

Faulkner, (Arthur) Brian Deane

by Marc Mulholland

Faulkner, (Arthur) Brian Deane (1921–77), Baron Faulkner of Downpatrick, prime minister of Northern Ireland, was born 18 February 1921 at Helen's Bay, Co. Down, elder son of a self-made businessman of Belfast, James Alexander Faulkner, and his wife, Nora Lillian Deane.

Family background and upbringing The Faulkner family, long established in Ireland, was by the nineteenth century deeply involved in Ulster's industrialisation. Faulkner's grandparents established a flax mill in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone, but financial difficulties led to the migration of his widowed grandmother to east Belfast, where she found employment as a teacher, while inculcating in her children the Victorian values of hard work and thrift.

James Faulkner took advantage of the opportunities offered by his post as a sales representative in the linen trade to reestablish his family as entrepreneurs in their own right. In Belfast he founded a profitable shirt-making operation that grew to become a substantial company. But his ambitions for his son extended far beyond the world of the Belfast bourgeoisie, and he seems to have been zealous in promoting Brian Faulkner's later political career. Faulkner developed an early and abiding love for horse riding and hunting. Although he was presbyterian, he attended the prestigious anglican college of St Columba, Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin (1935–9). Something of a fish out of water, he flourished nevertheless and acquired a poise and self-confidence that were marked in later years. At school he befriended Michael Yeats (1921–2007), son of W. B. Yeats (qv), though the two lost touch in later years. Faulkner maintained a cross-border social life, and through regular attendance at the Dublin horse show and various holidays he made social acquaintance even with Charles Haughey (1925–2006) and Seán Lemass (qv).

Faulkner read law for a term at QUB, but the outbreak of war in 1939 drew him back into his father's factory. There was a great military demand for uniform manufacture, and a shortage of men of management calibre, as staff joined the forces. Faulkner acquired valuable managerial skills, but he also attracted some distaste from a unionist establishment in which evading military service was anathema: well into the 1960s unionist politicians characteristically retained their title of military rank in public life.

Early political career Faulkner's early political career found him on the modernising, relatively liberal wing of unionism. In 1942 he wrote with Jim Bailie *The strength and the sinews*, a document significant in the campaign to rejuvenate party structures that had atrophied in the 1930s. He was closely involved with the Unionist Society, a pressure group anxious to acclimatise to the post-war world, and in 1948 he acted

as its secretary. One outcome of this modernising ferment was the establishment of the Young Unionists, of which Faulkner was the first chairman. Though something of an activist against the 'old guard', Faulkner was from the outset determined to work firmly within the parameters of party unity.

Faulkner joined the Orange Order in 1946, against the family tradition. Though he entered the elite Eldon Lodge, sponsored by Lord Glentoran (qv), the Unionist chief whip, he always praised the order for its social inclusiveness. Invited by Terence O'Neill (qv) to stand for election to the Stormont parliament, he was elected for the constituency of East Down in the notoriously polarised 'chapel-gates' election of 1949. In 1951 Faulkner married Lucy Barbara Ethel Forsythe, of a well-known Bangor family. His wife had been the secretary of Sir Basil Brooke (qv) and, though she possessed a formidable political intelligence, the marriage attracted Lady Brooke's ire. They had two sons and a daughter.

Once on the parliamentary ladder, Faulkner proceeded to belie his earlier liberal reputation by vigorously appealing to Orange populism. In 1955 he led an Orange procession through the catholic Longstone Road, despite government disquiet and local outrage. In the year of his appointment as minister of home affairs, 1959, he authorised a similar march through catholic Dungiven, though it had been banned the previous year by his predecessor, W. W. B. Topping (qv). When a 1958 conference of lay Roman catholics in Garron Tower indicated a willingness on the part of some middle-class catholics to work with the state, he reacted with intense suspicion and counselled against unionist conciliation. In October 1959 Sir Clarence Graham, chairman of the standing committee of the Ulster Unionist Council, and Brian Maginness (qv), the attorney general, suggested that catholics might be invited to join the unionist party. Faulkner opposed the innovation as indefinitely premature.

