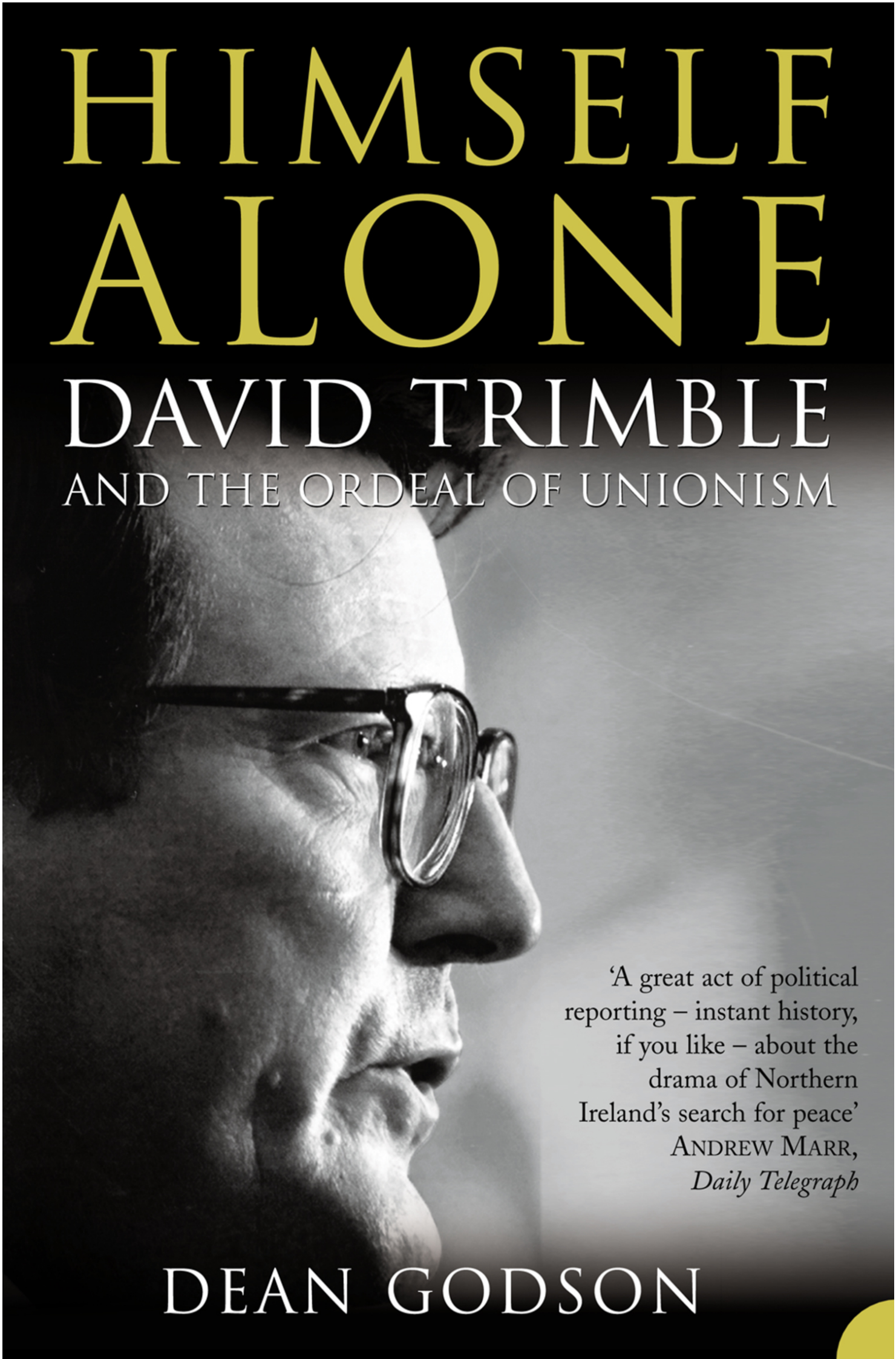
HIMSELF ALONE

DAVID TRIMBLE AND THE ORDEAL OF UNIONISM



'A great act of political reporting – instant history, if you like – about the drama of Northern Ireland's search for peace'
ANDREW MARR,
Daily Telegraph

DEAN GODSON

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Himself Alone: David Trimble and the Ordeal Of Unionism

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Himself Alone: David Trimble and the Ordeal Of Unionism / D. Godson — «HarperCollins»,

The comprehensive and groundbreaking biography of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning politician, one of the most influential and important men in Irish political history.Please note that this edition does not include illustrations.How did David Trimble, the ‘bête noire’ of Irish nationalism and ‘bien pensant’ opinion, transform himself into a peacemaker? How did this unfashionable, ‘petit bourgeois’ Orangeman come to win a standing ovation at the Labour Party conference? How, indeed, did this taciturn academic with few real intimates succeed in becoming the leader of the least intellectual party in the United Kingdom, the Ulster Unionists? And how did he carry them with him, against the odds, to make an ‘historic compromise’ with Irish nationalism?These are just a few of the key questions about David Trimble, one of the unlikeliest and most complicated leaders of our times. Both his admirers and his detractors within the unionist family are, however, agreed on one thing: the Good Friday agreement could not have been done without him. Only he had the skills and the command of the issues to negotiate a saleable deal, and only he possessed the political credibility within the broader unionist community to lend that agreement legitimacy once it had been made.David Trimble’s achievements are extraordinary, and Dean Godson, chief leader writer of the ‘Daily Telegraph’, was granted exclusive and complete access while writing this book.

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DEAN GODSON
HIMSELF ALONE
DAVID TRIMBLE
AND THE ORDEAL OF UNIONISM

DEDICATION

For my mother above all
but not forgetting Paul, Greta, John, Evelyn, Charlie and Gill

EPIGRAPH

I am Ulster, my people an abrupt people
Who like the spiky consonants in speech
And think the soft ones cissy; who dig
The *k* and *t* in orchestra, detect sin
In sinfonia, get a kick out of
Tin cans, fricatives, fornication, staccato talk,
Anything that gives or takes attack,
Like Micks, Tagues, tinkers' gets, Vatican.
An angular people, brusque and Protestant,
For whom the word is still the fighting word,
Who bristle into reticence at the sound
Of the round gift of the gab in Southern mouths.
Mine were not born with silver spoons in gob,
Nor would they thank you for the gift of tongues;
The dry riposte, the bitter repartee's
The Northman's bite and portion, his deep sup
Is silence; though, still within his shell,
He holds the old sea-roar and surge
Of rhetoric and Holy Writ.
W. R. Rodgers; from 'Epilogue' in *Poems*,
Michael Longley (Oldcastle,
Co. Meath, 1993), pp. 106–7

'Whatever an Ulsterman may be, he is certainly never charming, and of that fact, no one is more fully aware than the Ulsterman himself.'
F. Frankfort Moore, *The Truth about Ulster*
(London, 1914), p. 102

'I've changed, you know.'
David Trimble to his old friend, Professor Herb Wallace,
after signing the Belfast Agreement

'What do you want for your people?'
'To be left alone.'
Exchange between Sean Farren, a senior nationalist politician, and David Trimble at Duisburg, in the late 1980s

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ONE *Floreat Bangoria*

WILLIAM David Trimble was born on 15 October 1944, at the Wellington Park Nursing Home in Belfast of respectable, lower-middle-class, Presbyterian stock. From his earliest years he was called David, apparently to distinguish himself from his father, William Sr. The gregarious elder Trimble was generally known as 'Billy', but his flinty son was to reject all such attempts to turn him into a 'Davy' or a 'Dave'. He remained resolutely 'David'. This name apparently derives from his paternal grandfather, George David Trimble, born in 1874 and a native of Co. Longford. The earliest Protestant settlement there can be traced back to the reign of James I, though there was an overspill into Co. Longford resulting from subsequent influxes of Scottish Presbyterians into Ulster at the end of the 17th and early 18th centuries. Indeed, at its pre-Famine peak, the Protestant community numbered around 14,000 and the 1831 census suggests that it comprised 9.5% of the population. As late as 1911, in the parish of Clonbroney where the Trimbles lived, Protestants comprised 18.3% of the population.[1] It is not known when the Trimbles – a variation of the Scottish Lowland name of Turnbull – arrived in Co. Longford.[2] But what is certain is that David Trimble's own line of descent can be traced back to the end of the 18th century (he is not related to the Co. Fermanagh Trimbles, whose descendants own the famed *Impartial Reporter and Farmers' Journal.* By coincidence, his wife is part of that extended family). Like most Protestants, the Co. Longford Trimbles and the families they married into – the Smalls, the Twaddles, the Gilpins and the Eggletons – were farmers, with a few ploughmen, stewards and underagents amongst them. The first available record is of one Alexander Trimble (DT's great-great-grandfather) who farmed in Sheeroe, Co. Longford. His son, also called Alexander (DT's great-grandfather), lived from 1826 to 1904 and had eight children of whom the above-mentioned George David (DT's grandfather) was the youngest. According to Griffith's valuation of property in Ireland, conducted in the 1850s and 1860s, Alexander Trimble (II) rented a plot from one of the Edgeworths, the main landowners in the area, comprising lands of 11 acres, 3 roods and 16 perches. Its rateable valuation was £9 and 5 shillings, with buildings thereon valued at £1 and 15 shillings. But unlike most Protestants in Co. Longford, who were adherents of the Church of Ireland, the Trimbles were staunch Presbyterians: the parish registers show that George David, DT's grandfather, was baptised at Tully Presbyterian Church in 1875. They were thus a minority within a minority. History does not record how these Trimbles felt about the Ascendancy, in the shape of the Edgeworth family, nor about the Church of Ireland itself. If they keenly felt the disabilities long imposed upon Dissenters, it echoed down the years in odd ways: David Trimble himself never much cared for the traditional Unionist establishment.

The world of the Trimbles, like those of so many smallholders, would have been far removed from the elegiac evocations of 'Big House' Protestant life described by Somerville and Ross or Elizabeth Bowen. Especially during the latter half of the 19th century, they became increasingly vulnerable. There were a number of reasons for this: changing patterns in the rural economy, which led to the disappearance of farm servanthood and labouring jobs; difficulty in finding suitable local spouses, sometimes leading to intermarriage with Catholics and to conversion; and the lure of North America. Another, darker explanation for the decline in the Protestant population was the rising tide of Catholic disaffection – which took an increasingly violent form – and the attempts of some of the bigger landlords and of the British Government based in Dublin Castle to appease such anger through a variety of reforms at the Protestant smallholders' expense.[3] According to J.J. Lee, mid-19th-century Co. Longford was one of the six most disturbed counties in Ireland. David Fitzpatrick further states that in the immediate pre-Partition era, Sinn Fein membership in Co. Longford totalled between 600 and 1000 out of a 10,000 population, the highest of any county.[4] Whatever the exact causes of the collapse of the Protestant population of Co. Longford, the community undoubtedly declined by

40% between 1911 and 1926. By 1981, there were fewer than 1500 in the entire county. Census returns from Clonbroney at the time of the 2002 Easter Vestry to the Church of Ireland Diocese of Elphin and Ardagh showed that there were 43 regular worshippers – compared to 1010 in 1831.[5] In Longford as a whole, there were around 40 Presbyterians left in 2003, plus around 80 Methodists. Tully Presbyterian Church closed in the 1950s; only one, at Corboy, is left in the county. As Liam Kennedy concluded in his authoritative study of the Protestants of Longford and Westmeath, 'The Long Retreat', 'there is little comfort here for those seeking stories of ethnic accommodation along pluralist lines. True enough, by the 1930s or '40s, unlike the case of Northern Ireland, there was no minority ethnic or religious problem in the region. There was no minority.' [6] Throughout his career, David Trimble has been determined that the Protestants of Northern Ireland, and pro-Union Catholics, not suffer the same fate.

George David Trimble, DT's grandfather, was part of that exodus – though, again, his exact reasons for leaving remain unknown. Originally a farmer, he joined the Royal Irish Constabulary in 1895 (it seems an uncle, one Thomas Trimble, born in 1819, had earlier served in the Dublin Metropolitan Police from 1840–8). After tours of duty in Sligo, Armagh, Belfast and Tyrone, George David Trimble returned to Ulster's capital in 1909. He remained there for the rest of his life, attaining the rank of Head Constable. According to the official records, he received a life annuity of £195 upon the disbandment of the RIC in 1922, and then joined the newly created Royal Ulster Constabulary: his service record has neither blemishes nor commendations on it. He ended his career in 1931 at Donegal Pass RUC station and died in 1962, aged 87. Thus it was that the Trimbles came to settle in the 'greater Belfast area', as it is now sometimes called.[7]

Moustachioed Grandfather Trimble was a great 'spit and polish' man, who would daily 'bull' his boots till he could see the reflection of his face.[8] He stood at over six-foot-three and was not one to be trifled with: he had been through the severe inter-communal rioting which racked Belfast at the time of Partition and was ever on his mettle. When some relatives from the newly created Free State banged on his door in jest, shouting 'we've come to get you, Trimble', he drew his gun from his holster and repeatedly fired through the wooden panels, scattering his terrified country cousins.[9] According to Maureen Irwin, David Trimble's sole surviving first cousin, the 'Trimble temper' comes down from Grandfather George Trimble; the red hair and the florid complexion come from Grandfather Trimble's diminutive wife, Sarah Jane Sparks, daughter of James Sparks, a farmer of Cullentrough, Co. Armagh, to whom he was married in 1903. Grandfather Trimble sired three red-headed sons; the eldest, Norman, emigrated to Arizona; the middle child, Stanley, followed his father into the RUC and also attained the rank of Sergeant; Billy, the youngest, was born in 1908.[10]

Grandfather Trimble was also a staunch Presbyterian: when Stanley Trimble had his children baptised in the Church of Ireland, Grandfather Trimble was furious, believing that little separated the Anglicans from Rome. 'Were you at Mass today?' he would ask his grandchildren in later years.[11] Grandfather Trimble also signed the Ulster Covenant of 1912 – a mass pledge against Asquith's Home Rule Bill – at the Sandy Row Orange Hall. Indeed, he was a pillar of the Orange Order, rising to the post of Master of Ballynafeigh District Lodge (Ballynafeigh District's traditional 12 July parade through Belfast's Lower Ormeau Road became the most controversial Orange walk after Drumcree during the 1990s). The population of the area, once overwhelmingly Protestant, is now overwhelmingly Catholic; David Trimble wonders what kind of reception he would receive today if he returned to the string of modest terraced houses where Grandfather Trimble used to live in and around the 'Holy Land' of south Belfast (so called because of the large number of Middle Eastern street-names): at Agincourt Avenue, Carmel Street and at Jerusalem Street (where Billy Trimble was born). Latterly he lived across the Lagan at 50 Candahar Street, where the young David used to visit him on day trips.[12]

Strangely, Dàvid Trimble was quite unaware of his links to the Ballynafeigh District Lodge until he became leader of the Ulster Unionist party. This may owe something to the influence of his mother, Ivy Jack, who regarded the Loyal Orders as vulgar and who appeared unhappy when the teenaged Trimble eventually joined the Orange Order in 1962 (Billy Trimble was never a member, though he was a Mason). Ivy Jack was born in 1911, the only child of Captain William Jack and of Ida Colhoun. The lineage of Capt. Jack (DT's maternal grandfather) can be traced back at least as far as one Samuel Jack (DT's maternal great-great-grandfather), a landed proprietor of Lisnarrow in the parish of Donagheady, Co. Tyrone, who lived from 1776 to 1846. His son, also Samuel (DT's great-grandfather), became a prominent official of the Londonderry Corporation and for over 30 years served as water superintendent. His death notice in the *Londonderry Sentinel* of 16 February 1897 states that he was 'a staunch Unionist in politics … one of the electors who suffered "excommunication" from the Covenanting Church rather than forgo his right to vote at the Parliamentary elections'. Formally known as the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Covenanters were quite separate from the much larger Presbyterian Church in Ireland: they were descended from the Scots Covenanters, and did not agree with the Revolution Settlement of 1689 because it did not reaffirm the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, which swore to recognise Christ as King of the Nation. Since the Revolution Settlement did not provide the reassurance which they sought, the Covenanters held it was inconsistent for their communicant members to vote in parliamentary elections. Most of their flock went along with this ruling, but Samuel Jack was highly unusual in his unwillingness to give up the hard-won right of Dissenters to exercise this democratic liberty.[13] A hundred or so years later, his Presbyterian great-grandson, David Trimble, would also endure a kind of ostracism – again, risking much for his rejection of what he considered to be the other-worldly purism of some of his fellow Protestants.

Samuel Jack's son, Capt. William Jack (DT's grandfather), worked for J. & J. Cooke, timber merchants and subsequently for Robert Colhoun Ltd, the building and construction firm owned by his wife's family. He was a Derryman all his life – he served on the Board of Guardians – and signed the Ulster Covenant of 1912. Grandfather Jack only left Londonderry during the First World War in his 40s: in June 1915 he was given a temporary commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 12th Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, a support unit which furnished drafts to the 36th (Ulster) Division. In October 1916, he transferred to the southern-recruited Royal Irish Regiment and was posted to the 1st Garrison Battalion which provided guards for bases and prisoners. He then went to Egypt during Allenby's campaign in the Middle East against the Turks, but appears not to have left the place during the liberation of Palestine from the Ottomans. Instead, he spent much of his time in the British military hospital in Cairo: the service records in the PRO say nothing of wounds, as they normally would, suggesting he was felled by malaria or some other infection. After the war, he returned to his home at 5 Eden Terrace, in the city's Northland district.[14] It was some five minutes away from the house in Glenbrook Terrace where Trimble's fellow Nobel Laureate, John Hume, grew up (although, as John Hume is keen to point out, the Jack residence was in a much more up-market area).[15] It is a neighbourhood from where most Protestants have now fled. 'The biggest thing that's happened in Northern Ireland over the last 30 years is the ethnic cleansing of the west bank [of the River Foyle]', notes Trimble. 'There were 10,000 there till the early 1970s. The North Ward was Protestant. That's all gone.'[16]

Captain Jack's wife, Ida, was undoubtedly the most influential of Trimble's grandparents. Following her husband's death, she was crippled and came to live with her daughter and son-in-law until her death in 1966. Ida Jack was ever-present during Trimble's childhood and teenage years and imparted a smattering of loyalist lore to young David. She told him of how the inhabitants of Derry were reduced to eating rats during the Siege of 1689 and of how a forebear, one Robert Colhoun, had been in the Siege. She claimed that he subsequently married a daughter of George

Walker, the Rector of Donoughmore and joint governor of the city during the Siege (such claims are, however, not uncommon in many old Ulster families).[17] She also signed the Ulster Covenant in 1912. Family tradition holds that the Colhouns originally came from Doagh Island off the Inishowen peninsula in Co. Donegal. They left in the early 19th century because of deteriorating land conditions and eventually came to Londonderry, via Malins, Co. Donegal, in 1860 (John Hume's family made a not dissimilar journey from Inishowen).[18] The tithe applotment books show that they settled in Elaghtmore in the parish of Templemore, Co. Londonderry. Ida Colhoun was one of seven children of Robert Colhoun and his wife Anne Walker (DT's maternal great-grandparents), the daughter of one David Walker, a leather dealer from the Diamond on the west bank of the Foyle (DT's great-great grandfather). Robert Colhoun had founded the family construction firm: their buildings included the military barracks and Roman Catholic Church at Omagh, substantial tracts of the Bogside, the Guildhall in Londonderry and the Methodist Church at Carlisle Road, also in the Maiden City. The construction firm was eventually run by his mother's first cousin, Senator Jack Colhoun, a former Mayor of Londonderry, known to Trimble as 'Uncle Jack' (prior to the prorogation of Stormont in 1972, the Lord Mayor of Belfast and the Mayor of Londonderry were ex-officio members of the Northern Ireland Senate). The company ran into financial difficulties during the construction of Altnagelvin Hospital, which was to become Londonderry's leading infirmary. Although he did not have to do so, Colhoun sold up in 1961 in order to ensure that none of his subcontractors was out of pocket. Trimble was impressed by such probity. Indeed, when the Northern Ireland civil rights movement denounced the 'rotten borough' practices of the old Londonderry Corporation in the late 1960s, Trimble reacted on both a personal and on a political level. Recalls Trimble: 'I thought "Well, I know Uncle Jack. And I know he's not corrupt." So I started to think about things more deeply.'[19]

Billy Trimble met Ivy Jack whilst he was working in Londonderry as a middle-ranking official in the Ministry of Labour; she was a clerk-typist in the same department. They were married in the Great James Street Presbyterian Church in the Maiden City on 7 December 1940. Billy Trimble soon returned to Belfast, where he eventually became the deputy manager of the labour exchange at Corporation Street. Known in the local vernacular as the 'Broo' (a corruption of 'Bureau'), it was the largest such centre in Northern Ireland. The Trimbles settled in Bangor, which had become something of a dormitory town for Belfast and was rapidly expanding because of the post-war baby boom. They resided at an artisan's house, 1 King Street, just off Main Street, where David Trimble lived until he was four: his first memory is of the relaxing of sweets rationing in 1947. Although Trimble could, by his own admission, often be awkward and gauche in his dealings with his parents, peers and the outside world generally, he was always the dominant sibling. His older sister, Rosemary, born in 1943, was not overly assertive; his younger brother Iain, born in 1948, naturally looked up to him.

Trimble's mother, Ivy, was, by his own testimony, 'middle class moving downwards'. Little of the Colhoun legacy came down to her, and she was obliged from the early years of her marriage to bear the burden of caring for her own mother. Moreover, her husband's career went awry in his 40s: it may have had something to do with his heavy drinking, which became even more pronounced in his later years.[20] He would return home from work, listen to the news, fidget and then put on his coat and slip away to the local pub.[21] Indeed, Trimble's earliest recollection of his drinking habit was, at the age of six or seven, of finding beer bottles under the kitchen sink – though, fortunately, there were no great public embarrassments nor huge rows in the parental home.[22] Rather, Iain Trimble recalls, he was simply not there for much of the time.[23] More obviously problematic was Billy Trimble's decision to become a guarantor of a loan on behalf of an associate, which then went wrong. In 1960, the ensuing financial difficulties forced Billy Trimble to sell the semi-detached house which he had built himself with a neighbour at 109 Victoria Road, Bangor, and move a short distance up the hill to rented accommodation in a grander Victorian villa at 39 Clifton Road.

Trimble inherited his looks and his argumentative nature from his father. But, he says, they were perhaps too alike to be really close. 'Like a lot of Ulster Protestant males, Father was emotionally illiterate,' recalls Trimble. 'He told me I was "handless" [clumsy and uncoordinated], which was true, but telling you as much doesn't help.' Efforts by his father to interest him in football by taking him to Bangor FC matches were also unsuccessful.[24] But he bequeathed his son one hobby: music. Not only was classical music always around the house, but Billy Trimble was also a prominent member of the chorus of the Ulster Operatic Company, performing in productions of such Gilbert and Sullivan operettas as *Trial by Jury* and *Patience.* David Trimble also did some acting at school – playing the part of Stanley in *Richard III* – and later for the Bangor Drama Society: he says that these performances probably did as much as anything to increase his self-confidence. During the 1980s, as chairman of the Ulster Society, he also put on several productions of the plays of St John Ervine, the Ulster writer and dramatist. Although Trimble is no singer, and does not play any instrument, music remains his greatest enthusiasm and the family drawing room bulges with several thousands of albums. His first love was Elvis Presley; later, he graduated to Puccini, Verdi and Wagner (his particular favourite). Indeed, in times of crisis, says Daphne Trimble, such as after the setting up of the first inclusive Northern Ireland Executive in late 1999, he will turn to his records for solace.[25]

Trimble's relations with his mother were not very good, either. From her, too, he encountered a measure of coldness – the origins of which may owe something to the infant David's error of throwing her engagement ring into the fire.[26] Whatever the reality of their relationship, Ivy Trimble was the dominant personality within the household. She was also determined to maintain appearances and became a pillar of suburban society, both as chairman of the Women's Institute in Bangor and of the 'B&P' (or the Business and Professional Club). David Montgomery – who later became an important Trimble ally as Chief Executive of Mirror Group Newspapers which owned the *News Letter* and who grew up 100 yards away from the Trimble family – recalls that they 'epitomised the Ballyholme-Shandon Drive society and were much more visibly upmarket than we were'.[27] If so, it was relative privilege, for when Trimble entered Ballyholme Primary School, he was conscious of residing outside that catchment area and of coming from slightly the wrong side of the tracks. He may not have wanted for any essentials, but his home could not be said to have been 'earth's recurring paradise' – to quote Tennyson's poem 'Helen's Tower', about the folly built near Bangor by the First Marquess of Dufferin and Ava.[28]

The Trimble household could not, in the old Ulster phrase, be described as especially 'good living' – in the sense that alcohol, smoking and theatregoing were obviously indulged. Likewise, profane music and books were allowed on Sundays.[29] But certain traditional practices and forms were nonetheless observed. The family worshipped at Trinity Second Presbyterian Congregation of Bangor, whose minister John T. Carson had written several volumes, including a school story entitled *Presbyterian and Proud Of It* and *God's River In Spate*, a study of the 1859 religious awakening known as the Year of Grace; in 1966, he was called to the Moderatorial Chair of the General Assembly. Carson was in the forefront of the moderate evangelicalism of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in the post-war era and Trimble was an enthusiastic congregant from his teenaged years through to his mid-twenties. Between the ages of eleven and fourteen, Trimble spent part of several Christmas holidays at the interdenominational Belfast Bible College and attended morning and evening services every Sunday and at midweek, as well as special services: according to Iain Trimble, he was undoubtedly the most observant member of the family.[30] He was also 'headhunted' for a variety of tasks by the kirk authorities, of whom the most influential was Michael Brunyate, an Englishman who worked as an engineer at Harland and Wolff. Trinity wanted to attract more holidaymakers to its services and to that end, the young Trimble assisted Brunyate in rigging up the sound system to blare out hymns on Main Street: because of copyright problems, they had to pre-record their own devotional

music.[31] But this was not just a pastime for an awkward, bookish teenager: Trimble recalls that he was a genuine 'fundamentalist', asserting the literal truth of the Bible. Moreover, he was a 'creationist' – in the sense of believing it to be an accurate description of the order in which God created the world, though he always entertained doubts about the precise six-day timespan (he remains doubtful about Darwinian evolutionary theory to this day, but on intellectual rather than theological grounds). He would continue to be an ardent church-goer until the late sixties – though he declines to say why he stopped, on the grounds that it would be 'too complex' to explain.[32] Notwithstanding his often excellent memory, he would make a reluctant, even poor witness for the likes of Anthony Clare.

Perhaps because of the uneasy relationship with his parents, and his lack of coordination, Trimble was thrown back on his own resources at an early age. This self-sufficiency took both intellectual and emotional forms. Certainly, books were the safest refuge of all from family and contemporaries alike. His siblings recall him poring endlessly over war adventure stories: his brother Iain recalls that young David would read by candlelight after his parents switched off the lights at 9:00 p.m.[33] Later, he moved on to Winston Churchill's *The Unknown War*, about the eastern front during the First World War, and delighted in mastering the geography and history of the obscure countries described in that volume. Yet for many years, Trimble's knowledge of the outside world was largely derived from books. Despite his curiosity, he never holidayed overseas – apart from a couple of school-trips to Austria and Germany – until he married Daphne Orr in 1978. His parents could afford only cycling holidays in the Mourne Mountains or the Trossachs, where the entire family would stay in youth hostels.[34]

Such mastery of detail may have been entirely theoretical, but it served Trimble well in his own home. He established his pre-eminence in the house as much through a natural ability with words and his excellent memory, as through physical force. 'You could never argue with David because he always retained any information,' recalls Iain Trimble, who left home at fifteen to join the RAF as an apprentice photographer. 'He would always know more than you did. Which was quite frustrating. But it had the effect on me that if David said something, I'd believe it.' Whether the issue at hand was the Munich air disaster of 1958, the Floyd Patterson – Ingemar Johansson fight, or Elvis Presley, the young Trimble acquired an encyclopaedic mastery of the details.[35] Trimble is often called an intellectual snob, but this is not quite right: he could more accurately be described as a knowledge snob, whatever the subject. Even today, notes Daphne Trimble, 'he can be quite happy spending the evening at home reading, without exchanging a word with anybody in the family'.[36]

Such traits and interests set Trimble apart from his contemporaries at an early age – first at the Central Primary, then at Ballyholme Primary. In consequence, Trimble's mother entertained hopes that he might attend Campbell College (one of Northern Ireland's leading independent schools). Such aspirations were short-lived – especially after his father pointed out that they could not afford travel costs, let alone the fees. But he passed the 11-plus – the only one of the three Trimble children to do so – and in the autumn of 1956 he began at Bangor Grammar. Located within 100 yards of home, at College Avenue, it was an all-boys school of 350–400 pupils. Following his successful interview in June of that year, the headmaster, Randall Clarke – a former housemaster at Campbell College – wrote at the time that the young Trimble was possessed of good speech and manners. In appearance, he was neat and red-headed. He added that he was 'over-studious and over-conscientious. Nice child. Highly intelligent. Precocious.' He wondered: 'Has he been pushed too much?'[37]

The remark may have said something about the Trimble household, but it also said something about the prevailing ethos of Bangor Grammar: Jim Driscoll, who came to Bangor Grammar from Ballymena Academy in 1952 to teach Classics, found that 'to a certain extent, it reflected the tone of a holiday town'.[38] This, of course, is precisely what it was. Bangor, known in the 19th century as 'the Brighton of the North', was a quiet seaside resort of faded grandeur; some of the older people

then had never even been to Belfast. True, Bangor Abbey, founded in 558 by St Comgall, had been one the centres of learning in medieval Europe – which explains why the spot is one of only four places in Ireland referred to in the late twelfth-century Mappa Mundi.[39] By the 1950s any such academic distinction was mostly a thing of the past and university entrants, let alone Oxbridge awards, were then comparatively rare. But such qualifications were not really needed: higher education was the exception rather than the norm and, as Jim Driscoll recalls, most school-leavers had little difficulty in finding jobs.[40] Its proudest achievements were in sports and to this day, two of the most celebrated Old Bangorians are still Dick Milliken, the former British Lion, and Terry Neill, the football player and manager. Nor does the school appear to make much of its other famous politicians: one was H.M. Pollock, the first Finance Minister of Northern Ireland, and the other was Brian Faulkner, who attended Bangor Grammar briefly before completing his education at St Columba's in Dublin. Faulkner was the last Unionist politician who attempted an 'historic compromise' with Irish nationalism in 1973–4, and destroyed himself politically in the process.[41]

Bangor and its Grammar School were also socially ambitious – as was implied by the school song, *Floreat Bangoria*, adopted in conscious imitation of the Eton motto *Floreat Etona.* Indeed, class, rather than religious sectarianism, was the sharp dividing line in this overwhelmingly Protestant town. Although the Catholic Church was on the periphery of town (the three Presbyterian and two Church of Ireland houses of worship were conspicuously in the centre) there was no such thing as a 'ghetto'. Indeed, a few Catholics were to be found amongst both staff and pupils of Bangor Grammar and the two 'communities' socialised quite freely. Nor did Ivy Trimble have any objection to her sons associating with Catholic boys, provided they came from the 'right' sort of background, such as Terry Higgins and his brother Malachy (now Mr Justice Higgins); another Catholic friend was Derek Davis, later a BBC Northern Ireland and RTE presenter. Ivy Trimble's prejudices were not untypical of the time, and David Montgomery recalls that his mother shared the same attitude to contact with Catholics.[42] If most of Trimble's friends were Protestants, it was simply because they formed the bulk of the population – but, recalls Terry Higgins, that applied equally to Catholic boys such as himself.[43]

Bangor Grammar's cocktail of physical hardiness, social snobbery and academic mediocrity did not appeal to Trimble. Moreover, he disliked Randall Clarke personally. 'He treated me like a remedial pupil,' Trimble recalls.[44] So uncongenial did Trimble find Bangor Grammar that he now regards his main achievement as avoiding sports for two years. Certainly, he was an academic late-developer, only really coming into his own when he began his legal studies at Queen's. But neither was he a disaster, as some of his own recollections imply. The programme for the 1963 Speech Day shows that he won first prize in Ancient History and second prize in Geography and Latin. Still, he received no particular encouragement from Clarke to go to university. Certainly, many of Trimble's reports are replete with references to his 'carelessness' – something to which he was prone when not interested in the matter at hand. In his final term, in 1963, Clarke commented: 'This boy has a lively mind which sometimes leads him into irrelevance which can be disastrous in examination conditions.'

Trimble's teachers now remember a nervous, highly-strung boy who was a bit of a loner. He does not disagree: his friends were so few in number that he cannot recall the names of many of those with whom he was at school.[45] It is, therefore, curious that the swottish and 'handless' Trimble was never bullied. Perhaps it was because there was something forbidding about him. Family and friends recall a terribly serious and pencil-thin Buddy Holly lookalike, who could walk straight past any number of friends and acquaintances with the most tightly rolled-up umbrella anyone had ever seen.[46] 'The only way in which David was extreme was in his music and his reading,' his closest school-friend, Martin Mawhinney now says.[47] Trimble first heard Elvis' 'All Shook Up' in the amusement arcades of Bangor in 1957 and never looked back. Once, he and his friends went to three Presley films in a day: they began with *Loving You* at the now-demolished Tonic Cinema in Bangor (with its

great Hammond organ which would emerge from the floor during the interval); then to Newtownards to see *Jailhouse Rock*; the 'treble bill' would then be rounded off in a Belfast cinema. He acquired a Rover 90 for £50; and he taught himself how to drive it from the handbook. As a result, he crashed into a lamp-post on his first outing and did not drive again until he was into his 40s.

Trimble's recollections of an uneven academic performance may have owed something to his growing commitment to 825 Squadron of the Air Training Corps – the Bangor area 'feeder' for RAF ground crews (indeed, according to school records, Trimble indicated upon entry into Bangor Grammar that he wanted to go into the RAF). Leslie Cree, an older boy who was already a Warrant Officer in the ATC, recalls that 'in the early days we reckoned he was a wee bit of a boffin', with little sense of humour. But in fulfilling his tasks assiduously – which included shooting competitions with the local sub-division of the Ulster Special Constabulary, or 'B' Specials – Trimble earned respect. Cree thinks it helps explain why he was never bullied.[48] To this day, Trimble recalls with pleasure his low-flying experiences in England, hedge-hopping in a Chipmunk. It was also an institution where sectarian tensions were not high: Trimble was much impressed when one recruit personally gathered up his fellow Roman Catholic cadets and took them off to Mass in Bangor in full uniform before heading off to the parade ground.[49]

The ATC was significant to Trimble in social terms. As Cree points out 'he gradually became more acceptable and part of the human race'. Moreover, he had taken risks – such as a near crash landing at RAF Bishopscourt near Downpatrick – and actually enjoyed it. But its effects were more long-term. It was through the ATC that Trimble made the contacts which led him into the Orange Order and ultimately into politics. Although Trimble had been promoted to corporal in 1962, his poor eyesight meant he could never take up a career even in the ground crews. Those who were not going to enter the RAF had to leave the ATC by 18. Many, including Leslie Cree, went from the ATC into the 'B' Specials – then run by the district commandant, George Green, who later became an important figure in the hardline Vanguard party.[50] But Trimble's hand-eye coordination, though good enough with a .22 was less good with a .303, and potential entrants had to be proficient with both. How, then, would he stay in touch with his mates? The Orange Order provided at least a partial answer.

It was, nonetheless, a curious choice for Trimble in some ways. First of all, it obviously excluded his Catholic friends. Second, even in pre-Troubles Ulster – when the Order had a far larger middle-class membership – relatively few boys from Bangor Grammar joined up. As David Montgomery recalls, 'Bangor had middle-class English pretensions and therefore the Orange Order would have been seen as a bit comic.'[51] Third, neither of Trimble's parents belonged to it and his father's unionism amounted to little more than raising a Union flag on 12 July and putting up election posters for the local MP in the provincial Parliament, Dr Robert Nixon, who was also the family GP. Fourth, Orangeism in Bangor was shaped by the Church of Ireland and Trimble was, of course, a Presbyterian. Indeed, Cree, who was then a member of the Church of Ireland, recalls that it was no easy matter to persuade Trimble to join: Trimble gave a stirring defence of the 'Blackmouth', or the cause of the Dissenters. But Cree showed Trimble that the Order brought all Protestant denominations together in defence of their civil and religious liberties, and he was duly sworn into Loyal Orange Lodge 726, otherwise known as 'Bangor Abbey'.[52] Founded in 1948 by members of the Abbey Church, it was a smallish Lodge, 30 to 45 strong. Membership was in that period 60 to 70% Church of Ireland; it is still around 40% 'Anglican', as it were. It was a classless cross-section of society composed, amongst others, of civil servants, butchers and gas fitters. Unusually for a Lodge, it had no Orange Hall, meeting instead on Church premises. Trimble did not then know much about Orange culture, but he rapidly mastered its 'Constitution, Law and Ordinances', and for a period became Lodge Treasurer. In these early days, he attended every one of the Lodge's six or seven parades that were held each year.[53]

The mildness of Bangor Orangeism of the era may also owe something to the fact that it was quite untouched during the IRA Border campaign of 1956 to 1962. Indeed, Cree remembers that

Trimble and his friends were utterly shocked when a Republican slogan was painted on an advertising hoarding in Hamilton Road, Bangor. Indeed, so solid and secure was the world of Bangor Orangeism that the word 'Loyalism' would not even have been understood, at least in its contemporary sense, back then. That was only to come to the area with the onset of the Troubles, when housing clearances brought former residents of the Shankill and east Belfast to new estates in Breezemount and Kilcooley: the paramilitary influences came with some of them. Everything was assumed, and the world-view of the area can best be summed up by the genteel, stock phrase to be found in obituaries of the time in the *County Down Spectator* – 'a staunch Unionist in politics'.[54]

It makes Trimble's subsequent flirtation with the more robust elements in Orangeism – above all, at Drumcree – all the more curious. LOL 726 did go as a whole to show solidarity with their brethren during the first 'Siege of Drumcree' in 1995, which helped to propel Trimble to the Ulster Unionist Party leadership, but not in subsequent years. Indeed, he only joined the Royal Black Preceptory, the senior organisation within the Orange family, in the early 1990s at the behest of constituents in Lurgan (his lodge is RBP 207 or 'Sons of Joseph'). This was after declining earlier offers from lodges in Bangor to join 'the Black'. In other words, he did so as an act of duty as much as out of a desire to participate regularly in its activities. Indeed, by 1972, Trimble had dropped out from regular attendance at meetings of LOL 726. Partly, it was a question of professional commitments: Trimble believes that one of the problems with the Loyal Orders over many decades has been that instead of focusing on the great political questions ahead of them, they have devoted their energies to the rituals of Orange life with its incessant round of quasi-Masonic meetings and social gatherings.[55] Certainly, it was impossible to envisage him seeking higher office either in the District or the County Grand Lodge – in contrast, say, to his parliamentary colleague, Rev. Martin Smyth or John Miller Andrews, Northern Ireland's second Prime Minister, in retirement.[56]

Such concerns were far removed from the mind of the young Trimble as he contemplated his future in his last year at school. Quite apart from the discouraging noises which emerged from Randall Clarke, his father did not believe he could afford to go to university and tried to interest him in the Provincial Bank, later amalgamated with other institutions into the Allied Irish Bank. Billy Trimble had passed the Queen's University matriculation aged sixteen, but he could not afford to attend: his son wonders whether paternal jealousy may have played a part in the counsel he gave (the contrast with the pleasure which David Trimble derived from his eldest child's success in obtaining entry to Cambridge could not have been greater).[57] There was also the fear of rising unemployment, which seemed high by the standards of the time, though it was low compared to later jobless rates. Consequently, Trimble opted for security. He saw an advert to join the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and was admitted on the basis of his surprisingly good 'A' Level results. In the following September, he was posted as a Clerk to the General Register Office at Fermanagh House in Belfast, compiling the weekly bulletin which recorded births and deaths.[58] Like his father before him, Trimble seemed destined for a life of comparative anonymity.

TWO *A don is born*

TRIMBLE duly began his career in the NICS in September 1963, on a monthly salary of £35. He was rapidly transferred to the Land Registry – tucked away at the Royal Courts of Justice in Chichester Street, because it had originally been part of the Courts Service. The Northern Ireland Government, however, seemed most of the time to have forgotten the existence of this Dickensian backwater: a musty, overcrowded warren of rooms with high windows. It was primarily a place where paper was stored and when ancient title deeds would be brought out from the bowels of the registry, the member of staff would often find his clothing covered in dust. When a property transaction occurred, a change in the entry of ownership was required in the relevant folio; Trimble's job was to make a draft of the new entry. But the drudgery had a purpose. Transfer to the Land Registry afforded access to the NICS's scheme for recruiting lawyers. Under this programme, civil servants could study part-time for a law degree at Queen's University Belfast, whilst continuing their professional tasks, and then return at a higher grade.[1]

Tempting as the prospect was, Trimble asked himself whether he would be up to the task. After all, no Trimble had ever been to university. Queen's was then the only fully-fledged university in the Province and the most solid of redbrick foundations. It had been founded as Queen's College after the passage of the Irish Universities Act of 1845 as part of Sir Robert Peel's reforms. Hitherto, the Ascendancy had dominated higher education, as embodied by Trinity College Dublin. But the burgeoning middle classes, Catholic and Dissenter alike, demanded something more. Three such institutions were set up. Two of them, at Cork and Galway, were intended to serve the predominantly Catholic population of the south and the west and one, in Belfast, was to serve the overwhelmingly non-conformist population of the north-east. As such, it heavily reflected the Presbyterian ethos.[2] Although there was still a residual sense amongst Protestants, even in Trimble's time, that this was 'our University', he was initially hesitant about applying. The competition was stiff, and when the NICS scheme was pioneered in the previous year only two out of the 300 applicants had made it. But Michael Brunyate, who was still one of the greatest influences on Trimble's life, persuaded him that he would never be happy within himself if he did not obtain a degree.[3]

Trimble applied, and managed to win one of two NICS places for 1964: the other went to Herb Wallace, a friend and colleague from the Land Registry who would later hold a Professorial chair and serve as Vice Chairman of the Police Authority. Wallace initially thought the pencil-thin, ginger-haired, red-faced youth was 'a bit odd'; but they were soon to become firm friends. Again, like Trimble's family and school contemporaries, Wallace was impressed by his knowledge and authority, especially when it came to current affairs. Trimble was already a critic of Terence O'Neill, the mildly liberal Prime Minister of Northern Ireland from 1963 to 1969, as much because of his unattractive and haughty manner as because of his policies. Wallace recalls that Trimble then regarded Ian Paisley, who was starting to make waves in opposition to O'Neill's policies, as a crank.[4] Instead, he admired the two most dynamic figures in the Provincial Government: William Craig, the Development Minister, and Brian Faulkner, the Commerce Minister. He considered them both to be 'doers'. Trimble, who was irritated by the parochialism of the Northern Ireland news, was more stimulated by events further afield. During the General Election of 1964, he loathed Harold Wilson, identifying more with Sir Alec Douglas-Home; he was passionately interested in Rhodesian UDI and ardently backed the United States over Vietnam. He was also influenced in his opinion of the Cold War by the London-based monthly journal of culture and politics, *Encounter*, in which contributors often urged a tough line on the Soviets.[5]

Queen's Law Faculty was then still very much in its 'golden epoch'. Along with Medicine, it had always been the most prestigious of the University departments and enjoyed an intimate relationship

with the Provincial Bar and Judiciary. Places were specially set aside for law students in the library, who then underwent a four-year course. The student numbers, though they had increased substantially since the 1950s, were still very small compared to today – around 40 in each year. It was also a place where Catholic and Protestant undergraduates mixed relatively easily. But what made Queen's outstanding in this epoch was the quality of the teaching staff. They included colleagues such as William Twining, later Professor at University College London; Claire Palley, who taught Family and Roman Law and later became Principal of St Anne's College Oxford; Lee Sheridan, later Professor of Law at University College Cardiff; and Harry Calvert, a Yorkshireman who had written what was then the definitive text on the Northern Ireland Constitution.[6] Moreover, these academic grandees set the most demanding of standards: some years could go by when no 'firsts' were awarded, and even '2:1s' would be dispensed sparingly enough; many would fail their first-year exams.

Yet although Trimble was only a part-timer, he flourished. Indeed, in some ways, he rather resembled the young Edward Heath, whose life only really 'began' after he left his small-town grammar school and went up to Oxford.[7] Oddly, perhaps, in the light of Trimble's dislike of the work of the Land Registry, he particularly enjoyed Property Law and its bizarre algebraic logic, which he took in the final two years: but, unlike other 'swots', recalls Herb Wallace, he was always very generous about sharing his copious lecture notes.[8] So absorbing did he find the work that he began to attend less to duties in the Land Registry and in his final year took leave of absence.[9] Queen's, however, spotted his academic potential and in his fourth year William Twining informed him that he ought to consider taking up a teaching post – subject to his obtaining the right result. Trimble took an outstanding first in his Finals that summer and won the McKane Medal for Jurisprudence. On the basis of that achievement, he was offered an assistant lecturership in Land Law and Equity, with a starting salary of £1,100 per annum. The front page of the *County Down Spectator* of 5 July 1968 pictured him on the front page and claimed with pride that the local boy was the only Queen's student to take a first for three years. But his graduation was marred by the death of his father the night before the ceremony. In his will, Billy Trimble left an estate worth £3078.

Why did Trimble opt to become a lecturer? He also loved Planning Law and easily had the intellectual ability to become, in due course, a well-paid silk in London (indeed, he was called to the Northern Ireland Bar in 1969 and by Gray's Inn in 1970: two of his fellow pupils in the bar finals included Claire Palley and the late Jeffrey Foote, subsequently a leading QC and County Court Judge). Curiously, despite the small nature of society in Northern Ireland, he had few contacts at the Bar who would take him on as a pupil: his mother's childhood friend from Londonderry, Lord Justice McVeigh, politely heard out Ivy Trimble's representations on behalf of her son, but opened no doors for him. When eventually Trimble was called to the Bar, he was so lacking in contacts that his memorial had to be signed by a man who did not know him well, Robert Carswell, QC, subsequently Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and a Law Lord (indeed, to this day, many practitioners of the law in Northern Ireland look down upon Trimble as not a 'real' lawyer). His decision to become an academic may also have had something to do with his shyness and awkwardness, which mattered less in the more arcane realms of Property Law than it would have in the more social atmosphere of the Bar Library (the Northern Ireland Bar operates a library system, inherited from the old Irish Bar, rather than Chambers). Above all, Trimble knew that any proceeds from a practice at the Bar would be some time in coming. Legal aid had been introduced in Northern Ireland only in 1966 and prior to the Troubles, the law was still a comparatively small profession. And he now had another reason to opt for financial security: he had met the local girl he wanted to marry.[10]

Trimble had first encountered Heather McCombe from Donaghadee at the Land Registry. She was a plump and very popular girl; they were first spotted together at the office Christmas party of 1967. His friends and colleagues thought her a surprising choice. Not only was she outgoing where he was shy, but she was not obviously bookish. Nonetheless, they were married on 13 September 1968

at Donaghadee Parish Church with Martin Mawhinney as his best man; they honeymooned in Bray, Co. Wicklow – Trimble's first visit to the Irish Republic ('I had no idea how deeply unfashionable it was,' he now recalls).[11] On the proceeds of his work for the Supreme Court Rules Committee, he bought their first marital home at 11 Henderson Drive in Bangor. She soon became pregnant, and six months into her pregnancy went into premature labour. Trimble went to the hospital that evening, but did not appreciate fully what was happening and the medical staff told him to go home and to obtain some sleep. When he returned, twin sons had been born – but one had already died and the other was dying.[12] Trimble went into shock and according to Iain Trimble, withdrew into himself.[13] Subsequently, Heather Trimble became one of the first women to join the Ulster Defence Regiment, otherwise known as 'Greenfinches'.[14] It became an all-consuming passion for her and, indeed, many UDR marriages broke up in this period because of the highly demanding hours.[15] The combination of their social and work commitments soon put the marriage under intolerable strain. The hearing was held before the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Robert Lowry, and the decree absolute was granted before Lord Justice McGonigal in 1976.[16]

The unhappiness of Trimble's domestic life contrasted sharply with the growing satisfaction which he derived from his professional duties in the Department of Property Law headed by Lee Sheridan. It was perhaps all the more remarkable because he never became part of the 'in-set' around Calvert and Sheridan who played bridge and squash. He has always felt an outsider, whether at Ballyholme Primary, Bangor Grammar, Queen's, even in the Ulster Unionist Party. 'In those years I was suffering from an inferiority complex,' remembers Trimble. 'Not because the people around me are English – though that's a wee bit of it. No, it's because the people around me are confident. I'm a bit unsure of myself. Francis Newark asked me if I played bridge. I felt uneasy about saying no, but at the same time I wasn't going to learn it just to please him.' Even today, he looks at himself and says: 'It's a curious thing: deep down inside I believe I'm very good but somehow I'm not always managing to reflect that in what I do.'[17] Certainly, he was then unsophisticated. Claire Palley recalls how she and Trimble went to a French restaurant in the Strand after they completed their Bar exams: Trimble preferred the traditional British fare of steak and chips.[18] The contrast with today's Trimble – who has to order the most exotic items from the menu – could not be greater.

As throughout his life, Trimble gained self-confidence – and thus respect – by mastering his subject. His Chancery-type of mind, in contradistinction to the kind of horsedealing required at the criminal Bar, was perfectly suited to his dry-as-dust subjects. Students would often sense self-doubt in a lecturer, but Trimble kept order by asking questions which he knew nobody could answer. And when he himself then gave the response he would be able to cite the relevant case from his phenomenal memory and without referring to the textbook. Later, in judging moots, he would search on the Lexis Nexis database to check if there were any unreported decisions so he could pull the students up short; he hates nothing more than to be wrong-footed. Some, such as Alex Attwood – who became a prominent SDLP politician – thought him colourless; but as Attwood concedes, Trimble's subjects were not necessarily those which would inspire someone imbued with great reforming or radical zeal.[19] Others, such as Alban Maginness, who subsequently became the first SDLP Lord Mayor of Belfast, enjoyed his lectures.[20] This was because he invested his subject with such enthusiasm, and would bound about his room waving his arms around. Another plus point for many students, recalls Judith Eve – later Dean of the Law School – was that Trimble was young and local.[21] In 1971, he was promoted to Lecturer and in 1973 he was elected Assistant Dean of the Faculty, with responsibility for admissions. This appointment was a tribute to the impartiality with which he conducted his duties. Trimble later became a controversial figure in the University, but in this period his outside political activities were relatively low profile and in any case he was always assiduous in keeping his views out of the classroom (though that was easier when teaching subjects such as Property and Equity,

rather than the thornier area of constitutional law). Few, if any, in this period thought twice that he conveyed the 'wrong image' – least of all to have him go round schools of all kinds and denominations to extol the virtues of law as a career.

The effects of his term as Dean for admissions were significant. Only about 10 per cent of 500–600 hopefuls were accepted in this period. But according to Claire Palley, who regularly returned to Belfast, the percentage of Roman Catholic entrants rose markedly.[22] Of course, this had little to do with Trimble, and owed far more to broader sociological circumstances. But this supposed 'bigot' did nothing to retard these developments and was renowned for meticulously sifting every application (only mature students did interviews). Indeed, so assiduous was he in discharging his responsibilities to students that when one of them was interned for alleged Republican sympathies, Trimble went down to Long Kesh to give him one-to-one tutorials; even at the height of the Troubles, he also regularly went to nationalist west Belfast to the Ballymurphy Welfare Rights Centre as part of a university scheme to help the underprivileged, taking the bus up the Falls to the Whiterock Road. And despite the subsequent growth of a highly litigious 'grievance culture', no one can remember any accusations of sectarian remarks, still less of discrimination; he was never subjected to a Fair Employment Commission case of any kind. This is why he was so vexed when Alex Attwood accused him of being distant towards nationalist students: Trimble would have been impartially cold towards all.[23] 'There was a level of reserve there, undoubtedly,' remembers Alban Maginness. 'It was fitting enough for a lecturer in the Law Faculty. He didn't engage in simulated informality in a classroom context.'[24] Nor, notes Claire Palley, a one-time colleague, was he any sort of misogynist – and he shared none of the condescending attitudes of some Ulster males towards female colleagues.[25] The truth is that he is an old-fashioned meritocrat, who deplores the excesses of discrimination and anti-discrimination alike.

Trimble may have been the only member of the Orange Order on the Law Faculty staff, but that did not preclude good relationships with those colleagues who most certainly did not share his views (others were, of course, unionists with a lower case 'u', in the sense that they believed in the maintenance of the constitutional status quo, but were not Loyalists in the way that Trimble was). Thus, he enjoyed a good, bantering relationship with Kevin Boyle, a left-wing Catholic from Newry. Indeed, when his first marriage was breaking up, Trimble would even turn to Boyle for advice.[26] Trimble's best-known academic work, *Northern Ireland Housing Law: The Public and Private Rented Sectors* (SLS:1986), was written with Tom Hadden, a liberal Protestant, who also did not share his views.[27]

Trimble and Hadden had also clashed at faculty meetings over the Fair Employment Agency's attempt to review recruitment practices at Queen's, when Trimble was one of the few with either the courage or the intellect to challenge the assumptions of that body.[28] Moreover, whereas Trimble was a 'black letter lawyer', Hadden was very much more in the jurisprudential tradition. But for the purposes of this project, their complementary skills worked very well. Trimble was teaching housing law in the context of his property courses – such as how to sue landlords – and Hadden was covering the same terrain in the context of social policy. Trimble wrote three chapters, including those dealing with planning issues relating to clearance and development and technical landlord-tenant matters in the private sector (Northern Ireland's housing then differed from that of the rest of the United Kingdom in having a substantial rented sector). It was an authoritative consolidation of this amalgam of the old Stormont legislation with the Orders in Council which came in with the introduction of direct rule from Westminster in 1972; and it vindicated the expectations of the publishers, SLS (run from the Queen's Law Faculty), that it would be of use to practitioners, and sold its entire print run.[29] So impartial was Trimble in the conduct of his duties that when eventually he did become involved in Ulster Vanguard, many of his colleagues were surprised: the first that David Moore knew of any

political commitments on his part was when he saw Trimble on television during the 1973 Assembly elections.[30] Events soon ensured that it would not turn out to be an image that he would sustain for long.

THREE *In the Vanguard*

'I AM a product of the destruction of Stormont', is David Trimble's summation of his political genesis. On 24 March 1972, the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, announced the prorogation of Northern Ireland's Provincial Parliament and replaced it with direct rule from Westminster. The Troubles had already claimed 318 deaths, leading London to conclude that Ulster's devolved system of government known by the shorthand of 'Stormont' was no longer the best way of kicking the issue of Northern Ireland 'into touch'. Rather, as the Heath ministry saw it, Stormont was exacerbating the problem.[1] Many Unionists, including Trimble, believed that Heath had tyrannically altered the terms of the 1920 constitutional settlement – which they had imagined could only be done by agreement with Stormont. Since then, one of the consistent aims of Trimble's political life has been to undo the effects of this traumatic episode, by regaining local control over the affairs of the Province. His argument with Unionist critics of the 1998 Belfast Agreement centres on whether he has paid too high a price to attain that objective.

Why was this imposing edifice of Portland limestone, named after its location deep inside Protestant east Belfast, invested with such significance?[2] Before the First World War, the Ulster Unionists had bitterly resisted devolved government to all of Ireland, otherwise known as 'Home Rule'. They argued that it was little more than a halfway house to incorporation into an all-Ireland Republic, in which their liberties would endlessly be trampled upon by the island-wide Catholic majority. Led by Sir Edward Carson, they preferred to be governed like any other part of the United Kingdom from the Imperial Parliament at Westminster. But Lloyd George and the bulk of the British political class were not prepared to grant them this demand.[3] Westminster had been convulsed for at least a generation by the affairs of Ireland and the parliamentary elites now wished to hold them at arm's length. If possible, they also wished ultimately to reconcile the 26 (predominantly Catholic) southern counties with the six (heavily Protestant) northern counties. A permanently divided Ireland, many of the ruling elite calculated, could only be a recipe for further conflict and embarrasment in Britain's backyard – and a possible strategic threat in time of war. Equally, an attempt to coerce Ulster into a united Ireland would also cause fighting and embarrassment.

Lloyd George, therefore, gave the Ulster Unionists a stark choice. He conceded that the six northern counties neither would nor could be coerced into a united Ireland. Ulster could 'opt-out' and run their own unique, semi-detached institutions of government – that is, Home Rule. The Ulster Unionists, who had never wanted this anomalous arrangement, now reluctantly accepted it in the changed circumstances. Many in London had at first envisaged it as only a temporary expedient, leading to eventual re-unification. But over time, the Unionists became comfortable with this settlement – maybe too comfortable for their own good. 'A Protestant Parliament and a Protestant state' was governed from 1922 by the Ulster Unionist Party: the phrase was coined in a debate on 24 April 1934 by Carson's successor, Sir James Craig, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. It was made in response to de Valera's remarks about the Catholic nature of its southern counterpart (it was in the same speech that Craig also used another memorable phrase, 'I have always said I am an Orangeman first and a politician and member of this Parliament afterwards').[4] Stormont thus came to be seen by the Ulster Unionists as their bulwark against a united Ireland. Or, more precisely, it was seen as a bulwark against potential British pressure to join such a state: the experiences of 1919 to 1921 had taught the Ulster Unionists that the liberties of this small group of British subjects could easily be sacrificed where broader British interests were deemed to be at stake. Ulster Unionists may have formed a majority in the six counties, but they were in a tiny minority in the United Kingdom as a whole. Stormont thus became the institutional expression of their wish to control their own destiny and the pace of change. Indeed, the famous Unionist slogan 'Not an inch' is an abbreviation of another

of Sir James Craig's pronouncements – 'not an inch *without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland'.5*

Despite the rocky beginnings of the Northern Ireland state, successive British Governments did pay for the post-1921 settlement because Lloyd George's solution of 'semi-detachment' seemed to have worked. During Terence O'Neill's modernisation programme in the mid-1960s, it even appeared that residual sectarian differences would be dramatically modified by the 'white heat' of new technology. While allegations of discrimination in housing and employment and gerrymandering of electoral boundaries were still raised from time to time by assorted British civil libertarians and Labour MPs with large Irish populations in their constituencies, the issue of Northern Ireland was never at the forefront of the public consciousness until the late 1960s. Even within Ulster itself, the future looked rosy: David Trimble first became interested in national and international politics precisely because he found the politics of the pre-Troubles Province to be so soporific. Unlike many of his Unionist peer group, such as Sir Reg Empey or David Burnside, he had neither joined the Young Unionists nor the Queen's University Unionist Association. Indeed, some loyalist critics of the Belfast Agreement told me privately that Trimble's apparent emergence from nowhere suggested that he was some kind of long-term plant of the British state inside the unionist community.

A simpler explanation is that times of upheaval bring improbable individuals to the fore. After 1968, the state of Northern Ireland was under relentless assault. The offensive came first from the Civil Rights movement, elements of which successfully portrayed Stormont as little more than a discriminatory instrument of Protestant hegemony, and then from the resurgent IRA. Protestants, feeling their position under threat, retaliated. The exhausted RUC could not cope and regular British troops were dispatched during 1969 to aid the civil power. Three provincial Prime Ministers – Terence O'Neill, James Chichester-Clark and Brian Faulkner – resigned or were deposed in quick succession. Worse still from a Unionist viewpoint, many of the nationalist allegations of sectarian injustices and a repressive security system now found a sympathetic hearing in British official and journalistic circles. As long as Stormont 'worked' (in the sense of keeping things quiet) the British were happy enough to let it be. Once it was seen as a source of discontent and international embarrassment, the British cast around for less bothersome alternatives. The allegations against Stormont shaped one of the constants of British Government policy over a quarter-century: namely, that Unionists could never again be trusted with simple majority rule on the basis of the first-past-the-post electoral system. Henceforward, they would have to share power with representatives of the nationalist minority.

