

Explain why the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed and how Unionists and Nationalists reacted. [12]

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed on 15 November 1985 between the British and Irish Governments. There were many reasons why the agreement was signed. Constitutional Nationalists and both governments were afraid that if Sinn Fein overtook the SDLP then the situation would worsen in Northern Ireland and any possible solution impossible. Thatcher's main reason was security. She realised that she had to deal with Nationalist alienation before she could deal with the worsening security situation. Garret FitzGerald believed that an end to Nationalist alienation and a better security situation would undermine the IRA campaign of terror. Unionists reacted badly to the agreement seeing it as one step closer to a United Ireland. An estimated 100,000 attended a huge rally at Belfast City Hall and marches were also held outside the headquarters of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat. All 15 Unionist MP's resigned their seats in Westminster however this made little difference. The 'Ulster Says No' campaign began which involved civil disobedience, including a refusal to pay rates in Unionist areas. This was followed by a 'Day of Action' in March 1986 which brought much of Northern Ireland to a standstill. This campaign failed to reverse the agreement however. Loyalist violence increased against the RUC and effigies of Margaret Thatcher were burned along with that of Irish Foreign Minister Peter Barry. Alliance was the only party to support the agreement. Nationalist reaction was the opposite of this. The SDLP supported the agreement and saw it as an opportunity to create a better way of life in Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein argued that a United Ireland was further away as ROI now officially recognised Northern Ireland. The IRA continued their campaign of violence against the British Government.