

SOLVING NORTHERN IRELAND?

Brendan O'Leary

The Northern Ireland problem is often seen as insoluble. The first part of this article argues that there are possible solutions which can be explored. The second part, to follow in the next issue of CONTEMPORARY RECORD, will examine in more detail the difficulties of applying these solutions.

B RITISH political commentators, politicians and civil servants seem to relish declaring that 'there is no solution to the Northern Ireland problem' or that its deep-rooted conflicts 'can be managed but not solved'.¹ However, such tough-minded and self-congratulatory 'realism' is erroneous because there are many solutions to Northern Ireland's problems. If we are charitable the 'there is no solution' school of thought means to imply that there is at present no feasible macro-constitutional solution which can muster the agreement of the British and Irish governments as well as widespread consensus amongst nationalists and unionists within Northern Ireland. In this respect they seem to be correct. Northern Ireland seems to offer a perfect illustration of John Kenneth Galbraith's thesis that politics 'consists in choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable'. Any solution to Northern Ireland's macro-constitutional problems must revolve around three questions affecting the status of Northern Ireland, the type of state to which it should belong, and the most appropriate way of organising political power within and across its divided communities.

WHICH STATE?

The first question is: to which state should Northern Ireland belong? There are five

logical ways in which Northern Ireland's statehood could be arranged. First, Northern Ireland could be incorporated into an all-Ireland state as Irish nationalists have traditionally wanted. Second, it could remain within the United Kingdom as Ulster unionists insist it should. Third, it could be made into an independent state as former British Prime Minister James Callaghan and loyalist paramilitaries have suggested. Fourth, it could be subject to the joint authority of the British and Irish states. Finally, it could be destroyed, and its territory and people divided between the British and Irish states in a second, and presumably final, partition of Ireland.

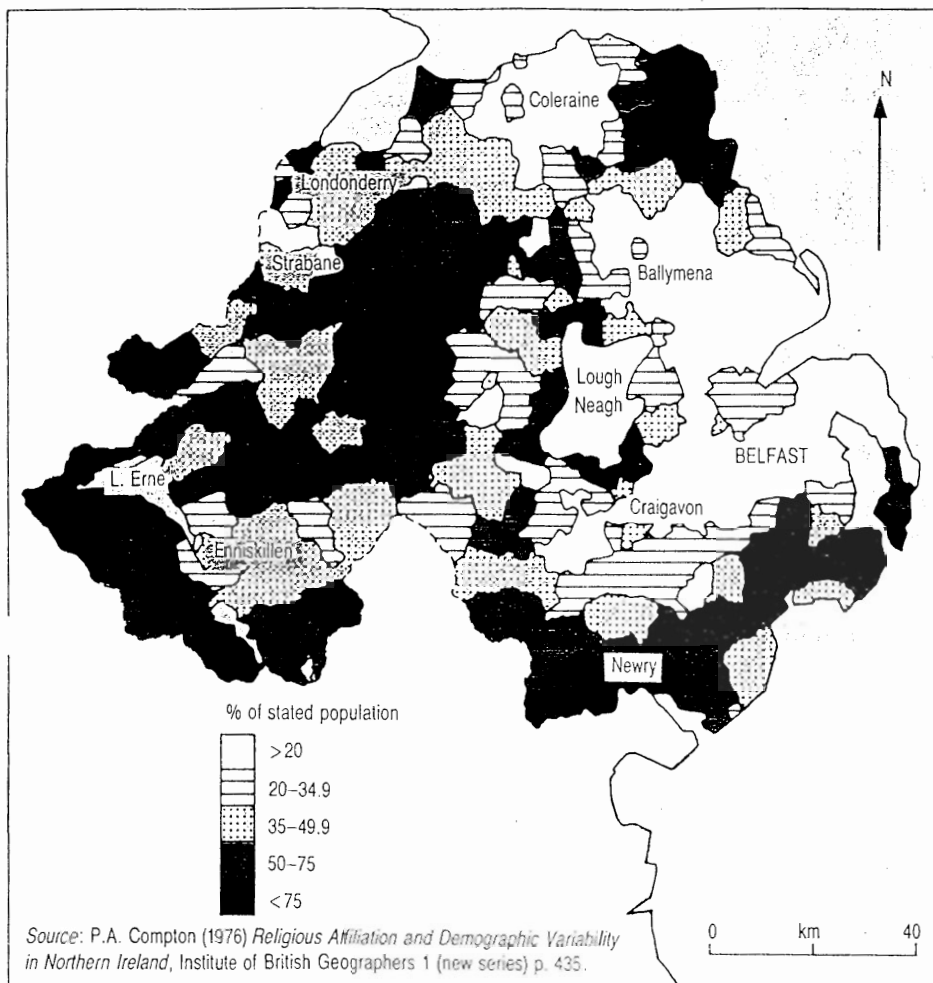
The first option, an all-Ireland state, is opposed by the majority of Northern Ireland's electorate, and vehemently and almost unanimously opposed by Ulster's Protestants who believe that they are British, and as a majority believe that their preferences should be paramount. They believe they would be economically impoverished, politically dominated and religiously oppressed in an all-Ireland state; and regularly demonstrate their willingness to fight to prevent their assimilation into such a state. The major weakness of Irish nationalism has been its signal failure to persuade Ulster Protestants that they are Irish, and that an all-Ireland state is a desirable proposition on economic, cultural or political grounds. The form of persuasion exercised by the Provisional IRA, and other nationalist paramilitary organisations, has been, to put it mildly, counter-productive.

