

The Limits to Coercive Consociationalism in Northern Ireland

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The merits of consociation as a means of solving the Northern Ireland conflict are presented through contrasting it with other cases of stabilizing bipolarity in divided polities. Why voluntary consociation has been unsuccessful in Northern Ireland and unfortunately is likely to remain so is explained. The signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) must be understood against the background of the failure of previous consociational experiments. The AIA partly represented a shift in British strategy from voluntary to coercive consociationalism. The prospects for this coercive consociational strategy and variants on it are evaluated.

Irish history is something Irishmen should never forget, and Englishmen should never forget
Oscar Wilde

Stabilizing Segmented Societies: the Case for Consociation

Northern Ireland is a 'segmented society'. Segmented societies are not real societies. They are, in extreme cases, divided into parallel societies with endogamous marriage, which school themselves, organize separate exclusive voluntary associations, read separate media, have different cultures and languages, and exclusively work with and service their own kind. The cleavages dividing the segments may be racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic or ideological, or some cumulative permutation, but all dispose people towards war. Segmented as opposed to homogeneous societies are more likely to experience civil war because their divisions are not conducive to consensus. They are unsuited to the Westminster model of simple majoritarian or minimum-winning coalitions, single-party governments, and a disproportional voting system which creates a governmental executive able to impose its will within a unitary state.¹ The home rule government of Northern Ireland (1920-72) was a pathological specimen of

majoritarian 'democracy', a tyranny of the majority, in which the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) won every parliamentary election held in the province.

Consociation by contrast is primarily distinguished by cooperation amongst political elites,² but has four key institutional traits. First, the state in a consociational system is governed by a power-sharing coalition of parties which enjoys the support of more than a simple majority of those who vote.³ Secondly, consociation endorses segmental autonomy, permitting the blocs which divide the regime freedom to make autonomous decisions on matters of profound concern to them. Thirdly, proportionality applies throughout the public sector: there is proportional representation in elections, in assembly committees, in public employment, and proportional allocation of public expenditure. Finally, mutual veto or concurring majority principles operate, permitting the minority segment(s) the ability to protect its (their) most important interests.⁴ Consociational democracy is therefore the antonym of majoritarian democracy.

Consociational theory explores how segmented societies may be stabilized and operated with liberal democratic institutions. It suggests, by implication, six ideal-typical strategies for stabilizing segmented societies: hegemonic control, integration, partition, internationalization, arbitration and consociation.⁵ According to consociational theorists regions like Northern Ireland must have consociation or no effective democracy at all, a claim this essay seeks to reinforce. To see why, consider the alternatives to consociation in Northern Ireland.

¹ I use UUP to refer also to the official Unionists for the OI, as they became known in the 1970s.

² A Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Explanation* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1977), p. 1.

³ This requirement is less than a grand coalition of all parties. Consociational require ments arguably are also met if all segments are proportionately represented within parties which compete for rather than share state power: see F. Aunger, *In Search of Political Stability: A Comparative Study of Van Brabantia and Northern Ireland* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1981).

⁴ The elements of consociation are elaborated in Lijphart's main publications: A Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1968); 'Epitologies of democratic systems', *Comparative Political Studies*, 11 (1968), 3-44; 'Consociational democracy', *World Politics*, XXI (1969), 297-328. Consociation, the model and its application in divided societies, in D. Rea (ed.), *Political Cooperation in Divided Societies: A Study of Papers Relevant to the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982), pp. 160-80. *Power Sharing in South Africa* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1985).

⁵ Lijphart mentions three strategies: integration, partition and consociation, in a review article 'The Northern Ireland Problem: cases, theories and solutions', *British Journal of Political Science*, 8 (1978), p. 102; while G. Lehmbruch, 'Consociational democracy in the international system', *European Journal of Political Research*, XI (1979), 3, mentions two: arbitration and consociation. Internationalization is my own term for developed my classification of six stabilization strategies before reading Lijphart's latest book where he argues: 'There are three logical solutions to the problems of violence and democratic weakness in plural societies: assimilation, consociation, partition, mass emigration and genocide. I mention the last possibility merely in order to make the list exhaustive.' *Power Sharing in South Africa*, p. 31. Assimilation is what I call integration. Like Lijphart I do not regard mass emigration or genocide as solutions worth considering, however unwise him, I believe that hegemonic control, arbitration and internationalization are 'logical solutions to the problems of segmented societies which are worth consideration.'

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¹ A. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies and Consociational Democracies in Fourteen Countries* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984).

fronched in a recent blueprint.¹⁷ rests on three wishful thoughts: the belief that Protestants will not fight (or not fight conveniently) if they are coercively integrated into the Republic; the belief that Irish policy-makers might wish to embark upon such a strategy; and the belief that a withdrawing British government will be prepared to invest the blood of its soldiers and its citizens' taxes to support the project.