To a young man like Trimble, it all had a 'disorienting effect. The established landmarks in one's life were shifting and I did not know where it would lead to.'[6] Trimble also disliked the way in which the British Army, which was accountable to central government, was introduced on to the streets of Northern Ireland in 1969. Like so many Loyalists, he felt it undermined the role of the old RUC and the locally raised militia called the Ulster Special Constabulary (or 'B' Specials), which were accountable to the Government of Northern Ireland.[7] He did not, however, initially respond by becoming politically active. Indeed, his first experience of elections owed more to informal peer pressure within the Law Faculty than to any reaction to the collapse of public order. Trimble was approached by Harry Calvert: would he help his friend Basil McIvor, then running in the 1969 Northern Ireland General Election as the Ulster Unionist candidate for one of the newly created south Belfast constituencies? Trimble knew McIvor's wife Jill, who worked in the Law Faculty. 'Even at that time I had difficulty in saying no,' recalls Trimble. 'I find it embarrassing. If people are pressing me, it's easy to say no, but if they ask nicely, it's much harder.'[8]

It was, at first glance, an unlikely pairing, for Basil McIvor was the most liberal of Unionists and a staunch ally of Terence O'Neill, Northern Ireland's aloof, patrician Prime Minister.[9] Moreover, he was one of very few UUP MPs elected to the old Stormont not to have been a member of the

Orange Order.[10] Trimble, by contrast, had always disliked O'Neill's style and his increasingly flaccid response to the disturbances: he less minded O'Neill's reforms than their timing, which he felt showed weakness and which could only encourage more violence. There was, however, another attraction in aiding McIvor. McIvor's seat not only contained such unionist terrain as Larkfield, Finaghy and Dunmurry, but also included the adjacent, predominantly Catholic, area of Andersonstown: Trimble wanted to see what it was like and duly canvassed it. In February 1969, things were not yet so polarised as to preclude such an excursion and Trimble even received a good reception – so much so that he reckons that as many as 1000 to 1500 votes out of McIvor's winning total came from Andersonstown (though some of these may have been cast by Protestants then still living in the area).[11]

Subsequently, Trimble sought to join the UUP but received no reply to his letter of application. The inertia of party HQ at Glengall Street in central Belfast seemed to him to incarnate all that was wrong with the organisation of the time. Glengall Street had failed to provide a sustained or coherent intellectual response to the critique of the Northern Irish state advanced by the nationalists and their left-wing allies on the mainland.[12] In consequence, says Trimble, 'quite a few contemporaries tamely accepted this fashionable view of things – of a politically and morally corrupt establishment. There was a widespread view then of a poor, down-trodden minority. Those of the same age as me all went with the spirit of the times – Unionist Government bad, Civil Rights movement good. When things went pear-shaped, one gets the impression that the middle classes opted out of unionist politics altogether and headed for a safe port. They found it in the nice, uncontroversial New Ulster Movement and later in the Alliance party'. The reaction of one colleague from Queen's was typical of the times: driving down the Shankill Road past Malvern Street, where an organisation styling itself as the 'UVF' had perpetrated a couple of grisly murders in 1966, his companion observed 'ah, we're passing your spiritual home'. Trimble was angered by the remark, but was not deterred. Indeed, the challenge of articulating a Unionist response also appealed to the counter-cyclical, even contrarian aspects of his nature: 'My feeling that they were wrong was not entirely intellectual, it was in my bones as well. But it took me a couple of years to work things out. I usually do find myself uncomfortable with fashionable views and I have spent most of my life arguing against them.'[13]

Trimble, therefore, responded to the crisis in the only way he knew: he searched the stacks at Queen's and read, read and read. There was a dearth of material. For although there had been some 'Unionist' historical writing during the Stormont years – such as St John Ervine's biography of Sir James Craig, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland – there had been little Unionist political thought since the 1950s.[14] With their massive majorities at Stormont, and little opposition, Ulster Unionists had become complacent. Trimble's aim over the last 30 years, and especially since becoming leader, has been two-fold: first, to persuade Unionists to think politically and not just to wave the Union flag at election time; and, as a consequence of that, to persuade the broad unionist middle classes to re-engage in politics. Later, Trimble found one unexpected source of inspiration. These were the publications of the British and Irish Communist Organisation (first known as the Irish Communist Organisation). Many then considered B&ICO was then a self-consciously Stalinist (but non-sectarian) faction. A substantial number of its leading lights believed that the British multi-national state was invested with certain progressive possibilities (by contrast, a large number of them contended that northern nationalism, encouraged by southern irredentist elements, was a sectional diversion from the reality of class struggle). Adapting Stalin's theory of nationality to the Irish context, B&ICO had come to conclude that Irish republicans had fundamentally misanalysed the situation. Far from northern Protestants being a minority within the Irish nation, they were a distinct nation of their own, no less entitled than the Catholics to political self-determination: any attempt to coerce them would not merely be foredoomed to failure, but would also lead to a blood-bath by virtue of dividing the working class. This became known as the 'two nations' theory (at the same time, B&ICO also believed in civil rights for Catholics – and that the British state was the best vehicle for achieving these

complementary ends). He was particularly influenced by three of their pamphlets: *The Economics of Partition, The Birth of Ulster Unionism* and *The Home Rule Crisis 1912–14*. In time, Trimble also became a fan of *Workers' Weekly*, the newsletter of an allied organisation, the Workers' Association for a Democratic Settlement of the National Conflict in Ireland – a compliment which that journal did not always reciprocate through the late 1970s and 1980s. It found him too devolutionist and Ulster nationalist for their more integrationist tastes (in its issue of 28 October 1978, following Trimble's speech at the UUP conference, *Workers' Weekly* described him as an 'advocate of getting Stormont back at all costs'). After Trimble became leader, the links with the left endured. Thus, Paul Bew, Professor of Irish Politics at Queen's and Henry Patterson, Professor of Politics at the University of Ulster – both of them formerly of the Workers' Association – became two of his strongest supporters in academe. And John Lloyd, the staunchly Trimbleista former Editor of the *New Statesman* who later worked for the *Financial Times*, had been in B&ICO itself for a time.

The retreat to the ivory tower was perhaps a predictable response for a shy academic who felt he needed to be on intellectually secure ground before entering the fray. Curiously, Trimble's unworldliness contributed in another very different way to his political education. From 1970–2 he lived for the only time in his life in Belfast – at 12 Kansas Avenue, just off the Antrim Road. He had moved into an area from which Protestants were rapidly departing. Nonetheless, he imagined that it was far enough up the Antrim Road and middle-class enough to avoid the clashes between the Catholic residents of the New Lodge and Protestants from the neighbouring Tiger's Bay. If so, it proved a forlorn hope, for Trimble regularly witnessed many sectarian confrontations at Duncairn Gardens. The experience further convinced him of the inefficacy of the Ulster Unionist establishment's approach, and that something more had to be done. But through what vehicle? Some of his contemporaries had joined the New Ulster Movement. To Trimble, however, the Alliance party did little to confront the Republican political offensive. Rev. Ian Paisley's hardline Democratic Unionists would certainly have been a possibility for a Unionist who wanted to protest against the alleged weakness of their traditional leadership. But as Trimble saw it, Paisley did too little to save Stormont for his own partisan reasons: if the provincial parliament went, so too would the UUP's patronage powers and therefore the DUP would be able to compete more equally with the UUP.[15] Trimble met Paisley for the first time during the 1973 Assembly elections on a broad loyalist platform. His reaction was mixed: 'One appreciated the broad earthy humour, and when he's in a good mood he can be charming. And, obviously, he has considerable gifts of crowd oratory. I would not have been very well disposed to him because of the inconsistencies of his background – his integrationist views and his flirtation with negotiating with Irish nationalism. Then there was the raucousness of his presentation and his purely sectarian approach. I occasionally looked at the *Protestant Telegraph* [Paisley's newspaper] and was struck by the crudity of it and that it contained too many vulgar quips from a churchman. And the more I think of it, it's an accurate reflection of his personality.'[16] For the bulk of the intervening three decades, the relationship of the two men would be antagonistic rather than cooperative. Both men are known for not mincing their words at each other.

It seemed to many, including David Trimble, that the abolition of Stormont was a precursor to a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland.[17] Even Brian Faulkner, whose energy and dynamism Trimble had hitherto admired, seemed to him to have no clue as to how to respond. Only one man appeared to Trimble to have the answers: William Craig, sacked from O'Neill's cabinet in 1968 for attacking the drift of Stormont's policy. Craig anticipated that Heath would move against the Unionists and urged that Ulstermen prepare for the coming constitutional crisis. Subsequently, he condemned Faulkner for meekly acceding to the abolition of Stormont – reckoning that Faulkner should have called a Northern Ireland General Election to demonstrate that Heath's unilateral violation of the 1920 constitutional settlement had no popular support.[18] But Craig went further still. Although he was mild-mannered in private and was a flat platform speaker, he nonetheless had a flair for the

dramatic pronouncement. 'I can tell you without boasting that I can mobilise 80,000 men who will not seek a compromise in Ulster,' he told a meeting of the Monday Club in the House of Commons. 'Let us put bluff aside. I am prepared to kill and those behind me will have my full support for we shall not surrender.'[19]

Certainly Craig – like Trimble – vaulted into the national consciousness as a hardline Unionist. But both men were far more complex than they first appeared. Indeed, when each man eventually sought to treat with the representatives of Irish nationalism, their flexibility would amaze supporters and opponents alike. Born in 1924, Craig had been a gunner in RAF Lancaster bombers during the Second World War. After building up successful solicitor's practices, he had entered the Northern Ireland Parliament for Larne in 1960. During the O'Neill era, he was portrayed (along with Faulkner) as a dynamic, modernising Wunderkind who could accomplish great things for the Province: a meritocratic, almost Wilsonian contrast with the 'big house' Unionists who largely ran the Province till 1971. Craig was also an ardent proponent of German-style federalism for the United Kingdom and Ireland. Significantly, Trimble recalls that Craig and he were the only two elected Unionists publicly to support a 'Yes' vote in the 1975 Referendum on the Common Market.[20] Moreover, most Ulster Unionists were instinctive Tories who until 1974 took the Conservative whip in the Commons – hence the latter party's official title of 'Conservative and Unionist'. By contrast, neither Craig nor Trimble were High Tories in the Enoch Powell mode.

These subtleties were, for the time being, lost in the mêlée. Unionist Ulster felt it was fighting for its life. Only a campaign of mass cross-class mobilisation – of the kind which Loyalists had launched against Home Rule in 1912 – could save the Province from absorption into an all-Ireland Republic. To a young Unionist activist at Queen's such as David Burnside, it did not then seem improbable that such a feat could be replicated. After all, it had been accomplished within living memory: veterans of the original UVF and 36th (Ulster) Division still regularly walked on Orange marches and there were large numbers of people around with military training from the Second World War.[21] Craig's chosen vehicle for conducting the struggle was the Vanguard Movement, which he launched as a pressure group within the Unionist party on 9 February 1972. Following the precedent of 1912, they produced a Vanguard Covenant. It asserted that the 1920 settlement – which partitioned Ireland into two parts, North and South – could not be undone save with the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland. By proroguing Stormont, and introducing an almost colonial system of direct rule from Westminster, Heath had unilaterally abrogated the terms of that bargain. The key test of political authority, the consent of the governed, was now lacking. Craig was accused of denying the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty; but he replied that there were political and moral limits to its theoretical power to legislate as it pleased.

Such propositions would have been uncontroversial amongst most Unionists. But where Vanguard differed was that it drew some highly radical conclusions from this state of affairs. Historically, the unique Ulster-British way of life had best been preserved by Union with Great Britain. But what if Ulster was locked into a loveless marriage and her affections were not reciprocated? What if the terms of that marriage could be altered under pressure from Irish nationalists and the IRA – as exemplified by Westminster's unilateral destruction of Stormont? What, indeed, if Westminster could use its sovereign power within the Union to deliver the Ulstermen 'bound into the hands of our enemies'? The price of marriage would then have become too high. Thus, for Vanguard, the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was not an end in itself, but a means to an end. If they could not regain an Ulster Parliament on satisfactory terms within the Union, then Vanguard preferred negotiated independence. The arrangements enjoyed by the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man – under the Crown but not in the Union – looked attractive. Vanguard's enthusiasm for independent dominion status would soon expose them to accusations from some supporters of Faulkner that they were no longer Unionists, but rather had become 'Ulster nationalists'.[22]

At the time, Trimble was prepared to give such Vanguardist ideas a fair wind. In an article in the *Sunday News* on 20 January 1974, he rebutted the views of Desmond Boal, QC, a leading adviser of Paisley. Boal believed that the time for greater integration of Northern Ireland with the rest of the United Kingdom had passed – but that Ulster independence had never been a runner. Instead, he favoured a federal Ireland Parliament and Provincial Parliament with 'Stormont' powers.[23] Trimble took particular issue with Boal's rejection of independence for Northern Ireland. He argued that if one accepted the notion that the British were prepared to pay large sums of money to leave Northern Ireland, then they would surely be just as happy to subsidise an independent Ulster as a united Ireland. He was implying that the coercion of Ulster into a united Ireland was costlier than independence. By contrast, independence might satisfy enough unionists and nationalists to leave behind a relatively stable entity. Intriguingly, he posited the idea that republicans mainly disliked 'British' forces, but had an ambiguous attitude towards Protestants (whom he did not describe as 'British'). Once these 'British' forces were gone, and Protestants gave a guarantee that the purpose of such an entity was not to reinforce an anti-Catholic hegemony, all but the most irreconcilable elements of the republican movement might be able to enter into some compact in a new, independent Ulster.

Such ideas must have seemed fairly fanciful as sectarian tensions sharpened. Vanguard held a series of Province-wide rallies, culminating in a great demonstration at Belfast's Ormeau Park in March 1972: the *News Letter* estimated the crowd to be 92,000, the RUC put it at 60,000.[24]Theatricality was an integral part of the Craig roadshow, who would arrive at gatherings with motorcycle outriders. It was widely reported that they were members of a uniformed group called the Vanguard Service Corps – although Trimble, for one, now doubts whether it actually ever existed in any organised sense. Trimble rebuts all allegations by the now deceased loyalist Sam McClure – that he was sworn into VSC at an initiation ceremony at Vanguard headquarters in Hawthornden Road – as 'utter balls'.[25] Some nationalists found Vanguard gatherings fascistic and even Trimble now says he was 'never terribly comfortable' at these 'embarrassing' occasions. Nonetheless, he attended many such events. He was present at Castle Park, Bangor, in February 1972, where Craig inspected 6,500 men as they stood to attention wearing Vanguard armbands (although Trimble declined to wear one).[26] He also turned up for the mass gathering at Stormont, just days after the abolition of the Northern Ireland Parliament had been announced.[27]

Given the circumstances – both civil war and British withdrawal seemed to be on the cards – Trimble did not consider Craig's rhetoric to be unjustified. 'Craig had a tendency to outbursts and to overstate things even before the Troubles,' recalls Trimble. 'But he was saying, "Look, there are a lot of people who don't like the direction of government policy and if pushed they are prepared to fight." His intention was to make Government in London sit up and think. He certainly succeeded in getting negative publicity!' Some felt that Craig was unleashing terrible forces in society, but Trimble does not agree: 'There were lots of things unleashing those forces – the abolition of Stormont, the IRA campaign. If anything, Craig's rhetoric provided an emotional safety valve.'[28] It was more than just rhetoric, though: Vanguard, after all, 'saw itself as a resistance movement against an undemocratic regime that could be shown to be unworkable when the time came'. To that end, it aimed for 'the coordination of all loyalist organisations under one banner to save Ulster'. The largest of these was the Ulster Defence Association, then still a legal organisation probably numbering about 40,000 members.[29]'Everybody was in it then,' says Trimble. 'I was conscious there were criminal types, but they were not dominant. The organisation then was a broad popular response to a near-civil war situation. But what's happened to the loyalist paramilitaries is that the criminal types have taken over and the broad popular types have gone away' (indeed, to this day, he thinks that the conventional police wisdom is wrong and that the Ulster Freedom Fighters are not a mere flag of convenience for the

UDA, but are a separate organisation). In retrospect, however, he concedes that Craig's condemnation of Protestant paramilitarism was inadequate.[30]

Trimble never saw himself as a street activist in this cause; his contribution, he thought, would be as a cerebral backroom boy. In 1972, after his flat in Belfast became too dangerous, he moved back to Bangor and resumed contact with some local Orangemen. It was they who provided him with his first public platform at the Ballygrainey Orange Hall at Six Road Ends, between Bangor and Newtownards. In 1973, the British Government had produced a White Paper, which outlined some possible political structures for the Province. The new Assembly would be elected by proportional representation rather than the traditional first-past-the-post (in fact, there had been PR elections during the early years of Stormont, but these had soon been scrapped, largely to maintain the unity of the UUP).[31] No one knew how to operate the Single Transferable Vote system – except, everyone thought, David Trimble. Trimble, in fact, had to go into the Queen's University library where he found a book on electoral systems by Enid Lakeman.[32] His description of how many candidates to run and how to maximise transfers so impressed one of those present, Albert Smith, that he called on Trimble shortly afterwards. Trimble recalls him asking: "'Would you like to give another talk?" I said yes, but when? "Tonight!" came the reply. It turned out he wanted me to speak to a North Down Vanguard meeting at Hamilton House, Bangor. I never looked back.'[33]

There, he met up with a group opposed to the local Faulknerite Unionist establishment. They included George Green, the former County Commandant of the since disbanded 'B' Specials, who was by now an independent councillor in the area. More important still to his long-term political development, he also met a Vanguard councillor, Mary O'Fee. Her husband, Stewart, was a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Health and Social Services, who would telephone Craig and identify himself as 'the Seaside Voice'. Trimble worried that the 'tide of history' was turning against the Unionists, but Stewart O'Fee snorted dismissively and told him to read Karl Popper's *Poverty of Historicism*, which he found inspirational.[34] But O'Fee came to have an even more direct influence: he was the anonymous author of two Vanguard's best pamphlets, *Ulster – A Nation* (April 1972) and *Community of the British Isles* (1973).[35] The former, in Trimble's own words, 'hurled defiance at our enemies'. It was a trenchant rebuttal of the High Tory case for Ulster's integration into the United Kingdom along the lines of Scotland and Wales, whose best-known advocate was Enoch Powell. But O'Fee believed this approach contained profound dangers for Ulster. First, the Province would be integrated into the more urbanised, 'permissive society' of the 'Swinging Sixties' – an unattractive end in itself for a still-religious people. Second, even if it was desirable in principle, integrationists did not possess the means to achieve this: peaceful persuasion would not work since the main British parties did not want it and street protests to attain it would only alienate their fellow citizens with whom they wanted to integrate. Third, Trimble shared O'Fee's belief that pure integration, without any body which Ulster could call its own to undergird it, contained a political trap. They both believed that integration could only work if the three main parties at Westminster supported the Union. But since many in Labour and the Liberals then appeared to favour the principle of Irish unity, albeit peacefully achieved, as an ultimate outcome, integration would leave Ulster and its tiny twelve-man contingent at the mercy of the 630-strong Commons.

Ulster – A Nation concluded with a ringing appeal for Ulster to redefine her relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. It posited the idea of a federated British Isles comprising Great Britain, Ulster and Eire, with three separate but equal regions cooperating to promote common prosperity. These ideas were fleshed out in *Community of the British Isles* which exerted an even greater impact upon Trimble's thinking. Great Britain would 'throw off the trammels of the residual sovereignty' that she exercises as a legacy of her colonial past and thus free herself of any guilt or international embarrassments which that legacy has caused her. More significant still, this would have profound implications for the Roman Catholic minority: 'The absence of British sovereignty would remove

one of the causes of friction and help confront both communities [within Northern Ireland] with the realities of the situation.' Trimble was impressed both by its emphasis on taking account of the existence of the nationalist community, which would not go away, and by the possibility of creating new structures that could accommodate everyone's diverse aspirations without surrendering to Irish nationalism. Indeed, the approach outlined in *Community of the British Isles* would eventually find expression in the British-Irish Council, established under the 1998 Belfast Agreement.

Again, such speculations seemed fanciful at the time. For Unionists were then enmeshed in debating the merits of Heath's attempt to outline the principles governing new political structures for Ulster. The Government White Paper of March 1973 aimed to provide something for everyone (and was the basis of the Sunningdale agreement of December of that year). For Unionists, it contained the guarantee that Northern Ireland's overall constitutional status would not be changed save with the consent of the Province's majority. Also, the bulk of Stormont's functions would be returned to local control (with the exception of security). But Unionists could only regain their parliament at the price of accepting nationalists in the Government of Northern Ireland for the first time. Nationalists would derive further reassurance from the establishment of an 'Irish dimension' – North – South bodies which could someday prove to be vehicles for harmonising the institutions of government on both sides of the border into all-Ireland structures. Faulkner accepted the White Paper and received the endorsement of his party's supreme body, the Ulster Unionist Council, by 381 to 231.[36]

Many hardline Unionists had been toying with the idea of creating a new party to oppose the drift of policy, but they had always been deterred from so doing by the feeling that they would have more influence by staying within the existing party structures. The vote to accept the White Paper proposals convinced them that they no longer could prevent such slippage. Craig and his supporters left to form the Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party: the word 'Progressive' was included to appeal to the substantial trade union element in Vanguard, led by such men as Billy Hull (formerly of the Loyalist Association of Workers) and Glenn Barr, a shop steward and senior figure in the UDA. Although opposed to the new system, Vanguard nonetheless contested the June 1973 Assembly elections. Trimble was uncertain about whether to stand, but in the end decided to do so. There were several reasons for this. First, he thought if he remained an academic, people would not respect him; he would, therefore, have to 'get his hands dirty' in the political arena. But there was another reason, which would continue to motivate him in the coming years. 'The Loyalist parties were getting a very negative press then,' he recalls. 'But I thought "well, it will make the media and the middle classes sit up and think if they find that not all of the Loyalist candidates are ignorant working-class types".'[37] He put his name forward for the Vanguard nomination in North Down and found himself alphabetically on the bottom of the three-man slate headed by George Green. The North Down Vanguard literature had a cartoon of the master (William Whitelaw, first Northern Ireland Secretary) tossing a bone to his lap-dog (Faulkner). And it proclaimed: 'Vanguard Unionists will not accept a humiliating, powerless, consultative Assembly in place of a proper Parliament … they will not allow murderers and quislings to destroy Ulster and hand it over to Republicans.'

Trimble's first serious outing on the hustings was, however, disastrous: during the abortive Loyalist strike of February 1973 which Vanguard had supported, a fireman had been killed by Protestant hoodlums. Trimble received a bitter reception in many quarters – 'it was guilt by association' he recalls – and came bottom out of eighteen candidates.[38] Vanguard took 10.5% of first preference votes for seven seats. Faulkner's group, with 24 seats, was nominally the largest. In conjunction with other pro-White Paper elements (including the SDLP, Alliance and Northern Ireland Labour parties) the group held 52 seats to 26 for the broad loyalist coalition. The reality, though, was more complex. Some of those who were officially within the Faulknerite camp in fact opposed his policy. The real picture was, therefore, 21 for Faulkner to 27 against him: enough to push

policies through with the help of the SDLP and others, but crucially depriving him of a majority and therefore legitimacy within the Unionist community.[39]

Despite Trimble's terrible showing, the campaign was not a waste of time. While on the hustings, he met Craig for the first time. Trimble felt an immediate sense of personal as well as ideological kinship: he always was able to anticipate what Craig was thinking. 'Craig had a penchant for surrounding himself with bright young men,' says Trimble. 'David Burnside, Reg Empey and myself have lasted the course. There was a sense with Craig of open-mindedness not associated with the "good old boy" network of Glengall Street. Unlike the others, if he discovered talent he would use it.'[40] Many of these Young Unionists had been locked out of Glengall Street – in Empey's case literally – after the split with Faulkner. Craig also cultivated another young hardline politician, John Taylor, who in the previous year had survived an assassination attempt by the Official IRA; but Taylor never made the leap. Trimble first met Taylor in Bangor in 1973 and liked him instinctively. 'He was a person who was entitled to respect. After coming within an inch of losing his life, he was still involved and not in any way intimidated.'[41]

Some felt that Trimble could be a little bit of a 'boffin' – but they also deferred to him on that basis. Isobel McCulloch, who was Craig's secretary, remembers that when Trimble referred to some legal concept by its Latin name, one of the less well-read figures in Vanguard piped up: 'Say that again, David – this time in English!'[42] The whole room, including Trimble, broke up laughing. But for the most part, observes Craig, 'he fitted in very comfortably. He became accustomed to talking with people. Events brought him out of his shell.' Craig found Trimble an ideal sounding board for fleshing out his existing ideas: this is significant since many suppose that Craig only extolled the Aland Islands – a semi-autonomous part of Sweden – as a potential model for Ulster because of Trimble's research. In fact, it was Craig who introduced Trimble to many of these concepts, as Trimble readily acknowledges.[43] Trimble was also introduced to the darker side of Loyalism in this period – including Andy Tyrie, the then Supreme Commander of the UDA. Tyrie found that Trimble was quite unlike any of the traditional Unionists of the 'fur coat brigade'. Not only was he 'great in committees, great working with people, but he had a quality I would have loved to have had – he was a good listener. Above all, he stayed with the people. Harry West [the Ulster Unionist leader] had no use for us once the crisis that had brought us together was over. David, though, always was available – even when he did not approve of what we were doing. He would say "look, this type of violence is totally counter-productive from your point of view".' Tyrie noted with appreciation that unlike most middle-class people, Trimble was prepared to fight, though he claims that he never asked him to join up. 'I would certainly have been very glad of him,' Tyrie adds.[44] Some time later, Tyrie invited Trimble to attend meetings of the UDA's Inner Council – an offer which Trimble declined, though he said he would be happy enough to draft papers. He refused because he believed that his talents lay in the realm of politics. When asked if he would have joined up to give the UDA political direction, Trimble replies, 'wasn't that what Vanguard was [already] doing?'[45] Whatever Vanguard's relationship to the UDA, there is no doubt that Tyrie trusted Trimble utterly at a political level. But did their closeness to each other make Trimble vulnerable to British state pressure years down the road? Trimble is unequivocal on the subject. 'There never was an effort by anybody – whether British or anyone else – to make capital out of my associations of the early 1970s. Which is surprising.'[46]

FOUR *Ulster will fight*

IN THE autumn of 1973, Trimble became the chairman of the constituency council of North Down Vanguard and was elected Publications Officer at the entire party's annual general meeting.[1] Many in Vanguard – including Trimble – were celebrating the success of the brand-new party in the Assembly elections, but Craig counselled caution. Hardline Unionists had, in fact, suffered a political defeat. Much as Unionists disliked his compromises, Faulkner was still in business. Now that the Assembly was up and running, the stage would be set for the establishment of the second pillar of the new political order as envisaged by the 1973 White Paper for Northern Ireland – a power-sharing executive (the third being the 'Irish dimension'). The creation of this executive was announced on 22 November 1973, although the wrangling over its composition and size was reminiscent of the disagreements which bedevilled the same exercise some 25 years later. Eventually, it was agreed that Unionists would hold six of the eleven seats, with four for the largely nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party and one for the Alliance. Faulkner became Chief Executive and Gerry Fitt, the leader of the SDLP, became Deputy Chief Executive. Although there was a bi-partisan welcome for this development in Great Britain, loyalists were enraged and vowed to destroy it.

The third and final pillar of the new institutions of government was to be the Council of Ireland. This was a reincarnation of the Council of Ireland provided for in the 1920 Act: it was originally intended that powers gradually be transferred to this body as a prelude to re-unification, albeit under the Crown. It fell into abeyance not because of Unionist intransigence, but because Dublin never nominated any representatives to it (a refusal which suited the Unionists well enough). There was, however, one key difference between the 1920 and 1973–4 settlements: the 1920 Government of Ireland Act notionally envisaged growing harmonisation, through the agency of the Council, between two devolved areas of the United Kingdom. As things turned out, only Northern Ireland accepted the 1920 settlement, whilst the southern part of the island gradually went its own way.[2] As Unionists saw it, such a formulation was more disadvantageous in the very different circumstances of the 1970s. For the 1973 Council of Ireland would have combined representatives of a devolved region of the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) with the representatives of a fully fledged sovereign entity that had severed residual links (namely the Republic of Ireland). Only once this Council had been established would full-scale direct rule be scrapped. However, the security powers would remain a matter for Westminster for the time being.

The British Government hoped that the emerging package would be sufficiently attractive to mollify most Unionists. Under its provisions, the Unionists secured the return of a devolved local parliament, albeit with smaller majorities under the new PR system than they had enjoyed under the first-past-the-post; and they would return to office, but not on the basis of traditional majority rule. Instead, it would be in an enforced cross-community coalition with some of their harsh critics in the SDLP. For nationalists, it was the all-Ireland aspects of the deal which were most important: the gradual transfer of powers to the Council of Ireland was seen by them as possessing the potential, over time, to take Ulster peacefully out of the United Kingdom and into a united Ireland of some kind. After all, they argued, they would be acquiescing in the return of Unionists to the hated Stormont, where nationalists would still be in the minority; and they acknowledged more explicitly than before that Ireland could be re-unified only with the consent of Ulster's majority. Therefore, in order to keep their constituency happy, the SDLP and the Irish Government felt that they had to obtain a 'result' on the Council of Ireland.[3] Heath duly summoned the leaders of the power-sharing parties – Faulkner Unionists, Alliance and the SDLP as well as the Irish government – for a conference at the Civil Service College at Sunningdale in Berkshire to draw these strands together. The deal struck there contained many of the elements found in the Belfast Agreement of 1998: hence the famous *bon mot* of

Seamus Mallon, now Deputy First Minister, that any subsequent settlement would be 'Sunningdale for slow learners'.[4] By this, Mallon meant that the broad outlines for any new arrangements in Northern Ireland were always going to be the same, whether in 1973–4 or in 1998–9. According to this analysis, the hardliners on both sides were too obstinate or confident of securing an unattainable ethnic victory over the other to perceive this essential reality.

But others have invested the phrase with a meaning beyond that given to it by Mallon. Mallon may have implied that David Trimble – a trenchant critic of Sunningdale – was one of the 'slow learners'. But to pro-Agreement Unionists, it was the two Governments who were themselves slow learners. From a moderate Unionist standpoint, the Governments had asked Faulkner, the leader of the largest party representing the majority community, to bear too much of a political burden: indeed, the then Irish Foreign Minister, Garret FitzGerald, with John Hume, pushed for a more ambitious version of the Council of Ireland.[5] Faulkner called these cross-border arrangements – which, initially at least, comprised tourism and animal health – as 'necessary nonsense' that would keep nationalists happy within essentially partitionist structures. But most Unionists perceived them to be an embryonic government for the whole island. Unionists (and, above all, David Trimble) derived the lesson that it was these all-Ireland aspects of the deal – rather than power-sharing with nationalists – which were unacceptable to the mass of Unionists. That is why in the week of the Belfast Agreement of 1998 – when the very 'Green' draft settlement was rejected by Unionists – Lord Alderdice of the Alliance party brought a predecessor who served in the Sunningdale Executive, Sir Oliver Napier, to meet Tony Blair. His purpose was to explain to the Prime Minister that Trimble would end up as another Faulkner if the draft agreement was rammed down his throat.[6] The ghost of Faulkner thus hangs over much of what Trimble does: indeed, both men rose to the leadership on account of their strong Orange credentials, in Trimble's case because of Drumcree, in Faulkner's because he led a disputed Orange march down the Longstone Road in Annalong, Co. Down, in 1955.[7]

Curiously, Trimble recalls that he felt a degree of sympathy with Faulkner's dilemma even at the time. David Bleakley, who was the Northern Ireland Labour party's representative in the 1975–6 Convention, remembers being struck by the fact that Trimble was one of the very few rejectionists in that body who did not lash into the deposed Faulkner.[8] Nonetheless, like everyone in Vanguard, Trimble found the overall Sunningdale package unacceptable. The prospects of derailing it, however, seemed at first slender. Shouting abuse at the Faulknerites in the Assembly had not proved noticeably successful. When Trimble heard of the idea of an all-out strike to protest against the new dispensation, he doubted whether it would work, for he recalled the ignominious failure of the earlier protests. In a peculiar way, this was to be a key card in the hands of the loyalist resistance. There had been so many abortive acts of defiance that when the strikes became really serious in May 1974, it came as a surprise to much of the government machine. As ever Vanguard, with its extraordinary mix of town and gown, took the lead in coordinating the resistance of a variety of loyalist organisations to the emerging settlement. Craig brought Trimble to the Portrush conference in December 1973, which was the precursor to the formation of the United Ulster Unionist Council. The UUUC (or 'Treble UC' as it came to be known) was to become the umbrella group for all of those Unionists – Vanguard, DUP and anti-Faulkner Ulster Unionists – opposed to the 'historic compromise' with nationalism. The aim of the conference was to evolve a single policy statement, for which purpose Trimble was a very suitable choice. He became a leading light in the working party that adopted a federalist blueprint for the constitution of the United Kingdom. Trimble first met both Enoch Powell and James Molyneaux there.[9] 'His was a very clinical kind of approach,' recalls Molyneaux. 'He was not at that stage concerned about whose toes he trampled on. And there was the natural tendency of anyone in that age group to have a very strong idea and to take it to the limit – and to shoot down any old fogey.'[10] If Trimble was intellectually arrogant, it certainly did him little harm: he spoke in nearly every debate and he remembers Ernie Baird telling him that he was the success of the conference.

Later, Craig also asked him to draft the rule book for a new organisation of which little was then known: the Ulster Workers' Council. At first, it was one of of innumerable organisations of the period, which seemed to arise and then disappear with dizzying regularity – but it would soon acquire great significance. Not that anyone, recalls Trimble, would have needed to consult such a constitution: the exercise was purely to give the organisation a veneer of procedural respectability in the event that anyone had asked. Moreover, it brought Trimble into contact with Harry Murray, a Belfast shipyard shop steward who chaired the UWC and lived in Bangor (and who often gave Trimble lifts into the city).[11]

The momentum which built up in favour of the UUUC's rejection of Sunningdale was not confined to the working classes. It was more broadly based, and as during the first two 'sieges of Drumcree' in 1995 and 1996 implied at least a level of middle-class Unionist acquiescence in street protest. The source of this discontent was quite simple: the deal did not seem to be delivering what it promised to do. The first major blow came after the Executive had taken office on 1 January 1974. The Ulster Unionist Council – where Faulkner's margins had been thinning ever since he accepted the White Paper in May 1973 – rejected Sunningdale by 427 votes to 374. The motion was proposed by John Taylor and was seconded by Martin Smyth. Faulkner promptly resigned as party leader, and although he took the Executive members and others with him, he was now completely detached from the bulk of the party machine.[12] Shortly thereafter, a former Fianna Fail Cabinet minister, Kevin Boland, launched a High Court challenge to the Irish Government's recognition of Northern Ireland's present constitutional status. He claimed that it conflicted with Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's 1937 Constitution. When the Government mounted its defence, it emerged that they were arguing that they had not after all acknowledged that Northern Ireland was outside the jurisdiction.[13] The consent principle, so crucial to Unionists, was fatally undermined by a clever legal formulation. The effects on Faulkner were more devastating still: so much so that when the United Kingdom General Election for Westminster was held on 28 February, the UUUC defeated every sitting Unionist candidate who was loyal to Faulkner and won eleven out of the twelve Ulster constituencies. Their slogan was, 'Dublin is only a Sunningdale away'.[14]

The February 1974 election was the closest thing there would be to a referendum on Sunningdale, and for the first time rejectionists could claim to have a popular mandate. Labour were back in power, and Harold Wilson, whose personal sympathies were in favour of Irish unity, was once again Prime Minister.[15] Meanwhile, the IRA stepped up the tempo of its activities: the murder of a UDR soldier, Eva Martin, at Clogher, Co. Tyrone, evoked particular horror. The killer was Sean O'Callaghan, who later became the highest ranking ever defector from the Provisional IRA and who would come to know Trimble well – and advise him – following his release from jail in 1996.[16] In this fevered atmosphere, the UWC demanded fresh Assembly elections. The UWC had been preparing assiduously behind the scenes and were especially well organised amongst the crucial power workers. Accordingly, when the Assembly rejected a motion denouncing power-sharing on 14 May 1974, by 44 to 28, Harry Murray promptly announced that the loyalists would reduce electricity output from 700 to 400 megawatts. The next day, in response to a general strike call from the UWC, workers downed tools at the Harland and Wolff shipyard; road blocks started to appear everywhere.

The organisational skills of the loyalists were impressive then. The strike was run from Vanguard headquarters at 9 Hawthornden Road, in east Belfast, by the UDA spokesman and Vanguard Assembly member Glenn Barr, with a fifteen-strong committee that included representatives of all the main political parties. Also on that committee along with the politicians and trade unionists were Andy Tyrie of the UDA, Ken Gibson of the UVF, and Lt Col. Brush of Down Orange Welfare. As well as power cuts, the strike committee started a system of issuing 'passes', so that workers in essential services could buy petrol: anyone who wanted to move about had to apply to the strike headquarters. Initially, the politicians were told to stay away for the duration of the strike –

and it suited them perfectly. For although the idea of the strike, according to Trimble, had originally come from Vanguard, they did not want it to be thought to be theirs alone or even originating primarily with them.[17] The focus of attention soon moved even further away from conventional politics and street protest: on 17 May, the UVF bombed Dublin and Monaghan, killing 33 people. It was the heaviest day of casualties during the entire Troubles. 'I was very surprised,' says Trimble. 'The whole object of the strike was that it was non-violent action. The perceived wisdom was that it was mid-Ulster UVF. I could never see the logic of sectarian attacks. This is one of the worrying things about loyalist paramilitarism, its absence of intelligence in both senses of the word.'[18] Trimble was present at Hawthornden Road on the evening that the Dublin-Monaghan bombs went off: despite Craig's instruction to key Vanguard figures to stay away so that the grassroots elements could appear to run the show, he could not stay away from the scene of the action for very long.[19]

After acting as telephone operator, Trimble graduated to printing very amateurish passes on a children's Letraset, which those who applied to the UWC could show at road blocks to go and buy fuel. Eventually, he produced the daily strike bulletin with Sammy Smyth of the UDA.[20] Smyth was a figure given to very extreme pronouncements: the *Irish Times* reported him as saying that 'I am very happy about the bombings in Dublin. There is a war with the Free State and now we are laughing at them.' For these, remarks, Smyth was 'disciplined' by the UDA – that is, beaten up – and was removed as a spokesman; he was murdered by the IRA in 1976.[21] (Curiously, until I raised the matter with him, Trimble states that he was unaware of Smyth's views, since he rarely read the newspapers in those fevered days). Indeed, at one point, Trimble was embarrassed when a professor at Queen's turned up at Hawthornden Road wondering how examinations would be run with petrol so severely rationed. 'Oh, Trimble knows all about that,' replied the trade unionist. The two university colleagues then had a strained conversation. For the most part, though, Trimble – who at the time stayed at his mother's house in Kilcooley – remembers 'an almost blitz spirit'. Local farmers, for instance, gave milk away rather than throw it out because they could not sell it. The sense of solidarity was reinforced by the knowledge that they were being listened to by the security forces. Trimble remembers watching a British soldier crawling along the ground trying to install a microphone at Hawthornden Road: he laughed loudly when George Green simply placed a radio near the device and switched it on, drowning out the loyalists' words. Trimble suspected that his mother's telephone was tapped, and his concerns were vindicated when she returned from holiday and was surprised to find that the line had been broken, which tended to occur when the primitive devices of the period were disconnected: Trimble, though, never sought to venture an explanation to her for this inconvenience![22] In fact, says one senior security source of the era, the technology even then was such that a breakdown of Ivy Trimble's telephone could not have been caused by the removal of the tap. But the source confirms that Trimble's telephone, along with many others, was monitored in this period.[23]

In these heady days for loyalists, Trimble was hugely animated. Herb Wallace, his closest colleague at Queen's, remembers that he was 'terribly excited to be associated with the leading lights on the UWC. Glenn Barr even told him that when he became Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Trimble would be Minister of Law Reform.'[24] On the morning that the Prime Minister was to make a broadcast to the nation about the growing crisis, Trimble attended a key meeting of the strike coordinating committee. Present were Craig, Paisley, West and the workers' representatives. They had just received a draft of Wilson's address condemning the strikers in even harsher language than the Prime Minister eventually employed. Trimble, like everyone else, thought that if he went ahead with that version, there would be an explosion of uncontrollable violence. 'I reckoned: "This is madness. This will destroy the country and double the death toll overnight."'[25] Word also came through back-channels that as they watched the broadcast that night, the UWC would be swooped on by the Army. Accordingly, the UWC high command went to ground and left the elected politicians behind: the

Army would then find they had bagged a bunch of parliamentarians, plus the Assistant Dean of the Law Faculty at Queen's University. But before they departed, the UWC did have one serious discussion about the legal aspects of a possible declaration of martial law. Trimble had brought along a copy of R.F.V. Heuston's *Essays in Constitutional Law*, which had an excellent treatment of the subject. The strike leaders were obviously sufficiently impressed by Trimble's exposition to borrow his copy of Heuston. It was not returned – and the Army never came anyhow.[26]

Wilson, in the end, diluted his speech, but it nonetheless turned out to be his best-known pronouncement ever on Ulster, in which he attacked the loyalists for 'sponging' on Westminster.[27] The strikers promptly began to wear little sponges on their lapels, and the effect of Wilson's speech was, Trimble recalls, to send the already high levels of support for the loyalists through the roof.[28] Despite Wilson's own resentment of the strikers, neither the Northern Ireland Office nor the Army wished to confront them: why risk bloodshed, they reasoned, for the sake of a doomed executive? Faulkner, faced with a complete end to electricity supplies, more unburied dead, and untreated sewage bowed to the inevitable and resigned with the executive on 28 May 1974. The Council of Ireland died with it and Merlyn Rees, the Ulster Secretary, resumed full-scale direct rule from London. Thereupon, the *raison d'être* of the strike vanished: those who wanted to press on and secure the return of the old Stormont were left isolated. Unionists had shown that they could veto unwelcome developments, but they had neither the strength nor the cohesion to reimpose Stormont.

Trimble, though not a figure of the first rank in the strike, had impressed many of those around him by taking his stand. 'It could have ruined his career in law – but he stood up and was counted,' says Andy Tyrie. 'David Trimble, David Burnside and Bill Craig were prepared to suffer the consequences. It could have been a failure. There were no MPs there. They all ran and hid over the law-breaking. All those generals and captains in the Orange Order left and did not want to be seen as bigots and thugs. But the David Trimble of today is the product of 1974. Nineteen seventy-four was the first time that ordinary people started to question how the Unionist family operated. In 1974, no Unionist politician of any prominence took part in the strike.'[29] (Paisley had been in Canada at the funeral of a friend when the strike broke out and some paramilitaries used this to undermine him, suggesting that he had only returned when it seemed to be gaining ground.) In the euphoria which obtained after the UWC strike, it was decided that the organisation needed to have a policy. Craig, therefore, 'loaned' Trimble to the UWC – in a bid to hold back some of the wilder ideas which would emerge from some individuals at 'brain-storming' sessions.[30] Eventually, the UDA went off in their own direction and in 1975 produced a document in favour of Ulster independence; and whilst Vanguard was the largest of the Unionist movements with an affinity for such ideas, neither Craig nor Trimble plumped for that logical extreme. Indeed, both men would soon astonish the political world with their boldness, but of a very different kind.

FIVE *The changing of the Vanguard*

TRIMBLE had earned his spurs during the UWC strike and its aftermath, but he was not yet a figure of any public note. All of this was soon to change as a result of the British Government's new set of proposals – one of many 'initiatives' that punctuated the Troubles. The White Paper, published in July 1974, set out a scheme for an elected Constitutional Convention. The job of this body was to consider 'what provision for the government of Northern Ireland is likely to command the most widespread acceptance throughout the community there?' The Convention was to be composed of 78 members elected by PR on the same basis as the 1973 Assembly, under the chairmanship of the then Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Sir Robert Lowry.[1] At first, though, Trimble thought he would not be a candidate. His marriage had broken up and he duly decided to withdraw himself from consideration in North Down (divorce was then much rarer in Northern Ireland than it has since become). George Green would anyhow head the Vanguard list on his home turf, making it unlikely that Trimble could win even if selected. But Craig had counted upon Trimble to be at his side in the Convention and persuaded him to put forward his name for the nomination for South Belfast, where Queen's University was located. Trimble had two rivals: Raymond Jordan (election agent for the local Westminster MP, Rev. Robert Bradford) and David Burnside. Jordan was assured of a slot, so the contest boiled down to a fight between Trimble and Burnside.[2] Trimble won out, but that did not prevent them from working together as the twin pillars of Craig's operation, with Trimble as the policy brains, Burnside as the press officer. Both men shared a common objective: to modernise Unionism. As early as 1976, Burnside favoured breaking the formal link between the Orange Order and the UUP, which is reminiscent of the trade unions' links to Labour. It was a relationship which would endure with many ups, and more downs, over the next quarter-century – by which time Burnside had become a prominent London PR executive whose premises served as home to the Unionist Information Office, and from 2001 as Ulster Unionist MP for South Antrim.[3]

Trimble's election literature showed a bookish Buddy Holly look-alike posing in a law library, and proclaimed the traditional Vanguard message of the necessity to restore effective devolved government. But it also contained a teasing hint of flexibility – and one which was to prove significant and bitterly controversial later. 'An effective local Parliament must have an executive which conforms with democratic principles (which includes the possiblity of coalitions freely entered into),' he declared. 'The executive cannot be formed on a sectarian basis or with places guaranteed to certain groups irrespective of the outcome of an election.' In other words, whilst rejecting compulsory power-sharing with a guaranteed place for the minority population no matter what happened, Trimble was prepared to look at another kind of arrangement with the SDLP. This codicil neither distressed nor enthused the electorate: to them, it was the sixth poll in just over two years. Trimble, initially, found it hard going on the hustings. 'I don't think that he actually liked the process of asking little old ladies for their votes – and I'm not sure he does today,' recalls Reg Empey, who was then chairman of Vanguard. 'I got the impression that he saw the election as the only way into the political process but he was uncomfortable talking about rising damp and other problems.'[4] But more important still was the way in which Craig chose to use Trimble in the Convention election. He fixed things so that Trimble would be given maximum coverage, picking him as the party's representative in a Province-wide TV debate. He certainly needed the experience. 'I showed John Taylor my scripted contribution beforehand,' recalls Trimble. 'It went "now let us dispose of some canards". Taylor, though, just mocked me. "Nobody will understand what that means," he said. And he was right.' On the next day, back on the doorstep in South Belfast, the atmosphere had changed: Trimble was now a personality in his own right and was treated as such. Trimble also stood in for Craig in a second broadcast after the Vanguard leader was taken ill, and thus appeared in two out of three of the party's election broadcasts.

This exposure did much to explain how Trimble was elected over Raymond Jordan, notwithstanding the fact that he came lower down the ballot paper alphabetically and had been less well known locally than his colleague.[5] Trimble secured 2429 first preferences (Martin Smyth of the UUP topped the poll with 15,061 votes) and following the distribution of transfers was elected on the ninth count with 7240 ballots cast.[6] Trimble was the fifth of the six representatives for the seat and duly became a member of the Convention on a salary of £2500 per annum.

Trimble, like Enoch Powell, is a loner who immerses himself and finds fulfilment in the work of institutions – and the Convention was no exception. He immediately set to work on the Standing Orders, and on the last day of debate was given the task of replying to all the points made from the dispatch box. 'It was a baptism of fire for a new comer,' recalls Trimble. 'I acquitted myself well and was exhilarated having come from being an almost complete observer of things to playing a significant role.'[7] Some opponents found his style too reminiscent of the kind of point-scoring that went on in university debating societies. Nonetheless, few doubted his worth to the body's deliberations. Maurice Hayes, who served as special adviser to the Convention, swiftly regarded him as 'unquestionably the most academically capable member of the body – although there was not much competition!'[8] Sir Frank Cooper, the Permanent Under Secretary at the NIO also spotted the young law lecturer. At a time when the NIO devoted more attention to the SDLP and to loyalist paramilitaries – because they were the ones who appeared to have the clout – Trimble stood out 'as someone with whom you could have a rational and intelligent conversation. London accepted the fact that people sometimes had to make extraordinary statements to maintain their credibility. But although he was seen as very right wing and much brighter than most other people, he would not have been seen as prospective leader. He would have been 25th on a list – well after Glenn Barr, say.'[9]

A glance at the Convention proceedings gives some clues as to why Trimble excited both approbation and resentment. His speeches are larded, inter alia, with references to the writings of Arnold Toynbee and Alexander Solzhenitsyn – scarcely conventional Unionist pin-ups. Indeed, when SDLP members urged that Northern Ireland emulate the power-sharing arrangements of Belgium, Holland and Switzerland, Trimble was ready with a rebuttal. Far from proving that there should be compulsory coalitions, they illustrated the very opposite: in the Netherlands the practice had evolved over time rather than by prescription in the constitution.[10] Anthony Alcock, an English academic at the University of Ulster, who joined Vanguard after settling in the Province – and who later advised Trimble during the 1996–8 talks – says that Trimble 'knows everything about the most obscure minority groups in the Caucasus. He is the only person I know of who can tell you about the two types of Karelians – Finnish Lutherans or Russian Orthodox.' Alcock, who had been commissioned by the Convention chairman, Sir Robert Lowry, to look at possible European models for resolving Ulster's conflict, also introduced Trimble to the intricacies of the South Tyrol question. It greatly appealed to Trimble, for it illustrates the principle in Europe of maintaining existing boundaries, while protecting minority rights within those borders. Even though there is actually a German-speaking majority within the South Tyrol, it has been accepted that this region should remain in Italy, but with special provisions through the local authority and with a proportionality rule for public service employees.[11] Such cosmopolitanism might in and of itself have been sufficient cause for suspicion, but some of Trimble's associations also aroused further doubts. After the Convention began, Trimble invited a couple of B&ICO activists – including Eamonn O'Kane, later General Secretary of the NAS-UWT – to place their pamphlets in the members' pigeon holes at Stormont. Trimble derived huge pleasure from escorting in the left-wingers, one with an obviously Catholic name. Later, he ran into a DUP Convention member, Clifford Smyth. 'David, there is such a thing as guilt by association, you know.'[12]

During the Convention, Trimble also came into prolonged contact for the first time with the British, joining Craig in seven meetings with Merlyn Rees and his officials. He also came into sustained contact for the first time with the SDLP. Trimble's maiden speech was a reply to Paddy Devlin. As the corpulent, working-class autodidact from the Belfast dockyards sat down, the pencil-thin, suburban academic stood up. As he did so, John Taylor whispered in his ear, 'congratulate Paddy on that speech'. Trimble was at a loss, since he had not actually listened to Devlin: he was searching for his notes, which he feared he had lost. Trimble duly told the chamber that Devlin was trying 'to achieve the greatest concord in this Convention. It was an approach which I welcomed and I am sure the people who sit on this side of the House with me welcomed it also.'[13] Afterwards Devlin beckoned him over. 'Can I have a word?' said Devlin. 'Any chance of getting some talks going?' Trimble said he did not know, but reported straight back to Craig.[14] Craig wondered whether Devlin wanted talks in Craig's capacity as Vanguard leader or as one of the chiefs of the loyalist coalition, or UUUC. When Trimble returned to Devlin, the latter said that either would do. For the next fortnight, Trimble spent much of his time at the Convention carrying secret messages back and forth between the two camps. Before entering the SDLP room at Stormont, Trimble looked down the corridor to make sure that no Unionists could observe him. Seeing that everything was safe, he opened the door only to find an SDLP group meeting in progress: the whole SDLP Convention party could see that Trimble was there. The consequence of such shuttle diplomacy was the inter-party talks which led to near-agreement on the voluntary coalition with the SDLP. Trimble remembers sitting alone in the members' room one morning, drinking coffee, when Craig walked in and out of the blue asked him: '"How are we going to prepare our people to bring the SDLP into government?" You could have knocked me down with a feather. And my thoughts went instinctively to Jean Coulter [the staunchly unionist UUP Convention member for West Belfast]. How are we going to get it past her? But the more I thought about it, the more I thought, "this is a bloody good deal".'[15] Years later, after he signed the Belfast Agreement, Coulter was again an opponent of Trimble's power-sharing ideas.

Why was Craig, the great foe of Sunningdale, prepared to offer this to the SDLP? His reasoning was simple. In his view, Unionism had essentially three options in this period. First, they could either reach agreement with the other parties; second, they could by use of their majority in the Convention push a report that would be unacceptable to Westminster, and knowing that it was such then work to make direct rule more efficient; or, third, they could force a report on an unwilling Westminster, which amounted to a kind of insurrection. The latter option was not viable by this stage, for the only way that loyalists could raise the people of the Province against direct rule was in a context where Westminster had behaved unreasonably, such as in foisting Sunningdale upon an unwilling majority.[16] The second option foreclosed any real possibility of a devolved govenment and meant acceptance of whatever 'crumbs' were on the 'table' from London. By contrast, the first option, in the particular circumstances in which Unionists found themselves, looked more attractive. For after the success of the UWC strike, Unionists were in a relatively strong position: not strong enough, he noted, to reimpose the old Stormont but enough to regain some kind of local institutions on better terms than Heath had offered to them. They had shown their residual muscle. And loyalist terrorists had even taken 'the war' down south in the Dublin-Monaghan bombings of May 1974. Moreover, a growing body of southern Irish opinion was anxious to disengage from 'the North' and effectively were telling Northern nationalists that they were now on their own and would have to cut the best deal they could with Unionists.[17] Given these circumstances, there was a real chance of cross-community agreement, without which Westminster would never accept the Convention report (a report adopted by simple majority – that is, of Unionists – would not be sufficient in political terms). But even if they failed to reach such an agreement, there were tremendous advantages to be gained by acting as reasonable men putting forward reasonable proposals. If Unionists were for once not seen to be the nay-sayers in the eyes of mainland opinion, there was every chance that they might then be able to extract other

concessions from central government, such as an increase in Northern Ireland's representation at Westminster.

