



AN PARTÍ DAONLATHACH

THE FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION.**The Nature of the Problem, and the Principles Underlying its Resolution :**
-----***Submission by the Progressive Democrats.*****Nature of the Problem :**

1. Whereas the roots of the Northern Ireland problem lie in the Plantations of the 16th. and 17th. Century, and the growth of Orangeism from the latter part of the Eighteenth Century, the key manifestation of the problem was the evolution of conflicting national allegiances on the island of Ireland during the Nineteenth Century.

As Irish Nationalism evolved during the Nineteenth Century, it crystallised around the Irish Parliamentary Party's campaign for a separate, or Home Rule, Parliament for Ireland. As that campaign appeared to verge on victory with the passage of the Third Home Rule Bill in 1914 (its implementation being suspended because of the outbreak of the Great War), it accelerated a vigorous anti-Home Rule movement among Irish Unionists, who were opposed to Irish Nationalism; who saw the Union link with Britain threatened, and, with it, their privileged position as the beneficiaries of the Union.

2. With more violent and separatist Nationalism eclipsing moderate Home Rule nationalism, through the 1916 Rising, and the routing of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the 1918 General Election, the crude compromise between separatist Irish Nationalism and Britain on the one hand, and between Irish Nationalism and Irish Unionism, on the other, was the creation of the two States of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State, under the 1920 Government of Ireland Act.

3. Whereas the Partition arrangement under the 1920 Act was crude and anomalous in the extreme, and was intended to be revised by the Boundary Commission of 1924, the fact remains nonetheless that it was a **result**, rather than the **cause**, of division between Irish Nationalists and Unionists.

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This point is of the most fundamental importance. Those who insist that Partition is the root cause of the current problem are refusing to face up to the different and conflicting national allegiances on this island that pre-dated the Partition Settlement, precipitated its creation, and continue to underpin it.

Any notion that Partition is primarily being maintained by the British Government is dispelled by the terms of the Downing St. Declaration, notably the British statement that "they have no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland", and that "as a binding obligation", they will introduce legislation to give effect to a united Ireland, or "to any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland may themselves freely so determine" (Par.4).

4. With approx. 20% of the population of the island of Ireland committed to the maintenance of the Union with Britain in the form of the Northern Ireland State, the basic problem quite simply is not one of the British presence, nor would it be solved by a "Brits-Out" solution.

This is the case because there are approximately one million people in Northern Ireland of a Unionist disposition, and the most likely consequence of a sudden, unilateral departure of British Administration from Northern Ireland would be large-scale civil strife, likely to impact on the entire island, and possibly resulting in the eventual establishment of a re-drawn and more homogeneously Unionist Northern Ireland, but at a terrible price.

5. If the Unionist allegiance of up to 1 million people, and their commitment to the Union with Britain, is seen as one of the key elements in the Northern Ireland problem, it must also be recognised that the inability of the Northern Ireland establishment for the past 74 years to accommodate and reflect the different national allegiance of approx. half a million non-Unionists is equally the other key element of the problem.

6. As the Northern State evolved from the early 1920's it became more and more a Unionist State for a Unionist people, notwithstanding the fact that a third of the population of that state did not share its *raison d'être* or its ethos.

One of the amazing features of Northern Ireland is that at no stage, up to the abolition of the Stormont Parliament in 1972, was any real effort made by the Unionist establishment to win the allegiance or support of a third of its citizens. Indeed, the minority were treated as the enemy within, and deprived of their full civil rights.

This only began to be redressed with the birth of the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960's, and was accelerated under the period of direct British rule since 1972.

7. Given the failure to accommodate Irish nationalism within Northern Ireland, it was only reasonable and inevitable that the Nationalist minority there felt alienated from the state of Northern Ireland, continued to aspire to all-Ireland unity, and reposed little faith in the prospects of being accorded a fair deal, or political accommodation, within Northern Ireland.

In varying degrees they placed the blame for their plight on the Unionist community, on the British Government for underpinning and sustaining Unionist supremacy, and on the Republic in the South for largely ignoring their situation.

8. While this undoubtedly reflects the accumulated legacy of relationships between Unionists and Nationalists within Northern Ireland, two other factors must be taken into account in describing the nature of the problem.

9. One of these is the role of the British Government since the introduction of direct rule in 1972. There is little doubt that gradually over that period, the British have engineered significant social, economic and legal reforms in Northern Ireland that have tackled some, but not all, of the injustices suffered by Nationalists under Unionist rule, and the state of Northern Ireland is now a fairer, more democratic and more balanced society in terms of civil rights, economic entitlement and fair opportunity, than it was.

