



Unionists must give much more than an inch

Brendan O'Leary

AS WE WENT TO PRESS, the Brooke talks had finally got under way at Stormont, and the constitutional parties were setting out their wares. Should they eventually produce the basis for a new British-Irish Agreement which transcends the Anglo-Irish Agreement. History will have been made, and Sir Peter Brooke and Sir Ninian Stephen (along with other unlikely contenders 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.

Asked to star-gaze without the benefit of insider knowledge, I have

'Why go into battle for William of Orange and celebrate a victory 300 years ago ...?'

Philippe Agret

IN FRANCE, land of Descartes and Voltaire, scepticism is king. As long as the weapons are not exhausted in Northern Ireland, it's difficult to believe in a political solution to the conflict. Especially when the talks were hardly begun before they stumbled on byzantine procedural quarrels, largely incomprehensible outside of the island.

Whether the region's politicians talk in London, Belfast, Dublin ... or Timbuktu—what does it matter? Provided they discuss.

If they spend weeks carping about the standing orders, the timetable or the colour of the cloth on the negotiating table—who cares? Provided they hurry up.

Whether the chairperson of the north-south talks is green, white or orange—what difference does it make? Provided he has a discussion to chair.

How do Messrs Molyneux, Paisley, Hume and Alderdice hope to surmount the fundamental problems—the really thorny questions of power-sharing and the republic's constitutional claim—when they have shown such reticence in settling trifling matters?

Meantime, sectarianism and terrorism take their daily toll. Nearly 3,000 deaths since 1969. The violence, the big headlines—always the same—are wearisome. The atrocities succeed one other amidst general indifference. Two soldiers lynched by the mob. Two teenage girls slaughtered in cold blood by a gang of loyalist killers. A taxi-driver turned half to ashes. And so on. And so on.

What more can one do in telling the story? Except to list, as every journalist has to do, *ad nauseam* in a big black book, the circumstances of each outrage and the number of victims, the names, religion and affiliation—RUC, UDR, UVF, UFF and IRA (the one best known from a distance). For the archives. And to try to avoid naïveté, cynicism or condescension.

But the symbols and the History, so viscerally associated with Northern Ireland, pass largely over people's heads. Why go into battle for William of Orange and celebrate a victory 300 years ago, when, even at its bicentenary, the storming of the Bastille—the storming of what?—seemed to have lost all ideological connotation?

At the end of the reckoning, the Northern Ireland conflict is reduced to its most simple—often superficial—expression. A part of the French left sees in it still the justified rebellion of an oppressed national minority, whether out of Anglophobia (irreducible, as with Asterix the Gaul) or republican sympathy.

Support for or rejection of the IRA varies with events—according to the cruelty of the crimes, according to the harshness of the state repression. France loves martyrs: there is a Bobby Sands Street in the traditional 'red' suburbs of Paris. But most people laugh at it. And what, should the talks succeed? If a regional assembly were established, even though elected by proportional representation, the unionists would remain, in every way, masters of the political game. They believe in majority rule.

And what of Sinn Féin? And the IRA? It's impossible to conceive of a solution without them. One day, they will have to be brought to the negotiating table.

That said, and by way of conclusion, 'impossible' is not a word the French like to utter.

analysed the prospects for the talks on the assumption that each party knows its preferences and will bargain rationally for them. This analysis thus ignores whether Charles Haughey and Rev Ian Paisley want to establish more benign reputations with 21st-century historians, whether 'public opinion' is pushing the rival leaders to an accommodation, whether unionist 'young Turks' of moderated dispositions are thrusting into view, and whether some actors are more astute or rational than others. It produces a pessimistic scenario—but I conclude with some flesh-and-blood political psychology to temper my pessimism.

The talks are supposed to address four (not three) key relationships: those between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland, those between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, between unionists and nationalists in all of Ireland, and between the UK and the republic.

The first strand—if it continues after the Intergovernmental Conference on July 16th—is focusing on internal governmental arrangements for Northern Ireland and, 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 'heads of agreement' before strands two and three begin, whereas the SDLP will want everything to remain in the category of 'undecided items' until strand three is completed.

