

VOICES OF '74 – PRELUDE

TEACHER OVERVIEW

Following the introduction of Direct Rule in March 1972, the British government sought to re-establish a government to Northern Ireland. This was based on a 'community government' (power-sharing) made up of both Unionists and Nationalists along with an undefined role for the Republic of Ireland. This 'Sunningdale Experiment' was to last less than 6 months. Through six different activities, this section provides an overview of the details of power-sharing, the role of the ROI along with their contribution to the Unionist-led UWC Strike of May 1974. Students will reflect on the relative significance of each of these factors.

KEY INQUIRY QUESTIONS:

- Why did the Ulster Workers Council strike happen?
- To what extent was power-sharing and the Council of Ireland a factor in the strike?
- Could the strike have been averted?

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE


Students will have studied the 'Context' session which would have led up to and included Direct Rule

LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of the activities pupils should be able to:

- Identify the three key conditions on which any government would return to Northern Ireland.
- Summarise the results and significance of the June 1973 Assembly election.
- Assign the different opinions of the role of the Council of Ireland.
- Assess several sources on the reasons for the UWC strike in May 1974.

CONTENT

 Access Clips: [Prelude: Part 1](#) and [Prelude: Part 2](#)

Several data-based exercises in which students must extract information from sources (including those from the video). These can be done on an individual and group level.

Teachers may also use these resources as 'student led' or 'pre-learning' before they study the actual events of the UWC strike.

TIMELINE

March 1972-British Government introduces Direct Rule in Northern Ireland taking away responsibility for the governing of the province from local politicians.


June 1973-Elections held for a new Northern Ireland Assembly. A majority of those elected support the idea of power-sharing.

December 1973-Sunningdale Conference outlines the functioning of power-sharing and a role for the Republic of Ireland.

February 1974-UK General Election. 11/12 MPs returned stand on an anti-Sunningdale platform.

May 1974-Start of the Ulster Workers' Council Strike in opposition to Sunningdale.

Following the imposition of Direct Rule by the British government in March 1972, attempts were made to try and restore devolution. The British government outlined three main conditions that must be met for this to occur:

- *A 'community government' made up of both Unionists and Nationalists. This was known as 'power-sharing.'*
 - *A role for the Republic of Ireland in the political affairs of Northern Ireland.*
 - *The consent principle in which NI would remain part of the UK for so long as the majority of people agreed.*
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ACTIVITY 1

Consider the oral history extracts below.

What key concerns for Unionism emerge from these testimonies?

Source 1 – Jim Dillon

I remember the talk about it and the leaders going to Sunningdale, Brian Faulkner and those those type of people. And I think Sunningdale probably would have been more acceptable, let's put it that way, if it hadn't have been for the Council of Ireland input into it, because the Council of Ireland seemed to be given the Republic of Ireland, it was then called the Free State, a say in the affairs of Northern Ireland, and that was taboo no Unionist was prepared to tolerate it accept the very, very moderate ones, and the moderate ones were getting less at this stage. That was a red line they just went they went that step too far, in my opinion.

Source 2 – Eamon Hanna

Well, they said it was the involvement of Ireland but I think a lot, not, not, not the Faulkner Unionists, but the, the other Unionists who were anti-Faulkner, I think, I think power-sharing stuck in their throats.

Source 3 – Maurice Mills

Well, it was just a straight avenue to an all-Ireland arrangement and in no way were we willing to countenance that whatsoever, not even in our dreams. So that was the position and that's why, that's why in actual fact the Workers' Council came into being because of that.

Source 4 – Paul Arthur

Well, I think what happens is that the Council of Ireland becomes the easy one to deal with because the Council of Ireland challenged everything that Unionism had fought from 1920 onwards because it appeared, whether it did or not, it appeared to give a role for an Irish government inside Northern Ireland. [...] So that again raises Unionist fears so that, if you like, was the Trojan horse with which we could undermine power-sharing. And that was the line in which they worked, that they were not opposed to sharing power with Roman Catholics, but they would not under any circumstances, have any form of rule, no matter how indirect from Dublin. So the Irish Dimension was the one that they played on and very, very successfully. No question that the vast majority of them were opposed to power-sharing.

Source 5 – Nelson McCausland

You began to wonder, will the IRA win here? Will they force us into a united Ireland? And for us a united Ireland meant being ruled by people like them and by people who had sympathized with them and been very close to them. Well, our perception was that they would see it as a major advance, but all these things in our minds were seen as, they'll see a major advance, but it's only a stepping stone. It's not stopping stone, it's a stepping stone to ultimately a united Ireland.

ACTIVITY 2

Transform each of the three conditions into an image (Magenta Principle)

Area	Image
A 'community government' made up of both Unionists and Nationalists.	
A role for the Republic of Ireland in the political affairs of Northern Ireland	
The consent principle in which NI would remain part of the UK for so long as the majority of people agreed.	

ACTIVITY 3

In June 1973, elections took place to a new Northern Ireland Assembly. Looking at the outcome of the election, decide if the following statements are 'Correct' or 'Incorrect.'

PARTY	UNIONIST/ NATIONALIST	POWER- SHARING	SEATS	% OF VOTES
FAULKNER UNIONISTS	UNIONIST	YES	24	29.3
UUUC (UNITED ULSTER UNIONIST COUNCIL)	UNIONIST	NO	26	32.6
SDLP	NATIONALIST	YES	19	22.1
ALLIANCE	OTHER	YES	8	9.2
NI LABOUR PARTY	OTHER	YES	1	2.6

Statement		Correct	Incorrect	If incorrect, re-write the statement to correct it.
1	Most parties who stood for election supported power-sharing			
2	The majority of those elected supported power-sharing			
3	A majority of Nationalists supported power-sharing			
4	A majority of Unionists supported power-sharing			

ACTIVITY 4

Sunningdale

Now that there was a majority of those elected to the new Assembly who were in support of power-sharing, the British and Irish governments along with the pro-power-sharing parties met at Sunningdale in England to discuss the role which would be played by the Republic of Ireland.

