**‘… no textbook solutions to the problems in Northern Ireland’:**

**Airey Neave and the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland, 1975-1979**

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‘The job of the [British] Army was to kill the terrorists and defeat them,

but one must not let political structures disappear from sight’.

[Airey Neave, 17 Feb. 1976][[1]](#footnote-1)

**Introduction**

This article examines Airey Neave’s contribution to the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy from 1975 to 1979; a hitherto neglected subject related to the Conservative Party, the Northern Ireland Troubles and more generally contemporary British and Irish history.[[2]](#footnote-2) Neave’s greatest contribution to political life came in the autumn of his career, following his promotion as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland in 1975. His appointment to Margaret Thatcher’s shadow cabinet, in the wake of her election as leader of the Conservative Party in February 1975, had important ramifications for the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy. From the moment he took up his new shadow cabinet portfolio, until his murder by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) in March 1979, Neave’s ‘first priority’, as he noted, was to defeat Republican terrorism.[[3]](#footnote-3) Although often preoccupied with security related issues, it is incorrect to suggest that Neave took little interest in the political fortunes of Northern Ireland.

In his outstanding biographical series on Margaret Thatcher, Charles Moore wrote that Neave’s attitude to Northern Ireland ‘will forever be disputed’.[[4]](#footnote-4) Indeed, given the secretive nature of the individual involved and the complexities of the subject that confronted him, one can understand why Neave’s legacy on Northern Ireland remains controversial. Although Neave confessed that ‘no text book solutions to the problems in Northern Ireland’ might have existed, this should not suggest that he did not have a Northern Ireland policy.[[5]](#footnote-5) This article tackles four specific issues that continue to divide historians in relation to Neave’s attitude to Northern Ireland.

Firstly, this article challenges the widely held misconception that Neave was simply a militarist when it came to Northern Ireland;[[6]](#footnote-6) that as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland his sole objective was to defeat Republican terrorists. On the contrary, while he sought ‘complete victory’[[7]](#footnote-7) over Republican paramilitaries, that he was ‘the one man in British politics who was unequivocal in his denunciation of terrorism’,[[8]](#footnote-8) Neave remained committed to finding a workable solution amongst the political parties in Northern Ireland in the hope of ending direct rule.

Secondly, it re-evaluates Neave’s attitude to devolution *vis-à-vis* Northern Ireland. Specifically, whether he championed the restoration of a devolved government, based on a power-sharing executive, or if he favoured a return to majority-rule in Northern Ireland? This subject is far from clear-cut. As is revealed, although during his early period as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, he favoured the Labour government’s plan to restore a power-sharing government,[[9]](#footnote-9) by the autumn of 1977, he abandoned support for this policy because, as he explained, it was ‘not practical politics’ in the medium-term.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Thirdly, it refutes that argument that Neave was a committed integrationist; that he supported integrating Northern Ireland fully within the United Kingdom. Rather, Neave can be most adequately described as a champion of so-called ‘compromise integration’,[[11]](#footnote-11) which advocated reform of local government in Northern Ireland, with the establishment of one or more Regional Councils.

Lastly, despite misguided accusations from some writers that on Neave’s death Thatcher was left ‘without a policy on Northern Ireland’,[[12]](#footnote-12) the reality is altogether different. In fact, although Neave’s assassination robbed Thatcher of a shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, in the aftermath of his passing, the Conservative Party *did* have an agreed strategy on Northern Ireland. During the British general election of 1979, Thatcher committed her party to follow Neave’s Northern Ireland policy. Chiefly, in his absence, as enshrined in the Conservative Party general election manifesto, if elected to government, the party made a commitment to establish one or more Regional Councils in Northern Ireland.

In their 2012 study, Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders argue that the history of Thatcherism and the Conservative Party is ‘still an emerging field’. ‘New questions’, they write, ‘are being asked and new evidence assessed’.[[13]](#footnote-13) This argument is no less true today. In fact, on the subject of the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy during Thatcher’s period as leader of the opposition from 1975 to 1979, little scholarship exists.[[14]](#footnote-14) This historiographical anomaly is compounded by the dearth of available knowledge in relation to Neave’s contribution to the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy, during his five-year period as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland from 1975 to 1979.

Even those studies that have referred to Neave and Northern Ireland have dealt with the subject on a piecemeal, *ad-hoc* basis. The respective chapters by Graham Goodlad and Marc Mulholland, which examine Thatcher’s Northern Ireland policy, pay fleeting attention to Neave’s contribution as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland. Both authors also fail to utilise an assortment of readily available archival material, chief among them the personal papers of Airey Neave (specifically related to Northern Ireland) and the Conservative Party Papers, including files related to the Conservative Party Parliamentary Northern Ireland Committee (CPPNIC)[[15]](#footnote-15) and accompanying ‘fact-finding’ sub-committee of the CPPNIC (discussed below).

In his 2016 publication, for example, Goodlad fails to unearth the complexities of Neave’s attitude to Northern Ireland, including his initial support, but ultimate rejection of his so-called ‘Council of State’ project, as an interim measure, because of an unwillingness on behalf of the political parties in Northern Ireland to agree to devolution.[[16]](#footnote-16) Similarly, in the 2012 chapter on Thatcher and Ireland, Mulholland makes a singular oblique reference to Neave, arguing that in 1978 the shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland announced that the Conservative Party ‘had formally buried its support for a devolved power-sharing administration in Northern Ireland …’.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Historical inaccuracies related to Neave and Northern Ireland continue within the relevant historiography. While Brendan O’Leary correctly asserts that Neave ‘shifted’ the Conservative Party’s bipartisanship policy with the Labour government in relation to Northern Ireland, he is incorrect in his suggestion that Neave ‘advocated the full administrative integration’ of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Neave’s sole biographer Paul Routledge argues that Neave’s contribution to the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy during his period as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland was ‘limited’, that he showed ‘… no signs of original thinking’ on this subject.’[[19]](#footnote-19) Routledge’s hypothesis is flawed. The available archival evidence (which Routledge failed to utilise) demonstrates unequivocally that far from making a ‘limited’ contribution to the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy, Neave put forward and supported several political and security initiatives, as are examined below.

Except for Charles Moore,[[20]](#footnote-20) Thatcher’s political biographers, likewise, have airbrushed out of history Neave’s contribution to the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy from 1975 to 1979.[[21]](#footnote-21) Thatcher, herself, was a victim of this approach. In her memoirs, she generally glossed over the subject of Northern Ireland during her period as leader of the opposition, including references to Neave and Northern Ireland.[[22]](#footnote-22) More general studies on Thatcherism,[[23]](#footnote-23) the Conservative Party’s relationship with Ulster Unionism,[[24]](#footnote-24) and studies on Anglo-Irish relations during the 20th century,[[25]](#footnote-25) have also offered fleeting attention to either Neave’s or the Conservative Party’s contribution to British thinking on Northern Ireland during Thatcher’s period as leader of the opposition.

This article readdresses this historiographical anomaly. The research on which this work is based consists of hitherto unused and neglected primary sources from several archival institutions in Britain and Ireland, including: The National Archives (TNA) of the United Kingdom;[[26]](#footnote-26) the Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons;[[27]](#footnote-27) the Churchill Archives Centre;[[28]](#footnote-28) the Bodleian Libraries;[[29]](#footnote-29) the National Archives of Ireland;[[30]](#footnote-30) and lastly, the University College Dublin Archives.[[31]](#footnote-31) The use of documentary evidence is complemented by the use of reported evidence, primarily online parliamentary debates[[32]](#footnote-32) and newspapers.[[33]](#footnote-33)

**‘My experience and knowledge of Northern Ireland is small’: the genesis of Neave’s thinking on Northern Ireland**

Neave was born on 23 January 1916, into an upper-middle-class family. The son of Sheffield Airey Neave, a well-known entomologist, he had a comfortable childhood. Educated at Eton, and later at Merton College, the University of Oxford and the Inns of Court, Neave lived for a short period in Germany during the 1930s, where he garnered a lifelong antipathy for Nazism. When the Second World War broke out in 1939 he immediately signed up for active service in the British Armed Forces. His experiences at Calais in 1940 (which he later described in his study, *The flames of Calais*),[[34]](#footnote-34) his subsequent capture and imprisonment by the Nazis, followed by his celebrated escape in 1942 from Colditz, a prisoner of war camp in Germany, cemented his reputation as a war hero (Neave was the first British officer to break out of the camp).[[35]](#footnote-35)

During the final years of the war, Neave was recruited by British Military Intelligence to work for MI9, a subsidiary of MI6, the British Secret Intelligence Service. He helped European resistance movements and planned escape routes for Allied airmen (a role he described in another of his works, *Saturday at M19*).[[36]](#footnote-36) After the war ended in Europe 1945 he joined the British War Crimes Executive to collect evidence against prominent Nazis and served the indictments on Nazi war criminals in Nuremberg. Thereafter, during the early years of the Cold War, Neave remained close to British intelligence in the global fight against Communism. From 1949 to 1951, he was commanding officer of the Intelligence School 9 Territorial Army (TA). In 1953, Neave made his first breakthrough into national politics following his election as Conservative Party MP for Abington, a seat he retained until his death in March 1979.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Primarily, Thatcher’s decision to appoint Neave as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland in her new shadow cabinet, in February 1975, was a reward for services rendered. His wartime experience and close links to the intelligence world had proved useful in acting as Thatcher’s campaign manager during her successful bid to become the leader of the Conservative Party, when he was known for having operated best ‘behind closed doors’.[[38]](#footnote-38) Initially, Thatcher had considered not appointing Neave to her new shadow cabinet because many of his fellow parliamentarians within the Conservative Party did not like him.[[39]](#footnote-39) Apparently, she toyed with the idea of retaining Neave to run her private office until ‘such a time as she could give him a peerage’.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Despite accusations to the contrary, Thatcher felt comfortable placing responsibility for the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy in the hands of Neave.[[41]](#footnote-41) She later recalled that he ‘was extraordinarily painstaking and diligent’.[[42]](#footnote-42) In relation to Neave’s political views, Thatcher always felt it ‘difficult to pin down Airey’s politics’. ‘I did not consider him ideologically a man of the right. He probably did not look at the world in these terms’, she recalled in her memoirs.[[43]](#footnote-43) On Neave’s political ideas, Thatcher was indeed correct. Neave was not a right-wing member of the Conservative Party. Rather, in the words of John Campbell, Neave was ‘a traditional One Nation Conservative’.[[44]](#footnote-44)