Trimble had no doubts about the benefits to Unionism of Roman Catholics participating in government. 'It would be of great benefit to Ulster's political debate if all Unionist parties would examine carefully some aspects of the relationship between Unionism and persons of the Roman Catholic faith,' he opined. '… But let us state what we mean when we say "We will accept Catholics in Government if they are loyal!" Qualifications for inclusion must mean 1. Being prepared to act constitutionally, and only to seek change within the law. 2. Being prepared to accept the will of the majority that Ulster remains part of the United Kingdom. 3. Being prepared to support the forces of law … In present circumstances it would be highly advantageous for unionism if there were Catholics, who satisfied the above conditions, and who could be included in a unionist administration. But they would have to be representative Catholics, not G.B. Newe type figures [the only Catholic brought into government under Stormont, during Faulkner's premiership].'[18]

On what terms, though, would these representative Catholics – that is, the SDLP – enter government? What was clearly unacceptable to Unionists was that they have a place in the administration of Northern Ireland as of right. Compulsory power-sharing would be outside of normal British parliamentary practice. But, Craig (and Trimble) conjectured, there were other ways of ensuring that a variety of parties were represented in government: in other words, fulfilling the need for minority representation without it appearing that a gun was being held at the head of the majority. If the composition of the government was voluntary – say, for the duration of a national emergency such as on the lines of the 1940–45 war-time coalition – then it might prove more acceptable. Moreover, few could argue that the circumstances then obtaining in Northern Ireland constituted anything other than an emergency. The SDLP would have a place in government, but beyond the first few years there would be no guarantee of anything. They would be bound by Westminster-style collective responsibility in the majority Unionist Northern Ireland Cabinet, whose First Minister/ Chief Executive could hire and fire at will. And, above all, any such arrangements would be lacking an 'Irish dimension', such as the Council of Ireland which had contributed so powerfully to Faulkner's demise after Sunningdale.[19]

Trimble says that Craig later told him that the idea first occurred to him during his private talks with John Hume, another senior SDLP figure, at John Taylor's house in Armagh in 1973.[20] (Craig now denies this to be the case, stating that he never met Hume at Taylor's house.) But if Trimble is right, Craig only unveiled the idea when the Convention talks had stalled on the question of enforced power-sharing and the Council of Ireland. Later, when more hardline unionists had torpedoed the voluntary coalition proposal – severely damaging Vanguard in the process – Trimble would be blamed for devising the plan. He was, after all, an easy target as the cosmopolitan *éminence grise* with rum contacts, who had persuaded Craig to go down the route of compromise – even, as loyalists saw it, surrender. In fact, both men today deny this, asserting rather that it was Craig's idea.[21] That said, according to Craig's secretary, Isobel McCulloch, Craig discussed the details of the plan more intensively with Trimble than anyone else in Vanguard.[22]

But what happened next was, and has remained ever since, a subject of controversy – and the *way* in which the proposal for voluntary coalition was brought forward was as controversial as the idea itself. For its opponents, the idea was something suddenly sprung on them out of the blue, with no proper pedigree within UUUC policy-making councils. But for its proponents, there was ample scope for voluntary coalition in the UUUC's manifesto.[23] Most of the UUUC would have viewed such proposals as mere window-dressing – especially since there appeared to be no chance that they might be accepted by the SDLP. But after the initial impasse was reached, events and positions moved very rapidly. Both parties exchanged position papers on 26 August 1975 and reported the deadlock to the chairman, Sir Robert Lowry – with the specific request that he look at paragraph 8 (iii) of the

UUUC document. That portion of it outlined three ways in which a coalition could be formed: first, by inter-party agreement before the election, approved by the electorate; second, by a combination of two or more minority parties obtaining a majority together; or, third, by parties coming together in the national interest during an emergency. Not only did this section – which was drafted by Craig and Trimble – appear to many in the UUUC to contradict the earlier passages on straightforward majority rule but they contended that it was not put to the UUUC Convention grouping as a whole prior to its presentation to the SDLP. That said, it was discussed by the 12-strong UUUC policy Cabinet (on which Trimble sat) and by the three appointed UUUC negotiators – Craig, Capt. Austin Ardill of the UUP and Rev. William Beattie of the DUP. Indeed, the official Vanguard account of this episode states that Beattie saw it and assented after showing it to Paisley and that it was ratified on the following day by the policy committee. The DUP leader later denied seeing it; Beattie says he only agreed to look at the early version, in which the coalition appeared to be voluntary. But when the DUP and others examined the fine print more closely, it turned out to be anything but voluntary.[24]

Whatever was or was not agreed, on 29 August 1975, the UUUC negotiators were told by Lowry that the SDLP had said that it was prepared to accept the the Unionists' position of 26 August as a basis for further discussion. As the official Vanguard record, drafted by Trimble and approved by others, then states: 'However it was recognised that further exploration was needed to see if the detail of such an agreement should be settled. Ian Paisley arrived and discussed the matter with Mr Craig. On their way out to their cars, Mr Paisley told Mr Craig that such an agreement would be satisfactory to the Unionist people if it was put in a referendum first … it was stated that the SDLP appreciated that there could be no constitutional guarantee within the structures of government envisaged by the UUUC and that consequently they could have no assurance beyond the life of the first Parliament and that they would be liable to dismissal if they failed to support government policy. It was also stated that the SDLP had agreed that "the first tasks of the new government would be to wage war on the terrorists"… they also accepted that the [Northern Ireland] Parliament should control security and have appropriate forces – indeed they said that they would prefer the war against terrorism to be waged by local forces rather than by Westminster.'[25] On 3 September 1975, according to Lowry, the UUUC negotiators came to him and requested that he prepare a paper on the voluntary coalition and the SDLP followed suit with a similar request: Hugh Logue, then an SDLP Convention member, says that although the SDLP were not at all enthusiastic about this idea, they decided that it would not be politically advantageous to shoot it down: 'Our view was "let's see if Vanguard can deliver",' he recalls. 'The problem was that had it become a real offer it would have caused tensions within the SDLP – and would certainly have triggered a vigorous debate.'[26] Indeed, Trimble remembers asking John Hume if he thought he could carry the whole of the SDLP: the Derryman calculated that they would lose three to four out of the party's seventeen-strong Convention caucus.[27]

Lowry's paper was delivered on 4 September. At the UUUC policy committee meeting that day, it became clear that Paisley would now oppose the plan. 'In the course of argument Dr Paisley conceded that there was no alternative way of regaining a Parliament but nonetheless felt that the price was too high,' noted the official Vanguard record. 'He said that all we could do was to await divine intervention. Billy Beattie privately informed a Vanguard member that the DUP would leave the coalition and said they were going out to rouse the country against this "sell-out" although he had not clearly dissented from the initiative earlier in the week.'[28] (Beattie reiterates that this was because he believed the proposals as originally presented were different from what they subsequently turned out to be.) Craig may have been under the impression that the UUUC team had agreed to his proposals; but when the matter went to the separate Vanguard and UUP Convention caucuses within the UUUC coalition, it was clear that the Unionists of all shades were split by the voluntary coalition proposal. David Trimble, addressing his fellow Vanguardists at Saintfield in the following year, laid the blame squarely at the door of the UUUC rather than the SDLP: 'At this point, the

UUUC panicked. The thought of obtaining an agreement even on their own terms so scared them that they broke off talks.'[29]

Reg Empey, then a Convention member, says that Craig never consulted him about the idea – even though he was chairman of Vanguard and his running mate in East Belfast. There had been no meeting of the party's full council, nor any debate at constituency level, and once leaks started to appear in the press, local party workers started to make alarmed calls to headquarters. The Vanguard leader insisted 'that they had to strike while the iron is hot' remembers Empey. 'I observed that we had been the principal complainants under O'Neill that there had been no consultation and numerous attempts to bounce the party into decisions without debate. But Bill had made up his mind, he was absolutely rigid and inflexible. Back me or sack me was his approach. He didn't take a conciliatory approach to colleagues.'[30] Certainly, the lack of preparation of the grassroots contributed to the emerging debacle, but it was not the only cause of it. As so often in Northern Ireland, terrorist action played its part in hardening attitudes: on 1 September 1975, four Protestants were murdered by the South Armagh Republican Action Force (a cover name for the Provisional IRA) at the Tullyvallen Orange Hall in Newtownhamilton, Co. Armagh.[31]

A more important cause of the the Voluntary Coalition disaster lay in the internal dynamics of Unionist politics – or, more precisely in this instance, Protestant politics. For when word of it leaked out to Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church, the reaction of his co-religionists was unanimous: have nothing to do with this. At a Church meeting on 7 September, Paisley was told that any further dalliance with the coalition idea would divide the Free Presbyterians as well as the DUP.[32] Trimble also discerned two reactions within the UUP. The first related to their doubts about holding their own supporters in line with Paisley touring the country denouncing the proponents of the scheme as 'Vanguard Republicans'. But the second calculation was, Trimble believes to this day, more cynical: that many of them saw Craig's gamble as a way of destroying the Vanguard leader. After all, by the 1975 Convention elections, Vanguard had leapt into second place in terms of the overall number of seats within the UUUC coalition (14 compared to the DUP's 12 and the UUP's 19, even though it was still third in terms of the popular vote). Moreover, it had more capable people than the DUP and UUP. In fact, as Clifford Smyth – a not uncritical observer – notes in his biography of Paisley, such low calculation was probably not the motive of the DUP leader in this instance: whilst 'the Doc' did eventually reap political rewards from the destruction of Vanguard, there was no way of knowing this for sure on 8 September 1975. After all, no one can have anticipated that having gone up the Voluntary Coalition cul-de-sac, and been stymied, Craig would not have been nimble-footed enough to extricate himself.[33] But above all, the bulk of elected Unionists were in no mind to compromise on very much after 1974: the Convention was, in Maurice Hayes's words, 'Unionism's victory lap'.[34] So when the idea of a Voluntary Coalition was put forward at a full meeting of the UUUC Convention group, the proposal was duly rejected. Paisley then put forward a motion rejecting the presence of 'republicans' in the Government of Northern Ireland, which was passed by 37–1; although he was one of Craig's staunchest supporters, Trimble actually abstained, reasoning that there would be no point in being the sole dissenter in the room (Craig, he says, had left by this point).[35]

Craig's offer also prompted astonishment in England – and praise from unlikely quarters.[36] An *Observer* profile of 14 September 1975 likened him to O'Neill, Chichester-Clark and Faulkner, 'each a Unionist leader who tried to confront the prejudices of his supporters, and was swept aside. In each case, the British public has been mystified by the apparent transformation, at bewildering speed, from near villain to near hero. So before it happens to Craig, the British public should be warned about a significant literary genre, the Belfast Europa school of journalism. Deeply influenced by the Western "B" movie, this school's simple rule has been to identify, preferably on the journey into Belfast from Aldergrove airport, the Good Guys in the White Hat. Craig has last week been awarded his white

hat.' Trimble duly noted the praise heaped on Craig by the mainland establishment, but not because it betokened to him a sell-out: rather, it illustrated to him how anxious official and semi-official circles were to latch on to any good idea. Far from having a master plan, the British state, in his eyes, was often rudderless in its aims and incompetent in its execution.[37]

Craig then proceeded to launch a media blitz to overturn the UUUC decision, spearheaded by Burnside and Trimble, and he won the support of the Vanguard Central Council on 11 October by 128 votes to 79 after a fighting speech. But the bulk of the Convention party were not with him and shortly thereafter they formed the United Ulster Unionist Movement. Then, following a five-hour meeting at Stormont Craig, Trimble, Barr and Green were expelled from the UUUC grouping. The Ernie Baird faction was admitted in their place, and Baird himself became deputy leader of the UUUC.[38] But Trimble's own expulsion was delayed. The reason had nothing to do with any innate affection for the man amongst his brother loyalists. Rather, it had everything to do with the fact that as chairman of the UUUC drafting committee he was the main author of the report which had to be delivered imminently by each of the parties. Despite some suggestions that he leave his detractors in the lurch, Trimble completed the task, asserting that it was vital for Unionism that it be done properly.[39] After the split, he also became deputy leader of the rump Vanguard party.

Trimble derived some crucial lessons from this episode. The first was that Craig should have done more to consult the average member of the Convention about the evolution of his thinking and the contacts with the SDLP. The sense of shock when these dealings emerged, says Trimble, did much to weaken Craig's position when the deal went awry and they panicked.[40] Trimble, who was part of Craig's inner circle, initially went to the opposite extreme in dealing with his Assembly party after the Belfast Agreement of 1998. According to Trimble, the collapse of Craig's initiative was one of the great political disasters to have befallen the Province during the Troubles. Had that opportunity been taken, he says, there would have been political stability in the second half of the 1970s, and an end to terrorism soon thereafter. There would have been no Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 – giving the Republic a say in the governance of Ulster for the first time – and none of the present political developments. And it amused him greatly when the DUP launched their *Devolution Now* document on 6 February 2004 – in which the Paisleyites extolled the concept of a voluntary coalition with the SDLP as one of three options for the future of the Province.[41]

Yet in the short term, Trimble was to suffer even more acute, personal discomfiture as a result of the Voluntary Coalition debacle. In the last debate of the Convention, on 3 March 1976 – just before its dissolution – Trimble wound up for Vanguard. His concluding remarks were directed at his UUUC colleagues, and especially at Paisley: 'In 1972, he [Paisley] was not prepared to exert himself to defend Stormont and in 1976 he does not seem to be prepared to exert himself to restore it …' opined Trimble. 'In the debate of the last few days I have been reminded of an old Russian proverb that I came across in the pages of *The Gulag Archipelago*, volume 2, to the effect that we should look for our brave men in prisons and for the fools amongst the politicians.'[42] It was, says Trimble, a bit of hyperbole on his part to hurt Paisley: in his view the DUP leader had always been a short-term thinker who was prepared to undermine Stormont for the sake of gaining an immediate advantage over the UUP. But the quote from Solzhenitsyn was also, he contended, a reference to his view of the way in which Paisley's rhetoric had fired up a lot of loyalist people, who had then ended up in Northern Ireland's jails. Those who did those deeds, thinks Trimble today (and then), had more bravery than those who encouraged them.[43]

Trimble was not, however, ready for Paisley's response. 'There is a story going round Queen's University that a well-known member of Vanguard and a lecturer in law at Queen's University, was toying with his personal side-arm in a young lady's home' retorted the DUP leader. 'After seemingly unloading it he pulled the trigger and surprise, surprise, it went off and a bullet embedded itself in a wall behind the girl, missing her head by a mere inch. Our man from Vanguard very quickly

filled in the bullet hole with Polyfilla. One wonders how good Polyfilla is for holes in the head. Mr Chairman, that might be an apocryphal story, but tonight the hon. Gentleman was certainly toying with a situation with which he was not prepared to come clean out into the open.'[44] The attack was a clear reference to Trimble. There was uproar and shouts of 'withdraw!' from Convention members; Trimble tried to make Paisley give way, but the DUP leader declined. John Kennedy, one of the clerks to the Convention, recalls that 'it was the most chilling, lowest, moment I have ever witnessed at Stormont. The blood literally drained from David Trimble's face. Even the nimble-witted Lowry was lost for words.'[45]

Not for nothing is Ian Paisley reputed to have the best contacts of anyone in the Province – and, to this day, David Trimble does not know how the DUP leader discovered about this episode.[46] Paisley still declines to say who his source was.[47] Indeed, a large number of people – mostly, but not exclusively anti-Agreement unionists – have asked me whether I know of 'Trimble's attempt to kill his first wife' or of an attempt of kill an ex-girlfriend. One senior Ulster Unionist even suggested to me that because of this supposed attempt to murder his then consort, Trimble was exposed to blackmail by MI5 – resulting in a vulnerability to British state pressure which led him, ultimately, to sign the Belfast Agreement (there are echoes here of the allegations made by some Irish republicans against Michael Collins, to the effect that he only signed the 1921 treaty because London 'had something' on him).[48] The reality then was rather more prosaic. Far from being an illustration of Trimble's temper in the course of a domestic dispute it was, rather, an illustration of his technical incompetence. Trimble was at the Belfast home of his girlfriend and wife-to-be, Daphne Orr, in Surrey Street off the Lisburn Road. He was clearing his personal protection weapon – a nine-millimetre automatic – and had removed the magazine. He thought he had cleared the chamber and squeezed the trigger to clear the spring. To his horror, 'there was a round up the spout which fired into a wall. Even now, I find it it a bit of a shock to recall it.'[49] Daphne Trimble recalls that her reaction after the bullet hit the wall was 'quite unprintable' – and adds, reasonably enough, that if she believed that he was trying to kill her, she would have terminated the relationship. The RUC was never called, nor did David and Daphne Trimble ever tell anyone about it: Daphne, who was in the public gallery when Paisley revealed this information, was in a state of shock. The episode contributed to Trimble's decision to give up the weapon in 1978, a decision made all the easier by the fact that he thought then he was leaving public life following the break-up of Vanguard.[50]

Daphne and David Trimble had first met at Queen's in 1972, where he had taught her Land Law in her second year and then advanced Property Law in her third year for her honours classes. She had been born in 1953 at Warrenpoint, Co. Down, a small port by the border with the Republic. She was the second of four Orr sisters, the last two being twins.[51] Her older sister, Geraldine, married a Newry Catholic, Connla Magennis – whose uncle, Frank Aiken, was an IRA Chief of Staff in the 1920s who later became Fianna Fail Foreign Minister (Trimble never met Aiken, and Daphne only met him once at her sister's wedding).[52] Daphne's mother came from Scotland and her father owned Fred C. Orr, a well-known jeweller in Newry, the nearest large town. Newry was, she recalls, a tinderbox in the early years of the Troubles, and Protestant businesses were regularly burned out: she remembers that when the next shop was set alight, the arsonists were burned to a crisp. Like so many border Protestants, they came under huge pressure in this largely nationalist area, but the family remained resolutely non-sectarian. None of her family ever joined any of the Loyal Orders, though her father was a Freemason. Her parents were in the New Ulster Movement, the precursor of the Alliance party, but she freely admits that had she not married Trimble she would never have become a political animal.[53]

Initially, she had only liked him as a lecturer and felt comfortable enough to ask him for advice on an apprenticeship, for she had few contacts in the legal profession in Belfast. He directed her to his

old friend from the Land Registry and personal lawyer, Sam Beattie, of F.J. Orr & Co. (no relation). It was only in the summer of 1975, after she had graduated, that they started going out with each other: the courtship was first struck up at a staff-student cricket match. Later, he took her to the bar at Stormont and taught her about classical music, especially Wagner. They were married on 31 August 1978 at Warrenpoint Methodist Church: as at his first wedding, ten years earlier, Trimble was married to the strains of the bridal march from Wagner's *Lohengrin*.[54] The reception was held in Banbridge and Trimble's new-found happiness was apparent for all to see: even today, members of his staff are struck by how his countenance lightens whenever her name is mentioned. Daphne Trimble's influence on his life has been enormous. As Herb Wallace notes, 'she is good at all the things David is not good at'. She provides the softening touch when he can be brusque or distracted – especially running the constituency office in Lurgan.[55] Sam Beattie notes that under her influence, he has become more even-tempered.[56] Above all, she provided him with four chidren: Richard, born in 1982; Victoria, born in 1984; Nicholas, born in 1986; and Sarah, born in 1992. Trimble had little contact with children prior to his marriage, but to Daphne's surprise has proved to be a good father. Since 1982, the couple have lived in a chaotic, detached house at Harmony Hill in suburban Lisburn – just off the old Belfast road heading towards Lambeg, Co. Antrim, and a mere ten minutes away from the outlying portions of republican west Belfast. More significantly, perhaps, the particular cul-de-sac in which they live is majority Roman Catholic.[57]

Despite that, Harmony Hill has provided a stable home and community in which to rear a family. It also permitted Trimble to reconnect with his spiritual roots. He had ceased to participate in the act of worship from 1968 to 1978, but resumed kirk attendance shortly after his remarriage. Daphne Trimble was born into a Methodist family, but they go every week to the nearby Harmony Hill Presbyterian Church, as much for geographical reasons as anything else. And when in London or abroad, he worships either at Crown Court Church of Scotland kirk in Covent Garden or at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington DC. Since 1992, the family has been ministered to by a liberal evangelical clergyman, David Knox, and all the children have been brought up as Presbyterians. This church is ecumenical in spirit and holds joint services with its nearby Roman Catholic neighbour, St Colman's, Lambeg: Trimble has read the lesson when the shared Christmas carol service is held at Harmony Hill, although he has never gone down the road to St Colman's itself. But there is no connection, says Trimble, between his religious evolution and his political development: he has kept a pretty rigid separation between church and state in his own life.[58]

SIX *Death at Queen's*

AFTER the Convention was dissolved, Trimble stayed loyal to Craig, who was still Westminster MP for East Belfast. In 1977, Trimble helped his chief defeat the abortive DUP-led loyalist workers' strike called for the purpose of pushing the British Government to adopt a more robust security policy to crush the Provisionals: like much of the UUP and the Orange Order, Vanguard did not believe that the time was right. There were a number of reasons for this. First, unlike in 1974, there was no obvious target, in the form of a power-sharing enterprise. Second, under the new Labour Secretary of State, Roy Mason, British security policy was at its toughest anyhow. Craig and Trimble duly met with Mason on 1 and 10 May 1977 to advise him on how to deal with the disturbances. In particular, after Mason had issued a stern attack on the strikers from his home in Barnsley, Trimble urged him to tone it down: he feared that it might consolidate support for the strike, much as Wilson's 'spongers' speech had done several years previously.[1] Perhaps Mason took notice, for he did not use such language again.[2]

However valuable Craig's and Trimble's advice was to the British Government, nothing could alter the central political reality: Vanguard was finished. Craig duly wound up the party in 1978 and decided that his movement would again work for change from within, rather than from outside the UUP. Trimble duly joined the UUP for the first time in 1978 and found a berth in the Lisburn branch of Molyneaux's constituency party in South Antrim. Far from slowly working his passage, after serving on the losing side in the internal party debate, both he and Craig were soon in the thick of the action again. At their 1978 conference at Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, the UUP backed the idea of a Regional Council for Northern Ireland. In other words, they would rather accept the lesser level of power inherent in local authority-style devolution than share a greater measure of Stormont-style power with nationalists. There were sound political reasons for this carefully calibrated stance. The party was deeply divided between integrationists and devolutionists. The Regional Council proposal could be represented as a move towards either wing of the UUP. For integrationists, it offered the prospect of British-style local government; for devolutionists, the return of such limited powers could be the prelude to return to Stormont.[3] Trimble put forward an amendment at Enniskillen which called for a restoration of a devolved legislature working along normal parliamentary principles. He told the gathering that the party's original motion would be interpreted as abandoning devolution and adopting integration as a policy.

Such interventions did little to endear Trimble to the UUP establishment. The reasons for their distaste were personal as well as political, and ensured that he remained an outsider for many years to come. First, he was a refugee from Vanguard, which in 1973 had contributed mightily to the split in the old UUP. Indeed, there was always a whiff of sulphur about Vanguard, with its air of unconstitutionality. 'It was not just David Trimble,' recalls Molyneaux. 'There was a certain reservation in the mind of a great many members of the party. It was a little unseen question mark – particularly if they do something impulsive. That was the trademark of the Vanguard party.'[4] Then there was the matter of his character, which was light years from the backslapping bonhomie of the 'good ole' boys' at Glengall Street; nor, he admits, did he do much to make himself amenable to them.[5] Then, of course, there were the more obvious reasons for political prejudice, namely Trimble's status as a devolutionist dissident in a party that was apparently becoming ever more integrationist under Enoch Powell's influence. No doubt such sentiments help explain why Trimble came in third place when he sought to become UUP candidate in North Down in the 1979 General Election, behind Hazel Bradford and the eventual nominee, Clifford Smyth.[6]

Given these sensibilities, it was perhaps fortunate that few, if any, of Trimble's party colleagues (including Molyneaux) knew that from 1976 to 1986, he often wrote the 'Calvin Macnee' column in *Fortnight* magazine, which alternated between a unionist and a nationalist (subsequently, nationalist contributors wrote under a *nom de plume* of Columbanus Macnee). He had originally been recruited by his colleague, Tom Hadden, who found it hard to persuade Unionists of Trimble's hue to write for the journal: Hadden recalls that Trimble would leave his contributions in his pigeon hole at the faculty in a brown envelope.[7] It was characterised by an irreverent, mocking tone: two of its main targets were Molyneaux and Paisley, though Martin Smyth and Harold McCusker were recipients of the occasional sideswipe as well.[8] Trimble was contemptuous of what he saw as politicians who would wind up the public and then walk away from the consequences of their actions – in terms which would have been well understood by Andy Tyrie and others in the UDA. 'Just the other day Harold McCusker was discussing, on television, the circumstances that would lead to loyalists firing on the RUC and the British Army. It is all rather reminiscent of the days when Bill Craig went to Westminster to make his shoot-to-kill speech. Though there are differences. When Craig made his threat he had the strength of the UDA and others behind him. Also, if I remember rightly, he used the first person singular, while McCusker ingloriously refers to what others might do.'[9] In particular, he heaped scorn upon Paisley's 'Carson Trail' antics, launched in protest at the Thatcher-Haughey dialogue and which followed Sir Edward's itinerary in protest at the Home Rule Bill in 1912. At one point, the DUP leader had assembled 500 men on a Co. Antrim hillside, supposedly waving firearms certificates. 'To be impressive you must have something extra – something to show that these men mean business,' opined Calvin Macnee. 'So what do they do? They all wave a piece of paper in the air, and it is suggested that the papers represent firearms certificates … If the "Big Man" wants to persuade the government that he is a threat to be taken seriously, he must do better than that. I've heard it said that the demonstration might not be unconnected with the current history programmes on television, which have unearthed a lot of interesting film of bygone days. Paisley himself has made the connection by saying that he is following the Carson trail. Well, I've heard it said too that the television set at the Paisley home is faulty – that it's not the example of Sir Edward that he is following, but Frank of that ilk…'[10] Correctly, he warned fellow Unionists that despite Margaret Thatcher's John Bull rhetoric, she was not reliable on Northern Ireland. As he saw it, Unionists tended to respond to her positively because of the very hostile reaction of Irish nationalists to the volume and manner of her remarks, rather than because of the intrinsically pro-loyalist content of policy.[11]

Before the 1979 General Election, Molyneaux had struck up a close relationship with Thatcher, then leader of the Opposition and her principal spokesman on Northern Ireland, Airey Neave. He had persuaded her to go for Scottish-style regional councils with no legislative powers and had contributed greatly to the writing of the section of the Tory manifesto on Ulster. But after Neave was murdered by the INLA in March 1979, and the Conservatives entered office in May 1979, Thatcher put in the much weaker Humphrey Atkins as Secretary of State. He listened very carefully to his officials, whose institutional preferences were profoundly sceptical of anything that might integrate Northern Ireland more fully into the rest of the United Kingdom. Instead, in November 1979, the Government published a consultative document, *The Government of Northern Ireland: A Working Paper for a Conference.* Although it ruled out discussion of Irish unity, confederation, independence, compulsory power-sharing or the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, it contained none of the positive suggestions for which the UUP had hoped. The SDLP, meanwhile, demanded the right to raise the 'Irish dimension', which was eventually conceded in 'parallel' talks.[12] Molyneaux reacted bitterly to what he saw as this betrayal and the UUP accordingly refused to attend the 'Atkins talks' – whilst the DUP, to the surprise of many, did so. Trimble, writing as Calvin Macnee in *Fortnight*, slammed Molyneaux's 'miscalculations' and dismissed the boycott of the talks as 'silly'.[13] Molyneaux, whose approach was always one of 'safety first', had his own calculations: he had to fend off a challenge

from the DUP. Paisley had scored the highest number of first preferences in the 1979 European elections, the first Province-wide 'beauty contest'. And during the 1981 Hunger Strikes, the DUP actually outpolled the UUP in the local council elections (as Trimble correctly predicted in *Fortnight* in July/August 1980).[14]

Trimble disagreed with Molyneaux's approach. 'Jim should not have assumed that the Government was going to pick up his ideas and run with them as a single option. The fact that there were talks did not mean that they would disappear. But he was petulant. Because he was not offered those things on a plate, it meant that his ideas could not possibly come about. It was a terrible tactical judgement from his own point of view. Molyneaux's negativism drove an impatient Thatcher into the hands of succesive Irish governments. She felt she had to do something following the Hunger Strikes of 1981, and this eventually resulted in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985' (significantly, even in this highly polarised period, Trimble was at pains to emphasise in his *Fortnight* column that he did not conclude from Bobby Sands' victory in the first Fermanagh-South Tyrone by-election of 1981 that the majority of Catholics backed violence).[15] Indeed, he recalls that even the South Antrim UUP management committee passed a highly unusual motion that was critical of Molyneaux's behaviour over the Atkins talks.[16] Despite these public reversals, Molyneaux proceeded to consolidate his internal grip on the party, prompting Trimble to form the Devolution Group in conjunction with some fellow dissidents. One of the key driving forces behind this ginger group was Trimble's colleague from Queen's, Edgar Graham, who would come to play an important role in his life. Superficially, they were birds of a feather, though in fact the two men were very different (nor were they 'best friends', as some have suggested). They had first met when Graham was a second-year law student, taking Trimble's course on Trusts. Graham, who was born in 1954, came from Randalstown, Co. Antrim and had attended Ballymena Academy. After Queen's, he had gone on to postgraduate work at Trinity College, Oxford, where he worked on a thesis on sovereign immunity. Returning from England, he was called to the Bar and taught Public Law at Queen's. He and Trimble occupied adjacent offices and became close professionally and politically, talking animatedly together in the Common Room during coffee breaks. Graham, who had been interested in politics since his teens, joined the UUP, but significantly did not join the Loyal Orders: he wanted to see how far he could progress in the party without such feathers in his Unionist cap. He was also opposed to capital punishment. He lacked the personal spikiness of Trimble, nor did he carry any of the Vanguard baggage and became one of the few intellectual indulgences which the UUP allowed itself.[17] After his election in 1982 to the Assembly, he displayed an impressive command of parliamentary procedure, which few could match. Many, including Molyneaux and Trimble, assumed that Graham would one day become leader of the UUP.[18]

Graham was elected Chairman of the Young Unionist Council in 1981 and in the following year was elected Honorary Secretary of the full Ulster Unionist Council. Ian Clark, a Queen's Young Unionist and Devolution Group activist who later became election agent to John Taylor, recalls feeling a sense of despair that Trimble, by contrast, could not have managed to be elected a party officer on the Devolution Group slate.[19] At one point, Trimble was even thrown off the Ulster Unionist Executive as representative from South Antrim and in the 1981 local elections he failed to be elected as a councillor in Area D of 'Loyalist' Lisburn.[20]Moreover, the space which he might potentially have occupied within the party was further 'crowded out' by two other capable lawyers who had recently joined up – Robert McCartney and Peter Smith. Significantly, both were critical of the drift of Molyneaux's policy. McCartney became chairman of the Union Group, which according to Trimble was founded to perform a function akin to the Bow Group or the Tribune Group. In 1982 the Union Group published *Options: Devolved Government for Northern Ireland.* McCartney wrote the foreword, while Trimble contributed the main paper. Trimble acknowledged that there could be no return to old Stormont-style majority rule and urged that a coalition be formed of all parties prepared

to support common policies – that is, something along Voluntary Coalition lines. It also endorsed Sir James Craig's flexibility at the time of Partition: 'Before the 1921 Treaty, Craig had gone south to speak to de Valera while the latter was still on the run. [Trimble's added emphasis] This meant putting himself into the hands of a go between, allowing himself to be taken, blindfolded, to an IRA hideout … Craig negotiated the Craig-Collins pact with Michael Collins which covered the whole range of law enforcement in Ulster, including the proposal that Catholic reserve constables should be recruited specifically for the policing of Catholic districts.' The favourable reference to these discussions is significant: according to Marianne Elliott, 'the Craig-Collins pacts had held out the prospect of peaceful collaboration by the minority with the northern state. Not until the Sunningdale agreement of 1973 was another such effort made.'[21] But few invested these lines with much significance at the time; and as James Cooper, a prominent Fermanagh Ulster Unionist notes, Trimble was a master draftsman, who would be careful to emphasise that he was simply putting forward options, which were not necessarily his own views.[22] Trimble says he was even perfectly prepared to place his academic expertise at the disposal of political rivals. *Ulster: The Facts*, published in 1982 under the names of Ian Paisley, Peter Robinson and John Taylor, was, he says, largely drafted by the Unionist writer Hugh Shearman and himself. It was written in preparation for the trio's visit to America and was described by John Whyte in his bibliographical study, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* as 'the fullest recent attempt to give the Unionist case a factual basis'.[23] However, Peter Robinson and Cedric Wilson – a director of Crown Publications, the company which produced this work – state vigorously that they have no knowledge of Trimble assisting in this endeavour. But Robinson concedes that Trimble might have worked privately with Shearman. By contrast, John Taylor states that he clearly recalls Trimble playing a leading role in drafting of the document. Whatever Trimble's precise role, it is clearly symptomatic of the divisions in Unionism that even so apparently uncontentious an issue as the authorship of a two-decades-old pamphlet should prompt such disagreement on basic facts!

Despite his skilled advocacy, much of the UUP hierarchy still regarded Trimble with suspicion as the most dangerous of the devolutionists. Those suspicions were further fuelled by the style as well as the substance of Trimble's politics. For Molyneaux's boycott of the Atkins talks and the attendant mistrust of the NIO were the antithesis of Trimble's approach: he believes in engaging political opponents head-on. In 1978, Trimble had several meetings with Allen Huckle, a young civil servant on secondment from the old Civil Service Department and later a senior member of the Foreign Office. He also met Stephen Leach, a rising civil servant in the political affairs division of the NIO, who contacted him out of the blue after reading his contributions to the Convention debates. The dialogue was a two-way process: the officials were out to influence the Unionists, and Trimble was out to influence them. Later, Leach introduced Trimble to a more senior figure in the NIO, David Blatherwick, who was on secondment from the Foreign Office and who later became ambassador to the Irish Republic and Egypt. 'Trimble came to us with a lot of suspicion not of the British state but of the Foreign Office and the NIO,' recalls Blatherwick. 'All of them, in his view, were selling out and pandering to the nationalists. You can't, of course, provide reassurance through mere words. You can only do it by consistency, by trying to explain what government is trying to do. If I had been in his position, I would have been suspicious, too. Everything normal about the Unionists' early lives had been swept away and here were these funny foreign guys from London put in charge temporarily and why should you trust them?'[24]

Trimble says he learned an important lesson from these conversations – that the Government had no master plan for the future of the Province and that Blatherwick was, in fact, grateful for ideas. Far from seeking a 'sell-out' or 'scuttle' from Ulster, Trimble contends that Blatherwick was looking for some formulation that would quieten things down.[25] The two men spoke in particular about the ideas which Trimble, Craig and David McNarry had expressed in their personal capacities as UUP members in February 1980 in a paper entitled *Towards the Better Government of Ulster.*

The document proposed a phasing of devolution which in the first stage could cover those services presently administered by the six Northern Ireland departments (Health, Education and so on), thus reserving more controversial matters for later. These reserved matters, it went on, could then be transferred within a specified period following a vote by a special or weighted majority of the members of the Northern Ireland Parliament. It added that the advantages of this procedure would be that there would be a clear incentive for all parties to work towards such a transfer. Some of these ideas were later incorporated into the 'rolling devolution' plans of Thatcher's second Ulster Secretary, Jim Prior, and the ensuing 1982–6 Assembly. Although the UUP participated in the Prior Assembly, many integrationists – and, above all, Powell – saw the body as a NIO stratagem to perpetuate the semi-detached status of the Province.

Trimble may have found discussions with officials informative, but they cost him dearly in the short term. In 1982, Enoch Powell raised a grave matter in the Commons, which came to be known in unionist circles simply as 'Sloan-Abbott'. The sequence of events was as follows: in February 1981, a young postgraduate researcher at Keele University called Geoffrey Sloan approached an upcoming NIO civil servant called Clive Abbott, for the purpose of interviewing him for his thesis. Sloan passed a record of this interview on to Harold McCusker, who in turn passed it on to James Molyneaux, who in his turn showed it to Enoch Powell. The contents of Sloan's notes were sensational. Abbott had apparently informed him that when the Tories entered office in 1979, the NIO had to tell them that the Neave (and therefore the Molyneaux) policy of greater integration was 'just not on', both because such an approach would forfeit the cooperation of the Republic in security affairs and because of past secret undertakings given to the Irish Republic on the constitutional future of Northern Ireland. The message was in line with Powell's worst fear: that civil servants were working actively to undermine the policy of the elected government of the day at the behest of a foreign power. Prior was enraged that a civil servant who could not defend himself should be named in this way. Moreover, he said, beyond the fact that these interviews took place, there was no agreeement on what Abbott had actually said. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, had conducted an investigation. According to his findings, Abbott had not said these things: the notes contained some basic errors which, he held, no high-flying NIO civil servant could ever make (such as the misnaming of a US Congressman interested in Ulster). Above all, Prior retorted, Powell had not – as it were – 'declared an interest' in the matter of Sloan. For it emerged that although Sloan was, indeed, a researcher at Keele, he had once done research for McCusker and had also met Molyneaux on a number of occasions. When Powell raised the matter, he did not mention this and it thus appeared (erroneously) that Sloan had been acting as an entirely independent observer. Whatever the truth of the matter, the apparent errors in the interview notes and the question of Powell's omission allowed the Government off the hook.[26]

But there was a further twist to the tale. For according to David McKittrick's 'Westminster Notebook' in the *Irish Times* of 3 July 1982, the document 'has Abbott naming a prominent Official Unionist politician and saying, "he is also a personal friend, and has kept us well-informed about what is going on inside Jim Molyneaux's party for a number of years". The politician named says he has never, to the best of his recollection, met anyone by the name of Clive Abbott.' That unidentified person was David Trimble. The notes were circulated widely in loyalist circles and their contents were advertised – accurately – to the author. Key passages have also subsequently been passed on to me by a prominent UUP figure. The implications of this allegation were very serious indeed and confirmed the worst suspicions of the UUP about anyone who spoke to the NIO. For, at best, he could have been seen by his fellow unionists to have been indiscreet in front of 'the Brits'. Indeed, the most damaging claim, says Trimble, was to be described as a 'good friend' by a civil servant. Trimble states that since he had not met Abbott, the reference to him was obviously meant in a departmental sense, in the light of his conversations with Huckle, Leach and Blatherwick. He protested loudly to Blatherwick about the damage, but the UUP leader remembers that 'the NIO had gone into deep defensive mode' and would not issue a denial on his behalf.[27] Blatherwick also denies that Trimble was an informer of any

kind and says that 'as a person he's honest to the point of brutality. A very proper person, very aware of his own position. That's why he took Sloan-Abbott so badly.'[28] Trimble also spoke to Molyneaux, as his local MP, to ensure that these claims were curtailed, but he remembers Molyneaux simply equivocated; Molyneaux says that he did not know what Trimble was alluding to. Even today, over two decades on, serving and retired senior civil servants are edgy about the Sloan-Abbott correspondence, refusing either to talk about it, or claiming that they cannot remember the details (or after much delay taking refuge in the Prior statement to the House in 1982). Abbott himself left the NIO a few years later for a senior position at the Home Office. Later, he held high rank in English local government and became chief executive of Cotswold District Council. He declined to talk on the record and his off-the-record comments added nothing beyond the existing public record. Sloan is now a lecturer in strategic studies and the author of an excellent tome entitled *The Geopolitics of Anglo-Irish Relations in the Twentieth Century.* Molyneaux strongly urged the author not to pursue the matter. Trimble, by contrast, is far more open about Sloan-Abbott than some of the other protagonists.

The accumulation of reversals contributed to Trimble's decision not to run for the Assembly and to contemplate leaving politics altogether. 'My first child was on the way and I was not getting anywhere personally,' recalls Trimble. 'Had it not been for Edgar [Graham] and the Anglo-Irish Agreement, my life would have gone in a totally different direction.'[29]Although Graham was by now in the Assembly – he had been elected for Trimble's old seat in South Belfast – the two men remained on friendly professional terms. Graham carried a personal protection weapon, but it was no macho indulgence on his part. The nationalist population – including many students at Queen's – had been 'radicalised' during and after the Hunger Strikes. Academia and judiciary, in particular, were becoming more vulnerable: in March 1982, whilst the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Robert Lowry, was visiting Queen's, the IRA fired four shots, wounding a professor; an RUC officer was shot in the head during an examination, though his life was saved; and Lord McDermott, Lowry's predecessor, was injured in a bomb blast whilst visiting the then Ulster Polytechnic at Jordanstown some years earlier.[30] And although the IRA did not usually target politicians, they had broken with this unwritten half-understanding in December 1981, when the Rev. Robert Bradford, Westminster MP for the constituency was murdered along with a caretaker at a community centre in Finaghy. Brian Garrett, a leading Belfast solicitor met Trimble at the opera that night and told him the news: Trimble's reaction was such that Garrett recalls that 'I felt as though I had plunged a knife into him.'[31]

By now, Edgar Graham had also come to the notice of the IRA. First, he was a relatively rare commodity – an intellectually talented Unionist politician. Second, in a debate at the Queen's University student union, he had conducted a brilliant defence of the so-called 'supergrass' trials (to which he always referred as 'turning Queen's evidence'), drawing attention to their effectiveness in Italy in combating the Red Brigades. The 'supergrass' system was then threatening to play havoc inside the terrorist organisations on both sides. Undoing it became one of the principal short-term aims of republicans and Graham was a highly articulate and plausible obstacle. Graham's colleague, Sylvia Hermon, who came to the debate to support him, never before witnessed such malignancy or hostility from some of the students. 'I felt afraid for him that day and in that environment,' she remembers. 'But I then did not realise the significance of it.'[32] There may have been other, more hidden threats as well. Trimble received a separate call after a gap of some years from Andy Tyrie to tell him that he had reason to believe a Queen's colleague, Miriam Daly, was using her post to gather information on people at or associated with the University (that is, the activity which subsequently came to be described as 'targeting'[33]). Miriam Daly was subsequently murdered by the UFF on 26 June 1980 – and was then described on the INLA headstone as a 'volunteer'.[34]

However, Graham had not only come to the attention of republicans. He had also angered the loyalist terrorists, opposing separation of prisoners in the Maze. Indeed, friends of Edgar Graham – including David Trimble – recall that at this point, he was more afraid of assassination by loyalists

than by anyone else and he alluded to this threat in an Assembly debate.[35] Trimble told him that this threat was an attempt to intimidate rather than seriously to injure – on the grounds that no elected Unionist representative had been seriously attacked in the way, for example, that senior SDLP figures had been assaulted by republicans.[36] Possibly, this was because Graham knew that a leading loyalist had been warned by a prison officer that he (the prison officer) overheard a UVF prisoner suggesting that Graham might be a 'legitimate target' because of his policies (the implication being that if the IRA killed Graham, there would be no reciprocal strike against a nationalist). Certainly, Graham was regularly attacked in *Combat* – the 'journal' of the UVF – during this period and especially for his views on prisoner issues. 'Does Assemblyman Graham really speak on behalf of the UUP and its elected representatives?' it asked. 'They will be judged by their silence!'[37]

A few months later, Sylvia Hermon walked into the Law Faculty building at 19 University Square to find two men she had never seen before looking at the examination timetable. She let them depart the building, but followed behind into Botanic Avenue. She ran into an RUC officer who intercepted the pair. When pressed, one of them said that he had been looking at the timetable for his sister, who was reading geography and law – a non-existent combined course. It sounded suspicious, but the policeman could do nothing.[38] On the last day of tutorials – 7 December 1983 – Graham walked across from the main university building to the Law Faculty. There, he met a colleague, Dermott Nesbitt. Nesbitt, a lecturer in accounting and finance, had been Brian Faulkner's election agent in East Down in the 1970s; after leaving the party with Faulkner to form the short-lived Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, he had returned to the UUP fold. Graham laid down his case on the pavement and told Nesbitt that he was going over to London the next day to talk to the Conservative backbench Northern Ireland Committee. 'John Biggs-Davison [vice chairman of the committee] is a good integrationist,' said Nesbitt, teasing his devolutionist colleague. 'Michael Mates [secretary to the committee] is a good devolutionist,' retorted Graham to his integrationist colleague.

At that point, two men ran up behind Graham and fired a number of times, at point-blank range, into his head. He fell immediately to the ground. The other plotters, who did not pull the trigger, began running in all directions to distract witnesses so as to prevent the identification of the killers. Stunned, Nesbitt looked up at the row of buildings opposite. 'Everyone was staring out of the windows,' remembers Nesbitt. 'With all the lights on during this dark December day, the hundreds of matchstalk heads looked like something out of an L.S. Lowry picture.' He ran into the faculty, where he immediately met David Trimble. 'It's Edgar,' exclaimed Nesbitt.[39] Sandra Maxwell, administrative assistant in the Law Faculty since the days of Professor Montrose, remembers that Trimble was very quick to react, thundering up the stairs to call the ambulances and the RUC.[40] But it was to no avail. Edgar Graham was dead, aged 29. Sylvia Hermon was present in the students' union when his death was announced over the tannoy: it elicited a vast roar of approval from some of the republican students. She has never been able to set foot in the place since.[41] Whilst regretting all deaths, Gerry Adams nonetheless declined to condemn the killing because Sinn Fein was not prepared to join the 'hypocritical chorus of establishment figures who were vocal only in their condemnation of IRA actions and silent on British actions'.[42]

Hitherto, Queen's had prided itself on being 'above the conflict' – a kind of safe haven where such unpleasantnesses did not intrude. Now, however, they found that the RUC investigation centred on republican students. According to *Lost Lives*, two former students were given suspended sentences for withholding information about the shooting – tariffs which the Unionists denounced as 'shameful'.[43] But Queen's was terrified at the prospect of the University being torn apart by the murder. The handling of the aftermath of the killing was therefore a matter of great sensitivity – and, to this day, Sir Colin Campbell, the Pro-Vice Chancellor, declines to say what measures he took in dealing with any member of the University.[44]

Some colleagues suspected that Queen's did not want Trimble making things worse because of what it might have considered as any injudicious pronouncements which he might have made in the heat of the moment. Trimble recalls Campbell coming up to him in University Square, with the body of Graham still on the ground, instructing him not to do any interviews on television. 'This is the University speaking,' Campbell told him.[45] Campbell says this was definitely not the case: he had no instructions at this point from the Vice-Chancellor, Peter Froggatt, and that there was no such conversation with the body still on the ground. What Campbell does say is that he was subsequently advised by Froggatt not to say anything: he says that Queen's policy in those days was not to get involved in anything which could be construed as hyping up political conflict.[46] Trimble says that, in fact, he had no intention of saying anything. But when he discovered that Queen's had no plans to make any collective institutional pronouncement, he told Campbell 'you've got to say something or I will'. He recalls that Campbell did talk to the press on the next day and that he did it 'very well'.[47] Again, Campbell's recollection is different. He says that upon seeing the massive media coverage of the event, Queen's changed its mind and gave him authority to speak on its behalf on *The World at One.* His concerns, he recalls, were twofold: first, he urged Trimble and everyone else to keep quiet to ensure that the University did not speak with a multiplicity of voices. Second, Campbell says, with one colleague already dead, he did not wish to see Trimble pushed further into the limelight.[48] But in the eyes of many of Graham's friends, Queen's had stuck its institutional head into the sand. The statement issued by the Vice-Chancellor's office, reported in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 8 December 1983, read: '[No]…evidence been offered to suggest that these attacks originated from within the University and this University has no knowledge of any direct involvement by any member of staff or student.' Piously, it concluded: 'The University does not impose – nor could it impose – any political test for entry as a student or appointment to the teaching staff, taking academic achievement as its only criterion'.[49] To this day, Colin Campbell describes it as 'not a political event, but primarily a human tragedy'.[50] Some of Graham's friends felt this was besides the point. It was not people's views which were at stake, but their actions.[51]

Whatever controversies attended the conduct of Queen's, one thing is certain: anyone who attended Graham's funeral still describes it as one of the saddest days they can ever recall. Rev. Dr Alan McAloney, who had baptised Graham, conducted a packed service at Randalstown Old Congregation Presbyterian Church, which included the teacher who taught him his first lessons and the seven members of the Graham family who sang in the church choir.[52] The cortège then moved to Duneane Presbyterian Church, one mile from the shores of Lough Neagh, where this only son was laid to rest close to his mother's forebears. Expressions of shock and sympathy came from all over the world: Margaret Thatcher, who had met Graham earlier in the year when he spoke at the Conservative party conference, wrote to the parents to express her condolences.[53] But whatever the condemnation, the killing had a profound and beneficial effect from the IRA's viewpoint. As one close colleague has noted, Graham could have been assassinated anywhere, but the choice of Queen's was quite deliberate.[54] Trimble observes that 'the murder reinforced the "chill factor" on campus. It reinforced the tendency of Protestant children to go elsewhere for their education.'[55] Indeed, when Nesbitt returned to teach the following term, he found on one occasion a mugshot of himself on the blackboard with a drawing pin through his head.[56]

The gunmen are still at large today, and their identity is widely known. Even in the wildly unlikely event that they admitted their involvement, the semi-amnesty provisions of the Belfast Agreement would ensure that any sentence served would be minimal. It contributed to the University authorities' reappraisal of political activity by members of staff. Until then, they had viewed such forms of public service indulgently. But thereafter many contend they became more concerned lest it enmire them in further controversy. Trimble and others increasingly felt that excursions into the

public arena would not help their careers.[57] Trimble has been unable to forget his fallen colleague and extolled his memory when he won the UUP leadership at the Ulster Hall in September 1995 and in a key vote of the Ulster Unionist Council of November 1999. So, too, did opponents of the Belfast Agreement: 'What would Edgar have done?' became a topic of intense debate between the two sides of the UUP. Every day, he passes the memorial stone set on the wall at the entrance of the debating chamber at Stormont. The inscription, with its quote from Euripides, was specially chosen by Anne Graham, sister of the deceased:

IN MEMORY OF
EDGAR SAMUEL DAVID GRAHAM
ASSEMBLY MEMBER FOR BELFAST SOUTH 1982–83
SHOT BY TERRORISTS ON 7 DECEMBER 1983
'KEEP ALIVE THE LIGHT OF JUSTICE'

SEVEN *He doth protest too much*

WHEN the University term resumed in January 1984 many colleagues of Trimble feared that he would be next in line for assassination. But short of leaving Queen's – where any lecturer working to a set rota of lectures and tutorials would be desperately vulnerable – there was little that he could do. Ian Clark, a Queen's Ulster Unionist student who was friendly with Graham, recalls an intimidatory atmosphere at the University in those days and remembers Trimble telling him that 'if he needed any protection', he could help to provide it: Clark understood this to mean physical muscle, but Trimble says that he meant he would intercede with the Queen's authorities and the RUC.[1] Whatever Trimble actually meant, the one thing which he was determined not to do was to be cowed by the University authorities into relinquishing all political activity: if nothing else he is 'thran' (an expression common to Ulster and Scotland spelled in three different ways, meaning in this instance 'obstinate').[2] An opportunity arose in 1984, when his old friend John Taylor – who was running for his second term as a member of the European Parliament – picked Trimble as his election agent. For the first time, he found himself running a campaign from party headquarters. Although personally disorganised, Trimble proved a good organiser on behalf of the party – and Taylor won the third of Ulster's three seats in Strasburg (Paisley again secured the highest number of first preferences and Hume took the second seat).[3]

In Lagan Valley, too, Trimble sought to burnish his credentials. In 1983 he became Vice Chairman of the constituency UUP and in 1986 sought renomination for the same post. He found himself opposed for this largely honorific job and assumed that it was a renewed attempt by elements of the local Unionist establishment to be rid of him. Suddenly, the incumbent Chairman of Lagan Valley announced he was not standing again. Since Trimble had put himself forward for Vice Chairman, it could reasonably be inferred that he was prepared to run for the top job. This he duly did and Trimble squeaked by at the AGM, with votes 55 to 53. Thus it was that Trimble became chairman of one of the largest Ulster Unionist associations. More important still, Trimble – one of Molyneaux's main critics – was now the local party chairman of the party leader. Although Molyneaux could not but acknowledge his abilities, the two men were never natural soulmates – to say the least. In Molyneaux's eyes, politics and policy were the prerogative of the Member of the Imperial Parliament. Ulster Unionist associations, like their Tory cousins, were supposed to be election-winning machines which collected subscriptions and raised funds, but did not bother themselves with great affairs of state. Indeed, even in times of great crisis, such as in 1985–6, the Lagan Valley Association minute books show that surprising proportions of meetings were still spent on such routine matters as fulfilling branch quotas and the payment for the use of Association facilities for jumble sales. Trimble, by contrast, was keen to 'politicise' Unionists and accordingly set up a monthly discussion at the Lagan Valley Management Committee meeting called the 'Current Political Situation'. For example, the minute books for 11 January 1985 record that Trimble suggested that Lagan Valley affiliate to the National Union (of Conservative and Unionist Associations) to influence the ruling mainland party. This initiative was noted with interest by *Workers' Weekly* on 2 February 1985, which stated that Trimble 'has not been foremost amongst those anxious to bring Northern Ireland's wretched local politics into the British mainstream. He has been a leading spokesman for the devolutionist wing of the UUP.'

There was one other contrast between the two men. Molyneaux was Deputy Grand Master of the entire Orange Order and Sovereign Commonwealth Grand Master of the Royal Black Institution, the senior branch of the Loyal Orders; whereas Trimble was an Orangeman out of a sense of duty and was rarely concerned with the plethora of meetings which office-holders in the District or County Grand Lodge had to attend. Trimble felt that the Orange Order with its rituals and procedures was

institutionally not suited to combating the *Kulturkampf* which Irish nationalists had launched against the Ulster-British way of life: in consequence of this campaign, many outsiders regarded Unionists as the 'Afrikaners' of the island of Ireland. Trimble's view of this matter had been given an extra urgency by the text of the joint communiqué which followed the 19 November 1984 summit at Chequers between Mrs Thatcher and the Irish Prime Minister, Garrett Fitzgerald. At the press conference, Mrs Thatcher had famously ruled out the three recommendations of the New Ireland Forum of the Republic's constitutional parties and the SDLP – which then became known in 'tabloid-speak' as her 'out, out, out' pronouncement. Unionists were delighted, but Trimble counselled caution. One of his reasons for caution was that in an attempt to slow down the momentum of Sinn Fein/IRA, the British and Irish Governments had agreed to give greater recognition to Irish culture in the life of Northern Ireland. Trimble could, therefore, see this emerging as the next great battle-ground.

Trimble believed that even the most balanced accounts of the island's history did not, taken as a whole, accord equality of treatment to Unionism.[4] Unless Unionists found an organisational vehicle to rectify this asymmetry, governmental support would go entirely to the Gaelic/Catholic/Nationalist side rather than the Orange tradition. Trimble reckoned that although the Orange Order was an entirely bona fide body, the 'cultural commissars' (his words) at the NIO would never dispense funds to it.[5] In some ways, he thought the Order was too exclusive a body, for the wider unionist community of Ulster was not coterminous with Orangeism. Likewise, to insert 'Protestant' into the title of any new body would also be unsatisfactory, for neither was the British community of Ulster synonymous with Protestantism: some of its most loyal citizens were Catholic. He was also anxious to avoid any hint of anti-Englishness, to which so many loyalists were prone after being let down by successive British Governments. Trimble now thought that anti-Englishness only played into the hands of Irish nationalists, and served to detach them from their natural moorings in the broader, more cosmopolitan community of the British Isles. What, then, would provide the broadest basis for fighting the dilution of Ulster's cultural identity?

'Ulster-British' – hyphenated – seemed the most satisfactory formulation. It implied a community capable of autonomous existence but which was also invested with wider associations in these isles as a whole. So following a seminar at the Park Avenue Hotel in Belfast on 25 April 1985, it was decided to set up 'the Ulster Society for the Promotion of Ulster-British Heritage and Culture'. On 28 September 1985 (the 73rd anniversary of the signing of Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant) the organisation was launched formally at Brownlow House in Lurgan. Brownlow House – a mid-19th-century sandstone structure that served as world-wide headquarters of the Royal Black Institution and was also the largest Orange Hall in the world – became its home base. Trimble became the chairman, and a young activist from Fermanagh, Gordon Lucy, became general secretary. The first project focused on loyalist folk music and entailed the collecting of the words and tunes of traditional Orange songs and ballads which were in danger of being lost to posterity (surprisingly or not, Trimble's musical tastes do not extend to loyalist bands). The second subject concerned Orange banners, with questionnaires to be sent to every lodge. Another study focused on the original UVF and 36th (Ulster) Division, which would trace and interview survivors of the carnage which that unit endured on the Somme. Nor was the international dimension neglected: the Ulster Society also sought to rekindle awareness of the contribution of Ulstermen to the American Revolution.[6] Later, he was instrumental in securing a reprint of Cecil Davis Milligan's *Walls of Derry*, the authoritative work on all aspects of the defences of the Maiden City, first published in the *Londonderry Sentinel* in two parts in 1948 and 1950.[7] Trimble also reviewed books on Ulster's contribution to the development of science and technology – including Sir Hans Sloane and Lord Kelvin – and wrote a new introduction to the third volume in the *Tom Barber* trilogy of novels by Forrest Reid, an early to mid-20th-century Ulster author.[8]

Maintaining the self-confidence of the Unionist community turned out to be even more necessary than Trimble had imagined when he determined to set up the Ulster Society. For on 15 November 1985, the British and Irish Governments signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which for the first time gave the Republic a formal say in the affairs of Ulster – on everything from security, public appointments, to the official use of flags and symbols.[9] As Trimble later noted, the 1985 Agreement did not even contain any declaration – as in the 1973 Act – stating that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, nor that it was the policy of the British Government to support the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland.[10] Worse still from a Unionist viewpoint, the Republic had achieved this role in the internal affairs of the Province without rescinding its claim over Northern Ireland contained in Articles 2 and 3 of the 1937 Constitution, which was illegal under international law. In the words of the Northern Ireland Assembly's report on the AIA – largely drafted by Trimble – 'the agreement clearly diminishes British sovereignty in Northern Ireland by admitting a foreign government into the structure and processes of government of Northern Ireland'. The Intergovernmental conference – with its secretariat at Maryfield, on the outskirts of Belfast – was 'a joint authority in embryo, which if allowed to develop will become the effective government of Northern Ireland'.[11] Trimble now believes that the British state was disappointed with the results of the AIA and pulled back from the logical drift towards joint authority. But even though today he prefers the description of 'direct rule with the Greenest of tinges', he still shudders at the thought of the AIA effectively placing the Irish Government inside British ministers' private offices.

It was an even greater blow than the suspension of Stormont in 1972. As such, it fulfilled the Ulster-British people's worst nightmares, both in the contents of the treaty and in the manner of its negotiation. For the UUP leadership had been ruthlessly excluded from consultation about the document. But should Molyneaux have seen it coming? As is shown by his Calvin Macnee article in *Fortnight* of 2 February 1985, even a relatively peripheral figure such as Trimble spotted that something was in the works as early as November 1984, when Thatcher and Fitzgerald held their press conference at Chequers (as has been noted, the occasion of her famous 'out, out, out' pronouncement – on the findings of the New Ireland Forum of the south's constitutional parties and the SDLP). Her words had delighted Unionists, and horrified nationalists. But Trimble was not so sure. He watched the whole press conference on television with fellow delegates to the UUP's annual conference at the Slieve Donard Hotel in Newcastle, Co. Down. What she actually said was: 'A United Ireland was one solution. That is out. A second solution was confederation of the two states, that is out. A third solution was joint authority. That is out. That is a derogation from sovereignty.'[12] Trimble noted, though, that she had hesitated when the third option was mentioned and had to be prompted by a civil servant – an odd slip for someone as well-briefed as she was. He concluded from this lapse that if the two Prime Ministers really had been discussing the New Ireland Forum, she would not have needed to be prompted. It followed in Trimble's mind, therefore, that they must have been discussing something else.

But what was that something else? Thatcher, who feared that the Cabinet might leak, left the negotiations largely in the hands of her Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, and one of his officials, Sir David Good-all. Increasingly desperate efforts to find out what was going on were met with ever more evasiveness as proposals emerged in the Dublin press. At one meeting at No. 10 between Molyneaux, Paisley, Thatcher and Douglas Hurd (the Northern Ireland Secretary) on 30 August 1985, the Prime Minister and Ulster Secretary simply listened and took notes but offered no guidance whatsoever on the contents of the negotiations. Many Unionists, including Trimble, could not grasp why Molyneaux – who had been aware of the seriousness of what was being negotiated for some time – waited till August 1985 to start agitating against the emerging deal; only then was a joint working group between the UUP and DUP set up. Trimble shares the conventional view of many Unionists that Molyneaux had relied excessively upon Enoch Powell, who believed that such

an agreement would not be reached (and whose utility was diminished by his own highly ambivalent relationship with Thatcher). Trimble also thinks that Molyneaux might have relied too much on Ian Gow, who had left his original post as Thatcher's PPS for a ministerial slot and who inevitably no longer enjoyed the same access as in the first term.[13] Frank Millar – who was then general-secretary of the party – remembers that although Molyneaux went along with his contingency planning in anticipation of an Anglo-Irish deal, the UUP leader nonetheless believed to the last that there would be no agreement.[14]

Why had Thatcher done it? Many were astonished, especially after Anglo-Irish relations suffered during the pro-Argentinian tilt of the Haughey Government during the Falklands War of 1982.[15] First, she felt that 'something must be done' over the rising tide of violence and the growth in Sinn Fein's electoral support after the Hunger Strikes of 1981: the SDLP needed to show that constitutional politics could deliver something and the AIA would comprehensively demonstrate that capacity (though Fitzgerald admits that he continued to emphasise the degree of the republican threat during the negotiations, even after the Sinn Fein challenge had begun to wane during the May 1985 local government elections).[16] Second, she was told that it would yield all sorts of new security cooperation: a top-ranking Gardai agent in the IRA, Sean O'Callaghan, had recently supplied the information which aborted the attempted assassination of the Prince and Princess of Wales at a Duran Duran concert. She may, therefore, have believed that signing the deal would open the door to more such successes.[17] Third, her old friend, Ronald Reagan exerted some pressure: according to an authoritative biography of Tip O'Neill, the Irish-American Speaker of the US House of Representatives, the White House mollified O'Neill's anger over Administration policy in Central America by 'delivering' something to the Massachusetts Democrat on Ulster.[18] Moreover, by associating the Irish with decision-making on Ulster, the Government hoped to minimise the international costs of this engagement. And fourth, as Trimble believes, she may well have been fed up with the UUP leadership for turning down every government initiative after she did not automatically proceed with their favoured proposals in the 1979 election manifesto.[19]

Trimble actually heard about the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement during his sabbatical year whilst on holiday in the Costa del Sol. Daphne Trimble recalls them turning to one another and saying, 'This will mean civil war.'[20] Like so many Unionists, Trimble erroneously thought the British state was on the verge of a complete scuttle from Northern Ireland. 'After the AIA, it was perfectly obvious that normal constituency activity was useless and the MPs had completely failed,' he recalls.[21] The effects of all of this were swift and dramatic: between 100,000 and 200,000 Unionists assembled to protest at Belfast City Hall on 23 November.[22] But how would the initial surge of protest be sustained? As in the early 1970s, Unionists felt themselves to be in a bind. If they played by the rules, no one would take any notice. Yet if they resorted to large-scale violence, they feared that the rest of the United Kingdom would be disgusted and would accordingly resolve – in Peter Robinson's memorable phrase – to keep Ulster on the 'window ledge of the Union'.[23] Trimble, therefore, had three reasons for immersing himself in the gathering storm of protests. If someone such as himself did so (known to the NIO as a moderate of sorts after the voluntary coalition episode of 1975–6) then it would send a powerful signal to the system about the depth of feeling within the Unionist camp. The second reason was that if the protests were not to damage the Unionist cause, it was vital that there be some guiding form of political intelligence behind them. The third reason owed much to his responsibility as constituency chairman: he says he wanted to protect Molyneaux's back from the more extreme elements.[24]

Nonetheless, Trimble was not a figure of the first rank and was probably more peripheral than he had been in 1974–6 – as is illustrated by the fact that he registered only just in the consciousness of senior servants of the British state. Sir Robert Armstrong, for instance, recalls 'a shadowy figure,

but little more than that'.[25] Trimble's chosen vehicle for protesting the accord was the Ulster Clubs: originally created before the AIA to oppose the re-routing of traditional loyalist parades, they had since then recanalised their energies to oppose the Agreement. Above all, they felt that neither the mainstream politicians nor the Orange Order were doing enough. Trimble became the founding chairman of the Lisburn branch, whose inaugural meeting was held at the town's main Orange hall. But Trimble was depressed by the combination of loose fighting talk about taking on the British Army and a lack of a coherent strategy to deal with the crisis. Indeed, he took it as a measure of how bad things were that the deputy supreme commander of the UDA, John McMichael, was the most sensible person at many of these meetings. McMichael, also from Lisburn, was the political brains behind the UDA, and the two men had a healthy mutal respect.[26] John Oliver remembered that 'McMichael thought the world of David' and over the next few years took to heart many of Trimble's strictures about the legitimate parameters of protest.[27] This contact proved important to Trimble, for without McMichael's help, he would have been unable to keep a grip on the wilder elements. But Trimble also used his own skills to chair the meetings of the Ulster Clubs. Nelson McCausland, later a Belfast city councillor, remembers Trimble's technique for dealing with the grassroots: 'What struck me was how people were talking a load of nonsense. David-Trimble would then summarise their ramblings in a very articulate way, "I think what you're really saying is…" and the person would be gratified that he had hit upon some new insight.'[28] Trimble would also do all the talking at meetings of the Province-wide executive of the Ulster Clubs, where his colleagues again seemed to him to be equally clueless. He directed them to the strategy of the Militant Tendency. 'I said to them, "if you're aligned to mainstream organisations, but oppose their strategy as a ginger group, one thing you can do is to set up a newspaper to influence the wider debate".' So it was that *Ulster Defiant*, the Clubs' newspaper, was born.[29]

To demonstrate that the AIA had no support in the majority population, the fifteen UUP, DUP and independent Unionist MPs resigned to create a massive Province-wide by-election: the SDLP put up candidates in only four of the most marginal constituencies. On 24 January 1986, the Unionists secured an overwhelming 418,230 votes and held all of their seats bar Newry-Armagh. This took the gloss off the victory. Indeed, the rise in the SDLP vote at the expense of Sinn Fein allowed the Government to claim that its strategy of strengthening constitutional nationalism was working. The collapse in the pro-Agreement (but loosely unionist with a lower case 'u') Alliance party vote showed the virtual unanimity within the Unionist family against the diktat. Gradually, all of Ulster-British society mobilised. Eighteen councils with Unionist majorities, including Lisburn, adjourned; rates protests followed; and southern Irish goods were boycotted (Trimble thought this last form of protest to be silly, but went along with it in the spirit of the times). The culmination of this phase of struggle was the Loyalist 'Day of Action', held on 3 March, whose purpose was to bring the whole of Northern Ireland to a standstill. Lisburn, of course, was to do its bit and set up a municipal coordinating committee comprised of representatives of the UUP, DUP, Loyal Orders, Ulster Clubs and farmers' bodies. After a series of road blocks, to shut off the town, they would then adjourn for a mass rally at Smithfield Square in the town centre.