The second option, the continuation of

Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, is strongly opposed by the nationalist minority within Northern Ireland, who make up most of Northern Ireland's Catholics, and is also formally opposed by the majority of the citizens of the Republic of Ireland. They argue that the Irish people as a whole were denied their right to self-determination when the island of Ireland was badly partitioned after the treaty between Britain and Ireland in 1921. They believe that the Irish state is right to claim sovereignty over Northern Ireland in its 1937 constitution. The current Irish Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, argues that Northern Ireland has proved to be 'a failed political entity', one in which systematic sectarian domination and economic discrimination has been endemic since its inception.² So far, Ulster unionists have never been able to persuade more than a minority of the Catholic minority that the British state is one which can treat them as full and equal citizens. The British themselves, whether their governments, political parties, or their peoples have also not regarded Northern Ireland as truly British. Despite Mrs Thatcher's assertion at the time of the Maze hunger strikes that Northern Ireland 'is as British as Finchley', successive British governments, including her own, have not taken measures to integrate Northern Ireland fully into the United Kingdom.

The third option, independence, is opposed by most actors within Northern Ireland. Unionists reject independence because it would mean that they would no longer be British, whereas nationalists reject it both because they would not be part of Ireland and because they would be a minority within a new state. British and Irish policy-makers reject this option as unthinkable, primarily because they do not believe such a state could be stable. Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement allows a majority in Northern Ireland to determine whether the territory is to belong to the UK or to the Republic of Ireland, but it does not permit such a majority to opt for independence. Others argue that an independent Northern Ireland would not be economically viable because it would be too small — a fallacious argument given the existence of numerous and viable small states, such as Singapore.³

The fourth option, joint sovereignty or joint authority, has been rejected by the current British government: first, because of the Thatcher government's well-known distaste for losing any iota of sovereignty; and second, because it is considered undemocratic since it would have to be imposed against the wishes of a majority of Northern Ireland's citizens. The most the current British government has been prepared to go in considering this option is embodied in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 (which was imposed against the



Northern Ireland: Percentage distribution of Roman Catholics in 1971.

wishes of a majority of the province's electorate).⁴ As a result of the Agreement the British government undertook to consult the Irish government on all matters of public policy affecting Northern Ireland, through the forum of a regular Intergovernmental Conference, and to make 'determined efforts ... to resolve any differences' between the two governments (Article 2). Every reader of CONTEMPORARY RECORD is presumably familiar with the outraged reaction of Ulster unionists to this very limited British move in the direction of tacit joint authority, and with the subsequent difficulties both governments have had in managing the Agreement.⁵

The fifth solution to Northern Ireland's statehood is to partition its territory and population between the British and Irish states, creating a smaller and more homogeneously unionist and protestant British Ireland, and a larger Republic of Ireland which would incorporate the majority of Northern Ireland's nationalists and Catholics.⁶ This option is not publicly favoured by any British, Irish or Northern Irish political party. Organising a just and stable partition would also be very problematic given the distribution of the

relevant populations; and the numerous lives lost in previous British-administered partitions in Ireland, India and Palestine can hardly inspire confidence in the merits of any proposal to rectify the botched partition of 1920-25.⁷

Each of the logical ways in which Northern Ireland's statehood could be resolved entails obvious and profound costs, and much less obvious and more intangible benefits. Note that the status quo also has considerable and predictable costs. However, the question 'To which state should Northern Ireland belong?' is merely the first of a set of further complex questions. Moreover, the same style of problematic answers are reached when we examine the second question: of what type of state should Northern Ireland be an integral component?