While Thatcher may have found it difficult to pin down Neave’s political philosophy, she had no such difficulty when assessing his attitude to Northern Ireland. Neave’s ‘intelligence contacts, proven physical courage and shrewdness’, she remembered, amply qualified him for ‘this testing and largely thankless task’, as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland.[[45]](#footnote-45) Thatcher’s choice of words is important. Her prioritising of Neave’s intelligence and military capabilities ahead of his political qualifications demonstrated, first and foremost, how she viewed him as an intelligence operative (during the 1970s Neave allegedly remained in close contact with the British Secret Intelligence Services[[46]](#footnote-46) and was also a founding member, in 1975, of The National Association for Freedom).[[47]](#footnote-47)

As is discussed below, however, Thatcher was incorrect in her assumption that Neave was solely preoccupied with security related issues. On the contrary, although his number one objective was to defeat Republican paramilitaries, Neave immersed himself in the nitty-gritty of policy development in relation to Northern Ireland’s constitutional future.

For an observer looking in it was an unusual, arguably strange, post for Neave to covet. In Conservative Party circles, Northern Ireland was regarded as a ‘graveyard for political ambition’.[[48]](#footnote-48) Although his grandmother was born in Ireland, over the preceding years Neave had shown no major interest in Northern Ireland.[[49]](#footnote-49) Revealingly, on his appointment as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, he admitted that ‘he had no experience of any previous decisions’ related to Northern Ireland.[[50]](#footnote-50) Under Heath’s leadership of the Conservative Party, 1965-1975, he had played no role in devising the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy. Indeed, he was not a member of the CPPNIC during the early to mid-1970s.[[51]](#footnote-51) In fact, prior to his appointment as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Neave had never raised the subject of Northern Ireland in the House of Commons.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Thatcher, likewise, had shown little, if any, interest in Northern Ireland prior to her appointment as leader of the Conservative Party in 1975. In fact, the subject never registered on her political radar prior to 1975. This is even more interesting considering that Northern Ireland had been a major preoccupation for the Heath government from 1970 to 1974. Yet, as secretary for education, Thatcher ‘played little or no role’ in the formulation of the government’s Northern Ireland policy.[[53]](#footnote-53) Indeed, she had no say in Heath’s decision to shut down the Northern Ireland parliament and introduce direct rule in 1972. Nor was she involved in the abortive Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, which had been an attempt to establish a power-sharing devolved government in Northern Ireland.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise to learn that it was by no means immediately apparent what course Neave would follow in his new portfolio. He admitted as much during his maiden speech, as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, in the House of Commons on 12 March 1975: ‘… there may be no textbook solutions to the problem in Northern Ireland’, he said.[[54]](#footnote-54) Indeed, while he was delighted to secure a post in Thatcher’s shadow cabinet, he was somewhat overwhelmed by his promotion. ‘This is my biggest job ... [and] toughest job I’ve ever had in my life’, he was reported as saying.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Despite any lingering apprehensions, on 20 February 1975, Neave articulated the rudimentary aspects of his Northern Ireland policy to a meeting of the CPPNIC. This was Neave’s first appearance at a meeting of the CPPNIC since his appointment as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland. He explained that he ‘wished to make it clear that he was not taking on the post as a spokesman for the British Armed Forces. He was primarily a democratic politician’, he said. ‘At the moment the main objective would be to help the [Provisional Irish Republican Army [PIRA]] ceasefire to continue’, he noted, but that he would ‘speak out on any issues if it became necessary’.[[56]](#footnote-56)

**Security and politics were ‘inextricably intertwined’: an overview of Neave’s Northern Ireland policy, 1975 to 1979**

Based on extensive analysis of the relevant archival files, the basis of Neave’s Northern Ireland policy during his period as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland from February 1975 to March 1979 can be explained under two sub-headings: (I) *Security* and (II) *Political*. In Neave’s mind, as he outlined in October 1975, when it came to the labyrinth affairs of Northern Ireland, security and politics were, as he phrased it, ‘inextricably intertwined and one cannot be isolated from the other’.[[57]](#footnote-57)

(I) *Security*

The basis of Neave’s stance on security *vis-à-vis* Northern Ireland can be understood along four key principles:

1. the Conservative Party was opposed to British Army withdrawal from Northern Ireland, which Neave described as being ‘a suicidal policy, probably leading to something like civil war’;[[58]](#footnote-58)
2. a Conservative government would never make concessions, negotiate nor surrender to Republican terrorists;[[59]](#footnote-59)
3. the Conservative Party categorically refused to restore ‘political status’ to paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland;[[60]](#footnote-60) and lastly,
4. a Conservative government would consider re-introducing the death penalty (capital punishment) for ‘terrorist killings’.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Security related issues were a constant preoccupation, arguably obsession, of Neave during his period as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland. Central to his security policy, aligning himself closely with Thatcher, was the defeat of Republican terrorism in all its guises. As Neave later acknowledged, his ‘first priority’ was the ‘defeat of the fairly small, but utterly ruthless, groups of terrorists, who are mainly responsible for the present troubles’.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Throughout his period as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland Neave routinely promised that a Conservative government would ‘take all possible steps to ensure the defeat of terrorism’.[[63]](#footnote-63) This stance was not altogether surprising given Neave’s own background, particularly given his close ties with the British military intelligence world. As a veteran of the Second World War and someone who had an intimate knowledge of the murky world of espionage (including close links with British Army generals, senior policeman and spooks), he believed that for a political deadlock to be found in Northern Ireland, Republican terrorists needed to be decisively defeated.

Despite Neave’s commitment to follow a bipartisan approach on Northern Ireland tensions soon surfaced between himself and the Labour government regarding security related issues. The catalyst was a decision, in February 1975, by Merlyn Rees, secretary of state for Northern Ireland to release over 270 political prisoners or “hard-core terrorists”, as Neave described them (this policy on behalf of the Labour government was in response to a decision by the PIRA to renew its ceasefire on 10 February).[[64]](#footnote-64) In line with his continued support for internment in Northern Ireland (which lasted until 1975), Neave argued that the release of detainees in the Province was a ‘very dangerous gamble’.[[65]](#footnote-65) Addressing the House of Commons, on 12 May 1975, he attacked Rees’s decision, exclaiming that it had caused ‘the greatest apprehension’ amongst Conservative Party MPs.[[66]](#footnote-66)

It should come as little surprise, therefore, to learn of Rees’s antipathy for Neave. In fact, feelings of personal animosity between both men were mutual. Rees always found Neave ‘difficult to deal with’,[[67]](#footnote-67) and was reportedly ‘greatly annoyed’ by the shadow secretary of state’s recent comments in relation to the Labour government’s decision to release political prisoners.[[68]](#footnote-68) The secretary of state for Northern Ireland recalled that since Neave’s appointment to the shadow cabinet the Conservative Party had become ‘increasingly sceptical and was sometimes outright hostile to our [Northern Ireland] policies’.[[69]](#footnote-69)

More generally, Neave was at ‘loggerheads’ with Rees regarding the Labour government’s Northern Ireland security policy.[[70]](#footnote-70) Rees’s answers on security, Neave privately noted in May 1975, were ‘very unconvincing’.[[71]](#footnote-71) Two years later Neave’s attitude had not changed. By this period, he regularly called on the Labour government to take up an ‘offensive’ strategy against Republican paramilitaries. ‘In my view the whole concept of a long, defensive, “war of attrition” is completely wrong’, he was recorded as saying in April 1977.[[72]](#footnote-72)

Rather than release Republican prisoners, Neave maintained that the Labour administration should focus its resources on arresting the 100 or so ‘most dangerous merchants of terror, the “Bonzen” of the assassination squads’.[[73]](#footnote-73) He argued strongly against negotiating any ‘ceasefire or amnesty’ with Republican paramilitaries,[[74]](#footnote-74) and that it was ‘fundamentally wrong’ to hold talks with Provisional Sinn Féin.[[75]](#footnote-75) He regularly called on the British government to declare Sinn Féin ‘illegal and charge its members, if they are thought to have aided and abetted terrorism, while belonging to a proscribed organisation’.[[76]](#footnote-76)

Neave went as far as to advocate that the British Special Air Forces (SAS) should be ‘expanded into a Brigade’ and sent to Northern Ireland, that special emergency legislation be enacted ‘to plug gaps in the law’ and the possibility of establishing ‘special courts’ with ‘lesser standards of evidence and in which incitement to terrorism could be considered’.[[77]](#footnote-77) As he privately informed Roy Mason in April 1977, ‘It was now the time to “finish off” the terrorists before the situation dragged on any further’ (Mason replaced Rees as secretary of state for Northern Ireland on 10 September 1976).[[78]](#footnote-78)

(II) *Political*

On the politically sensitive subject of Northern Ireland’s constitutional future, Neave never wavered in his support of six key principles:

1. that Northern Ireland must remain an integral part of the United Kingdom;[[79]](#footnote-79)
2. the Conservative Party sought ‘peace and reconciliation’ in Northern Ireland’;[[80]](#footnote-80)
3. no major constitutional changes or reforms should be implemented without the agreement of the main political parties in Northern Ireland;[[81]](#footnote-81)
4. direct rule should not last indefinitely;[[82]](#footnote-82)
5. the Conservative Party refused to negotiate with Provisional Sinn Féin and that the movement should be banned;[[83]](#footnote-83) and lastly,
6. the Irish government had no right to interfere in the affairs of Northern Ireland.[[84]](#footnote-84)

Despite Neave’s commitment to the above six political principles, confusion remains when assessing his stance on the Conservative Party’s medium to long-term political strategy for Northern Ireland, specifically in relation to devolution. As is discussed below, although he initially favoured the Labour government’s calls for the restoration of a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland, in the hope of ending direct rule, by the autumn of 1977, he *abandoned* support for this political initiative, based on the argument that it was no longer practicable in the medium-term.