If the former procedure is agreed, then the talks are likely to break down during strand one; if the latter, during strands two and three. Why? Because there are many substantive issues over which strand one can founder. Procedural arrangements will simply determine when these arise, and whether they arrive together or serially. Neither side has an interest in making unilateral concessions in the preliminary stages which can subsequently be used to political advantage by the other.

There are two crucial substantive issues which must arise—indeed may already have—during strand one. The first is whether an 'internal settlement', involving a power-sharing devolved government within the UK, or within some limbo between the UK and the rest of Ireland, is to be part of the overall settlement. The second is security.

The key problem about an 'internal settlement' is that it is impossible to detach from any prospective 'external settlement'. Let us assume that unionists are prepared to offer a power-sharing devolved government—even though the present leaders of the UUP and DUP built their careers on never having made such an offer and as yet have shown no signs of making one. Also assume that the SDLP is prepared to consider such an offer—given its non-ideological attitude towards devolution, this expectation may be more reasonable.

Three thorny questions follow: the relationships between such a government and the institutions of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and Westminster and Whitehall, the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, and the stability of any devolved government without 'external guarantees'.

If unionists are being generous, they will want to tie a power-sharing internal settlement to a modification of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and, within the UUP, to 'integrationist' measures at Westminster—an end to orders in council and the establishment of a beefed-up Northern Ireland parliamentary committee. If the SDLP is prepared to consider a power-sharing internal settlement, it will not be enthusiastic about these predictable unionist riders—it might insist that they be deferred until the unionists 'sort out' their relationships with the republic.

Alternatively, the SDLP could add riders of its own: it could propose that the terms of the power-sharing devolved government be negotiated under a modified form of article four of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It could pose a problem for Peter Brooke's Conservatives and the UUP by suggesting proportional representation for Westminster elections. If it wished to be amusing it might propose that Northern Ireland's Westminster MPs take an oath of loyalty to whatever all-Ireland institutions/dimensions are agreed as part of the overall settlement. And if it wished to be provocative it might propose that a Westminster parliamentary committee be balanced by a Dáil committee in which both traditions from Northern Ireland would be represented.

Unionists will insist on clarification of the status of Northern Ireland within the UK as part and parcel of the negotiation of a devolved government, whereas the SDLP will want the status of Northern Ireland to be compatible with future relationships with an all-Ireland entity. Once again, the SDLP will want to postpone resolution of this issue to strands two or three, whereas the unionists will want to do otherwise.

Given the experience of the last devolution experiment, the SDLP (and the Alliance party) will want to tie down any new arrangement with 'external guarantees'. If a power-sharing government breaks down—say, after the withdrawal of the DUP members of a cross-party government—the SDLP will insist either that the Anglo-Irish Agreement

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Reiner Gatermann

IN GERMANY THERE is a lot of sympathy for Ireland. There are many attempts to analyse and understand the battered north, and to contemplate all sorts of solutions for it, not least in the press. After all, Germans and Irish had at least until some months ago two things in common which distinguished them from all other European countries: both were divided and both experienced the brutality and senselessness of terrorism. Nevertheless, almost all Germans face the Irish problem with helplessness, confusion and—very often—resignation. 'They cannot be helped, since they are unable to help themselves' are words often heard.

As a journalist, one needs to use quite a few words in each article just to explain the basic terminology of the party-political system in Northern Ireland—and often one has 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 government) to which they profess loyalty. At the end one surrenders to history, trying to explain everything in terms of events some hundreds of years or at least some decades ago.

Obviously, the mistrust sown over centuries is a major obstacle on the way to reconciliation. But peoples, or, for that matter, members of different religions, cannot live forever with the ballast of their history. The Germans and the French, the Finns and the Russians learned their lessons. Today, what would Europe be like without the German-French reconciliation? And soon, hopefully, we will see the German-Polish reconciliation. Should this be an impossibility for the British and the Irish? I cannot believe so.

