaret Thatcher had resigned which was October 1990. He mentioned that he could not understand why she had sent someone to meet with him. McGuinness believed that she "recognised that at some stage

²⁹ Graham Goodlad, *Thatcher*, (New York, 2016) P.163

that the British government were going to have to engage with Irish Republicans”³⁰. She believed that if she calmed the IRA down and negotiated with them then peace would slowly but surely be restored to Northern Ireland because she saw IRA as the main problem causing the violence and tragedy’s in Northern Ireland.

Margaret Thatcher may have started the talks with the IRA but she was not going to see it through to the end as her time in power was quickly coming to an end. The Poll Tax introduced in March 1990 made Mrs Thatcher and her government extremely unpopular. Her Deputy Prime Minister Geoffrey Howe had resigned in protest over her handling of Europe. Howe’s resignation inspired Michael Heseltine to challenge her for the leadership of the Tory party but failed to beat her in the first ballot. Margaret Thatcher was told by her colleagues that she had to go because they felt that she would not win the second ballot. Her colleagues concluded that the country had simply had enough of the longest serving Prime Minister of the 20th Century. So on the 28 November 1990 Margaret Thatcher left Downing Street for the last time and it was the end of an era. John Major had succeeded Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party. Major was not as ruthless and tough as Thatcher was but still a good Prime Minister. As soon as he arrived in office he re-opened talks with the IRA. The Downing Street Declaration followed that in December 1993 between Major and the Irish Taoiseach/Prime Minister Albert Reynolds which led to an IRA Ceasefire in 1994. This decision then paved the way for the Good Friday Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998 between the British Prime Minister of the day, which was Labour’s Tony Blair and Irish Prime Minister/Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. The Agreement was put to the voters

³⁰ Martin McGuinness on the Late Late Show Part 1, 2010 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0rMTwv4rSg>) (18/05/16)

of Northern Ireland and the Republic and overwhelmingly they voted in favour of the agreement.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, There is really no answer to the question of was Margaret Thatcher a troublemaker or a peacemaker when it came to the troubles in Northern Ireland. Many people have labelled her a troublemaker and some would say she was a peacemaker but personally there is no definite answer to this question. Throughout this essay there have been highlights of her being a troublemaker for example, the hunger strikes and then there have been highlights of her being a peacemaker for example, the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement even though she was forced to sign it by Ronald Reagan. Overall, she did not understand the problems in Northern Ireland. She never found a security solution to the problems during her three terms in office. Many people died in Northern Ireland during her eleven years in power, she allowed ten men to die on hunger strike and signed an agreement which she later regretted. However, having said that she did open the channel with the IRA that began a process to peace being fully secured in Northern Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Agreement has been considered by many historians as the major step towards peace and Thatcher along with Fitzgerald have to be applauded for that even though as was said earlier she was made to sign it and did not do it out of the goodness of her heart. There is no question that she has remained a strictly divisive and controversial figure in both Irish and British life. Majority of Nationalists have never forgiven her for the hunger strikes while the Unionists still despise her over her signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. What both sides fail to see is that during her time in office she paved the way for further peace talks like the Downing Street Declaration and the Good Friday Agreement and ultimately the peace in Northern Ireland today and the massive improvement in Anglo-Irish relations.

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