WHICH TYPE OF STATE?

There are three established constitutional modes of organising sovereignty in liberal democratic states: in unitary, federal, or confederal forms. In their turn unitary

states, federations and confederations can be more or less centralised or decentralised, depending upon the structures of government, intergovernmental relations and the allocation of powers and functions.

An Irish unitary state, advocated by Fianna Fáil in the Irish Republic, is not appealing to Ulster unionists, even if it were to be accompanied by extensive devolution of authority to the existing region of Northern Ireland. They find it unacceptable since it would inevitably vest sovereign power in the hands of the nationalist/Catholic majority in the island of Ireland. The fact that since 1982 it has been the objective of Sinn Féin and the IRA to obtain a unitary Irish state does nothing to enhance this option's attractiveness to Ulster Protestants.

An Irish federation or confederation would either have to be a two-unit federation or confederation, or it would have to be built upon three or more freshly created political provinces throughout the island of Ireland. The problem with a two-unit entity is that the historical track-record of such political institutions in bi-communal societies is disastrous. They have proven consistently unstable elsewhere in the world.⁸ The problem with any more than two-unit entity is that it would require very severe disruption of the existing institutional fabric of the Republic of Ireland, a price which neither its political élite nor its people seem prepared to pay. Thus even if unionists were prepared to contemplate such a schema it would probably not be viable.

The United Kingdom is presently a unitary state. Northern Ireland used to have a devolved government within the UK's decentralised unitary state: the notorious Stormont parliament which presided over institutionalised discrimination against Catholics and nationalists. However, since 1972 Northern Ireland has been centrally governed, under direct rule from Westminster and the Northern Ireland Office, tempered after November 1985 by the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the workings of the Intergovernmental Conference. The centralisation of government within the British unitary state, direct rule, has not proved more legitimate, nor has it produced successful conflict-regulation. Moreover, all British attempts to establish an agreed form of devolved government within Northern Ireland have failed. The Executive established after the Sunningdale conference in 1973 was brought down within a year. The Constitutional Convention of 1975-6 was wound up without agreement. Negotiations with Northern Ireland's constitutional parties by Secretary of State Humphrey Atkins in 1979-80 proved fruitless. 'Rolling devolution', the schema devised by Secretary of State James Prior in 1982, foundered on nationalist abstention and the

refusal of unionists to advance devolutionary proposals which might win nationalist consent.⁹ Historically informed pessimists therefore have good reasons to suppose that the current round of 'talks about talks' about devolution, orchestrated by the new Secretary of State Peter Brooke, are likely to go the way of their precursors. If, and when, all the invited parties agree to share the same conference venue they are unlikely to be speaking the same language.

The United Kingdom has never formally been a federation or a confederation. However, even if it were to become more like a federation or a confederation, let us say after the establishment of Scottish and Welsh devolution as well as powerful English regions by a radical reforming Labour government, it is not clear what significance this constitutional transformation of the UK state would have for solving the problems of Northern Ireland. Ulster unionists would presumably seek a UK federation which gave them autonomy within Northern Ireland and a bulwark against Irish nationalism; whereas Northern Irish nationalists would see a UK federation or confederation as failing to meet their aspiration for an Irish dimension, and would fear that it might become a vehicle for the re-establishment of something resembling the Stormont regime.

What about a federation or confederation of the British Isles, as some utopians are wont to suggest? Would not such an institutional transformation satisfy the dual national aspirations of the peoples in Northern Ireland? Perhaps, but the British and Irish states are unlikely to surrender sovereignty over all their territories to solve the Northern Irish question if they currently find it so difficult to manage their conflicting sovereignty claims over the province. Moreover, Irish nationalists, both North and South, would see any proposal for a federated or confederated British Isles as a trojan horse for the re-incorporation of Ireland under British control, and for that reason alone such an idea would be rejected out of hand.