No anti-power-sharing parties attended this conference. It was agreed that the role for the Republic of Ireland would be through a new institution called the Council of Ireland which would have a 'consultative and reviewing role' on issues affecting NI and the ROI. One of the main difficulties was the fact that of the key signatories of the deal, they all had different opinions upon what the actual role of the Council of Ireland would be. This was to have serious consequences for the stability of any future Northern Ireland government.

Even though most Unionists did not support power-sharing, the majority of those elected did. Do you think this would be a stable basis for any future power-sharing government in Northern Ireland?

Discuss with your partner/group and provide a response for each argument.

ACTIVITY 5

Read the following views of the Council of Ireland and identify if they were from the perspective of:

- The British Government,
- The Irish Government,
- Pro-power sharing Unionists,
- Pro-power-sharing Nationalists

Their opinion of the Council of Ireland	Who am I?
Merely an 'advisory' body. A 'token' gesture to deal with economic issues.	
A great way to increase political links with the Republic and a step towards a United Ireland. It would be a vehicle that would trundle(push) Unionists into a united Ireland	
It will hopefully encourage more Nationalists to become involved in the political process as they see a role for the Republic of Ireland in the affairs on Northern Ireland	
This will not only improve relations between us and the North but will also lay the foundations for eventual reunification.	

ACTIVITY 6

Following Sunningdale, the new power-sharing Assembly and Executive was set up on 1st January 1974. The next month, there was a UK General Election called in which Northern Ireland would send 12 Members of Parliament to London to represent its views. Anti Sunningdale Unionists (UUUC) made the election about the Sunningdale Agreement (power-sharing and the role of the ROI). They won 11/12 seats showing a clear lack of support among the Unionist population for the Sunningdale Agreement. When their call for new elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly were rejected by the British government, they then carried out the Ulster Workers' Council Strike in May 1974. There is an on-going debate as to whether the UWC Strike came about due to the power-sharing element of Sunningdale or the role for the Republic of Ireland through the Council of Ireland.

Looking at the following resource, answer the following questions:

Q1-What % of Protestants supported the idea of power-sharing?

Q2-What % of Protestants felt that the Council of Ireland was a bad idea?

Q3-Do you think that if power-sharing had functioning WITHOUT the inclusion of the Council of Ireland, it would have remained stable? Use the opinion poll and your own knowledge to support your answer

Results of the opinion poll on the Sunningdale Agreement taken between 31 March and 7 April 1974

(i) Do you approve or disapprove of power within the Executive being shared?

	<i>Protestant %</i>	<i>Catholic %</i>
<i>Approve strongly</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>Just approve</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Don't know</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Just disapprove</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Disapprove strongly</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1</i>

(ii) Do you think that the Sunningdale proposal for a Council of Ireland is a good or bad idea?

	<i>Protestant %</i>	<i>Catholic %</i>
<i>Good idea</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Bad idea</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Have not heard of proposals</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Don't know</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>18</i>

Source: Gillespie, Sandra, Northern Ireland and its neighbours since 1920 (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), p. 122.

ACTIVITY 7

Read through each of the sources and complete the following table to explain whether Unionist opposition to the Sunningdale Agreement was based on power-sharing, the COI, or both?

Source	Power-sharing	COI	Both	Key words/phrases from the source which supports your choice
1				Sunningdale probably would have been more acceptable, let's put it that way, if it hadn't been for the Council of Ireland
2				the other Unionists who were anti-Faulkner, I think, I think power-sharing stuck in their throats.
3				it was just a straight avenue to an all-Ireland arrangement and in no way were we willing to countenance that
4				Council of Ireland challenged everything that Unionism had fought from 1920 onwards. the vast majority of them were opposed to power-sharing.
5				It's not stopping stone, it's a stepping stone to ultimately unite Ireland.

Extension Q- If Articles 2 & 3 (in which the ROI claimed control of Northern Ireland) were removed from the Irish constitution before the COI was set up, do you think this would have been enough to prevent the UWC strike? Use extracts from each of the sources to support your argument.

KEY WORDS

Taboo: A taboo is something that is forbidden or not allowed by social customs or rules. It is often a subject or behaviour that people feel strongly about and avoid talking about or doing because it is considered inappropriate or offensive.

Red-Line: A Red Line is a limit or boundary that should not be crossed. If someone notes that something is a Red Line, it means it is a strict rule or condition that, if broken, will lead to serious consequences.

Countenance: Countenance means to support or approve of something. For example, if you say a teacher will not countenance bad behaviour, it means the teacher will not tolerate or allow it.

Trojan Horse: A Trojan Horse is something that seems good or harmless but can be viewed as dangerous or harmful, an attempt to deceive. The term comes from a story in ancient Greek mythology where the Greeks used a wooden horse to trick their enemies and sneak into the city of Troy. Today, it can refer to anything that is used to deceive or trick someone.

PLENARY

From March 1972-May 1974 the British government created plans which would provide the basis for any future political settlement in Northern Ireland. The inclusion of both power-sharing and a role for the Republic of Ireland were components which had a mixture of political reactions. Whether or not it was power-sharing itself or a role for the ROI which brought about the UWC Strike is still a contentious historical point.

VOICES OF '74



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