WEEKEND 8: Books

Exploring the roads to consensus

BY BRENDAN ORRE

Nationalists, Unionists and Marxists share the defect of bastin- ing the prime mover of the conflict in existential crises (whether it be British imperialism or the Republic's irredentism). In con- resists shows the dominant undercurrents are both existing and new. He also notes that the current conflict perspective perspective amongst academics has been transformed into the modus operandi for policy-makers, no mean achievement given that "There can be no agreement on the solution until there is an agreement on the problem facing us." There are three flaws in Whyte's essay, but these do not detract from its overall merits. First, he understates the extent of inequality in Northern Ireland, both in Catholic, employment opportunities and their impact on impartial judicial administration. Second, Whyte's account of the political situation in Northern Ireland is largely one of power-sharing at the expense of the traditional Unionist/ nationalist divide, which he fails to address. Finally, Whyte's analysis neglects the extent to which the central conflict is shaped by past and present Anglo-Irish conflicts.

The pursuit of power-sharing within Northern Ireland is not by its nature the product of intellectual conver- gence on the inter-state-conflict per- spective. John Whyte's essay on power-sharing examines some of the reasons why its failure has been so, for reasons ranging from incapacity on the part of policy-makers to the exercise of political power.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement must be understood partly as an attempt to halt the spiral of power-sharing into the conflict under which the Republic accommodates will be more stable and endur- able. The Prime Minister aimed at a power-sharing strategy to balance the balance between the British North Irish anti- Unionists. This was designed to make possible more than just power-sharing by giving ordinary people a say in policy formulation (as in North Ireland). If this was also true for the SDLP, they would be able to compete for power-sharing, so they were being strengthened in competition from Sinn Fein. As the existence of the Irish dimension was understood in the Ulster Agreement, the SDLP was prepared to engage in power-sharing without the unionists accepting the Sinn Fein position. They are more important in accounting for the failure of the agreement to create a single political program, and the potential for future violence. The Anglo-Irish Agreement has been more significant than the Fucks Out Movement.