What of the idea that Northern Ireland's problems will be transcended within the framework of an emergent European federation or confederation? It is true that joint membership of the European Community has profoundly aided the development of good relations between the London and Dublin governments but it is not obvious what impact spillovers from increasing European union will have on intra-communal relations within Northern Ireland. Key issues surrounding dual national identity, the administration of justice, military policing, paramilitary violence, discrimination and the distribution of local political power are not likely to be resolved as by-products of the repercussions of 1992. The removal of tariff barriers and increased economic



Peter Brooke, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, if it materialises, will not resolve a conflict centred on nationality and ethnicity. Moreover, the border across Ireland is likely to remain one of the most heavily policed in the European Community whatever the fate of the 1992 project. European cooperation is something desirable in its own right, not something to be favoured because it will be a panacea for Northern Ireland.

Unitary, federal or confederal formulae for a Northern Ireland which stays in the UK, or becomes part of an all-Ireland state, do not appear to advance the search for a solution, at least upon cursory inspection. The same argument holds true for an independent Northern Ireland or for a Northern Ireland governed under joint authority. In part the reason why these formulae are unhelpful is that they are imprecise about the nature of their implications for political decision-making.

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- (3) A spirited case for an independent Northern Ireland is made by James Crimmins and Margaret Moore, 'Chapter 10. The Case for Negotiated Independence', in McGarry, J. and O'Leary, B. (eds) *The Future of Northern Ireland*.
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- (5) See B. O'Leary, 'Northern Ireland and the Anglo-Irish Agreement' in Patrick Dunleavy et al *Developments in British Politics* 3. Eloquent arguments in favour of joint authority have been advanced by A. Kenny, in *The Road to Hillsborough*, 1986, Pergamon and in 'Chapter 9. Joint Authority' in McGarry, J. and O'Leary, B. (eds) *The Future of Northern Ireland*.
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- (7) See T.G. Fraser, *Partition in Ireland, India and Palestine*, 1984, Macmillan.
- (8) See M.J.C. Vile, 'Federation and Confederation: The Experience of the United States and the British Commonwealth', in D. Rea (ed.) *Political Co-operation in Divided Societies: A Series of Papers Relevant to the Northern Ireland Conflict*, 1982, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin. It will be interesting to see if democratic Czechoslovakia proves an exception to this generalisation.
- (9) See the discussion in C. O'Leary, S. Elliot and R.A. Wilford, *The Northern Ireland Assembly*, 1982-6, 1988, Harast.

Brendan O'Leary is Senior Lecturer in Political Science and Public Administration at the LSE. He is currently engaged on research into the Anglo-Irish Agreement, supported by the Nuffield Foundation.

gentle and obsequious, or orchestrated from Downing Street.

In the run-up to the next election there will be a battle to shape and define the political agenda. In the 1987 Election there were three major parties and it was difficult for the BBC and ITV to locate the 'neutral' middle ground; the middle ground was the location of the Alliance. One consequence was a tendency to follow the (mainly Conservative) popular press agenda. In the next election, with the Alliance gone, news executives in the BBC and ITV may find an easier and more acceptable definition of the middle ground; this may be the ground shared between *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, (on the left) and *The Times* (steering a more moderate Tory course under its new Editor, Simon Jenkins).

REAL EVILS

Media professionals — especially American ones — are inclined to see criticism of the media as blaming the messenger for the bad news. Perhaps Hugo Young should not blame his fellow journalists for the evils of contemporary media.

Certainly some of the less attractive characteristics of our political system are reflected in the British mass media. In the 1980s, bi-polar politics and excessive partisanship were reflected in the press. The partial dismantling of local government has been accompanied by the virtual elimination of a regional element in the national press and an increased gap between the salaries and resources available in the national and regional press.

Among the many messages carried by the press is a message about educational levels. Is a nation whose most popular reading materials are *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*, fully equipped to face the 1990s decade, and the next century?

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Jeremy Tunstall is director, communications policy research centre at City University, London.

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Brendan O'Leary concludes his penetrating analysis of the political options facing Northern Ireland.

WHAT TYPE OF DECISION-MAKING?

The key question for Northern Ireland, whichever state it belongs to, and whatever its constitutional nomenclature, is straightforward: how should political and policy-making power be organised across and within the respective communities? There are basically four ideal typical ways in which this question might be answered: arbitration, majority-rule, power-sharing and cantonisation. Each of these types could be permuted in multiple ways, but here I have not the space to expand upon this theme.

Arbitration

First, an external power might be given the role of arbiter in Northern Ireland, refereeing conflicts and adjudicating disputes in the absence of consensus. This role has been exercised by British governments since 1972. After the Anglo-Irish Agreement it has been exercised in consultation with the Irish government, providing 'direct rule with a green tinge'.¹ In principle, at some future juncture, arbitration might be exercised by both Britain and Ireland in a system of joint authority. More fancifully, arbitration might be exercised by the European Community (direct rule from Brussels) or by the United Nations.

