

THE ALLIANCE PRINCIPLES
AND ANALYSIS

An Introductory presentation from
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Since its formation in April 1970, Alliance has regularly produced and developed detailed proposals for the kind of governmental structures which would be required to produce a stable and democratic society in Northern Ireland.

In 1972 we put forward proposals which prefigured our participation in the ill-fated Power-sharing Executive. In 1975 we made proposals to the Constitutional Convention (the last occasion when our four parties met together to discuss the political future). In 1980 we made recommendations to the Conference on the Future Government of Northern Ireland, chaired by the Secretary of State, Humphrey Atkins, and these were developed further during the life of the Northern Ireland Assembly from 1982 to 1986. The collapse of the Assembly, the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, and the more overt participation in politics by representatives who support and condone terrorism, required us to review—our earlier ideas, and in 1988 we published 'Governing with Consent', which set out in detail our most recent proposals.

This Conference is different from any of the earlier attempts to reach a political settlement, not least because for the very first time all the major constitutional parties to the problem have committed themselves to looking seriously at difficulties which have haunted our communities for generations, with intent to understand them, and seek an agreed resolution. This is a very considerable and ambitious task, and the Secretary of State has helpfully requested that in our introductory remarks we set aside the question of structural answers, and concentrate on setting out our analysis, and the principles which we hold and which need to be addressed during our talks. It is therefore to our fundamental principles and our analysis that I will devote this paper.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Our view is concisely set out in the Four Fundamental Principles upon which Alliance was founded in April 1970.

Briefly stated these are:

1. That the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, and to govern themselves within that context.
2. That there should be equality and tolerance in all matters.
3. That the economy should be managed in a non-doctrinaire fashion.
4. That there must be fair and firm administration of the law.

The third principle is concerned with economic management and is of less relevance at this stage in our discussions, however I will deal with each of the other principles in turn, to explain and clarify our thinking, and then add one further principle which refers to the contribution of those who live outside Northern Ireland.

PRINCIPLE 1

"We support the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom. We know that this belief is shared by the overwhelming majority of our people and that provocative debate about it has been the primary cause of all our most fundamental troubles. The union is in the best economic and social interests of all citizens of the state. It also implies British standards of democracy and social justice, which will be energetically secured and steadfastly upheld. We are firmly committed to the principle of devolved government."

This first principle expresses our view that Northern Ireland, despite its obvious divisions, is a community, and like any other community, has the right to decide its future, and be fully involved in its own governance.

Article 1, Clause 1, of the United Nations Convention on Human Rights expresses the right of peoples to freely determine their own political status, and pursue their own economic, social and cultural development. The view is often expressed that when this clause is applied to Northern Ireland it means that the decision about self-determination must apply to all the people on the island. Others have expressed the opinion that it applies to all those who live on these islands. Irish Nationalism maintains the former position, and expressed itself in the desire for an Irish Republic with jurisdiction over the whole island. British Nationalism, or Unionism, held to the latter, expressed as a desire to maintain the United Kingdom, with its loyalty to the British Monarch. The underlying view of Unionism changed only slightly after 1922. Post-partition Unionism regarded the position of the Free State much as one regards the black sheep in a family. On the one hand disowning it completely, and at the same time having maintained in its legislation and in practice that the Republic of Ireland was not a foreign country, and hence extending to all the citizens of the 26 counties, rights and privileges of a unique nature.

Both these analyses regard the natural geographical boundaries of the island, or the islands, as being the crucial factor. This is tidy, and has a romantic conviction about it at a very deep level. As Ernest Jones pointed out many years ago, the islandness of Ireland has a crucial role to play in the unconscious and irrational elements of its political psychology. Despite the fact that Irish Nationalism would regard itself as fundamentally different from Unionism, the only **real** difference is the question of whether one uses the physically bounded island, or the physically bounded archipelago, as the arbiter of the community which has the right of self-determination.

The Alliance analysis is quite different. We take the view that the boundary of a community is a much more complex and less tidy matter.

We believe that in the long history of the people of the North-East of the island there has developed both a sense of separateness from the rest of the island, and also a strong affinity with the people of South-West Scotland. It is not surprising that there is a closer relationship with Scotland than with the people of the rest of Ireland for in days gone by it was much easier to travel by boat to Galloway than to get to Dingle or even

Dublin. Some people maintain that this is all due to the Plantations, and further argue that the manifest injustice of these settlements robs the settlers descendants of any claim or rights. In actual fact the evidence is that such a position is more romantic than objective. There were also plantations in Leix & Offaly, in Munster, in South Leinster, and indeed the situation of the Scots in Antrim and Down was by no means regarded as satisfactory by the Government, precisely because they were not seen as dependably loyal to England, and their settling had not arisen through the 'due processes'.