The converse strategy, the coercive integration of Catholics into Britain, is more feasible, given the organizational resources of the British state; the fact that the Catholic minority are already in the UK and that a significant proportion of Catholics do not wish to become part of the Republic.¹⁸ However, successful integration requires the crushing and transformation of the nationalist identity of the minority. It would probably generate considerably more violence than currently exists. Even if coercive integration were to be carried out through British party competition in Northern Ireland, with both main parties offering programmes of reform to make formal equal citizenship a substantive reality, the goodwill generated would be more than offset by the repression required to crush the IRA, and its social base, built and articulated by Sinn Féin (SF). It would also require the abandonment of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA), lead to a breakdown in Anglo-Irish relations with serious repercussions for cross-border security, compel the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) to become more nationalist, and produce world-wide embarrassment for the British state, especially in European and American capitals. Such coercive integration is not on the agenda. British governments show no desire to crush the minority's national identity and have increasingly recognized the legitimacy of its nationalist identity. British policy-makers consistently emphasize that Northern Ireland is a *condominium* of the UK, it is part of the UK so long as a majority of its inhabitants so wish. Such statements demonstrate that departure from Northern Ireland is 'thinkable' for British policy-makers. This long-standing mentality, which is not likely to be eroded, is not favourable to the integrationist strategies favoured by Robert McCartney and the Campaign for Equal Citizenship. Integration, however, it is understood, is not a feasible starting point for stabilizing Northern Ireland.¹⁹

Partition. A logical solution for the problems of segmented societies is partition. The territory in which rival segments live can be partitioned (with internationally binding agreements, boundary commissions, local referendums, and funded population transfers) to remove all prospect of interactions which precipitate violence. This option of last resort has been carried out, usually very badly, in

¹⁷ Rowthorn and Wayne, *Northern Ireland*.

¹⁸ The best normative case for such a strategy is made by H. Roberts, *Northern Ireland and the Hegemon: A Strategic Case for Equalism* (Belfast: Athol Books, 1980) and 'Sound supports the British party system and the Northern Ireland question', *Constitution and Criticism*, 22, 3 (1987), 118-15. However, Roberts seems blind to the coercive implications of his arguments.

¹⁹ However, it is a matter of fact that most enthusiasts for integration for Northern Ireland into Britain are not enthusiasts for authentic equal citizenship (that is, programmes of affirmative action to rectify existing segmental inequalities).

²⁰ This argument implies no hostility to the promotion of 'cross-community relations' policies such as *voluntarism*, integrated education. It is merely sceptical about their political prospects.

many ex-British colonies (notably in Cyprus, Palestine and the Indian sub-continent).²⁰ Northern Ireland itself was created in 1920 through the Partition of the island of Ireland, and the province of Ulster.

Partition requires careful management if it is not to induce more conflict than it is designed to prevent. It has often imposed horrendous costs: the partition of India cost half a million lives. Partition also has long-run costs if it is carried out 'imperfectly': it creates Northern Ireland.²¹ The 1920 partition of Ireland was not perfect. Indeed nationalists argue that the contemporary violence stems from a partition which produced a politics based upon 'a sectarian backdrop. The territory of Northern Ireland was carved out by unionists in 'those districts which they could control'.²² However, nationalists (constitutional or otherwise) do not argue for a better partition, rather, they oppose re-partition and argue instead for the complete reversal of partition. Unionists, while also opposed to re-partition, are vehemently hostile to the reversal of partition. By contrast, less partisan observers argue that the imperfect partition of 1920 might be rectified by an improved re-partition.²³

What is common to the nationalist and unionist traditions is that neither want re-partition, both for principled and strategic reasons. The practical difficulties of re-partition, spelled out by various demographers, geographers, lawyers and political scientists,²⁴ are known to both the British and Irish governments, and help explain why there has been no serious move to explore its merits. However, while it is an 'unthinkable' strategy for Irish governments (thumbed by the constitution of 1937 and the shibboleths of Irish nationalism), on the British side Mrs Thatcher is said to have commissioned papers on re-partition²⁵ and it is obviously an option which will increase in attractiveness to British governments if the AIA does not induce an attractive settlement. However, the costs of a second and drastic partition of Ulster currently inhibit policy-makers from considering it.

Cooperative Internationalization. Another means by which conflict in segmented societies can be regulated is through cooperative internationalization. States external to a conflict, even if they have interests at stake, can agree jointly to manage it; or international organizations, such as the United Nations, can provide peacekeeping forces and organize diplomatic negotiations between the contending segments. This option is one which the British and Irish governments

²⁰ For a good discussion of British-managed partitions see T. G. Fraser, *Partitions in India, India and Pakistan: Theory and Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

²¹ G. D. Khosla, *Siren Rocking: A Survey of the Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Bhawan, 1980).

²² Without a minority in Northern Ireland the 1920 settlement would have been perfect. John Hume cited in P. O'Malley, *The Covenant: The Irish Peace Process* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1985), p. 100.

²³ D. Miller, *Quincy's Rebels: A Fair Location in History of Re-partition* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), pp. 122ff.

²⁴ P. Compston, 'The demographic background', in D. Watt (ed.), *The Constitution of Northern Ireland: Problems and Prospects* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 74-92.

²⁵ See *more ad id* Compston, 'The demographic background'. Boyd, 'Segregation and mixing', K. Boyle and T. Madden, *Ireland: A Frontier: Proposals for Humanism* (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 51.