Faulkner appreciated that traditionalism facilitated a rise through unionist ranks, particularly for one without the resources of gentry deference or a record of military war service to draw upon. However, this was not simply opportunism: Faulkner was genuinely impressed by the cross-class nature of unionism and Orangeism. In many respects he remained a moderniser, as was evident in his allegiance to the far-sighted minister of education from 1957, Morris May (qv). Had May not died prematurely in 1962, it is quite likely that Faulkner would have backed his candidature for the premiership.

Political advancement Faulkner's evident ability, and reputation on the backbenches as a populist gadfly, earned him appointment as chief whip in 1956. In December 1959 he was promoted to be minister of home affairs, and in this capacity he oversaw the successful use of internment against an IRA campaign launched in 1956. Never vigorous, this republican offensive was already on the wane and Faulkner's security initiative complemented the republic's use of emergency detention. Neither condition would be in place in 1972. Faulkner also had the opportunity to present himself as a tireless hardliner, piloting in 1962 the complex

electoral law bill (which amalgamated a raft of piecemeal legislation passed over the years, but which changed nothing substantially) against the most concerted nationalist parliamentary opposition for years.

When Lord Brookeborough resigned as prime minister in 1963 his successor was chosen by the governor of Northern Ireland, advised rather uncertainly by Lord Brookeborough, and helped by the diplomacy of the unionist chief whip, William Craig. An unofficial straw poll among unionist MPs, conducted by Craig, found that nine supported Faulkner for premiership, against nine for J. L. O. Andrews (qv), the affable minister of commerce, and sixteen for Terence O'Neill, minister of finance. Faulkner was considered too close to the unionist hard-right. His lack of active service in the war was also held to be indicative of a certain insularity and lack of appeal to British ministerial interlocutors.

Faulkner felt that he had lost the prize to O'Neill because he lacked his rival's social standing. It is likely, however, that he also recognised that he had not the necessary profile with Britain's political elite. His insistence that O'Neill appoint him minister of commerce in 1963 reflected a desire not only to exercise his business know-how, but also to engage with powerful corporate figures in Britain and further afield. In this he was unanimously considered a great success, and his office at Dundonald House in Belfast became something of a rival power centre to O'Neill's at Stormont castle. Nevertheless, what Faulkner had most admired in Lord Brookeborough was his sure touch with both British ministers and the Ulster Unionist Party rank and file. O'Neill's attitude to local unionist opinion, he was convinced, was dangerously aloof. Faulkner prioritised party and unionist unity above attempts at cross-community reconciliation. He believed that attempts to cajole Catholics away from a gut nationalism were very unlikely to succeed and certainly divisive of unionist opinion.

Relationship with Terence O'Neill Terence O'Neill had good cause to believe that regular protestations of loyalty to the government – never to O'Neill personally – masked Faulkner's unrelenting siege on his hold on office. Very few of the O'Neill initiatives escaped obstruction from Faulkner, inside cabinet and sometimes outside it. Faulkner opposed anti-corruption measures in the 1963 local government bill and poured cold water on the Northern Ireland Economic Council, Ulster Weeks in Britain, and the Wilson plan, all key features in O'Neill's style and substance of government.

Nor did he support measures designed to ameliorate the cruder trappings of unionist dominance. Against general cabinet opinion, he doggedly opposed any salary rise for members of parliament, though the salaries were set so low that they penalised the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) and working-class representation generally. An opportunity to show generosity on the funding of the Roman Catholic Mater Infirmorum hospital was delayed beyond O'Neill's premiership by Faulkner's recalcitrance. He was almost as obstructive in reaching a settlement with the Northern Ireland committee of the ICTU, despite his generally good relations

with trade unions. In June 1966 the minister of home affairs, Brian McConnell (qv), apologised on behalf of the government to the presbyterian general assembly for failing to prevent the harassment of their delegates by anti-ecumenical protesters led by Ian Paisley. But Faulkner openly spoke up for the freedom to picket, and criticised the assembly for its posture of patrician liberalism. This chimed with unionist opinion in the country. Faulkner clearly appealed to those unhappy with O'Neill's rhetoric of change from above.

