Unionists must give much more than an inch

Brendan O'Leary

As we went to press, the Belfast talks had finally got under way at Stormont, and the constitutional parties were setting out their states. Should they eventually produce the basis for a new Belfast Agreement which transcends the Anglo-Irish Agreement, history will have been made, and Sir Peter Brooke and Sir Norman Stephen along with other unlikely commissioners from the Lebanon and South Africa will share the Nobel Peace Prizes in 1992. There are, however, rational grounds for discounting such hopes - though I'll be delighted to be proved wrong.

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 Asked in star gaze without the benefit of insider knowledge, I have
analysed the prospects for the talks on the assumption that both parties knew its principles and would bargain rationally for them. This analysis thus ignores whether Charles Haughey and Rev. Ian Paisley want to estab

lish a more benign reputation with 20th-century historians, whether "public opinion" is pushing the rival leaders to mix accommodation, whether unionists' "young Turks"' demonstrations are thrusting into view, and whether some actors are more willing than others.

The first strand—its certainty after the Intergovernmental Conference on July 16th—is focusing on internal governmental arrangements in Northern Ireland. If the unionists have their way, upon the relationships between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The unionist parties will presumably want the participants to sign provisional "bonds of agreement" before theirs two and three begins. Whereas the SDLP will want everything to remain in the category of "undecided matters" until strand three is concluded.

If the former procedure is agreed, then the talks are likely to break down along strand one, the latter. Given strand's two and three exists. Why? Because there are many substantive issues over which strand can做完。 Procedures are likely to become uncertain when these arise, and whether they arrive together or separately. Neither strand has an interest in making unilateral concessions in the preliminary stages which can subsequently be used to penalise advantage by the other

There are two crucial substantive issues which must arise—including mig on strand three. The first is whether an "internal settlement", involving power-sharing in devolved government within the UK, or within some limbo between the UK and the rest of Ireland, is to be the "part of the overall settlement. The second is security.

The key problem about an "internal settlement", rather it is impossible to draw from any prospect of "external settlement". Let us assume that the unionists are prepared to negotiate sharing in devolved government, even though the recent leaders of the UUP and DUP believe their careers on never having made such an offer and yet as yet have shown no sign of making the offer. If they wish to maximise the value of the offer or to extend the non-negotiable attitude towards devolution, this explanation may be more plausible.

Three further qualifications: (1) the relationships between the UK government and the institutions of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and Westminster; (2) the interaction between the ULDP and the Northern Ireland parliamentary committees. If the SDLP is prepared to consider a power-sharing settlement, it will not be enthusiastic about the payment of these predictable preconditions—e.g., it might insist that they be cleared after the unionists "sort out" their relationships with the republic.

Alternatively, the SDLP could add riders of its own, it should propose that terms of the power-sharing agreement be devolved for regional and under a modified form of article four of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It could suggest by proportional representation for Westminster elections. If it wishes to be realistic it might propose that Northern Ireland's Westminster MPs sit as a distinct party. Even if all parties in the unionists agree on dimensions are agreed of the overall settlement. And if it wished to be provocative, it might propose that the Northern Ireland parliamentary committees be balanced by a Dail committee in which both traditions from Northern Ireland would be represented.

Unionsists will insist on clarifying the status of Northern Ireland within the UK as part of the peace. In order to get agreement on the terms of the devolved government, which is to say that the Wang of Northern Ireland within the UK must be recognised by the negotiation of a devolved government, when the Wang of Northern Ireland within the UK must be recognised by the Northern Ireland's Westminster MPs sit as a distinct party. Even if all parties in the unionists agree on dimensions are agreed of the overall settlement. And if it wished to be provocative, it might propose that the Northern Ireland parliamentary committees be balanced by a Dail committee in which both traditions from Northern Ireland would be represented.

On August 16th it will be good news for the SDLP to be used to the DUP of the SDLP members of a cross-party govern

ments—will it insist on the Anglo-Irish Agreement

"They cannot be helped, since they are unable to help themselves” are words often heard" Reiner Gatermann

GIRISH THERE is a lot of sympathy for Ireland. There are many attempts to analyse and understand the hatred north, and to contemplate all ways of solutions of it, not least in the press. After all, Germans and Irish had at least their geopolitical reasons to know one another. German-Irish relations were often marked with a certain amount of mutual understanding, despite the occasional friction. Nevertheless, almost all Germans face the Irish problem with helplessness, confusion and—in very often—frustration. They cannot be helped, since they are unable to help themselves. Without heart goes on words often heard.

As a journalist, one needs to use a few words to each article just to express the basic terminology of the party conflict in Northern Ireland and in one has more doubts about the accuracy of the descriptions. There is an emotional resistance to connect a party, openly supporting terrorism, to the word "Catholic" or the word "loyal" to parties which have done a lot of damage to the country (or governments) to which they profess loyalty. At the end one surrenders to the try to express in terms of events some hundred or years or at least some decades ago.

Obviously, the majority win over centuries is a major obstacle on the way to reconciliation. But peoples, or, far that matter, members of different religions, cannot live forever with the burial of their history. The Germans, the French, the British and the Irish. Our history teaches us lessons. Today, what would Europe be like without the so-called German-French reconciliation? And soon hopefully, we will see theGerman-Polish reconciliation. The question is, however, if it is impossible for the British and the French. Have I ever been willing to look at the whole of the Irish and German history.