The most fundamental problem with arbitration is that the arbitrated do not regard the most likely arbiters, namely Britain and Ireland, as sufficiently disinterested to be neutral. In particular Irish nationalists, with considerable

justification, regard direct British rule in Ireland as responsible for continuing economic discrimination and regular abuses of human rights by the security forces. Unionists, by contrast, find repulsive the mere idea of institutionalised consultation with the Irish Republic by the British government.

Majority-rule

Second, political power might be exercised according to majority-rule principles. This fundamental norm of the Westminster model is, however, problematic in ethnically divided societies.² Under the Stormont government there was one party rule by the Ulster Unionist Party for over 50 years, and there was no prospect of the nationalist opposition achieving governmental authority. The system of majority-rule devolution provided a perfect milieu for the systematic abuse of political power. Majority rule decision-making procedures attached to unitary, federal or confederal *formulae* would create the same threat, whether Northern Ireland was Irish, British, jointly governed or independent.

In any case the question might well be asked: which majority? Irish nationalists claim that Northern Ireland is illegitimate because its borders were drawn so as to create an artificial majority, and that they are the genuine majority in the island of Ireland; whereas Ulster unionists claim that they are in a majority within Northern Ireland and should be allowed to exercise power commensurate with that status.

British nation-builders, by contrast, argue that the true majority is in the United Kingdom as a whole. They contend that if

'real' British political parties, viz. the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, were to organise and compete in elections in Northern Ireland then its ethnically-based politics would be transformed.³ This argument, currently very fashionable amongst the Young Conservatives, rests on three very insecure foundations. First, it presupposes that Northern Irish voters will vote for British political parties in large numbers if they are given the opportunity. The evidence to date is not persuasive. The Conservatives, the solitary British political party to have organised in the province, have lost deposits in both the European Parliamentary election 1989 and the by-election in Upper Bann in May 1990, and have performed adequately in only one very unrepresentative local government election in North Down. Groups seeking to persuade the Labour Party to stand in the province have received derisory votes. Second, the argument rests on the assumption that Northern Irish voters who will vote for British political parties will do so for non-sectarian reasons. However, polling evidence suggests that the Conservatives would appeal most to those in favour of the Union, i.e. Protestants; whereas the Labour Party would appeal most to those in favour of Irish unity, i.e. Catholics, because Labour favours achieving Irish unity by consent.⁴ Far from transcending sectarian politics the organisation of the major British political parties in the province would directly embroil them in the national and religious conflicts, just as they were deeply affected by them before 1920. Third, the argument erroneously assumes that the major cause of national, ethnic and religious conflict in Northern Ireland since 1920 has been the absence of British party competition in the province. These electoral integrationist arguments, favouring majority rule in the United Kingdom as a whole, are as wildly idealist about the benefits of the Westminster model as Gaelic romantics are about Irish unification. In the British Isles political romanticism is not an exclusively Irish commodity.

Power-Sharing

However, political relationships in Northern Ireland might be organised according to a third principle, power-sharing. Known as *consociationalism* to political scientists, power-sharing is characteristic of democratic and stable societies which are nonetheless deeply divided by ethnic or religious cleavages.⁵ Consociational democracies usually have four key features. First, a grand coalition government incorporates the political parties representing the main segments of the divided society. Second, proportionality rules throughout the public sector: the



proportional representation of each segment in key political institutions (the electoral system, executive, legislature, judiciary, and the bureaucracy) is matched by the proportional allocation of public expenditure to each segment. Third, segmental autonomy norms permit each group self-government over those matters of most profound concern to them: for example, each group may be proportionally and equally funded to support and run its own educational system. Finally, consociational systems entrench the right of constitutional veto for minorities.

In effect successive British governments since 1972 have been trying to promote a consociational solution to Northern Ireland's problems, seeking to persuade its constitutional political parties to share political power in a devolved government. Under Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement both the British and Irish governments have been committed to this solution since 1985, and Mr Brooke has been actively seeking to implement it in recent months.