It was, though, an organisational nightmare. Trimble knew that street protests had to be managed. And the only people who could exert sufficient influence to prevent things spiralling out of control were the paramilitaries themselves. When tempers frayed, such crowd scenes could easily degenerate into full blown riots. Trimble participated in an ad-hoc action committee of 20 that included McMichael, whose purpose was to discusss the arrangements for the event. They decided on peaceful pickets of all the main arteries leading in and out of town. Trimble went around the traders in Bow Street, asking for their support: only one of them, he recalls, gave a dusty response. On the day itself, he positioned himself on the Hillsborough Road. During the course of the protest, some UDA men began to thump a bus which had been stopped. Trimble tried to stop them and

they told him in no uncertain terms where to go. He rang McMichael, who duly told them to cease, and was always grateful to the UDA leader for sticking by what they had agreed.[30] Later in the day, Trimble presided at the mass rally in Smithfield Square, packed with families and farm vehicles. The *Ulster Star* – a local newspaper – reported on 7 March 1986 that he saluted the work of the coordinating committee. 'Mr Lawson Patterson and Mr Eddie Blair were thanked for arranging the tractor cavalcade and there was praise for the representatives of the Loyal Orders and Mr John McMichael, of the UDA.' But there was an uglier side to some of the subsequent protests as well. Lisburn RUC men who were put in the front line of policing the demonstrations were burned out of their homes and Seamus Close of the local Alliance party claimed it was significant that these had come on the heels of 'sinister and intimidatory' comments by UDA spokesmen.[31] Indeed, later that year, the Housing Executive reported 114 instances of intimidation against Roman Catholic families in the greater Lisburn area. 'It was a very unhappy time,' recalls Trimble. But he was determined not to allow that element to spoil the legitimate demonstrations of others.[32] In May 1986, on the occasion of the intergovernmental conference, Trimble and his fellow loyalists took over the rates office, urging householders and businessmen to withhold payments for as long as possible. He hoped that if enough people did so, the temporary shortfall would cost the Treasury £100 million in interest payments. When he eventually paid up, he did so with a giant, blown-up four foot by ten hardboard cheque for £616.16 drawn on his own and Daphne Trimble's personal account: he had derived the idea from A.P. Herbert, who once wrote a cheque on the side of a cow. When Peter Barry, the Irish Foreign Minister, visited Northern Ireland on 17 June 1986, Trimble and others chained themselves to the railings at Hillsborough Castle; he arrived at work on the next day to find a photograph of the stunt displayed on the front page of the *News Letter*: it certainly annoyed his supporters at Queen's such as Herb Wallace, who at the time was 'managing' his campaign to be elected Dean of the Law Faculty. In the eyes of the university authorities, it may well have confirmed their impression that Trimble was someone unsuitable for preferment.[33] Indeed, Trimble received two convictions for minor public order offences, such as parading without a permit in Lisburn with his own branch of the Apprentice Boys of Derry.

As time went on, it became clear that the Government would not budge. It correctly calculated – on the advice of Sir Robert Armstrong and other senior officials – that there would be no repeat of 1974.[34] They also came to this conclusion on the basis of assessments from the security forces.[35] For in 1974, there was a locally-based political experiment to bring down. This time, there was an unassailable international treaty signed by two governments which could not be pressurised like the Faulk – nerites were. The 'Irish dimension' had thus been used to outflank the Unionist majority in Ulster. Or, as John Hume was reported as saying, 'I always expected a furious Unionist reaction to the Agreement, but the Protestant boil had to be lanced.'[36] The Government also saw that hardline loyalist protests, such as the 1977 strike and Paisley's much-vaunted 'Carson Trail' of 1981 had been damp squibs: in the more straitened financial circumstances of the 1980s, loyalists were less prepared to engage in the kind of industrial militancy which had proven so successful across the United Kingdom in the 1970s. Partly, this was conditioned by the growing dependence of both the Protestant and the Catholic working classes on the subvention of the United Kingdom Exchequer. Above all, the British Government correctly reasoned that the ultra-respectable Molyneaux and the UUP would never sanction a mass uprising: indeed, Molyneaux and his party only accepted the March 1986 Day of Action when they were left with no other choice.[37]

Unionist protests became ever more desperate, partly out of frustration with the Unionist leadership. In his first major interview in the *News Letter*, on 6 November 1986, Trimble said: 'If you have a situation where there is a serious attack on your constitutional position and liberties – and I regard the AIA as being just that – and where the Government tells you constitutional action is ineffective, you are left in a very awkward situation. Do you sit back and do nothing, or move

outside constitutional forms of protest? I don't think you can deal with the situation without the risk of an extra-parliamentary campaign. I would personally draw the line at terrorism and serious violence. But if we are talking about a campaign that involves demonstrations and so on, then a certain amount of violence may be inescapable.' In fact, Trimble's course in this period was seemingly contradictory. On the one hand, he wanted an escalation of protests, warning that unless the Unionist leadership improved its performance, the paramilitaries would soon take over. On the other hand, during the June 1987 General Election, he was struck by the reaction on the doorstep in Lisburn. There was hostility to the council boycott – as reflected in the Lagan Valley Unionist Association minute books – but more especially to the MPs' policy of staying out of the Commons chamber. Boycotts were to Trimble a tactic, not a principle, and if they were undermining the struggle then they would have to be wound down. But if Trimble's methods for attaining his goals were variable, so were his goals. On the one hand, he lent his support to those Unionists who responded to the AIA by urging complete integration into the United Kingdom; on the other, he flirted with constitutional forms which resembled independence. He was the most senior Unionist to campaign in a personal capacity in the 1986 Fulham by-election for his Queen's colleague Boyd Black, then a B&ICO activist, who ran as Democratic Rights for Northern Ireland candidate. And although many integrationist themes found their way into Ulster Clubs' literature (indeed, Boyd Black's election address was printed on the front page of *Ulster Defiant)*, Trimble's own pamphlet for Ulster Clubs explored a much wider range of options, ranging from Powellite-style total integration to independence. The treatise was entitled *What Choice for Ulster*? and it came down on the side of Dominion status – in other words, a relationship that bore more similarity to full independence than integration. It was an unusually glossy publication by the Samizdat-like standards of Loyalist pamphlets: the front cover bore the famous propaganda poster entitled *Ulster 1914*, with the Province personified as a young woman with long, flowing hair. She defiantly carries her rifle against a Union Jack background, proclaiming the words 'Deserted! Well – I Can Stand Alone'.

Trimble declared that Ulstermen were aiming for negotiated separation rather than UDI. Not only, Trimble declared, would this new Ulster be able to rely on 'native ingenuity' but it would also enjoy food provided by provincial farmers and energy supplies from Antrim lignite and Fermanagh gas. In echoes of his first speech to the Assembly and to the Nobel Prize-winning ceremony in Oslo, Trimble acknowledged that more could have been done during the 50 years of Unionist domination to make nationalists feel at home. 'We should say to the nationalists in our midst, "a united Ireland is impossible, but a united Ulster is possible, and we invite you to be part of it",' observed Trimble. *Workers' Weekly* regarded such thoughts as 'twaddle' produced by an 'introverted Unionist'. and in its edition of 22 August 1987 opined: 'What is being said here in code is more or less the equivalent of what the Provisionals are saying – get out of the house but leave the money on the table.' These musings would not be forgotten by Trimble's rivals: years later, in a televised debate on the eve of the 1998 referendum on the Belfast Agreement, Paisley dusted off the pamphlet to illustrate his belief that the UUP leader was soft on the Union.[38] Trimble, though, never took such reasoning to its logical conclusion to advocate full-scale independence – such as the 'Republic of Northern Ireland'. He held several meetings with a Presbyterian cleric from Co. Tyrone, Rev. Hugh Ross, who headed the Ulster independence movement, but remained unpersuaded. Trimble believes that the bulk of Ulster Unionists would never wish completely to relinquish the link with the Crown.[39]

How does Trimble reconcile these varying positions? After all, one of them (integrationism) is based upon the notion of the inherent inclusiveness of Unionism; the other is based upon the 'apartness' of the Ulster-British from both the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic. Trimble argues that equal citizenship is very much the first choice of all Unionists, as was the case in 1921; but that if that is not on offer, then they will have to find some alternatives which preserve their way of life. He had concluded that the Union was in such peril that he had to set as many hares running as possible – including contradictory approaches in which he did not necessarily believe

himself. If integrationism took off, all well and good. If not, then alternatives would have to be found. Another reason why Trimble could embrace both apparently contradictory approaches is that there is an element of intellectual gamesmanship in Trimble's personality, which owes much to his training as an academic lawyer: he will draft anything for the sake of an argument. What is certainly the case is that Trimble was one of very few people who straddled the two, mutually antagonistic strains within Unionism: one was the world of integrationism, of the vision of Northern Ireland as part of a broader, more cosmopolitan entity. This attracted many Unionist colleagues in the professional middle classes and amongst Queen's undergraduates after the AIA. The other world was that of 'little Ulster' which, more often than not, had its roots in evangelical Protestantism and was much remoter from the British mainstream. He was not, though, the only Ulster politician to adopt a dizzying array of positions: as Clifford Smyth notes in his study of Paisley, 'the Doc' was also perfectly capable of adopting integrationism, devolution, or independence – depending upon which of them most advanced the Protestant interest at a given moment.[40]

Such activities, which were widely reported, can have done little to endear Trimble to the authorities at his workplace. The Queen's of the 1980s was very different place from the Queen's of the 1960s and 1970s. Political activism, once regarded as a public service, was now seen as less of an asset. It was not merely that the controversy-aversive University was determined to avoid a repetition of the killing of Edgar Graham for Trimble's own sake; it was also because under the cumulative impact of fair employment legislation designed to eradicate sectarianism in the workplace, the University had become far more sensitive to such matters and its 'image'. A campaign had been launched primarily (but not exclusively by nationalists) to allege that there was religious discrimination in the composition of the teaching staff. Most of them were Protestants – if not necessarily from Ulster – whilst the undergraduate population was ever-more Catholic. It thus echoed recent allegations contained in the MacPherson report that the Metropolitan Police is 'institutionally racist'. In the words of Alex Attwood, who was president of the Students' Union in the early 1980s and subsequently vice chairman of Convocation (a body comprised of all graduates) 'Queen's succeeded Short's as the representative employment management issue in the North'.[41] Queen's responded by settling many cases out of court.

Although Trimble was never sued for harassment or discrimination (nor, indeed, was any complaint ever lodged against him) his face did not fit in this not-so-brave new world of pious neutrality. He says that Colin Campbell bluntly told him that he would never hold a professorial chair; Campbell says that he simply gave Trimble the advice which he gave to all colleagues at that stage in their careers – that Trimble would not obtain a professorship unless he increased his output of published materials.[42] As editor of the Northern Ireland Law Reports, he would be summarising and synthesising, rather than doing original work of his own. What is beyond doubt is that Trimble did not fulfil his ambitions. The first chair which came up – to replace the departing Campbell – went to Simon Lee, a 'superstar' academic with good media credentials, and the second to his old friend Herb Wallace. Wallace, for example, also came from a unionist background, but he was not an active politician and he was thought less likely to blow his top in a crisis. Trimble also believes that his political commitments may have played a part: as Iain Macleod observed of R.A. Butler, 'Rab loves being a politician among academics and an academic among politicians; that is why neither breed of man likes him all that much.'[43]

Professorial chairs were not, though, the only avenue for advancement. In 1986, the post of Dean of the Law Faculty came vacant – an administrative post that involved much persuasion and cajoling. Normally, elections went uncontested and Trimble seemed to be certain of winning: indeed, to make absolutely sure of things, Trimble authorised Herb Wallace, as his unofficial campaign manager, to say that if elected, he would cease all active politics. Colin Campbell, the Pro-Vice Chancellor, asked Judith Eve, a colleague of Trimble's from the Law Faculty to run. According to

Herb Wallace, Campbell might have viewed Trimble's political activities as detracting from the Law Faculty's reputation (a third candidate, Geoffrey Hornsey, also entered the contest though he soon withdrew).[44] In the ensuing battle royal, the 'jurisprudes' formed the core of the anti-Trimble camp, whilst the 'black letter' lawyers of his own department were the core of the pro-Trimble operation. Trimble was the more senior, and had more administrative experience, but the elegant Eve was viewed as the 'safer pair of hands'. 'She was cooler, and without moods,' recalls Sylvia Hermon, then – as now – one of Trimble's most ardent supporters. The election was so close a contest that postal votes from faculty members travelling abroad were solicited, yet the Trimble camp still thought they had the edge. One morning, Sylvia Hermon came in and picked up the *News Letter*: there, she found Trimble pictured on the front page, tied to the railings at Hillsborough Castle as part of an Ulster Clubs' protest against the intergovernmental conference.[45] 'Short of raping the vice-chancellor's wife on the front gates of the university, he could not have done much worse,' wryly recalls Brian Childs, a colleague in the department of commercial and property law.[46] It may have been decisive, for Eve scraped home by 18 votes to 16, with one abstention.

Trimble's friends began to despair of his prospects. Trimble, though, was not to be deterred for long. Some months later, the post of the director of the Institute for Professional Legal Studies became available. The Institute was part of Queen's, but was independent of the Law Faculty and was governed by the Council for Legal Education. It had been set up in 1977 for professional training of law graduates.[47] Again, he seemed to have all the experience and duly applied; and, once again, a presentable younger woman entered the field. Her name was Mary McAleese, a Belfast-born Catholic, the 36-year-old Reid Professor of Criminal Law at Trinity College Dublin.[48] Her publications portfolio may have been less voluminous than compared to that of Trimble, but she had two skills which he conspicuously lacked: she marketed herself superbly and was immensely adept with people. The 10-strong interview panel was chaired by Lord Justice O'Donnell, who led the questioning. He was assisted by Lord Justice Kelly, who as Basil Kelly had been Unionist MP for Mid-Down at Stormont and was the last Attorney General of Northern Ireland under the *ancien régime.* Trimble performed poorly, whilst McAleese dealt with the questions adeptly and she was duly appointed.[49] The upward trajectory of McAleese's career was maintained and she later became Pro-Vice Chancellor. In 1997, she received the Fianna Fail nomination for the presidency of the Republic and won the election.

Trimble's record of disappointment in university politics contrasts very sharply with his successes since his election to Parliament in 1990. 'The difference between university politics and party politics is that university politics are a closed hierarchical system, whereas party politics are open,' he explains. 'In terms of the UUP, oddly, my position wasn't very different from that at Queen's. During the Upper Bann by-election, very few unionist figures were favourable to me. I thus came in 1990, and more particularly in the 1995 leadership race as an outsider. The great thing about politics is that they are decided by wider groups. My position vis-à-vis the Unionist hierarchy was just the same as vis-à-vis the Queen's hierarchy.' So why does he have such bad relations with his academic and political peer groups? 'It's my lack of diplomatic skill,' Trimble declares. 'I know that's a rather big failing. I'm argumentative by nature and get into arguments without any consideration as to who they are with and the career implications. As I get older my arguments are couched in less aggressive terms. From the point of the view of the "Good Ole' Boys" in Glengall Street [the tightly knit clique of men who ran the party headquarters in central Belfast for years] I'm never one of them. I come from the outside and I'm a bit too ready to tell them what they should do.'[50]

EIGHT *Mr Trimble goes to London*

TRIMBLE'S self-analysis was shared by many of his party colleagues. In early 1989, he was finally elected one of four honorary party secretaries at a meeting of the 860-strong Ulster Unionist Council – yet his problems with his peer group endured. What his coevals immediately saw was a man in a hurry. 'I was brought up by Jo Cunningham [later party president] that you listened for the first year,' recalls Jack Allen, the long-time party treasurer. 'David could never be accused of doing that.'[1] Likewise, Jim Wilson, the party general-secretary recalls: 'He had little time for convention and the rule book – because in the rule book you find reasons for not doing things. I suppose at that time I thought, "Hey, David you're not going to fit in here, you're rocking too many boats." And he was also suspected of leaking officers' decisions.' (Trimble says he may have gossiped, but that he never deliberately leaked.)[2] At the same time as being voluble, Trimble was not very sociable: after party officers' meetings on Friday afternoons at Glengall Street, he would not be found drinking Ken Maginnis' beloved Rioja with members of the team. Subsequently, Molyneaux was annoyed by Trimble's habit of playing with his personal computer whenever the discussion became boring.[3]

Trimble could still be wonderfully inept with larger audiences as well. When John Taylor announced his retirement from the European Parliament in 1988, Trimble was one of four candidates who sought to replace him. His main rival was Jim Nicholson – a Co. Armagh farmer who had lost the Westminster seat of Newry and Armagh in the 1986 set of by-elections (caused by the resignation of all Unionist members in protest at the AIA). Nicholson already enjoyed a substantial sympathy vote for making this sacrifice. On the night, Trimble made a brilliant speech. The only problem was that he failed to mention agriculture once – something of an omission, remembers John Taylor, since the Common Agricultural Policy then comprised more than half of the EU budget and the room at the Europa Hotel was full of farmers! Moreover, under questioning, Trimble (who speaks passable French and German) modestly downplayed his genuine foreign language skills; whilst Nicholson, an arguably less cosmopolitan figure, did just the opposite. Nicholson won with 52% on the first ballot.

But even this defeat, reckons Trimble, helped raise his profile in the party. Moreover, it was a party in which there were fewer articulate lawyers than before: Edgar Graham was dead; Robert McCartney was no longer in the party; and Peter Smith had gradually moved out of politics to concentrate fully on his legal career. As if to emphasise his new-found primacy Trimble set up the UUP legal affairs committee in the autumn of 1989. Its principal work was the party's submission to Lord Colville, a law lord then conducting a review into Ulster's anti-terrorist legislation. The document, entitled *Emergency Laws Now*, was written by Trimble himself and was partly based on the old Vanguard submission to the Gardiner Committee in 1974. Amongst its principal recommendations, it urged an end to 'exclusion orders' debarring certain Ulstermen from the British mainland – which, in Unionist eyes, treated Northern Ireland as a place apart. Trimble's profile was further raised when he participated in a demonstration with DUP members against Charles Haughey's visit to Belfast in 1990 as a guest of the Institute of Directors at the Europa Hotel. From the roof of neighbouring Glengall Street, they waved Union flags and shouted anti-republican slogans.[4] Ironically Haughey was greeted by two local dignitaries, both of whom later flourished mightily under Trimble's patronage: the head of the Institute, John Gorman, later became the senior Catholic politician in the UUP. Likewise, Reg Empey, then Lord Mayor of Belfast became one of Trimble's closest colleagues. Both men were knighted under his leadership.[5]

For all his hyper-activity, Trimble remained a figure of the second rank and all prospect of advancement at Queen's now appeared denied him. Yet, suddenly, there was an opening. Harold McCusker, the UUP MP for Upper Bann, died of cancer on 14 February 1990 at the age of 50: Trimble, like many others in the UUP knew that McCusker had been ill for many years, but the

cancer had appeared to be in remission. Some in the UUP, including his widow, Jennifer McCusker, even believed that his death was hastened by the shock of the AIA.[6] Now that a vacancy had occurred, Trimble was interested. But it would not be an easy passage. After all, he did not live in the area and even if he did, he was not of the community after the fashion of McCusker – who was born and bred in Lurgan, lived in Portadown and would mix effortlessly with supporters of his beloved Glenavon FC on match days. A variety of local worthies were expected to stand, including four past mayors of Craigavon District Council and Jennifer McCusker (in so solid a Unionist seat, the victor of the selection contest would effectively be the winner of the by-election). Moreover, Trimble was scheduled to go on a long-planned Ulster Society trip to the United States which would coincide with the selection process: he feared giving that up to enter a race in which he stood no chance. Daphne Trimble, though, urged him to run: 'He was 45 and looking at boredom for the rest of his life,' she recalls. 'He was fed up with Queen's and I knew he would really love to be an MP and would always regret it if he did not do it.'[7]

Almost a fortnight after McCusker's death, whilst attending an Apprentice Boys of Derry Club research meeting at the Royal Hotel in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone, on 24 February, Trimble was approached by Robert Creane. Creane is a colourful figure of great energy who was the chairman of the Edenderry division of the Upper Bann Ulster Unionist Association (one of the Portadown branches). Creane remembers pulling Trimble aside and asking him three questions: had anyone asked him to run? Would he run? And, if he did, would he ever withdraw from the race? Trimble answered that no one had asked him to contest the nomination, that if asked to do so he would say yes, and that if he ran he would not withdraw. Creane was delighted, and on that basis began to organise support. Creane's first act on behalf of his candidate was to call Victor Gordon, an ace reporter of 20 years' standing on the *Portadown Times*, the leading newspaper in the constituency. Creane drove Gordon up to Trimble's home in Lisburn, on Saturday 3 March.[8] As Gordon recalls, 'I did not know this man, but Creane did a real PR exercise, and spoke of Trimble's love of Ulster.' In the course of the interview, Trimble announced that he would run.[9] Creane also arranged a secret meeting of twelve Upper Bann members at the Seagoe Hotel in Portadown: they concluded that Northern Ireland at this time needed something more than 'parish pump politics'. Moreover, they felt that none of the local candidates in this manufactured seat would gain support in other parts of the seat: the three main towns of Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge all felt a keen rivalry for one another and therefore to pick a native son could prove divisive in other parts of the parliamentary division. Trimble, the articulate lawyer from Lisburn, fitted the bill.[10]

In conjunction with Gary Kennedy – a local schoolmaster who had become interested in politics after the massacre in 1976 of ten Protestant workmen near his home town of Bessbrook in south Armagh – Creane organised a series of 'get to know you' meetings to introduce Trimble to the members of the 20 branches in Upper Bann. Trimble also produced a highly professional *Letter to the Unionists of Upper Bann.* 'I know we have an irrefutable case,' he wrote, 'but I also know that in Westminster and elsewhere there is still much work to be done to persuade others of the justice of our cause and to repudiate the slanders of our enemies.' It made much of his work for the Ulster Society, based at Brownlow House in Lurgan, and referred to his activities on behalf of Vanguard during the UWC strike (there were still old Vanguardists in the seat, and one of William Craig's legal practices had been in Lurgan). It also referred to his convictions for minor public order offences whilst chairman of the Lisburn branch of the Ulster Clubs.

First, he had to overcome formidable local opposition. Jennifer McCusker had run the constituency office for her husband. But having nursed her husband through his final illness, she soon made it clear elective office was not for her. Samuel Gardiner then rapidly emerged as the favourite. His credentials were indisputable: a councillor from Lurgan, a three-time mayor of Craigavon District Council, the then chairman of the the Upper Bann Association, Assistant Sovereign Grand Master

of the Royal Black Institution (also headquartered at Brownlow House), and High Sheriff of Co. Armagh. Also running was Arnold Hatch of Portadown, another former mayor of Craigavon DC; Jim McCammick of Portadown, another former three-time mayor and past president of the local chamber of commerce; George Savage, also a former mayor and prominent beef and dairy farmer from Donacloney, whose support base was in the rural areas which used to comprise the old Iveagh seat at Stormont; Councillor Samuel Walker of Gilford, Co. Down; and Jack Allen, a senior figure from the UUP establishment.[11] Although Allen was in fact from Londonderry, he had run at the behest of Mrs McCusker and of his old friend Ken Maginnis.[12] William Ward of Lisburn also ran.

The selection meeting was held in front of 250 delegates at Brownlow House on 19 April 1990. The atmosphere, recalls Gary Kennedy, was very tense. The candidates went on in alphabetical order: several of them, including Trimble, wound up their pitch with the stock Protestant quotation from Martin Luther, 'here I stand, I can do no other'.[13] But Trimble's speech was much more than the usual 'you know what I've done, now choose me' routine of some of the local eminences. He made much of the fact that the Upper Bann by-election would be the first seat contested by the newly formed Northern Ireland Conservatives. The race would thus receive national media attention and Unionists would need a capable media spokesman to articulate why they rejected the governing party. 'We wanted somebody to elucidate our feelings in a reasoned way,' remembers Gary Kennedy. 'We couldn't any longer afford guys thinking "I wish I had said that" halfway home in the plane. We needed someone who could think on their feet – and we didn't have a Unionist MP who was a lawyer. We all believed that things were going to be all right because of the perception that Molyneaux was having cups of tea with members of the Royal family.'[14] After the first round of voting, Gardiner had 91 votes; Trimble 68; Savage 37; Hatch, 18; Allen 13; McCammick 12; Ward 11; and Walker 5. Trimble then knew he was in with an excellent chance, because he felt that Gardiner had hit a ceiling and that whilst his Lurgan-based support was 'deep', it was not very 'wide'. Ironically, for someone who excites such passions, Trimble was everyone's second choice. In the second round, Gardiner was ahead but his vote had increased to just 93, whereas Trimble's had risen to 89. Allen, Hatch and Savage went down to 6, 8 and 33 votes respectively, with McCammick still on 12. In the third and final ballot, the other candidates pulled out: George Savage was seen walking down the rows of his supporters, telling them to swing behind Trimble. He now reckons that only three of his initial 37 did not switch to Trimble. The final result was 136–114 in favour of Trimble. His lack of a local track record, far from proving to be a hindrance, turned out to be one of his greatest assets.[15]

Although Upper Bann was a solidly Ulster Unionist seat, Trimble was every bit as nervous as any other first-time candidate entering into a strange area. This hybrid seat, which straddled the northern portions of Co. Armagh and western Down, was organised around 20 fiercely independent branches: it comprised the town of Portadown, known as the 'hub of the north', which had a 70–30% Protestant – Catholic population, and which included some of the staunchest loyalists anywhere. It cherishes the memory of the first leader of organised Ulster Unionism, Col. Edward Saunderson (the MP for North Armagh at Westminster), who observed of the second Home Rule Bill in 1893, that 'Home Rule may pass this House but it will never pass the bridge at Portadown'; his presence endures to this day in the form of a statue outside St Mark's Church in Market Street.[16] Beside the local bridge, in the Pleasure Garden is a plaque to the memory of the local Protestants drowned in the River Bann by their Catholic neighbours, during the 1641 uprising.[17] Even today, the ardour of local loyalism can in part be ascribed to the fact that many of the residents are descendants of refugees from the border counties of the Republic and the more southerly parts of Co. Armagh – which are increasingly 'no-go' areas for Protestants. In this climate of increasing residential segregation, the non-sectarian, trade-union based traditions of the old Northern Ireland Labour party (which used to be quite strong amongst the light industrial workers of Portadown) had inevitably waned. Lurgan, just five miles away from Portadown, was perhaps the most evenly and bitterly divided town in Ulster, with a 50–50

sectarian split. Banbridge in Co. Down was two-thirds Protestant at the time of Trimble's selection and tended to think of itself as a cut above the Co. Armagh portions of the seat.

Like McCusker – who was known to leap over fences – Trimble set a ferocious pace on the hustings; indeed, the first remark which many people made was how much he physically resembled his predecessor (a few were upset that he did not opt to live in the constituency, because he 'did not want to live over the shop' and this still rankles with some). Then, because no one knew him, he could canvass an estate in a mere 20 minutes, but now he can scarcely do one house in 20 minutes. Partly, also, it owed much to his natural shyness which he has taken years to overcome, for he would come across on the doorstep and sway back and forth on his feet. He soon enough learned some of the politician's techniques, though: on one occasion, a voter asked him, 'Are you washed in the Blood of the Lamb?' Trimble replied, 'I'm actually here on behalf of the UUP'. More insistently, the elector said, 'No, but are you washed in the Blood of the Lamb?' Trimble thought for a second and finally assented to the proposition.[18] To further integrate into the community, Trimble joined the Royal Black Preceptory. After he signed the Belfast Agreement, many members of his lodge would be supporters of the 'No' campaign. But in those days, there was only good fellowship between brother loyalists. 'I really loved the place then,' remembers Trimble. 'There was a keen interest in politics which never existed in Lisburn or Bangor.'[19]

Nationally, the main interest in the campaign lay in the fact that it was the first time that the Conservatives were running in Northern Ireland. This was not evidence of serious integrationist intent by the Conservative Government: rather, they had been dragooned into setting up associations by a grassroots revolt by English and Scottish Tories at the 1989 party conference. Kenneth Baker, the party chairman, came to canvass on behalf of the Conservative candidate, Colette Jones (a Moira house-wife) along with the Environment Secretary Chris Patten (then a staunch advocate of the NI Conservatives' cause); and Ian Gow, who was to be murdered that summer by the IRA, boomed the Tory message on the loud-hailers. The SDP also launched one of its last, quixotic electoral forays, and Dr David Owen turned up to lend his support to the candidate, Alistair Dunn. Meanwhile, Paddy Ashdown came to Portadown to back the candidate of the Liberal Democrats' sister organisation, the Alliance party. The other candidates included Rev. Hugh Ross of the Ulster Independence Party; Gary McMichael, son of the late John McMichael (also murdered by the IRA: Trimble heard the car bomb go off in Lisburn), representing the Ulster Democratic Party, the political wing of the UDA; Brid Rodgers, a very experienced SDLP local councillor; Sheena Campbell of Sinn Fein, who was subsequently murdered by the UVF; Tom French of the Workers' Party (formerly the political wing of the Official IRA); Peter Doran of the Greens; and Erskine Holmes of the Campaign for the Right to Vote Labour.[20] Trimble loved the attention, relishing particularly his first encounter with the mainland press in the person of Donald Macintyre, who visited Lurgan for the *Sunday Correspondent.* Trimble's message was unremitting: he sought resounding defeat for the nationalists and an exemplary humiliation for the Tories who had signed the AIA of 1985. The voters in the 18 May 1990 by-election clearly agreed: on a 53.66% poll, Trimble romped home with 20,547, compared to the second-placed Brid Rodgers of the SDLP on 6698. The sectarian head-count in the seat made such a result inevitable, but the real story was that despite bringing in the heavy guns, the Tories lost their £500 deposit and secured only 1038 votes, or a mere 3% of the poll; they were beaten into sixth place by Sinn Fein with 2033, the Ulster Independence Party with 1534 and the Workers' Party with 1083.[21]

Curiously, the press speculation about what kind of an MP Trimble would turn out to be was rather more accurate at the time of his arrival in the Commons than when he became UUP leader in 1995 – especially in the southern press. Thus, Marie O'Halloran in the *Irish Times* prophesied that 'some consider him a potential future leader with a close association with the maverick Strangford MP John Taylor, while overall he is viewed as a middle class intellectual with an understanding of both sides of the integration/devolution divide'.[22] The NIO was divided within itself about the

implications of Trimble's election: in this period, they were seeking to find a formula that would afford Unionists the latitude to participate in talks without scrapping the AIA. 'We were trying to break the permafrost,' recalls one former senior official. 'The election of David Trimble, who was a volatile loose cannon, was seen as changing the internal Unionist party balance, and thus could lead to what we called "creative instability".'[23] The following Tuesday, he took his seat in the Commons for the first time in the presence of Daphne Trimble, his mother and his sister-in-law and her husband. John Kennedy – who for many years was clerk at Stormont to the suspended Assembly – spoke to one of his counterparts at Westminster. 'Brains at last in the Unionist party', was their verdict.[24] Indeed, within a month or two of his election, Trimble recalls half the Tory Cabinet came and sat down next to him at the large table in the members' dining room: he was particularly pleased to come to know Malcolm Rifkind, who had been greatly admired by William Craig. 'My impression was some were coming over to have a look,' Trimble observes.[25]

It did not stop him from rebuking the Tories and Labour in his maiden speech during the Appropriations (No. 2) Northern Ireland Order debate on 23 May 1990. Initially, Trimble's speech was a fairly routine tribute to his immediate predecessor and a discussion of the history of the seat – although, characteristically, it was much more learned than the contributions of the bulk of new MPs. The former Land Law lecturer delighted in describing the critical role of the 'Ulster custom' (a special provincial form of landholding arising out of the customary rights that tenants had won for themselves) which some have claimed provided the basis of the indigenous growth of the industrial revolution in the Lagan and the mid-Bann Valleys.[26] He described the role of another predecessor, Col. Edward Saunderson, reminding the House that the father of Ulster Unionism had started out as a Liberal MP for Cavan before representing North Armagh. (Trimble would have been conscious that his Colhoun great-grandfather voted Liberal, prior to Gladstone's embrace of Home Rule.) His purpose here was to emphasise that the UUP was not a provincial party. Rather, he asserted 'we are the British national parties' in the Province, formed as an alliance of Tories, Liberals and latterly of Labourites who had to band together in defence of their constitutional rights; indeed, Trimble reminded Labour MPs that their party did not organise in Northern Ireland. But his main target was the Conservative decision to fight the by-election. As saw it, the poll showed that there was 'no mandate' for the Government's policies. Their real aim in standing for the first time in 70 years was to 'divide and diminish' the Unionist voice.[27]

Whatever effect he had on his colleagues, there can be no doubt that Trimble took to the Commons with great gusto. He was a staunch defender of its traditions, and well after he became UUP leader denounced the new Blair government's decision to curtail the rights of backbenchers by cutting down the number of Prime Minister's Question Times from twice a week to once weekly.[28] On social and cultural matters unrelated to the Ulster crisis, he developed a moderately conservative record: he is pro-hunting; opposes the 1967 abortion legislation on the grounds that it has become abortion on demand; and on homosexuality, he takes a cautious line on lowering the age of consent.[29] Important though these issues were, they were not fundamental to the nature and scope of Trimble's parliamentary mission. Of far greater significance was Molyneaux's decision to invite him to become home affairs spokesman. Trimble duly immersed himself in the details of criminal justice and Prevention of Terrorism legislation; it was during the committee stage of one of these debates that he came across his young Labour counterpart – Tony Blair.[30] Indeed, Frank Millar was struck by the fact that like all Unionist MPs who come to Westminster, Trimble became much more of an integrationist.[31] The consistent thread of his contributions was to illuminate how Northern Ireland was treated in a fashion very unlike the rest of the United Kingdom. Thus, Trimble spoke up when an IRA terrorist, Paul Magee, received a 30-year sentence for murdering a special constable in Yorkshire: he was outraged that the average tariff for security-force killers in Northern Ireland was a mere twelve

years. Likewise, he spoke out against the fact that the only major government department without a Commons Select Committee was the NIO.[32] But these were staple Unionist themes over the years, albeit put forward with rather more eloquence and erudition by Trimble than by most UUP MPs. What was really distinctive about his contributions was his eye for the international dimensions of the Ulster crisis: he said the principles of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, signed by 34 countries at the Paris summit of November 1990 (where the Cold War formally ended), should apply to Northern Ireland: these held that existing frontiers ought to be recognised, but that the rights of national minorities should be provided for, too. What was good enough for eastern and central Europe should, he reckoned, be good enough for Ulster.[33]

Inevitably, Trimble also took much time over his duties as a constituency MP. At first, he did not know where to collect the mail at the Commons and it piled up in a great mass for a month before he discovered what to do. He located his constituency office in Lurgan: this was closer to his home in Lisburn than any of the other possible sites, and was ably run by his wife Daphne and Stephanie Roderick (whom he met whilst she worked at the Ulster Society). He may not have been the authentic grassroots politician that McCusker was, but his academic skills could still be very useful. Thus, in 1993, the fifteen-strong Economic Development Committee of Craigavon District Council visited La Grange in Georgia, where the world-wide headquarters of Interface carpet tiles was located: it was his first visit to the United States, and Trimble played his part in persuading the Americans to create 30 jobs in Lurgan with a masterly exposition of their shared Ulster-Scots heritage (the forebears of Andrew Jackson, the seventh President of the USA, came from the Ulster area, along with those of four other Presidents. At least two further holders of the office appear to have been of southern Protestant origin).[34] But in truth, his work in Upper Bann has never defined his identity as a parliamentarian as completely as it did Harold McCusker's. Bob Cooper, former chairman of the Fair Employment Commission claims that Trimble was far less active than his predecessor in bringing anti-discrimination cases on behalf of Protestants – though, as he adds, this opinion is only possible because McCusker was so unusually hyper-active on behalf of his constituents.[35] Trimble was, deep down, far more of a creature of Westminster than McCusker and he would rarely miss a division at the Commons in order to attend a meeting of his private (Orange) lodge, after the fashion of his predecessor.

The hardest part of the job, Trimble found, was visiting the families of murdered constituents, whether Catholic or Protestant – though he usually rang the RUC beforehand to make sure that the deceased had no paramilitary links. Since his own constituency was a centre of terrorist activity, dealing with security matters occupied more of his time than had he been MP for relatively unmolested seats such as North Down or Strangford. Large IRA bombs went off in the constituency at Craigavon in 1991, Lurgan in 1992 and Portadown in 1993.[36] He also campaigned assiduously, with the DUP, on behalf of the 'UDR 4' (a quadrumvirate of soldiers convicted of the murder of a Roman Catholic in Armagh in 1983: all of them asserted their innocence, and three of them were subsequently released on appeal).[37] Trimble went to HMP Maghaberry with Ian Paisley, Jnr, and then presented materials on the miscarriage of justice to the then Secretary of State, Peter Brooke. Unusually for a Unionist MP, he was not a supporter of all forms of capital punishment: in the Commons division of 17 December 1990, he favoured it as a penalty for the murder of police and prison officers, and for killings committed with firearms and explosives, but not for any murder. Indeed, since the defeat of Enoch Powell in the 1987 General Election, probably only Ken Maginnis was a more consistent opponent of capital punishment in the voting lobbies within the Unionist family.[38] Partly, this was because of Trimble's acute sense of the possibility of miscarriages of justice. Indeed, he believed that mainland juries, in particular, had a tendency to react with excessive emotion to atrocities. 'Because of the nature of terrorism and the emotional response to it, the response of the man in the street cannot be trusted,' opined the former law lecturer during the debate on the renewal

of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1991. He believed there was a good case for replacing juries with judge-only, Diplock-style courts throughout the United Kingdom.[39]

More disturbing still to Trimble were rumours that officials were engaged in talks with Sinn Fein. He wrote to John Major in January 1991 asking the Prime Minister to confirm that there were no such negotiations with republicans: Major replied, assuring him that the Government would not have talks with terrorists or those threatening violence to advance their agenda. Major's formulation did not, though, preclude 'contacts' between republicans and officials – a very fine distinction, but one to which ministers would have increasing recourse in the coming years. Channels of communication had been operating almost continuously in one form or another throughout the Troubles: Ed Moloney has shown that overtures were certainly being made during Tom King's period as Secretary of State.[40] But the talks to which Trimble was referring were those described by Anthony Seldon in his authorised life of Major. In late 1990, the Secretary of State, Peter Brooke, had been approached by John Deverell, a senior MI5 officer and director and coordinator of intelligence in Northern Ireland.[41] He requested that a line of communication which had existed in 1974–5 and during the Hunger Strikes of 1981 be reopened. Brooke gave his approval, subject to it being deniable in the event of exposure. His reasoning was two-fold. First, terrorist deaths had risen from 62 in 1989 to 76 in 1990 (an increasing proportion of which were by loyalists) and he was determined to do something to reduce them. Second, he was informed by John Hume – who since 1988 had been engaged in a much criticised dialogue with Gerry Adams – that republicans were engaged in their own process of revisionism. According to this conventional interpretation of events, the IRA recognised that the 'war' was unwinnable, at least as traditionally defined, and that if the conditions were right they might wish to 'come in from the cold'. They had reached a ceiling of 30 to 40 per cent of the nationalist vote and were finding it hard to break out of such electoral ghettoes in Northern Ireland – let alone the Republic, where their support remained minimal after the republican movement's decision in 1986 to end the policy of abstentionism from the Dail. The public response to this was Peter Brooke's Whitbread Lecture of 9 November 1990, in his Westminster South constituency, where he first formulated the phrase that Britain had 'no selfish strategic or economic interest' in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Significantly, an advance text was shown to Sinn Fein.[42]

At the same time as such possibilities seemed to offer themselves, the Government was also engaged in trying to coax Unionists back into the political mainstream. Partly, it was a function of British disillusionment with the AIA. First, it had not yielded the end to violence and the levels of security cooperation with the Republic for which the British had hoped. Second, as Patrick Mayhew recalls of his subsequent term in office from 1992–7, the AIA 'was like a lead necklace, not so much for its content as the secretive way in which it was foisted upon the Unionists. It precluded me from saying what I wanted to say, "trust me".'[43] It was possible, but distinctly harder, to operate 'direct rule with a Green tinge' with only minimal cooperation of the representatives of the majority community; and it was certainly impossible to obtain agreement for more broadly based, popular institutions of government, without them. But how could it be done without scrapping the AIA, or at least suspending it, the minimum requirement of Unionists? Under Tom King, Secretary of State from 1985–9, Thatcher was reluctant to make even the most tacit, public admission that the AIA had been anything other than beneficial; but where King failed to gain her approval for a gesture to win over Unionists, Brooke succeeded. The result was Brooke's other major address, of 9 January 1990, to a gathering of businessmen in Bangor: in his bid to launch inter-party talks and devolution, he urged Unionists to end their 'internal exile'. If they did so, then the AIA would be operated 'sensitively'.[44]

After the failure of the protest campaign against the AIA, Unionists were also anxious for a way out. British 'revisionism' of the AIA seemed to offer this. Aided by a 'suspension' of the AIA and the Maryfield permanent secretariat whilst talks took place, they opted to participate in the elaborately constructed, three-stranded approach, first announced by Brooke in March 1991. The concept of

the three strands would provide the framework for all future negotiations and structures: Strand I, chaired by Brooke and his successors, would focus on the internal governance of Northern Ireland – with the aim of restoring some sort of devolved institutions. Although any devolved parliament or council would not be based upon majority rule, Unionists would still be the largest bloc and it would, therefore, constitute an institutional structure of sorts to protect their interests. Inevitably, nationalists always sought to hedge about and to restrict its powers. By contrast, the Strand II talks (which had an independent chairman) catered for the Irish identity. Their purpose was to create North-South bodies – of greater or lesser degrees of autonomy from the northern and southern legislatures – which, nationalists hoped, would over time acquire greater powers and thus form the basis for an all-Ireland government. Inevitably, Unionists always sought to limit their remit. Strand III dealt with the east-west dimension – that is, the wider context of British-Irish relations. For long, it was the 'poor relation' of the strands – but it was the one which most interested David Trimble.

Molyneaux seems to have calculated that there would be no agreement. On this, he was proved right and talks eventually collapsed in November 1992.[45] Nationalists had little reason to make an accommodation at this particular point. For it was the Unionists who were desperate to be rid of the AIA, not nationalists. Thus, if the talks failed, the worst that could happen would be that the Agreement would simply resume its normal workings, and another impasse combined with further IRA violence might even prompt an Anglo-Irish Agreement Mark II or Joint Authority. Nonetheless, it seemed reasonable to the UUP to suppose that if they were flexible – which included going to Dublin for the Strand II talks without the DUP – they would be rewarded in some way for taking risks. This, combined with British disillusionment with the AIA, led them to believe that the Government would then return to a more Unionist agenda. It was not altogether a fanciful conception, since during the 1992 General Election, Major had successfully taken up the theme of the Union: he particularly had Scotland in mind, but he also referred to the 'four great nations' of the United Kingdom and Brooke had attacked Labour's 'unity by consent policy' during the campaign. After the election, the NIO team headed by Patrick Mayhew was 'just about as Unionist as the current Conservative party could produce'.[46] In the meantime Molyneaux decided to play along with the three-stranded formula for those very tactical reasons. But although ministers acknowledged after the failure of the 1991–2 talks how far the UUP had moved, and that SDLP intransigence had undermined progress, the party never received a pay-off commensurate to the extent of its flexibility. This was because at the moment when Unionists hoped that the British Government might adopt such an agenda, a far bigger prize than the re-entry of the weakening Unionist community into the restructured institutions of government in Northern Ireland became a real possibility. That potential prize was, of course, an IRA ceasefire.

Retrospectively, therefore, the work of the 1991–2 UUP talks team looks rather peripheral to what was really going on. Indeed, as has been noted, Trimble devoted himself to what then seemed to be the most marginal issue of all: to develop the Strand III 'basket' of the talks, which resembled the old Vanguard concept of the Council of the British Isles. In the short term, his focus on this matter seemed largely to have had the effect of annoying his colleagues, as much on grounds of style as of substance. Ken Maginnis, who later became a staunch ally of Trimble, was less than impressed: 'I thought that he was intolerable at that time. He had a purely theoretical approach to the situation without any sense of the practicalities. And his only friend in a parliamentary party full of non-graduates was the other Queensman, John Taylor [with whom Trimble shared an office]. The two were considered to be academically a cut above the rest.'[47] Substance divided the two men as well. Whereas Trimble wanted to forge ahead on Strand III, Maginnis wanted to push ahead on the North-South bodies. Trimble was riveted by Brian Faulkner's experience: that powerful cross-border institutions could prove to be the vehicle for smuggling unionists into a united Ireland. His view was that the AIA and any such Strand II structures could be transcended by bringing them into a

wider context – of regions cooperating with each other on an equal basis.[48] Maginnis thought this to be nonsense. Far better to deal with Dublin one-on-one, where Unionists had some real negotiating muscle, than in such a large community of variegated peoples. In this entity, he argued, the Ulster Unionists would end up as a small, isolated group in one vast pressure cooker. When its deliberations turned sour, as they easily could when the British had to take into account their relations with the Irish Republic and other regions, there would then be enormous pressure within the unionist family to withdraw from such a body.[49] Whoever was right, there can be no doubt that once again Trimble had done little to endear himself to his colleagues at Westminster. But the dramatic events of the coming three years made such tensions irrelevant. For Trimble would soon become the main beneficiary of the challenges posed to traditional Unionism by the British state's increasingly strenuous attempts to treat with republicanism.

NINE *Framework or straitjacket?*

TRIMBLE may have been the youngest and most junior UUP MP – but he was already acquiring a reputation as the party's most intellectual elected representative. Indeed, he did remarkably well to maintain his historical and intellectual interests after his election to Parliament. Trimble's main efforts lay in two pamphlets for the Ulster Society.[1] The first, *The Foundation of Northern Ireland* (1991), sold out its complete print run of 2000: it recounted familiar events leading to Partition and immediately thereafter, but gave them a 'revisionist' twist. Far from being simply the 'gallant little Ulster' taking its stand against the Fenian hordes and a faithless British Government, Trimble painted a much more complex picture. Its real political interest lay in the fact that here – at the heart of the Ulster Society – was a Unionist MP again praising Sir James Craig for going unprotected to Dublin to negotiate with terrorists. 'At home, there were some who were ready to criticise Craig, but what was not in dispute was his enormous physical and political courage,' noted Trimble. The paper was written at the time of the Brooke-Mayhew talks of 1991–2 and its aim was to show that Unionists could once again make up for their lack of political power through manoeuvre and tactical adroitness: the Craig – Collins pact, believed Trimble, had worked in the Unionists' favour. It also provided a sharp critique of Sinn Fein's policy of abstentionism at Westminster, following their triumph in the south in the General Election of 1918. By declining to take up their seats, they were unable to affect the direction of the debates on the Government of Ireland Act 1920, and the Unionists had the field to themselves. In the following year, Trimble produced another paper for the Ulster Society, entitled *The Easter Rebellion of 1916.* Its main interest lies in its rarity value, for few Ulster Unionist MPs had ever bothered to tackle this subject seriously, and it was a competent survey of the secondary literature. Indeed, even so formidable an adversary as Martin Mansergh, who became adviser to successive Fianna Fail leaders, acknowledges the quality of Trimble's researches in his recent collection of essays, *The Legacy of History.*

But of greatest significance to Trimble himself was the lengthy preface which he wrote in 1995 to Gordon Lucy's study *The Great Convention: The Ulster Unionist Convention of 1892*, again published by the Ulster Society. Trimble describes it as 'the closest thing to a personal political credo which I have written'. The 1892 Convention was held in Belfast as a response to Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill. Trimble believed that this body had been mis-characterised by R.F. Foster in *Modern Ireland 1600–1972* as a symbol of the Protestant Ascendancy, whereas he believed that it was an authentic popular response by the democratic majority in Ulster to the prospect of being coerced into a Catholic state. In fact, Trimble was not entirely fair to Foster on this: Foster certainly employed the term 'Ascendancy' but he also acknowledged that '[the Convention] constituted a class alliance that was underestimated by Irish nationalist and British politicians alike'.[2] Whatever the rights and wrongs of Trimble's analysis, few Ulster Unionist MPs of the Troubles era – with the exception of Enoch Powell – would have had the intellectual self-confidence to challenge Foster.[3] Even bolder in the light of Trimble's own political circumstances at the time was his foreword to the Ulster Society's republication of C. Davis Milligan's study, *The Walls of Derry: Their Building, Defending and Preserving.* Penned in 1996, it contains an intriguingly favourable reference to the trenchworks built before the siege by Governor Robert Lundy. To this day, Lundy is a hate figure in Ulster Protestant lore for supposedly betraying the Williamite cause by virtue of his lack of enthusiasm for resisting the Jacobite forces. Relatively recent scholarship suggests, however, that he was fainthearted or just plain 'realistic' in his assessment of the city's prospects.[4] Years later, of course, Trimble himself would be accused by his loyalist detractors of being the 'Lundy' of this era. Yet, curiously, his attempted rehabilitation of Lundy stirred little controversy at the time it was written. Whatever

its actual political significance, Trimble certainly loved being 'the cleverest kid on the block' and he would have enjoyed nothing more than penning a quirky, contrarian rehabilitation of such a man.

There can be no doubt that the Ulster Society dramatically raised his profile in the Province at large: the fact that its headquarters was located at Brownlow House helped him secure the nomination for Upper Bann. And the scores of talks which he gave and attended throughout Ulster brought him into contact with hundreds of grassroots Unionists, which helped mightily when he ran for the leadership in 1995. Trimble had plenty of time for such activity, since he was scarcely part of the UUP's most inner councils under Molyneaux. Michael Ancram, who became Political Development Minister in 1993, recalls that Trimble was not someone that ministers would come across a lot, not least because sustained dialogue had in large measure broken down after the end of the Brooke-Mayhew talks in November 1992; nor, says Michael Mates, did he accept invitations to dinner at the minister's Belfast residence at Stormont House.[5] Trimble was thus a peripheral player in the negotiations which led to the Downing Street Declaration of 15 December 1993, issued jointly by the British and Irish Prime Ministers – one the most important statements of intergovernmental strategy issued in 30 years.

Some such pronouncement was a cardinal aim of the republican movement: Major had been told as much by Charles Haughey at their summit in December 1991. Haughey said that the Irish Government's soundings led them to believe that if the language was right, a declaration of principle could help to bring about an end to IRA violence. Hume, who had been engaged in his dialogue with Adams since 1988, also said as much and had his own draft version of what such a document would look like. In essence, Hume – Adams envisaged that in exchange for a ceasefire, the British Government would become a 'persuader' for a united Ireland and would gradually 'educate' Unionists into accepting the inevitability and logic of such an outcome. Major was, as ever, very cautious. Contrary to the widespread belief in Irish nationalist circles, this was not primarily a function of his shrinking majority after his narrow re-election in the 1992 General Election, and the need for the support of the nine Ulster Unionists in the Commons. Rather, Major's caution over the emerging dialogue with republicans owed at least as much to his consensual style of management of the Cabinet and of the Conservative backbenches, whatever the numbers. Patrick Mayhew recalls that he hardly made a move without the support of the whole Cabinet Northern Ireland Committee, for he wanted to be sure that any initiative he took would not be disowned if it went awry.[6] The sceptics on this inner group included not merely such well-known Unionist sympathisers as Viscount Cranborne, leader of the Lords, and Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, but also the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, and, at times, Michael Heseltine. The reason for their doubts was simple: 25 years of terrorism (not least the murders of Gow, Neave, the casualties of the Brighton bomb, and the mortar attack on Downing Street) had given a new lease of life to the profound dislike and distrust of republicanism within the Conservative political elite (whatever their views of Ulster Unionism as a creed or Ulster Unionists as individuals). Furthermore, many MPs knew of servicemen or civilians from their constituency who had been slain or injured. Indeed, Andy Wood, then Director of Information at the NIO, reckoned that one of the little noticed by-products of 30 years of violence was that Northern Ireland at a human level has become much closer to the rest of the United Kingdom than it had been at the start of the Troubles. He calculates that as many as several hundred thousand troops have made their way through the Province – whereas, by comparison, hardly anyone from the mainland had been there in 1969.[7]

Major's consensual approach also governed his dealings with the Unionists. Whatever personal feelings, Major was certainly of the opinion that any new arrangements had to comprise at least the Ulster Unionists, if not the DUP. In that sense, there could be no repetition of the AIA. But how were these two objectives – bringing in the IRA whilst keeping the UUP on board – to be reconciled? After all, Hume was hated within Unionism for his dealings with Adams. It would, therefore, have been suicidal for Molyneaux to have accepted any joint declaration which emanated from them, or at

least was seen to emanate from them. Major understood that Molyneaux had a hugely difficult act to perform on his own party, and was determined that he be afforded the space to do so by negotiating a formulation that was more acceptable to the UUP. *More* was the key word. For Molyneaux would never be able to throw his bowler hat into the air over a text designed to draw in the Provisionals. All that was needed, says Michael Ancram, was that he should acquiesce in it.[8] To that end, Major extensively consulted Molyneaux: Molyneaux recalls that from 18 October 1993 onwards, he and the Prime Minister met on a weekly basis. One British official who participated in these meetings recalls that Molyneaux would often say "'I don't think my folk will wear this"; sometimes, he was acting as a spokesman for the state of party opinion, sometimes he was using it as a vehicle for expressing his own discontents'. The British, in turn, would play this back in their innumerable negotiations with the Irish Government. Such confidence-building measures became all the more vital after the Shankill bomb killed nine Protestants in October 1993 and the revelations of secret contacts between British Government representatives and the Provisionals; thereafter, they would take place three times a week. After all, Major had said that such discussions would 'turn my stomach'. Was there another secret deal, asked unionists – this time between the Provisionals and the British Government? Molyneaux, who was consulted at an ever more frantic pace along with his advisers, became convinced that there was no such conspiracy. His authority was still sufficient to carry the Ulster Unionists with him – thus also forestalling a revolt from the 30 or so Tory backbenchers who might have baulked at the text of the Joint Declaration had the UUP leader given the signal.

British ministers and officials to this day remain well pleased with their work on the Downing Street Declaration. In Michael Ancram's words, 'we delivered a pretty Orange document in green language'.[9] According to this reading, the British Government was merely reiterating what it had already conceded – that it had 'no selfish strategic or economic interest' in staying in Ulster – indicating to Hume and the IRA that they were neutral rather than imperialistic in motivation, and that republicanism's real 'British question' was how to deal with close to a million pro-British subjects in the north-east corner of Ireland. The British Government was now a facilitator for an agreed Ireland – again, Hume's concept – but that was not necessarily a united Ireland. Such a polity could only come about if consent was freely and simultaneously given by the people of Ireland, north and south. Partition was secure in that Ulster folk would determine whether there would be Irish unity and not the Irish people as a whole, as the republicans wanted. Moroever, the British would simply seek to uphold those democratic wishes, be they for unity or the status quo and, crucially, would neither seek to persuade nor to coerce Ulster into any new arrangements. Unionists were told that it was significant that it was the Fianna Fail Government of Ireland – traditionally the 'Greener' of the Republic's two main parties – which acknowledged a united Ireland needed the consent of the majority in Ulster. Both Governments added that all could participate fully in the democratic process if a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods was established. In his subsequent explanation of the DSD in the Dail, the Irish Foreign Minister, Dick Spring, defined a 'permanent' abandonment of violence as including 'the handing up of arms…'. British ministers also made such demands – a point which annoyed Adams greatly in early 1994 when he told the *Irish News* on 8 January 1994 that 'they [the British] want the IRA to stop so that Sinn Fein can have the privilege twelve weeks later, having been properly sanitised and come out of quarantine, to have discussions with senior civil servants of how the IRA can hand over their weapons'. The terms on which Sinn Fein/IRA gained access to the negotiating table and even the new institutions of government in Northern Ireland would prove to be one of the most vexing questions of the coming years.

To someone like Trimble, the language of the Declaration ought to have made for very uncomfortable reading. First of all, there was the very fact of the statement itself: a foreign government with an illegal territorial claim was once again pronouncing upon the future of Northern Ireland. Second, it spoke of the 'people' of Ireland – whereas Trimble, who subscribed to the B&ICO's 'Two Nations' theory, believed the Ulster-British to be a breed apart. Third, though it acknowledged

the right of the majority in Northern Ireland to determine its constitutional future, it repeatedly posited the idea that any changes in that status would inevitably be in the direction of Irish unity, rather than towards still closer relations with Britain. But for all his doubts (which in part centred around the fact that because Molyneaux went alone to Downing Street, he could be outmanoeuvred) Trimble was reluctant publicly to denounce the document in which his leader had such a hand. To have done so, Trimble says, would have pushed him into the Paisleyite camp and would forfeit him such limited access as he then enjoyed.[10] Any fears which the NIO may have harboured that he would be the source of right-wing opposition to the DSD were thus never realised. 'If we are suspending judgment today on this statement today, it is in the hope that it will lead to a way out of the cul-de-sac in which the people of Ulster have been condemned for the last eight years,' he observed in the Commons on the day of the signing of the DSD. Instead, he focused upon the so-called 'democratic deficit' in Northern Ireland – partly a reference to the system of legislating for the Province via Orders in Council rather than properly debated and scrutinised Bills.[11]

With hindsight, Trimble feels that Molyneaux did a fairly good job in removing the 'Greener' elements within the Hume – Adams conception.[12]It was an early indication that Trimble, unlike Robert McCartney, did not regard the peace process as a fraud designed to deliver a united Ireland by stealth; rather, it was something which, if the terms were right, was worth studying and could yield fruit. In Trimble's eyes, that fruit was the tantalising prospect of no more impositions from above, such as the abolition of Stormont by Westminster in 1972, or the AIA of 1985. This, he hoped, would be a settlement which Unionists would be able to shape for themselves rather than being left to wait 'like a dog', in Harold McCusker's famous phrase, outside the conference chamber as the future of the Province was carved up.[13] Paisley swiftly detected Trimble's modulated position, describing him in a speech to the annual dinner of the Tandragee, Co. Armagh, branch of the DUP in early 1994 as 'plasticine man' over the DSD: Trimble was 'being made to look up, look down, look left and look right in whatever way he was punched by events'.[14]

The Provisionals, for their part, never endorsed the DSD – if only because they could never then accept that Northern Ireland was the relevant unit within which the consent principle should be exercised – but it nonetheless contained enticing amounts of 'Green' language. This was emphasised by both Reynolds and Hume, thus enabling it to become an important building block in the construction of the first IRA ceasefire of 31 August 1994 – although Adams may have gambled that the 'precondition' about decommissioning would be waived more swiftly than was actually the case. Whilst republicans debated the DSD's contents and requested 'clarification' from the British Government (in an attempt to draw them into public negotiations before a ceasefire had been called), Trimble urged that they not be allowed to dictate the pace of progress. Hume had told the British and Irish Governments that there would peace within days of the DSD, but it had not been forthcoming. 'The government have held the carrot,' Trimble observed. 'Now it is time for the stick. Militarily they should clobber the Provos.' He became the pre-eminent advocate in the Commons of the idea of the then Chief Constable of the RUC, Sir Hugh Annesley, to allow wiretap evidence to be used in court (partly, he argued, because such evidence could sometimes assist in the defence of the accused).[15] From his knowledge of European law, Trimble also urged that the Italian-style, mafia-busting investigating magistrates be brought in to deal with the IRA.[16] He named a number of alleged provisional IRA godfathers.