²⁶ B. Walsh, 'Comment', in D. Watt, *The Constitution of Northern Ireland* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 93-9, and Rose, *Northern Ireland*, pp. 100-3.

²⁷ *Sunday Press* (4 Nov. 1984).

Finally quarantining Northern Ireland 'from mainstream British political considerations whilst maintaining international respectability, held the arbitration strategy together. British governments wanted to ensure that conflict did not spill over into Great Britain, and to avoid international embarrassment. The former concern was demonstrated by their refusal to organize British political parties in the province, and legally expressed in the Prevention of Terrorism Acts (1974, 1976, 1984 and 1989). The latter concern was shown in regular public relations missions to the United States. Northern Ireland's exceptionalism was emphasized to justify political and legal practices otherwise foreign to British political culture. Bipartisan consensus was encouraged to prevent party controversy over British management of Northern Ireland. Broadcasting organizations and the press were subjected to unprecedented pressure, in 'peacetime', to portray government policy-making in the image of the 'honest broker'.

Arbitration seemed to work in the late 1970s. A concurrent majority saw direct rule as preferable to either power-sharing (Protestants) or minority rule (Catholics).⁵² There were hopes that the welfare and security apparatuses had become more professional and that the Fair Employment Agency would implement effective anti-discrimination measures. The levels of violence, measured on all indicators (deaths, explosives, shootings), receded after the abandonment of internment. Finally, although Northern Ireland did cause international embarrassment it did not arouse major anxieties in Whitehall and Westminster. The conflict had apparently been quarantined with the defeat of IRA operations in Britain.

However, arbitration came unstuck in the 1980s. Direct rule, intendedly or otherwise, was biased. It was a unionist status quo, even though most Unionists were not enamoured by it. Direct rule meant *British* rule of Northern Ireland.⁵³ Catholics saw it as, at best, a temporary expedient, a pause before power-sharing and the constitutional transition to a united Ireland (the SDLP perspective), or a pause before British withdrawal (the IRA perspective). The longer direct rule persisted the more British government became the primary target of minority discontent and blamed for all discreditable features of Northern Irish society. The British were perceived to rely upon sectarian instruments of government: the Protestant-dominated RUC and Ulster Defence Regiment and the 'extraordinary' legal system. Roy Mason's years as Secretary of State (1976-79) were not seen as arbitrating by the Catholic working class. 'Islamization', 'criminalization' and 'normalization' suggested the British were on the side of the unionists. The minority Labour government's expedient concession of extra Westminster seats to Northern Ireland confirmed Catholics' belief that direct

rule was another bastion of Protestant privilege.⁵⁴ In the absence of power-sharing, direct rule prompted greater nationalist sentiment among the minority and undermined local and international perceptions of British neutrality.⁵⁵ It also allowed unionists to veto significant accommodation. They preferred direct rule to conceding power-sharing and/or an Irish dimension.

The insubstantiality of reform pushed many in the SDLP away from accommodation towards more full-blooded, albeit constitutional, nationalism, especially because reform often appeared no more than symbolic. The achievement of the goals of the civil rights movement (one person one vote and the end to gerrymandering in local government) did not legitimate direct rule because the reformed institutions had ceased to be centres of power. Catholic unemployment remained dramatically higher than Protestant unemployment, the male Catholic rate being 2.5 times the male Protestant rate.⁵⁶ Catholics blamed all the differential upon discrimination.⁵⁷

Criminalization backfired most spectacularly. The IRA were on their knees in 1976-77, in danger of losing their social base and future recruits.⁵⁸ However both Labour and Conservative governments failed to realize that their handling of emergency legislation, interrogation procedures, judicial processes and person management would rebuild support for the Provisionals. It was embarrassing to argue that those convicted by Diplock courts were 'ordinary' criminals. The Maze protests, followed by the hunger strikes of 1980-81, allowed SF to emerge as a serious political force, mobilizing the abstentionist Catholic electorate but also eating into the SDLP's vote. The martyrdom of the hunger strikers fuelled the growth of SF and legitimated the IRA, in the eyes of some of the world's media, as an authentic national liberation movement.⁵⁹ The electoral rise of SF, which did not peak until they had obtained 43 per cent of the nationalist vote, was firm evidence of the failure of criminalization.

Direct rule embarrassed Britain. It appeared remarkably like colonial administration. Efforts to promote power-sharing failed. The lack of progress in reforming Northern Ireland became increasingly visible. Finally, the delegitimation of criminalization won the IRA publicity. The world's press, Amnesty International, Irish-American Congressmen and European Community parliamentarians regularly visited Northern Ireland and reported in ways which cast British policy-makers in an unflattering light. The quarantining of Northern Ireland came unstuck. The Conservatives and then Labour broke from bipartisan consensus. The current Conservative government was elected to office in May 1979 on an integrationist manifesto pledge but the policy did not survive. Airey Neave's murder by the INLA, the Conservative's contemplated majority-rule devolution for Northern Ireland (1979-80) before deciding to improve

⁵² P. Arthur, 'Anglo-Irish relations and the Northern Ireland problem', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 2, 1 (1985), 37-89.

