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**Stephen Kelly. *Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Party and the Northern Ireland Conflict, 1975-1990*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 408 pp., ISBN: 9781350115378, £85 (hardback)**

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Stephen Kelly's conspectus of Margaret Thatcher's political engagements with Ireland, covering her role in the conflict, consolidates his work in this area, building on the achievements of his previous works in this field. He brings his expertise on southern Irish political engagements with the North to bear on the role of the pre-eminent political figure on the British side of the conflict prior to the peace processes.

It is an impressive work of research, and there can be only very few relevant sources that Kelly has failed to consult. Government and institutional archives on both sides of the Irish Sea have been meticulously examined, and numerous intriguing details brought into consideration, supporting the comprehensive reading in primary sources, including newspaper archives, personal letters, public records, interviews and so on. The result is a book that can be regarded as a definitive work on the Thatcher government and Ireland.

The early pages detail the evolving positions of the Conservative opposition during the early years of the conflict, when Thatcher was a junior minister. Given her almost complete indifference to (and ignorance of) Irish issues, much of this first section examines the roles played by those Conservative politicians with more significant expertise on Ireland, who were Thatcher's early advisers on the topic, particularly the members of the Conservative Party Parliamentary Northern Ireland Committee (CPPNIC). Airey Neave is the principal figure on the CPPNIC, and his influence on Thatcher is described in detail. Here, Kelly's deep research shows, uncovering illuminating sources that throw light on Neave and other lead players. John Huston, a research officer at the Conservative Party central office, is revealed to have noted in conversation that Neave was 'not the brightest man in the world' (44). The chapter on Neave and the CPPNIC tends to obscure Thatcher from view, though this likely reflects the reality of her engagements with the Irish question. It is only after Neave's death (54-57) that we see Thatcher emerging with something like an evolved policy, though this was largely a commitment to ensure all policy was security focused.

Kelly's research, and the analysis it allows, is most impressive in the second and third sections, detailing some of the most important developments in recent Irish politics, and of the Thatcher period in office, including the republican hunger strike of 1981, the Brighton Bomb of 1984, and the intergovernmental negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Along the way, we are treated to some revealing anecdotes.

Humphrey Atkins, when trying to 'read himself' into the job of Northern Ireland Secretary on his appointment in Thatcher's first cabinet (46), is shown a map of the north of Ireland. He asks what the green and orange areas on the map denote and is told that they are

the districts with majorities of Catholics and Protestants respectively. Atkins then asks about the area marked in blue, unaware that at the centre of Ulster was Ireland's largest lake: Lough Neagh. Atkins' naivety on Irish matters is not unique. Similarly, when appointed to succeed Atkins in same role, Jim Prior is recorded to have been in a 'complete state of ignorance' (160). This seems to have been a general state of affairs.

As a historian with expertise on the Irish leaders of the period, Kelly is in his element when discussing the Anglo-Irish dimension of Thatcher's Irish policy, and we get markedly less material on her interactions with the northern politicians, both unionist and nationalist. The relationship between Irish Taoiseach Charles Haughey and Thatcher, initially friendly, is nicely encapsulated in the gifting by Haughey, at their first summit in 1980, of a silver teapot engraved with the quotation from Francis of Assisi that Thatcher used on her arrival at Downing Street after the 1979 election (103). In showing the initially warm relationship between the two leaders, it sets the scene for the rupture that resulted following Haughey's briefing to the press after the second summit some months later.

Kelly gives us the fine details that surround the falling out, with Haughey having used the term 'totality of relationships' in discussions with Thatcher during summit negotiations (117), and then elaborating to the press what he thought that meant, in terms of the role of the Irish government in northern Irish affairs, infuriating Thatcher. It is clear, however, from Kelly's research, that Thatcher had failed to challenge this usage in the negotiations, and thus felt obliged to retrench in the aftermath. The comments by the Irish leader after the 1980 summit, while ill-disciplined, only elaborate on what was in the communiqué issued. Thus, Kelly shows that the relationship, at first characterised by charm and warmth, swiftly cools as Haughey tries to play politics with Thatcher. Nonetheless, the process of the joint Anglo-Irish studies thus begun would lead, ultimately, to the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) in 1985 and a new era in Irish-British relations.

Haughey's successor, Dr. Garrett FitzGerald, Taoiseach twice in the period from 1981 to 1987, was instrumental in developing the groundwork that led to the AIA. The book is at its strongest when analysing the back stairs negotiations between British and Irish civil servants, such as those between David Goodall and Michael Lillis, Robert Armstrong and Dermot Nally. It is clear that the real progress toward the AIA and eventually the 1990s peace processes were made here. Even when advised by her civil servants, Thatcher's propensity to want to remain in command of all details meant that she often vacillated, or demurred, (184) when advised by her officials. Kelly gives us a sense of a leader who was naturally inclined to exercise rigid control and had an enduring suspicion of the civil service. This created difficulties for the developing processes of détente. Further strains in Anglo-Irish relations resulted from her insistent focus on security, with FitzGerald criticising her 'colonial mentality' (200), claiming it alienated northern Catholics and strengthened the position of the Irish paramilitaries. Kelly shrewdly notes the naivety of FitzGerald in thinking that he could engineer a shift in Thatcher's position and win concessions. Like Haughey, and others, he underestimated her stubbornness.

Kelly shows that Thatcher's preoccupation with security was an inevitable consequence of key moments in the first term of her prime ministership, notably the murder of Airey Neave. In developing her views on the Irish situation early in her premiership,

Thatcher is continually in consultation with Ian Gow and Enoch Powell, security-focused right wingers who supported a hard line on Northern Ireland and were notably sympathetic to Unionism. She showed a cold resolve when facing down the Irish republican hunger strikers in 1981, refusing to concede on conditions for paramilitary prisoners as ten men died. The 1984 bombing by the IRA of the Grand Hotel in Brighton where she was staying during the Conservative Party conference only succeeded in hardening her single-minded dedication to a policy on Ireland predicated on security.

This focus on defeating the IRA produced a gloves-off mentality within the security services, which involved using questionable, and illegal tactics, explored in the fourth part of the book, on her truncated third term in office. Among the tactics that her government approved, or on occasion did not seek to disapprove, were the use of the Special Air Service (SAS) undercover in the north of Ireland with an alleged 'shoot-to-kill' policy; and the use by the British Army and intelligence services of agents within loyalist paramilitaries who participated in sectarian murder. There was the continuing deterioration in the relationship with Haughey, who managed four separate terms as Taoiseach during Thatcher's three terms in office and, notoriously, the ban on the voices of spokespeople from proscribed organisations in broadcasts (the so-called 'broadcast ban') which primarily affected Sinn Féin politicians. Her final acts in relation to the Northern Ireland conflict was to allow the last of her Northern Ireland secretaries, Peter Brooke, to develop a talks process that engaged with Sinn Féin, before she was ousted by her cabinet, and her party, resigning in 1990.

Given the quality of the research on display here, it is unfortunate that infelicities of language, that one might expect a diligent copy editor to have noticed, occasionally mar the prose. Thatcher is described as wanting to 'deduce rampant inflation' (15); Airey Neave is accused of 'undertaking a consorted campaign' (54); the British and Irish governments are described as 'working in tangent' with one another (125).

The depth of research undertaken by Kelly, his focus on the minute details of character, relationships and policy, and the deep analysis of Thatcher's time as leader of the opposition and in the office of Prime Minister of the UK mark this out as an important history in the field. In assessing Anglo-Irish relations between 1979 and 1990 it is unlikely to be bettered.