Trimble's interpretation of the IRA's decision to call its first ceasefire is fairly orthodox. 'The RUC were slowly winning the war of attrition,' he now recalls. 'The security forces were gradually getting on top of them and consequently for republicans in the early 1990s the picture is of a long haul where they were becoming less effective and their campaign could just peter out. So Sinn Fein's involvement in the peace process is partly about cashing in the armed struggle for a political process whilst it still has some value; but it also has something to do with the rising tide of loyalist violence

after the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which was starting to hurt Sinn Fein as well.'[17] Whether or not Trimble's interpretation of the IRA's rationale for its first ceasefire was correct, there can be no doubt that unionism as a whole was thoroughly unprepared for the new phase of struggle and the challenges posed by the 'peace process'. It was especially hard for them to endure the adulation which was heaped on the heads of the Sinn Fein leadership as they sought to portray themselves as 'normal' politicians. This included visas to enter America, subsequent trips to the White House, and an end to the Republic's and Britain's broadcasting bans. Sharp-suited articulate republicans were all over the airwaves; whilst Unionists such as Paisley, remarked Trimble, would protest ineptly at the injustice of the process and be thrown out of the Commons chamber or No. 10. Trimble, though, was not himself immune to such expressions of rage: he stormed out of a Channel 4 studio in the following year, when he found himself unexpectedly appearing on a remote link-up with Martin McGuinness. 'We do not share platforms or programmes with Sinn Fein/IRA,' he thundered.[18] Years later, even when he had become a much more experienced television performer, Trimble could still explode – exemplified by his anger when he felt himself provoked by the presenter Noel Thompson on BBC Northern Ireland's *Hearts and Minds* programme on 27 June 2002.[19]

Again, Unionists asked themselves: had the British Government done a deal at their expense to secure a ceasefire? Trimble himself soon concluded that whilst there was no secret deal between the British and the IRA, there was possibly a deal between Adams, Hume and Reynolds. This would be the so-called 'pan-nationalist front' so feared by Unionists. At this period, the Unionists greatly feared this would carry all before it. As they saw it, the republican movement would trade violent methods for the adoption of at least some of its aims by the constitutional parties. Thus, he believed, Hume and Reynolds were more inclined to regard the IRA ceasefire as 'permanent' than either the UUP or the British Government, even though the IRA refused to employ the 'p' word and hoped that such an impression of reasonableness would force the British into making concessions. If such concessions were not forthcoming, the British would then be blamed by nationalists for 'foot-dragging' and for adding 'preconditions' to Sinn Fein's entry into the political process – so validating the fears of IRA 'hardliners' that they had been tricked into abandoning armed struggle. Having represented the abandonment of violence as 'permanent', the thwarted IRA could then go back to Irish nationalists, and proclaim that they had acted flexibly but that British bad faith made it imperative for them to return to armed struggle. But the 'upside' of the British Government's caution was that Unionists were gradually bound into the 'process': Trimble says that he noted in 1994 that in contrast to the ceasefire of 1972 – when the young Gerry Adams was released from internment to negotiate with William Whitelaw at Cheyne Walk within 48 hours of the guns falling silent – this time there was a much longer 'quarantine' period before talks could begin. Indeed, when Trimble was asked whether he agreed with John Taylor and the Rev. Martin Smyth, MP, that Sinn Fein would eventually be involved in talks, Trimble replied: 'Personally, I would put a very big reservation against that … for myself, that's a matter which I don't expect to be doing.' In other words, Trimble rejected this option on contingent rather than principled grounds. Later, at the Young Unionists' conference at Fivemiletown, Co. Tyrone, Trimble urged the creation of an assembly in which Sinn Fein could take part – thus sidestepping the difficulties which would occur if they sought to gain access to all-party talks too quickly. Trimble was thus publicly raising the question of diluting preconditions for their entry into the political process, in exchange for a local elected body in which Unionists would, of course, enjoy a clear majority.[20] It appears to be the first time that he raised the topic on a public platform in Northern Ireland – though he had, in fact, already made a similar suggestion in an article in *The Independent* on 14 September 1994. This was a mere fortnight after the IRA had declared its first ceasefire.

But in the immediate term, the majority which exercised the minds of everyone in this period was the shrinking Tory margin in the House of Commons. Although nationalist Ireland assumed that as a consequence of this arithmetic Molyneaux exercised vast influence, the UUP did not see it that

way (indeed, if anything, the reverse was the case, precisely because the Tories did not want to be seen to be bending the knee to the UUP).[21] Trimble believes that Molyneaux was wrongly accused at the time by his own tribe of not extracting enough from Major. But from his own subsequent experience as leader, Trimble concludes there was very little that could be extracted from the Tories, since although the British Government was generally weak, it was not weak in the affairs of Northern Ireland and could always call on Labour for bi-partisan support in a crisis. Trimble's private criticism of Molyneaux, rather, centred around his habit of meeting the Prime Minister alone. His objections were two-fold, on both mechanical and on political grounds. First, it was often difficult both to conduct a negotiation and to take notes – particularly when there were differences in recollection over what had been agreed. This would then expose him to accusations within the UUP of having been gulled by another Tory Prime Minister. Second, such an accusation was harder to maintain when senior colleagues were roped into these discussions.[22]

These concerns were felt particularly keenly by the younger cadres in the UUP. They would increasingly look to Trimble as their standard-bearer in the coming months, as the contours of the two Governments' detailed proposals for the future of the Province became apparent. These built upon the statement of principles in the DSD and were known as the Frameworks Documents – and, as in 1991–2, were based upon the three-stranded approach. Michael Ancram, assisted principally by the Political Director of the NIO, Quentin Thomas, had been working on them since early 1994 and Molyneaux had appointed Jeffrey Donaldson, Reg Empey and the party chairman, Jim Nicholson, as the UUP liaison. Once again, Trimble was on the periphery of his own party. Nonetheless, No. 10 thought it best to keep him sweet: Trimble was summoned to Major's suite in the Highcliff Hotel, Bournemouth, in October 1994 for a conversation with the Prime Minister. Major asked him what would he do in his position – a stock ploy which often flattered his interlocutor.[23] Trimble was taken aback – he was rather less experienced then in dealing with senior government figures – and informed Major that he would proceed in the same way but that he would test the Provisionals' sincerity against events. Major, in turn, concurred. Major then added, 'You know, I'm a Unionist.' Trimble then replied: 'I know that, I don't think you're going to sell us out in the sense of taking us into an Irish Republic. My concern is that you would see an opportunity for settling the problem and that would involve what would appear to you a minor concession but would to us be a vital interest.'[24]

The episode was curious for several reasons. Did Major already view Trimble, the youngest and most junior of the UUP MPs, as a potential leader – or perhaps as potential spoiler of the Government's plans? Trimble himself is not sure. But Major says that he spotted Trimble as 'able and ambitious. I thought it would be useful to get to know him. He was likely to be the voice of the grassroots.'[25] This view was widely held in Whitehall by the officials, too, and they may well have drawn it to Major's attention. Thus, Dame Pauline Neville-Jones, who chaired the Joint Intelligence Committee and later became Political Director of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, states that Trimble was already seen as a potential counterweight to Paisley – and a clever one, at that.[26] If so, it was a rare instance during the post-ceasefire period when ministers actively cultivated and sought the views of Unionist MPs. For though they handled the UUP with great skill in the run-up to the DSD, Major's whips' office touch deserted him and his colleagues during the run-up to the Frameworks. Partly, this was because after the DSD and the first IRA ceasefire, their attention was mostly focused upon the political and 'military' intentions of the republican movement. Indeed, many Unionists believe to this day that the Irish Government showed a very 'Green' draft of the Frameworks Documents to Sinn Fein/IRA before its publication in order to secure an IRA ceasefire and to bind them into the process – though Irish officials still deny that this was the case. Whatever the truth of the matter, Trimble himself believes that in the attempt to draw republicans into conventional politics, they tacked so far in a nationalist direction that they forfeited the UUP's acquiescence, for a short while at least. Thus, at the time of the IRA ceasefire Molyneaux – seeing that his three appointed

representatives were no better informed of the two Governments' plans – again offered to run an 'Ulster eye' over the Frameworks, as he had with the DSD. Mayhew wrote to Molyneaux to say that this would be very helpful but that the document was still very much at the drafting stage and that it would not quite be the done thing for the UUP leader to talk to civil servants.

In the eyes of the civil servants, there were sound, time-honoured reasons of Whitehall practice about this: the Frameworks were, they insist, a quite different kind of document from the DSD. First, Frameworks was a negotiating document, not a definitive statement of principle. It was a starting point, and therefore to prenegotiate it with any one party, especially one which almost held a balance of power in the Commons, would expose the British to accusations of adopting an uneven approach. Such pious formalism contrasted with rumours emanating from Dublin. Most worrying from a Unionist perspective were the claims made by the former Taoiseach Albert Reynolds (whose Fianna Fail-led Government had fallen in November 1994 following a scandal and had been replaced by a coalition led by the more instinctively anti-republican Fine Gael leader, John Bruton) that all-Ireland bodies with executive powers had been agreed between the British and Irish Governments. This, of course, would have been a reprise of the Council of Ireland which had proven so offensive to Unionists during the abortive Sunningdale experiment of 1973–4 – or worse. Trimble was also receiving his own warnings from his old Vanguard colleague on the UUP liaison committee with the NIO, Reg Empey. These indicated, he believed, that NIO civil servants had 'run amok'.[27] Molyneaux tried to engage Major in a 'control' exercise, but by the time Major was prepared to show him a draft it was too late. Indeed, Molyneaux remembers that when Major invited him into the Cabinet room to look at the draft version, the Prime Minister said he would leave him sitting at the Cabinet table whilst he went upstairs – and the UUP leader should ring the bell when he was finished. Major pushed the explosive paper across to the septuagenarian Ulsterman; the Ulsterman promptly shoved it back in the direction from whence it came. Molyneaux pointed out that he could not influence its basic direction and that by looking at it on Privy Council terms he would thus become acquiescent in its provisions.[28]

Such concerns soon ceased to be the preserve of the Unionist political classes and became dramatically clear to the Unionist population and to the world at large. In January 1995, David Burnside was shown a draft copy of the Frameworks Documents. Before he placed it in the press, Burnside went to see Molyneaux. 'I have seen them and it is terrible and disastrous.' 'What do I do?' asked Molyneaux, taken aback. 'Go and see Robert Cranborne,' said Burnside, referring to the most ardent Unionist in the Cabinet. 'I don't want to compromise his position in the Cabinet.' Burnside flared up: 'For Christ's sake, this is the Unionist cause we're talking about here.' Burnside also told Trimble of its contents, though the latter never saw the document and thus was unable to evaluate any later changes that were made when the final paper was actually published.[29] The extracts were then shown to a *Times* leader writer, Matthew d'Ancona, a prominent Trimble fan in the London print media. It turned out to be one of the greatest journalistic coups of recent years. No. 10 and the NIO were enraged: the 'spin' was that d'Ancona had endangered the 'peace process', although ultimately it had the opposite effect. *The Times* front page pronounced that the Frameworks brought 'the prospect of a united Ireland closer than it had been at any time since partition in 1920… today's disclosures will alarm many Unionists who were promised by Mr Major last week that the draft would contain "no proposals" for joint authority'.[30] It posited extensive all-Ireland bodies with executive powers. Although it was pointed out that some of the proposals in this draft had already been excised in the intergovernmental negotiations, the damage was nonetheless done. Major's pep talk to the Conservative backbenches and to the nation rallied the party and mainland opinion; but in Unionist circles, Trimble recalls, Molyneaux was once again seen to have been overly trusting of a British Prime Minister.[31] No. 10 felt that the leaks were less about the substance of the proposals than about the internal power struggle within the UUP. Realising that his flank had been exposed and that he had been unable to pull off the same success as over the Downing Street Declaration,

Molyneaux asked Major to see three members of his own party in the Prime Minister's room in the Commons behind the Speaker's chair. The three included Trimble – potentially his most dangerous internal party critic – and two close allies, William Ross and Rev. Martin Smyth. Trimble took the lead, employing his lawyerly skills to assault the leaked paper. Nothing that Major said in any way reassured the Ulstermen.[32] Trimble had already appeared to distance himself from the Tories: the Government noted that along with John Taylor, he abstained in the tight Commons vote on fisheries policy on 18 January 1995. With the exception of Ken Maginnis, the other UUP MPs voted for the then Government.[33]

Major had to persist, even though he knew that the Frameworks Documents were still-born: to have abandoned them, he felt, would definitively have proven to nationalist Ireland that the British Government was in hock to the Unionists. Instead, he opted to shave down the most controversial parts – much to the irritation of the Irish – in the hope that elements of the Frameworks would prove to be a basis for negotiation at a later date. When the Documents were published in Belfast on 22 February 1995, Unionists were not mollified. Mitchel McLaughlin of Sinn Fein seemed happy enough, telling a conference at the University of North London that 'John Major, by the very act of publishing the Frameworks Documents in the teeth of opposition from right-wing Conservatives and the Unionist leaderships has demonstrated that his government is not totally hostage to the mathematics of Westminster'.[34] The Strand I proposals posited a 90-member assembly, elected by PR, serving four- or five-year terms, with all-party committees overseeing the work of the Northern Ireland departments; their activity would be scrutinised by a three-man elected panel (Hume had envisaged a six-man panel, with EU and British and Irish Government representatives: this was his way of circumventing Northern Ireland's in-built Unionist majority, but it was negotiated away by the British, not least because they feared that it would inflame neuralgic Eurosceptic sensibilities on the backbenches and in the Cabinet: ministers were mindful of the problems that might arise if the causes of Euroscepticism and Unionism became bound up with each other). Strand II, on the North-South dimension, reiterated many of the principles of the December 1993 Joint Declaration and stated that such bodies were to exercise 'on a democratically accountable basis delegated executive, harmonising and consultative functions'. The designated topics for harmonisation would include agriculture and fisheries; industrial development; consumer affairs; transport, energy, trade, health, social welfare, education and economic policy. The remit of the body should be dynamic, enabling progressive extension by agreement of its functions to new areas. Its role should be developed to keep pace with the growth of harmonisation and with greater integration between the two economies. Furthermore, the Irish Government pledged to make changes to its Constitution which would fully reflect the principle of consent and which would show that no territorial claim of right contrary to the will of Northern Ireland's majority be asserted.[35]

Major claimed that this renunciation was 'crucial' and that any such North-South bodies would not be free-standing but would rather be democratically accountable to the assembly. Nor, he said, was there a predetermined list of such functions as they would exercise: indeed, the definition of harmonisation in education, as revealed under paragraph 33, included such prosaic notions as mutual recognition of teacher qualifications. The NIO held this to be evidence that they had, once again, delivered an 'Orange document in Green-speak'. Despite these glosses, and despite Major's reiteration of the 'triple lock' – the formulation whereby any deal had to have the endorsement of the Westminster Parliament, and the people and the parties of Northern Ireland – the Unionists were not reassured. Nor were many on the Tory backbenches. If devolution, proportional representation and a Bill of Rights were so unsuitable for Great Britain, why were they suddenly so beneficial for Northern Ireland? In and of themselves, these were not great issues for David Trimble, though. Certainly, Ulster's anomalous treatment vexed as much as it always had done, but Trimble was no purist defender of English constitutional norms as he saw them and he believed in a continent of empowered regions.

Rather, Trimble's worries focused on paragraphs 46 and 47: as Unionists interpreted them, these held that if the assembly ever collapsed, the default mechanism would allow the two Governments to continue to operate North-South bodies without any local input. Those bodies would be free-standing and not be set up by the assembly. They could, therefore, easily become the vehicle for creeping, even rolling unification. That this would be the case was proven by the fact that their functions were invested with a character that was described as 'dynamic', 'executive' and 'harmonising'. The 'd', 'e' and 'h' words assumed a great importance to Trimble, as did the authority under which they operated: during the negotiations leading up to the Belfast Agreement of 1998, Trimble devoted great amounts of his energy and political capital to excising these atrributes and to making sure that the Strand II institutions were explicitly accountable to the assembly. Even as they stood, the listed of areas of cooperation – such as health – were amongst the most sensitive for many unionists. After all, Catholic values still held sway on the medical ethics committees of hospitals in the Republic. How would greater integration with such a system affect the freedoms of Ulsterwomen within the NHS? Moreover, any hint that priests might have a hand in the upbringing of Protestant children was potentially explosive. Trimble further warned that British-Irish ideas for harmonising key welfare policies would threaten the right of the Province's taxpayers to equality of treatment with the rest of the United Kingdom, for which Sir James Craig had fought so hard. Would Northern Ireland be harmonised down to the Irish level or would the Republic be harmonised up to the British level? Nor was Trimble satisfied with the apparent withdrawal of the Irish constitutional claim over Northern Ireland. Whilst the Irish undertook in Frameworks to withdraw the claim to jurisdiction, they did not satisfactorily expunge the claim to territory and thus denied Northern Ireland explicit legitimacy in southern eyes.

But the failure to keep the Ulster Unionists on board was much wider than just Major's inability to tie the Irish down more precisely. Some senior figures in the Government felt that the failure to repeat the delicate balancing exercise of the DSD could be ascribed to the fact that whereas the DSD was mainly formulated out of No. 10, the Frameworks was mainly drafted in the NIO; and that officials such as Quentin Thomas had become too close to their Irish opposite numbers such as Sean O hUiginn and that they failed to see the political wood for the bureaucratic trees. Certainly, Molyneaux believed this and told Major that 'they've double crossed us again' – a variant of his old line that 'the rats have been at work'.[36] Was this really the case, though? It was always easy to blame civil servants, especially under the circumstances of direct rule in Northern Ireland. There, they wielded exceptional powers under ministers who were not MPs in Ulster and thus were not democratically accountable in the normal way. Moreover, much of their information on the correlation of political and military forces inevitably derived from secret organs of state. Certainly, Michael Ancram believes that Thomas had an instinct to undo Lloyd George's historic error in agreeing to partition Ireland and that he frequently restrained Thomas from going too far.[37] Not so, says Thomas. He claims that he was, in fact, trying to stabilise the status quo but that he also believed that British rule in Ulster was inevitably subject to a higher set of legitimacy tests than was the case for the Irish (as exemplified by the vastly greater protests whenever the RUC would shoot terrorists than when the same act was perpetrated by the Gardai). He says, rather, that he always believed that Northern Ireland's general position should be determined by the consent principle.[38] Other colleagues, such as Peter Bell, say that Thomas' key conception was that Sinn Fein were lobsters and that the task of British statecraft was to tempt them into lobsterpots.[39] At the time, Trimble also believed that attitudes such as those attributed to Thomas did much to explain why the Irish had won 'hands down' over the Frameworks. But there was also a bit of useful play-acting in all of this: officials such as Thomas were convenient bogeymen for Unionists, since it was much easier to lay the blame on treacherous advisers rather than the ruler himself. Appealing over the NIO's head to No. 10 thus became a stock Unionist ploy, and one which would be played even by Trimble – who himself had little faith in the leaders of the

modern Conservative party. Sometimes, it even worked, for successive occupants of No. 10 liked to flatter themselves that they could work their magic in ways that mere departmental ministers could not. At other times, the dance might even have been pre-choreographed between No. 10 and the NIO as part of a 'hard cop, soft cop' routine: it was sometimes useful to give Unionists the illusion that they were making progress, thus binding them ever more thoroughly into the process.

The effects on Molyneaux of the Frameworks debacle were immediate. Ken Maginnis, for one, told John Bruton that he thought that William Ross, a robust opponent of power-sharing, would be the beneficiary and succeed Molyneaux.[40] On 18 March 1995, at the AGM of the UUC, a 21-year-old student named Lee Reynolds ran as a 'stalking horse' candidate against him. Reynolds declared that 'the leadership record since 1984 is one of successive defeats and an ongoing weakening of the Union'. His seconder was one of Trimble's closest associates and a Unionist intellectual, Gordon Lucy. Many supposed that Trimble was behind the challenge. Not so, says Trimble – a point confirmed both by Lucy and John Hunter, another close associate at the time. If anything, Trimble was worried that people would think just that and accuse him of disloyalty. Normally, the post went uncontested, but Reynolds received 88 votes to Molyneaux's 521 or 14 per cent of the total.

Worse was to come for Molyneaux. Two days later, the independent Unionist MP for North Down, Sir James Kilfedder, suddenly died of a heart attack. The UUP chose Alan McFarland, a former regular Army officer, as its candidate in the by-election in this most middle-class of seats (many NIO civil servants also lived there, helping to make it in some ways the most recognisably 'English' division in Ulster). It was not, though, promising DUP territory. Who, then, would carry the torch for Carsonian Unionism and the concepts of equal citizenship? A more than suitable candidate emerged in the shape of Robert McCartney, a QC originally from the Shankill Road who had become one of the Province's top-paid silks and lived in a spacious house at Cultra near Belfast Lough. Not only had he carved out a reputation as the most trenchant critic of the 'peace process'; he was also a non-Conservative who refused to join the Loyal Orders. He thus appealed both to the prosperous middle classes and to ordinary voters (although that summer, substantial portions of the bourgeoisie were also in a militant mood, as exemplified by their hostility to the attempt by Queen's University to stop playing *God Save the Queen* at graduation ceremonies and to replace it with the EU hymn, Beethoven's *Ode to Joy).41* McCartney – running under the 'United Kingdom Unionist' label but without a formal party organisation – beat the UUP candidate by 10,124 votes (37.0%) to 7232 votes (26.4%) on a 38.6% per cent turnout.[42] Even though his native Bangor was in the seat, Trimble did not canvass for the UUP candidate: he says that he was not asked to do so.[43] After 17 years in the UUP, he was still not a conventional party man.

TEN *The Siege of Drumcree (I)*

THE high politics of the Frameworks were of little interest to the mass of the Ulster-British population, but many of them felt that their national destiny was anything but secure. Every night on their television screens, clever and articulate Sinn Fein/IRA spokesmen seemed to win the battle of the airwaves hands down. It was part of the unremitting diet of defeat which the unionist community had suffered since 1985. But few Unionists, including Trimble, can have foreseen where their countrymen would choose to draw their line in the sand. That spot would be at Drumcree church two miles from Portadown town centre, in the heart of Trimble's constituency. There, ever since 1807, local Orangemen had attended divine service on the Sunday before 12 July (it was the oldest recorded Orange service in the history of the Orange institution, and was almost as old as the Order itself). Thence they would march back to Portadown itself. There they would arrive to the 'crack of the cane' on a lambeg drum, their colourful banners – often depicting Biblical scenes – fluttering high. This scene has changed little from 1928, when the Belfast-born Catholic artist, Sir John Lavery, painted a Portadown 12th: he claimed in his diary never to have seen anything to equal its 'austere passion'.[1]

Why was this? Because Portadown is, in the words of Sir John Hermon, a former Chief Constable of the RUC, 'the Vatican of Orangeism'.[2] Trimble also notes that local lodges boast a total of 1100 to 1200 members – in a town with a Protestant population of 20,000. Of these, over half are women and a quarter are juveniles, which means that perhaps as many as one in six of the eligible population are in the Order. Portadown District Lodge is numbered LOL No. 1, and as Trimble says, it regards that as being more than just an accident.[3] A challenge to its prerogatives and traditions would not be suffered lightly. Disaster had narrowly been averted in the mid-1980s, when the town's growing nationalist population demanded that parades through or close to Catholic areas be curtailed. Following negotiations with the RUC, the Orangemen surrendered the custom of passage down Obins Street. In exchange, they believed that they had won permanent right of passage down the Garvaghy Road – their traditional route to the town centre after completing the Drumcree church service on the Sunday before 12 July. They were reinforced in this belief by an RUC statement in 1986 claiming that 'unlike the Tunnel area [where the Orangemen ceased to march], Garvaghy Road is a major thoroughfare in which Catholics and Protestants reside'. The RUC denied that any specific guarantees had been given about the Garvaghy Road – though they acknowledged that such restrictions rarely applied to major thoroughfares. Whatever the precise understanding, the parades had nonetheless gone off relatively quietly in the intervening years in the presence of the new local MP, David Trimble, who was invited as matter of courtesy to march with the District Lodge.[4] Although scarcely an active Orangeman, Trimble was happy enough to take his place out of a sense of duty. Indeed, John Hunter remembers that Trimble loved turning round and watching the ranks of bowler-hatted brethren streaming down the hill to Portadown.[5]

But this time-honoured pageant was about to undergo its greatest challenge ever – which vaulted it into the forefront not merely of provincial concerns, but of national and international consciousness as well. For the Garvaghy Road Residents' group, which claimed to represent the inhabitants of the nationalist housing estate which comprised part of the route of the Drumcree march, indicated that they were unhappy about the parade. They had become far more active in recent years and claimed that demographic changes in the area justified a re-routing of this offensive and intimidatory march. The Orangemen retorted that the march only skirted the nationalist estate and that in any case, the protest was orchestrated by Republicans in the person of Brendan Mac Cionnaith, convicted for offences related to the bombing of the Royal British Legion Hall in Portadown in 1981 (a point of particular significance since it was the ex-servicemen's lodge which led the march down the Garvaghy Road). Many Orangemen saw the threatened street protests as an expression of aspects of TUAS –

the IRA's post-ceasefire strategy of Tactical Use of Armed Struggle. Republicans would thereby seek to heighten street tensions in order to provoke Orange reprisals. These would then enable them to portray themselves as defenders of the embattled Catholic community. Supporters of this contention rely on reports that Adams admitted in private to a Sinn Fein gathering at Athboy, Co. Meath, that the protests against a number of parades had not been spontaneous but that 'three years of work went into creating that situation, and fair play to those who put the work in'.[6] On the other side of the coin, Mac Cionnaith and other residents denied this and claimed it was simply a legitimate expression of nationalist rights.

On the morning of 9 July 1995, Portadown District prepared for their annual ritual in glorious sunshine, which would take them from Carleton Street Orange Hall in the town centre to the Drumcree church. The march out to Drumcree – not via Garvaghy Road – passed off quietly enough, and the service began at 11:15 a.m. During the course of it, Gareth Watson, then Deputy Master of LOL 273 spoke on several occasions to Superintendent Jim Blair, the RUC sub-divisional commander for the area. Watson had been formally appointed as Blair's contact shortly beforehand and stayed outside the church throughout the service. As the Rev. John Pickering, the Church of Ireland Rector of the parish of Drumcree concluded his sermon and the singing of the National Anthem began, Watson saw a large number of RUC Land-Rovers heading for the church, apparently blocking the return route to Carleton Street. Subsequently, Blair called with some disturbing news for the Orangemen. He told them that there had been a disturbance on the Garvaghy Road, with sit-down protests by the residents. Blair said that the RUC blockage was there for the Orangemen's protection, since a hostile nationalist mob might attack them, and that he would like to talk to the District officers. Portadown District duly brought David Trimble with them, relying upon him for political guidance. That said, Trimble had no master plan of action, nor any overall project in mind. Rather, he simply felt that he could not walk away and had to stay there out of a sense of personal honour and obligation to the men there.[7]

The Orangemen claim that the RUC did not immediately clarify the purpose of the blockage of the route in these talks: but they gave the impression that they were playing for time so that the police could clear the road. David Trimble told Gordon Lucy that neither he nor the District officers were told that the march would be 're-routed'.[8] To increase pressure upon the RUC, some Orangemen went to Portadown to keep their brother loyalists informed. Two hundred Protestants soon blocked Corcrain Avenue, where they were serenaded by the Portadown Flute Band. Their number was joined by Billy Wright and boys, the commander of the UVF's mid-Ulster brigade known widely as 'King Rat', who was suspected of the murders of numerous Catholics and republicans. Wright called the Nationalist residents a 'rent-a-mob' and threatened to match their numbers by bringing in loyalists from elsewhere in the Province. Wright was utterly convinced that the march was halted by the Government at the request of Cardinal Cahal Daly (the Roman Catholic Primate of Ireland), John Hume and Gerry Adams. As Lucy notes, even if Wright's contention was wrong, after the AIA and the start of the 'peace process' loyalists were in a mood to believe such charges.[9] Wright et al. therefore determined to make a ban on the parade even costlier than letting the march down the road.

The RUC were thus in an extremely difficult position. They were obliged legally to do whatever was necessary under the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 – to minimise the threat to life and property. But in this context, it was hard to define what 'minimisation' meant. Did it mean locally, or Province-wide? Blair Wallace, then Deputy Chief Constable for Operations, recalls that the potential nightmare for the RUC was to allow 1000 loyalists to march in the teeth of the opposition from the residents as well as the possibility that 'heavies' might infiltrate the recesses of the nationalist estate in ones and twos without the knowledge of the residents. If this resulted in bitter hand-to-hand combat, the RUC would be condemned both for imposing Orangemen on the community and for allowing the two sides to fight it out. At a minimum, says Wallace, the RUC feared that there might be

distasteful scenes comparable to those outside Sean Graham's bookmakers at Belfast's lower Ormeau Road on 8 July 1992, when Orangemen in Belfast had taunted nationalists at the scene of an earlier massacre by the UFF – which had helped to turn the Ormeau Road into another flashpoint during the marching season. If reproduced on television, such scenes would not only make a settlement of that dispute harder to achieve, but would also have a 'knock-on effect' upon other contentious parades such as at Bellaghy, Co. Londonderry. Moreover, recalls Wallace, it was the first year of the first IRA ceasefire, which was looking shaky. This was especially the case following nationalist riots on 3 July, triggered by the release of Private Lee Clegg of the Parachute Regiment, who had been convicted of the murder of a Catholic girl (a conviction that was subsequently quashed).[10]

Such were the circumstances in which Assistant Chief Constable Freddie Hall, who commanded the southern region, would decide whether the march could proceed under the terms of the Public Order Order.[11] At 12:15, he decided to halt the march in consultation with his senior colleagues in southern region. At 12:50, Trimble took the first symbolic steps down the road, followed by 803 other Orangemen. There, they were faced by a phalanx of the RUC's grey, Hotspur armoured Land-Rovers. The RUC contingent comprised six to seven Mobile Support Units, each with four to five Land-Rovers, consisting of one Inspector, four sergeants, and 24 constables. At this stage, they were all in soft gear as opposed to full riot mode. Rev. John Pickering called to his wife at the Drumcree Rectory, 'Quick, you might never see the likes of this again.'[12] Trimble walked at the head of the brethren and when he arrived at the road block he decided not to stop but rather continued walking on the route until he could not go any further – 'as was my right'.[13] From his perspective, Jim Blair recalls that Trimble charged straight into the nearest officer, who staggered back. There, the two men stood eyeball to eyeball. 'That was the first demonstration of physical contact between an Orangeman and the police, and was seen by all of the officers of Portadown District,' says Blair. 'It was an indication of how he was prepared to wind the situation up.'[14] Later that afternoon, Trimble and Harold Gracey, then Master of Portadown District No. 1, went into Portadown to talk to the assembled loyalists, where Trimble urged them again to keep the protests going; they were almost prevented from returning to Drumcree by an RUC road block. According to Gordon Lucy, the two men then had their first serious conversation. 'If this goes badly, you and I have to be the last two people to leave,' Trimble told Gracey.[15] He remembers thinking that failure was more likely than not – hence, he believes, the possible reluctance of Rev. Martin Smyth, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ireland to turn up (Smyth states that he had commitments in London and wanted to stay in touch with the Government – and therefore sent Molyneaux, who held high rank in the Loyal Orders, to Portadown. He claims that he thought all along that the Orangemen would win).[16] Trimble's doubts were assuaged by the massive numbers who spontaneously turned up in support of Portadown District. Those present would be entertained by the bands, some with mighty 17th-century lambeg drums, weighing 40 pounds and three foot in diameter and depth, which rejoiced in names such as the 'Earl Kitchener the Avenger'.[17] These unalloyed expressions of solidarity buoyed up Trimble in the subsequent negotiations with the RUC. Trimble claimed on the basis of information from Orange sources that, at times, there were a mere 30 nationalist protesters who could easily be swept away. Hall, though, denied this was the case and said that the opposition to the march would be much more substantial. Jim Blair states that the actual numbers were closer to several hundred, with who knows how many 'hard men' hidden away.'[18]

Trimble and Gracey then briefed the crowd on events, and the local MP introduced the District Master to the assembled journalists. The next day, the *Belfast Telegraph* quoted an RUC officer's observation that Trimble was 'grossly irresponsible'.[19] But it was Gracey's remarks which were of greater significance on this occasion. He told them 'be it days, hours, or weeks, we will stay until we walk our traditional route'.[20] It was now to be a fight to the finish to preserve Ulster-British

culture. Everything, they felt, had been taken away from them: their Provincial Parliament; their locally controlled security forces; the right to display pictures of the Sovereign; the right to fly Union flags and to wear Glasgow Rangers T-shirts in the workplace; and much else besides. All of these, in their eyes, had fallen foul of the Dublin/SDLP/Sinn Fein/IRA-inspired reforms, to which weak and duplicitous British Governments had acceded in order to buy themselves a quieter life. Now even their marches, already greatly reduced in number, were to be re-routed or even banned, and that in the year of the 200th anniversary of the Battle of the Diamond in Co. Armagh, which led to the formation of the Orange Order.

The numbers began to build up further, and by 10:15 p.m. Ian Paisley had arrived. The relationship between Trimble and Paisley was never going to be an easy one, not least bearing in mind Paisley's past attacks on Trimble. Some, such as Jim Blair, thought that Trimble was in awe of the 'Big Man'; but others, such as Rev. Pickering, thought that Trimble was very much in the lead role in his own constituency and that Paisley deferred to him more often than not. Indeed, Pickering remembers that at a subsequent gathering, Paisley kept looking at his nails until Trimble was fetched – he would not brief those present until the local MP arrived.[21] Whatever the truth of the matter, it was at this meeting that Trimble suggested a compromise, whereby a smaller but still substantial contingent would go down the Garvaghy Road. Hall discussed it with Chief Superintendent Terry Houston, the RUC divisional commander. All they undertook to do was to examine the possibility of allowing the half-dozen Portadown District officers to march. This was unacceptable to the Orangemen but Trimble acknowledged that, from their perspective, this was at least a move in the right direction. Paisley then went and addressed the crowd and denounced the reduced numbers suggested by the RUC, and thereafter went to see Blair Wallace to try to persuade him to change the ruling. Other observers described 'a surreal atmosphere – a mixture between a military camp and a scout jamboree', with accordion and flute music playing to keep up the morale of the protesters. That night, Trimble tried to obtain some rest in his Renault Espace: he never went home during Drumcree 1995, nor was he able to shower and change clothes. But he was constantly interrupted by 'alarums and excursions', such as Paisley returning from his meeting with Blair Wallace. Scrambling to put his shoes on, Trimble emerged dishevelled and with his tie askew. Paisley then told him that Wallace could not help in the way they would have wished. Later, Trimble was again pulled out of his car, bleary-eyed, this time in order to becalm the Orangemen who were becoming aggressive towards the RUC. His techniques could be unorthodox and showed a sure grasp of street confrontation: when the loyalists became convinced that they would be the recipients of a rush attack by the RUC, Trimble took the lead and stood with his back to the police, making it psychologically harder to baton charge the Orangemen. 'They're not going to charge with my back to them,' advised Trimble. The idea was picked up by some of the Orange stewards, who employed later it on. In the process, recalls Houston, 'he could become very red in the face, so much so that we were concerned about his blood pressure'.[22]

The next day, Trimble attended a meeting at Carleton Street Orange Hall between senior Orangemen and the RUC. Relations between Trimble and Hall, the key figure on the RUC side, were anything but easy. The Upper Bann MP disliked what he saw as Hall's penchant for such fashionable concepts as 'conflict resolution' techniques, which he had learned at training courses at Police Staff College at Bramshill and with the FBI. In fact, Hall was an officer with much front-line experience, during the course of which he had incurred serious wounds; in 1977, he was awarded a Queen's Gallantry Medal. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, the two men proved to be ill-matched for each other during these tensest of circumstances and Trimble began to criticise Hall's conduct of the crisis. 'Mr Hall, one of your problems is that you do not listen,' snapped the local MP.[23] Hall did not, however, respond to Trimble's accusations and held his peace. But little came out of these tense exchanges. At 5:30 p.m., they met again, this time in an RUC vehicle. Trimble reiterated his compromise of allowing a 'substantial' number of Orangemen down the road. Yet Trimble felt more

optimistic than before. Far from melting away, ever greater numbers of Orangemen were assembling; with loyalist womenfolk bringing copious quantities of food, they were better provisioned than the RUC. By now, Larne was blocked and protests were erupting everywhere, and in the Fountain estate in Londonderry, the last Protestant enclave on the west bank of the River Foyle, residents had erected barricades. Then came the news that the Garvaghy Road Residents would begin direct talks at 7 p.m., rather than demand unilateral re-routing of the parade. The Orangemen felt that this was not possible because of Mac Cionnaith's conviction for terrorism and, in any case, Trimble and others would be attending or speaking at the mass rally scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Nonetheless, some kind of progress was being made. At the suggestion of the RUC – and with the agreement of the residents and of Jeffrey Donaldson – the Mediation Network had already begun to explore the possibilities for an agreement. The Mediation Network, now Mediation Northern Ireland, had originally been established in 1987 and stated that its mission was to be an 'impartial "outsider" in situations of conflict assisting people to resolve or manage difference in ways which promote human dignity and mutual respect'. As Terry Houston recalls, the RUC knew that they had no 'in' with the Garvaghy residents. It was agreed that Mediation Network would shuttle back and forth between the parties.[24]

The rally by Drumcree church attracted 25,000 to 30,000 loyalists from all of the Province's counties, as well as Orangemen from Cavan and Monaghan in the Republic and representatives of Scottish lodges. Trimble was forced to leave the platform during Paisley's speech after he was told that there was trouble brewing down by the police lines. Trimble mounted one of the RUC Hotspurs and sought to quieten the crowd, but instead he was booed. Gracey and Trimble then sought to obtain a passage through RUC lines to speak to senior officers. Trimble indicated his desire for a parting of the solid police line so that he could make his way through; this was obtained and just after Trimble secured entry a T-shirted young loyalist sought to rush after him further to breach the cordon, as it were. The RUC ranks closed promptly and a mêlée ensued. Stones began to fly from the Orange side and police reinforcements charged forward, leaving Trimble exposed behind RUC lines with stones flying from behind and riot squads charging straight at him: with his face down, one of the policemen almost did not recognise him and he narrowly escaped injury. He was then invited to take shelter in an RUC Land-Rover. Harold Gracey, who frequently had strong disagreements with Trimble thereafter, still had no doubts as to his physical courage. 'There was no fear in him, nor did I ever hear him swear once,' recalled Gracey. 'Although his hands did move and wave about like a Frenchman!'[25]

Trimble returned to Drumcree church hall for fresh negotiations with the Mediation Network. The Mediation Network reported that they had discussed a range of issues with Mac Cionnaith. These discusssions were then interrupted by news of further disturbances, as Orangemen sought to envelop the police lines and more plastic baton rounds were fired. Trimble and Donaldson arrived and agreed with the RUC to conduct further talks at Edward Street station in Portadown centre. The RUC now seemed to the Orangemen to be closer to accepting Trimble's compromise about 'substantial' numbers going down the road, if not the traditional full complement – in other words, Portadown District and nobody else from outside the area. The Orangemen then offered to go down six rather than two abreast to allow the parade to pass off more swiftly and without a band. Hall, though, did not give a 100 per cent guarantee. Both sides present were worried, each for their own reasons, about raising expectations – a point which Trimble emphasised by raising and lowering his hand off the table. But from the Orange perspective, this represented further progress: the focus of the conversations now became 'how', rather than 'whether'.[26] The RUC were also more optimistic after this: Trimble now appeared to accept their contention that 200 loyalists could not commence a surprise march down the road at 4 a.m., which would trigger major disorder, and that there would have to be some kind of prior tacit arrangement with the residents. (The point about the Garvaghy residents' likely reaction had been forcibly made by Brendan McAllister of the Mediation Network at the meeting.)[27] Trimble went back to the Orangemen, partly to segregate the Portadown from the non-Portadown Districts

in the hope that some such compromise might come off. But privately he was becoming ever more anxious. The closer that they came to 11th night, with great Province-wide bonfires on the eve of the 12th July, the greater the likelihood of massive disturbances in support of the thwarted Portadown brethren. Portadown District Lodge proclaimed that unless the affair was resolved by 7 a.m. on the morning of 11 July, they would march at a time of their choosing.

Portadown rose the next morning to what Brendan McAllister of the Mediation Network, surveying the scene from the hill at Drumcree, describes as 'the orange glow of the dawn, with the sun rising to sounds of lambeg drums'.[28] Slowly, the police Land-Rovers began to move down the hill, away from the Orangemen, and to point towards the nationalist residents. By this time, they feared that the march might go ahead; growing numbers were already sitting down on the Garvaghy Road. The Land-Rovers reversed course back towards the Orangemen. Trimble was worried that some Orangemen had gone home believing that there was an agreement to march; things could go nasty if it turned out that the decision was then reversed.[29] The local MP duly went to the Drumcree Rectory and telephoned RUC headquarters at Knock, where he spoke to the other Deputy Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan, the senior duty officer. He warned Flanagan of the gravity of the situation, and then rang Molyneaux to ask that he use his influence with the Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Annesley, to secure a speedy resolution to the affair and to overturn the ban: Molyneaux had greater standing with the RUC as the long-time leader of the Province's largest party. At around 8 a.m. Houston shifted position and stated that he would seek to take the Orangemen down the road as quickly as possible. The final ruling was delayed until Blair Wallace and Flanagan arrived from Belfast to oversee the new decision. A compromise of sorts seemed to be emerging. It appears to have been understood that Portadown District only would go down, with no bands, and minimal police presence. This meant that Trimble could not walk since he was only there in an ex officio capacity, nor could Paisley. Trimble was not very happy with this, but accepted for the sake of the march in the years to come. Instead, he would meet the marchers by Shillington's Bridge, once they were safely past the controversial part of the route and were well on their way to returning to Carleton Street Orange Hall. But the events which surrounded the closing of the deal remain controversial. The nationalists believed that there was no question of parades going down that route next year without the consent of the local community – a point which the Mediation Network organiser relayed to Brendan Mac Cionnaith and which persuaded many nationalist residents to voluntarily remove themselves from the road. The Orangemen claim that they would not have been party to any oral agreement that denied their right to march.[30] According to Flanagan, the agreement was that there would be no march on the next day – 12 July itself – and subsequently the Orangemen made no serious attempt to walk the route on that occasion. Whatever was actually agreed, the episode had the effect of enhancing the nationalist sense of grievance when the main march went down the road in 1996.[31]

Meanwhile, the Orangemen would have to fall back to facilitate disengagement of the two sides. Jim Blair then walked the length of the RUC line. As he went along, he tapped each Hotspur with his 30-inch blackthorn swagger stick (a prerogative of senior policemen since the days of the old Royal Irish Constabulary, but banned after the RUC's replacement by the new Police Service of Northern Ireland) thus signalling that the vehicle should move back.[32] At 10:30, Gracey led the 800 or so Orangemen down the hill, past the silent residents of the Garvaghy Road, who had removed themselves from the thoroughfare at a given signal. According to Gordon Lucy, those who participated remembered above all else the sound of tramping feet. By the time they arrived at Shillington's Bridge, an atmosphere prevailed that was reminiscent of the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council strike: Jim Blair in all his years as a policeman never saw a scene like it, with ex-servicemen weeping tears of joy.[33] Trimble, who rejoined them now, was exhausted rather than emotional. As the march swept up to Carleton Street, the Orangemen came to a halt. A shout went up for Gracey and then for Trimble and Paisley. Paisley, though, seemed to be forging ahead. Trimble knew that he had to do something to

maintain his status as Paisley's equal. 'My thought was, "I don't want this fellow walking in front of me, upstaging me."' Thus it was that the two men clasped hands at chest level, as they took the salute of the admiring throng. 'By this gesture I made sure that we would both be walking side by side,' Trimble says.[34] 'No words were spoken,' recalls Paisley. 'It was a spontaneous gesture.'[35] But he had no realisation of how this episode would be seen, nor even that cameras would be present. Thus was born the idea that Trimble had danced a jig with Paisley down the Garvaghy Road in full view of the Catholic residents – though, in fact the episode took place approximately a mile away on Carleton Street, in front of loyalists. If Trimble's account is right, the walk with Paisley down Carleton Street was born of opportunism and relief, rather than innate triumphalism. But the oddest part of this episode is that no one viewing the video of the event could ever suppose that any kind of dance was going on. The idea that the two men performed a jig may originate with the editorial in the *Irish News* of 12 July 1995 (the day after) which accused Trimble of 'dancing' over the feelings of his nationalist constituents, but this was obviously meant in a metaphorical sense only. Certainly, neither the *Irish News* nor the *Belfast Telegraph* of 11 or 12 July mentions either Trimble or Paisley 'holding hands' or 'dancing'; and, as was shown years later in his comments on the iniquities of 'line dancing', Ian Paisley took a dim view of jigging with women, let alone male political rivals. One theory advanced by the writer C.D.C. Armstrong is that the comedian Patrick Kielty in his BBC Northern Ireland comedy show in the autumn of 1995, showed the film of Trimble and Paisley holding hands and put it into reverse at high speed, thus making it appear as if they were dancing. Whatever the strange origins of this myth, it became ever more embedded in the consciousness of nationalist Ireland. Shortly thereafter, Trimble would compound the anguish of local nationalists by denying that there had been any compromise struck with their representatives, and this would make it harder to resolve the crisis in the following year. Trimble acknowledges that the image of him 'dancing a jig' down the Garvaghy Road was 'unhelpful' and that it was exploited in ways that were detrimental to the Orange interest. He was determined to ensure that it did not happen again and he pointedly refused to be 'chaired' by the crowd during Drumcree 1996.[36] The bitterness which attended the close of proceedings obscured the real achievement of the RUC and the Mediation Network – to have secured some sort of agreement between the Orangemen and the nationalist residents. It was certainly the last occasion on which there was any kind of consensus and henceforth the march would either effectively go down by *force majeure* or not at all.[37]

In the eyes of the British Government, the first 'siege of Drumcree' confirmed their suspicion that none of the Unionists could be trusted; one civil servant who observed Patrick Mayhew at close quarters remembers that it confirmed him in his conviction that the Northern Protestants were *sui generis.* Even now, Mayhew says that Trimble's performance was 'undoubtedly triumphalist, and there's no point in saying it wasn't'.[38] He remembers that the Irish Government – not understanding how the relationship between police and politicians differs between Northern Ireland and the Republic – assumed that the Ulster Secretary could just snap his fingers and obtain the result he wanted. Fergus Finlay, the special adviser to Dick Spring, the Irish Foreign Minister, recalls coming back from holiday to find a new hate figure in the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin – David Trimble.[39] The television critic of the *Irish Times* was scathing: 'Ruddy, gloating and pompous, David Trimble's face filled the screen.'[40] Nuala O'Faolain, writing in the *Irish Times*, thought that the irresponsibility of men such as Trimble and Paisley would turn places such as the Garvaghy Road into 'little Mostars' (a reference to the scenes of devastation in the Bosnian War). 'They don't have to live, of course, where their neighbours hate them and they hate and fear their neighbours. They just do what harm is to hand, and go home to their comfortable houses,' she observed.[41] To many of his critics, Trimble's behaviour was reminiscent of nothing so much as John Hewitt's description, in his poem 'Minister', of the young Brian Faulkner – who initially made a name for himself as a hardliner for his role in ensuring that an Orange parade went down the Longstone Road in Annalong, Co. Down:

Not one of your tall captains bred to rule
that right confirmed by school and army list
he went to school, but not the proper school.
His family tree will offer little grist
to any plodding genealogist;
his father's money grew from making shirts.
But with ambition clenched in his tight fist,
and careful to discount the glancing hurts,
he climbed to office, studiously intent,
and reached the door he planned to enter, twice
to have it slammed by the establishment.
A plight that well might sympathy command,
had we not watched that staff of prejudice
he'd used with skill turn serpent in his hand
Frank Ormsby (ed.), *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (Belfast, 1992), p. 141

Why did Trimble arouse such hostility in nationalist Ireland and amongst mainland progressive opinion? Trimble shrugs his shoulders and says that such anger is of 'no interest to him', but it is worth examining the reasons for it. To his detractors, both nationalist and now loyalist, there has always been 'something of the night about him' (to quote Ann Widdecombe's description of Michael Howard in his time as Home Secretary).[42] Like Howard, Trimble may also have aroused liberal revulsion, precisely because many right-thinking people feel that someone of his intelligence and professional standing ought to have known better. Trimble was, therefore, potentially much more dangerous than someone such as Ian Paisley precisely because he was both hardline *and* a thoroughly modern man, who could not be dismissed as a throwback to the 17th-century Covenanters. He had secured the support of much of the London quality print media without compromising his principles, or playing the liberal Unionist. Thus *The Times* took 'the presence on the march of the moderate Unionist MP, David Trimble' as evidence of 'the broad appeal which the Orange Order still exercises in the Province'.[43] Then there was also the undercurrent that Trimble was engaged in sheer opportunism, of playing to the mob. Some, such as Jim Blair who observed Trimble closely in those days, believe that Trimble saw the entire issue as a magnificent opportunity to burnish his Orange credentials in preparation for a leadership bid.[44] Certainly, as he readily admits, there was opportunism in his behaviour at Carleton Street once it was all over, but that does not mean that it was governed by such considerations all along.[45] It was a huge risk, as is attested to by Trimble's nervousness during the crisis (Gordon Lucy remembers that at moments, his arm went into a spasm) and he knew he would suffer the brunt of any recriminations if either they did not go down the road or else did so with large-scale casualties. Indeed, Gordon Lucy recalls that he shouted to Trimble on the Monday night, 'this will be the making of you', but that Trimble demurred. Trimble also said to Lucy afterwards that he feared that 1996 would be an unmitigated disaster and that the Orangemen would not 'get away with it' two years running.[46] Drumcree was, therefore, subject to too many variables for it to be a truly satisfactory launching pad for Trimble's leadership bid, at least when the crisis began. Rather, Trimble appears genuinely to have been swept along by his sense of duty as the local MP. It was a predicament which even internal rivals such as John Taylor understood. 'If I'd have been the MP for the seat, what on earth would I have done?' asks the veteran politician.[47] But Trimble was also swept along by the emotion of the occasion, which was bound up with such hallowed loyalist concepts as the right to 'walk the Queen's highway' – to which he heartily subscribed. During the crisis itself, he told several people that if the march went through, it would be as significant a development in the history and folklore of Orangeism as the events at Dolly's Brae in 1849 (when, according to Protestant lore, the Catholic Ribbonmen sought to prevent Co. Down Orangemen from completing their march via their

preferred route through the Mourne Mountains). As Trimble's friend Ruth Dudley Edwards observes the historical romance of the events at Drumcree would have appealed to the theatrical streak in his personality – and it explains his request to Lucy to write his book, which was begun in August 1995.[48] In so far as he was thinking in a calculated way about political effects, Trimble felt that street protest was the only way to obtain results under direct rule – a system which he once described to me in deliberately hyperbolic terms as 'dictatorship moderated by riot'.[49] 'Old thinking', perhaps, to use Gorbachevian terminology, but scarcely evidence of a preordained stratagem on Trimble's part to advance his career. Indeed, for much of his career, he has drifted into situations and improvised rather than pursued a detailed, preordained game plan.[50]

Joel Patton, who went on to found the 'Spirit of Drumcree' group within the Orange Order as a vehicle for protest against what he saw as the insipidity of the leadership, says that one of the weaknesses of loyalism is that they need men on white horses: they cannot accept that Drumcree was their victory, so they alighted upon Paisley and Trimble as explanations for that success. But Patton also expresses the view which many loyalists have held since the Belfast Agreement – that the British state, and particularly elements of the British intelligence services, wanted to give Trimble such a victory in order to build up an apparently 'hardline' Unionist who would then have the credibility to effect an historic compromise with Irish nationalism.[51] In Trimble's eyes Patton's views are just another example of loyalist conspiracy theories. 'Many of these anti-Agreement Unionists decided after the Belfast Agreement of 1998 that I was a bad 'un and therefore had to have been a bad 'un all of the time,' responds Trimble. 'These anti-Agreement Unionists have a problem. They have to avoid the lurking doubt that I might still have good reasons as a Unionist for what I am doing post-1998. If I was a good 'un in 1995, how can I have been a bad 'un? People like simplicity and they have difficulty in coping with the complexity of political life.'[52]

What is certain, both during Drumcree 1995 and 1996, is that the British politicians, including the Prime Minister, were taken by surprise.[53]The point is confirmed by Sir Robin Butler, the then Cabinet Secretary, who recalls that 'there were problems with marches the whole time and to us, it seemed as though all the protagonists were like a child crying wolf'. According to Butler, Major's attitude was to ask whether 'it was reasonable that the loyalists be so insistent about marching down this piece of road'.[54] Indeed, after the second 'Siege' of Drumcree, Mayhew told Paul Bew that 'no one told me what would happen'. By this, Mayhew did not mean that he was totally ignorant of the fact that some sort of trouble was brewing, simply that it was possible that many of those Unionists who were telling him that such crises would occur may have had a vested interest in hyping them up to secure the result they wanted (such as Trimble himself). Some of those within the NIO who were meant to provide advice on what would actually happen may not have done so with sufficient vigour: when he subsquently raised Mayhew's concerns with a senior civil servant, Bew was told by the official that it was not his role to provide this sort of 'tribal advice'. As the official saw it, the best traditions of the British mandarinate were those of impartiality. Bew also derived the impression that after the AIA it became perceived career death amongst some officials to state the 'Unionist line'; and in any case, everyone had seen the Protestants faced down before, as in 1985–6, and may simply have assumed it would happen again.[55] Peter Bell, then British joint secretary of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat, recalls that at this point, Drumcree was seen as a public order issue. It was therefore primarily a problem for the RUC and the Army (from which the Government could and arguably should stand back) rather than as an issue of the first political magnitude. This perhaps reflected an enduring lack of empathy for Unionist concerns on the part of many NIO officials from outside the Province and a reluctance on the part of some local civil servants to speak out lest they be thought of as 'sectarian'.[56] Speaking to loyalists on 12 July 1996, Trimble offered his own interpretation why the state was blind-sided during successive years' disturbances. He said this was because the leading

intelligence operatives had all perished in the RAF Chinook crash on the Mull of Kintyre in August 1994. Had they lived, Trimble opined, it is unlikely that they would have failed to see the loyalist protests coming.[57] Again, this is pure speculation – and in any case, grievous as the losses were, men such as John Deverell (the senior MI5 officer in Northern Ireland) would have been retired by the time of Drumcree 1995. As with the disaster over the Frameworks Documents, the likeliest explanation is that the state as a whole was so focused on republican intentions during the first IRA ceasefire that they became tone deaf to sensibilities on the loyalist side. If so, Trimble was again the unexpected beneficiary of a Government cock-up – although he denies that Drumcree had much to do with his subsequent election as leader. Justly or unjustly, though, it was the benchmark by which much of the world, and his own community, judged his subsequent performance.