Instead, as an interim measure, the crux of Neave’s Northern Ireland policy, from a political standpoint, focused on reform of local government. This approach was initially packaged in the form of Neave’s so-called ‘Council of State’ proposal. By February 1977, however, Neave abandoned this latest political initiative. In its place, by early 1978, he instead agreed to support the Labour government’s plans to reform local government in Northern Ireland, with the establishment of one or more Regional Councils.

**Majority-rule or power-sharing? Neave and the Northern Ireland devolution debate**

It did not take long into Thatcher’s leadership for differences of opinion to emerge amongst members of her shadow cabinet in relation to Northern Ireland: with Neave and Willie Whitelaw, deputy-leader of the Conservative Party and Party MP for Penrith and The Border, 1955-1983, being the main antagonists. At the crux of the dispute was Neave’s alleged abandonment of a central plank of the Conservative Party’s traditional policy on Northern Ireland, namely support for the restoration of a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland.

More than anyone else in Thatcher’s shadow cabinet Whitelaw understood the Northern Ireland problem. Following the introduction of direct rule in Northern Ireland in 1972, Ted Heath had appointed him as the first secretary of state for Northern Ireland; a post he retained until he was called back to London by Heath in the winter of 1973 to shore up support for a crumbling government. During his time in Northern Ireland Whitelaw familiarised himself with not only the major political parties on either side of the political and religious divide, but also negotiated with the PIRA chief of staff Seán MacStiofáin in July 1972.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Most significantly, prior to his recall to London, Whitelaw helped lay the necessary groundwork for the Sunningdale Agreement of 3 December 1973, which facilitated the establishment of a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland, on 1 January of the following year. Under the terms of the Sunningdale Agreement the Heath government, with the support of then leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)[[86]](#footnote-86) Brian Faulkner, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) leadership and the Alliance Party, agreed to set-up the controversial ‘Council of Ireland’, which promoted cross-border economic and security co-operation between Belfast and Dublin.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Although Whitelaw was greatly perturbed by the collapse of the Northern Ireland executive in May 1974, as a result of the Ulster Workers’ Council strike, his mental model for securing a workable political solution to the Northern Ireland Troubles always remained wedded to power-sharing. Indeed, on his passing in 1999, one of many obituaries recorded with sadness, that the failure to find a settlement in Northern Ireland was ‘the greatest disappointment of his public life’.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Within weeks of Thatcher’s appointment as leader of the opposition, rumours began to the emergence in the media regarding Neave’s apparent desire to abandon the Conservative Party’s support for a return of power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland. An article in the *Irish Times*, dated 25 February 1975, reported that while Whitelaw remained firmly committed to a power-sharing model, which included a provision for a Council of Ireland, Thatcher, under Neave’s influence, was considering a return to majority-rule.[[89]](#footnote-89) Although on several occasions Neave placed on the record that the Conservative Party supported the Labour government’s attempts to reinstate a power-sharing executive,[[90]](#footnote-90) because as he phrased it, he did not wish to make ‘a dog fight’ out of the issue,[[91]](#footnote-91) speculation remained that this approach might soon disintegrate.

Neave’s intervention, however, did little to quash Whitelaw’s anxieties. The deputy Conservative Party leader, together with several Conservative Party MPs (including Ted Heath) were reportedly ‘furious’ with Neave and his co-collaborators in their assertions that power-sharing in Northern Ireland was “no longer possible”.[[92]](#footnote-92) In May 1975, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that Whitelaw had written to Thatcher warning her that several senior Conservative Party MPs ‘would not support any attempt to re-establish Unionist one-party rule at Stormont’, rather they remained committed to the power-sharing model.[[93]](#footnote-93) Whitelaw’s protests were understood to be so strong that there was speculation that he might resign from the shadow cabinet frontbench.[[94]](#footnote-94)

By January of the following year and despite Whitelaw’s protests, confusion remained regarding the Conservative Party’s official policy on devolution in Northern Ireland. By now, when it came to the politically sensitive subject, Neave had learned a valuable lesson in relation to nomenclature. Addressing a meeting of the Leader’s Consultative Committee (shadow cabinet), on 6 January 1976, he deliberately refused to use the term ‘power-sharing’. Moreover, in a demonstration of his unwillingness to permit the Irish government any institutionalised involvement in the affairs of Northern Ireland, Neave deliberately refrained from making any reference to Whitelaw’s previous public support for the creation of a Council of Ireland. Rather he informed Thatcher and her shadow cabinet that the Conservative Party should express support for the need to find ‘a system enjoying the widespread consent of both sections’ of the Northern Ireland community. ‘This is the only system’, he advised, ‘which offers a chance of long-term stability’.[[95]](#footnote-95)

In fact, Neave now found himself stuck in a difficult situation. His difficulties in relation to the devolution debate must be understood within the context of the ongoing Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention (NICC) talks. As a result of the Ulster Workers’ Council strike and the fall of the Northern Ireland executive in 1974 the Labour government had toyed with the idea of establishing an elected convention whereby, in the words of Merlyn Rees, local politicians ‘would come together to discuss the future of the province’.[[96]](#footnote-96) Although the NICC was not a parliament and had no legislative powers, it was an attempt to deal with constitutional issues in relation to the status of Northern Ireland, which sought to “win support and respect throughout all parts of the community”.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Following the publication of a White Paper on Northern Ireland in July 1974 and several months of discussions, in February 1975, the British government made a commitment to hold elections to the NICC (although no specific date was provided). In March of that year, under the chairmanship of Lord Chief Justice Robert Lowry, an agreement was reached that elections would be held the following May in each of Northern Ireland’s twelve Westminster constituencies, to establish a seventy-eight consultative body, with a mandate to consider Northern Ireland’s constitutional status.

Despite opposition to the NICC within Ulster Unionist circles, they agreed to contest the elections under the umbrella of the United Ulster Unionist Coalition (UUUC).[[98]](#footnote-98) The UUUC, however, stood on its general election manifesto, which demanded a return of devolved government in Northern Ireland based on majority-rule. The constitutional nationalist party, the SDLP, for its part, fought the election campaign with a commitment to restore devolved government in Northern Ireland, based on a power-sharing executive and an “internationalised Irish dimension”.[[99]](#footnote-99) When the votes were counted, the UUUC secured forty-seven seats. The SDLP was the biggest winner on the Nationalist side securing seventeen seats, while the Alliance Party won eight. The Convention first convened on 8 May 1975, finally publishing its report on 20 November of that year.

At the outset of the NICC talks, Lord Chief Justice Lowry made it clear that his brief was to assist the Northern Ireland political parties to agree “the provision for the government of Northern Ireland that is likely to command the most widespread acceptance throughout the community”.[[100]](#footnote-100) The signs, however, were ominous. From the beginning, the UUUC and the SDLP were at loggerheads with one another. On the one hand, UUUC members overwhelmingly opposed a return to power-sharing, instead favouring the reinstitution of devolved government to Northern Ireland, in the form of majority-rule. On the other hand, the SDLP demanded the re-instatement of a power-sharing executive, together with advocating an ‘institutional link between Northern Ireland and the Republic [of Ireland], in relation to security and other fields’.[[101]](#footnote-101)

The UUUC rejected, out of hand, the above two policies advocated by the SDLP. A stalemate thus ensued. Although Rees attempted to reconvene the NICC in February 1976, the UUUC and SDLP could not reach agreement. Therefore, left with little choice, on 4 March of that year, Rees announced the dissolution of the NICC and that Northern Ireland remained under direct rule.