⁵³ R. Rose, I. McAllister and P. Marr, *Is There Life in an Orange Man's Hand? About Northern Ireland* (Colchester, Studies in Public Policy No. 22, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, 1978).

⁵⁴ A similar problem existed with the Army. Jonathan parodied it as an image: D. Henell, *Per in the Middle: The British Army in Northern Ireland* (London, Methuen, 1985). There is a telling Catholic saying: 'There are two things wrong with the British Army. First, it is British. Second, it is an Army.'

⁵⁵ Nationalist academics supported this argument: E. O'Donnell, B. Robinson and M. Fomensen, *Northern Ireland: Background and Rights and a Call for its Abolition* (St. Books, 1981).

⁵⁶ The extra seats were awarded under pluralist rule, guaranteeing unionist over-representation if they maintained a majority of unity.

⁵⁷ Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, *Relation and Practice of Discrimination and Exclusion of Appropriation in Northern Ireland: Report of Fair Employment Act and H.M.S.O.*, 1987, and D. Smith, *Equities and Inequities in Northern Ireland* (London, Policy Studies Institute, 1987).

⁵⁸ Objectives, analysis, demonstrators that induced discrimination through internal recruitment remains the main focus in expanding differential unemployment over previous years.

⁵⁹ V. Bowdrie and V. O'Loide, *The Ballot and the Bullets: *Martinis**, 1983, 15.

⁶⁰ D. Bergstrom, *The Men Behind the Stars of the 1981 Irish Hunger* (New York, London, Graham Books, 1987).

between the rival segments reveal sufficient inequality, discrimination and belief in discrimination to sow immense distrust.⁴⁷ Very considerable socioeconomic inequalities have been recently documented.⁴⁸ These inequalities are historically rooted in the relations of domination established during the plantation of Ulster and the wars of conquest in the seventeenth century and explain why Northern Ireland had no strong traditions of political accommodation before the advent of mass democracy or the creation of the regime.⁴⁹ The foundation of Northern Ireland took place against a background of armed communal mobilization and civil war. The only conducive background conditions which Northern Ireland apparently possesses – small size and the relative isolation of the segments – are unfortunately ones which Lijphart criticises have argued are based on implausible premises.⁵⁰

The implications are bleak. Lijphart's checklist of conducive conditions suggests that voluntary consociational experiments in Northern Ireland are bound to fail. So far all such experiments have failed. Successive attempts to establish a devolved settlement commanding widespread cross-community agreement have been unsuccessful: the Sunningdale settlement of 1973–74, the Constitutional Convention of 1975, the all-party talks of 1979–80, and Pöhl's rolling devolution scheme which underpinned the Northern Ireland Assembly (1982–86).⁵¹ Policy-makers persuaded by Lijphart's theory seem to face two options: either promote partition (which he suggests might be the best option), or engineer the conducive conditions.

Consociational engineering entails creating at least the following favourable conditions: a multiple balance of power, a commonly perceived external threat, socioeconomic equality between the segments and overarching society-wide loyalties. There are two ways in which a multiple balance of power might be realized. The first is through provoking a deep split between the DUP and the DUP, deep enough to make the DUP favour power-sharing with the APNI and SDLP. However, this outcome, if feasible, would at best create a cross-sectarian majority, rather than a grand coalition (since the DUP and SF would be excluded from power-sharing). The second way is through a significant growth in the SDLP and SF electorate, fostered by higher Catholic population growth. This much predicted outcome has yet to materialize. Even if it did, it is not obvious that it would promote consociation. Rather, it might intensify nationalism amongst Catholics. The only easily imaginable way to create a common external enemy is to threaten a second partition of Ulster, in the hope that this threat to Protestants in western and southern Northern Ireland, and to Catholics in west

Belfast, might generate consociational motivations.⁵² Working on removing socioeconomic inequalities, as experience has demonstrated, is equally difficult. It produces animosity amongst the majority, who deny that discrimination exists, and it increases their hostility to power-sharing. Moreover, even if reforms were to be successful they do not guarantee more accommodating attitudes on the part of the minority. Finally, overarching society-wide loyalties are values which consociational engineers seem unlikely to induce. Manufacturing a shared consociational or Christian identity is beyond the grasp of policy-makers.

Promoting consociation on Lijphart's model seems unlikely to succeed, so power-sharing has been widely dismissed as an unworkable solution.⁵³ However, Lijphart himself advocates consociation when the background conditions are not at all favourable, even in South Africa.⁵⁴ Should policy-makers follow his normative advice, despite the pessimism which his analysis induces? We seem to be faced with a contradiction. Political science determinism tells us that the conditions for consociation are absent, therefore it is not viable. Yet, Lijphart suggests that idealist goodwill on the part of well-motivated elites can create consociation, even in unfavourable conditions.