Given we talk so much about religion in connection with the Northern Ireland conflict, it amazes me how little the churches have contributed to a solution. Where, among the clergy of both communities, is the spirit and commitment in the struggle against terrorism and for reconciliation which were instrumental in the tremendous changes in Poland and east Germany? Sometimes one cannot resist the impression that religion has made the situation worse—and that some clergymen give higher priority to their political career than to their ministry.

Some years ago my editor asked me: "Are there no positive stories about Northern Ireland?" Of course there are. Like tiny weak plants they try to root amid mistrust, violence, prejudice and political stubbornness. I wrote about integrated schools, a reconciliation group in Derry and the revival of Belfast's inner city. Recently I wrote about projects, essentially supported by the International Fund for Ireland, designed to bridge the sectarian divide. These are good signs.

Yet, some weeks later one had to report the tug-of-war over the conference venue for the second stage of the Brooke initiative and over who would be its chair. It looked like hair-splitting: in the Europe of 1991, with its trend 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.

comes back in full force, or, in the event of any repeat of the loyalist strike of 1974, that there be joint British and Irish governmental authority. The Anglo-Irish Agreement as the default option must be the minimum guarantee for the SDLP, whereas joint authority would presumably be its maximum negotiating stance.

Are unionists prepared to consider the SDLP's minimal requirement to stabilise an internal settlement? There is a precedent: the unionists are participating in these talks knowing that if they produce nothing then the default option will be a return to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But accepting, under protest, the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a default for the present talks is very different from building in the entire accord as an agreed default option for a settlement which unionists will sign.

Moreover, signing any such agreement would lock unionists into power-sharing with the SDLP, without being able to threaten their resignation from the government. Are unionists ready to make such a shift? They must know that the insistence by the SDLP (and Alliance) on 'external guarantees' for any internal settlement is sane, and will be regarded as such by policy-makers in both Britain and the republic.

The question of security must arise during strand one. Security issues are key subjects of any internal settlement, but they are also linked to external questions. How do the parties finesse their disagreements over whether control of security should be devolved, a British concern or a bi-governmental matter? The parties may agree that nationalist and loyalist paramilitaries should be beaten through a legitimate political settlement and the rule of law, but such formulae bypass the important questions: the status and future of the UDR, police accountability, the role of the army, cross-border security and so on.

Will the UUP and DUP be willing to have a Seamus Mallon figure as gamekeeper? Irish history should tell them that the most successful coercers of Irish nationalist paramilitaries, from Michael Collins to Charles Haughey, are other Irish nationalists. But are they prepared to consider—let alone offer—giving the SDLP direct control over security? And, if they are, could the SDLP accept the poisoned chalice? Moreover, the internal parties are not the only actors likely to disagree on who should handle security: will London and Dublin be willing to transfer security to a devolved government?

Let us imagine success in strand one. The Brooke show is still on the road, shuffling its way towards Dublin. Sir Ninian presides over discussions between the contending parties and the republic's government.

Here, too, the fault lines are predictable. The unionists, in return for whatever concessions they are prepared to consider in strand one, will want the teeth of articles two and three of the constitution drawn. But it is not clear whether they would be content to have them minimally altered to be compatible with the Anglo-Irish Agreement—say by attaching (a perhaps marginally modified) article one of the Hillsborough accord to article three of *Bunreacht na hEireann*. It is possible they will adopt the maximalist position of agreeing to settle if and only if articles two and three are deleted and the aspiration to Irish unity has no constitutional expression—a non-starter for Fianna Fáil and the SDLP.

The republic's government, unlike the British government, cannot alter its constitution with a bare parliamentary majority. Changing articles two and three, which Eamon de Valera inserted to weaken the IRA in the 1930s, will require the unionist leaders to give Irish nationalists something which can be sold by both Charles Haughey and John Hume in referenda north and south. The price unionists have to pay the two nationalist parties most in danger of splitting over any grand settlement must be two Irish dimensions.

The first one unionists *might* be prepared to concede, it being merely an update of the Ireland Act of 1949—a constitutional provision which permits Irish unity at some future juncture if a majority in Northern Ireland were to vote for it in a referendum, or if a devolved government were to agree to negotiate Irish unity. The second and more important Irish dimension will stick in unionists' throats—a constitutionally entrenched intergovernmental conference with a policy-advisory and possibly policy-making role in Northern Ireland.

