

IT IS AXIOMATIC THAT IF A PEOPLE WILL NOT
RULE THEMSELVES THEY WILL BE RULED BY OTHERS

I firmly believe that there can be no lasting solution to the Northern Ireland problem until the existing anachronistic political structures are fundamentally altered. As they stand at present they only serve to aggravate all concerned, and perpetuate and accentuate the political and religious differences between the two communities in Northern Ireland, creating and sustaining at state of unrest and division. It is therefore essential that both 'parent' countries, Britain and the Irish Republic, withdraw their conflicting claims to sovereignty over N.I.- because those conflicting claims are the real reason for the conflict within our province and between our people. The land we live in and love should be exclusively ours, and that is where our first loyalty should be directed- inwardly- and not wasted on those whose sincerity and concern over our future should be taken with more than a pinch of salt.

Most of us (as good Christians) will be familiar with the biblical story of King Solomon's judgement: when two women claimed to be the mother of a child each pleaded with him to let her have custody of it. He settled the matter by ordering that the child be cut in two and half be given to each woman. Rather than give the real mother the satisfaction of getting the child the false mother agreed. But the real mother told the king that rather than have the child killed the other woman could have custody. At this Solomon then knew who was the real mother and ordered that she should have the child. The morality of this story could well apply to Northern Ireland as far as our two 'parents' are concerned. Admittedly, we too are are a fairly recent arrival, but old enough not to cling foolishly to either of their skirts. If they both claim to care so much about us then let them give us our freedom- with their blessings (and their bouties!). In short, I believe that some form of negotiated independence for our province is the best solution for all concerned.

Possibly the Protestant/British community will feel that they would be asked to make the greater sacrifice. That must be a matter of speculation at this stage, but it would be understandable. The Roman Catholic/Irish community in general see themselves as native Irish; sons and daughters of Ireland who would be warmly clasped to the bosom of 'Mother Ireland' by the Irish Republic.* Perhaps some residual feeling of remorse on the part of Britain might relieve the (ex)Loyalists' feeling of desertion and isolation by providing certain guarantees (Dominion status for a time?). But it would be up to themselves to show what mettle they are made of. Their forebears- the Scots Irish, have an immortal place in American (* But see postscript on page VI).

history- they are no mean people! (their well known generosity to charity appeals apart.) These people- the descendants of the stock that gave America such legendary figures as Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone as well as a disproportionate number of American presidents, should be well able to stand on their own two feet. Who can doubt that within them there is still the latent qualities of those frontier men: Determination, Adaptability, Resilience, True Grit and Courage.

"I am sure that a race of Presbyterians and Protestants worthy of the best traditions of our faith will rise in the near future with their minds cleared of Unionist cant and blood purified from the rust of serfdom and that they will claim to dwell in the land, not under the protection of the Saxon, not by the permission of the Celt, but in virtue of the service they will render to a country which we love and for whose welfare we pray."

-Rev. J.B. Armour, Presby'n Min.
At a meeting at Ballynure, Co. Antrim 1893/4.

"If we are to regain that courage and sense of adventure which once sent our forebears as pioneers to the four corners of the world we must find the faith to cross new frontiers. The adventure of today however is not the exploration of new territory but the exploration of new ways of living."

Dr. J.D.A. Robb
New Ireland Movement Pamphlet
1976 (Still available).

THE SOLUTION

PART 'A'

The question of Economic Viability.

Unless the British and Irish governments agree in the first instance to consider and accept in principle the idea of a peacefully negotiated independence it is extremely unlikely that it could be achieved by other means; including rebellion by the 'Unionist' dissidents, which would be disastrous to all concerned, particularly the 'Unionists' themselves.

Although the terms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement as it stands at present may appear to offer the option of self-determination for N.I. a closer examination would appear to rule out actual independence. If the agreement is to be retained, pro tem., as the touchstone of the two nations' joint policy this would need clarification and amendment. Clearly, a newly independent N.I. could not be economically viable to begin with and it would be essential for British subventions to continue until such time as the new state would become at least minimally self-supporting. Surely, in all conscience, it is the least Britain could do and would be the honourable thing. Indeed, they would probably gain from it all by becoming on better terms with other nations (the USA in particular) and the E.C. As the amount of aid required should tail-off (less expenditure on security, etc.) they would eventually be rid of N.I. as a perennial drain on their own economy. Hopefully the USA and the E.C. would also be supportive, particularly in the field of industry and investments, and loans at low interest rates, etc.