I want to develop an argument based on synthesizing Lijphart's critics, which postpones this analytical choice. The validity of Lijphart's set of conducive background conditions is widely disputed.⁵⁵ The critique of Lijphart suggests that three hypotheses, reconstructed from his speculations, remain plausible. First, consociation can be achieved only by elites sufficiently motivated to engage in conflict regulation: 'the independent actions of political elites, often taken in opposition to their followers' demands, rather than societal variables, ... best account for conflict regulation successes and failures in democratic regimes'.⁵⁶ Secondly, consociation is favoured where political elites enjoy predominance over a detrimental and organizationally encapsulated following.⁵⁷ Finally, consociation is promoted not so much by a multiple balance of power but rather by the stability of the subcultures in the segmented society.⁵⁸ The logic behind these hypotheses is straightforward. The first is the simplest: conflict regulation can take place when elites are motivated to engage in it. However, the firmest proponent of this argument does not believe that goodwill is enough. Elites must be confident they can carry their followers with them. The conditions in the

⁴⁷ I may be the sole eccentric publicly to have recommended such a strategy. B. O'Leary,

'Exploring the roads to consensus', *Irish Times* (1 Dec. 1988).

⁴⁸ Consociation is not extensively discussed in a deceptively influential book, K. Boyle and J. Hadden, *Ireland: A Postwar Prospect* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985). They dismiss power

sharing as requiring a highly unrealistic degree of consensus: 'requiring politicians to agree on everything all of the time' and as incapable of providing 'any mechanism for resolving the differences of opinion that are bound to arise within a cabinet of executives' (pp. 49, 71–84). These are Anglo-centric legislative judgments. If they were true, much of Western Europe would be ungovernable. Power-sharing may not be capable of working in Northern Ireland, but the causes of its fragile prospects are more deeply rooted.

⁴⁹ Lijphart, *Power-Sharing in South Africa*.

⁵⁰ See note 43.

⁵¹ Norlingner, *The Anatomy of the Democratic State* (London, Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 225.

⁵² This is the central theme of Norlingner's *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies*. See also Pappalardo, 'The conditions for consociational democracy', p. 187, and Barry, 'The consociational model and its dangers', p. 196.

⁵³ Pappalardo, 'The conditions for consociational democracy', p. 187.

⁴⁷ Pappalardo, 'The conditions for consociational democracy', p. 139.

⁴⁸ See *inter alia* R. Fisk, *The Point of No Return: The Stride to End the British in Ulster* (London, Andre Deutsch, 1975); Rose, *Northern Ireland: P. Bew and H. Patterson, The British State and the Ulster Crisis* (London, Verso, 1982); and C. O'Leary, S. Eibert and R. A. Willard, *The Northern Ireland Question, 1921–1980: A Constitutional Government* (London, Hurst, 1988).

⁴⁹ Lijphart calculates that the angle of cross-utility between religion and social classes is 68° and that the index of cross-utility equals 0.50. *Democracy in Plural Societies*, p. 118. These measures, based on 1960s' data, indicate considerable but not extreme inequalities between the segments.

⁵⁰ See note 47.

⁵¹ See *inter alia* I. Lusk, *State Building Failure in British Ireland and French Algeria* (Berkeley, Institute of International Studies, 1985) and R. E. Lester, *Modern Ireland, 1972–1984* (Oxford, Allen Lane, 1988).

whether to pursue devolution (McUsker, Taylor and the recently departed Millar) or integration (the line backed by Molyneux, Powell and the recently departed McCartney). It has endured several breakaway factions (Faulkner's UPN) and Craig's Vanguard Party in the 1970s, and McCartney's integrationists in the wake of the AIA. It seems to be in a permanent leadership crisis. The ULP's lack of positive ideological direction undermines whatever prospects might exist for structured elite predominance.

The SDLP displays greater structured elite predominance than the ULP but the autonomy of its leaders is still limited. The first study of the party gave the impression of a modern party with extensive discretion vested in its leadership.⁶⁷ However, the party leadership, partly because of its constitution, has not always been able to impose its wishes upon its local branches. Moreover, the SDLP has not been without its leadership crises: John Hume and Seamus Mallon, the current leader and deputy-leader respectively, are more closely tuned to the party's grass roots than were social democrats like Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin, but this makes them less disposed towards concessions to the unionists. The tension over the relative importance of power-sharing and the Irish dimension, evident in the SDLP's 1979 leadership turmoil, remains latent. Hume's decision to engage in talks with SF during 1988 brought out this tension.⁶⁸ Since the signing of the AIA the SDLP's leaders do not seem clear about what concessions they are prepared to make to the unionists to produce a tangible internal settlement. The failure of secret discussions at Duisburg suggests that Hume is not prepared to trade even a temporary suspension of the AIA in return for a consociational deal.⁶⁹

Structured elite predominance in the other three major parties – APNI, DUP and SF – is less analytically important in considering the prospects for consociation. The autonomy of the APNI's leadership is less relevant because it supports power-sharing. The DUP may well enjoy the structured elite predominance of Ian Paisley, but nobody believes his eminence is beneficial for the prospects of power-sharing. Finally, SF (which has also had major leadership and doctrinal crises) is led by people who do not desire to shift towards a wholly political strategy (which would mean abandoning terrorism), and are incapable of delivering such a strategy even if they were persuaded of its merits.

⁶⁷ J. McAlister, *The Social Democratic and Labour Party of Northern Ireland* (London, Macmillan, 1972).