Consociational solutions, which together with many others I believe to be the most desirable for divided societies like Northern Ireland, failed to work before 1985 for clear reasons — although British governments took a long time to learn them. First, consociational solutions cannot work easily or effectively where the rival segments are fundamentally divided over their national as opposed to their ethnic or religious identities. Nationality conflicts appear to have an irreducibly zero-sum

character, a view which is mightily reinforced by murderous paramilitaries who aim to make everybody believe the proposition that 'one nation = one state'.

Second, the majority of constitutional unionists rejected institutionalised power-sharing as non-British, and argued that they could not be expected to share power with people who wanted Northern Ireland to belong to a foreign country. Third, the majority of constitutional nationalists rejected any consociational proposals if they were not accompanied by an institutionalised Irish dimension. Fourth, political leaders of nationalist and unionist parties who were personally prepared to compromise fundamentally on the outlines of a consociational settlement rapidly found themselves isolated within their parties and within their ethnic communities.

Finally, since both the nationalist and unionist communities were internally divided into 'ultras' and 'moderates' the latter were insufficiently free to negotiate a consociational settlement. The SDLP had to look over its shoulder at Sinn Fein and the IRA, whereas the Official Unionists had to watch out on their extremist flank for fear of being outmanoeuvred by the Democratic Unionists and loyalist paramilitary organisations.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was meant to break this stalemate. By entrenching an Irish dimension it was intended to weaken Sinn Fein, strengthen the SDLP and make them more disposed towards a consociational settlement. The Agreement has weakened Sinn Fein, but not as much as was hoped, and the SDLP have not shown themselves to be as keen to negotiate on devolution as the British government surmised.⁶ The SDLP's spokespersons have emphasised that the party has 'no ideological commitment to devolution', even if it is to be based on power-sharing. Moreover SDLP leader John Hume has consistently argued that only when unionists have 'sorted out' their relationships with the rest of the people of Ireland can a general consociational accommodation between nationalists and unionists be reached.⁷ Since 1986 Hume seems to have been canvassing pan-Irish solutions to the conflict rather than advocating an internal settlement. Meanwhile the IRA has continued to create mayhem, supported by Sinn Fein, and to disrupt whatever limited prospects exist for political negotiations.

By entrenching an Irish dimension the Agreement was also intended to encourage unionists to negotiate a consociational settlement since Article 4 cleverly provided that where nationalists and unionists agreed to share power the role of the Inter-governmental Conference would become less important. However, unionists were nearly unanimous in entirely rejecting the Agreement, and campaigned vigorously for

its abolition throughout 1986–7. Enthusiasts for power-sharing within their ranks remained isolated, whilst the majority insisted that they would only negotiate with nationalists if the Agreement was removed, or at least suspended. Seasoned observers believe that the strategic aim of key unionist leaders remains that of destroying the Agreement rather than negotiating a consociational settlement with an Irish dimension. These unionist leaders remain hopeful that one of a number of scenarios (a change of British policy, a hung parliament at Westminster, or a catastrophic deterioration in Anglo-Irish relations) will accomplish the objective of breaking the Agreement. James Molyneaux, the leader of the Official Unionists, is known to be hostile to devolution in principle (and to favour Northern Ireland's complete integration into the United Kingdom, which is why his current involvement in talks with Mr Brooke has provoked scepticism amongst journalists and analysts of Irish politics.

However, it is very clear that both the British and the Irish governments remain firmly committed to the Agreement, as they declared in their Official Review of the Agreement in May 1989 — which 'carved the Agreement in stone' as one Dublin official put it to me. Only a broader agreement which unionists negotiate and accept could produce change in London and Dublin on the text of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Therefore, short of a miracle Mr Brooke's current talks to establish a devolutionary consociational settlement cannot succeed for one simple reason. In order to get rid of the agreement unionists must offer nationalists a new agreement which transcends the previous one, a new agreement in which the Irish dimension is at least as significant as the present one, as well as offering nationalists a power-sharing devolutionary settlement within Northern Ireland. If they are prepared to do that, and offer it as the united package of both the principal unionist parties, then Mr Brooke will easily win the Nobel peace prize nomination in 1991, and along with many others I will have to eat hats throughout the next year.

The constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, and the British and Irish governing parties, are best seen as engaged in a complex war of manoeuvre in which each agent's prime objective is to ensure that they are not held responsible for the breakdown of talks about talks. Therefore consociational solutions, while eminently desirable, seem destined to fall on stony ground in Northern Ireland for the foreseeable future.

