Abstract: McCann begins this chapter with the resignation of Sean Lemass and his successor Jack Lynch. The change in leadership in Dublin helped create a policy vacuum on North-South co-operation which was ultimately filled by rhetoric on Irish unity. The rising tensions between the two states put real pressure on a fragile relationship between the two states. During this period, McCann highlights that co-operation in a number of areas stalled and by early 1968, effectively ended due to increasing tensions and the weakened positions of both Premiers.

North-South relations at the end of 1966 had largely stalled as a result of the political instability within Northern Ireland, as civil servants from the Republic felt it was unsafe to make visits to Belfast to discuss proposals on co-operation due to the level of sectarian violence. As more conservative Unionists attempted to destabilise O’Neill’s leadership, it became politically difficult for a further summit with the Taoiseach to materialise. Despite the political pressures on O’Neill, aspects of co-operation between civil servants and cabinet ministers did proceed in areas such as electricity and tourism, proving that co-operation could withstand some political turbulence. Nevertheless, O’Neill would have to deal with a new Taoiseach, as Jack Lynch succeeded Seán Lemass in November 1966.

3.1 Lynch takes over

In examining Lynch’s background, there is a striking similarity with O’Neill in that both were somewhat aloof from the mainstream of their parties. O’Neill was raised outside of Northern Ireland which liberated him from many of the political shibboleths within Unionism. Similarly, Lynch was not born into a typical Fianna Fáil family as his cabinet colleague, Pádraig Faulkner, noted, ‘as Taoiseach and as a relatively new leader of the Fianna Fáil party, Jack Lynch faced an extremely difficult task. He was the first Fianna Fáil leader not to have had any involvement, personal or family, with the struggle for Irish independence or with the Civil war.’ In an interview after he stepped down as Taoiseach, Lynch noted that it was his father, Dan, who had the greatest influence on his politics and that his father was neither a supporter of Eamon deValera or Michael Collins, but the nationalist politician William O’Brien. O’Brien’s approach of co-operation and consent over militant republicanism would become the hallmark of Lynch’s approach in dealing with Northern Ireland throughout his time as Taoiseach.

While Lynch may have been lacking some of the Republican credentials of his predecessor, his background on co-operation with Northern Ireland was probably aside from Erskine Childers, the most progressive