⁶⁸ The extensive formal discussions, involving the exchange of papers and in vivo face dialogue between SDLP and SI representatives in 1988, were significant. The talks were initiated by Hume, apparently to persuade SF that their strategy made Irish unification ever more unlikely. SF participated to show they were prepared to argue their case. The talks lasted until Hume felt confident that ending them would reflect upon SF rather than the SDLP. He argued forcefully that SF IRA are the greatest obstacles both to an accommodation with unionists and to a united Ireland. However, some unionists understandably commented that Hume's organization of the talks was designed to subvert discussions about devolution between the Secretary of State and the (unionist) parties.

⁶⁹ These doubts about structured elite predominance in the SDLP do not suggest that Hume, the most impressive of Northern Ireland's politicians as a weak leader. Structured elite predominance is not a synonym for strong leadership; it refers to organizational and social conditions which allow strong leaders to make autonomous decisions.

The Absence of Intra-Segmental Stability

Even with the existence of the appropriate motivations and structurally predominant elites, consociation would not automatically follow. Political elites must be secure in their segmented bases before hazardous compromise. Northern Ireland's political elites have obviously not felt secure. The 20-year crisis and the change in the electoral system have encouraged the fragmentation of the rival segments. When the Protestant unionist monolith collapsed it broke into five factions (the ULP, DUP, APNI, Vanguard and UPN) and then into three (the ULP, DUP and APNI). Competition for hegemony within this segment has weakened any impetus for power-sharing and accommodation. The DUP (and Vanguard before it) forced the ULP to be as belatedly anti-consociational and loyalist as themselves. The Catholic nationalist bloc consolidated behind the SDLP (as the civil rights activists and traditional nationalists made their peace) in the early 1970s but then fragmented under the lack of political progress. Competitive pressure, first from the Irish Independence Party and then SF, left the SDLP looking over its shoulder. The pattern of fragmentation within the majority and minority has also not been beneficial for consociation. The fraction of the Catholic nationalist bloc prepared to consider power-sharing has been consistently higher than the fraction so disposed amongst the Protestant unionist bloc.

Northern Ireland has not only lacked Liphart's conditions conducive for power-sharing but also the conditions specified in the reconstructed theory of consociationalism which I built through synthesising the arguments of Liphart's critics. This conclusion must inspire further pessimism. However, there is no need to abandon all hope. The question is whether elite motivations, elite autonomy and segmental structures can be reshaped by British and Irish policy-makers in ways which are conducive to consociation. Can the AIA promote consociation?

From Voluntary to Coercive Consociationalism

The AIA has been interpreted in radically different ways.⁷⁰ However, no one disputes that it formalized British and Irish cooperation, internationalized the conflict and gave the Irish government a role in the government of Northern Ireland (which was less than executive but more than consultative in its scope.⁷¹) The AIA was also a notice that whilst the unionist guarantee remained (Northern Ireland is and will be part of the UK as long as a majority so wish),

⁷⁰ For the diverse academic reactions see P. Arthur, 'The Anglo-Irish agreement: conflict resolution or conflict regulation?' *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, 18, 4 (1987), A. Coughlan, *Failed Peace: The Anglo-Irish Agreement and After* (Dublin, Mercier Press, 1986), W. H. Cox, 'The Anglo-Irish agreement', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 40 (1986), T. Hacker and K. Bowie, 'Hopes and fears for Hillsborough', *Studies*, 75, 300 (1986), B. Laddield, 'The Anglo-Irish agreement 1985: blue print or green print?', *Northern Ireland Local Quarterly*, 37, 1 (1986), A. Kinn, *The Road to Hillsborough* (London, Pergamon Press, 1986), B. O'Leary, 'The Anglo-Irish Agreement: sacrifice or folly', *West European Politics*, 10, 1 (1987), W. V. Shannon, 'The Anglo-Irish agreement', *Foreign Affairs*, 64, 4 (1986), and the essays in P. Leazerred, *Reconsidering the Road to London*, Lawrence and Wishart, (1987) and G. Lowenthal ed., *A Consensus on Ireland: Opposers and Realists* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988).

⁷¹ This formulation is Dr. Garret FitzGerald's.

its prospects of success and more insistent that any such initiative must be accompanied by a North-South settlement incorporating all-Irish relations.

These conflicting priorities contributed to public difficulties in Anglo-Irish relations, especially in 1988, but what is important to note here is that they are not helpful to consociation. To facilitate the latter Irish governments must commit themselves to 'agreed devolution' as envisaged under Article 4 of the AIA and put more pressure on the SDLP to pursue it. This commitment would not be incompatible with the long-run aspirations of constitutional nationalists. If Catholics and Protestants cannot share power in Northern Ireland they are not going to share power in a united Ireland.⁷ Consociation in Northern Ireland is a precondition of a stable and democratic united Ireland, even if that is envisaged as occurring at some date in the future-perfect.

The Internal Front

What has been the internal impact of the AIA on elite motivations, elite autonomy and segmental stability? First let us consider the nationalists. The SDLP responded favourably to the AIA. To sustain the SDLP's belief in its merits and its interest in consociation, it is imperative that the British government follow three consistent policies: reform the administration of justice; reform Northern Ireland's employment practices and facilitate functional cross-border cooperation to make meaningful the Irish dimension of the AIA. These measures are necessary to make the SDLP willing to compromise on a consociational settlement to enable its leaders to avoid the loss of electoral support and to rebuild the SDLP as the dominant segmental party of Catholics nationalists.