Given we talk so much about religion in connection with the Northern Ireland conflict, it amasses how little the inhabitants have contributed to a solution. Where, among the clergy of both communities, the spirit and commitment in the struggle against terrorism and for reconciliation which were so meaningful in the tremendous changes in Poland and east Germany? Sometimes one cannot insist the impression that religion has made sufficient mistakes—yes, and that some clergymen are in the service of the political career.

Some years ago my editor asked me: "Are there any positive memories about Northern Ireland?" Of course there are. Like tiny weak plants they try to root amid mud, violence, prejudice and political stubbornness. I wrote a great many items about schools, a reconciliation group in Derry and the revival of Belfast’s inner city. Recently I wrote about projects, actively supported by the European Commission. I don’t think I will be able to write about the peace. It looks like the split of the European Union in 1991, with its move to closer cooperation and the fall of boundaries, an outsider cannot help but wonder at the arguments in the political debate about Northern Ireland’s future.

One can only hope that the secretary of state, Mr. Brooke, will be successful in his efforts to bring a situation only comparable to that in South Africa to an end.

FORTNIGHT JULY/AUGUST 11
comes back in full force, or, in the event of any repeat of the loyalist strike of 1974, that there we join British and Irish governmental authorities. The Anglo-Irish Agreement is the default option. But if the government were to show willingness to play a more creative role, the SDLP, with goodwill, could be in a position to bring the Good Friday Agreement back on track. The failure of the SDLP to respond in a meaningful way to the needs of the community, and the way in which it has continued to be associated with paramilitary activity, has seriously damaged its credibility and its prospects for the future. It is clear that the SDLP must do more to prove its commitment to the peace process and to the political process. It must also address its own internal problems and work to rebuild its support. The situation in Northern Ireland is complex and will require a sustained effort to achieve a lasting peace.
Okay, let's all laugh at Jim and Ian

Fionnuala O Connor

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

GOOD FUN. Ed Pearce's column in this issue's space last issue—a nifty piece of union-bashing that managed to simultaneously flatter internationalists. Within limits. Classic English liars: great company, the truth, if you can keep them off their wrenched history. Unionists, on the other hand, are no fun at all. My Pearce only did it to annoy. In real life, there is an anti-Irish tendency to fall for this stuff. It creates an illusion of shared superiority, you see—all the more enjoyable when one has occasionally noticed an English laugh at the very sound of an Irish accent. How nice, then, to gang up together against foolish unionists, how satisfying the communion of sophisticated souls while lesser breeds thumb their Bibles. Anglo-Irish relations haven't encouraged anyone's better nature.

But the Brooke business has tried temps wholesale, even those of the outsiders. Difficult, for example, to know what's a make of the proposal that Peer Carringtom should chair the north-south talks. At first it looked like the perfect excuse of ganging up to sadden the unionists. Certainly no one who knew anything about the last ten years could have imagined Jim McKevitt and Ian Paisley happily returning to Lord Carringtom as Chairman. Officials in Dublin and the SDLP will know what the reaction would be—and relished, it to the arrangement of straightforwardly face Lord Carringtom's executive; the only thing the former British foreign secretary would be fine example of self-interest, but priggery. Why did Mr Brooke go for it? Why would he controve at an Irish suggestion, intended to injure and wrong-foot the unionists? Why, on such a stubbornly provocative issue, would he risk the disintegration of a process he'd spent so much time assembling?

The answer is equally obvious, of course, if still amazing. Mr Brooke didn't know what the reaction would be, and no one told him. Brian Mawhinney, David Fell—the native observers made no difference. The communal wisdom of the Northern Ireland Office yielded up the seamlessly mistaken conviction that Lord Carringtom was a serious contender. And perhaps it's naive to be amazed—naive to underestimate the arrogance and ignorance that muffles the common sense of senior civil servants. The Foreign Office stuff that sweeps through is a million before and makes others doubt themselves.

True, unionists have made life easier for themselves than need be. True, because they're fundamentalists, they've never questioned the unionists' tactics for the top job. But when Dublin government spokesmen peer at unionist inability to negotiate they beg a couple of questions: Who helped make unionist politicians what they are? And isn't think Ian Paisley and Jim McKevitt a dubious method of building an alternative leadership?

Neither state, British or Irish, has anything to be proud of in the history of their dealing with Northern Ireland. Should any new settler even of come about, the republic, at least, will have to face the implication for itself—no only in terms of lost illusions. As for the British, who set the boundaries of all our counties and looked away so steadily unionists ruled in their name, what price will they pay?

They already pay in cash. And they lose people, lives, limbs, liberties. Governments declare their sense of responsibility for Northern Ireland, but in day-to-day dealings and in overall approach what comes across is imitation, the desire to be out of it. And above all is the conviction that it is the fault of the Irish Catholics and Protestants, unionists and nationalists, sincere though they all try. British ministers meanwhile operate a policy on fair employment that has meant at best patchy improvement for Catholics, and steadfastly refuse independent investigation of the security forces which operate in their name. A mutualubbish of unionists, and the British position is a counterpoised equal to the Northern Ireland Office, vanilly can be the sum of Irish aspirations for any Anglo-Irish agreement.