ELEVEN *Now I am the Ruler of the UUP!*

AFTER a year of set-backs, James Molyneaux finally resigned as UUP leader on 28 August 1995 – the day after his 75th birthday. Trimble says he was surprised by the timing of the departure, of which he had received no advanced warning (in contrast to Major, who was notified by Molyneaux some two weeks before).[1] Indeed, John Hunter remembers Trimble dismissing the notion of a Molyneaux resignation when he raised the subject shortly beforehand at a barbecue given at the home of Drew Nelson, a leading Co. Down Orangeman. But when the news came, Trimble rang Hunter and said, 'well, you'll be happy this morning, the sun is shining'. Trimble knew that Hunter was a staunch opponent of Molyneaux, but insisted he had made no definite decisions himself.[2] However, Daphne Trimble recalls her husband saying that if he did run, he would win.[3] By contrast, the man who definitely thought that the sun was shining that morning was John Taylor. Trimble knew that the Strangford MP would seek the leadership, nor was he entirely averse to the prospect of a Taylor victory, since he was sure he would become his right-hand man.[4] Much of the political class agreed with this analysis. Thus, Jack Allen recalls that much as John Taylor was disliked by some, the majority of the party officers thought he would win – with or without Trimble in the race.[5] The NIO agreed: according to Sir John Wheeler, the security minister, Ancram's senior officials wanted Taylor precisely because he was seen as a good 'deal-maker'.[6]

Trimble soon weighed the pros and cons of running. His plus points, as he saw them, were that he was articulate, could hold his own on television, and because over the previous year he had distanced himself 'slightly' from the Frameworks proposals. He reckoned these points would weigh heavily with the UUP's unique electoral college, despite the fact that he was the youngest and most junior of the UUP MPs and was without formal standing within the Loyal Orders (beyond the reputation which he had acquired at Drumcree). If the choice had been up to the populace at large, Maginnis would be the victor. He enjoyed a good reputation amongst Unionists on security issues – the ex-UDR Major had been the intended victim of at least a dozen assassination attempts – but without compromising his non-sectarian credentials (as was evidenced by his success in holding the constituency of Fermanagh-South Tyrone, with its narrow Roman Catholic majority, in successive Westminster elections). And thanks to his personable manner, he was able to communicate on southern Irish television in a way that few other Unionists could match. Indeed many Unionists believed that he was far too willing to treat with the South, as exemplified by what they saw as his excessive generosity in the Strand II 'basket' of the 1991–2 talks in Dublin. If it were up to the MPs, Ross was reckoned to be the likely winner; and if it were up to the councillors and the business community, Taylor seemed to be favourite. But none of these groups formed the electoral college. Because the decision would be made by the Ulster Unionist Council, an 860-strong body with representatives from all of the then seventeen constituencies and other affiliated bodies such as the Orange Order and the Young Unionists, Trimble might stand a chance. The UUC was, he then reasoned, full of people with a greater knowledge than the man in the street, but was at the same time possessed in his eyes of a detachment which the full-time MPs and councillors did not have. In so far as there was an Orange constituency – and it was wider than just the Order's own delegates, since ordinary branch representatives might also be individual members – Trimble calculated that he had it sewn up. This, he maintains passionately, was not because of Drumcree but because of his work for the Ulster Society. His doubts were, therefore, not about his viability as a candidate, but whether he actually wanted the position itself at this juncture. He knew that it would be an uphill struggle to accomplish anything and, in any case, 1995 was scarcely the best year to become UUP leader after the debacle of the Frameworks Documents.[7]

Such apparent ambivalence accounts for the initial reports that Trimble had ruled himself out of the race. Thus, *The Times* editorial on the day after Molyneaux's resignation stated that 'it is regrettable that Mr Trimble, MP for Upper Bann, seems disinclined to stand' and on the back of that decision decided to endorse Taylor.[8] What Trimble had actually said to the journalists was that he did not consider himself to be a runner, but added that 'if other people are keen for me to run, then I will give it serious consideration'. In retrospect, it looks like a classic piece of political ham-acting ('if the people want me, who am I to refuse?'). According to Gordon Lucy's private diary of the campaign, Trimble was annoyed that the journalists, with the exception of Dick Grogan and Frank Millar in the *Irish Times* on 30 August and Victor Gordon of the *Portadown Times*, had failed to pick up on the nuances. Gordon, writing without a by-line in the local free-sheet called the *Craigavon Echo* on 30 August 1995 also correctly divined that Trimble had not ruled himself out of the contest. In the *Portadown Times* of 1 September, Gordon also reported that Trimble was '95%' certain to announce his candidature. Trimble stated that since he had said he 'might' run, 'my 'phone has been red hot with messages of support'. Trimble asked Lucy whether he should run, and Lucy said that of course he would support him and work for him – but that it was his decision and that he would have to live with the consequences of it. Lucy subsequently learned from Daphne Trimble that this was the wrong answer, since she wanted him to say 'yes'.[9]

Trimble was left with the impression that his natural supporters felt let down by his apparent reluctance, and that he would damage himself if he did not run. He was also discovering that in the eyes of many delegates, John Taylor was not universally popular. According to Lucy, Trimble finally made up his mind to enter the race on 30 August. The Upper Bann MP then telephoned John Taylor and told him that he would be going forward as a candidate. Taylor replied that he would be sorry to see this happen. Taylor's then aide, Steven King, states that Taylor did not in fact think that he could win after Trimble entered the race, and that henceforth his heart was never quite in it.[10] Trimble discussed his platform with Lucy: it was not so much an appeal for more right-wing Unionism as for more proactive Unionism, for a new style at least as much as new substance. Trimble planned to announce his candidature at Belfast's Europa Hotel on 1 September. He knew that he would have no heavyweight endorsements, neither from fellow MPs, nor party officers, nor from any constituency chairmen save his own, George Savage. As an outsider, as it it were, he was certain of one thing: he did not wish to repeat the errors of John Redwood's failed bid for the Conservative leadership earlier in the summer. Indeed, he told Gordon Lucy and John Hunter that their presence at the launch would have the same effect upon his bid as the support of Teresa Gorman and Tony Marlow had on the challenge of the former Welsh Secretary. Instead, inspired by Nicholas Jones' book *Soundbites and Spin Doctors: How Politicians Manipulate the Media – and Vice Versa* he opted for a bit of DIY choreography. He decided that he would be accompanied by four relatively unknown figures, all of whom would represent portions of the new Unionist coalition which he was assembling. They included Elaine McClure (a young woman); Lt Commander Bill Martin (whose service background symbolised the traditional backbone of the party); George Savage, his constituency chairman and a farmer (thus seeking to corral the substantial agricultural vote); and Nigel Connor of the Queen's University Unionists (to emphasise his appeal to youth). From there, Trimble and Lucy repaired to Hunter's house off the Upper Malone Road to plot out strategy. Two crucial steps were taken. First, an alphabetical list of all UUC delegates was obtained from Glengall Street, so that he could send out *A Personal Message From David Trimble.* The package made much of the complimentary remarks which Trimble received from both *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times:* a key Trimble theme was the notion that it was crucial for Unionists to influence key decision-makers and opinion-formers in London, rather than sit there and let change envelop them. Second, Hunter and Lucy, who had assisted in Drew Nelson's 1992 campaign in South Down, were convinced of the merits of telephone canvassing – still a new concept in Northern Ireland, at least in Unionist circles, where

many traditionalists thought it not quite the done thing. But Lucy and Hunter, correctly, believed that attitudes towards use of the telephone were changing, even amongst the older generation where resentment of such intrusions tended to be greatest. Accordingly, extra telephone lines were installed in Trimble's Lurgan office. Two young women were recruited to do the telephone canvassing as volunteers.[11]

The professionalism of the Trimble campaign, though scarcely sophisticated by standards elsewhere, contrasted with the relative amateurism of its rivals' efforts. Whereas Trimble's team would 'cold call' anybody, Taylor would only ring those he already knew. Taylor's campaign suffered a further blow when he appeared on BBC Northern Ireland's *Spotlight* programme at 10:45 p.m. on the eve of the poll on Thursday 7 September. There, he attacked Trimble for 'prancing in the streets with Ian Paisley'. By this, Taylor was seeking to appeal to that segment of the UUP electorate which rejected Paisley's populist style. Often, this would have been a correct appraisal of the party's mood, but Drumcree I was a spontaneous popular eruption which, like the UWC strike of 1974, enjoyed an exceptional degree of middle-class Unionist acquiescence, if not active support. Taylor's remarks were thus taken by many ordinary Unionists as an implicit attack on their relief over the outcome. Meanwhile, Ross's campaign never really took off. One of his main supporters, David Brewster – a solicitor from Limavady, Co. Londonderry and the constituency party secretary – had his practice to run. He found that many who would have backed his local MP were now opting for Trimble.[12] Martin Smyth's campaign was dogged by a lack of organisation, which made few in-roads beyond his South Belfast constituency association and some Belfast Orangemen. Smyth concedes that many of his brethren in the Loyal Orders felt that he had stood aside from the events at Drumcree, though in fact he was attending to his duties at Westminster. Maginnis made a game effort, but his perceived liberalism counted against him in the circumstances.

Lucy meanwhile was busy putting the finishing touches to the Trimble campaign. He drafted Trimble's *News Letter* article which appeared on the day of the poll, Friday 8 September 1995. Significantly, Trimble approvingly quoted the definition of the consent principle offered by the leader of the Opposition, Tony Blair, 'as meaning that the people of Northern Ireland could choose between an all-Irish state and the Union' rather than any of the Conservative Government's glosses. Moreover, he counselled that 'a purely negative, unimaginative unionism that simply turned a "hard face" on the outside world is vulnerable to an appeal over its head to the wider society'. But despite such efforts, Trimble remembers that when he arrived at the Ulster Hall on the night of 8 September, he was in a very nervous state – whereas Daphne was quite calm (with customary candour, she says that she merely concealed her own worries).[13] The packed Ulster Hall had been the scene of many of the great events in Unionist history: there, in 1886, Lord Randolph Churchill launched his campaign to save Ulster from Home Rule.[14] But Trimble's nerves were misplaced. The candidates spoke in alphabetical order, with Ken Maginnis first: the ex-UDR Major did his 'soldier and statesman' routine. Smyth's address was full of Biblical allusions but the rest of it was every bit as disorganised as his campaign. Ross's was the best delivered of the five, but in Lucy's words was 'a brilliant speech for leadership circa 1930'. Taylor, though, was the greatest disappointment to his supporters. His address was delivered off-the-cuff, and in the words of Denis Rogan, the then party vice chairman, was 'the most arrogant speech of his life – and that's saying something';[15] Steven King claims that he in fact had 'a fit of nerves' on the night.[16] Taylor retrospectively concedes that he was not that keen to assume the leadership.[17] Trimble, who was the last speaker, read his speech like a lecture, but Lucy remembers that the audience nonetheless listened.[18] As Trimble recalls, 'mine was the only political speech whereas the others were saying what great chaps they were. But I also said I would go anywhere and speak to anyone. I was signalling that I would go to Dublin and talk to Sinn Fein, though that was not stated. It was in nobody's mind at the time, except John Dobson, who was smiling.'[19]

After the first round of balloting, Trimble's appointed scrutineer, Mark Neale of Portadown, told him of the result:

Smyth – 60 (7%)
Ross – 116 (14%)
Maginnis – 117 (15%)
Taylor – 226 (28%)
Trimble – 287 (36%)

'Oh, that's not what If … ng wanted to happen,' declared Trimble. 'Well, what do I do now?' asked the Upper Bann MP. 'Tell your wife and start writing an acceptance speech,' replied Neale. Trimble duly proceeded to do so – but not before he had pulled his new 'Seige [sic] of Drumcree' medal out of his pocket. As Neale recalls, even at this moment of maximum drama, Trimble did this less out of loyalist pride than out of a desire to point out the spelling error.[20] When this result was read out in the hall, Jim Wilson, the party chief executive, immediately saw the mounting astonishment on the faces of the MPs. 'This was the UUC saying "let's jump a generation".'[21] In the heat of battle, Trimble also thought back to the Upper Bann selection of 1990, when the first-round winner, Samuel Gardiner, had been overhauled by himself in the final ballot after hitting a ceiling. He feared that Taylor could still do the same to himself. But Trimble's support was wide as well as deep, and in any case there was no way in which Ken Maginnis would ever throw his support to Taylor as George Savage had done for Trimble in 1990. After Smyth dropped out, the chairman, Jim Nicholson, read out the results of the second round:

Ross – 91 (11%)
Maginnis – 110 (13.5%)
Taylor – 255 (31.5%)
Trimble – 353 (44%)

Trimble now knew for sure that he would become the 12th Unionist leader since the formation of the UUC in 1905, and felt utterly flat inside. There was thus an inevitability about the final result as far as the cognoscenti were concerned – as Trimble's rivals sat with arms folded and legs crossed. Ross could not break out from his core of supporters from the farming community west of the Bann, dropped out. So, too, did Maginnis: he could see that not only did Trimble do well outside of the greater Belfast area generally, but that he had made substantial inroads amongst some of his own constituents in Fermanagh, notably in the Newtownbutler, Rosslea and Lisnaskea areas close to the border. After the third ballot, Nicholson announced the result of the run-off:

Taylor – 333 (42%)
Trimble – 466 (58%)

Trimble remembers one big blur; whilst Daphne Trimble says that 'on one level I went into shock. Nothing would ever be the same again. Part of David didn't want it at all; a part of him wants a quiet life – to sit at home and listen to music and to go to the opera. But at least as far as the house was concerned, his election didn't make much difference since he doesn't do the normal things that husbands do like the gardening. When we married he at least made an effort and we definitely had shelves put up.'[22]

How had he done it? After all, here was a man who just a few years earlier could not even win a council by-election in ultra-safe Lisburn. Moreover, this bookish academic had now been elected as the leader of one of the least intellectual political forces in the United Kingdom; indeed, he was the first university graduate since the foundation of Northern Ireland to lead the UUP, for many of his patrician predecessors had served in the forces but never attended a university (Carson was a graduate, but effectively handed over the leadership to Craig upon the foundation of the state; and Faulkner matriculated at Queen's in the autumn of 1939, but never graduated).[23] Nor did he seek to make himself congenial to his colleagues – indeed, in some ways the very opposite. 'Drumcree' was

an obvious answer, and is certainly the explanation for his victory most favoured by senior colleagues. Likewise, Caroline Nimmons, who did much of the telephone canvassing of the delegates, says that Drumcree was referred to positively more often than any other issue.[24] Others, such as Jim Wilson, are not so sure: they think that it may have cost him as much as it gained him, and Trimble certainly said as much in his first interview with the *Portadown Times* after his victory.[25] Gordon Lucy, one of Trimble's closest aides in the contest, attributes his victory to a wider range of causes, though he does not doubt Drumcree's importance. He notes that Trimble had built up a profile well before that. Such sentiments were expressed to Ruth Dudley Edwards during her visit that summer to Aughnacloy, Co. Tyrone for 'Black Saturday' (the last Saturday in August, when the Royal Black Preceptory hold their most important procession). Clogher Valley Blackmen told her that Molyneaux's successor should be higher profile and more combative. 'We've been too stiff-necked and proud to explain ourselves,' said one. 'We've got to change.'[26] They also wanted someone who would resist the pan-nationalist juggernaut and not be taken in by the British Government (hence Trimble's pledge never to go into No. 10 alone). Finally, the hated media had made John Taylor the favourite. 'There may have been an element of pig-headedness in voting for Trimble,' noted one UUC member. 'Delegates wanted to buck the trend.' In a group as 'thran' as the Ulster Unionist grassroots, that cannot be discounted. Indeed, it was an utterly paradoxical victory: here was Trimble, an untelegenic figure with crooked teeth (who stormed out of studios and distrusted the local media hugely), running as the improbable herald of almost Mandelsonian modernisation. Yes, he was articulate, but his TV performances were often larded with obscure references to the arcana of the talks process – and were scarcely populistic either in content or delivery. Thus, a vote for Trimble was, paradoxically, a vote both for change and for cussed defiance of Ulster's many enemies.

The reaction in portions of the Irish media would doubtless have vindicated the UUC grassroots in their choice – if, that is, any of them read southern newspapers. Dick Grogan, then Northern Editor of the *Irish Times*, stated that 'he clearly regards compromise as a surrender, and that bodes ill for all-party talks … His quick temper and truculent manner will indeed bring a drastic change of image to the party leadership and align it more closely to the manner of political conduct favoured by the DUP.'[27] But Trimble's allies in the media were delighted. Ruth Dudley Edwards, writing an open letter to Trimble in the Dublin *Sunday Independent* on 17 September 1995, advised him to 'learn from your enemies: Sinn Fein has much to teach you. First, its leaders have had the humility and good sense to learn painstakingly how to present themselves. We may laugh at their Armani suits, we may sneer about their use of image consultants but the fact remains that they leaped straight from enforced media silence to a mastery of the media. So please do what every other political party does and have your spokesmen take basic courses in television technique. And persuade them that it is not un-Protestant to smile or demonstrate that sense of humour they exhibit in private … one last tip: if the UUP is intent on modernising itself, isn't it time it invested in an answering machine for your Glengall Street headquarters?': one such device was soon acquired, and Trimble himself bought a mobile telephone. Significantly, she counselled Trimble against forming a pan-unionist front with the DUP, and urged him to surround himself not with 'hardline friends' but with liberals such as Ken Maginnis and Reg Empey; this, of course, is exactly what happened and may well be what Trimble wanted to happen all along anyhow (though it remains open to question how much influence she exerted towards that end). *The Daily Telegraph* also stated that despite his uncompromising line on decommissioning, 'it would be wrong to conclude that his election necessarily represents a setback for the peace process … a strong Unionist voice is badly needed to redress the imbalance that has been allowed to develop within the peace process'.[28] But it was not only instinctive Unionists who were pleased: Andrew Marr in his *Independent* column correctly predicted that despite the images of Drumcree, 'the great Crustacean is shedding its shell. David Trimble's election as leader of the UUP is only the first stage in what is likely to be a dramatic reshaping of Unionist politics … he is

something rather new, a modernising but utterly committed Ulster Unionist. To bien pensant opinion that probably sounds about as likely as finding a vegetarian head hunter or a druid with a PhD. But it is real and fascinating and of great importance … I think he will be difficult, and sharp, and unfamiliar, and it is clear that these are exceptionally dangerous and sensitive times. But it seems a little odd to go on for years about stupid Unionists and then panic when you get a clever one. That's part of the lesson of the past twelve months. This man has a conscience and a fast mind. And for the time being he is the future of Northern Ireland.' Unsurprisingly, Marr was in regular contact in this period with No. 10, the NIO – and with Trimble's friend, Ruth Dudley Edwards.[29]

Handling the press was, appropriately enough, Trimble's first task after his victory. He held a one-and-a-half-hour press conference at Glengall Street the following morning. Trimble immediately acceded to this idea. But, as ever, Trimble's approach was more complex than his pronouncements suggested. For although the new UUP leader understood the importance of the media better than anyone, his personal engagement with the press was much less 'proactive' than his election manifesto suggested: often, it had to be laid out on a plate for him. If rung by any journalist, he would certainly give very generously and courteously of his time. But as Matthew d'Ancona observes, Trimble never went out of his way to cultivate or even to contact somone as sympathetic as himself – an approach which d'Ancona characterises as 'light years removed from the attitude of a New Labour Cabinet minister'.[30] Charles Moore, erstwhile editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, and Michael Gove, assistant editor of *The Times*, likewise confirm that unless they contact Trimble, they would never hear from him from one year to the next; and although he is a long-time subscriber to *The Spectator*, Trimble never made much effort to contact successive editors. Nor did any of these mainland outlets receive many press releases from the UUP: their support for Unionism predated his arrival on the scene and subsequently owed little to Trimble's own actions. Indeed, Trimble came to know key figures in the London print media in the early to mid-1990s largely through the agency of David Burnside, who wanted to build up Trimble as a putative deputy to John Taylor, in preparation for the post-Molyneaux era. Having come to know the London quality press, Trimble enjoys their company and values their good opinion. But to woo them would, in his world-view, have smacked too much of 'brown-nosing'. In that sense, he started out as the most unconventional of British political leaders – and remains such to this day.

TWELVE *The Establishment takes stock*

AS Trimble and his supporters celebrated their victory, members of the British-Irish Association were enjoying their post-prandials in the very different surroundings of St John's College Cambridge. Most of those who attended this annual conference of the great and the good fully expected that the winner would be the pragmatic John Taylor or perhaps even the liberal Ken Maginnis. But when Frank Millar, now the London editor of the *Irish Times*, conveyed the news in the bar, there was a general sense of horror.[1] Many of the guests would have shared Marigold Johnson's distaste for 'that ghastly man Trimble'; now, they feared that the far right had taken over the UUP and that the victor of Drumcree would end the 'peace process'.[2] (She would later come to change her opinion of him for the better and believed he was the best choice of leader for that time.) The British and Irish states, though, could not afford such self-indulgence. Now, they had to work with him. Yes, there was apprehension – as always occurred with any 'changing of the guard' in the remarkably stable Northern Ireland party system. Indeed, one minister was reported as saying that 'I choked on my Frosties' when he read in a *Times* editorial that the newly elected UUP leader was a 'moderate'.[3] The minister in question was Michael Ancram, who now claims that he did so out of surprise rather than disgust.[4]

But when all was said and done, the British state's private audit of Trimble's election was more finely balanced than is commonly supposed. According to John Bruton's contemporaneous note of a conversation with the British Prime Minister on 23 September 1995, 'Major said David Trimble was a prickly man, into detail, not grand conceptions. Don't reject his ideas too quickly…' Woodrow Wyatt's diary for 17 September 1995 records the British Prime Minister as observing that 'there was nothing to worry about because he's a clear thinker but it shows the IRA and Sinn Fein that he's a tough customer. He said "He's a lawyer and a very good one and, being on the right wing of the Ulster Unionists, he'll be able to make them agree to things which his predecessor couldn't."'[5] Likewise, Major's Assistant Political Secretary, George Bridges, who was with his chief when news of Trimble's victory came through, says that Major was not at all displeased.[6] In so far as they were worried, the British Government's main worry, says Patrick Mayhew, was Trimble's weakness.[7] They believed that he had won the election without the public support of a single MP, and amongst constituency chairmen only enjoyed the backing of his own in Upper Bann. For the last thing that the NIO mandarins wanted on their hands was 'another Faulkner'. They wanted someone who could deliver the party, and it did not matter that much to them who that person was. A secondary worry was Trimble's volatility, for he was seen as driven more by his temperament than his intellect (considerable as they conceded it was). But on the positive side of the ledger, as they saw it, was Trimble's ambition. No. 10 was not sure where this ambition would lead. Some thought that Trimble wanted to be a Law Officer in a Conservative Government, but Mayhew was convinced that Trimble wanted to be Prime Minister of a devolved Northern Ireland (all of which Trimble says was then untrue).[8] In this respect, Trimble was an improvement on the gentlemanly Molyneaux, who was too old for the position and who would not in any case have wanted it on grounds of integrationist principle. But there were also officials such as Peter Bell – the joint head of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat at Maryfield – who argued it was vital that the UUP be led by someone with intellectual self-confidence, rather than someone who would assume that any negotiation was bound to be disadvantageous to the Unionist cause. Elements of the system thus saw Trimble as much the most 'modern' of the Unionist MPs, along with Peter Robinson (on such occasions as the DUP deputy leader could escape from Dr Paisley's shadow).[9]

These calculations, though, did not necessitate any fundamental reappraisal of the grand strategy of the British state. The officials had a long-held view of where a 'balanced' settlement

between the two traditions lay. Trimble's election did, though, affect the state's tactics, most obviously towards the new Unionist leader himself. The NIO immediately contacted Rod Lyne, the Prime Minister's Private Secretary for foreign affairs: they then began a pincer movement. It was reckoned that Trimble was open to flattery by No. 10 – few would be exempt from it, especially from a minor party at Westminster – and made sure to advertise that there was an open door to him whenever he needed it. Indeed, on one morning shortly after his election, Trimble spent three hours at No. 10 talking to Lyne, who provided him with further reassurance about the British Government's intentions towards Northern Ireland: after the Molyneaux years, when the then leader kept the key details of discussions with Government very much to himself, Trimble found that the conversation made him more comfortable about state policy.[10] This process of cultivation took place on many levels: Daphne Trimble remembers that at Major's behest, Lyne gave the whole family a tour of No. 10, including the Cabinet Room, during the Christmas break.[11] Meanwhile, Sir John Kerr, who had just taken up his position as British ambassador to the United States, wrote to Trimble suggesting that he come to America as soon as possible to meet with senior administration officials.[12] Andrew Hunter, MP, the chairman of the Conservative backbench Northern Ireland Committee was asked twice by Mayhew for an assessment of Trimble's personality and was then told to maximise his contact with the UUP leader. Later, his instructions became more explicit still: on 22 May 1996, Hunter noted following a meeting with Major that 'we have a chance of winning the election if we can hang on until May next year. You can help us. Do everything you can to keep the Unionists happy.' (Discussing the AIA, Major also told Hunter that 'I'd like to tear it up … Margaret got it wrong … the government assured the UUP that there was nothing going on. All along Margaret was planning it.') Trimble immediately grasped what was going on here and became defensive, thus making it very hard for Hunter to report back to Government ministers. 'He didn't know if I was a spy or a friend,' says Hunter. 'He knew that I was playing two roles and that I was partly a spy for the Government.' Because of his status, Hunter was also regarded as being partly on 'the team' and frequently cleared his pronouncements with No. 10. Hunter now says that he is 'ashamed' to have been a conduit for so much Government 'spin' to the Unionists: this sense of guilt partly explains why he campaigned for a 'No' vote during the 1998 referendum on the Belfast Agreement.[13] It was the start of a journey which would ultimately take Hunter into the DUP.

The reason for the British state's curiosity was that Trimble had immediately begun an almost Gorbachevian whirligig of activity. This was not so much antithetical to their interests as it was unpredictable. For if he had a detailed game plan, he certainly shared it with very few people, though the broad outlines – scrapping the AIA, regaining a measure of local control through devolved institutions, and ending the marginalisation of Unionism – were well enough understood. The frenetic round of meetings had been implicit in his Ulster Hall election speech, where he pledged to go anywhere, anytime to promote the Unionist cause (the only exception turned out to be the Forum on Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin, which he declined to attend on the grounds that it was a 'nationalist body').[14] His priority, as he saw it, was to free Unionism from ideological taboos which restricted its freedom of manoeuvre – such as the terms on which Unionist leaders could go to Dublin to talk to the Irish Government. The first opportunity to do this presented itself on the Monday following his election. Notwithstanding his unhappiness over Trimble's election, one of the UUP's best-known left-wingers, Chris McGimpsey, contacted Glengall Street with some important information. His fellow progressive, Proinsias de Rossa, the Irish Social Welfare Minister, was in town for one of his regular meetings with his colleagues in Democratic Left. Would a meeting be possible?[15]

This suggestion was, in the Northern Irish context, less improbable than it might at first glance appear. Democratic Left had emerged from the split in the old Workers' Party, once the political wing of the Official IRA. These previously pro-Moscow Marxists were arguably the most anti-nationalist

political force on both sides of the border and had been deadly rivals of the Provisionals (who had split from them in 1970–1). Many of them regarded the Provisionals as fascists, and the Provisionals reciprocated their loathing, accusing the 'Stickies' (as the Officials were nicknamed) of betrayal of national ideals. Prior to embracing constitutional politics, de Rossa himself had been a republican activist: in May 1957, he was arrested at Glencree in the Wicklow mountains, was remanded and then sentenced to two months' imprisonment for declining to account to the Gardai for his movements – a crime under the Offences Against the State Act. Whilst in Mountjoy jail, the southern Government introduced internment against the IRA, which had begun an unsuccessful border campaign that lasted until 1962. De Rossa was thus kept inside – only this time at the camp run by the Irish Army at the Curragh, Co. Kildare, where he remained until February 1959. But now, he was one of three party leaders in the 'Rainbow Coalition' and a member of the Irish Cabinet's Northern Ireland Committee. John Bruton, the Fine Gael Taioseach – who was more instinctively hostile to the most atavistic forms of nationalism than almost any other holder of that post – felt closer to de Rossa on northern questions than any other member of his Government. Indeed, a poll of UUP delegates conducted at the party's annual conference by Liam Clarke of *The Sunday Times* showed that de Rossa was the Irish politician most trusted by Ulster Unionists – and, as such, way ahead of John Bruton, Dick Spring and John Hume. No doubt this was because of his anti-Provisional credentials.[16]

When Trimble learned that de Rossa was visiting Belfast, he immediately invited him to visit UUP headquarters: had any other Irish Cabinet minister been visiting he would not have moved as he did. Above all, this particular encounter had the virtue of sending out the signal that Unionists would talk to those who had genuinely embraced constitutionalism – whilst simultaneously annoying the Provisionals.[17] Its significance was largely symbolic and little of substance was discussed: for his part, de Rossa recalls that 'I wanted to knock for six the notion that David Trimble was an obstacle to peace. Ruth Dudley Edwards, who knew him socially had said as much and she was influential in this regard. I got some hassle over it, though Democratic Left loved it.' De Rossa remembers that throughout the 30-minute meeting, Trimble displayed a nervous exuberance. But he was left with the distinct impression that the UUP leader was willing to talk to all political leaders in the Republic, including the Taoiseach.[18] Whether or not the meeting seriously annoyed the Provisionals, it certainly set alarm bells ringing at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin. Fergus Finlay recalls that it was interpreted as an attempt to create a 'back-channel' to the Taoiseach at the expense of the Foreign Minister and Tanaiste, Dick Spring: Unionists saw Spring and his department as far more hostile to their interests than John Bruton.[19] Shortly thereafter, Trimble also stated that 'some unionists at the moment would have difficulty envisaging Gerry Adams coming to Glengall Street, but that's because they see Adams as he is today. But if we have a situation where people have proved a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and have shown that they abide by the democratic process, that will put them in the same position as Proinsias de Rossa is today.'[20]

The unhappinness of elements of the Irish Government over the meeting with de Rossa was one thing; a discontented UUP parliamentary caucus was quite another. It was not so much the substance of such exercises in free-thinking which vexed them: after all, as Trimble never tired of pointing out, Martin Smyth had been the first MP to declare that Unionists might have to talk to Sinn Fein, subject to a surrender of weapons.[21] What really annoyed them was the manner in which the meeting took place. Trimble had met with de Rossa before he had met with his colleagues. Indeed, he did not meet the Westminster MPs for weeks afterwards – either collectively or one-on-one. Partly, it was his own personality. It was not his style to dabble in the little touches in man-management at which Molyneaux excelled, such as solicitous inquiries after wives and children. Indeed, Trimble says that he knew he had serious problems with his fellow MPs, but that it did not occur to him to meet with them until Parliament resumed in the following month. Ken Maginnis – who became one of Trimble's strongest supporters – still thinks it was a cardinal error of judgment which has damaged him to this

day.[22] Trimble, though, believes that levels of resentment were such that he doubts it would have made very much difference.[23] Certainly, in the case of William Ross, the gulf between the two men was probably so enormous as to be unbridgeable. Ross, a magnificently 'thran' sheep farmer from the Roe Valley near Dungiven, finished his elementary education at the age of fourteen and is very much out of the 'School of Life' Brigade; he would soon emerge as Trimble's most forthright critic in the Westminster team. Ross regarded Trimble as a clever butterfly who moved from one group to the next – from Vanguard to the UUP to the Union Group to the Ulster Clubs and finally on to the Ulster Society. Although no fool, Ross's conservatism was of the heart, not of the mind. This proved to be the essence of his differences with Trimble. He felt that Trimble had no gut understanding of the malignancy of republicans because he came from the most English part of Co. Down, where there was a tiny and largely quiescent nationalist population. By contrast, Ross's native Dungiven, which was one-third Protestant when he grew up, was now almost completely Catholic and the local IRA units were much in evidence. Talk of a balanced accommodation, Ross believed, was all very well – unless you were on the receiving end of ethnic cleansing.[24]

The member of the parliamentary party with whom Trimble then felt more comfortable was his closest rival for the leadership – John Taylor. The two men had an older brother – younger brother relationship since Vanguard days: Taylor, first elected to Stormont in 1965, was then the longest-serving elected representative in Northern Ireland.[25] But for all their compatibility, Taylor was also the only Unionist who could conceivably threaten his leadership. A role had, therefore, to be found for him. But of what kind? Trimble rang Taylor from his Lurgan office and asked to come to the latter's home near Armagh. He knew that if Taylor had won, the older man would have appointed him as chief whip. But to have done the same for Taylor would have been beneath Taylor's dignity. On the drive down, a solution occurred to him. He remembered that the parliamentary party was not governed by UUC rules. Harold McCusker had been elevated to the deputy leadership of the Unionist caucus in the 1982–6 Prior Assembly. Armed with this precedent, Trimble made his offer to Taylor. The Strangford MP duly accepted, though Trimble acknowledges that this action, too, inflamed some in the parliamentary party.[26] But it was worth it: they could not decide Trimble's fate, whereas Taylor, with his 333 third-round votes, easily could. Indeed, as Reg Empey recalls, 'Trimble needed Taylor more than Taylor needed Trimble'.[27]

The move had been foreshadowed earlier in the month when Trimble took Taylor with him for his first meeting with John Major at No. 10: he was determined to tie him into his policy. The reluctance to go alone to see the Prime Minister was, says Trimble, a reflection of his own weakness. As a token of his esteem, Major greeted Trimble on the doorstep of No. 10 (the meeting, which began at 10:30 a.m., ran well over time, and ensured that Trimble had to run frantically across Whitehall for his 12:00 noon appointment with Tony Blair, the leader of the Opposition, at the Commons).[28] The encounter at No. 10 was dominated by one subject, which in the words of Sir John Chilcot 'lay there at the heart of the process like a coiled snake: decommissioning'.[29] Trimble remembers that Major rounded on him for letting down the Government by holding too soft a position on decommissioning. If so, it was an acute reading of Trimble's remarks at his first press conference at Glengall Street. He demanded that both the Irish and British Governments stick to their original interpretation of paragraph 10 of the Downing Street Declaration, which demanded the establishment of a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods. In subsequent interviews, Trimble appeared to harden the UUP postion by requiring the disbandment of paramilitary groupings, as well as decommissioning. But amidst this smokescreen, Trimble was sending other signals, which would have eluded most ordinary Unionist supporters. For Trimble also hinted that this commitment could be shown in a variety of different ways. The point was underlined by the interview he gave to the *Belfast Telegraph* the day after his election, where it was revealed that senior Ulster Unionists (that

is, himself) were considering proposals for a new assembly that could help end the deadlock over decommissioning and all-party talks.[30]

It was an early illustration of how carefully Trimble used language. As Dick Grogan correctly observed, 'Mr Trimble [though] is not averse to the use of nuance when it suits, and his avowed precision is a tactical weapon carefully employed only within certain closely cordoned areas where he chooses to engage and damage his enemy … but he would not, or could not, specify or even speculate on – the nature or quantity of evidence he will require in order to be satisfied that these sweeping conditions have been met.'[31] Major's annoyance was, however, understandable. The Government had sought, through decommissioning, to supply reassurance to the nine Ulster Unionists and Conservative backbenchers that Sinn Fein/IRA would not be brought into constitutional politics without proper 'sanitisation'. The Government had, therefore, paid a price for supplying such reassurance in the shape of 'Washington III' – Mayhew's demand of 7 March 1995 that the IRA start decommissioning prior to entry into all-party talks as a confidence-building measure. That led to tensions with nationalist Ireland and to some degree with the United States. And now, here was a 'hardline' UUP leader quietly pulling the rug from under their feet.

In the longer run, the British Government had reason to be grateful to Trimble. For he thus afforded them the space to resile from Washington III. Not that anyone thought the Government's stance to be immutable, if they could find a way off the hook (which may partly explain why Trimble chose to pre-empt them by implictly waiving the Washington III criterion, and in exchange cashing in other gains that he thought were of greater long-term value). Indeed, Trimble recalls that whilst he and his fellow party leaders assembled in the first-floor waiting room at the Foreign Office for his first Remembrance Day ceremony at the Cenotaph, he was approached by Blair and Paddy Ashdown: was Major really committed, they asked, to decommissioning? If so, they would support him as part of the new tri-partisan consensus. Trimble confirmed that Major was committed. Blair again stated that he was prepared to support Major on the weapons issue, but said that he thought it was the wrong issue: he preferred to fight on the consent principle. If Trimble staked everything on that, he would have the support of every democrat in the land. What again impressed Trimble was the solidity of Blair's commitment to the consent principle. He did not have the same degree of confidence in the Tories' adherence to it: no Unionist could do so, he long thought, after the AIA of 1985. Indeed, the attitudes which led to that debacle were, in Trimble's view, still there. He appeared to believe that 'imperialistic' attitudes lurk deep in the heart of English Conservatism (*vide* the Frameworks Documents). By contrast, at least Labour – for all its faults such as its powerful Irish nationalist fringe – was a genuine believer in the democratic imperative.[32] But Trimble's distrust of the Conservatives in this period was not just a matter of Tory culture; it was personal as well. Unlike all of the other Unionist MPs, Major had not known Trimble when he served as Northern Ireland Office whip from 1983–5. Trimble certainly enjoyed the ritual of going to Downing Street, yet he felt that Major was such a constructed personality that he was never sure whether he was meeting the real man – nor did he ever quite understand where Major's much-vaunted 'Unionism' came from.[33] Trimble was also disconcerted by Major's habit of starting off meetings by giving an apparently off-the-cuff summary of the current situation at any given moment, but which in fact he contended was a carefully calibrated way of guiding the discussion in a direction that he wanted. Andrew Hunter also recalls that much as he (Hunter) enjoyed going to No. 10, briefings from Major could often become worthless because the PM would repeat back what Hunter said at the last meeting in order to illustrate that he (Major) was basically on the same side.[34]

The failure to establish a truly trusting relationship with Major was all the more surprising because Trimble – like all UUP leaders – would seek to cultivate a 'special relationship' with the Prime Minister of the day. The purpose of this gambit was to circumvent the NIO officials and ministers, whom Unionists alleged were in hock to Dublin's agenda. To some extent this was a delusion (or

convenient fig-leaf). Coordination between No. 10 and the NIO was very close and Mayhew and Major enjoyed an excellent personal rapport. Driving a wedge between No. 10 and the NIO became all the more of an imperative for Unionists because the personal relations between Trimble on the one side and Mayhew and Ancram on the other were so bad. Again, in the first instance, this may seem peculiar. Mayhew had been widely criticised by nationalists for the decision not to prosecute on the basis of the findings of the Stalker-Sampson inquiry on the RUC's alleged 'shoot to kill' policy when he served as Attorney General and was also a known sceptic of the way in which the AIA of 1985 had been secretly negotiated.[35] Ancram was a Catholic Scotsman who now sat for an English seat and who frequently touted his Unionist credentials. But whatever credentials either man had enjoyed beforehand, they counted for little with Unionists once in office. For despite his track record, Mayhew says he had made little time as a Law Officer to come to know the Unionist MPs; rather, he made it his particular business to look after the Northern Ireland judiciary.[36] Even his admirers thought, in some ways, this quintessentially viceregal figure was oddly un-political (in contrast, Trimble notes, to the highly political Ancram). 'Paddy was a patrician who saw politics primarily as declarations from above,' says Andrew Hunter, who observed the relationship from close up for some years. 'He never understood the subtleties and innuendoes of pavement politics.'[37]

But Mayhew's difficulties were more personal still. His height (six-foot-five), bearing, voice and family background all counted against him in the eyes of hardline Unionists. Daphne Trimble recalls that 'David was famously public in criticising Mayhew's "grand" accent – which really is something the poor man couldn't help. Maybe it was inexperience in dealing with secretaries of state – not that he liked Mowlam, either.'[38] Andrew Hunter ascribes the deteriorating relationship in part to the petit bourgeois academic lawyer's sense of social and professional inferiority to an eminent silk and scion of the southern Ascendancy (though Trimble says that what he really objected to was Mayhew's exaggerated patrician manner).[39] Mayhew's forebears had come to Co. Cork in the 13th century but as he himself observes, 'families like mine had very few connections with Protestants in the north. Living in the south, Anglo-Irish families tended to think of northern Protestants as denizens of the wild woods; and one of the things I was so grateful for as Secretary of State was coming to know them.'[40] Andrew Hunter, though, feels that Mayhew had little sympathy for Unionists.[41] Sir John Wheeler, who served as Security Minister from 1993–97, also says that 'Mayhew never understood Unionists or the Loyal Orders. Even though he was the first Secretary of State to visit an Orange Lodge [at Comber, Co. Down, in 1995], I don't think that he had that instinctive understanding of how they feared their position within the United Kingdom was being eroded. It took me a little while to understand it but when I did, it enabled me to deal with them.'[42] There was, notes Michael Ancram, a further reason for the mutual antipathy: 'David Trimble was very good at being very, very rude – to both of us. Paddy would sit there afterwards and ask me why did I take it whenever David accused us of being liars or whatever. It was mutual hatred. David's nostrils would flare, his eyes would go very wide and his cheeks very red. Partly, it was histrionics, but partly it was genuine. David was a new type of Unionist who was far more mistrustful of the Conservatives.'[43] Trimble preferred Ancram on a personal basis: 'He was good company and one could even trade insults with him in jocular fashion,' says Trimble. Moreover, he felt that Ancram (the heir to the Marquess of Lothian) had fewer airs and graces than his boss. That said, Trimble never took Ancram's 'Unionism' terribly seriously either and he was intensely suspicious of his key officials in the Political Development Directorate of the NIO – principally Quentin Thomas and Jonathan Stephens.[44]

One minister who kept a close eye on Thomas's activities was Viscount Cranborne, leader of the House of Lords. To Cranborne, Thomas embodied 'the habits of decades of imperial decline. This habit brought about the cast of mind of British officialdom of assuming that the most expedient way of tackling any difficulty is finding the most elegant path of retreat – and most emphatically so

in Northern Ireland. Considerations of improving or advancing the interests of your own loyal people are now totally alien to the British official mind, and I suspect have been since the 1920s. As a result, I think they saw David Trimble as yet another little colonial problem to be managed.'[45] Probably no senior Tory has enjoyed so dark a reputation in nationalist Ireland since F.E. Smith, who was loathed for his part in the Home Rule crisis of 1912.[46] Cranborne's Unionist credentials derived partly from the record of his forebears, but also from his own career: when he retired from the Commons, aged 40, in 1987 he cited his disgust with the Anglo-Irish Agreement as one of the reasons. And now, it was alleged, he was placing obstacles in the way of the 'peace process'. He was credited with so much influence that one senior Irish official describes him as having been 'effectively Prime Minister in respect of the affairs of Northern Ireland'.[47]

Yet was Cranborne's reputation justified? And what was his relationship to Trimble? Certainly, Major came to depend on him not merely to manage the peers but also to run his re-election bid after he resigned the Conservative leadership in June 1995. More significantly, Cranborne had asked for, and was rewarded with membership of the Cabinet's Northern Ireland Committee. This body met monthly (or more often, when necessary) in the Cabinet Room. It also included Major, Mayhew, Kenneth Clarke, Michael Heseltine, Ancram, Wheeler, Alistair Goodlad (the Chief Whip). Following Redwood's leadership challenge that June, the balance on that body had marginally tilted away from the Major – Mayhew line because of the resignation of Douglas Hurd. Hurd was a key figure in formulating the Anglo-Irish Agreement and his replacement, Malcolm Rifkind, did not share his enthusiasm for the subject. Mayhew would start the meetings, with Ancram presenting the political picture and Wheeler the intelligence briefing. Cranborne scarcely dominated these gatherings: he would sit at the end of the table in the Cabinet Room so that he could see everybody and would not look pushy. In any case, he notes, these were not occasions for great passionate arguments – confrontation was distinctly 'non-U' – and much was left unsaid.[48]'Robert's importance was that he knew and was trusted by all Unionists,' says Mayhew. 'After we had a row with the Unionists over the Scott Report [in February 1996, the Ulster Unionists voted against the Government over the inquiry into the arms for Iraq scandal] things were very bad between us. I'm not good at the Realpolitik of reconciliation. But Robert is different. He was very understanding of Trimble.'[49] Yet curiously, Trimble and Cranborne were not personally close. Indeed, Cranborne observes that Trimble would rarely come to see him in this period. Rather, it was Cranborne who sought out Trimble. Cranborne feels that Trimble always saw him out of politeness and says that he has never met a politician who plays his cards closer to his chest than Trimble (the UUP leader retorts, 'What cards do I have?'). Trimble trusted Cranborne as a genuine Unionist, though he feared at times that Cranborne might not always be in the loop or else might be used as a channel for spin.[50] It said much about the British state's successful alienation of Unionist affections that even this relationship was characterised at times by a degree of wariness.

THIRTEEN *Something funny happened on the way to the Forum election*

TRIMBLE'S first major speech after assuming the Unionist leadership was to address a reception on the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the UUC. Gordon Lucy was summoned to help and assumed that it would be an historical *tour d'horizon* concerning Unionism past, present and future. He was not merely to be disappointed, but shocked when Trimble informed him that he was thinking of 'bringing in the Provisionals from the cold'; shortly thereafter, John Hunter was told much the same. Hunter listened and says that he took this to be simply a throw-away remark. Trimble says that he did not quite say this: he was just trying to urge his party 'not to display the usual stock hostility to [republicans] and all their works'. Whatever the actual content or significance of the remark, Trimble's line of thinking ultimately led to a series of breaches between both men and the UUP leader.[1] Trimble's chosen first step for accomplishing the task of weaning the republicans off violence was an elected forum. On the night of the address, at the Balmoral conference centre in south Belfast, Trimble reiterated his public position on decommissioning. Then, he added: 'It could be that both these matters could be resolved in the one way. Sinn Fein could obtain a democratic mandate and show a commitment to the democratic process if there were elections, say, to a new Assembly. By standing, taking their seats and contributing to the debate they could show whether they are committed to the democratic process and the principle of consent. In such elections it would be very interesting to see what support Sinn Fein actually has. If they took their seats we would recognise their position and could debate with them across the floor and thus talk to them at a time when they have not fulfilled all the requirements of the Declaration and thus be unable to move into formal inter-party talks. An Assembly could bridge that gap until they do meet the requirements of the [Downing Street] Declaration.'[2] The address was classic Trimble and it pointed up the complexity of Trimble's actions. For although he disclaimed any intention to recreate Stormont, Trimble saw merit in facilitating dialogue with Sinn Fein in an inherently partitionist body. If they did so, all well and good; but, if not, then their refusal to accept Northern Ireland as the relevant political unit (and thus the consent principle) would be apparent to all. It would stop the obsessive concentration on decommissioning. But Trimble also thought that such a forum could provide a training ground for the younger Unionist cadres whose aspirations were stymied by the current political arrangements. Local government was so powerless as to offer little to any rising stars; and members of the ageing parliamentary party at Westminster showed scant inclination to retire.[3]

Trimble recalls that the speech caused excitement in No. 10: Downing Street was looking for flexibility and his speech afforded them the necessary space to 'get off the prior decommissioning hook'. But the reaction elsewhere was less favourable. William Ross, who was listening with his wife Christine, was shocked. 'Did he say what I think he said?' she inquired. 'And where does this leave us?' 'In one bloody awful hole,' replied the East Londonderry MP with customary candour.[4] From the other side of the divide, the SDLP – which would be critical to the success of any such venture – was scathing. Thus, Mark Durkan mocked the illogicality of Trimble's willingness to engage with Sinn Fein in an assembly but refusal to hold all-party talks without decommissioning.[5] Many felt that the reason for SDLP hostility to the Trimble plan was that the party feared it would do badly in any contest with Sinn Fein, which had been legitimated by the 'peace process' and which was a much younger and more dynamic party. Significantly, though, the plan was not dismissed out of hand by the Taoiseach, John Bruton.[6] The emerging relationship between Trimble and the Irish state would be critical to the UUP leader's willingness to engage in the talks and ultimately to sign the Belfast Agreement. It was to be a tortuous and sometimes tempestuous process – on both

sides – and its beginnings were inauspicious. Fergus Finlay, Dick Spring's adviser, recalls that when Trimble was elected leader, the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin (known as 'DFA') feared that the relationships forged with liberal Unionists in the early 1990s – with figures such as Ken Maginnis and the McGimpsey brothers – counted for nothing. It was assumed that those whom the Irish knew best would now be marginalised. Moreover, states Finlay, 'he was a total stranger to us. All we knew was stuff we didn't like, which everyone knew, like Drumcree. But no one had ever had lunch with him, or really encountered him on a prolonged basis.'[7] Finlay was not entirely correct: Sean O hUiginn, the head of the Anglo-Irish Affairs division at the DFA had first met Trimble almost 20 years before in the post-Vanguard period. O hUiginn had huge reservations about the conduct of Trimble at Drumcree, but also found in his election intriguing parallels with the rise of Daniel O'Connell, the leading campaigner for Catholic emancipation of the early 19th century. O hUiginn noticed that as with O'Connell, Unionists laid huge stress on how 'articulate' Trimble was: the classic response of a grouping which feels itself to be voiceless (the analogy held up in another way, too, since both men could be very splenetic!).[8]

Trimble still saw the Republic as a political, if not a cultural enemy.[9] In the early 1970s, he thought that 'the Republic was very close to waging proxy war against us. The role of the Irish Government in creating the Provisional IRA was the turning of blind eyes. Things changed under [the government of Liam] Cosgrave in 1974–5 and as far as the Irish public was concerned. Northern Ireland had gone off the boil and they were anxious to have things settled. The Irish state was then wholly sectarian. Changes had started with Vatican II but they were taking a long time to work their way through Irish society. Only in the last decade – partly under the influence of the divorce referendum, and the exposure of the paedophile priests – has social life ceased to be controlled by the [Catholic] Church. And then, of course, there was the embattled, declining southern Protestant community. I remember attending one Apprentice Boys of Derry function in the late 1980s at Raphoe, Co. Donegal, and them telling me "don't end up in the same hole as us".'[10] Subsequently, though, in his UUP annual conference speech at Portrush, Co. Antrim, on 21 October 1995, Trimble approvingly quoted John Whyte as stating that the Republic was not merely a poorer society, but also a more unequal one on account of its retrograde housing and education policies.[11] In fact, much of Trimble's analysis of the southern economy and society was already out of date. He tended to underrate the rise of the 'Celtic Tiger' as a source of self-confidence to nationalists on both sides of the border, making the price which they would ask for any deal all the higher.

Such was the baggage which Trimble carried on his first visit to Dublin as leader of the UUP. There was still a degree of reticence on the Unionist side about accepting this kind of invitation. Molyneaux had gone to Dublin Castle in 1992 as part of the Strand II segment of multilateral talks, but had not gone to bilaterals with the Irish at Government Buildings, where the Taoiseach's office is located. Indeed, not since Terence O'Neill's meetings with the then Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, at the Mansion House in 1965, and with his successor, Jack Lynch, at Iveagh House in January 1968, had a UUP chief gone south for this sort of exchange. Again, Trimble's purpose in so doing was to kill such taboos once and for all.[12] He wanted to do so at this particular point when he was under relatively little pressure, rather than be forced to abandon this stance under duress during a crisis in the talks. But Trimble also wanted to make another point. He wanted to be seen to be meeting first with the Taoiseach rather than Dick Spring, whose department had day-to-day responsibility for Northern Ireland. Such a meeting also contained the implicit message that Trimble was the potential Prime Minister-in-waiting of Northern Ireland, the two men dealing as equals.

After breakfasting at John Taylor's house near Armagh, the Unionist team crossed the border. Their first task was to launch a book at the Mansion House written by two Unionist policy analysts, Esmond Birnie and Paddy Roche, entitled *An Economics Lessson for Irish Nationalists and Republicans*, which charged that a united Ireland made no economic sense and that the Republic in

any case could not afford reintegration of the national territory. Under the gaze of Daniel O'Connell – whose portrait hangs in the Mansion House – Trimble signed the visitors' book and wrote his address as 'Lisburn, Co. Antrim, UK'. At the reception, afterwards, which was attended by de Rossa and the new leader of Fianna Fail, Bertie Ahern, Trimble signed copies of the book. The reception had another significance in the longer run. For it was at this event that Trimble first met Eoghan Harris, the *Sunday Times* columnist, former Workers' Party political strategist, and scriptwriter for the television series *Sharpe.* Harris describes himself as 'a sort of Andrew Neil without the charm, a sort of Peter Mandelson without a party', and had guided both de Rossa and Mary Robinson to their respective triumphs in the European election of 1989 and the presidential election of 1990.[13] Harris was spotted in close conversation with the UUP leader, causing one journalist to remark, 'he's probably looking for an advice contract. They must be the only political party who he hasn't advised.' 'Who said he hasn't?' responded another. The reporter's hunch was prophetic.[14]

The encounter with Bruton was in and of itself relatively unmemorable. Trimble stated his belief that all-party talks could not possibly begin by the end of 1995 because of Sinn Fein/IRA's intransigent stance on the weapons issue. Bruton found Trimble to be not particularly *au fait* with the nuances of southern politics, but he noted that the UUP leader was prepared to take the chance of finding out more.[15] A new channel of communication was established and regular meetings would be held in future. The media reaction was mostly positive: *The Times* of London speculated that Gerry Adams had met his match.[16] Mary Holland of the *Irish Times* was impressed by Trimble's boldness and reckoned that because of Drumcree he now had a stock of political capital to persuade his own community that the structures of government in Northern Ireland would never again be based upon majoritarian principles.[17]

Holland also restated nationalist fears that John Bruton would be seduced by Trimble. But were these justified? Bruton, who was elected as the youngest TD in the Dail for his native Meath in 1969 was not merely the guardian of Fine Gael tradition – the party which founded the state and set up the institutions of law and order. Bruton's own origins lay in the Centre Party, one of the successors to John Redmond's Irish Party which until its final eclipse in the 1918 General Election at the hands of the old Sinn Fein had demanded Home Rule for Ireland within the United Kingdom (a picture of Redmond even hung above Bruton's desk, and he enthusiastically devoured Paul Bew's rehabilitation of Redmondism, *Ideology and the Irish Question*, of which he had been given a leather-bound edition by his officials for his 48th birthday in 1995). One of the sources of Bruton's visceral anti-nationalism was the death of one of his closest friends, Senator Billy Fox. Fox was a Protestant legislator from Co. Monaghan who had been murdered by the Provisionals in 1974 whilst visiting his girlfriend (Bruton recalled the episode to effect in his debate on RTE with Ahern during the 1997 general election: Bruton also was advised by the ubiquitous Eoghan Harris).[18] This episode inevitably informed his dealings with republicans. Bruton declined to give 'sectarian coalitions' public recognition of the kind which Albert Reynolds accorded them, notably the dramatic three-way handshake between that Fianna Fail Taioseach and Hume and Adams on the steps of Government Buildings in Dublin in September 1994.[19]

Whatever Bruton's own views, he was leader of an unlikely agglomeration known as the Rainbow Coalition – comprising Spring's Labour party and de Rossa's Democratic Left. Dick Spring as Minister of Foreign Affairs was much the most important since he ran Northern Ireland policy on a day-to-day basis. Spring came from a staunchly republican family in Tralee, Co. Kerry, and had inherited his seat in the Dail from his father, Dan: Spring *père* had been a staunch supporter of Charlie Kerins, a senior IRA figure executed in Mountjoy jail by the de Valera government in 1944 for murdering a Garda Sergeant.[20] Spring, a former rugby international, saw his own role in the government as a balancing act – not unlike the former West German Foreign Minister, Hans-

Dietrich Genscher of the FDP, who switched from supporting the SPD of Helmut Schmidt to the CDU/CSU bloc of Helmut Kohl in 1982. He acted as a restraint on the instincts of the Fianna Fail-led Government of Albert Reynolds (backing the idea of a 'suspension' of the AIA in 1992 to make it easier for Unionists to enter into three-stranded talks); after moving over to a Bruton-led coalition in late 1994, many saw him as rectifying the new Taoiseach's instinctive sympathy for Unionism and keeping republicans on board. The policy of the Irish state was largely settled, so any 'innovations' by Spring were as much about presentation as about substance. Trimble certainly genuinely disliked what he saw as Spring's excessive solicitude for the republicans; but it was also because he felt the excessively 'green' spin which the Tanaiste and DFA officials placed on events made it that much harder for him to nudge the unionist community into accepting the full logic of the three-stranded process.

Trimble was thus enraged when Spring told the UN General Assembly on 27 September 1995 that it was time for the British Government to abandon its insistence on a handover of IRA weapons ahead of all-party talks.[21] And writing in the *Irish Times* on the morning of his first meeting in Dublin, Trimble stated that the British Government was now taking a principled stance on the issue of decommissioning. 'Wobbling out on a limb, however, is the Tanaiste, Mr Dick Spring, who appears to have "gone native" with the zealots in the DFA and is now demanding that the IRA be allowed into all-party talks without the removal of any weapons or a commitment to permanent peace…' Trimble's dislike of the DFA was shared by almost all Unionists. An elite corps of over 300 diplomats, the DFA was quite unlike any other foreign ministry in the world. In most countries, foreign ministries are the least nationalistic of government departments. In Ireland, it is the most nationalistic (its foil is the Department of Finance, whose culture on northern questions is partly informed by a dread of paying for the absorption of Ulster into the Republic).[22] Certainly, Trimble felt that until the Ahern era, 'the DFA's policy was that Ulster is the fourth green field [the term given to the four Provinces of Ireland, only three of which, in the view of nationalists, have been liberated]'. In Trimble's view, they always ran rings around British officials – not because of superior ability, but simply because they were convinced of the rightness of their cause and were comparatively guilt-free. In particular, Trimble disliked the DFA's leading light, Sean O hUiginn, head of the Anglo-Irish division since 1991: he believes that O hUiginn's departure for the United States as Irish ambassador in September 1997 enormously improved the atmosphere in the talks.[23] Whatever the accuracy of Trimble's assessment of O hUiginn's position, the DFA often were able to 'punch above their weight'. They may not have enjoyed the resources of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, nor of the British intelligence services, but they secured results because, in the words of one Irish minister, 'they are driven by the zeal of the second division side seeking to knock a premier division club out of the cup in a local derby'. Moreover, because the Irish state is small and has relatively few crucial policy objectives compared to the United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, EU budgets and the maintenance of neutrality – its very best servants can specialise in these areas.

It was Trimble's belief that no meaningful dialogue was possible with Spring which made him so reluctant to meet him on a regular basis. This view was widely held in the UUP, and was most memorably expressed by John Taylor who pronounced Spring to be 'the most detested politician in Northern Ireland': Trimble says that once his deputy started the name-calling, he could not very well repudiate him (Nora Owen claims that Trimble always behaved differently when Taylor was present and was much more hardline).[24] In the end, says Fergus Finlay, Spring decided to put up with the abuse for the sake of the peace process. The first bilateral between the two was duly held at Glengall Street in late October 1995. Finlay remembers that it was a surreal occasion, and that Trimble made only one reference to past attacks. 'You and I are men of affairs,' Trimble intoned, 'and you recognise that these are things that have to be said to satisfy one's public.'[25] Indeed so: Trimble needed the bogeyman of Spring to afford cover for his overtures to the south, although his dislike of the Tanaiste

was genuine enough. Finlay remembers that Trimble was constantly interrupted by Ken Maginnis and hardly spoke for the rest of the meeting.[26] Finlay reckoned that Trimble was devoting far more time and attention to his position as the leader of Ulster Unionism than to his relations with both the British and Irish Governments. Finlay's problem with Trimble was not so much that the UUP leader had to engage in such posturing, but rather that he was much ruder than he needed to be in order to achieve the desired effect in his own community. In that sense, he was utterly different from the courteous Molyneaux. From Finlay's viewpoint, this was not necessarily bad for the 'peace process'. Molyneaux was exquisitely polite, but impossible to pin down; whereas Trimble could be very discourteous, but was at least 'engaged'.[27]

Given such antipathy, it was scarcely surprising that Trimble should persist in his efforts to cultivate Bruton and to sideline Spring. Trimble sought to work on a back-channel via Paddy Teahon, Secretary-General of the Taoiseach's Department. But the DFA soon got wind of the UUP's attempted approaches and immediately contacted the Taoiseach's Department and any such proposed back-channel of communication was soon terminated.[28] Thereafter, it was all done on a more formal basis. Partly, it was a turf war within the Irish Government, but there was also a genuine fear in the DFA that to give such recognition so soon to the Bruton – Trimble relationship would elevate the UUP leader to such a level as to make him less willing to make concessions to northern nationalists. As they saw it, the full fruits of such summitry should be bestowed after a deal, not beforehand. In any case, they feared an unstructured dialogue when no one was clear as to Trimble's ultimate intentions. Did he, for example, really want to be Prime Minister of a new Northern Ireland (in the sense of being willing to pay a price on Strand II to achieve his Strand I objectives)? For, if not, there was a real danger that Trimble would simply 'pocket' the meeting, return to Northern Ireland and proclaim 'I've confronted the lion in his den' – thus humiliating the Taoiseach in exchange for nothing. Far better, some DFA officials reasoned, slowly to 'sus' him out. In this respect, the state of knowledge amongst the British about Trimble's goals was rather more accurate than their Irish counterparts; many of them were worried by the failure of the southerners and Trimble to forge a satisfactory relationship, which made a settlement that much more remote. Indeed, much as John Bruton tried to reassure Trimble that the Republic was not on for a tribal adventure and sought only stability, the UUP leader never felt that he could risk doing the deal in these circumstances. This was because in his view Bruton did not fully control his own coalition government's policy towards Northern Ireland and could only intervene from time to time – an impression that was reinforced by Trimble's trips south of the border.[29] If Fine Gael came to an accommodation with the Unionists (which would inevitably include a referendum on the revision of Articles 2 and 3) they would always be vulnerable to accusations from Fianna Fail that they had betrayed the nation. Even though Bruton instinctively wanted no part of the pan-nationalist front, the fact remained that no Taoiseach could shun Sinn Fein/IRA once the 'peace process' had started. 'As Sinn Fein saw it, the pan-nationalist front meant that the Irish Government would act as buffer and conduit for their views rather than behaving with a mind of its own,' says Finlay. 'In their analysis there were only two protagonists of significance in this conflict, themselves and the British.' Finlay recalls that in discussions with the Irish Government, they displayed little interest in the evolution of Unionist politics, such as Trimble's election as leader (a point confirmed by British ministers and officials of the period). Certainly, the traditional republican view of Unionists and Unionism was dismissive. According to this line of reasoning, Loyalism was a mere creation of British imperialism. These local surrogates would disappear once their colonial paymasters in metropolitan Britain faced them down, forcing them into an agonising reappraisal of where their true interests lay. But republicans were coming to a more nuanced, if no less hostile view of their neighbours. Thus, the pseudonymous Hilda Mac Thomas, commenting on Trimble's election as leader in the Sinn Fein newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* on 14 September 1995, was noticeably free of the sanctimonious and disapproving tone which characterised the reactions

of some constitutional nationalists and much of Ulster's chattering classes. Whether or not Trimble forged a pan-unionist front with other loyalist parties, it concluded, 'this does not change the context in which [he] has got to work … The question is, will Trimble push his party in the same cul-de-sac, or will he be the one to lead them to a new agreement with the people in Ireland. An even more presssing question for him will be that of preventing the fragmentation of the Official Unionist Party [sic], as those unionists who would have adopted a more pragmatic line leave or are edged out.' In retrospect, Hilda Mac Thomas was only really incorrect on the last point, for if anything it has been anti-Agreement Unionists who have been 'purged' (and then without much efficiency).