The failure of the NICC talks convinced Neave that the prospects of a devolved administration in Northern Ireland were virtually impossible in the present circumstances. He was acutely aware that given the widespread opposition to the restoration of a power-sharing executive among Ulster Unionists, devolution for the time being, in his own words, ‘was not practical politics’.[[102]](#footnote-102) In fact, by the autumn of 1977, the available records reveal that Neave abandoned his support for power-sharing, on the basis that this approach was impractical in the medium-term. ‘You know my view that a power-sharing Government at Stormont is impossible with eight political parties in conflict and could not be imposed anyway’, he informed Thatcher in September 1977.[[103]](#footnote-103)

Therefore, because of the ongoing failure of the mainstream political parties to agree on a workable long-term solution to the constitutional future of Northern Ireland, based on devolved government, Neave’s attention instead focused on improvements in local government, in the form of his so-called, ‘Council of State’. In March and again in July 1976, addressing the House of Commons, Neave publicly spoke out in favour of establishing a Council of State, as his preferred medium-term policy.[[104]](#footnote-104) Such a Council, a source close to Neave reported, would be a ‘strictly interim affair’, unconnected with any long-term moves towards devolution for Northern Ireland.[[105]](#footnote-105) As Neave privately conceded in October 1976, his support for a Council of State for Northern Ireland was ‘as a stepping stone to a devolutionary system’.[[106]](#footnote-106)

**An ‘interim affair’: Neave and the Council of State proposal**

In Neave’s thinking his Council of State proposal or ‘advisory body’, as he phrased it, would ‘ameliorate the bureaucracy of direct rule’[[107]](#footnote-107) and consist of forty to fifty members, appointed rather than elected from nominations submitted from various interest groups in Northern Ireland. Faced with the political reality that devolution remained a long-term goal, rather than a medium-term policy, Neave argued that his plans for a Council of State should have responsibility for scrutinising draft legislation, drafting regional plans, considering reports from public bodies, (e.g. political parties, District Councils, Area Boards, Trade Unions, employers’ organisations and the Universities), and ‘questioning Ministers and senior officials’.[[108]](#footnote-108)

Initially, Neave’s proposal to establish a Council of State was not universally welcomed by senior figures within the Conservative Party. In July 1976, a policy paper on Northern Ireland produced on behalf of the so-called ‘fact-finding’ sub-committee of the CPPNIC (of which Neave chaired),[[109]](#footnote-109) working in conjunction with the Conservative Research Department (CRD), had advised against incorporating the proposal to establish a Council of State, as official Conservative Party policy on Northern Ireland.[[110]](#footnote-110) Moreover, there was no mention of this proposal, in the sub-section on ‘Northern Ireland’, within the Conservative Party’s official policy booklet, *The right approach: a statement of Conservative aims*, which was published in October 1976 (this policy booklet outlined the Conservative Party’s ‘aims today’, including chapters on ‘Political choice’ and ‘The Right economic strategy’).[[111]](#footnote-111)

By December of that year, however, following protracted behind the scenes lobbying and an intense round of media kite-flying exercises, Neave managed to secure the support of Thatcher and her shadow cabinet colleagues for his Council of State proposal. At a meeting of the CPPNIC, on 21 December 1976, members agreed that following some revisions the recommendations on behalf of the Conservative Party study group on a Council of State for Northern Ireland should be sent to the shadow cabinet for agreement and published as a discussion document.[[112]](#footnote-112) Specifically, CPPNIC members advocated that the so-called ‘Queen’s Representative in Northern Ireland’ should not chair the Council of State, but ‘the Queen’s Representative’s deputy act instead’, and less than half its membership should consist of politicians’.[[113]](#footnote-113)

Almost immediately, however, the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) privately expressed its reservations regarding Neave’s proposal. The relevant files held by TNA contain numerous letters and memoranda produced on behalf of senior NIO mandarins outlining their collective opposition to Neave’s proposal. ‘If any bandwagon for an advisory body were to start rolling’, an NIO official wrote, ‘with the OUP and SDLP, and the Conservatives, on board, we could find it difficult to halt it’.[[114]](#footnote-114) Instead, the NIO advised Mason to use his influence to convince Neave and ‘certain Unionists’ to abandon the idea of a ‘Council of State’ altogether and instead agree to leader of the UUP in the House of Commons, Jim Molyneaux’s idea of one or more Regional Councils.[[115]](#footnote-115)

Neave was infuriated by the NIO’s orchestrated campaign to undermine his Council of State proposal. Thereafter, relations between the shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland and the NIO remained tetchy and occasionally antagonistic. He believed that NIO Civil Servants were deliberately undermining his efforts to make political progress in the hope of introducing local government reform in Northern Ireland, as a stepping-stone towards devolution. Addressing a meeting of the CPPNIC in October 1976, for instance, he exclaimed that ‘Direct Rule was having a stultifying effect on local politics and the Province was effectively [being] ruled by a semi-colonial style civil service’.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Prominent Ulster Unionists, likewise, ridiculed Neave’s Council of State proposal. Harry West, leader of the UUP[[117]](#footnote-117) and a spokesperson for the Vanguard Unionists, separately publicly went on record to say that such a body would be a “waste of time”.[[118]](#footnote-118) The shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland’s proposal also received an unsympathetic response from the SDLP. R. Ramsay (who worked in the office of the secretary of state for Northern Ireland) reported that the SDLP were ‘likely to reject’ this latest political initiative.[[119]](#footnote-119)

By the early months of 1977, albeit reluctantly, Neave had arrived at the same judgement as Ramsay. At a meeting of the CPPNIC, on 15 February 1977, Neave explained that because no obvious basis for agreement could be found amongst the political parties of Northern Ireland, in support of the Council of State proposal, he had decided to abandon this project.[[120]](#footnote-120) Later that year, Neave privately conceded to Mason that the Conservative Party had now ‘gone off Advisory Councils or Councils of State’ and were ‘re-thinking its policies about devolution to Northern Ireland and that they now favoured starting the devolutionary process at the local government end’, by establishing one or more Regional Councils.[[121]](#footnote-121)

**‘Compromise integration’: Neave and the Regional Council debate**

In July 1977, Mason held individual talks with the leaders of the Northern Ireland political parties, including the UUP and SDLP, regarding his plans to establish one or more Regional Councils in Northern Ireland, as an ‘interim step towards full legislative devolution’.[[122]](#footnote-122) The proposal to reinstate the upper tier of local government, which was removed in October 1973, in the form of locally elected Regional Council or Councils, was planned to fill the gap between the twenty-six District Councils in Northern Ireland and the Parliament at Westminster.

It was envisaged that such a Regional Council or Councils would be responsible for overseeing a large range of ‘Macrory’ functions, namely services that were of ‘immediate concern to local people’. Possible ‘Macrory’ functions mentioned included: town and county planning, roads, streets, car parks, water, sewerage, education, libraries, housing and rating. Importantly, there was no suggestion that this new proposal would have ‘any legislative powers whatever. It would simply be a super-local authority’.[[123]](#footnote-123)

This proposal, originally labelled the “Molyneaux plan”, amounted to a development of the ideas put forward during the second reading debate on the Scotland and Wales Bill in December 1976, by James Molyneaux.[[124]](#footnote-124) Molyneaux argued that his scheme was effectively a form of administrative devolution, whereby regional powers currently in the hands of ministers and civil servants in the Government of Northern Ireland would be transferred to one or more Regional Councils in Northern Ireland. Based on Molyneaux’s plans, if only one Regional Council was established, it would have approximately ninety members, ‘one elected for each of the 90 district electoral areas’. ‘If proportional representation was inevitable, they might be elected district by district, one for each of the electoral areas in each district’.[[125]](#footnote-125)

By supporting a system of administrative devolution, in the form of one or more Regional Councils, Neave was ensuring that the Conservative Party would make direct rule ‘more responsive to local opinion’.[[126]](#footnote-126) Moreover, in placing his support behind this political initiative Neave was laying the ground for his eventual preferred long-term policy to restore a devolved government in Northern Ireland. Significantly, neither privately nor publicly, did Neave provide a commitment that the establishment of one or more Regional Councils automatically necessitated the setting up of a devolved government in Northern Ireland, based on majority-rule.[[127]](#footnote-127)

At a meeting of the CPPNIC, on 1 March 1977, Neave recommended that the establishment of one or more Regional Councils form the basis of the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy, from a political perspective.[[128]](#footnote-128) The shadow secretary of state’s proposal did not win universal approval from his party colleagues.[[129]](#footnote-129) Undeterred, however, over the next several months Neave routinely propagated the virtues of this proposal.[[130]](#footnote-130) His endeavours eventually bore fruit. On 7 April 1978, Neave selected a luncheon of the UUC in Belfast, to formally place on the public record the Conservative Party’s backing for the establishment of one or more Regional Councils in Northern Ireland. In this speech, which was endorsed by Thatcher,[[131]](#footnote-131) the shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland said that while the Conservative Party’s ‘ultimate aim has long been a system of devolved Government’, it was ‘better in the short term to concentrate’ on local government reform, in the form of ‘a Regional Council or Councils with substantial local powers’.[[132]](#footnote-132)

Unsurprisingly, the SDLP leadership ridiculed Neave’s decision to back this Regional Council model. In supporting this political scheme, the shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland was accused of deliberately seeking to abandon the Conservative Party’s traditional support for the reinstatement of a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland and indeed, in doing so, to ensure that the Irish government would be given no institutionalised role in the affairs of Northern Ireland, via the establishment of a Council of Ireland.