There have been perceptible but small-scale changes in the direction of reforming Northern Ireland. However, this programme has not yet built Catholic confidence in British government of Northern Ireland and it has often been set back by British 'counter-insurgency' initiatives. In an interview with a Northern Ireland Office official I posed the following question: 'Will future historians say that the British government missed a key opportunity to promote power-sharing in the immediate aftermath of the Agreement?' During this period, when unionists were unwilling to talk, surely the reform of Northern Ireland could have been accelerated? If that had happened, and had been seen to be happening, then the SDLP's gains at the expense of Sinn Féin might have been greater, and the SDLP would have found compromising on a devolutionary settlement much easier when unionists eventually began to have 'talks about talks' in 1987-89.⁸ The official replied that the question was unfair. Some reforms, especially those on fair employment, needed lengthy consultation and deliberation and could not be achieved overnight. However he conceded that accepting three-judge, as opposed to single-judge Diplock courts, would have consolidated support for the AIA amongst nationalists. Moreover, he made the

⁷ In his first major interview on his role in the ICI, Brian Feenhan, the Irish Foreign Minister, claimed to have three equal priorities: the promotion of the welfare of the majority, easing the fear of the majority, and reforming Northern Ireland. *Irish Times*, 11 May 1987.

⁸ A point made clearly in a widely-analysed pre-1987 British Labour Party policy statement. K. McNamara, J. Marshall and M. Woodson, *Towards a United Britain: Reform and Harmonisation: A Dual Strategy for Implementation* (Front Bench Statement of the British Labour Party, 11 October, House of Commons, 1985).

following point: 'I have been ever more conscious of the contradiction of talking of the "achievements of the Agreement" against a background of current government policy of not attributing developments specifically to the Agreement, and implying that most of them would have happened in any case.' This contradiction, which exists because of the British government's desire to suggest that the AIA has not weakened British sovereignty and its concern to minimize unionist hostility, is obviously not good for supporters of the Agreement. As a result, Catholic support for the AIA has remained predicated more upon unionist hostility to it than upon the concrete change it has delivered.

The maladministration of justice, emergent legislation and certain methods of policing remain fundamental obstacles to Catholic confidence in British intentions to reform Northern Ireland. The same is true of British efforts to reform employment opportunities in Northern Ireland. Sixteen years after the van Strathbenze Report⁹ and 13 years after the establishment of the Fair Employment Agency, Catholics remain over-represented in semi- and unskilled occupations, and in those industries most susceptible to recession and high unemployment.¹⁰ Moreover, the Conservative government has failed to stiffen employment legislation in ways which might satisfy critics.¹¹ The Government White Paper, *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland* (May 1988), and a 1989 bill designed to strengthen fair employment law and administration, have fallen short of what are designed to win Catholic support. As predicted by critics of the White Paper the bill makes reverse discrimination illegal, makes certain types of affirmative action illegal and omits prescribing employment patterns.¹² Based on goals and timetables to create representative employment patterns.¹³ Based on the minority report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, which was clearly influenced by standard unionist assumptions, the bill seems better designed for public relations than changing employment patterns. Such short-sighted policy-making may well give SF a future advantage in the competition for hearts and minds within the Catholic community, making the argument that 'Northern Ireland is unreformable' stand more convincing.

The IRA and SF are violently opposed to consociation. Their actions are also one of the most significant factors in unionist hostility to consociation. The British and Irish governments, and the SDLP, are not likely to be able to change the minds of these self-styled 'national' libertarians. However, SF are more vulnerable than the IRA. Entry into electoral politics has constrained the IRA's military options which SF can freely endorse. Moreover, SF will find it difficult if Britain reforms Northern Ireland. They cannot easily reject actions which

⁹ Non-attributable interview with a SF official in London, 1989.

¹⁰ W. van Strathbenze, *Northern Ireland: Department of Health and Social Services. Report and Recommendations of the Working Party on Prevalence in the Private Sector in Employment* (Belfast: HMSO, 1973).

¹¹ The percentage level of unemployment in the age 16-24 Northern Ireland Protestant boys' cohort around the UK average (12.5 per cent). This shows equal unemployment. The percentage level of unemployment amongst Catholics is 25 per cent or twice as high (1988).

¹² Fear of the consequences for rural and small-town areas in the mainland, as well as ideological hostility to regulation, may be restraining the government's willingness to undertake radical steps. Cf. McCadden, 'Fighting unemployment: opportunities in Northern Ireland', *Legal Opportunities Review*, 10 (1988), p. 21.

¹³ Cf. McCadden, 'The Northern Ireland Fair Employment White Paper: a critical assessment', *The Industrial Law Journal*, 17 (1988), 162-80.

power-sharing is worthwhile. On the other hand it would work through forcing what some regard as disagreeable change in Northern Ireland, persuading unionists that power sharing might be a better way of protecting their interests.⁷² This strategy was blunt in the terms of the AIA and deserves to be tried more vigorously.