Hilda Mac Thomas was not the only republican with a nuanced view of Trimble's election. Andrew Hunter met with Mitchel McLaughlin of Sinn Fein at the Clonard Monastery in west Belfast in December 1995. According to Hunter's extensive notes of the discussion – and he told McLaughlin he would be reporting back to the British Government – the Sinn Fein chairman described Trimble as 'a formidable politician, not to be underestimated … McCartney will eventually succeed Paisley as leader of Unionist hardliners. Trimble is on his guard against this: hence the populist stand which Trimble sometimes adopts.' McLaughlin expressed grave reservations about Trimble's idea of an elective route to negotiations, but he did not rule it out: he opined that one reason why Trimble wanted elections was to demonstrate how derisory was the support for the UDP and PUP, the parties representing the UDA and the UVF. This, McLaughlin said, would destroy the credibility of Gary McMichael, David Ervine and other loyalist politicians whose participation exasperated mainstream Unionists.

Over the longer term, McLaughlin was confident that republicans would obtain what they wanted, which was nothing less than the Frameworks Documents. This was because in his view, 'ordinary Unionist people and the Unionist business community are far more realistic' (this was also the NIO line of the post-ceasefire period). Whilst preferring not to have a Northern assembly under its Strand I proposals – on the ground that it would confer some legitimacy upon the six counties – McLaughlin said that Sinn Fein would accept it in the context of a 'transitional process' if there were sufficient checks and balances to prevent a return to majoritarian Unionist domination. If satisfied on this point, Sinn Fein might tolerate an assembly for a short while as a tactical concession. When Hunter asked him why unionists should cooperate in creating a united Ireland, McLaughlin replied: 'We accept there must be a transitional process but it will be an interim phase on the way to a united Ireland. It will enable unionists to adjust to change. They will grow to accept a united Ireland.' Later, the tone became harsher still. McLaughlin told Hunter that 'the British are spoiling for a fight. If they want one, they can have it.' (McLaughlin's office states this was said in a purely political sense.) But the IRA was already preparing its devastating response to the 'log-jam' in the 'peace process'. Hunter suspected that all was not well. Likewise, Trimble was alarmed by the increasing numbers of punishment beatings and terrorist training and targeting. Thus, at their first meeting after he became UUP leader, on 14 September 1995, when John Hume told him that he felt that the IRA would not go back to violence, Trimble viewed the claim with much scepticism.[30] His fears would soon be terribly vindicated.

FOURTEEN *Go West, young man!*

IF David Trimble stands for anything as leader of his party, it is for the modernisation of Ulster Unionism. This is not simply a question, as he often likes to say, of making Unionists 'think politically rather than simply presenting a hard face to the world'. It is also a question of overhauling party organisation and of bringing on energetic young cadres who would become the Unionist First XI of the future. Many thought that this was largely a matter of breaking or reforming the party's traditional links with the Orange Order, but it was more ambitious in scope than that. It took up much of his time in his early months as leader; Conor Cruise O'Brien paid his first visit ever to Glengall Street shortly after Trimble's election and was struck by how absorbed the new leader was in internal party management and with establishing his credentials within the broader Unionist family.[1] Fergus Finlay derived the same impression and concluded that such imperatives would preclude rapid progress in the 'peace process'.[2]

The party which David Trimble took over from Jim Molyneaux was antiquated in its culture and structure. Thus, until the mid-1990s, claims Jim Wilson (the chief executive of the UUP from 1987 to 1998) the party would send out press releases in black taxis to just five obvious outlets, such as the *News Letter*. Then there was the matter of the party's federated structure. Its organisation resembled that of the Tories prior to William Hague's reforms of 1997–8. There was, however, one crucial difference with the Conservatives: whereas the power of Tory associations via the old National Union and Central Council was more apparent than real, the analogous UUP structures were invested with genuine democratic significance. The party was a collection of highly independent local associations and affiliated bodies which came together in something called the Ulster Unionist Council. This met annually, usually in March, to elect the officers and the leader. Crucially, a mere 60 signatures was required to trigger a meeting of the UUC, a rule which was to bedevil Trimble's life in the coming years. The 860-member UUC delegated to the leader and the officers collectively the task of employing the staff of the headquarters organisation. The officers, in turn, were also subject to the scrutiny of the 120-strong party executive, whose job was to make policy in consultation with the leader. Because of local autonomy, there was no common membership list throughout the Province and Glengall Street thus had little idea of the party's total strength. Indeed, in many places the lists were held in exercise books and people would be deemed to be members of the UUP if they donated an apple pie to a Halloween fundraiser.[3] And then there was the vexed issue of the UUP's links with the Orange Order: as well as the obvious individual party members who happened to be Orangemen, the Orange Institution as a whole sent around 120 delegates to the UUC. Those delegates could be appointed by people who were not necessarily members of the UUP; indeed, as Jack Allen observes, as much as two-thirds of the members of some County Lodges could be supporters of the DUP.[4]

Concern about the UUP's organisational obsolescence predated Trimble's election as leader, but little came of it. There was always something else on the agenda in terms of the peace process, and the important invariably yielded pride of place to the urgent. The group of dynamic young hardliners who had pushed Trimble for the leadership were, however, determined to change things. But it is hard to know, even in this area, what Trimble really wanted to do, as opposed to any casual talk of radical reform in which he may have indulged others before 1995. Prior to his victory, says John Hunter, Trimble always wanted a 'clean-out' of Glengall Street and that he spoke derisively of its 'good ole' boy' culture.[5] The 'Young Turks' appear to have been operating on the asssumption that they were ridding the sovereign of his 'turbulent priests'. Denis Rogan, then UUP vice chairman recalls that 'either they were promised or in the campaign thought there would be a gutting of Glengall Street – a whole series of young advisers brought in to drive a new policy'.[6]

A counter-offensive was soon launched by the old guard. James Cooper spoke for many senior party stalwarts – few of whom declared for Trimble in the leadership race – when he opined that Trimble had been elected with too narrow a base from the right wing of the Orange Order (at this point, says Cooper, there were also doubts about Trimble's stability and his willingness to stay the course).[7] But Trimble was for now the leader and they would have to work with him. The question was on whose terms? The Young Turks' or the party establishment's? Jim Nicholson's recollection of the first officers' meeting was that 'it was fairly difficult and edgy. A lot of officers didn't trust what David Trimble would do – an attempt to do a clean sweep of party people who did great service.'[8] Jeffrey Donaldson, an honorary secretary of the party, says that at this first meeting, Trimble was told in no uncertain terms that he was not to conduct any widespread purges.[9] Jack Allen recalls that 'Jim Nicholson would muse that times were changing and that there was now a new regime but it soon became clear that things would go on as before. I told Jim Wilson "David Trimble can't sack you." The leader doesn't really have that power, though he can influence things.'[10] Allen's last remark accords with Trimble's own analysis. Trimble says that he was gravely embarrassed by Hunter's claims of imminent purges, 'none of which I could have done if I'd wanted to'. He notes that Ulster Unionist leaders are in a very weak position vis-à-vis the party organisation compared to Paisley's DUP (which, Trimble believes, operates on a top-down basis, rather than a bottom-up basis). The leader has no capacity to hire and fire the chief executive, which is in the hands of the officers and UUP Executive collectively, of whom the leader is just one. But obviously a leader could, if he was so minded, recommend it.[11]

But why did Trimble not seek to move his colleagues in a more radical direction through persuasion and influence? Partly, because he can be disorganised and often cannot see things through to their conclusion: in that sense, his *déformation professionelle* is as much that of the chaotic, overburdened university lecturer as it is the hyper-legalism of the academic lawyer. There is also a sense in which he is like a butterfly: he often cannot stick to an objective and rapidly moves on to the next, more interesting topic. (Jack Allen recalls that in his frenetic early days as leader, he would not delegate to anyone, to the point of insisting on doing the photocopying himself. In this sense, he was rather like Molyneaux.)[12] But it is also the case that party reform was less than radical because the UUP establishment grew accustomed to his face – and he grew comfortable with them. Moreover, as he lost his original base of 'Young Turks' because of his compromises with the British Government and with Irish nationalism, he increasingly needed the old guard to push through his policy on the peace process. A complete overhaul of the UUP party risked stirring up a hornets' nest of vested interests, which could imperil his immediate policy objectives. Indeed, Trimble was to discover that he could construct a kind of 'New Unionism' with 'Old *Unionists*'.

But one seemingly minor change in the way that party business was conducted turned out to Trimble's great long-term advantage: shortly after he became chairman in early 1996, Denis Rogan increased the numbers of party executive meetings from four to six per annum, including two on Saturdays. The purpose was to ensure that the party was more thoroughly involved in the decision-making process, a concept which Trimble heartily endorsed.[13] As a result, crucial moments in the 'peace process' were punctuated by these meetings, which ratified their leader's decisions. Would he surmount the extra hurdles at each stage of the emerging deal? It could have turned into a disaster for Trimble, but in fact he turned them to his advantage. First of all, by giving at least the appearance of openness, he sought to scotch the notion that secret deals were being cooked up at No. 10 or elsewhere between the UUP leader and the two Governments. Second, by giving Trimble a chance to speak more often, it played to his strength – mastery of complexities of the talks process, allowing him to 'blind them with science'. Third, by having to account to this increased number of meetings, which could have rejected his policies, Trimble was able to create a sense of crisis. He thus used his

weakness to give himself extra bargaining leverage with the Governments, because he had to give the UUP Executive something when they met.

But such innovation was a rare exception. In practice, Trimble has proven reluctant to pay much of a price to achieve party reform. This tendency was illustrated by his reaction to the debate on the link with the Orange Order, at his first party conference as leader. Trimble had never wanted to break the connection entirely, but he did want it substantially modified.[14] Partly, he was motivated by a wish to see the UUP as a voice of new, civic unionism which would attract Catholic members put off by its sectarian tinge. But he also knew that even if such change was accomplished, there would be comparatively few gains amongst the Catholic population. Rather, his real motive was to make the UUP attractive once again to middle-class Protestants who found the connection to the Loyal Orders an embarrassment. Trimble felt that Unionism could ill afford the Protestant middle classes' continuing opt-out from politics – to which he was such a marked exception. At the party conference at Portrush, Co. Antrim in October 1995, he pitched not only for a common membership but also for reform of the delegate structure. Henceforth, the UUC and the Executive would be composed only of association and branch representatives. In other words, no one would sit on them as representatives of the Orange Order *per se.* Of course, individual Orangemen would still sit on the ruling councils of the party as constituency representatives, and he hoped that this innovation would actually stimulate more of them to participate: many supposed that if the Loyal Orders were formally represented then they need do nothing themselves.[15] But despite the standing ovation which he received for his address, and notwithstanding what the *Orange Standard* called his almost Harold McCusker-like 'cult figure' status amongst the brethren in north Armagh, reforming the link with the Orange Order proved harder to effect in practice.[16] Partly, he did not succeed because of the unexpected. During the debate at Portrush, Drew Nelson pronounced that 'in a sense this party was a child of the Orange Order, but the child has now grown up': much heckling and booing ensued.[17] Trimble believes that Nelson's undiplomatic sally polarised debate and caused it to go off the rails. The officers then had to calm things down and they opted for a compromise resolution calling for a top-level review.[18] It was passed by a two to one margin, but little change has been effected since.[19] Many compared this task to Tony Blair's recasting of his party's relations with the trade unions. In truth, Trimble failed not because of Drew Nelson's candour but because he had not done the necessary preparatory work; for all his admiration of New Labour, he lacked the Blairite zeal and organisational ruthlessness to push such changes through. Later, this would greatly irritate Irish nationalists, who believed that a failure to purge such elements made for perpetual crises in Unionism and condemned Trimble to endless narrow margins within the UUC.

Similar ineptitude characterised Trimble's dealings with the parliamentary party. Shortly after the election, a very senior UUP source told Frank Millar that 'we have five MPs who I wish would just go, announce that they intend to stand down at the next election'. The five named were Ross, Smyth, Cecil Walker (North Belfast), Roy Beggs (East Antrim) and Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim).[20] Trimble says that he knew he had a generational problem: indeed, in early 1996, the *Belfast Telegraph* noted that the combined age of the nine UUP MPs was 560 years, or an average of 62.2 (with Trimble as the youngest at 51). Whilst most Ulster parties tend to be older on average than their mainland counterparts, the UUP's record was then the most gerontophile. Some of the Young Turks were pushing for deselections, notably the Oxford-educated North Belfast councillor, Nelson McCausland, who had targeted Walker. Trimble says that he did nothing to dissuade McCausland, but nor did he help him either (Trimble would later change his view of Walker dramatically for the better).[21] David Brewster, then Treasurer of the East Londonderry Association, says that Trimble's backing helped him to win one of the party's four honorary secretaryships at the 1996 AGM of the UUC. Brewster thinks that Trimble had a reason for this: he told the younger man that if he wanted his support to

take over from Ross, he would have it. Brewster had no interest in making such a challenge against Ross, and would subsequently become a leading critic of Trimble in the Union First Group after the signing of the Belfast Agreement and in December 2003 joined the DUP.[22] McCausland's challenge in North Belfast fizzled out, partly because of the endemic factionalism in that association, which as Brewster observes, 'makes Kosovo look simple by comparison'.[23]

Trimble also appeared to flirt with the idea of recreating a pan-unionist front – an idea which resurfaces every time that loyalists feel under threat. The idea was that Unionists would opt out of the process *ad interim*, build up their strength, modernise their structures, and then return to the table stronger and better equipped to repel the advances of their enemies. After Drumcree I, the conditions for such a recoalescence of pro-British forces appeared more auspicious than they had for some time. Certainly, Paisley welcomed Trimble's election as leader and ascribed his success to his identification with a stance closer to that of the DUP. Within ten days of his election, Trimble had met with Paisley at the latter's home in Cyprus Avenue (a street made famous in the Van Morrison song on the album *Astral Weeks*).The two men expressed their unity of purpose on the Union and the Frameworks Documents, but made little further progress.[24] But this *démarche* failed – largely because the UUP feared it would end up co-opted into a Paisleyite front in which it would become the junior partner. The other significant Unionist party leader, Robert McCartney of the UKUP, was soon to develop doubts about Trimble as well. Initially, McCartney had also welcomed Trimble's election as leader, judging him to be the candidate most willing to work with the leaders of the other Unionist parties.[25] A week after the election, Trimble contacted McCartney, who duly invited Trimble to his home, where the two men discussed the future of Unionism. As Trimble was leaving, McCartney said to him: 'David, you are now leader of the largest Unionist party and as such you will not want for advice. There are people in London, Dublin and Washington who will take you to the top of the temple and they will say, "all of this can be yours if you do what you are told".' According to McCartney, Trimble simply nodded, smiled and left.[26]

Washington was not so sure whether Trimble was quite so biddable as McCartney feared. Nancy Soderberg says that the US administration knew little about Trimble, apart from what had been observed on the television screens at Drumcree earlier in the year.[27] But for all their doubts, the Clinton administration had to make the effort to see whether the new UUP leader would become 'engaged'.[28] Trimble did so with gusto. For unlike so many of the older generation of Unionist politicians, Trimble carried no anti-American baggage, either culturally or politically – although he disliked the activities of many Irish-Americans and of Nancy Soderberg in particular. Prior to serving as senior staff director for European affairs on the President's National Security Council with specific responsibility for Ireland, Soderberg worked for Senator Edward Kennedy. For this, and above all for her role in helping Gerry Adams obtain a visa over British Government objections in 1994, she became a hate figure amongst Unionists, earning the soubriquet of 'Nancy Sodabread'. Moreover, she forged a close working relationship with Jean Kennedy Smith, the American ambassador in Dublin and a sister of Senator Kennedy, who had out-gunned her counterpart in London, Raymond Seitz, over the Adams visa. But Soderberg and her colleagues also understood that it took 'two sides to tango'. Having 'engaged' with Adams, they would now have to work much harder with Unionists to convince them that they, too, had a stake of sorts in the 'process' and that the United States was not utterly hostile to the interests of the Ulster-British population. They were keen to emphasise their desire to promote a peaceful settlement and did not care that much about the precise terms of the deal. As Nancy Soderberg observes, 'the truth is we were knocking on the unionist door for some time and Trimble was the first one to answer'.[29]

Trimble was indeed the first Ulster Unionist leader of recent times to answer the call on a sustained basis, but the links went further back than Soderberg's remarks suggested. Terence O'Neill

as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland sought to make much of Ulster-Scots heritage in his dealings with both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and his Christmas card of December 1964 showed him meeting with LBJ at the White House: on St Patrick's Day of that year, O'Neill had presented the Commander-in-Chief with a book on the Scotch-Irish and banqueting cloths (which delighted the Linen Guild back at home).[30] Charles Reynolds, an Ulsterman living in America, also organised information campaigns on behalf of the pro-Union population following the outbreak of the Troubles, the highlight of which was a highly effective tour by Brian Faulkner in June and July of 1972.[31] And efforts were made at various points in the 1980s by David Burnside, Frank Millar and Harold McCusker. Likewise, Peter Robinson, Gregory Campbell and others undertook activities on behalf of the DUP.[32] However, during the long tenure of James Molyneaux, such activities were not given a notably high priority by the UUP. Towards the very end of Molyneaux's long tenure in office, arrangements were put in place for a UUP North American bureau with offices donated by Tony Culley-Foster, a Washington businessman who grew up in Londonderry. One of his employees, the Scottish-born Anne Smith of McLean, Virginia, was seconded to work for it, officially for one day a week.[33]

Nancy Soderberg acknowledges that the UUP North American bureau did provide some kind of reference point which had not previously existed, and other Administration officials have been courteous enough about Smith's contribution.[34] Nonetheless, Smith was neither from Northern Ireland nor could she be described as a 'heavy-hitting' Washington lobbyist type who 'packed a punch inside the Beltway'. Trimble stuck doggedly by her and refused to entertain any suggestions to have Smith removed. Moreover, this outfit had nothing like the resources of Sinn Fein's North American organisation. It has remained determinedly low-key in the years since then: David Burnside says that he had secured a pledge of $250,000–$300,000 for a full-time professional lobbyist, but the offer was rejected.[35] According to Trimble, Burnside offered a lobbying firm to raise money. But the idea was partly rejected by the UUP officer team on the grounds that it would be embarrassing if the North American office spent more money per annum than Glengall Street. More important, says Trimble, was the point that the money could have come from conservative American sources who wanted it to be used for partisan, anti-Clinton purposes. This was something he was not prepared to countenance, despite the fact that the US Administration was close to a low ebb at this point following the Republicans' takeover of Congress in the 1994 mid-term elections.[36]

Trimble's election also coincided with a change in key personnel amongst British and American officialdom in 1995, notably the appointment of Sir John Kerr as British ambassador to Washington, and that of Blair Hall as Political Counsellor at the US Embassy in London. Both men earned Trimble's admiration and trust, in a way that Soderberg never did: she realised that Unionists had to be brought in, but carried so much baggage by this point that she was unable to do it herself. Kerr and Hall were thus crucial to the task of facilitating the Unionists' admission into the international mainstream. Kerr was a Glaswegian Protestant married to a Catholic of Irish descent: Trimble certainly felt that as a native of the west of Scotland, he had a greater instinctive feel for the problems of Ulster than a more conventional 'Oxbridge type'. Kerr arrived in Washington on the heels of Sir Robin Renwick's devastating rebuff over the Adams visa. The British Embassy was enormously defensive towards Capitol Hill and the media. Kerr determined to reverse this through a variety of measures. In March 1996, Kerr broke with tradition by hosting his own St Patrick's Day party in the Lutyens embassy residence; Dermot Gallagher, the then Irish ambassador retorted that he would throw a St George's Day drinks party to even the score. But there was a serious message behind Kerr's move. Its essence was that Irishness was not the sole preserve of Irish nationalists or of the Irish state.[37]

America need not necessarily have been stony ground for Unionism. As a *News Letter* editorial of 9 November 1995, 'Selling Ulster', put it: 'the Unionist message has never been fully explained on

the other side of the Atlantic and this has undoubtedly been to the detriment of a majority population who enjoy a kin relationship with up to 25 million of US citizens, descended from the quarter of a million Ulster-Scots Presbyterians who emigrated to the American frontier 200/250 years ago. Of the 40 million Americans who would claim to have Irish blood in their veins, an estimated 56 per cent come of Ulster Protestant stock. Whilst the knowledge of the political nuances in Northern Ireland may be extremely limited, this section would be broadly susceptible to the unionist argument and the importance of effectively dealing with terrorism conducted by a tiny unrepresentative group of people.' Trimble wholeheartedly agreed with these sentiments. Indeed, according to the American website *Political Graveyard*, no fewer than seven Trimbles have been elected to the US Senate and Congress since the inception of the Republic – mostly from Kentucky and from neighbouring Ohio (the most recently elected Trimble had, ironically, served in the US House of Representatives as a Democrat from Arkansas from 1945 to 1967). There was even a Trimble County in Kentucky, named for Robert Trimble, who became an Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court and an intimate of the great John Marshall, Chief Justice. His forebears had orginally come from Co. Armagh in the 1740s. And General Isaac Trimble of Virginia – a descendant of a Trimble who emigrated from Co. Antrim in the early 18th century – had led two brigades of Pender's division during Pickett's charge at the Battle of Gettysburg. He was captured by Union forces after the lower third of his leg was amputated near the battlefield.[38]

This was the heritage which, in British eyes, lent Trimble such significance in America. For a long time, the US Administration had been influenced by the notion that the Unionists were mere puppets of the British and of the Tories in particular. This idea had been assiduously fostered by Sinn Fein via Irish Americans. Patrick Mayhew, with his patrician manner, was not the best man to correct this impression with American audiences and his visits became more infrequent. Trimble's manner was obviously not patrician. His accent alone was proof that there were intelligent and reasonable residents of the geographic entity of the island of Ireland who wished for no part in an all-Ireland state. Moreover, the British Government understood that the Unionist population were fed up with the ceaseless reminders of Adams' film-star status in America. If it continued unchecked, they could easily conclude that the 'peace process' was irremediably stacked against them. They would then become even less willing to cut some deal with Irish nationalism. The British also understood very well that many Unionists have always had a craving for respectability, perhaps more than some of their critics and admirers have supposed. This included the UUP leader. 'Trimble went to America a huge amount,' recalls Sir John Wheeler. 'It played to his ego. He loved his Washington jaunts and was made much of. Suddenly, here was the man from Vanguard who walked with kings and princes.'[39]

William Crowe, the American ambassador in London, and Blair Hall, the Political Counsellor at the embassy, also recognised that a one-sided process would be inherently unstable. But initially, it looked as if these overtures might go disastrously wrong. Anthony Lake, the National Security Adviser, came to London in October 1995 and met Trimble in the sunlit corner room of the US ambassador's residence in Winfield House, overlooking Regent's Park. There was an exchange of pleasantries which well matched the Gainsborough pictures and the flowered armchairs. It all passed smoothly until Lake urged Trimble to 'exert leadership' over prior decommissioning and ventured that his community would understand. 'Don't tell me what my community thinks!' exploded Trimble. Lake appeared shocked, and it confirmed the Americans' fears of Trimble's volatility (Lake and Soderberg also expressed scepticism about Trimble's elective assembly).[40] It is possible that Trimble wanted to show that he was no pushover, and that he chose deliberately to foster what Richard Nixon called the 'madman theory': that he needed to be handled with great care lest he go off the rails. Trimble denies this to be the case, though he is calculating enough in other ways.[41] It may be that he behaved thus out of genuine annoyance at a foolish suggestion which showed no comprehension of the balance of forces within Unionism.

The British were determined to persist with the UUP's 'outreach': Trimble recalls that John Major had told him that if he pressed for a meeting with the President, the request would be favourably received. It was accordingly arranged that the President would make a 'drop-by', 'spontaneous' meeting whilst Trimble was in Vice President Al Gore's suite. This was the form employed when the President did not yet want to bestow a full Oval Office tête-à-tête, but from a Unionist perspective it was a significant step to parity of treatment with John Hume.[42] Sir John Kerr says that there was huge interest in Trimble when he came to town. Attention particularly focused upon internal relations within the UUP, notably between Trimble and Taylor. Nobody, says Kerr, had studied Trimble in advance and they did not know what to make of him (such uncertainty did not affect the hardline republican Irish American Unity Conference, which took out an advert in the *New York Times* on 30 October 1995 entitled 'A WELCOME TO DAVID TRIMBLE, THE "DAVID DUKE" OF IRELAND' and likening the Orange Order to the KKK. The next day, David Duke expressed anger that his name had been blackened by such unfavourable comparisons!). Following a breakfast meeting with Edward Kennedy, the senior senator from Massachusetts singled Trimble out as the most important political leader in the Province and said that 'all of us here in Congress know that Mr Trimble is going to play a vital role in settling the future of Northern Ireland. Whatever is worked out will be worked out for the future of Northern Ireland by the people of Northern Ireland.'[43] This belied the rancorous nature of Trimble's meeting with the Ad Hoc Committee on Irish Affairs, including Congressman Peter King, a Long Island Republican and an energetic supporter of Sinn Fein. All relentlessly peppered him with hostile questions, and Trimble responded in kind. At the White House, Trimble met with Gore for half an hour and they were joined by Clinton for ten minutes.[44] Trimble again pressed his idea of an elected assembly, but little of substance was achieved. One thing would impress him above all others: he presented Clinton with copies of two Ulster Society publications: Ronnie Hanna's book on American servicemen in Northern Ireland during the Second World War, *Pardon Me Boy* and Gordon Lucy's lively study of the Ulster Covenant – which he brought into the White House in a grotty plastic bag. When the President made his first visit to Belfast some weeks later, he had read both from cover to cover, and was able to put the British Prime Minister right on points of fact. The White House noticed one other thing about Trimble during these early visits: according to Anthony Lake, the UUP leader would glance across to John Taylor to see his deputy's reactions.[45]

In truth, Trimble made a mixed impression on those he met. He seemed to many of his interlocutors to be very prickly, and very much on the look-out for insults and slights. Partly, it was inexperience: he handled the US media in a confrontational manner more appropriate to a rowdy Unionist gathering back at home. But, says Anne Smith, it was also because many of his interlocutors were either hostile – as was the case with the Ad Hoc Committee – or else uninformed. As she observes, the most common question which Trimble had for years to endure on his visits to America was 'why won't you shake hands with Gerry Adams?' They always, says Smith, wanted Trimble to make the first move, because that is the way that reasonable men settle their disputes in the United States. It would take some years for Americans to understand the reasons for Trimble's reluctance – namely, the reaction of ordinary Unionists to the idea of such a meeting.[46] That was because such understanding of the Unionist case as was achieved was entirely functional: no Unionists, no process. But there was no year-round constituency created with a positive understanding of the merits of Unionism. There was, eight years later, no pro-Unionist bloc to counteract the influence of the Irish-American lobby.

In some ways this was understandable. After all, when it came to the affairs of Ireland, the Scotch-Irish Protestant immigrants of the 17th and 18th centuries were more thoroughly assimilated than the Gaelic Catholic Irish of the 19th and 20th centuries. That said, many small peripheral peoples without limitless resources such as the Chechens had set up Washington offices on a shoestring basis

and had successfully mobilised far more support for their cause. Indeed, in the 1980s, even a figure such as the military dictator of Guatemala, General Efrain Rios Montt (who was pushing a rather worse case than the Unionists of Ulster) had managed to garner some support amongst his fellow evangelicals in the United States for his regime. Why then did the UUP not succeed in making inroads? Anne Smith states there was simply no time to cultivate the 'Bible Belt', partly because of what she claims to be the size and fragmentation of the community.[47] But Unionists did little better with secular conservatives 'inside the Beltway'. Despite widespread conservative disgust with the Clinton administration, Unionists were unable to cash in much on his granting of a visa to Gerry Adams at the behest of that great right-wing *bête noire*, Edward Kennedy. Indeed, Sinn Fein/IRA was allied to many bitterly anti-American 'national liberation movements' such as the PLO: the historic hostility of Irish republicans to US foreign policy objectives throughout much of the world remained one of their best-kept secrets until 2001. Nor was the UUP leader aware of the existence of the extended Trimble clan in Kentucky and Ohio, despite his own historical enthusiasms. Trimble himself recognised that the UUP ought to do more, but was too busy and too disorganised to do anything about them. There was, however, another aspect to his failure to deliver. Did Trimble really want to build up a network of support amongst Congressmen from the Deep South, who might act as a counterweight to the Kennedys et al.? When the idea of such an 'outreach' operation in America was broached to him at the October 2000 Conservative party conference in Bournemouth, he said, 'No, I can't be associated with yahoos.'[48] Certainly, he never reached out on a regular basis to such natural allies as Senator Jesse Helms, who held the chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee throughout that period, and who loathed the Provisionals. Partly, this was because Trimble had gradually became acutely self-aware of his status as a pillar of the international 'civilised' order. And because he is naturally shy, he liked to engage only with a few people in the United States, or anywhere else: what mattered to him above all else were his dealings with Clinton. It was a pattern which would eventually be replicated in his dealings with Clinton's admirer – Tony Blair.

FIFTEEN '*Binning Mitchell*'

TRIMBLE'S tetchy approach in America and at home may have won him few friends; but intentionally or not, it served him well enough in his dealings with the unionist community. For every time the two Governments resiled from their positions on decommissioning, Trimble would eventually follow suit. But because he often did this with ill grace, it masked the extent of his acquiescence in the intergovernmental strategy. This was particularly true of his acceptance of the 'Twin Track' procedure in 1995–6. In essence, what happened was that the British accepted that Mayhew's 'Washington III' demand for IRA decommissioning prior to a republican entry into talks was no longer viable: the IRA simply would not decommission. Since the purpose of British state strategy was to secure an all-inclusive settlement which stopped nationalists and unionists fighting each other and thus harming British interests, the price of upholding Washington III became too high to pay. The only question was how to wriggle off the hook of prior decommissioning without obvious humiliation and without inflaming Tory backbench sensibilities. The two Governments hit upon 'Twin Track' as the vehicle for accomplishing this.[1] It entailed setting up an international commission to arrange for the terms of decommissioning simultaneous with the start of preliminary all-party talks: in other words, parallel decommissioning as opposed to prior decommissioning. It enabled them to say they had not abandoned the principle, but simply altered the timing and the mechanism.

Trimble publicly signalled his willingness to go for a Twin Track procedure in an *Irish Times* interview on 11 November 1995. Trimble stated that despite his serious misgivings, he had never ruled out Twin Track – so long as it was linked to his assembly proposal. As Patrick Mayhew notes, if the UUP had rejected this formulation, and stuck to Washington III, the two Governments would have been in trouble, not least with the Tory backbenches; but it was Trimble's willingness to go along with it, subject to certain conditions, which convinced Mayhew that the UUP leader was ultimately serious about doing the deal.[2] Indeed, Trimble sometimes behaved as if immediate decommissioning was a tactical device which could be downplayed and then resurrected and traded for some other, more sought-after, objective. Thus he told Andrew Hunter to keep up the pressure on decommissioning, even as he sought to dilute the concept for the sake of more valuable gains.[3] His decision not to put too many eggs into the decommissioning basket at this point was also conditioned by his inner belief that ultimately the two Governments were not that serious about it anyway. It would always be subject to broader political imperatives. And in November 1995, the most urgent of those was the forthcoming visit of President Clinton to these islands.

Drafts of a formula on the Twin Track mechanism had been shuttling back and forth across the Irish Sea throughout the autumn. Now, both Governments wanted something in place before Clinton's arrival. They hit upon a three-man international commission, which would report on how disarmament should be achieved by the end of January 1996. It was to be chaired by George Mitchell, the half-Lebanese, half-Irish-American former US Senate Majority leader, who was mistrusted by many Unionists because of his ancestry. He would be 'counterbalanced' by the former Canadian Chief of the Defence Staff, John de Chastelain, a great favourite of the UUP Security spokesman, Ken Maginnis; and Harri Holkeri, a former Finnish Prime Minister. The deal was sealed at a dramatic, late-night summit on 28 November between the two heads of government in Downing Street.[4] The British were well pleased with themselves. True, the Commission further 'internationalised' the conflict – a concession that almost precipitated a Tory backbench revolt. But on the positive side, from the British Government's viewpoint, the formula was remarkably similar to that of September 1995. This, of course, had initially been accepted by the Irish and was about to be announced at a summit when the Dublin – Government was bluntly informed by the republicans that to set up a disarmament body on those terms would prompt a crisis in the peace process and so the Irish duly

pulled out of the summit. This time, things were different, and the 'Rainbow coalition' agreed to the international body.[5]

Trimble knew of the possibility of a backbench Tory revolt, and that if he had chosen to stick to Washington III he could have forced the Government to reject Mitchell. But he feared that if he did so, he would lose the battle for public opinion in England and would only have the support of *The Daily Telegraph* (in fact, decommissioning, unlike Orange parades, was one of the areas where English opinion was sympathetic to the Unionists' position, as polls subsequently showed). But he also knew that he could not sound too positive a note about Mitchell in the first instance. This was typical of his *modus operandi*: tactical, rhetorical escalations to mask a line of strategic retreat. He described the communiqué as 'shameful' and a 'fudge', and observed that 'we have had all this rushing about and a press conference at 11 p.m. last night, all that so that John Major could meet Bill Clinton and say "what a good boy I am, I've done what you told me".' As Jeffrey Donaldson observes, this was classic Trimble: he was bargaining that many Unionists would listen to the volume, rather than the content of what he said.[6] But as the day progressed, Trimble moderated his tones and did not rule out an alternative to decommissioning, if the international body came up with something acceptable.

Trimble's changing tone might have had something to do with his imminent encounter with the US President. Trimble was a particular target of Clinton's attention on this visit – again, on the principle, that if you treat him 'like a statesman', he will become one. 'And he did grow in confidence and stature, within his own community and beyond,' recalls Anthony Lake.[7] Like all presidential visits, it was organised on the principle of 'taking care' of the mythological Chicago alderman. This required photographic acknowledgement of the stature of the individual local worthy, who poses in time-honoured fashion with the Commander-in-Chief. Blair Hall and the White House advance men ensured that Trimble had a substantial measure of private time alone with the US head of state. They also took care to ensure that the form of presidential favour would be especially impressive to Trimble's community. They therefore arranged for the ultimate accolade: Trimble would take the short ride from the Whitla Hall at Queen's University to the Europa Hotel with Clinton in the presidential limousine. This was no easy thing to organise, since the limousine is the inner part of the presidential cocoon. But the Americans were determined that Trimble be seen entering and leaving the car. In time, the strategy became more elaborate still. Administration officials concluded that even Trimble's rudeness could be turned to good effect. He had to be seen to beat his breast and to win over the US Government to his position (exemplified by his extollation of Unionist work in North America in his address to the 1996 UUP party conference).[8]

Trimble was well satisfied with Clinton's visit to Belfast, which on this occasion he found very even-handed; he particularly liked Clinton's address at the neutral venue of Mackie's plant on Springfield Road, where the President told the paramilitaries that 'you are the past, your day is over' (it was not, of course, to be: whilst Clinton was there, the IRA was making preparations to end the ceasefire).[9] That night, the two men took their short drive together back to Clinton's hotel. 'He was tired, I was tired,' Trimble recalls. 'But he referred to the books I had given him in Washington. He had read them, and especially liked Ronnie Hanna's' (on American servicemen in Ulster during the Second World War). Clinton asked Trimble what he saw as the final outcome: the Unionist leader dwelled very much on Strand III of the Talks, outlining his vision for a Community of the British Isles. Trimble was thrilled with the meeting, and spoke about it to colleagues for some days afterwards. But contrary to what some believe, Clinton applied no direct pressure whatsoever on Trimble, either then or in the subsequent negotiations.[10] Clinton would never say, for example, 'don't make decommissioning a precondition to all-party talks'. It was a more subtle process than that. Rather, Clinton would call Trimble and say something along the lines of 'now what can I do for you at this stage in the process?' or 'how can we help?' Often, the mere fact of a call from the President was pressure enough to maintain the momentum of the process. Clinton's involvement was thus not a

case of rape, but of seduction. Trimble undoubtedly gave the Americans a greater understanding of his position, but this 'influence' over American policy was bought at a price: the Americans now had a purchase upon the party leader's calculations which they had never enjoyed before. Indeed, Jeffrey Donaldson recalls that Trimble's fear of forfeiting unionist 'gains' made in America was an important factor in his decision to remain in the talks after Sinn Fein's admission on easier terms in 1997.[11]

Mitchell met with Major three times during his deliberations, with Ancram more often. Mitchell recalls that 'the British repeatedly told me that David Trimble was in a difficult position politically, that there's a political division in Unionism and we've got to help him work his way through that'. Ancram, he says, 'told me that the elective route is very important to David Trimble and we want to see it in there'.[12] Trimble, obviously, made similar points.[13] Trimble's position was strengthened by a poll in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 17 January 1996, which revealed that seven out of ten respondents in Ulster wanted a new elected body as the next step towards negotiations, including two-thirds of SDLP supporters and half of Sinn Fein's constituency. But when Mitchell showed his report to the British Government, prior to publication, the results were not what they had hoped for. Mayhew's secret paper, sent to his colleagues on the Cabinet's Northern Ireland Committee on 23 January 1996, noted 'Senator Mitchell and his team were given a hard task … not surprisingly [they] have produced something of a curate's egg. It is disappointing that they have accepted, without question, that the paramilitaries will not start decommissioning in advance of negotiations.' Instead, it suggested decommissioning in parallel with negotiations. Mayhew had no problem whatsoever with the six Mitchell Principles of democracy and nonviolence, which he recognised would prove difficult for Sinn Fein (such as an end to punishment beatings) and the International Body's rejection of the notion of equivalence between security force weapons and illegally held stocks. It noted that the Body 'also recognises that an elective process, if broadly acceptable, could contribute to building confidence despite Sinn Fein and the SDLP's public opposition to unionist proposals'. And it went on 'we know that Sinn Fein expect the Body to pose some particularly hard (if not impossible) challenges for them. They also anticipate that the Body will not endorse Washington 3. Reporting indicates that Adams hopes that the British Government, by giving a premature negative reaction to the Body's failure to endorse Washington 3, will relieve Sinn Fein of all responsibility for giving a positive response to the challenges posed to them by the Body's report.'

But how would the British Government respond? Mayhew indicated there were three broad options:

'(a) Reject the Report. This would be highly damaging. HMG would be exposed. There would be stalemate. Sinn Fein – as we know they hope – would be let off the hook: The nationalists and all their sympathisers, including the Americans, would stand together in holding HMG responsible for the continued impasse.'

'(b) Accept the approach the Report canvasses. I do not believe that would be the right approach, without further consideration and development in consultation with all the parties. As it stands it provides too uncertain a basis for the necessary confidence. We need to test the response of the paramilitaries, and to take view of the parties including of course the UUP.

'(c) Take a positive line in response to the Report, in no way abandoning Washington 3, but promote a modified way ahead involving an elective process, as identified by the Report albeit rather faintly, requiring broad support within the political track as the next stage.'

Mayhew continued: 'I consider the third option offers the best way ahead. It enables us to take the initiative both in responding positively to the report and in putting forward a route to negotiations which builds on unionist ideas but will be difficult and damaging for nationalists to reject out of hand.' As for the proposals for an assembly, Mayhew noted that 'the attraction of some elective process is that it builds on unionists' own idea. The DUP, UUP, and Alliance Party have all proposed some form of time-limited elected body. They have all said they would be prepared, without prior

decommissioning, to sit down with Sinn Fein after an election for discussions … nationalists are opposed to such a body, but I believe their concerns could be met if:

– elections clearly gave direct access to substantive negotiations (ie without further insistence on prior decommissioning);

– those negotiations remained on the three-stranded basis agreed in 1991;

– there was a proper role, as in 1991, for the Irish Government in appropriate strands and the British Government in all strands;

– the negotiators themselves were drawn from the pool of elected representatives, avoiding unwieldy 90-member negotiations although the full body of elected representatives could be consulted at key points;

– HMG maintained its position that there could be no purely internal settlement.'

The document demonstrates several points. The first is the central importance of the UUP to the then Government's thinking: no UUP, no process. This was a genuine article of political faith (though it was functional rather than ideological in character) which pre-dated the parliamentary arithmetic. Rather, the Government saw it as the Realpolitik of the Northern Irish political scene. The second is how even at this stage, the Government were seeking formulae which would dilute and even divest the elective route of its content as envisaged by the UUP, to make it bearable to nationalists. That, of course, was to be a hallmark of the peace process: for every advance by one side, there would be a counterbalancing measure in the next round.

Above all, does Mayhew's paper show that the Tories 'binned Mitchell', as nationalists contended – thus showing their bad faith and tilting the balance in the IRA back to the 'militarists' as opposed to the exponents of the 'political route'? For one thing, as was demonstrated during the trial of the Docklands bombers, plans for the resumption of full-scale IRA violence began prior to Mitchell's appointment to the International Body, let alone before Major responded to his report.[14] But on the point of 'binning', the record is less clear. It was not binned in the sense of the first option canvassed by Mayhew. But nor was it accepted in toto, either. Rather, the response can be interpreted as classically Majorite fudge: make positive sounds without giving the report wholesale endorsement, and seek to play up those elements of it that most suited the Government's needs.

When Trimble was briefed by Ancram on the Mitchell Report, he shared the Government's disappointment: in particular, he found the principles and the reference to the elective route too weak. Trimble made it absolutely clear that if Washington III was abandoned without compensating gains, he would be 'blown out of the water'. To this day, he believes that his warnings were responsible for the strength and tone of Major's response to Mitchell in the Commons on 24 January 1996.[15] The strength of Major's response may also have been partly conditioned by a rough ride meted out to Mayhew at the meeting of the backbench Northern Ireland Committee when they were briefed on the report. The Irish claim they also received a faxed copy of Major's remarks an hour and a half before he was due to deliver his official response in the Commons. Fergus Finlay recalls that the DFA felt that it was written by 'John Major, the Chief Whip', looking at it from the point of view of his parliamentary majority, rather than 'John Major, the Prime Minister'. As they saw it, the assembly idea was another 'precondition', meaning 'elections first, and then we'll see'. Indeed, there was no date set for the commencement of all-party talks. Finlay says there was a huge sense of shock that this risk had been taken with nationalist Ireland in order to keep David Trimble on board (whom the DFA believed to be far stronger than he made out).[16] Major responded much along the lines which Mayhew had outlined, but his tone was more insistent; significantly, Tony Blair, the Opposition leader, maintained the bi-partisan approach and offered unqualified support (thus upsetting Labour's 'Green' wing, which often took its cue from John Hume). Trimble, who spoke third, praised Blair for his willingness to facilitate legislation on the assembly. He also tweaked Hume's tail with an aside about the degree of sympathy for the elective route amongst SDLP supporters: this may have contributed

to the Derryman's mood and, in a rare misjudgment of the mood of the Commons, he lashed out at Major and the Conservatives.[17] For the first time in years, an Ulster Unionist leader was making the political weather, and nationalist Ireland did not like it.

SIXTEEN '*Putting manners on the Brits*'

AT 7:02 p.m. on Friday, 9 February, the British and Irish official elites were assembling for pre-prandial drinks at the Foreign Office conference facility at Wilton Park. At that precise moment, a massive bomb detonated at South Quay in London's Docklands, ending the IRA ceasefire. Within minutes, the news had been relayed to Ted Barrington, the Irish ambassador to the United Kingdom. Barrington told his fellow guest, Quentin Thomas, what had occurred. The Political Director of the NIO was stunned. So, too, was Martin Mansergh, special adviser to successive leaders of Fianna Fail. The next day, he paced around the gardens, alone, seemingly in a state of shock. The attempt to draw this generation of republicans into constitutional politics – one of his life's main goals – appeared for the time being to be in ruins. According to Thomas, the two men had spoken a few minutes earlier, when Mansergh had expressed optimism about the future.[1] Meanwhile, John Major was in his Huntingdon constituency when the news came to the No. 10 switchboard at 6 p.m. that RTE had received a call from the IRA stating that the ceasefire was over: the codeword was genuine.[2] The White House rang shortly thereafter to say that Adams had called with the same information. According to Anthony Lake, Clinton's National Security Adviser, the Sinn Fein President was 'elliptical and sounded concerned. But we didn't know what he meant. And I still don't know whether he knew what was going to happen.'[3] At Stormont House in Belfast, Sir John Wheeler, the Security Minister at the NIO, was making his way through paperwork: it was his turn to be the duty minister. His Private Secretary immediately came on the line with the news. Wheeler stayed up till 1 a.m., reintroducing many of the security measures withdrawn after the ceasefire began.[4]

But despite the shock of the South Quay bomb, the British state did not alter course: there was no fundamental reappraisal of the nature of republicanism. Wheeler says that at no stage did the Government even contemplate the notion that there should be anything other than an inclusive settlement so long as the IRA was on some kind of ceasefire; or, as Cranborne puts it, 'it was treated almost as though it was a *cri de coeur* from a delinquent teenager rather than a full-scale assault on British democracy'.[5] Andrew Hunter recorded in his diary of 21 February 1996 that even as Mayhew expected another IRA 'spectacular' on the mainland, the Government still were looking for signals that some kind of process was possible. Indeed, one senior NIO official was shocked within weeks of the blast to find the Government negotiating again with Sinn Fein: he concluded from this episode that if even a Conservative ministry with a narrow majority could do such a thing, then a serious question mark had been placed against the viability of the Union. The official was therefore prepared to toy with the idea that negotiating a federal Ireland was a possible means of 'getting the Provisionals off the Prods' backs' and to minimise their leverage over the system.[6]

John Steele, the then Director of Security in the NIO, states that as he saw it, 'the IRA were cracking the whip. They were demonstrating that bad things could happen. But the break in the ceasefire was a carefully calculated signal, not a wild lashing-out.' Steele recalls that even Wheeler – the minister most sceptical of the IRA – only wanted to respond with enhanced intelligence gathering. The Security Minister suggested neither the reintroduction of internment, nor did he advocate letting the SAS use lethal force.[7] Nor were the prisoners released during the first ceasefire recalled, and the border was not sealed. Mary Holland correctly observed the 'surprisingly mild' response to that atrocity. 'We heard almost nothing from the British side about the spirit of the bulldog breed,' she noted in her *Irish Times* column of 29 February.

The British were convinced that such measures would prove counterproductive at home and abroad. At home, they concluded, it could be a recruiting sergeant for the IRA. Abroad, principally in America, old-style counter-insurgency was deemed diplomatically too costly – even if set in the

context of an overall 'carrot and stick' approach to the republican movement. Thus, Cranborne also had no purist scruples about offering the republicans the 'carrot' of political development – provided they were prepared to abandon armed struggle entirely. But he also believed that the political forms of the 'stick' were not being employed properly either. He therefore sent Major 'an intemperate memo' suggesting that the Government was totally inactive in trying to defeat the IRA. Cranborne wanted 'to put our money where our mouth is and appoint a counter-terrorist supremo in the Cabinet in charge of winning it on all levels'. This supremo would be responsible to the Prime Minister, special Cabinet committee and the Intelligence and Security Committee of the Commons. Cranborne knew that the 'mandarinate' would oppose his plans, on the grounds that they would cut across existing lines of departmental reponsibility and chains of command in the security forces and the police (although the creation of the National Criminal Intelligence Service had shown that there was scope for innovation). Major was deeply uncomfortable with the idea and the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Butler, shot it down completely. Butler and Major met with Cranborne and instead offered improved intelligence coordination but no radical overhaul.[8]

Curiously, for all his rhetoric, David Trimble did not really push a return to an old-style security crackdown; nor, even then, did he think that the republican movement would necessarily be beyond the pale in the future. Mayhew notes that Trimble did not ask the Government to scrap the 'peace process' as a concept now clearly based upon false premises. 'I think he always had it in his mind to do something more than spend the whole of his political career leading a minority party in the Commons,' says the former Secretary of State.[9] Fergus Finlay also states that Trimble never asked the Irish Government to endorse the concept of a deal without Sinn Fein: without them, Finlay believes, the UUP leader could never realise his ambition to be Prime Minister of a stable Northern Ireland.[10] Again, this was partly because Trimble felt that the British state from the outset was not going to place republicans beyond the pale, and would work tirelessly to restore the broken ceasefire. Indeed, Major told Trimble that the decision to return to armed struggle was taken by a curiously informal grouping of 20 senior republicans and not through the more 'formal' mechanisms of the IRA Army Council; the actual operation was run by a very tight group based in the Republic, not involving Northern Irish 'assets', though some of the participants were northerners. Trimble drew the inference that the South Quay bomb may not have been the settled view of the whole organisation. Indeed, he says that there are many unanswered questions about the role of Adams and McGuinness in that bombing.[11] On 1 March 1996, Trimble told the *Irish News* that if there were to be an IRA ceasefire which means 'a change of heart' he would not want to create 'unnecessary obstacles about Sinn Fein's involvement in all-party talks'. All he asked for was adherence to the terms of the Mitchell Report. 'Mitchell does talk about parallel decommissioning, not prior decommissioning. If we had reasonable commitments we would be able to move in that direction.'[12]

In his first lengthy disquisition on the end of the ceasefire, published in *The Daily Telegraph* on Monday February 12, Trimble stated that the purpose of the bombing was to stop elections to his proposed body from taking place. This later turned out to be unlikely, for the simple reason that the IRA's decision to return to 'war' was taken well before the Forum idea was accepted by the British Government. But whatever the real reasons for their actions, it was certainly inept of Trimble to identify this as a cause of the bomb: it implicitly validated the nationalist notion that Major's actions in 'binning' Mitchell and alighting upon the glancing reference in the International Body's Report to the elective route had in some way precipitated South Quay. But did the IRA resumption of violence work from their perspective? Many in nationalist Ireland, and not a few Unionists, certainly believed as much, pointing to the announcement of all-party talks made on 28 February 1996 at Downing Street by Major and Bruton.[13] Bruton disagrees with this notion, observing that the decision to set a date for such negotiations had been taken in principle when the British Government accepted Mitchell as Commission chairman in November 1994. Bruton also notes that the log-jam on prior

decommissioning had already been broken by the elective route of the Forum: he feels that Trimble received insufficient credit for this idea.[14] But the manner and timing of the announcement of a date for all-party talks made it appear as though the Provisionals had 'put manners' on the two Governments.

Trimble decided straight after the South Quay bomb to head to the United States to brief Clinton on what had happened, taking the advice of John Holmes, the Prime Minister's new Private Secretary before he did so. When Ken Maginnis and Donaldson arrived at the White House on Monday 12 February at 2 p.m. they found a President who seemed ill at ease. Trimble said he was surprised at the timing of the bomb. 'Yeah, it was stupid, damned stupid,' lamented the Commander-in-Chief, referring to the fact that the blast took place at the very moment that there was a chance of all-party talks. But Trimble says he never asked Clinton to place the Provisionals beyond the pale at this moment: 'They [the US Administration] know best what leverage they have,' Trimble explains. 'There is no point in telling them what to do.'[15] He shares the conventional British wisdom that this blast came as a tremendous shock to Clinton, thus prompting a reappraisal of White House attitudes towards Northern Ireland. In fact, Trimble's recollection is not quite correct: he asked that Adams' visa to the USA be rescinded and that there be a ban on fundraising by Sinn Fein, but both these options were rejected by the US Administration. Mike McCurry, the White House spokesman, rejected this reasoning, stating that 'Mr Adams is an important leader in this process because he speaks for Sinn Fein. It is hard to imagine a process making progress towards peace without the active involvement of Sinn Fein.' Partly, the White House's unwillingness to place Adams beyond the pale can be ascribed to the fact that the British Government did not want to do so, either: they favoured Adams' admission to the USA and for the doors then partially to close on him as a sign of displeasure as exemplified by the Sinn Fein president's exclusion from the annual St Patrick's Day party at the White House. Trimble did, however, attend a dinner of the American-Ireland Fund on St Patrick's Day at which Gerry Adams was present – another small breach in the wall of taboos surrounding the republicans (Trimble had initially not wanted to attend, but feared the consequences of 'exclusion' if he did not turn up).[16]

Once the immediate shock of the South Quay bomb had passed, the attention of the political classes on both sides of the Irish Sea moved to the form of election to the new assembly and to the format of the talks. Trimble and the UUP did relatively badly in this. Indeed, Andrew Hunter noted in his diary of 21 February 1996 that 'Secretary of State [Mayhew] worried about the case for elections to a Peace Convention. Believes it is difficult to find solid, objective justification. Michael Ancram and I argued that elections justified on pragmatic grounds; no other way to get Unionists into all-party negotiations … Not much optimism in our discussion. Implicit agreement that PM overegged elections in his Mitchell response.' Yet Trimble was himself partly responsible for affording the British Government the space which it needed to make the elective process 'work' vis-à-vis nationalist Ireland. As early as 24 December 1995, he had suggested in a *Sunday Tribune* interview that the assembly 'could take evidence from the Republic, from the Irish Government and other interested bodies' about possible North-South cooperation. The new body would not be a recreation of Stormont, he noted, but rather would be time-limited to two years (though it was a point which he never had much success in conveying). Trimble's proposal was very considerably short of joint management of the talks but Irish offficials approvingly noted the UUP leader's flexibility. Later, Trimble indicated that if the questions were framed in the right way and if it was clear that it was not an island-wide referendum, he might under certain circumstances back John Hume's idea of a plebiscite in both jurisdictions simultaneous with an assembly election (concerning the right of the Irish people, north and south, to self-determination and their right also to determine the method whereby that might be achieved). There was, of course, another imperative behind his need to obtain an elective process: Trimble says that if he won an election, he would greatly increase his authority within the UUP.[17]

Trimble's position within the UUP helps to explain his concerns about nationalist successes in diluting the Assembly idea: he was worried at least as much by the appearance as the substance. In a memorandum to Major, dated 22 February, entitled 'UU outline talks scheme', Trimble stated that there was some limited flexibility on when the Provisionals could begin decommissioning – effectively a green light to the British Government considering the other pressures on them. But on the presentation, there was no such hint of flexibility: 'The announcement of the elections for the Peace Convention and the associated talks should avoid the usual Anglo/Irish style, i.e. it should avoid the language typical of Stormont Castle/Iveagh House joint productions,' stated Trimble. 'There should be no references to the two Governments jointly sponsoring or jointly managing the Peace Convention or the talks.' In the end, the Ground Rules for Substantive All-Party Negotiations paper produced by the British Government in March 1996 gave precisely that impression: to the intense annoyance of Trimble, it was sent out while the Unionist leader was in America and suggested that the Irish Government be the joint coordinator of the negotiations.[18]

The crucial next step of setting a date for all-party talks was complicated – and dramatically so – by the Government's parlous position in the Commons. Lord Justice Scott's report on the Arms for Iraq affair was scheduled for debate on 26 February 1996. If the Government was defeated in the House, it would trigger a vote of no confidence. Not all Conservative MPs were solidly behind the Government and attention again focused on the Unionists' intentions. From the Conservative Government's viewpoint, the initial signs were not hopeful. In an interview with Roy Hattersley, Trimble had told the former Labour deputy leader that he was appalled by the use of Public Interest Immunity certificates (the gagging orders produced by the Attorney General, Sir Nicholas Lyell, which were said to have prevented ministers from revealing information on national security grounds that would have shown that the defendants in the Matrix Churchill case had acted with the state's approval).[19] He was thus less worried by the Government's Iraq policy than by the fact that innocent men might have gone to jail for *raison d'état.* No less important, the former law lecturer believed that Lyell gave poor legal advice – and had stated as much as early as the original debate on the Arms for Iraq affair in November 1992.[20]

But Trimble could not now afford the indulgence of thinking like some independent-minded backbencher. The UUP's stance would have also to be based upon the Realpolitik of Unionist interests. It was a close call. On the one hand, Trimble was dubious about how much he could extract from a weak Government. 'Major can't deliver much on his own,' he told Hattersley. '[I would prefer] a strong Government with the confidence to take difficult decisions.' Hattersley stated that Trimble did not believe that such a Government existed then. 'Ireland [sic] cannot go right for Major in any big way before the election,' predicted the UUP leader. 'It can only go wrong. That means that we are likely to have another year of stalemate.'[21] On the other hand, although Trimble may then have felt that the prospect of New Labour was more congenial, there was still much short-term business to be transacted with the Conservatives (whom Labour would broadly back as part of the bi-partisan approach towards Northern Ireland). The most immediate item on the agenda was the method of election to the new body proposed by Trimble: he feared that the Government was at this stage leaning to a variant of the DUP's preferred system (which, for a variety of complex reasons, also benefited the SDLP and thus mitigated nationalist hostility). The Paisleyites wanted a Province-wide poll based on a party list system, as in the European Parliamentary elections, which was well suited to maximising the large personal vote of their chief who would then barn-storm the Province. The Ulster Unionists, by contrast, wanted a single transferable vote in the constituencies, which would maximise their greater strength in depth further down the ticket. If a Paisley-friendly system emerged, it could conceivably destroy Trimble and inflict a serious blow to his conception of New Unionism. His fears of a deal were confirmed when one colleague heard from Paisley himself that the three DUP MPs would not enter either lobby for the Scott vote; indeed, Paisley's deputy, Peter Robinson, recalls

that the Government communicated via NIO civil servants that an electoral system more in line with DUP needs would be introduced – though, as he points out, the linkage was hinted at rather than being 'crudely made'.[22] Trimble believes that the NIO has quietly favoured the DUP over the years as a means of weakening the solidarity of the Unionist bloc and specifically of its largest component, the UUP. But perhaps of greatest significance to the Government was the fact that the DUP might potentially participate in such a representative institution with Sinn Fein at some point in the future – assuming there was a ceasefire and that republicans would then take up their seats in such a body. Quentin Thomas had been impressed from the early to mid-1990s by the point made to him by senior DUP politicians that they could not voluntarily agree to share power with nationalists; but, they added, if such an outcome was forced upon them and sanctioned by a particular kind of electoral process (as on District Councils, where committee chairmanships were shared out proportionately according to party strengths) then the DUP would not decline to fulfil their democratic mandate and take up their allocated slots.[23]

But Trimble still had to treat with the Tories, and examine what, if anything, they had to offer. If they offered something very tempting (approximating to the UUP's preferred system of election) Trimble could not possibly say no. But if the Government made no such offer, Trimble might as well stick to his principles and obtain a bit of credit with an increasingly powerful Opposition. What happened next remains a matter of dispute between the Tories and the Ulster Unionists. To this day, Conservatives assert that Trimble appproached the Government to make a deal; Trimble says that on each occasion, he was approached by the Government. Trimble met twice with Major on the night of the vote, in the Prime Minister's room behind the Speaker's chair. On the first occasion, between 6 and 7 p.m., Major urged Trimble to support the Government. Trimble explained to Major that he was in some difficulty because he had reason to believe that the Prime Minister had done a deal with the DUP: irrespective of the merits of the Scott case, he would look 'bloody stupid' if he supported the Government that week and then a week or so later an election system emerged that ruined his party's chances. 'I'm not in the business of damaging the UUP,' replied Major.[24] But Trimble noted that the Prime Minister did not contradict his assertion that there was some understanding with the DUP. Major added that he could not say what kind of electoral system he would deliver since he had not told anyone else and could not have it said that he had preferred one party over all others. On the second occasion that night, Trimble says he was approached in the tea room by the Conservative Party chairman, Brian Mawhinney. 'The boss wants to see you,' Trimble recalls Mawhinney saying.[25] Mawhinney, by contrast, says that he asked Trimble in the course of a more general conversation if he wanted to see the Prime Minister. In other words, states Mawhinney, he gave Trimble the option of speaking to Major and the UUP leader chose to make the effort to avail himself of it.[26] When Trimble arrived, Major was in the room with Michael Heseltine; the chief whip, Alistair Goodlad; and Mawhinney. Trimble expected Major to say something, but he did nothing of the kind. Instead, the two just sat there and looked at each other. One witness to the scene recalls Major stating that 'I will not do a deal with you' and Trimble replying that 'I will not ask you to do a deal': it was as if both men were waiting for the other to make the first move.[27]

Trimble says he did not believe the Government's assertion that there could be no deal. He thinks they were, indeed, in the market for trading policy concessions in exchange for UUP support. Rather, it was simply not their first choice to rely on the UUP, especially after the furore in nationalist Ireland over the British response to the Mitchell report. They needed to show that they could not be bought specifically by the UUP. A DUP abstention was, by contrast, somehow a less explicit assertion of the Unionist family's 'hold' over the Government than a UUP vote for the Government. The support of the DUP was arithmetically less valuable and ideologically less predictable than a link-up with the UUP (and they were less close to the Tory backbenches than the UUP). Thus, in a peculiar way, the DUP was in these circumstances less threatening to nationalists. Specifically, a

deal with the DUP afforded certain advantages to the SDLP: if enough votes haemorrhaged from the UUP to the DUP, the SDLP might receive the huge boost of becoming the largest party in Northern Ireland. The DUP and SDLP also had strong personalities at the top of the ticket, namely Paisley and Hume. But ministers still entertained doubts over the reliability and deliverability of the DUP. Because the Government was not sure until the last minute what the DUP might leak, it kept its options open. The likeliest explanation of what happened is that once it thought it had the DUP in the bag, Major et al. sought to make a virtue out of not doing a deal with the UUP.