During a meeting with an SDLP delegation, John Biggs-Davison, Neave’s deputy shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland and Conservative MP for Epping Forest, 1974-1988, was told in no uncertain terms that the party had ‘… no interest in talking about ideas for a Regional Council’.[[133]](#footnote-133) In fact, Neave’s UUC speech in Belfast infuriated the SDLP hierarchy. SDLP deputy leader John Hume immediately called for Thatcher to sack Neave as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland.[[134]](#footnote-134)

Neave, however, was unperturbed. He refused any suggestions that he should abandon his support for the establishment of one or more Regional Councils in Northern Ireland. As he informed a meeting of the CPPNIC, in early November 1978, in opposing this latest proposal in favour of full devolution, the SDLP was ‘going into the green corner very fast’.[[135]](#footnote-135)

There was a mixed reaction within the UUP to the Conservative Party’s willingness to support the Labour government’s plans to establish one or more Regional Councils in Northern Ireland. UUP leader Harry West, whom Neave believed to be a Unionist hardliner, was reluctant to support this proposal because it fell far short of his preferred political objective of majority-rule.[[136]](#footnote-136) West reportedly harboured the ‘suspicion’ that this proposal was ‘either a substitute for devolution, or merely the first stage of an operation which will lead (sooner rather than later) to another power-sharing executive and assembly’.[[137]](#footnote-137) Writing to his party colleague, on 21 July 1977, West warned Molyneaux that support for this policy must be ended immediately.[[138]](#footnote-138)

Molyneaux ignored his leader’s protests. Soon after, he publicly welcomed the shadow cabinet’s support for this latest political initiative.[[139]](#footnote-139) However, Molyneaux sought assurances from Neave that in supporting the restoration of an upper tier of local government the Conservative Party had not abandoned its commitment to devolution.[[140]](#footnote-140) In a letter to Thatcher, dated 4 May 1978, Molyneaux wrote that he wished to personally record that he was ‘naturally very glad’ to learn of the Conservative Party’s support for the establishment of one or more Regional Councils in Northern Ireland.[[141]](#footnote-141)

Significantly, by supporting the creation of one or more Regional Councils Neave was providing a ‘compromise’ between those within the Conservative Party and the UUUC who favoured a full integrationist policy against those who supported devolution. This form of ‘compromise integration’ to quote Graham Walker,[[142]](#footnote-142) ‘promised to bring Northern Ireland more into line with the wider British practice and thus gave cheer to integrationists, while it was also capable of being interpreted as a step towards the restoration of devolved government’.[[143]](#footnote-143) Importantly, however, Neave went on record, as noted above, that his Regional Council proposal should not be regarded as a substitute for eventual devolved government in Northern Ireland. In this way, Neave did not support ‘pure intergrationism’.[[144]](#footnote-144)

What was the integrationist approach? Effectively, as Jim Prior, Thatcher’s shadow employment secretary, later explained, integration would entail ‘integrating Northern Ireland fully within the United Kingdom, running it as though it were no different from, say, Norfolk or Yorkshire’.[[145]](#footnote-145) Championed by Enoch Powell, Ulster Unionist MP for South Down, 1974-1987, the integrationist lobby argued that Northern Ireland’s complete integration into the rest of the United Kingdom would witness the “burial of the notion of power-sharing”.[[146]](#footnote-146) This would mean that any idea of restoring devolved administration in Northern Ireland ‘would be abandoned and more power would be returned to the local councils’.[[147]](#footnote-147)

The integrationist, which included among its ranks Ian Gow, Thatcher’s parliamentary private secretary and Conservative Party MP for Eastbourne, 1974-1990,[[148]](#footnote-148) argued that the safest way to end the conflict in Northern Ireland was for the British government to demonstrate categorically its firm commitment to Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom.

Although some writers, such as Brendan O’Leary, maintain that Neave ‘advocated the full administrative integration of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom’, the available archival records fail to support this argument.[[149]](#footnote-149) In fact, despite Neave coming under pressure from some senior figures within the Conservative Party to support integration he was not convinced of the long-term viability of this policy. Addressing a meeting of the Leader’s Consultative Committee, on 6 January 1976, at which Thatcher and most of her shadow cabinet were present, Neave explained his reservations regarding full integration.[[150]](#footnote-150) Reading from a prepared policy memorandum on Northern Ireland, under the sub-heading, ‘Long-Term options’, Neave noted that Northern Ireland’s full integration into the rest of the United Kingdom ‘… would increase the burden at Westminster at a time when devolution for Scotland and Wales is contemplated. It would worsen relations with the [Northern Ireland] minority and the [Irish] Republic’.[[151]](#footnote-151)

Thereafter, with Northern Ireland’s full integration into the rest of the United Kingdom ruled out, the establishment of one or more Regional Councils constituted official Conservative Party policy on Northern Ireland, until Thatcher’s election as British prime minister in May 1979.[[152]](#footnote-152) At a meeting of the CPPNIC, on 23 January 1979, Neave said that ‘he did not intend to advise the Shadow Cabinet to make any substantial changes in Conservative policy before the [British general] election. The concept of a Regional Council would therefore continue to be emphasised’[[153]](#footnote-153) (this is all the more significant given that by this period Roy Mason had now decided to dump this policy).[[154]](#footnote-154)

Thereafter, this proposal formed the basis of the 1979 Conservative Party general election manifesto’s sub-section on Northern Ireland, which committed a Conservative-led government “to establish one or more Regional Councils with a wide range of powers over local services”.[[155]](#footnote-155) It was widely understood that if the Conservative Party were victorious at the polls Thatcher would appoint Neave to her cabinet, as secretary of state for Northern Ireland.

Neave, however, was callously robbed of a place in Thatcher’s first cabinet. On 30 March 1979, a little over a month before the scheduled British general election, of 3 May, the shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland was murdered by an INLA bomb. This terrorist attack on behalf of the INLA, to quote Richard English, was a ‘tactical-operational success’.[[156]](#footnote-156) At 2.58 p.m., an enormous explosion engulfed New Palace Yard, northwest of the Palace of Westminster. Soon after, as Paul Routledge wrote, smoke was seen billowing from the smouldering wreckage of a Vauxhall car on the ramp leading up from the underground carpark. Blood was running from the car and down the ramp. In the car lay sixty-three-year-old Neave. He was quickly taken to Westminster Hospital where he underwent emergency surgery. It was too late. Neave died on the operating table.[[157]](#footnote-157)

Thatcher received news of Neave’s murder while preparing for a party political general election broadcast at BBC headquarters. “Please God, don’t let it be Airey”, was her response.[[158]](#footnote-158) When it was confirmed that Neave was indeed the victim Thatcher was described as ‘numb with shock’.[[159]](#footnote-159) Later that evening, alone in her room, Thatcher composed a short, moving tribute to her friend and shadow cabinet colleague. In a handwritten note, she described Neave as ‘One of freedom’s warriors. Courageous, staunch and true. He lived for his beliefs and now he has died for them’.[[160]](#footnote-160)

Significantly, and despite arguments to the contrary,[[161]](#footnote-161) on Neave’s death, the Conservative Party *did* have an agreed strategy on Northern Ireland. In Neave’s absence, Thatcher turned to the CRD, chiefly Christopher Patten, Adam Ridley and Alistair Cooke, and her shadow cabinet colleagues, Willie Whitelaw and Francis Pym, for advice on Northern Ireland policy. A memorandum produced on behalf of the CRD, dated 2 April 1979, marked Manifesto Briefing, Northern Ireland, reaffirmed, if elected, a Conservative government’s commitment to adhere to Neave’s previous stance on Northern Ireland. Apart from a pledge to uphold the Union and to continue ‘the firm security policy followed by the present Secretary of State, Roy Mason’, a Conservative government promised to support the establishment of one or more Regional Councils in Northern Ireland. It continued:

We believe that a council or councils could provide effective democratic control over purely regional services in Northern Ireland … it is virtually certain that there would be only one council, which could make use of the Parliament Buildings at Stormont where the necessary civil servants are already working.[[162]](#footnote-162)

In a handwritten letter, dated 10 April 1979, Thatcher reassured Callaghan that despite the ‘tragic events that have happened’, the Conservative Party had not changed it’s ‘stance on Northern Ireland matters in any way. They remain on the same bi-partisan basis’. ‘Any step you take to step up security will continue to have our full and vocal support’, she added. She also reaffirmed that the Conservative Party remained committed to Neave’s ‘Irish section in the manifesto’, which he had written some 3 to 4 hours before he was assassinated’. ‘Naturally’, she wrote, ‘we would not wish to change it. The sentiments and the words he used are along familiar lines and contain nothing new. We are both moving towards the restoration of local government’, she concluded.[[163]](#footnote-163)

Thatcher’s commitment to adhere to a ‘bi-partisan’ policy with the Labour government on Northern Ireland revealed her muddled thinking on this subject. She failed to realise that Neave’s support for the establishment of the one or more Regional Councils, as the basis of the Conservative Party’s political strategy on Northern Ireland, no longer had the support of the Labour government. Indeed, although the two parties continued to follow a broadly similar policy on Northern Ireland security related matters, the political fortunes of Northern Ireland was an entirely different matter. Significantly, the Labour Party’s 1979 general election manifesto did not refer to the Regional Council model. Rather, in the face of the impasse amongst the Northern Ireland political parties to agree on the long-term constitutional strategy, the manifesto stipulated that ‘Direct Rule remains the only viable alternative’.[[164]](#footnote-164)

The following day, 11 April, the Conservative Party published its official British general election manifesto. Its contents, to quote Paul Arthur, ‘barely touched on the problems of Northern Ireland’.[[165]](#footnote-165) Nonetheless, the two paragraphs that dealt with the subject remained loyal to Neave’s previous stance on security and political matters in relation to Northern Ireland. Firstly, if elected, a Conservative government promised to ‘maintain the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in accordance with the wish of the majority in the Province’. Secondly, in relation to security, the Conservative Party made a commitment to defeat ‘terrorism’ and to restore ‘law and order’ in Northern Ireland. Lastly, on Northern Ireland’s political future, in line with Neave’s proposal for reform of local government in Northern Ireland, the manifesto noted that, ‘In the absence of devolved government, we will seek to establish one or more elected Regional Councils with a wide range of powers over local services’.[[166]](#footnote-166)