The parties to the intergovernmental conference could be the UK, the republic and Northern Ireland; or the republic and Northern Ireland; or the UK and the republic as at present. The agenda could be security, economic development, EC co-operation and other matters of high politics. But, whatever its intergovernmental character and agenda the republic's government would have to be one of its parties.

Here is where the talks can again be driven into the sands. The SDLP and Fianna Fáil—assuming unionists cannot divide them—have to be offered something as good as, if not better than, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, in return for modifying or removing articles two and three. Do

'Americans ask why they should give their money ... to such a frustrating problem'

Virginia Hamill

'STRIFE-TORN' NORTHERN Ireland—a frequent journalistic characterisation in the US—intrudes into the American consciousness in ways that evoke outrage, exasperation and hope, sometimes at the same time.

The IRA's human-bomb attacks, their slaying of Ian Gow and the rocket attack on Downing Street are only the most recent fodder for the evening news and for the leader columns excoriating the 'mindless exercise of terror for its own sake'. Why, they wonder, at a time when many of the world's wounds are healing and when 1992 holds out new promise for Europe, won't the principals of this intractable conflict get their peace-making act together?

So the Belfast talks have provided a new source of anticipation for those in official Washington for whom Northern Ireland ranks as an issue that taps—rather than thumps—at their doors. But Rev Ian Paisley's walkout at the outset seemed likely to underscore perceptions of the unionists in Washington as the camp of 'No' and 'Never'.

And the shooting dead of a UDR member that day could only reinforce the caution and skepticism behind public support for Peter Brooke's applauded initiative. These incidents are the kind that make Americans ask why they should give their money—even their attention—to such a frustrating problem.

The Irish issue acquired an establishment lobby in Congress with the formation of the Friends of Ireland in 1981. It is credited, even by opponents of its moderate approach, with raising congressional and administration awareness of the complexity of the north's problems. Its older, scrappier cousin, the Ad Hoc Congressional Committee on Irish Affairs, has assumed a more confrontational stance than the Friends, vociferously challenging Britain on human rights in the north, backing the MacBride principles and organising letter-writing campaigns in support of a US visa for Gerry Adams.

The two Irish caucuses, and other Irish interest groups such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the pro-IRA Noraid, will never rival Washington's premier foreign-policy lobby—the complex of pro-Israel groups. But 40 million Americans of Irish descent constitute the largest ethnic group represented in Congress.

The most prized jewel in the Friends' crown is the International Fund for Ireland, which—thanks to the work of its current chair, John McCuckian, many say—has largely surmounted withering criticism of some early projects and withstood attacks by congressional, State Department and press opponents of aid to such a developed country.

The fund now engenders satisfaction on Capitol Hill and in the executive branch as a tangible measure of American support for peace. Congressional aides involved in the appropriations contentedly cite the quick and quantifiable in an area where results, they say, are visible more quickly than in more basic projects in the Third World.

But the clamour for shrinking aid dollars brought on by the collapse of communism and the insistent pull exerted by truly destitute countries will test the agility and clout of the Irish lobby. Supporters of the fund hesitate to talk of more than a year at a time in terms of the US contribution (fiscal year 1992 is going well). They are feeling the competition, and the impatience of those urging a solution—as one leader article put it, "before the rest of the world stops listening".

unionists want to make such an offer? Even if some of them do, could they survive the resulting inter-party and intra-party strains? The unionists surely have not come all this way to sign up to something they disagreed with in the first place—at least that is what some of their supporters will say. Has all the palaver since November 1985 been simply about their exclusion from the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Let me star-gaze one light-year further. Strands one and two have brought into public view the outlines of a feasible settlement: a power-sharing devolved government, transformation of articles two and three into an aspiration, and two Irish dimensions. What would then remain to be done, apart from putting the package to the peoples of Ireland?