The situation almost certainly did not just arise with the Plantation. However far back one goes it is clear that the people of the North-East had a tendency to separateness from the rest of the people of the island. Long before England was England, Cuchulainn was defending Ulster against Queen Maeve, and when Congal of Ulster was fighting with Domnal of Meath as far back as 637AD his support came from the Scots. The Kingdom of Dalraida extended across the North-East of Ireland and the South-West of Scotland. Indeed I have often wondered if the highly ambivalent attitude which many Ulster Loyalists feel towards Britain is not due to their loyalty being to the Scottish rather than the English Crown, and the confusion being caused by the fact that for almost four hundred years the same person has worn both crowns.

This tendency for the people of the North-East to be somewhat different, has tempted some people to elaborate notions of a separate racial group, in order to give reason or justification for the establishment of a separate jurisdiction. I must make it clear that I am not entertaining such arguments. They are simply fruitless disputes about nationalisms. The essence of nationalism is the attempt to establish a border within which are contained all the people of a particular racial or ethnic group, which can be separated off from 'the others'. Our contention is that such a process is unhelpful, and indeed dangerous. It is the rationalisation that is given for discrimination against, or prejudice against minorities who find themselves within the borders. The struggle of Irish, Ulster or British Nationalists for the creation of national homelands is very deeply powerful as a myth, but is only ever possible at great cost to minorities, and in our case is an injustice to our diverse heritage.

Our people come from many different origins, Celts, Picts, Vikings, Saxons, Angles, French, but we are all totally mixed, intermarried, and related with each other. Nothing illustrates this more than our names. Take that most ancient and illustrious Ulster family, Magennis. We have Ken Magennis amongst the Unionists, Alban Maguinness in the SDLP, Danny McGuinness in Alliance, and even Martin Maguinness in Sinn Fein. Or to look at it a different way. Molyneux is obviously French, Paisley and Alderdice come from Scotland. Of course Hume is also a lowland Scottish Presbyterian name, but we have all been living for generations in Ireland. Perhaps too, despite the seriousness of our work today, I might be permitted to observe that we have John and Seamus leading the SDLP, John and Seamus leading Alliance, and Ian and James leading the Unionists. We are all more part of each other, than of anyone else. Alliance believes that our task is to nourish the sense of common community, and appreciate the shared and rich diversity of our roots.

It is also our belief that for a community to be politically healthy, there must be a focus of democratically elected power and responsibility. In local communities this is Local Government. At a regional level this is Provincial Government, and so on. Such a government in Northern Ireland benefits the unionist section of the community who realise that they remain part of the United Kingdom. It is of importance to nationalists to know that important issues are being decided by Northern Irish people, in Northern Ireland. And for those whose loyalty is primarily to the province of Northern Ireland, there is an immediate sense of identity.

This whole central principle might be stated thus:

Alliance sees the people of Northern Ireland as a community, however divided, and like any other such community, our people have the right to determine their own future, and participate directly in their own governance. A Provincial Government is necessary to provide a common focus of identity, and an opportunity to share in self-government.

PRINCIPLE 2

"Our primary objective is to heal the bitter division in our community by ensuring:

Equality of citizenship and human dignity,
The rooting out of discrimination and injustice,
The elimination of prejudice by a just and liberal appreciation of the beliefs and fears of different members of the community,
Equality of social, economic and educational opportunities,
The highest standards of democracy at both parliamentary and local government level, and
Complete and effective participation in our political, governmental and public life at all levels by people drawn from both sides of our present religious divide."

If our first principle maintains that our community, whatever its historical coherence, is characterised by differences, then our second principle presents our primary objective to be the protection and the valuing of minorities.

It is our firm conviction that the currently central question in the onward march of democracy, whether in South Africa, in Central and Eastern Europe, in the European Community or here in these islands, is the problem of how to protect the rights and culture of minority communities. Redrawing borders simply creates different minorities. In Northern Ireland there is a nationalist minority. The creation of a so-called United Ireland solves their problem only at the cost of creating an even larger minority of non-nationalists in the new framework. Nothing is solved. A dictatorship of the majority is no less oppressive for the individual than an oligarchy. Surely not only Catholics in Northern Ireland in the past, and dissenters at all times, but also unionists in a United Kingdom which imposed the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, must appreciate the iniquity of a dictatorship of the majority. The essential difference between populism

and democracy is precisely how minorities are treated. Alliance believes in just such democracy.

All the parties to these talks are minority parties. The Ulster Unionist Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, and the Alliance Party, vary considerably in size, but none on its own is a majority party, and of course within the United Kingdom, and within this island, none represents more than a small minority of the population. We ought all therefore to have a concern about the Rights of Minorities. If we can find ways of valuing and protecting minorities we will not only enrich our community, and develop our democracy, but we will also advance our own self-interest.

