



LAGAN COLLEGE POLITICS

After 3 decades of troubles and over 3,000 dead, in 1998 a ground breaking and controversial agreement was signed in Belfast. This became known as the BELFAST AGREEMENT or GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT. It was arranged between the Northern Ireland political parties and the UK and Irish Governments.

It was OPPOSED by the DUP

The GFA contained THREE STRANDS and a number of other issues.

- It brought SINN FEIN into the political process
- It created a new devolved Assembly based on power sharing
- it added an all Ireland dimension to NI affairs

The GFA was endorsed by the NI public at a referendum with 71% support.

This had significant Protestant opposition however

1) BACKGROUND



GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT 1998

STRAND 1
An acceptable form of Power sharing N.Ireland

THIS WAS TO BE ACHIEVED IN A NUMBER OF WAYS

- 1) REPRESENTATION
108 MLAs were to be chosen by STV, a form of PR based on constituencies. This would give much broader representation than traditional unionism and nationalism.



- 2) A POWER SHARING EXECUTIVE (government) would be chosen. This would be based on electoral strength. It would be a MANDATORY (forced) Coalition. This was to be chosen using d'Hondt. It was aimed at encouraging cooperation and debate. This would be led by a FIRST AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER. This was a joint position representing both major communities and could not exist without the other so was mutually dependent.



- 3) COMMITTEES would be established. Membership would also be based on electoral strength and d'hondt. Their Chairpersons would be chosen to balance the Minister (e.g. SF minister - DUP Chair) It was hoped these would foster cooperation instead of confrontation



- 4) THE ASSEMBLY was given key roles and powers to legislate, scrutinise and represent. Certain powers were TRANSFERRED to a Stormont and some were Excepted and kept by Westminster such as foreign affairs, tax, justice (at this stage) and defence. - Safeguards were included such as Cross Community Voting to protect communities and encourage trust in the system. MLAs had to designate themselves Nationalist Unionist or Other for this .

STRAND 2:
AN ACCEPTABLE ROLE FOR THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND (North-South links)

- 1) The Republic of Ireland dropped their historical claim to Northern Ireland in their constitution. (Articles 2&3) This eased unionist fears of a United Ireland



- 2) THE NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL was formed
This was set up to coordinate policy across shared areas within the island of Ireland



- there would be regular departmental meetings between ministries north and South (for example transport)
- there would also be biennial meetings between heads of governments (Irish Taoiseach and Top ministers and First and Deputy First Minister of NI)
- There are bodies set up to coordinate ; food standards ; trade; waterways; tourism; health etc
- GOOD EXAMPLES OF NSMC IN ACTION:

- 1) recent coordination of children's heart surgery. Instead of very expensive duplication this is now carried out in Dublin. The fact that the DUP health Minister agreed to this and endorsed it shows how far things have come.
- 2) in 2010 in the wake of the financial credit crunch, the Republic put all the 'toxic assets' of banks (ie property that had lost massive amounts of value and was reclaimed) into NAMA a state agency. As this now owned 10% of housing stock in Northern Ireland, discussions were held to prevent a quick sale which would send northern house prices plummeting further.
- 3) Cooperation over crises like the FOOT AND MOUTH CRISIS which saw cross border cooperation .
- 4) the building of MOTORWAYS such as the Dublin Belfast M1 As well as the new road to Derry from Dublin (A5)

STRAND 3:
East-West institution to legitimise link between British Isles

BRITISH IRISH COUNCIL set up to coordinate policies across the main components of the British Isles. These include Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Jersey, Isle of Man, Guernsey



This has regular meetings on areas of mutual concern, such as e commerce, tourism and transport links



THERE WERE ALSO A RANGE OF OTHER CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES:

- 1) PRISONER RELEASES. As part of the agreement prisoners were to be released on licence. This created a great deal of anger, particularly the unionist community



- 2) REFORM OF THE RUC (police force)
The PATTON REFORMS were introduced to change the name of the police to the PSNI, the badge was changed; the make up of the police was changed to make it more representative



- 3) DECOMMISSIONING
Decommissioning was a controversial issue that would dog the GFA. Unionists felt that it was agreed that the IRA would decommission as a result of the GFA. Republicans argued that this was not the case and decommissioning would be tantamount to surrender.



WHAT HAPPENED NEXT? NEGATIVES



- 1) While the UUP were the largest unionist party, they had to be seen to deliver results. Soon concessions seemed to all drift towards nationalists. Prisoner releases, changes to the police and the steady removal of British forces seemed to be achieved without the key nationalist concession of decommissioning. This fatally weakened the UUP who seemed to have gone into government with SINN FEIN without key concessions.
- 2) the DUP were fundamentally opposed to the GFA and were determined to bring it down from within through policies of non cooperation with SF and non attendance of NSMC meetings. support began to drift to them from the UUP... along with key political figures like Arlene Foster and Jeffrey Donaldson.
- 3) the first assembly was marked with distrust rather than cooperation. minister went on solo runs rather than intending to the advice of their committees as was intended. Examples include Bairbre de bruin, SF health minister who sited the new maternity hospital in the Royal Victoria hospital (her constituency) rather than the proposed city hospital site which the committee had recommended. Education minister at the time Martin McGuinness also abolished the 11 plus again against committee advice
- 4) A suspected SF IRA spy ring was the issue which brought the Assembly crashing down. It was to revert to direct rule and would not reopen until the St. Andrews agreement of 2007

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT? POSITIVES



The first Assembly met and had a number of successes.

- 1) many in the electorate were pleased with having devolved powers over Westminster direct rule.
- 2) David Trimble (UUP) and Seamus Mallon (SDLP) were the 1st FIRST and DEPUTY FIRST MINISTERS
- 3) the agreement seemed popular. The SDLP polled its highest election results and was the largest nationalist party. The DUP polled the highest unionist vote and was the largest unionist party. Unionists seemed to have given them the benefit of the doubt... As long as they could deliver on decommissioning
- 4) Many new shades of representation emerged due to STV. The N.Ireland Women's Coalition and Alliance were represented along with working class parties like the PUP.
- 5) there were policy successes. Notably the foot and mouth policies undertaken by the SDLPs Brid Rogers had been strong and few cases of the disease affected the province ... Unlike the rest of the UK