A substantial body of disgruntled unionist backbenchers attempted to have O'Neill removed as party leader in September 1966. Faulkner was the obvious candidate to replace him. However, he refused to commit himself, preferring to wait on events. O'Neill rallied and depicted his opponents as unreconstructed diehards, tainted by association with Paisley's 'O'Neill must go' campaign, and therefore anathema to Britain. The gambit succeeded. Faulkner took cognisance of this, and from 1967 increasingly displayed his more liberal credentials. While continuing to warn against unionist division, he moved towards quasi-O'Neillite language of cross-community bridge-building, and cautious optimism that catholics might eventually be won to unionism. In response to the rising propaganda war on civil rights, Faulkner guardedly proposed pragmatic evaluation on a case-by-case basis, rather than outright rejection of catholic claims.

The civil rights movement When the storm of civil rights agitation broke in October 1968, Faulkner positioned himself as flexible on reform, but insistent on strong unionist government. Within cabinet, he argued that order should be restored in advance of reform and that pressure from the Labour government in London should be resisted. O'Neill believed that no such luxuries were available, and he had to hammer through a reform programme against the stalling of Faulkner and William Craig. The November 1968 reform package was holed below the water by the absence of a universal local government franchise. The civil rights movement's most evocative demand, 'one man, one vote', remained unaddressed.

Faulkner emerged as the champion of firm party government in opposition to O'Neill's attempts to bypass Ulster Unionist Party structures. Thus, for example, Faulkner opposed O'Neill's television broadcast on 9 December 1968 as an unwarranted appeal over the head of the party. It was on this principle that Faulkner finally resigned from the government on 24 January 1969. He opposed O'Neill's ploy of appointing an independent commission to report on the disorders, in the expectation that it would recommend the introduction of universal local government franchise. Faulkner rejected this as an abdication of leadership, arguing that the reform should be introduced immediately, and approval won within the party. Unsurprisingly, this position befuddled the unionist right wing, who looked increasingly to William Craig. Faulkner, however, wished to build consensus around solid party government, determining its own policy independent of outside pressure.

O'Neill attempted in February 1969 to stamp his authority, even at the cost of unionist schism, by calling an election. Faulkner, however, cannily outbid O'Neill by expressly calling on Catholics in his constituency to vote for him. Disquiet at this innovation among North Down unionists, however, suggested the internal strains of Faulkner's fine balancing act. Nor was it sufficient to convince sceptical liberal unionists. When O'Neill finally resigned in April 1969, Faulkner had the support of the unionist rank and file, and probably the majority of the province, to succeed him. Nevertheless, O'Neillite unionist MPs rallied to James Chichester-Clark (qv), who defeated Faulkner by seventeen votes to sixteen. O'Neill, who voted, had frustrated his old rival.

Prime ministership and parliamentary reform Faulkner returned to the government and was appointed minister of development. As such he was closely associated with the implementation of reforms by the Stormont government, including root-and-branch restructuring of local government, and the establishment of a non-political housing executive to allocate public housing. Faulkner, therefore, attracted the ire of the unionist right. The manifesto issued in 1970 by the diehard West Ulster Unionist Council, led by Harry West (qv) (1917–2004), was entitled *Faulkner's fiddle-men out of tune*. However, he retained his reputation as a proponent of decisive unionist leadership and firm security measures. Chichester-Clark was unable to compete. His attempt to reconcile unionist demands to British priorities failed in exhaustion, and he resigned on 20 March 1971 to 'bring home to all concerned the realities of the situation'.