Let me read something to you:

"We are convinced that power-sharing based on full participation by everyone, as well as protection against domination, offers the only feasible answer. Full participation includes equal treatment and opportunities for all citizens of the country, regardless of their colour, culture or descent. It means that all citizens must be entitled to the rights and privileges which citizenship of a democratic country normally entails. In the nature of things it entails a vote of equal value for every adult citizen.

Full participation is one leg of power-sharing. The other leg is protection against domination. This includes the constitutional protection of minorities, collective values and individuals within the constitution, as well as a Bill of Rights.

Important methods of preventing domination are situated inter alia in the decentralisation of power, the imaginative devolution of authority, constitutional checks and balances, the requirement of consensus on contentious matters, systems which are conducive to consensus, and a strong independent judiciary. And then the list is by no means complete."

This statement is not from an Alliance Party document. It is not the proposal of a liberal opposition group fighting for a place in the sun. It is a recent direct quotation from Mr F W de Klerk, State President of the Republic of South Africa. It is his proposal for the future government of that divided community.

PRINCIPLE 3

"We firmly believe that without universal respect for the law of the land and the authorities appointed to enforce it, there can be no measureable progress. We therefore intend to secure the rapid achievement of such respect and the absolutely equal enforcement of the law without fear or favour, in every part of the state. Equal justice will be guaranteed to all citizens regardless of their political or religious persuasion."

That was written twenty years ago, but the elusive prize of widespread acceptance and respect for the administration and enforcement of the Rule of Law is yet to be achieved. There are nagging questions. 'How could it be possible that the British system of justice has not only failed to defeat the terrorists who continue to murder innocent people with apparent impunity, but even to protect the innocent from wrongful conviction by the courts?' It seems to us that the answer seems to us to lie with people's involvement in and identification with the creation, the administration and the execution of the law. Where people are not, or do not feel themselves to be involved in the law at all of these levels, through their own representatives, there is not confidence, ownership and respect.

There is no future for any community, no security for any family or individual, and no prospect of economic improvement without such respect. **At every level those who take positions of responsibility and represent all strands in our community, must have, and must exercise, confidence in the law and in those who administer it.**

This is an immensely thorny question, and the principle is more easily stated than incarnated, but it is a central issue for all of us in these talks, and without its resolution, there will be no resolution.

PRINCIPLE 4

To these expansions of three of our Four Founding Principles, I would add one more.

"There is a contribution to be made, and a price to be paid for peace in our community, not only by those who live here, but also by those who live outside of Northern Ireland, in the rest of the United Kingdom, and in the Republic of Ireland, and further afield."

I should wish to remind you of Leviticus Chap 16 verses 21-22. "He shall lay both his hands on its head, and confess over it, all the iniquities of the Israelites and all their acts of rebellion, that is all their sins, and he shall lay them on the head of the goat, and send it away into the wilderness in charge of a man who is waiting already. The goat shall carry all their iniquities upon itself into some barren waste and the man shall let it go, there in the wilderness." This is of course the account original 'scape goat', and to it I will return.

This year, 1991, is the three hundredth anniversary of the ending, on the west coast of Ireland with the battles at Aughrim and Limerick, of those struggles which had such profound significance for the constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom. The so-called Glorious Revolution changed irreversibly the relationships between the Monarch, Parliament and People.

The last couple of years have also seen the eightieth anniversary of the Treaty of Versailles which brought the First World War to such an inauspicious end, and the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. While in Belfast there were commemorations of the

terrible Battle of the Somme fought in the First World War, and the fiftieth anniversary of the Blitz and of call-up of Ulstermen to serve in the Second World War, throughout the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe, remarkably little was said or done to commemorate these events. We must wonder why commemorations should continue to exercise their hold in this island, when in other places they, and other even more significant events, are either forgotten, or lose their overt violence and become ritualized into a common and shared culture. What, we must ask, is the driving, motivating and maintaining force behind the ill-concealed violence of the commemorations on this island? But there are many other questions which the observer must ask about the relationships between these Western European islands.

Why should they need to be governed by a special and very particular Agreement despite, and subsequent to, both of them joining the European Community on the same day, January 1, 1973?

What is the significance of the fact that this new Agreement was described as an Anglo-Irish Agreement, rather than a British-Irish Agreement?

In respect of the Agreement itself, surely it is at least curious that such an Agreement should come about which seems to refer only to one part of the combined territory, and yet have failed to include any participation by the majority of people who live in that part of the archipelago.