Such a strategy should also be accompanied by a systematic change in the election systems in Northern Ireland. All elections, to the European Parliament, Westminster, a new Northern Ireland Assembly and to local councils, should take place under the same system – a party-list system of proportional representation. This change would have several advantages. The first is uniformity. Currently Westminster elections are first-past-the-post, whereas other elections take place under the STV system. Secondly, the change would alter elite motivations amongst the DUP (competition rather than cooperation with the DUP at least during Westminster elections, would become more likely). Thirdly, the first system, by contrast with STV, enhances the authority of party leaders as opposed to voters,⁷³ and might make compromise easier. Fourthly, the first system is genuinely proportional, unlike STV which is a system which curtails preference rankings and the intensity of preferences. Fifthly, the first system is used in successful consociational systems. Finally, the first system is the European norm.

Radical direct rulers intent on producing consociation should also take advantage of British and Irish membership of the European Community to promote maximum feasible functional cross-border cooperation (in attracting investment and European Social and Regional Funds, in agricultural policy, energy production and distribution and public transport) and maximum feasible legal harmonization (in bills of civil and social rights). The direction of more political attention to Brussels, away from London and Dublin, will be doubly beneficial. European arbitrations of interests in Northern Ireland are less likely to be regarded as enemies of either segment and greater European integration will make the differences between membership of the British and Irish states less salient over time. Such developments will not provide a panacea for Northern Ireland but will make consociation more rather than less feasible, in any case they are desirable on other grounds.

By contrast, the other variants on coercive consociationalism should not be tried. Joint authority is one way of increasing the coercive content of coercive consociationalism. The introduction of the Irish government into full sharing of authority in Northern Ireland might force upon unionists the merits of power-sharing.⁷⁴ However, this strategy would not work for two reasons. Under joint authority, nationalists would have no incentive to share power with unionists. Joint authority would also be destabilizing, as it would be interpreted, correctly, as the end of British sovereignty of Northern Ireland. It would not therefore produce a consociational response amongst unionists, rather it would create support for a unilateral declaration of independence.

⁷² The aim of the Lisbon Part II strategy is the preservation of Northern Ireland *Et cetera*. *The intention is to achieve consociation in the long run, not to bring it about*. The Paris speakers for Irish unity by consensus do not disagree with it and it is evident that this aim is not expected within the framework of Lisbon agreement.

⁷³ I report *Power and Politics*, p. 137.

⁷⁴ M. Deim, 'The Role of a Third Agreement and Hardship in the E.U. and Political Cooperation in Ireland', *European Council*, pp. 128–9.

The other variant of coercive consociationalism, forced independence designed to produce power sharing, might also be considered a viable strategy on the grounds that nationalists and unionists would have to agree to accommodate one another without British arbitration. However, I believe that this variant would also be destabilizing and produce of greater civil war. Nobody wants independence even as their second-best option. There would be ineffective incentives for Protestants to share power in an independent Northern Ireland where they would be hegemonic. Nationalists would still seek, by gun and ballot box to unite the entire island. The new regime would also not be recognized by the Irish Republic or by the European Community unless it had the full support of the SDLP, which it would not get.

Some Constitutional Options

If consociation cannot be engineered in any of the modes outlined then there are three feasible political and constitutional strategies available for the consideration of British policy-makers. The first entails the *status quo ante*, maintaining a modified form of direct rule, downplaying the importance of the AIA and reverting to the crisis management much criticized by the Irish government before November 1985. Over the longer run this policy is unsustainable. Policy-makers in liberal democracies are under constant pressures to do something. The famous fallacy 'something must be done, this is something, let's do this' operates regularly in politics. Irish policy-makers want to solve a conflict which threatens the stability of their state. British policy-makers want to end a conflict in which they have no major economic, geopolitical or political stakes. I assume, perhaps erroneously, that British policy-makers believe themselves to have exhausted this option's possibilities.

The second option involves a unilateral abandonment of the AIA by the British government, in order to integrate Northern Ireland into the British political system. This strategy is very unlikely to be embarked upon by British policy-makers who have always been anxious to quarantine Irish affairs from mainstream British politics.⁷⁵ British political parties do not regard Northern Ireland as anything other than a conditional unit of the United Kingdom and there are no obvious material or ideological reasons why this outlook is likely to change. British political parties are not going to be prepared to pay the price of integration: drastic deterioration in relations with the Irish Republic, international condemnation, increasing the likelihood that Northern Ireland MPs hold the balance of power at Westminster and permanent coercion of the recalcitrant Irish nationalist minority.

The final feasible initiative, re-partition, entails abandoning both voluntary and coercive consociationalism and facing a different set of dilemmas. Although it is not on the immediate agenda, it is clear that should efforts to engineer consociation fail in the next decade then re-partition will become increasingly attractive to British policy-makers. Re-partition is the drastic but logical solution to consociational failures. It is also a solution which British policy-makers have been associated with before, in Palestine, India and Ireland. It partition is

⁷⁵ I lack the space to explain why I consider these options the most plausible alternatives to consociation.

⁷⁶ See R. D. Boyce, *The Irish Question and British Foreign Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1988).