Brian Faulkner had long been heir apparent. On 23 March 1971 he was elected head of the parliamentary unionist party, and thus prime minister, by twenty-six votes to four over William Craig. His initial moves reflected his desire to rebuild party unity. Harry West was brought back into the cabinet and the moderate Basil McIlvor (qv) (1928–2004) was made minister of community relations. Faulkner's innovative boldness was also evident in his bringing into government David Bleakley, a stalwart of the NILP, and Gerard B. Newe (qv), a Catholic who was neither a unionist nor an MP. Nevertheless, centrifugal tendencies persisted. West's appointment led to the resignation from the party of Anne Dickson, the moderate MP for Carrick. On the right of the party, William Craig presided over a meeting in the town of Portadown, involving Unionist representatives from forty-three of the fifty-two constituency parties. From this emerged a faction known as Vanguard, bent on the restoration of full internal security responsibility to the Northern Ireland government.

Faulkner pressed on with considerable energy, attempting to construct a new political dispensation. In a major speech in Stormont on 22 June 1971, he outlined new proposals for participation by members of the parliamentary opposition in the chairmanship of committees, to be set up before the end of 1971. These parliamentary committees would oversee legislation and have privileged access to civil service information. It was inching the opposition into the antechamber of the executive. On 7 July the first ever inter-party meeting was held at Stormont, with

representatives of the Ulster Unionist Party, the newly formed Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), the Nationalist Party and the NILP in attendance.

Violence, opposition and direct rule The continued escalation of violence sabotaged this bold stroke. In July 1971 the constitutional nationalist SDLP boycotted Stormont in protest at British army brutality. Nationalists were further alienated by the introduction of internment – detention without trial – on 9 August 1971. Faulkner had urged this upon the British government, who were responsible for the army, in response to a rapidly building IRA bombing campaign. Loyalist perpetrators, whose violence, though widespread, was inchoate and generally not yet deadly, were thus not targeted in the initial months of internment. The IRA was relatively little inconvenienced and the popular sympathy their struggle attracted from nationalists increased substantially. At least initially, internment only poured fuel on the flames.

Despite the spiral of violence, Faulkner remained proactive, continuing to tack and veer. He was prepared to confront powerful unionist interests when, in January 1972, he renewed for a year a ban on parades, including the traditional summer parades. Ironically, the immediate result was not a make-or-break test of Faulkner's authority within unionism, as expected, but confrontation between a banned nationalist march in Derry and the British army on 30 January, in which fourteen catholic protestors were killed by troops. Catholic nationalists reacted with outrage to 'bloody Sunday'.

Vanguard, meanwhile, grew in strength and bellicosity, threatening to rebel against British attempts to sideline Ulster unionists. Faulkner was forced to respond by warning dire consequences if unionism's power base – the government and parliament of Stormont – was abolished. Nevertheless, on 22 March 1972, the British government demanded that Faulkner hand over complete security control to London, and stated firmly that substantial political reform was unavoidable. Faulkner's reputation rested upon his championing of real unionist responsibility for government and thus he had little choice but to reject this emasculation. On 24 March, Edward Heath, the British prime minister, announced that London would immediately prorogue Stormont and assume direct responsibility for the administration of Northern Ireland.

Faulkner's bluff was now called, as he had predicted a 'terrible battle' if direct rule was introduced. However, he carefully condemned the move not as a *casus belli* in itself, but because it seemed to presage a further fundamental undermining of the union between Britain and Northern Ireland. In practice, he proposed vigilance and in the meantime limited himself to calling for non-cooperation with an advisory commission to be appointed by the new secretary of state for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw (qv).

William Craig, as Vanguard leader, called a two-day general strike in protest at direct rule. On the second day of the strike, 20 March, no fewer than 100,000 people demonstrated at Stormont itself. Fearing a *de facto* seizure of leadership by Craig, Faulkner assumed the role of master of ceremonies by ushering Craig out to a balcony to address the crowd. Craig lost his nerve and, bowing to Faulkner's authority, he called for three cheers for the prime minister. Vanguard subsequently fumed in vain at Faulkner's *coup de théâtre*.