There are several ways in which the British and Irish governments might react if they recognise this increasingly palpable fact. They may simply opt to engage in crisis-management. Alternatively they may

agree to play a long-term strategy, reforming Northern Ireland's discriminatory economy and its administration of justice to win the political confidence of nationalists, isolating the IRA and Sinn Fein, whilst simultaneously gently coaxing unionists in from the cold. The logic of this strategy would be to accomplish all of the institutional features of consociationalism except grand coalition government — which would have to await until a later date. In other words the two governments would aim to ensure proportional representation in non-elected political institutions (including, eventually, the police), segmental autonomy, and a bill of rights guaranteeing equality of citizenship and entrenching some minority rights.⁸

The British and Irish governments might also take the more risky and drastic step of threatening a major new initiative, such as moving towards joint authority or repartition, in order to increase the pressure on unionists and nationalists to arrive at a consociational settlement. Arend Lijphart, the pioneer of the theory of consociationalism, argues that partition is the most stable and least undesirable solution when consociationalism fails, and that threatening partition might sometimes bring the relevant actors to the negotiating table. In the concluding chapter of our forthcoming book, *The Future of Northern Ireland*, John McGarry and I sketch a similar argument for Northern Ireland.

Cantonisation

However, there is one final way in which political power might be distributed in Northern Ireland which permits repartitionist, majority-rule and consociational logic in a distinctive synthesis which is worthy of consideration.⁹ Northern Ireland could be cantonised, in a manner similar to the Swiss mode of government, that is to say political power could be extensively devolved to new and very small political units, averaging about 20,000 people, although Swiss cantons are much larger. Such political units could be designed either to achieve a very local form of consociationalism, grand coalition government of Catholics and Protestants, in certain areas; or, given the scale of residential segregation in other areas, to create religiously and ethnically homogeneous units where majority rule would be practically coterminous with the self-government of all the relevant community. Where intra-national conflict is high then the partitioning of units to create homogeneity would be the operating administrative principle; and where such conflict was low local consociationalism might be encouraged through the design of balanced 'mixed' cantons.

This strategy would decompose Northern Ireland into islands of nationalist, unionist, and consociational cantons; simultaneously combining majority rule, partitionist and consociational principles. Some areas with high political violence would have to remain under direct rule, and a province-wide anti-terrorist force would obviously still be required. However, under a schema of 'rolling cantonisation', so to speak, policing and judicial powers could be gradually devolved to those areas where the population expressed a wish to exercise such powers, and where the British and Irish governments judged that the experiment had some prospects of success.

Needless to say this cantonisation idea is fraught with potential difficulties, notably the difficulties in drawing and policing appropriate units of government, winning consent for them, and the ever-present threat that cantonisation, especially of policing and judicial powers, might be used by paramilitary organisations to seize control of parts of Northern Ireland, and treat them as 'liberated zones'. However, advocating cantonisation is at least as realistic as pressing for a consociational settlement, pushing traditional unionist or nationalist positions, or commending joint authority. Cantonisation is also more gradualist in its implications than drastic repartition because it permits both governments freedom to reverse the experiment. For these reasons it deserves to be debated more widely — although this remark should not be construed as an uncritical endorsement of the merits of cantonisation.

CONCLUSION

This very brief resumé of some of the solutions canvassed for Northern Ireland's macro-constitutional problems has been neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. For fuller arguments John Whyte's *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford, Clarendon) and the collected and diverse essays in McGarry and O'Leary's edited collection, *The Future of Northern Ireland* should prove of value. Moreover, this note has paid little attention to the minefields of complexity in public policy affecting security, justice and employment in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless if it persuades readers that there are more solutions to Northern Ireland problems than they thought, and that some of those solutions are worthy of greater frowning of the brow, it will have achieved its central purpose.

If there is no solution then there is no problem' is a well-known managerial maxim. Would you happily apply it to Northern Ireland? This question is plainly rhetorical. If you have been persuaded that it is false to say that 'there is no solution

to the Northern Ireland question' I congratulate you on having advanced beyond one of the thought-stopping clichés which dominate commentary on Northern Ireland.