In strand three the relations between Great Britain and Ireland have to be 'sorted out'. Yet, the British government says it will accept whatever is agreed. So, if the republic's government agrees a deal with the unionists and there is an internal settlement, then the road to dual referenda opens, and all is partially resolved—give or take paramilitary campaigns and possible negative reactions in the two electorates.

However, the question then arises: why do we need strand three in third place? Since the two governments intimate that they will agree on whatever is agreed by everybody else, but they also intimate what the elements of such a settlement would have to comprise to be agreeable, should strand three not have come first? The governments have a much longer period of successful co-operation than the Northern Ireland parties; and they have developed repertoires of negotiation. If the two governments had outlined the parameters of what they would regard as a reasonable settlement then it would have been much easier to see whether or not Northern Ireland's parties could agree to them.

As it is, the external parties have once more left the internal parties

to show the world that they cannot agree by leaving them the widest possible agendas to consider. Indeed, the external parties can be blamed for leaving the internal actors to zig-zag for a long time towards a settlement which the two governments could have drafted in the first place—and have conceivably endangered by creating such a mine-laden agenda.

The foregoing analysis suggests eventual impasse. Introduce, however, the assumption that the actors look to what happens if the talks break down, and that that prospect affects their psychology. We know that the unionist parties and the SDLP would seek to blame each other for any breakdown. The unionists would also seek to pin blame on the Dublin government if they could, whereas the SDLP would be more cautious about pinning blame on the British government.

But who would succeed in pinning the blame most successfully? Thus far the unionists have done an excellent job of persuading public opinion in Great Britain that they are unreasonable, internally divided and incapable of elementary political negotiation. In appearing to be the guilty parties in wrangling over the venue, chair and agenda for strand two, they have ensured that they look the most reluctant negotiators. If this pattern continues, and the talks break down, the SDLP is going to be in an excellent position to persuade US, European and British opinion that it is time to deepen the two governments' co-operation in the Anglo-Irish Agreement—with a touch of padding about European integration added in for good measure.

If unionists want to block this scenario then they must give more than an inch. They must say 'yes' to many, many things to which they have always said 'no'. And they must do it altogether, in public, and with some public relations panache to sell it all to their own supporters. ●



Okay, let's all laugh at Jim and Ian

Fionnuala O Connor

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

GOOD FUN. Ed Pearce's column in this space last issue—a nifty piece of unionist-bashing that managed simultaneously to flatter nationalists. Within limits. Classic English limits: great company, the Irish, if you can keep them off their wretched history. Unionists, on the other hand, are no fun at all.

Mr Pearce only did it to annoy. In real life, there is an ancient 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 cloddish 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 tempers wholesale, even those of the onlookers. Difficult, for example, to know what to make of the proposal that Peter Carrington should chair the north-south talks. At first it looked like the perfect example of ganging up to madden the

unionists. Certainly no one who knew anything about the last ten years could have imagined Jim Molyneux and Ian Paisley happily referring to Lord Carrington as Chairman.

Officials in Dublin and the SDLP well knew what the reaction would be—and relished it, to the accompaniment of straight-faced SDLP claims that surely a former British foreign secretary was a fine example of compromise on their part. Shameless: but why did Mr Brooke go for it? Why would he connive at an Irish suggestion, intended to infuriate and wrong-foot the unionists? Why, on such an obviously 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 advisers made no difference. The communal wisdom of the Northern Ireland Office yielded up the seamlessly mistaken conviction that Lord Carrington 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 swank that sweeps all before it and makes others doubt themselves.

True, unionists have made life even harder for themselves than need be. True, because they're fundamentally split their tactics trip them up. But when Dublin government spokespersons jeer at unionist inability to negotiate they beg a couple of questions. Who helped make unionist politicians what they are? And isn't mocking Ian Paisley and Jim Molyneux 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 settlement ever come about, the republic, at least, will have to face the implications for itself—if only in terms of lost illusions. As for the British, who set the boundaries of all our quarrels and looked away so steadily while 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 irritation, 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, tiresome tiresome tribal throwbacks.

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 mutual rubbishing of unionists, and the flattery of being treated as intellectual equals by the Northern Ireland Office, surely can't be the summit of Irish aspirations for any Anglo-Irish agreement.