Power-sharing In the following months Faulkner wavered between reining in the fears he had himself encouraged by his linking of direct rule with British sell-out of the union, and stoking them as Britain moved towards talking to the Provisional IRA directly in July 1972. After the collapse of the short-lived British–IRA truce, he could afford to act more positively, and crafted a new unionist position, made public in September 1972, proposing the restoration of the Northern Ireland parliament as a single-chamber assembly with a committee system to ensure greater participation by all parties. While the devolved government would be responsible for internal security, there would be a bill of rights to safeguard minority rights. This was not enough to convince London, however. In March 1973 the British government's white paper proposed an assembly for Northern Ireland that would consist of eighty members elected by proportional representation, and a devolved cross-community (power-sharing) government in Northern Ireland. It further proposed that control of security matters would remain with Westminster, and that provision be made for the setting up of a Council of Ireland for north–south discussion on relevant matters. Faulkner cautiously welcomed the paper as a basis for discussion, but William Craig dismissed it. The following month Craig's new Vanguard Progressive Unionist Party formally constituted itself as a rival to the Ulster Unionist Party. Under the champion of unionist unity, the party had split.

Vanguard's secession did little to secure Faulkner's position, with many leading Ulster Unionists coming out against the white paper. Elections to an assembly, held on 28 June 1973, saw Vanguard unite with Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and sundry dissident unionists in a 'loyalist coalition', which won eighteen seats. Candidates of the Ulster Unionist Party, pledged to Faulkner, won twenty-two seats, but another ten successful candidates for the party rejected his leadership. Unionists opposed to power-sharing outnumbered Faulkner unionists. Faulkner's core electoral support now seemed to lie with the protestant middle class.

Anti-power-sharing unionists challenged Faulkner's pretensions to speak for the pro-union majority in Northern Ireland. Including nationalist and centre-ground representation, however, the majority in the assembly was in favour of the white paper. Faulkner considered himself to be the *de facto* representative of the unionist people within this plurality. Moreover, he was anxious to work with Whitelaw: while direct rule had brought violence to the province, he told his party conference in October 1973, it had also brought something else: 'an able mind, an outstanding personality and a real hard worker in Willie Whitelaw'. This faith was substantially

justified by Whitelaw's stewarding of the inter-party discussions, leading to the establishment of a devolved power-sharing government in Northern Ireland. The most fraught issue had been the allocation of seats on the proposed governing executive, with the SDLP determined to prevent Faulkner's unionist faction having a majority. Faulkner had his way, however, with six out of eleven unionist executive members, and Faulkner himself as chief minister. Perhaps even more importantly, virtually nothing was done to address the nationalist agenda of fair employment or security reform. Internment, in particular, remained.

There remained the Council of Ireland to be agreed, on a tripartite basis among the governments of Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. At this delicate point, William Whitelaw was replaced by Francis Pym (1922–2008) as secretary of state for Northern Ireland. During the talks, held in Sunningdale, Berkshire (6–9 December 1973), Faulkner was generally out-manoeuvred. Nationalist opinion, held to have made more concessions in the first round of negotiations, was slightly favoured. Nevertheless, Faulkner felt he had done enough in limiting the competence of the Council of Ireland to peripheral policy matters, securing a pledge from the government of the republic accepting that 'there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority' desired it, and setting in train cross-border security initiatives.

Faulkner's party did not share his strategic estimation, however. On 4 January 1974, four days after the power-sharing executive took office, a meeting of the Ulster Unionist Party's ruling council held in the Ulster Hall, Belfast, supported a motion rejecting 'the proposed all-Ireland-council settlement' by a majority of eighty votes. Three days later Faulkner resigned as party leader, though he remained head of the unionists in the assembly who were in favour of power-sharing. From this point, the Ulster Unionists opposed to Faulkner's leadership were known as the 'official unionists'. In May 1974, the pro-Faulkner unionists formally constituted themselves as the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland (UPNI).