Trimble next remembers coming out into the division lobby after the vote – in which the Government scraped by with 320 votes to 319 – to be met by a torrent of abuse from the Tories.[28] This, he suspected, emanated from Mayhew who had alleged that the UUP leader sought to blackmail the Government. Mayhew never felt comfortable with political horse-trading (he himself admits that Michael Ancram was much more comfortable doing such deals) and his distaste for the political arts emerged that night. According to Mayhew, he was crossing the lobby when he was met by the BBC's Jon Sopel. 'What do you think of the result?' asked Sopel. Mayhew replied: 'Delighted, and the more so because the Unionists tried to do a deal and the Prime Minister sent them away and we've still won.' Mayhew says he thought the conversation was on lobby terms but claims that within minutes his remarks were broadcast to the nation; Sopel denies that Mayhew's name was used, since as an experienced lobby journalist, he would have known better. Whatever the precise sequence of events, Trimble was enraged and shortly thereafter went up to Mayhew, scarlet with anger. 'It was a hostile act,' fumed the UUP leader. 'It was a hostile act to try and bring us down,' retorted Mayhew.[29] Major was even angrier over the events of that evening. Andrew Hunter recorded in his diary that he twice met the Prime Minister in the division lobby: according to the backbencher, he felt 'betrayed; furious; he had done so much for them; UUP had tried to make a deal; he would never play party games over peace. What deal [was offered]? About elections.' Later, Hunter met Ancram in the smoking room, where he was nursing a large whisky. According to Ancram, Trimble had offered a constituency-based electoral system, elections before proximity talks and no guarantee that such elections would lead into proximity talks. On the next day, Mayhew contacted Hunter whilst the latter was at Heathrow's Terminal 1, on one of innumerable semi-official missions both to Ulster and the Republic which he undertook during these years. According to Hunter's account, Mayhew told him that the UUP had offered one year's support in exchange for their tariff of demands, and had given the British Government one and a half hours in which to think about it. Indeed, when Hunter met Trimble in the lobby, he remembers telling Trimble that he had blown it. Trimble did not need to make the offer which he did, asserted Hunter, not least because Hunter believed that in conjunction with other backbench supporters he could guarantee Unionist interests. In so doing, the Tory said, Trimble had demeaned himself. Moroever, he had soured relationships with backbenchers who might lose their seats in any elections precipitated by the UUP voting with the Opposition. It was a further illustration of the point that for all of the complaints of nationalist Ireland, Trimble's hold over the Government was in practice severely circumscribed (or at least was much more complex than that simplistic analysis suggested).

But the mess illustrates another point: what was Trimble playing at all through the 1995–7 period? What was his strategy vis-à-vis the mainland parties, and from whom did he really think he could obtain the best deal for Unionism? The evidence is contradictory. According to Paddy Ashdown's diary for 27 February 1996, Trimble said that he would have abstained in a no-confidence vote that might have followed any Government defeat on Scott and added "'we hate this crew and the sooner they go, the better'". Ashdown then commented: 'The old line. I wonder if he means it?'[30] But Woodrow Wyatt's diary for 27 November 1996 records a *Spectator* party at the Savoy, at which Trimble told him that 'it was very much to Major's credit that he'd managed to get some kind of peace going for so long. "I make a face every now and again for the hell of it, but yes, we'll back

him [Major]. He'll be quite safe until he wants to call an election.'"[31] Trimble says that the situation altered sharply in the months between these two conversations: Labour knew by November 1996 that it was on for a big victory and therefore had no need of Trimble to bring down the Conservative Government quickly, lest the situation change to the Tories' advantage.[32] The implication is that he might as well have continued to enjoy a few months more of limited leverage. These contrasting remarks to Ashdown and Wyatt illustrate two other points: the obvious desire that both men report back to Blair and Major, respectively, things that each party leader would want to hear. Indeed, as Paddy Ashdown noted in a conversation with Blair on Remembrance Sunday 1995: 'I told [Blair] that I had had a brief chat with Trimble at the Cenotaph earlier in the day, when Trimble had made it clear that he couldn't support the Government. Blair said "but can we trust him?" I said I thought we could, though it was the nature of Irish [sic] politicians to face both ways at once, as it was necessary for their survival.'[33] These contrasting bits of evidence do, however, also show that Trimble had no detailed, preordained game plan and may well have been making it up as he went along.

Indeed, all sides played at horse-trading of this kind during the latter part of the Conservative Government's life. John Bruton sought to reduce Major's dependence on the UUP by volunteering to ask John Hume to vote for the Government in the debate (Bruton felt that there were echoes here of the possibilities opened up by Parnell's flirtation with the Tories in 1885 – a strategy predicated upon the notion of not putting all of the Irish party's eggs into the Liberal basket. Parnell in the end returned to the Liberal fold when the Grand Old Man outbid the Tories by converting to Home Rule in the following year).[34] The leader of Fianna Fail, Bertie Ahern, attacked Bruton and asserted that it was not the role of the Taoiseach 'to be helping the British Government as an assistant whip hours before the vote'; but Bruton's effort was unsuccessful in its own terms, for Hume would not break with his Labour colleagues in the Socialist International. As an exercise in intergovernmental diplomacy, though, Bruton's intervention was more successful. It contributed to the attainment of a key Irish objective in the summit communiqué of 28 February, which the British withheld until almost the last moment: the start of all-party talks on 10 June 1996 (which would only become inclusive upon the restoration of an IRA ceasefire). The summit communiqué also stated, inter alia, that political parties would be asked to attend proximity talks to consider the structure, format and agenda for the all-party talks, and discussions would be held finally to determine the form of elections that would lead to the all-party talks. Moreover, there was no mention in the communiqué of prior decommissioning.

Trimble now acknowledges that the elections lost a lot of their value to the UUP. In part, he says, this was because of 'collateral damage' which he suffered as a result of the bruised relations with the British Government after the Scott vote (though he feels that nationalist pressure would have eroded much of the UUP's advantage, anyhow). He now concedes that his own inexperience at the time played a part in these reverses and that his own proposal should have made clearer the link between the elected body and the talks. Trimble had in mind something like the Convention of 1975–6, which included serious debates but also had the potential for informal negotiations arising in the corridors. He was alerted to this problem when he met Mo Mowlam, the Labour spokesman on Northern Ireland, in the corridors at Westminster and she informed him that the linkage between the elective body and the talks was not sufficiently explicit. 'I don't need to make it explicit – it'll happen organically,' Trimble told her. However, he says he underrated nationalist 'paranoia' about the Unionists 'pocketing' the concession of what the Irish saw as a 'new Stormont' – and, having obtained what they wanted, then stalling on the negotiations. The UUP would thus have regained something akin to their Parliament, whilst nationalists would not have obtained their cross-border bodies and other reforms.[35] Whatever the alleged diplomatic shortcomings in the presentation of Trimble's election proposal, the fact remains that both he and the DUP pointedly stayed away from multilateral consultations about the format of the forthcoming talks, which began in the following week at Stormont. In the following weeks, recalls one senior official of the period, much complex

mathematical work was done in the NIO to come up with the 'correct' electoral system. He believed they needed a system that satisfied the UUP entitlement to a majority of the majority community (though they did not in the end, manage it) but which would at the same time give due weight to the DUP and the smaller loyalist paramilitary parties. At the same time, the NIO obviously also had to consider the effects of any electoral system on the internal balance of forces within the nationalist community. Could they avoid handing a victory to Sinn Fein against the ageing SDLP – and in any case was that so wrong, they asked themselves? After all, senior NIO officials reasoned, the more that Sinn Fein expanded and stretched in support, the more diluted their ideology would necessarily become and they would be unwilling to lose new-found supporters by returning to full-scale violence. Over the long term, the NIO reasoned, this would help Adams and those who wished to go down a more political route. It would enable them to show to the apolitical militarists that the electoral route could yield greater gains than the armed struggle of the old variety. In consequence, the British came up with a hybrid of the constituency and list systems: electors voted for parties rather than people in the new, expanded number of eighteen constituencies, each of which returned five representatives. Two extra seats would be allocated to each of the ten most successful parties in the Province as a whole, thus guaranteeing representation to the small loyalist parties with minuscule levels of public support. The outcome of these deliberations was, in the view of one senior official, 'the least democratic election of all time. It shows that Governments can tweak voting systems and how careful you have to be with reforming the mainland system.' In the background all of the time were the Americans: Anthony Lake recalls that he would have long discussions with Sir John Kerr in his office in the West Wing of the White House to determine what kind of electoral method would be used for the elective route (that is, Single Transferable Vote, etc).[36] It was a remarkable illustration of the degree of American interference in internal United Kingdom matters.

Indeed, Brian Feeney, a former SDLP councillor in Belfast with a regular column in the *Irish News*, spotted the irony in the system which was set up for the elective route into negotiations. It was, he asserted, the most un-British, un-unionist formula ever devised. 'Professor Umberto Eco, who knows about these things, says all structures in the west display a Protestant or a Catholic mentality. If Protestantism is all about individualism the list system is fundamentally the opposite of a political system where people vote for individuals rather than parties. This political Protestantism reaches its peak in the USA where Democrats and Republicans do their own thing on the floor of the Senate … but thanks to David Trimble, we've got a Catholic continental system where the individual is subsumed within the party discipline and dogma. Only Sinn Fein has adopted an innovative approach. They have fielded candidates from the Republic who will be elected. Also in a number of areas they have placed at the top of the list prominent figures who have been convicted of high profile IRA activities. No doubt these men unambiguously support the armed struggle. They will certainly be elected. So thanks to David Trimble and his political acumen, the pro-Union vote will be divided a dozen ways and more overtly republican candidates than ever before will be elected under a system as mysterious as a papal conclave. Take a bow, David.'[37] Feeney was being customarily bilious about the Unionist leader (whom he nicknamed the 'Portadown Prancer' after Drumcree I) and it was undoubtedly unfair of him to blame Trimble for the kind of system adopted. But Feeney's observations were invested with one underlying truth. Like so many of Trimble's victories, the elective route into negotiations blew up in his face. Thus, Trimble reproved Robert McCartney for splitting the Unionist vote in the 1996 Forum elections. McCartney replied that but for Trimble's elective route into negotiations – which required that anyone who wanted to be at the talks table had to stand for the contest – he would never have set up the United Kingdom Unionist Party (prior to that, McCartney sat as an independent Westminster MP for North Down but had no Province-wide party organisation).[38]

Trimble duly sought to make the best he could of his unexpectedly bad hand in the run-up to the elections, which were to be held on 30 May 1996. As ever, he set a cracking pace. Elaine

McClure of the Ulster Society recalls that Trimble was perhaps 'the only Unionist leader with the guts to canvass the main street of Newry [an overwhelmingly nationalist town]. There was always an excuse for not doing the town, such as the top part of Hill Street. But he took his red, white and blue bus there, and it was a huge psychological boost to those remaining Unionists.'[39] But Trimble's aim was also to reach out to those members of the Catholic community who were not so staunchly nationalistic. The encouragement which Trimble gave to the candidature of John Gorman typified this approach. Gorman was a third-generation Catholic Unionist: his maternal grandfather, Dr Patrick O'Brien, had been a close friend of the moderate southern Irish Unionist, the Earl of Midleton, at the start of the century. Gorman's father, a native of Co. Tipperary, had served as a major in the Royal Horse Artillery Irish Guards in the First World War and was thereafter the last Adjutant of the the Royal Irish Constabulary. He moved north – as loyal Catholics and Protestants from the south did after Partition – and served as County Inspector of the new Royal Ulster Constabulary for Londonderry and Fermanagh. Later, he became deputy head of the RUC mission in Greece during the Civil War in the Hellenes in the mid to late 1940s. Gorman himself fought in the Second Battalion, the Irish Guards, in the Second World War, winning a Military Cross in Normandy; the Intelligence Officer of the Battalion was Captain Terence O'Neill, later the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland from 1963–9. After the war, Gorman joined the RUC, becoming District Inspector for Ballymoney, Co. Antrim. Gorman and Trimble came to know each other when Gorman subsequently headed the Housing Executive, and Trimble was the foremost authority in the Province on housing law. Gorman, who would have become actively involved in Unionist politics much sooner than he did but for the Orange link, was precisely the kind of man whom Trimble admired. For he embodied the diversity of traditions and allegiances that had been obscured by 30 years of Troubles. Trimble further addressed this topic in his speech at the 1996 UUP conference in Ballymena, Co. Antrim, when he extolled the Catholic Unionist tradition as personified by Sir Denis Henry, who was present at the creation of the Ulster Unionist Council in 1905, represented South Londonderry at Westminster, and was subsequently appointed as the first Lord Chief Justice of the newly created Province of Northern Ireland.[40] Forge an enduring settlement, believed Trimble, and such allegiances could reassert themselves. Trimble later recommended that Gorman become the chairman of the elected Forum, and he received a knighthood in 1998.[41]

Gorman was not the only Catholic whom Trimble sought to recruit to be a flag-bearer for the Unionist cause. He endorsed the appointment of Patricia Campbell, the daughter of an RUC constable, as organiser of the Unionist Information Office in London. This was set up in 1996 under the aegis of David Burnside, which held twice-yearly receptions and occasional briefings for journalists. Under Burnside's tutelage, she edited a magazine, *The Unionist*, brimming with anodyne articles. These were accompanied by pictures of kittens and puppies frolicking with each other, bearing such italicised captions as *Reconciliation is possible* and a cover photograph of a cherubic sleeping new-born in swaddling clothes headlined *Let's keep The Peace For Their Tomorrow*.[42] It prompted some mirth in journalistic circles that so ruthless an operator as Burnside (affectionately known in the PR trade as 'the kneecapper') should produce such sentimental copy; a more serious point was that none of these treacly images did anything to increase any real understanding of the Unionist cause. Even when Unionists finally grasped the importance of PR, they could only rise to the challenge by coming up with images that erased their distinctive message almost completely. Nonetheless, Campbell's appointment – like that of Gorman – incarnated a mood of change that seemed to abound in certain Unionist circles during this period. Indeed, keen as Trimble was for more women candidates, only seven were actually selected for the Forum elections (out of a total of 78) – of whom only one was successful.[43] Selecting standard bearers remained a local affair, where Trimble's personal preferences counted for little. 'New Unionism' was for much of the time a glimmer in his eye, rather than a reality.

Trimble was especially exercised during the campaign by the remarks of the Tanaiste's special adviser, Fergus Finlay, on Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme. Finlay stated that talks without Sinn Fein were 'not worth a penny candle'.[44] Bruton was also furious, because he believed the remark took the heat off the Provisionals.[45] Why, he wondered, should the IRA call a new and this time more credible ceasefire if they knew that the process could not go on without them? The only way in which republicans would do so was if they feared that there was a possibility that a settlement could be achieved by the constitutional parties alone. Finlay concedes that the remark enabled Unionists to say that his boss was surrounded by fellow travellers of the Provisionals. From an Irish prespective, Finlay's remarks had 'reactionary consequences', as the Soviets used to call them. Finlay remembers Sean O hUiginn's regretful remark: 'True diplomats learn early in their careers that the truth is sometimes best served by silence,' opined the head of Anglo-Irish affairs. As far as O hUiginn was concerned, the problem with Finlay's remark lay with its overly stark presentation, and not its substance.[46] The Provisionals could now sit pretty and wait for the two Governments to come to them. The British were doing this anyhow, as exemplified by Major's *Irish Times* article of 16 May 1996, in which he further diluted the Tories' demands on when decommissioning would have to be carried out. But keen as Major was to obtain a renewed IRA ceasefire, he could never move quickly enough for the Provisionals.

Trimble, though, was also in trouble. The novel electoral system, just as he had predicted, would 'shred' the Unionist vote: a poster appeared in the closing days of the campaign depicting a splintered Union flag, with the words 'Division and Weakness, Or Unity and Strength'. Such fracturing also occurred in his own party: at the UUP manifesto launch at Belfast's Laganside, the late John Oliver recalled Martin Smyth looking round at the large numbers of outsiders whom Trimble had brought in and remarking: 'You'd have thought this was the Ulster Society campaign, not the UUP campaign.'[47] Smyth's observation pointed up the deep unease about Trimble within the UUP, which long predated the Belfast Agreement: namely, that as a latecomer to the party, he was not really one of the UUP tribe. For his part, Trimble also found the party organisation at the grassroots to be in worse condition than he imagined. His fears were vindicated. In the 30 May elections, on a 64.5% turnout, the UUP remained the largest single party, with 24.2% of the vote, winning 30 seats; the DUP won 18.8% and 24 seats; the SDLP won 21.4% and 21 seats; Sinn Fein won 15.5% and 17 seats. Two points were significant: first, despite the IRA's return to violence, Sinn Fein turned in their best performance ever, garnering 116,377 votes. Trimble was in no doubt as to the reason for the republicans' success. In a lengthy interview with the editor of the Dublin *Sunday Independent*, Aengus Fanning, Trimble observed that many SDLP voters had crossed over to Sinn Fein under the illusion that it would be a vote for Adams' peace strategy and against republican militarists. These nationalists had succumbed to this logic because 'the boundary lines between Sinn Fein and the SDLP', he believed, 'had been blurred by the Hume-Adams pact'.[48]

The other significant aspect of the Forum elections of 1996 was the shredding of the Unionist vote, which fell 5.2% on the 1993 council elections result. Consequently, the UUP won under 50% of the vote of the majority community; the DUP took 18.8% of the total; McCartney's UKUP took 3.6% for three seats; whilst the PUP and UDP took 3.5% and 2.2% respectively. Neither of the latter two would have won seats in the main constituency system, but they squeezed in under the Province-wide top-up system which guaranteed two extra places to the ten largest parties.[49] Moreover, the UUP's failure to win half the vote meant that when the rules for the talks were finally settled, the UUP was dependent upon at least one other unionist grouping to push through its policies (under the rule of 'sufficient consensus', any important proposal had to win the support of the representatives of over half of each communal bloc). This proved crucial especially after September 1997, when the DUP and UKUP walked out. For it left the UUP dependent upon the smaller loyalist paramilitary parties, who had their own objectives on such issues as prisoner releases that were not necessarily congenial

to constitutional unionists. This played a part in forcing Trimble to acquiesce in those demands on Good Friday 1998. Trimble believes that Ancram was very pleased with these results, because they increased the divisions within Unionism. It had long been the policy of the British state, Trimble contends, to wear down the Unionist family, so as to make them more pliant to the broader needs of central government. Ancram disagrees with this analysis: it would have been far easier, he says, if Trimble had won a majority, thus diminishing his worries about Paisley and McCartney (who were then still in the talks).[50] But whoever is right, what is beyond dispute is that the Forum election was the first of a series of poor UUP electoral results under Trimble's leadership – though the decline long predated his ascent to the top job.

SEVENTEEN *The Yanks are coming*

THE days following the Forum elections presented Trimble with the severest test yet of his leadership. For it was in the fortnight leading up to 10 June 1996 – the date set by the two Governments for the commencement of all-party negotiations – that the pattern of the talks was settled. Ever since the South Quay bomb, despite sometimes fierce disagreements between the two sets of negotiators, intergovernmental policy had been drifting in a pro-nationalist direction. This included the terms of entry into negotiations; when and how decommissioning would be dealt with; and, most dramatically, the issue of who would chair the talks and his remit. Unionists understood the reasons for this slippage only too well. Under ceaseless prodding from the Irish, the British were always tempted by the idea that they could win the prize of a second ceasefire. The nature of the game, as ever, was to give republicans enough whilst not losing the Unionists. But how would Trimble respond? If presented with a *fait accompli* by the two Governments, would he bring the current process to its knees – by withholding the consent of the largest Unionist party? Or would he break with his brethren in the DUP and UKUP, who adamantly opposed any resiling from earlier commitments, to keep the current talks process alive? No one knew for sure on what terms the UUP leader would settle. And as Viscount Cranborne observes, no one he has ever dealt with in public life plays his cards closer to his chest.[1]

The UUP's public position, as outlined by Trimble in the *Irish Times* on 29 May 1996, was simple enough. He referred back to the Major – Bruton communiqué of 28 February 1996, in which they stated that the opening session of talks would deal with first a 'total and absolute commitment' to the Mitchell principles of non-violence. In accepting this report, Trimble noted, the UUP had acknowledged the validity of the Mitchell compromise – that there had to be a decommissioning in parallel to negotiations. The commitments would have to be given immediately and honoured shortly thereafter – and not 'parked' as a fourth Strand which ran independently of the rest of the talks and whose success or otherwise could not affect the rest of the process. Secondly, there was the question of the agenda. Unionists were especially upset that the rules on the emerging Strand III were too intergovernmental in character and excluded them from any serious role in renegotiating the AIA. The whole thing, he believed, smacked of a classic Anglo-Irish imposition from above, instigated at the behest of those he called 'the little Hitlers' in the DFA and their 'collaborators' at Stormont. Strong words – but what did he really mean by them?

As ever, Trimble's supporters in the Conservative party were fired up by his language. They worried that the Government would dilute the conditions on decommissioning in order to secure a second IRA ceasefire (such as 'parking' the issue). On 19 May 1996, Andrew Hunter faxed the following concerned message to Trimble regarding his intentions: 'Robert Cranborne and I both feel there are too many grey areas, but see little point in demanding more than you are reported to find acceptable'. Trimble replied on the same day: 'I have not agreed anything with Major. There are too many grey areas. I find difficulty in seeing any differences between Major and Spring in terms of his procedures: tho' John claims they are different. I do not want to sound too hardline during the election. But I will insist on clarity before 10 June.' It may well have been that Trimble had not agreed anything in a formal sense, though the Prime Minister had picked up on the 'vibes' which the UUP leader was exuding. Major recalls thinking – correctly – that Trimble's hostility to Mitchell was 'more sound and fury than genuine opposition'.[2] So what was the purpose of Trimble's denial of such an agreement? He frequently preferred that unionist sympathisers on the mainland make the running for him – 'doing my dirty work' was the expression he often employed – rather than for himself to make a fuss. Thus, he appears perfectly capable of encouraging English Unionists to maintain the pressure

ad interim, whilst planning an accommodation all along. 'Calling off the dogs' too soon would have resulted in a worse deal.

The final words of Trimble's response to Andrew Hunter were significant. 'I am also going cool on [Senator George] Mitchell since an unsatisfactory response yesterday from Anthony Lake [Clinton's then National Security Adviser] to my request for assurances that Mitchell was still committed to his report.' Nationalist Ireland was keen on a key role for Mitchell in the talks, in particular as chairman of Strands II and III, regarding this as a symbol of the further internationalisation of the conflict (and thus the dilution of British sovereignty). Trimble was concerned for several reasons. He liked Mitchell personally and could endorse his report – which he believed presented the Provisionals with some difficulties – but he feared that in a presidential election year the former US Senate Majority leader would be susceptible to pressures from Irish-Americans, who would force him to resile from his own report.[3] He wrote to Major on 20 May 1996 to state that he had spoken to Lake who 'told me that Senator Mitchell was acting in a private capacity, independently of the US administration and Mr Lake said he would be annoyed if the Senator was approached by anyone involved in the US elections. On decommissioning, Mr Lake said he had not spoken recently to the Senator but that he had no reason to believe that the Senator had changed his mind.

'In view of the somewhat ephemeral and indirect nature of the assurance on the second issue, I would not be able to agree to any involvement by Senator Mitchell *as matters stand* [author's emphasis]. Last Monday, however, you mentioned the possibility of arranging a private discussion for me with the Senator. If you are minded to pursue the possibility of the Senator's involvement in the process, I would now need to have such a discussion before I could agree to such involvement.' In this letter, Trimble attached his note to UUP candidates in the forthcoming Forum elections. In this message, however, he appeared more inclined to exclude Mitchell: 'I have made it clear to Major that we want a non-political chair for those stages of the talks [chairing Strands II and III] i.e. not Mitchell. Mitchell did a fairly good job in the Report on decommissioning. It is possible that he could help to persuade the paramilitaries to accept his report and commence actual decommissioning alongside talks. We have not agreed any such role, but we have not closed the door either.'

At Trimble's next formal meeting with the Prime Minister on 3 June 1996, Major said that he wanted Mitchell to be the overall chairman of the talks process. Trimble says he was surprised by this step, and that he told the Prime Minister that the choice of Mitchell would be unpopular with the Unionists. Major, though, was quite determined to do so. The Government believed that the appointment was important for relations with the United States and in any case there was no one else available.[4] John Hunter, who accompanied Trimble to this meeting, states that when Major told Trimble that Mitchell would be the chairman, the UUP leader swallowed hard – but made no real attempt at that meeting to fight the appointment.[5] Andrew Hunter recorded in his diary entry of 4 June that when he met Major in the division lobby, the Prime Minister denied that he would concede on Mitchell. This was because: 'a. He could not deliver because Unionists would not live with it; the negotiations would break down; there would be too many empty chairs. b. Even if he could deliver he would not. c. To entice further comment I nebulously agreed. d. PM said "we simply aren't in this business to let the Irish have it all their own way. They may do little other than cause immense trouble and be exceedingly tedious but we are on the Unionists' side."' But Major's notion of being 'on the Unionists' side' depended on a reading of where the Unionists were. Increasingly, it would not be alongside Andrew Hunter and other like-minded friends of Ulster in Great Britain.[6]

The next day, most of the headlines were devoted to the question of when decommissioning would be addressed. Trimble agreed that the opening stages of talks could begin while a deal on arms was worked out over the summer break, though the UUP would not let the negotiations proceed to a substantive phase until they saw actual 'product'. 'The Prime Minister said he will not agree to

this issue being sidelined,' stated Trimble.[7] But that, of course, was precisely what was happening – and Trimble acquiesced. Partly, it was because he feared that if he joined the DUP and UKUP in opposing Mitchell in principle, and brought about a stalemate, he would create enemies in America where he was trying to 'win friends and influence people'.[8] But he may also have calculated that the Provisionals would not call another ceasefire – in which case the issue of when decommissioning was addressed was entirely academic, since their political wing could not gain admission to the talks without first ending the violence. Indeed, the events of those June days in 1996 would have appeared to support such an analysis. On 5 June, the IRA issued a statement that it would never decommission short of a final settlement; and on the 7 June, an IRA unit killed a Garda officer, Jerry McCabe, during a mail van robbery at Adare, Co. Limerick. Bruton was enraged by Sinn Fein's refusal to condemn the act, for which the IRA admitted responsibility a week later, and there was a wave of revulsion in the Republic.[9]

But the killing did not take the pressure off Trimble by illustrating the irreformable nature of the republican movement. Indeed, if anything, the pressure was increasing upon him daily. On 6 June, the British and Irish Governments produced a joint paper which gave Mitchell the role of chairing the plenary sessions as well as the subcommittee on decommissioning; whilst Mitchell's colleagues General John de Chastelain and the former Finnish premier Harri Holkeri would be independent chairman and alternate respectively of the Strand II segment of the talks.[10] The Unionist community was deeply uneasy. Paisley and McCartney were irrevocably opposed; Trimble appeared to be opposed to this paper as well, though with reservations.

What happened next remains, again, a matter of controversy. Trimble knew that when the Unionist community was under pressure, there was a widespread desire for a common approach. Accordingly, he decided to meet with Paisley and McCartney at Castle Buildings on 8 June to hammer out an agreed line. All were as one, says Trimble, on not wanting the Frameworks Documents, nor the Ground Rules paper. According to Trimble, McCartney noted that he had reserved his position on the appointment of Mitchell, but was keen to know what was the UUP leader's real position. Trimble states that he replied 'we'll have to see when we get there – but it could be difficult for you'. Trimble says he thought he had clearly signalled that he was not opposed to Mitchell per se, but rather to his powers as envisaged by the two Governments.[11] Paisley and McCartney, however, were convinced that they had agreement with the UUP to fight the appointment of Mitchell; McCartney says that the agreement was based upon a document which he faxed to Trimble on the day before. He adds that he was never, at any stage, made aware of reservations by Trimble.[12] Trimble felt that the DUP and UKUP might work with him to dispose of the Frameworks Documents, but that any such achievement would always be secondary to gaining party advantage over the UUP: he feared that if he rejected Mitchell, he would vindicate their contention that the process was rotten all along, and they would then be able to hijack Unionism for their form of protest politics.[13] His preferred solution was for the Northern Ireland parties themselves to write the rules of procedure (including the chairman's role) rather than have the two Governments impose them. Thus, he could claim a victory, even if the Ulster-British had suffered a symbolic defeat through the internationalisation of the conflict in the person of Mitchell.

McCartney noticed that Trimble, who had held his ground on Monday 10 June, was 'weakening' in his opposition to Mitchell by Tuesday 11 June: he sensed that some dealings were occurring between the UUP and UDP/UDA and the PUP/UVF.[14] Between them, these three parties would have over 50 per cent of Unionist community support on the basis of the Forum elections and thus would satisfy the rules of 'sufficient consensus' for proceeding with the talks if they chose to accept Mitchell. The pressure from the two Governments was ferocious. Partly, it reflected the investment of time and prestige by both Major and Bruton, who had come to launch the talks. Any failure would

reflect badly on them, with attendant effects on the UUP's relationship with the two Governments. The talks had already started badly enough. Sinn Fein leaders, who claimed entry into the talks on the basis of their mandate in the Forum election, were denied admission because the IRA still had not declared a ceasefire. But they arranged for a piece of street theatre: to the intense annoyance of Mayhew, senior republicans turned up at the gates of Castle Buildings so their exclusion would be on view for the whole of mankind, and especially the Irish portion of it.[15] Moreover, George Mitchell and his two colleagues had been waiting for nearly two days whilst the parties wrangled over his appointment and the procedures. As far as the Governments were concerned, the friend of the US President was being 'humiliated'. Mayhew and Spring repeatedly apologised to Mitchell for the delay in seating him: they feared he might pick up his bags and go home (though Mitchell reassured them that he would sit it out till some kind of conclusion).[16]

But the pressure on Trimble was redoubled because key Irish and British players reckoned that such techniques might work. Nora Owen, the Republic's Justice Minister recalls thinking if Trimble really wanted to reject Mitchell, he would never have come to Castle Buildings with the American already designated as chairman.[17] British officials calculated similarly. 'I think that Trimble came to the negotiations knowing he would have to accept Mitchell as chairman,' observes one senior civil servant. 'But in the process he wanted to establish himself as the key figure who had to be dealt with – in other words, he was saying "don't think that you can go off and deal mainly with Adams and the DFA". He therefore played along with Paisley and McCartney to extract the most he could on the rules and procedures. He was saying "I'm a serious character, I don't care about being bolshie."' But it was a tactical escalation amidst a strategic retreat: John Taylor declared that to put Mitchell in charge of the talks 'was the equivalent of appointing an American Serb to preside over talks on the future of Croatia …'.[18]

Late on Tuesday 11 June, in his office on the fifth floor of Castle Buildings, Mayhew told Trimble of his decision. There were, he said, no alternatives to Mitchell. Trimble went silent; according to one official, the pause 'seemed like an eternity'.[19] The UUP then withdrew to their own offices. Trimble finally decided to go along with Mitchell, but extracted a price for it. He had determined that the *quid pro quo* would be a blank sheet on the rules governing the talks – that is, not the Ground Rules paper nor the document of 6 June. At 5:30 p.m., Trimble visited the Irish Government's rooms for direct talks to see if they would back this compromise. Shortly thereafter, Nora Owen and Proinsias de Rossa visited the UUP rooms and were happy to supply Trimble with the sort of reassurance he wanted. 'The agenda is not written in stone,' said Nora Owen. 'That's very interesting,' replied the UUP leader.[20] Nigel Dodds, the then DUP party secretary, remembers Trimble moving back and forth with drafts of how the talks would be structured. 'I've always made it clear I may part company with you [on the issue of the chairmanship],' Trimble told the DUP.[21] Trimble recalls that when he kept reporting to Paisley and McCartney the nature of his conversations with the Government, the DUP leader warned him 'to consider the personal implications of what I was doing. Up till then there had been no question of attacks.'[22] McCartney, though, asserts that Trimble never told the other Unionist parties of his intention to accept Mitchell.[23]

Even the physical imposition of Mitchell in the early hours of Wednesday 12 June had to be organised 'like a military operation'. Mayhew feared that a hardline Unionist such as Cedric Wilson (then of the UKUP) might try to prevent Mitchell from being seated in the chair; Wilson was certainly hovering in the general vicinity. Accordingly, a politician and an official – Ancram and Stephen Leach – were deliberately sat in the co-chair before Mitchell approached the spot. Mayhew remembers propelling Mitchell by the arm into the conference room; the politician and civil servant moved only seconds before he arrived. The DUP reaction was, to say the least, forthright: Sean Farren, a senior SDLP negotiator observed in his notebook that 'Trimble [was] taunted with remarks like "remember

Brian Faulkner".' As hardline Unionists raged, the twelve- to fourteen-strong Irish team led by Owen and de Rossa repaired to the Anglo-Irish Secretariat to celebrate. The Irish ministers formally toasted the officials; the officials responded in kind. The seal had formally been set on a long-time Irish goal – the internationalisation of the conflict. 'There was a huge sense of achievement,' states Nora Owen. 'We already had the New Ireland Forum Report [of 1984, composed of nationalist parties north and south of the border, but from which Unionists absented themselves]. But we did not have the majority community there. Now we did. Mitchell was in as chairman, with Ulster Unionist agreement and they had not walked. Without this, there would have been no process.'[24]

British ministers, such as Patrick Mayhew, were also impressed that Trimble had braved huge pressure in his own party and within the wider Unionist community.[25] But to senior officials, the events of June 1996 began to have a familiar pattern or – in the opinion of one civil servant – 'an almost algebraic rhythm'. This ran as follows. A proposition would be put forward by the British and Irish Governments. The Alliance party and SDLP would offer broad support, though possibly not Sinn Fein. The small Loyalist parties would then often back the Government. The DUP and UKUP would express outright opposition, whilst the UUP would express grave doubts but not close the door completely. The acceptance of the proposal would then depend upon Trimble, for whom all sort of dances would have to take place till he had established his credentials within the wider Unionist community; only then could he proceed.[26] But how much did this approach profit him? Trimble was under no doubt that it had brought about substantive gains. He had obtained his blank sheets on the rules for the talks. The all-powerful chairman, as envisaged in the two Governments' paper of 6 June, would now be more of a facilitator than an enforcer – or, in John Taylor's revised description of Mitchell, 'a Serb with no powers is acceptable'.[27] Trimble noted with pleasure to how he had shaved the Governments down. In the first Irish draft, the Government of the Republic proposed that 'the two Governments with the assistance of the chairmen will consult the parties'; the UUP objected. In the second, the Irish suggested 'the chairmen, with the assistance of the two Governments will confer with the parties'. Again, it was rejected by the UUP. The third draft read: 'The chairmen, the two Governments and the parties will confer.' Trimble accepted this version.

But Trimble's Unionist critics (and the SDLP) regarded his victories as the window-dressing – the illusion of control rather than the reality. According to this analysis, the two Governments were perfectly prepared to let the parties mess around with the small change of the talks once the big accounts had been settled, notably with nationalist Ireland and the United States. Decommissioning had again been postponed. Mitchell came with the blessing of the President of the United States: his mere presence was enough to constrict the UUP leader's room for manoeuvre. For once the prestige of the American Commander-in-Chief was bound up with the process, it would be ever harder for Ulster Unionists to walk away. For all of the reassurance offered to Trimble about his role, Mitchell was not insulated from the presidential election and he even played the role of Clinton's Republican opponent, Senator Robert Dole, in the mock debates that preceded the live television exchanges between the two nominees in October 1996.[28] And although Mitchell had not disavowed his own report of January 1996, he moved on with the intergovernmental consensus – which entailed constant dilution of the timing of its provisions.

Above all, Mitchell personified the internationalisation of the conflict. As Peter Bell observes, all players in the Ulster crisis increasingly looked towards the United States. 'We are now rather like those minor east Asian potentates described in Polybius' history of Republican Rome,' he states. 'There we are, in that neo-classical setting in Rome on the Potomac, imploring Senators for favours.'[29] Irish nationalists might not have obtained all that they wanted, but the appointment of Mitchell and the willingness of Trimble to fracture the Unionist bloc could be represented as gains nonetheless. To northern nationalists such as Sean Farren, it was a far cry from the Unionist stance of 1996 and that of 1991–2, when they still regarded political discussions over the future of Northern Ireland as

essentially an internal United Kingdom matter.[30] And to obtain revision of the rules, they had even turned to the Irish Government, further legitimising the southern role. Above all, it was done with the agreement of one man, David Trimble, who a mere six years earlier had been standing on the roof of Glengall Street protesting against the visit of the then Taoiseach, Charles Haughey. Paisley was in no doubts as to what the events of that night meant. 'That's it,' he told his party colleagues in the DUP room at Stormont. 'There's going to be an agreement now. Our task is to ensure that the people outside know what is going on and we keep Trimble to what he said. But he won't work with us any more.'[31]

EIGHTEEN *The Siege of Drumcree (II)*

THE praise bestowed upon Trimble by 'world opinion' for his statesmanship in helping to seat Mitchell proved short-lived. The reason could be summarised in two words: Drumcree II. Trimble's Unionist critics saw the new, unprecedented levels of opprobrium that were heaped upon him for his role in the Drumcree stand-off as all too predictable. They felt that it illustrated the pointlessness of basing key political decisions on the need to propitiate the 'international community'. Unionists only ever won plaudits for the concessions they made; by contrast, any attempt to stand up for their vital interests in a vicious inter-communal conflict was regarded by many 'right-thinking' people as the moral equivalent of such IRA atrocities as the South Quay bombing. According to this analysis, Unionists should just concentrate on defending their way of life – since good PR came at a price and of its nature could never endure. Indeed, men like William Ross believed good PR was like a monster which had endlessly to be fed and which would end up devouring the traditional Ulster-British way of life.[1] From a very different perspective, Frank Millar of the *Irish Times* also wondered whether the UUP leader had not blown a golden opportunity in taking the stance that he did during Drumcree II. As he saw it, there was a brief window of opportunity in the Republic, where opinion had turned against Sinn Fein after a series of terrorist attacks. These included the killing of Garda McCabe on 7 June and the bombing of Manchester on 15 June.[2]

But such calculations seemed at the time to be far removed from the real world of life in Portadown. There, tensions had once again reached fever pitch over the planned Orange march down the Garvaghy Road. For although Trimble liked to take the long view, especially now that he was leader of the UUP, he could not overlook the obvious: he was still the MP for the area, and no politician likes to say goodbye to a substantial portion of his electorate unless he absolutely has to do so. But it was very much a role thrust upon him – and it was a duty which the new, emerging Trimble scarcely relished. Indeed, Harold Gracey recalled that between July 1995 and July 1996, he hardly heard from Trimble, even though everyone knew the crisis was bound to come.[3] There is other evidence that Trimble simply did not want to deal with the issue at all until he was forced to address it. The Garvaghy Road Residents Group claims that they wrote three times to Trimble in 1995–6 requesting talks to avoid a repetition of the stand-off, but received no reply. Trimble now states that his failure to respond owes something to laziness: he would have to have replied himself and would not have relished a correspondence which would have taken on the air of a debate. This last point was a source of frustration to him. He felt constrained by the rut into which loyalists had inserted themselves by adopting the tactic of not talking to the Residents Group – which in his opinion was then exploited by their wider republican enemies as evidence of intransigence.[4] Since the option of talking to the residents was not open to him at this stage – indeed, he did not dare do so till 1999, well after he entered face-to-face negotiation with Sinn Fein/IRA's leadership – he may well have wanted to avoid thinking about a tricky subject which he could not even handle on his own preferred terms.[5] Indeed, many of the local Orangemen treated him as if he was one of their own in the security forces, such as the RUC Reserve and Royal Irish Regiment, and would not tell him the game plan. Gordon Lucy confirms that Trimble had remarkably little to do with the extensive Orange planning and preparations for the 1996 stand-off (by comparison, 1995 was a spontaneous protest).[6]

Trimble was in Stirling on Saturday 6 July for the Boyne anniversary Orange walk, as a guest of the County Lodge of Central Scotland, when his mobile telephone rang with dramatic news: the Chief Constable of the RUC, Sir Hugh Annesley, had decided to re-route the march. Until the last minute the UUP leader had been hopeful that the march could be taken down the road quickly and quietly.[7] Annesley stated that purely operational considerations governed his decision, but few Orangemen

believed him – and in this crisis it was again perceptions which counted for most on both sides. Trimble spoke for the Loyalist mainstream when he asserted incorrectly that the decision was taken by 'those members of the RUC who regularly visited the Anglo-Irish Secretariat in the run-up to the decision … I think the strategists of the Department of Foreign Affairs believed, if Orangeism could be faced down during this summer, this would create a situation in which Sinn Fein could be enticed into talks.'[8] Speaking on Radio 4's *Today* programme on the following Monday, he warned that Annesley's decision was 'placing at risk the tranquillity we have enjoyed over recent months', a comment which Lucy says was principally construed as a reference to the fragility of the loyalist ceasefire.[9] For this act of 'scaremongering', Trimble was criticised by Gary McMichael of the Ulster Democratic Party, the political wing of the UDA: 'I don't think they [the UUP leadership] should be talking about the loyalist ceasefire being broken…[loyalist paramilitaries] shouldn't be prompted by people like David Trimble.'[10] Annesley later said that Mayhew offered him no advice on Drumcree. Annesley told him that either of the two options could potentially lead to disorder.[11] Yet Annesley's ban did not find particular favour in the NIO, illustrating that the decision to re-route was not taken because of instructions emanating directly from the intergovernmental conference. 'The Chief Constable took a principled decision,' opines one senior civil servant but 'It was not pragmatic and the result was near civil war.'[12] Sir John Wheeler remembers that even if Mayhew had been motivated by a political agenda relating to obtaining a new IRA ceasefire (the prospect of which appeared to have receded in recent weeks, anyhow) the Secretary of State would always have been hamstrung by his lawyerly belief in the constitutional proprieties concerning operational independence of the Chief Constable. Wheeler does, though, confirm the accuracy of one of Trimble's contentions, that the Irish DFA wanted the Orangemen to be taught a lesson. 'It was implicit in their arguments that we would have to do whatever was necessary to keep them from going down the road,' says the former Security Minister. 'Though it was never explicitly stated, it was implicit in the course of action that they were urging upon us that we would have to shoot down our countrymen if necessary!'[13]

It was into this seething cauldron that Trimble returned on Sunday 7 July. He left his RUC personal protection unit at Carleton Street – they could not accompany him to an Orange event – and joined the brethren in the field; that night, he slept on the floor in the church hall at Drumcree. An amazing cross-section of Ulster society was to be found resting there that night, including the Star of David Girls' Accordion Band![14] But one innovation enabled him to stay in touch with the wider world in a way that had not been possible in the previous year. In the intervening months, he bought a mobile telephone, which became a kind of omnipresent trademark. By Sunday night, it was estimated that 10,000 Orangemen had turned up out of solidarity. The RUC was starting to feel stretched. Road blocks disappeared as swiftly as they emerged; on Monday evening alone, they would have to police 230 small to medium-sized parades. The atmosphere swiftly darkened, rioting occurred overnight in Belfast, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Londonderry and Portadown. The next morning, the body of Lurgan taxi driver, Michael McGoldrick – a 36-year-old Catholic, newly graduated from Queen's, with one child and a pregnant wife – was found in his cab near Aghalee, Co. Antrim: he had been shot twice in the head.[15] No one claimed responsibility. Trimble said that 'if it should turn out to be a sectarian murder, it will be condemned unreservedly'. He went further: 'This is the sort of thing we don't want to see. It is just the sort of thing that we have repeatedly appealed to persons in paramilitaries not to do.'[16] Not everyone was as robust. David Ervine of the PUP-UVF initially said that his party did not engage in the 'politics of condemnation' – reminiscent of the formula sometimes employed by republican spokesmen when commenting upon IRA actions.[17] Suspicion immediately focused upon the highly independent mid-Ulster Brigade of the UVF, headed by the dissident Portadown loyalist, Billy Wright. Later, McGoldrick's family claimed that 'fire and

brimstone speeches' and 'loose talk' by politicians had partly been responsible for the taxi driver's death.[18]

As the protests mounted, Trimble wrote to George Mitchell to inform him of the UUP's withdrawal from the talks until the authorities 'come to their senses'.[19] The M1 and A1 were blocked, and Aldergrove airport was sealed off. Eventually, Larne harbour closed as well. David Kerr recalls driving with Trimble to a meeting with Mayhew in Belfast: shortly after they turned off the Birches roundabout on to the M1, the UUP leader saw three plumes of smoke rising eerily in the distance. 'That's Lurgan, that's Portadown, that's Craigavon,' he noted.[20] At one point, David Campbell, a young Orangeman who was organising the protests in Lagan Valley met with Trimble and John Hunter by the Drumcree church hall. Campbell noted the support that the demonstrations enjoyed. 'Give the word, the people are there and willing to do it,' Campbell told the UUP leader. 'Let's take the country.'[21] According to Hunter, Trimble gulped at that moment.[22] And he added: 'No, we don't need to do that.'[23]

By comparison, there were few serious disturbances at Drumcree itself, though the tension rose further. Such was the strain that the Orange leadership suggested that crush barriers be used to separate the two sides, as might be erected on the occasion of a Royal visit. The RUC agreed to the creation of barriers, but the Orangemen misunderstood their shorthand and it soon emerged that what was being put up was concrete and barbed wire akin to those on dangerous border crossings. When the Orangemen asked to see the intended barrier (Trimble was worried what would happen if the Loyalists were pushed up against the wire) they were told that they could inspect it at St Paul's Roman Catholic School. A group of marshals, accompanied by Trimble, went down to the school – only to find nothing there and that the wire was already being set up. Just then they heard the noise of a fracas coming from Drumcree. They were told on their mobile telephones that the police had begun to charge the Orangemen and to push them back. Trimble drove swiftly in an unmarked vehicle to the scene through the police lines at the end of the Ballyoran estate with truckloads of regular troops looking on. As they ran through the last of the police lines to reach their brethren, they found that the RUC had entered the cemetery, assuming their new position atop several graves: according to Harold Gracey, the RUC had promised him that they would never enter the cemetery.[24] Although they offered no resistance, one Orangeman complained bitterly that it was the resting place of his father. Trimble gestured to the crowd to calm down in the face of what he, too, saw as an 'escalation by the RUC' and urged them to sit down on the road: it would then be harder for the RUC to charge them again. He then went back to the cemetery where he was filmed gesticulating a lot at the riot squad and urging them to pull back. He suddenly noticed one officer pointing a baton gun towards him. Trimble could not see the number on his tunic – thus precluding the possibility of making a complaint since it would be impossible to establish the constable's identity. 'As the officer was eyeballing me I thought to myself, "this bloody man is quite capable of shooting me".'[25] It remains the most memorable image of Trimble in that year: quite apart from the nationalist community, it horrified many Unionists as well. 'Unionists of my generation found it unacceptable to poke a finger at the RUC,' says James Molyneaux.[26] Curiously, for all of their differences, Mayhew did understand Trimble's predicament. Andrew Hunter noted in his diary of 9 July 1996 that Mayhew said to him in a telephone conversation that 'Trimble can't afford not to be there'. Summarising the attitude of the Orangemen towards the UUP leader, Mayhew observed, '"We put you there, now do the stuff." [Trimble is being] reasonably responsible.'

Trimble spent the night of Monday 8 July 1996 at home: unlike the first Drumcree, he was better organised and managed to return to his house for some sleep and a shower. The next morning, he and Daphne Trimble went to London. His reasons were two-fold. First, he had sought an appointment with Major to discuss the crisis – along with Paisley, McCartney and Rev. Martin Smyth

in his capacity as Grand Master of Ireland. Second, he had been invited on the night of Tuesday 9 July 1996 to the state banquet at Buckingham Palace in honour of Nelson Mandela.[27]Trimble knew he had to put on a display of Unionist unity because the community wanted it and there was in any case no point in holding separate meetings.[28] McCartney, though, recalls that Trimble objected to his presence and that it was Paisley who insisted that all of the Unionist leaders be there. 'You're being allowed into this meeting – but you're not allowed to dominate it,' Trimble told McCartney. To McCartney, this was a clear indication he was there on sufferance and he exploded. 'You pompous posturing ass, how dare you speak to me in those tones!': personal relations between the leaders of the various strands of Unionism were by then much worse than those which obtained between the leaders of constitutional and physical force nationalism.[29] But once they were in the Prime Minister's room in the Commons, the three party leaders emphasised that if the march did not proceed, the authorities might have eight or nine different Drumcrees on their hands.[30] But it was the dealings which took place outside of the formal context of that meeting which were most significant. Before he went into the meeting, Trimble communicated to Major that he planned to ask the four main church leaders in Ireland to intervene in the Drumcree crisis: the Church of Ireland Primate of All Ireland, the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Roman Catholic Primate of All Ireland. Trimble also entertained the idea of a *quid pro quo* whereby the nationalist residents would remove their objection to the Orange march if they were allowed the equivalent of a St Patrick's Day parade. Trimble offered this because he says they knew that the Government wanted the dispute resolved by negotiation rather than by *force majeure* and that the Major ministry would view their case sympathetically if the Orangemen took the initiative and negotiations then broke down. Major duly endorsed the plan. After the three Unionist leaders emerged from the session with the Prime Minister, Trimble separated himself from the others and announced this initiative which he did not reveal over the table.[31] The church leaders' meeting, which was inconclusive, took place in Armagh the next day: its significance lay in the novelty value of a Unionist chief meeting all of the church leaders together.[32]

That night, Trimble and the Prime Minister again found themselves under the same roof-this time at the Mandela state banquet in Buckingham Palace. The Queen was 'most solicitous' he recalls, but the Duke of Edinburgh pointed at Trimble and teased the UUP leader with the words 'oh, ho, ho – so they managed to drag you away from the barricades?'; afterwards, Trimble told fellow Loyalists privately that the Sovereign's consort had a good grasp of the situation at Drumcree.[33] Jeffrey Donaldson claims that when Trimble returned the next day, the UUP leader told him, 'Major will give me a victory', so long as they went through the motions of conciliation. Trimble says that the state banquet was very conveniently timed, but he denies that Major promised him that the march would go down the road; and Major agrees with Trimble's recollection that no such pledge was given.[34] Whatever really occurred between the Prime Minister and the UUP leader that night, the visit to London did Trimble little good amongst the brethren in the fields outside Portadown. Many of them felt that he had gone to sup with a terrorist, in the person of Mandela; others saw the pictures of Trimble in white tie and tails and felt that he had let down his own people by abandoning his post to enjoy the high life.

The scene when Trimble returned on Wednesday 10 July was about as far removed from the niceties of Buckingham Palace as it was possible to imagine. The Reverend John Pickering, the Rector of Drumcree parish, had been unable to sleep all night and at around 1:45 p.m. was packed off to bed by his wife. According to his private diary, he was still lying down in the late afternoon when he received a telephone call. A huge mechanical digger was moving round at the top of the hill – and metal was being welded on. Pickering informed Trimble, who said there was no such device. 'You'd better take another look,' said Pickering. When he saw the digger, Trimble became

very concerned.[35] Trimble recalls that senior RUC officers were also very worried about the digger – it had been nicknamed 'police buster' – and contacted Trimble to see if the UUP leader could do anything about it (there were also rumours that slurry tankers filled with petrol were being readied to spray the RUC). Key players such as Harold Gracey did not know where the digger came from, though Denis Watson believes it must have originated in a local construction firm. Trimble went up to the digger and clambered on to the vehicle, which according to Denis Watson was manned by loyalists in boiler suits. Billy Wright sat there, calmly sunning himself on a deck-chair, whilst the men welded on more armour plating. 'What on earth do you think you are doing?' Trimble asked them. They gave him short shrift and one of them denounced him as an MI5 agent. He was rescued by some Orangemen: Denis Watson says that 'David Trimble is a very lucky man he wasn't murdered at that stage.'[36] Harold Gracey recalled telling Trimble "'David, go you out of the way" – and he did.' Gracey then spoke to the men, whom he said that he had never seen before or since, and they switched off the engine. 'Okay, we'll do it for you, but not for him' (that is, Trimble).[37]

But the danger of them driving the digger at police lines during the night remained. Trimble then knew that there was only one option open to him. He had to find the one man reputed to enjoy influence upon these militants: Billy Wright, who had acquired an almost folkloric status amongst hardline loyalists in the region as 'King Rat'. Trimble had never met Wright before – the UUP leader states that Wright was not visible to him at Drumcree I – though the Portadown loyalist was certainly known to him as an aggrieved constituent. Wright had once turned up in his Lurgan office to complain about alleged harassment by soldiers of the Ulster Defence Regiment/Royal Irish Regiment: Trimble's secretary, Stephanie Roderick, recalls that Wright was very polite but that he had the coldest, most piercing blue eyes she had ever seen.[38] According to Trimble – who had the matter verified by his security spokesman, ex-UDR Major Ken Maginnis – some UDR/RIR soldiers had put a bounty on Wright's head: those soldiers on patrol who observed Wright obtained a £50 bonus, whilst there was a £25 bonus for sightings of Wright's side-kick, Mark 'Swinger' Fulton. Indeed, in a Commons debate on media coverage of terrorism that he himself had introduced in 1992, Trimble had condemned a Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme, entitled *The Committee*, which alleged that there was a secret body consisting of senior RUC officers, businessmen and politicians to plan the assassination of republicans. Wright appeared on the programme, leaving Trimble with the impression he engaged in paramilitary activities with the approval of the police.[39] 'I hold no brief for Mr Wright,' declared the MP for Upper Bann. 'I am told that he is a gangster who tries to cloak his crimes with political motivation, occasionally gets involved in sectarian crimes about which he then boasts to journalists, giving interviews to them regularly. Whether he has committed all the offences of which he boasts I do not know, but I can hazard a fair guess as to why he collaborated with *Dispatches* and gave credence to the accusation that some RUC officers collude with paramilitaries … He had a clear interest in harming the police force.'[40]

The full truth about Wright will probably never be known. What can be ascertained is that Wright was 35 years old in 1996. He apparently joined the Young Citizen Volunteers – the YCV, or the youth wing of the UVF – aged fifteen after the massacre of ten Protestant workmen at Kingsmills in his home patch of south Armagh in 1976.[41] Like so many who had felt the sharp end of republican terrorism, he moved to the northern part of the county where he determined to make a last stand. At that stage, he had never been sentenced for any offence, though in the early 1980s he had been remanded for one year on charges of murder and attempted murder; these were dropped.[42] He originally supported the loyalist ceasefires of September 1994, but soon became disillusioned. Wright reserved particular disdain for the 'doveish' Belfast leadership of the PUP-UVF. Much of the PUP-UVF ideology was based upon the notion that they had hypocritically been pushed into 'fighting the war'. The PUP-UVF asserted that the Protestant working class had suffered as much from Stormont's

neglectful policies as their Catholic counterparts. Since their men had been dying and going to jail to maintain the privileges of the Unionist elite, they were now entitled to an independent political perspective. At times, the PUP spoke of how much they had in common with the Provisionals in terms of shared experiences of deprivation. Such talk was anathema to Wright. Leave politics to the politicians, he asserted, and let us provide the muscle. Wright believed that the PUP-UVF were putting their socialism ahead of their Unionism and that the UVF should be a broad church in terms of its ideology. He regarded men like David Ervine as traitors and saw the PUP as the pawns of British intelligence, seeking to create further splits in the Unionist bloc. They, in turn, believed that Wright was a drugs dealer who used the cause of Ulster to further his criminal ends.

Trimble met with Wright twice, once in a room in the church hall, once in the vicinity of the digger. On one level, Trimble found it disgusting. Wright told Trimble 'quite mendaciously' that he had not been involved in the killing of McGoldrick. On the other hand, recalls Trimble, 'he was rational. He wasn't stupid by any means. It was easier to talk to him than the men on the digger.' Trimble suggested the option of a St Patrick's Day parade by nationalists as a *quid pro quo*. Initially, Wright opposed it, Trimble says, but Wright soon came to understand its necessity in the context of the talks then going on to achieve a resolution of the crisis (Paisley, believes Trimble, did not agree with this proposed compromise and therefore sought to scupper it).[43] Wright later said that 'Mr Trimble spoke to me on the basis of anti-violence. He asked me to use any influence I had to ensure there was no violence during the protest. It was not a pre-arranged meeting. He believed I had influence on the wilder elements at Drumcree and on the streets of Portadown.'[44]

Wright might have done so, but his main aim was not conciliation. Rather, his objective was victory for his people at Drumcree. Trimble also says that Wright informed him that if the RUC and Army were about to move forward on the loyalist crowd – and he had reason to believe that they would do so at 2 a.m. on Thursday 11 July – then the paramilitaries might retaliate. Trimble states that he rang Mayhew and asked him to pull back the security forces in the light of the warning; the Ulster Secretary, for whatever reason, agreed to the request and Army manoeuvres and the police profile were lowered by 7 or 8 p.m. on Wednesday 10 July. Wright denied that this part of the conversation took place, but whatever the truth of the matter one senior RUC officer is under no illusion as to the impact of 'King Rat's' presence: 'Wright's threats were a part of the reversal of the ban on the march,' he states.[45] Jim Blair also believes that 'the Wright factor' played its part in this decision, though he is not sure that it was necessarily the main element in the ultimate ruling.[46] Trimble now says of the 'digger episode': 'At the end of the day, looking back at it, I now think it was all a bluff.' Gracey subsequently even said to Trimble that he had an understanding with Wright dating back to 1995 that nothing serious would happen.[47] At the time, though, the threat appeared real enough. Daphne Trimble recalls that Trimble was desperately worried that bloodshed could both end his career and the chance of peace. If things went wrong, and the whole country erupted in violence, he would be blamed as MP for the area and any prospect of a deal with nationalist Ireland would be lost – perhaps for ever. This explains why he took the huge risk which he did in meeting Wright, even though he knew that if it emerged it would cost him dearly in terms of opinion on the British mainland as well as amongst Catholics.[48]

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