The Conservative Party pulled off a resounding general election victory under Thatcher’s leadership. The party won 339 seats, with the Labour Party claiming 269. Thatcher’s majority was almost twice what it had been in October 1974, under Heath. The swing of the Conservative Party, 5.1 percent, demonstrated the sheer scale of the election success. This was the biggest swing either way since 1945. When the Thatchers arrived at No. 10 Downing Street, to cheers of congratulations (accompanied by some boos) a journalist asked how she felt. Apart from quoting St. Francis of Assisi and a reference to her father Alfred Roberts, she left her final words, before entering No. 10 Downing Street, to her former shadow cabinet colleague and friend. Quoting Neave, ‘whom we hoped to bring here with us’, Thatcher said, “There is now work to be done’”.[[167]](#footnote-167)

**Conclusion**

In relation to the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland policy, over the preceding five years, Neave had already done a great deal of ‘work’. By assessing hitherto closed or overlooked archival material, this article provides compelling new evidence in support of the argument that Neave thought deeply about Northern Ireland’s constitutional future and was not simply obsessed with security preoccupations. Although on taking up his new portfolio as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland in 1975 Neave confessed that there may be ‘no text book solutions to the problems in Northern Ireland’,[[168]](#footnote-168) during his time in this portfolio, he fashioned a distinctive Northern Ireland strategy. He was never afraid to defy the Labour government’s Northern Ireland policy, nor was he much perturbed about challenging some sacred cows within the Conservative Party, particularly in relation to the politically delicate subject of power-sharing.

In the security realm, Neave championed several key policies, some that continued to follow the bipartisan policy with the Labour government (including his opposition to British withdraw from Northern Ireland),[[169]](#footnote-169) and others that were unique to the Conservative Party. Notably, during his period as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Neave firmly opposed granting concessions or negotiating with Republican paramilitaries, including a refusal to restore ‘political status’ to paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland.[[170]](#footnote-170)

On the political front, Neave remained committed to finding a workable solution amongst the political parties in Northern Ireland in the hope of ending direct rule. Therefore, one can now confidentially dispel the myth that he was simply a militarist in relation to Northern Ireland. In the long-term, the evidence provided above, demonstrates that Neave favoured the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland. Although by 1977, in order to avoid controversy, he deliberately refused to say whether he supported a power-sharing model or majority-rule government.

Neave’s support for the ultimate restoration of the Northern Ireland executive also helps one to reject the claim that he favoured Northern Ireland’s full integration into the remainder of the United Kingdom. Neave was never a supporter of the hard-line integrationists. Rather, Neave lent his support to the so-called ‘compromise’ integrationists, who advocated a system of administrative devolution in Northern Ireland.

As a pragmatist, confronted by the political reality that the mainstream political parties in Northern Ireland could not agree on the terms of devolution, he instead championed reform of local government in Northern Ireland, as an interim measure. By initially championing the establishment of his so-called ‘Council of State’, subsequently followed by a proposal to create one or more Regional Councils in Northern Ireland, Neave sought to end ‘civil servants’ paradise’, which existed under direct rule.[[171]](#footnote-171) Importantly, however, his support for reform of local government in Northern Ireland, in Neave’s own words, was intended as a ‘stepping stone to a devolutionary system’.[[172]](#footnote-172)

In the long-term, what influence did Neave’s Northern Ireland policy have on the Conservative Party following his passing? In the security realm, Neave certainly left a positive influence on Thatcher’s thinking. During her period as British prime minister from 1979 to 1990, for example, Thatcher continued to follow several of Neave’s policies. These included her refusal to withdraw the British Army from Northern Ireland and to restore ‘political status’ to paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland, as demonstrated during the Republican Hunger Strikes of 1980 and 1981.

Neave’s legacy on the political front is less positive. While the Conservative-led governments under Thatcher made a commitment that Northern Ireland would remain an integral part of the United Kingdom, several of Neave’s political principles were abandoned. Soon after her appointment as British prime minister, for example, Thatcher ditched support for Neave’s Regional Council and instead came out in favour of a return to a devolved government in Northern Ireland.[[173]](#footnote-173) Moreover, overtime she agreed to permit the Irish government a ‘consultative role’ in the affairs of Northern Ireland, as enshrined under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985.[[174]](#footnote-174) Most significantly, and no doubt a decision that would have greatly perturbed Neave, during the early 1980s, Thatcher facilitated the opening up of back-channel negotiations between the Provisional Sinn Féin leadership and the British government.[[175]](#footnote-175)