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- 3 Representative statements from this perspective can be found in H. Roberts, 'Sound stupidity: the British party system and the Northern Irish question', *Government and Opposition*, 1987, 22, 3: 313-35, and A. Aughey (1989) *Under Siege: Ulster Unionism and the Anglo-Irish Agreement*, Hurst. Critical evaluations can be found in B. O'Leary, 'A Hegelian inspects the Laager' *Irish Times*, 6.1.1990, and J. McGarry and B. O'Leary, 'Chapter 11. Conclusion: Northern Ireland's options: A framework and analysis' in *The Future of Northern Ireland*.
- 4 The most comprehensive statement of Labour's frontbench policy for Northern Ireland can be found in K. McNamara, J. Marshall and M. Mowlam, 'Towards a United Ireland. Reform and harmonisation: A dual strategy for Irish unification', *House of Commons*, 1988.
- 5 The *locus classicus* of the theory of consociationalism can be found in A. Lijphart's *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 1977, Yale. Its general difficulties, and its difficulties for Northern Ireland, are summarised in B. O'Leary, 'The limits to coercive consociationalism in Northern Ireland', *Political Studies*, 1989, 37, 4.
- 6 For more details see B. O'Leary, 'Chapter 12. Northern Ireland and the Anglo-Irish Agreement' in P. Dunleavy et al (eds) *Developments in British Politics*, 3.
- 7 See Frank Millar's interviews with John Hume in the *Irish Times*, January 1989.
- 8 This logic is one possible way of reading the practical policy advocated by the British Labour Party, as articulated in its document 'Towards a United Ireland' (1988).
- 9 This sector briefly develops an idea which is expressed slightly differently in Liam Kennedy's *Two Ulsters*.

Brendan O'Leary is Senior Lecturer in Political Science and Public Administration at LSE. He is the co-editor with John McGarry of The Future of Northern Ireland (1990), Oxford, Clarendon Press, author of The Asiatic Mode of Production (1989), Blackwell, and co-author (with Patrick Dunleavy) of Theories of the State (1987), Macmillan. He is currently engaged in research on the Anglo-Irish Agreement, supported by the Nuffield Foundation.

YES, INTERVIEWER!

Changing Art of the Political Interview

David Walter and John Forsyth

Recent clashes between politicians and media interviewers, and accusations of alleged bias against certain broadcasters, have again highlighted the sensitivity of the political interview. This article puts on the record an important radio programme analysing the political interview's postwar history.

THE television or radio studio has challenged both Parliament and the public meeting as a focus of political life for successive generations of the electorate. In both the hustings and the House of Commons, even since the arrival of the TV cameras, the politician is — or hopes to be — in control, choosing the subject and largely setting the tone.

For most of the electorate the only opportunity they will have to hear a politician's views and grasp of his or her subject tested comes through the intervention of an interviewer. In June 1989 BBC Radio 4's *Talking Politics*¹ focused on the evolution of the art of the political interviewer and the art of answering — or not answering — his questions. Over the years the broadcasters have pushed the frontiers back against the politicians. Over the last decade or more politicians have organised themselves to push the frontiers back again.

When Clement Attlee flew home from the United States, he faced what passed in the 1950s as a grilling in front of the television cameras:

INTERVIEWER Good morning Mr Attlee. We hope you've had a good journey.

ATTLEE Yes, excellent.

INTERVIEWER Can you, now you're back, having cut short your lecture tour, tell us something of how you view the election prospects?

ATTLEE Oh, we shall go in and have a good fight. A very good chance of winning, we shall go in confidently, we always do.

INTERVIEWER And on what will Labour take its stance?

ATTLEE Well, that we'll be announcing shortly.

INTERVIEWER What are your immediate plans, Mr Attlee?

ATTLEE My immediate plan is to go down to a committee and decide on just that thing, as soon as I can get away from here.

INTERVIEWER Anything else you'd care to say about the coming election?

ATTLEE No.

Politicians can't get away with it like that any more — interviewers that deferential, subjects that condescending. It wasn't long after that interview with Clement Attlee that radio and television journalists decided to take the trilbies off their heads and the plums out of their mouths, and make the questions a great deal tougher. The development was spurred on by the start of Independent Television News in September 1955 as a rival to the BBC. The Corporation soon found itself competing with ITN's much more robust attitude to politicians. Robin Day was in the vanguard of the revolution — first for ITN — then for the BBC:

DAY There was no controversy in broadcasting at all, and therefore when one started and asked the visiting minister at the airport any question other than 'Are you tired after your long trip?' it was seen to be a ruthless, probing question. It wasn't only me, there were others working on the new *Panorama* at that time, and my colleagues in ITN, notably George Ffitch and others, we were convinced that the right way to question politicians was to ask the relevant questions courteously and persistently, and in a carefully prepared way.

Performance on the media as a test of political prowess had become very important by the early 1960s. Before