The historical evolution of the people of these islands was one of a developing influence of the people of the South East of England over the rest of the communities of the archipelago. Although it eventually became known as the United Kingdom, it has always been a union of diverse systems. The developing constitutional arrangements are complex and difficult to analyse because of the absence of a written constitution. Unlike most communities held together by common political, legal and religious arrangements, there is no integrated political system, no single legal system and no universal ecclesiastical system in the United Kingdom. One could point to the very British characteristic of 'living by conventions', but the argument could be made that the single most unifying fact is both hidden, and at the same time glaringly explicit, in the name - the United Kingdom. It is perhaps the enormous symbolic significance of the Royal family which holds the United Kingdom together. The ancient tie with the Principality of Wales is maintained by the eldest son who is heir to the throne, and the more recent Union with Scotland is affirmed by the fact that with the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne as James I of England in 1603, all British monarchs wear both the English and Scottish crowns. The Union with Ireland however was never forged with such a powerful symbol. The only partial exception to this was the ancient historical connection with the north-east of Ireland, since it was the extension of the Ulster kingdom of Dalriada into Scotland that provided one of the early roots of the Scottish royal lineage of later years.

The rest of Ireland had no such connection, and fought to break the link. The constitutional independence which was achieved early in this century, however did not rid Ireland of its fascination with its erstwhile conqueror. A hugely intricate matrix of connections had been elaborated

over the centuries and now binds England and Ireland together in an unequal and uncomfortable magnetic field. I say England and Ireland rather than Britain and Ireland, for I do not think that there is much evidence that Wales or even Scotland plays much of a part in this aspect of the relationship.

Perhaps when it began to emerge into the preconsciousness of the political mandarins that the insolubility of the Northern Ireland problem might be due to the unresolved relationship between England and Ireland it was indeed right that there should be discussions. And when an Agreement finally came about it is quite rightly described as an Anglo-Irish Agreement, not a British-Irish Agreement, for although it has all the appearance of being about how to deal with the difficulties of Northern Ireland, the energy behind it is also based on other considerations. And herein too lies its unsatisfactoriness.

It seems to me that Northern Ireland functions as a kind of scapegoat in Anglo-Irish relations. In constructing a political device which deals only with those relationships between the two states which are mediated by Northern Ireland, but specifically excludes Northern Ireland from having any say in what goes on in the relationship, there can be no resolution of difficulties; merely a maintaining of the province in position of a scapegoat. But since the problems in the English-Irish Relationship have not been resolved, the early satisfactions, must inevitably give way, in time, to a re-emergence of the problems. Hence we find that the British Government is prepared to discuss the matter of confidence in the legal arrangements within Northern Ireland, but when concern about the decisions of juries in the Birmingham or Guildford issues is raised, that is altogether different. Similarly, the British Government implodes with consternation at Irish extradition arrangements. In truth the Agreement which appears to be about how to deal with Northern Ireland is perhaps just as much about Anglo-Irish Relations. Does this confusion help to clarify the irony that the Government of the Republic, which in Articles 2 and 3 of its constitution claims jurisdiction over Northern Ireland, is represented at the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conferences by its Minister of Foreign Affairs, while the United Kingdom, which regards the Conference as an international matter, sends an internal minister, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland?

But in this fascinating melange, all may not be lost. The failure of the Agreement to come to completion through the establishment of a devolved parliament in Northern Ireland, has given the two partners a chance to get used to each other. If this can be maintained, and if there can be a recognition that the 1985 arrangements do not properly attend to the problem of the relationship between England and Ireland, never mind the internal problems of Northern Ireland, much less its relationship with the Republic of Ireland, we can perhaps begin to construct a further development which can enable a growth of mutual respect between the two states, and release Northern Ireland from its bind. This would however require that Northern Ireland was no longer excluded as a scapegoat.

At present almost nobody at the meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference comes from Northern Ireland. It would undoubtedly be uncomfortable to have us there, but then perhaps issues could genuinely begin to be resolved

and Ireland could become more truly independent of England. Or, since none of us is actually independent at all, we could more truly speak of moving to a more mature interdependence in the European Community.

Let us remember too that the scapegoat is not only the one who bears the blame and goes out into the wilderness, but is also the one who has the greatest possibilities for bringing a form of salvation. A real working at a resolution of the problems of Northern Ireland will bring a new depth and self-respect in relationships within and between England and Ireland. It is precisely these considerations which led us to commit ourselves to the concept of this three-strand series of negotiations upon which we have embarked.

The introduction to Strand 1 is not the place to spell out the contribution which we must expect from Dublin or London, or indeed from Brussels. It is enough to say that we believe that all who are involved in this process, (and the two governments have made the same commitment as the rest of us) all must be prepared to make strenuous efforts, and to bear some pain if there is to be a healing of the relationships.

All of us must be involved in enabling, guaranteeing and securing a settlement.

These then are the four underlying principles which Alliance brings to the talks, and some explanation of the reasons why we hold to them. The principles are not new, but as Tom Paine said in the conclusion to his book the Rights of Man, 'the question is not whether these principles are new or old, but whether they are right or wrong.' We believe them to be right, and we hold to them.