1. Comments by Neave. Record of Conservative Party Parliamentary Northern Ireland Committee (CPPNIC) meeting, 17 Feb. 1976. University of Oxford (UO) Bodleian Libraries (BL) Conservative Party Archive (CPA) Conservative Research Department (CRD) 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A version of this article was first presented at a meeting of the *Bolton Historical Association*, 15 Dec. 2017. I wish to acknowledge the generous financial support provided by the John Antcliffe Archives By-Fellowship, 2016-2017, Churchill College, the University of Cambridge, during the research and writing stages of this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Neave to Mrs. Winifred A. Walker, 3 April 1978. Parliamentary Archives (PA) Airey Neave Papers (AN)/461. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one: not for turning* (London, 2014), 588. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Comments by Neave, 12 March 1975. House of Commons (HC) Debate, Vol. 888, cc. 529-530. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Paul Routledge, *Public life, secret agent: the elusive life and violent death of Airey Neave* (London, 2003), 1, 18 & 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lord Lexden, ‘35 years ago today, Airey Neave was murdered and the course of British politics changed’, 30 March 2014. Available from <http://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2014/03/lord-lexden-35-years-ago-today-airey-neave-was-murdered-and-the-course-of-british-politics-changed.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Martin Dillion, *The Dirty War* (London, 1991), 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See, for example, comments by Neave in support of power-sharing in Northern Ireland. Record of meeting of the fact-finding sub-committee of the CPPNIC, 14 Oct. 1975. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/4/3. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Record of speech by Neave, at a luncheon given by the UUC, Belfast, 7 April 1978. University of Cambridge (UC) Churchill Archives Centre (CAC) The Margaret Thatcher Papers (THCR) 2/6/1/181. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Graham Walker, *A history of the Ulster Unionist Party: protest, pragmatism and pessimism* (Manchester, 2004), 228-229. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Routledge, *Public life, secret agent*, 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders, ‘Introduction: varieties of Thatcherism’, in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds), *Making Thatcher’s Britain* (Cambridge, 2012), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Apart from the introduction chapters by Graham Goodlad and Marc Mulholland, respectively, Thatcher’s Northern Ireland policy from 1975 to 1979 has been ignored within the general scholarship on Thatcher and Thatcherism. See Goodlad, *Thatcher*, Chapter 7, ‘The troubled union – Northern Ireland: 1979-1990’, 153-168; and Marc Mulholland, ‘“Just another country”? The Irish question in the Thatcher years’, in Jackson and Saunders (eds), *Making Thatcher’s Britain*, 180-196. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The CPPNIC is sometimes alternatively referred to as the Conservative Party Backbench Northern Ireland Committee. See Northern Ireland sub-section, UO BL CPA: <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/cpa/crd/crd4.html#crd4.A.15.2>. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Goodlad, *Thatcher*, 153-168. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Mulholland, ‘“Just another country”?, 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Brendan O’Leary, ‘The Conservative stewardship of Northern Ireland, 1979-97: sound-bottomed contradictions or slow-learning?’, *Political Studies*, XVL (1997), 663-676; 664. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Routledge, *Public life, secret agent*, 1, 18 & 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume* one, 588-589 & 593-595. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See, for example, Jonathan Aitken, *Margaret Thatcher: power and personality* (London, 2013), 176-210; John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher, volume one: the grocer’s daughter* (London, 2000), 312-410; and Hugo Young, *One of us: a biography of Margaret Thatcher* (London, 1989), 100. See also Brenda Maddox, *Maggie: the first lady* (London, 2003), 109; and Kenneth Harris, *Thatcher* (London, 1988), 59-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher: the path to power* (London, 1995), 282-461; Margaret Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher: the Downing Street years* (London, 1993), 385-386; and Margaret Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher, the autobiography, 1925-2013* (London, 1995), 175-254. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See Jackson and Saunders (eds.), *Making Thatcher’s Britain*; and Dennis Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British politics: the end of consensus?* (Oxford, 1987), 201-208. See also Clive Bloom, *Thatcher’s secret war: subversion, coercion, secrecy and government, 1974-1990* (Gloucestershire, 2015), 38-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See, for example, Michael Cunningham, ‘Conservative dissidents and the Irish question: The “pro- integrationist” lobby, 1973-94’, *Irish Political Studies*, 10:1 (2007), 26-42; Paul Dixon, ‘“The usual english doublespeak”: The British political parties and the Ulster Unionists, 1974-94’, *Irish Political Studies*, 9:1 (2007), 25-40; and Jeremy Smith, ‘“Ever reliable friends’?: The Conservative Party and Ulster Unionism in the twentieth century’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 121, No. 490 (Feb., 2006), pp. 70-103. See also Jonathan Moore, *Ulster Unionism and the British Conservative Party* (London, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See, for example, Paul Arthur, *Special relationship: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland problem* (Blackstaff Press, 2000), & Michael Cunningham, *British government policy in Northern Ireland* (Manchester, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This article has utilised the follow department files held by The National Archives of the United Kingdom(TNA): the Northern Ireland files (CJ); and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office files (FCO). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Following a FOI request (1783) by this author to the Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, in Oct. 2016, fifty-two hitherto closed files in the Airey Neave Papers were opened to researchers. These files, AN/413 to AN/464, relate to Neave’s period as shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, 1975 to 1979. Email correspondence between author and Claire Batley, senior archivist, Parliamentary Archives, House of Commons, Oct. to Dec. 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This article has utilised the follow personal papers held by UC CAC: THCR; The Enoch Powell Papers (POLL); Lord (Julian) Amery Papers (AMEJ); and Lord Hailsham Papers (HLSM). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. This article has utilised the follow papers held by UO BL CPA: Leader’s Consultative Committee (LCC); and the CRD, specifically, (a) minutes of the Conservative Party Parliamentary Northern Ireland Committee (CPPNIC), (b) minutes of the ‘fact-finding’ sub-committee of the CPPNIC, and (c) the letter books of Alistair Cooke, CRD deck officer for Northern Ireland, 1977-1983. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This article has utilised the follow department files held by the National Archives of Ireland (NAI): the Department of the Taoiseach (DT); and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. This article has utilised the following personal paper(s) held by University College Dublin Archives (UCDA): The Garret FitzGerald Papers (P215). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See House of Commons debates, House of Commons Hansard archives. Available from <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/hansard/commons/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. This article has utilised several newspapers, including *The Belfast Telegraph*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The* *Guardian*, the *Irish Times* and *The Times*. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Airey Neave, *The flames of Calais* (London, 1972). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Neave was awarded the Military Cross in 1942, the Distinguished Service Order in 1945, the Territorial Decoration in the same year and the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1947. For biographical information on Airey Neave see Brian Harrison’s entry, ‘Airey Neave’, in *The oxford dictionary of national biography*. Available from [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31488](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31488). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Airey Neave, *Saturday at M19* (London, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Harrison, ‘Airey Neave’, in *The oxford dictionary of national biography*. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Harris, *Not for turning*, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See Harris, *Not for turning*, 110; and Geoffrey Howe, *Conflict of loyalty* (London, 1995), 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Graham Goodlad supports this argument. See Goodlad*, Thatcher*, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Record of speech by Thatcher at Airey Neave’s memorial service, 17 May 1979. A copy of this speech is available from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104085>. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher: the path to power*, 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher, volume one*, 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Thatcher, *The path to power*, 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Routledge, *Public life, secret agent*, 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The National Association for Freedom, founded in 1975 (renamed The Freedom Association in 1978), is a pressure group in the UK that describes itself as non-partisan, centre-right and libertarian, which has links to the Conservative Party. See also Bloom, *Thatcher’s secret war*, 39-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Routledge, *Public life, secret agent*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See Neave to Mrs. W. O’Sullivan, 22 Feb. 1978. PA Airey AN/446. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Comments by Neave. *Irish Times*, 24 Feb. 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See, for example, record of CPPNIC meetings, 1971-1975. UO BL CPA CRD 3/18/2 and UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/2. When parliament was in session, the CPPNIC usually convened on a fortnightly basis, providing senior Conservative Party MPs, Party backbenchers and invited guests, a platform to debate the party’s Northern Ireland policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Record of Neave’s contribution to House of Commons debates, June 1953 to March 1975. See <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/people/mr-airey-neave/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Goodlad, *Thatcher*, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Comments by Neave, 12 March 1975. HC Debate, Vol. 888, cc. 529-530. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Quoted in *Daily Mail*, 21 Feb. 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 20 Feb. 1975. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/2. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Comments by Neave. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 30 Oct. 1975. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/2. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See, for example, record of meeting between Neave and Mason, 23 Sept. 1976. TNA CJ 4/1351. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See, for example, Neave to M. Clarke, 11 Jan. 1979. PA AN/422. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See, for example, comments by Neave, 1 March 1976. HC Debate, Vol. 906, cc. 915. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See Neave to Mayor A. R. Braybrooke, 7 Dec. 1977. PA AN/416. Following the Birmingham PIRA bombings in Nov. 1974, in which twenty-eight people lost their lives, the Conservative Party shadow cabinet discussed the return of the death penalty. The idea was rejected, but Thatcher was known to have favoured its reintroduction. See Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 276, footnote marked ‘\*’. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See Neave to Mrs. Winifred A. Walker, 3 April 1978. PA AN/461. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. See, for example, Neave to R. B. Bew, 24 Jan. 1979. PA AN/419. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Comments by Neave, 27 June 1975. HC Debate, Vol. 894, cc. 910-911. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See *The Times*, 6 Dec. 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Comments by Neave, 12 May 1975. HC Debate, Vol. 892, cc. 644-645. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Record of conversation between Dermot Gallagher, press and information counsellor, Irish Embassy in London and Roger Carroll, 22 April 1975. UCDA P215/136. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See comments by Douglas James, deputy secretary of the Northern Ireland Office. Record of meeting between O’Sullivan and James, 12 Aug. 1975. UCDA P215/158. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Merlyn Rees, *Northern Ireland: a personal perspective* (London, 1985), 324. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. See, for example, record of meeting between Rees and O’Sullivan, Irish ambassador in London, 29 April 1975. UCDA 215/152. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 15 May 1975. UC CAC AMEJ 2/1/73, file 2 of 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Record of speech by Neave to the Conservative Club, Abington, 23 April 1977. TNA CJ 4/1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Record of speech by Neave to the Conservative Club, Abington, 23 April 1977. TNA CJ 4/1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Record of meeting between Neave, PUS and Ford, 6 Dec. 1977. TNA CJ 4/1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. See, for example, comments by Neave, 25 March 1976. HC Debate, Vol. 908, cc. 655-656. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Record of speech by Neave, at a luncheon given by the UUC, Belfast, 7 April 1978. UC CAC THCR 2/6/1/181. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Record of meeting between Neave and Mason, 29 April 1977. TNA CJ 4/1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. See record of meeting between Neave and Mason, 29 April 1977. TNA CJ 4/1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. See, for example, Neave to Mrs J. Parvin, 9 Oct. 1978. PA AN/449. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. See, for example, Neave to A. H. James, March 1979. PA AN/436. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. See comments by Neave. *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 Feb. 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. See, for example, copy of memorandum by Neave, ‘Debate on Northern Ireland: January 12th’, circa Jan. 1976. UO BL CPA LCC 1/3/9. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. See, for example, Neave to Dr D. L. Armstrong, 9 March 1978. PA AN/414. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. See, for example, Neave to Richard S. McFadden, ‘April 1978’. PA AN/442. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. See William Whitelaw, *The Whitelaw memoirs* (London, 1989), 77-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Synonyms: Official Unionist Party (OUP). The UUP was also known as the Official Unionist Party during the 1970s ‘because of the fact that it represented the remnants of the UUP which governed Northern Ireland at Stormont between 1921 to 1972’. See <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm>. Faulkner was succeeded as UUP leader by Harry West in Jan. 1974. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Under the terms of the Sunningdale Agreement it was agreed that the Council of Ireland would be comprised of seven ministers from each side, and a sixty-member consultative assembly, elected half by Dáil Éireann and half by a newly formed Northern Ireland assembly. See Edward Heath, *The autobiography: the course of my life* (London, 1998), 444. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *The Independent*, 1 July 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See, for example, *Irish Times*, 25 Feb. 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. See, for example, comments by Neave in support of power-sharing in Northern Ireland. Record of meeting of the fact-finding sub-committee of the CPPNIC, 14 Oct. 1975. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/4/3. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. See comments by Neave. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 27 Nov. 1975. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/2. See also record of Leader’s Consultative Committee 77th meeting, 1 Oct. 1975, dated 24 Sept. 1975. UC CAC Lord Hailsham Papers (HLSM) 2/42/2/48. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 May 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 May 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. See Garret FitzGerald, *All in a life: Garret FitzGerald, an autobiography* (Dublin, 1991), 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Copy of memorandum by Neave, ‘Debate on Northern Ireland: January 12th’, circa Jan. 1976. UO BL CPA LCC 1/3/9. See also record of Leader’s Consultative Committee 90th meeting, 6 Jan. 1976. UO BL CPA LCC 1/3/9. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Rees, *Northern Ireland*, 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Rees, *Northern Ireland*, 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Est. in Jan. 1974, the UUUC brought together Unionists opposed to the Sunningdale Agreement. The UUUC was comprised of the UUP, the DUP and the Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party. The UUCC contested the 1974 (Feb.) British general election, winning eleven seats (seven UUP, three VUPP and one DUP). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Rees, *Northern Ireland*, 193. See also Seán Farren, *The SDLP: the struggle for agreement in Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Quoted in Farren, *The SDLP*, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. ### See ‘Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention Report, 20 November 1975’. Available from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/convention/nicc75report.htm>.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Neave to Major C. J. E. Seymour, 6 March 1978. PA AN/455. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Neave to Thatcher, 1 Sept. 1977. UC CAC THCR 2/1/1/46. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. See, for example, comments by Neave, 5 March 1976. HC Debate, Vol. 906, c. 1719. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. *The Times*, 24 Jan. 1977. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Comments by Neave. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 19 Oct. 1976. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 19 Nov. 1976. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. See ‘Conservative Proposals for a Council of State’, D. Chesterton, 23 Feb. 1977. TNA CJ 4/2415. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. This ‘fact-finding’ sub-committee, working under the auspices of the CPPNIC, was established in May 1975, with the task, as the minutes phrased it, to ‘reassess the policy in the Ulster Situation’. See record of CPPNIC meeting, 15 May 1975. UC CAC AMEJ 2/1/73, file 2 of 3. The fact-finding sub-committee was comprised of approximately ten MPs drawn from the CPPNIC. Neave chaired the first meeting (and was elected committee chairman thereafter). See record of first meeting of the fact-finding sub-committee of the CPPNIC, 17 June 1975. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/4/3. See also *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 June 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Significantly, this policy paper on Northern Ireland was conspicuous for its reference that the fact-finding sub-committee of the CPPNIC did ‘not advocate’, at this time, ‘a further re-organisation of local government’ in Northern Ireland. See copy of policy paper on Northern Ireland by the CRD, signed ‘JFH/SO’B’, 28 July 1976. UO BL CPA LCC 1/3/13. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. See *The right approach: a statement of Conservative aims* (Conservative Central Office, London, 1976), 46-47. See also record of CPPNIC meeting, 19 Oct. 1976. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Record of meeting of the CPPNIC, 21 Dec. 1976. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. See record of meeting of the CPPNIC, 21 Dec. 1976. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. See, ‘2. Advisory Council (Council of State)’, unsigned and undated, circa 1977. TNA CJ 4/2415. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See, ‘Conservative Proposals for a Council of State’, D. Chesterton, 23 Feb. 1977. TNA CJ 4/2415. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Record of meeting of the CPPNIC, 19 Oct. 1976. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Synonyms: Official Unionist Party (OUP). The UUP was also known as the Official Unionist Party during the 1970s ‘because of the fact that it represented the remnants of the UUP which governed Northern Ireland at Stormont between 1921 to 1972’. See <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. See *News Letter*, 30 Dec. 1976. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. See Ramsay to Mason, 10 Feb. 1977. TNA CJ 4/2415. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 15 Feb. 1977. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. See note ‘Mr Neave and the Unionists’, by A. P. Wilson, 1 Dec. 1977. TNA CJ 4/1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. See, ‘Advisory Council: Line to take’, unsigned and undated, circa 1977. TNA CJ 4/2415. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Memorandum marked, ‘strictly confidential’, ‘discussion paper based on suggestions made by [John Brooke 2nd] Viscount Brookeborough [son of Basil Brooke, prime minister of Northern Ireland, 1943-1963]’, compiled by the CRD, signed ‘JB/JAO/JH’, 22 Feb. 1977. UC CAC HLSM 2/42/2/59. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. *The Times*, 5 July 1977. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. See memorandum (on House of Commons letterhead) entitled, ‘Outline proposals for an upper-tier of local government or regional council in Northern Ireland’, undated, circa 1977. UC CAC POLL 9/1/9. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Memorandum marked, ‘strictly confidential’, ‘discussion paper based on suggestions made by Viscount Brookeborough’, compiled by the CRD, signed ‘JB/JAO/JH’, 22 Feb. 1977. UC CAC HLSM 2/42/2/59. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. See, for example, comments by Neave, 10 March 1977. HC Debate, Vol. 927, cc. 610-611. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 1 March 1977. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. See, for example, comments by Gow. Record of meeting between Mason and a delegation of the Conservative Party, 22 March 1978. TNA CJ 4/2642. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. See, for example, speech by Neave to the Surbiton Conservative Association, 1 Feb. 1978. TNA CJ 4/2642. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. See copy of speech by Thatcher to UUC, Craigavad, Holywood, Northern Ireland, 19 June 1978. UC CAC POLL 9/2/26, file 2 of 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Record of speech by Neave, at a luncheon given by the UUC, Belfast, 7 April 1978. UC CAC THCR 2/6/1/181. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. See comments by Neave on the reaction of the SDLP leadership because of his support for the Regional Council model. Record of meeting between Mason and Neave, 24 Oct. 1978. TNA CJ 4/2642. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. See Irish government memorandum, ‘Conservative Party policy on Northern Ireland as outlined in statements by its leader and spokesmen – July ‘77 – Sept. ’78.’ NAI DFA 2009/120/1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 7 Nov. 1978. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. See comments by Neave. Copy of memorandum by Neave, ‘Ulster Unionists’, 7 March 1977. UO BL CPA LCC 1/3/13. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Conservative Party memorandum, ‘Ulster Regional Council(s)’, unsigned and undated, circa 1978. UC CAC THCR 2/6/1/181. Given the tone and content of this memorandum Neave may very well have been the author. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. West to Molyneaux, 21 July 1977. UC CAC POLL 9/1/9. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Conservative Party memorandum, ‘Ulster Regional Council(s)’, unsigned and undated, circa 1978. UC CAC THCR 2/6/1/181. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Conservative Party memorandum, ‘Ulster Regional Council(s)’, unsigned and undated, circa 1978. UC CAC THCR 2/6/1/181. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Molyneaux to Thatcher, 4 May 1978. UC CAC THCR 2/6/1/181. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. See Walker, *A history of the Ulster Unionist Party: protest*, 228-229. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Walker, *A history of the Ulster Unionist Party*, 228-229. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. See Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 588\*. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Jim Prior, *A balance of power* (London, 1986), 192-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. See comments by Powell. *Daily Express,* late Oct. 1975. Quoted in Simon Heffer, *Like the Roman: the life of Enoch Powell* (London, 1998), 764. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Prior, *A balance of power*, 192-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. In March 1978, during a meeting between Mason and senior Conservative Party figures, Gow noted that in relation to Northern Ireland, ‘full integration offered the best way forward’. Record of meeting between Mason and a delegation of the Conservative Party, 22 March 1978. TNA CJ 4/2642. See also Prior, *A balance of power*, 192-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. O’Leary, ‘The Conservative stewardship of Northern Ireland, 1979-97’, 664. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Record of Leader’s Consultative Committee 90th meeting, 6 Jan. 1976. UO BL CPA LCC 1/3/9. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Copy of memorandum by Neave, ‘Debate on Northern Ireland: January 12th’, circa Jan. 1976. UO BL CPA LCC 1/3/9. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. See, for example, comments by Neave, 30 June 1977. HC Debate, Vol. 934, cc. 646-647. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Comments by Neave. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 23 Jan. 1979. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Privately, Mason reportedly said that he had ‘no intention of reshaping local government in Northern Ireland. See record of meeting between O’Kennedy and Mason. 14 Feb. 1979. NAI DT 2009/135/703. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. See copy of document, ‘Briefing: Conservative Manifesto 1979’, issued on behalf of the CRD. UC CAC THCR 1/11/5. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Richard English, *Does terrorism work? A history* (Oxford, 2016), 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. The information in this paragraph is sourced from Routledge, *Public life, secret agent*, 7-8. See also Jack Holland and Henry McDonald, *INLA: deadly divisions* (Dublin, 1994), 139; and Dillion, *The Dirty War*, 285-287. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Quoted in Routledge, *Public life, secret* agent, 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Quoted in Aitken, *Margaret Thatcher*, 229-230. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Copy of handwritten statement by Thatcher, 30 March 1979. Available from [www.margaretthatcher.org/document/10390](http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/10390). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Routledge, *Public life, secret* agent, 318. See also Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 587; and Campbell, *Gerry Fitt and the SDLP*, 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. See memorandum, Manifesto Briefing, Northern Ireland, 2 April 1979. UO BL CRD Alistair Cooke Letter Book CRD L/4/12/1. See also UC CAC THCR 1/11/5. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Thatcher to Callaghan, 10 April 1979. UC CAC THCR 2/6/2/118, part-one. Although Thatcher abandoned support for the Regional Council policy soon after her appointment as British prime minister in May 1979, this should not detract from the fact that she remained loyal to his Northern Ireland policy throughout her period as leader of the opposition. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. See copy of the Labour Party’s 1979 general election manifesto, sub-section ‘Northern Ireland’. A copy is available from <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab79.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Arthur, *Special relationships*, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Quoted in the *Financial Times*, 12 April 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Copy of remarks by Thatcher on her appointment as British prime minister, 4 May 1979. Available from [www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104078](http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104078). [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Comments by Neave, 12 March 1975. HC Debate, Vol. 888, cc. 529-530. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Although on return to government in early 1974 Labour Party leader and British prime minister Harold Wilson directed that the option of British withdrawal from Northern Ireland be examined, and in May of that year had drafted his own “Doomsday Scenario’, the proposal was ultimately ‘rejected by the Cabinet Committee on Northern Ireland on 11 November 1975’. Quoted in Garret FitzGerald, ‘The 1974-5 threat of a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 17 (2006), 141-150: 142. Bernard Donoughue, *Prime minister: the conduct of policy under Harold Wilson and James Callaghan* (London, 1987), 128-131. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. See Thomas Hennessey, *Hunger strike: Margaret Thatcher’s battle with the IRA, 1980-1981* (Dublin, 2014), 10-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Copy of speech by Neave, addressing the Northern Area Conservative Council, Hartlepool, 12 Nov. 1977. TNA CJ 4/1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Comments by Neave. Record of CPPNIC meeting, 19 Oct. 1976. UO BL CPA CRD 4/15/2/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. See, for example, comments by Thatcher. Record of meeting of the cabinet’s defence and oversea policy committee, 3 Oct. 1979. Available from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/116687>. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. See Stephen Kelly, ‘*A failed political entity’: Charles Haughey and the Northern Ireland question, 1945-1992* (Dublin, 2016), 316-319. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. See Hennessey, *Hunger strike*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)