In the February 1974 Westminster election, seen as a referendum in Northern Ireland on power-sharing, unionists who opposed power-sharing – united under the banner of the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC) – put forward a simple negative message: 'Sunningdale . . . weakens the British link and leads to an all-Ireland republic.' Faulkner emphasised that the Council of Ireland was contingent on the republic's recognition of Northern Ireland's right to a secure existence and self-determination. The result, nevertheless, was a resounding success for the UUUC. Eleven out of the twelve Northern Ireland seats at Westminster were won by UUUC candidates supporting anti-Sunningdale policies. Faulkner's unionists failed to secure a single seat (the SDLP picking up West Belfast). It was a body blow to Faulkner, but still the executive could continue until the next scheduled assembly election, and Faulkner believed that by then the innocuous reality of power-sharing and the Council of Ireland would have dispelled unionist fears. He thus held on as chief minister.

Resignation and death Faulkner was denied his period of grace. On 15 May 1974, a previously obscure group, the Ulster Workers' Council (UWC), called a political general strike in protest at the executive, now clearly bereft of majority support. Faulkner reacted to the growing crisis by insisting that implementation of the most contentious elements of the Sunningdale agreement be postponed until after the next assembly elections due in 1978, and that the council then be limited to its inter-governmental tier. Though the SDLP unhappily agreed, the UWC were not placated and the strike remained solid. Facing the prospect of defections from his ministerial ranks, on 28 May Faulkner demanded that the Labour government's secretary of state, Merlyn Rees (qv) (1920–2006), open talks with the UWC. Rees refused, echoing Faulkner's old mantra of sole governmental responsibility for political and constitutional authority, and consequently, along with the other unionist members of the executive, Faulkner resigned as chief minister. Rees closed the executive and prorogued the assembly.

Faulkner's political career was effectively at an end. In August 1974 his UPNI formally abandoned the very idea of institutional north–south links. The October 1974 Westminster elections delivered the *coup de grâce* to the unionism of Faulkner, and, indeed, Chichester-Clark and Terence O'Neill. The UUUC increased their majorities in seven of the seats and gained an even bigger overall percentage of the votes than in February. Faulkner's unionists polled fewer votes than the Republican Clubs.

Faulkner retired from active politics in August 1976. He was created a life peer as Baron Faulkner of Downpatrick in the new year honours of the following year. On 3 March 1977 he was killed in a hunting accident, aged fifty-six, near Saintfield, Co. Down. His funeral service was held on 5 March at Magherahamlet presbyterian church, Co. Down. He was survived by his wife and three children.

Faulkner's guiding principle was the positive exercise of power, both as the due appropriate to his political and administrative personal ability, which in combination far exceeded any of his contemporaries in Northern Ireland, and as the essential focus for the unity and strength of the Ulster unionist community. This orientation allowed him a flexibility in policy unusual in Ulster's political culture, but it also inhibited his ability to appreciate the necessity for political pragmatism, requiring deference to less able but powerfully representative rivals. His feud with Terence O'Neill served only to taint the prize of leadership when finally it was in his hands. Ironically for the politician most committed to the mission of a unified unionist political movement, he presided over its unprecedented disintegration and relapse into purely negative power.

J. F. Harbinson, *The Ulster Unionist Party 1882–1973: its development and organisation* (1973); D. Bleakley, *Faulkner: conflict and consent in Irish politics* (1974); B. Faulkner, *Memoirs of a statesman*, ed. J. Huston (1978); M. Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the crossroads: Ulster unionism in the O'Neill years* (2000); H. Patterson, 'Faulkner, (Arthur) Brian Deane, Baron Faulkner of Downpatrick (1921–1977)', *ODNB*

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