Of course complete independence for any country is neither possible nor desirable and it would be in the best interests of both parts of Ireland to work towards one single economic unit as soon as possible. Hopefully the British Isles as a whole would soon become one integrated regional E.C. trading block.

When the two nations and the N.I. politicians arrive at a mutually acceptable blueprint it should be presented to the people of N.I. for consideration. After a suitable period for discussion and reaction it should be put to referendum, possibly with other options. If the people choose independence broadly on the terms offered the two nations should enter into a treaty whereby both nations withdraw their respective claims to sovereignty over Northern Ireland. This treaty to be underwritten by the United Nations and the European Community.

THE SOLUTION - PART 'B'Political structures; parties; aspirations and identities.

Perhaps the best way to start is by trying to identify the areas most likely to remain sources of discord even after independence. As at present politics and religion will be hard to separate, but hopefully, in a less stressful state where the people feel that their religions and ethnic derivations are not in danger an acceptable and workable set of checks and balances would remove a lot of fears and suspicions, thus improving relations between the two communities.

In the event of independence the existing pro-British and pro-Irish Republic parties should become redundant in the new N.I. It would therefore be necessary to decide beforehand what kind of government would be best suited to the new state, bearing in mind that what is suitable for other countries may have to be modified for N.I.

It must be admitted that Unionists would probably feel that they were being left out on a limb, bearing in mind that those who would probably retain their united Ireland aspirations could still hope for eventual unity. The Unionists on the other hand would in all likelihood have no hope of rejoining the United Kingdom. There again checks and balances would have to be devised. Bearing in mind that there is probably no perfect answer I suggest the following possibilities:

The formation of a new political party favouring Federation with the Irish Republic which would perhaps satisfy the aspirations of those who would still prefer a united Ireland. They could look on this as the first of two stages, the second stage would be full unity with the I.R.

The alternative for the anti-Republicans would be the formation of a N.I. Unity and Independence party, in the belief that a Bill of Rights and other legislation ensuring fair play for all, together with peace, stability and prosperity would provide sufficient inducement for the majority to maintain the status quo.

Any change to the status of the new state would require a two-thirds majority.

Without wishing to get involved in the subtleties of Federation and Confederation there should be no change in sovereignty over N.I. until a final referendum, i.e., not through federation.

Such a solution might well satisfy moderates in the community but would it satisfy the terrorists and extremists on both sides. Distasteful as it would be to many those groups would have to be 'talked with' prior to actual independence. Would the IRA for instance be satisfied with at last getting 'The Brits' out of Ireland and look on it as a victory? Would the Protestant extremists call it a day if they were convinced that they were not going to be coerced or bamboozled into a United Ireland? We should know

by now not to underestimate the destructive potential of a small minority of fanatical people, but I would be optimistic that they could be persuaded to see the advantages of a peaceful settlement, with honour.

I have decided to forgo the pleasure of setting out a detailed schedule of how I think the New Northern Ireland should be organised and governed. If negotiated Independence is accepted in principle and is eventually implemented I'll be more than satisfied. There are others better by far qualified to draw up the blueprint and put the nuts and bolts to the framework.

Where there's a will there's a way- particularly if it's Goodwill!

Postscript

In my preamble I suggested that the mainly R.C./Irish community readily identify as native Irish, whereas the non-Irish remainder could well find themselves undergoing an identity crisis, on being deprived of their accustomed Britishness. For this reason I've decided to attach a copy of an article by M/s Deidre Speer, B.A.(Hons.) A.U.G.R.A., which appeared in an issue of the 'Ulster Patriot', an Ulster Independence Committee publication. It would be an excellent thing if some kind of homogeneous North Irish culture could come about through an interweaving of the two strands of Celtic culture.

Watching a BBC Panorama TV programme (12.10.'92) I was struck by the relevance of a statement made by Herr Volker Rùhe, German Defence Minister, when the problems arising from the re-unification of the two parts of Germany were being discussed; he said: "...the only identity in eastern Germany was a Communist identity. They have to adjust almost 100 % to western Germany and that is causing real and very understandable problems. We are in the middle of this very difficult process (re-unification) and it's going to take a lot of strength from us in the years to come."

To present people with a 'mirror-image' as a sudden solution would not be a good idea. A lot of healing has to be done and it will take a lot of strength from us too in the years to come.