10. The other factor that is important is the evolution of society in the Republic of Ireland. In most respects the Republic is now a post-Nationalist society. It is no longer obsessed by its relationship with Britain, and its full membership of the wider European Union for the past 22 years has given the Republic a greater sense of self-confidence, a much higher degree of economic independence and an appreciation that it can play a meaningful role in international affairs, including peace-keeping. The South has moved away from the heavily confessional and inward looking society that characterised it in its earlier decades. It has largely benefitted from healthier foreign influences and outlooks.

In the Republic therefore, the sense of Irish identity is no longer seriously expressed in terms of anti-British or anti-English sentiment, in contrast with the way many Nationalists in the North express their sense of identity.

A topical symbol of our national self-confidence in the Republic, and our ability to relate to Britain in a totally positive way, is the story of the Irish soccer manager.

The vast majority of people in the Republic have no time at all for the more extreme form of Irish nationalism as espoused by Sinn Fein/IRA. Their battle-cry of "Brits Out" and their version of Irish national self-determination turn off most people in the Republic, and that is reflected in the lack of electoral support for Sinn Fein.

Furthermore, the IRA campaign of violence has made very many people in the Republic uncomfortable with the term "republican"; and has even killed interest in the very notion of Irish unity for many.

Principles of a Solution :

COMMITMENT TO PEACEFUL MEANS BY ALL PARTIES ESSENTIAL STARTING POINT .

1. The foremost principle must be a commitment by all sides to resolve the problem by peaceful means only. The abandonment of violence by both sets of paramilitaries has made this possible. Full credit is due to those who helped bring about the cessation of violence, and the task of all democratic politicians now is to ensure that the outbreak of peace is not accompanied by a re-birth of intransigence. The people of the entire island would never countenance a recommencement of terrorist violence.

If that principle can be accepted as binding on all sides, then everything is possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND NOT A POLITICALLY HOMOGENOUS SOCIETY.

2. The elementary lesson of Northern Ireland history is that it is not a politically homogenous society. Unionism and nationalism tend to see one another as mutually exclusive, and majority-rule or winner-take-all political models are doomed to fail. Northern Ireland is both Irish and British, and a key principle is that governmental models must reflect and accommodate these conflicting loyalties in a unique way. Northern Ireland is sui generis and foreign models and parallels are of limited value. Protestant and Catholic Irish people do co-exist happily and fruitfully in the South and abroad. Neither sees the other as in any way a threat. They can eventually do so in Northern Ireland too when neither sees the other as a threat and when neither seeks to dominate the other.

ACCEPTANCE OF CURRENT STATUS OF NORTHERN IRELAND.

3. Another key principle in the search for a solution must be an acknowledgement of the constitutional status quo. Reciting historical wrongs, and disputing the legitimacy of the state of Northern Ireland will get us nowhere. In that context, we welcome the assurance given by the Irish Government in the Downing St. Declaration that "it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland, in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland".

All parties should accept that we must all seek to move forward from where we now find ourselves, not from where we might wish to be; notwithstanding the historic reality of the undemocratic foundations of Northern Ireland.

REAL EQUALITY FOR NATIONALISTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

4. The next principle of any political settlement must be the guarantee, **and tangible delivery of**, real and substantial equality for Nationalists with Unionists within Northern Ireland.

While it is politically unhelpful to recriminate about history, the path to reconciliation between the two communities in Northern Ireland must include a clear acknowledgement and redress of the massive wrong done by discrimination against Nationalists, especially in the Stormont era, coupled with guarantees that discrimination will be completely eliminated.

Respect for Nationalism must be institutionalised within Northern Ireland. Moreover, if a change in the Republic's Constitution is demanded to remove the territorial claim, it follows that Nationalism must be legally, institutionally and economically legitimised within Northern Ireland.

New laws to validate Nationalist sentiment and aspirations must be part of any lasting reconciliation and settlement. Bigotry, triumphalism and sectarianism have no place in a society that cherishes both traditions equally.

Unionists must accept that the Catholic/Nationalist community will not become reconciled to Northern institutions unless these are remodelled to reflect the existence of two different traditions.

WRITTEN CONSTITUTION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.

5. As the next principle underlying a resolution the Progressive Democrats propose the creation of constitutional guarantees for the citizens of the North.

Given that Northern Ireland already has its own Courts and things like special voting arrangements in Euro-elections and local elections, there is no real obstacle to giving Northern Ireland a written Constitution, incorporating a Bill of Rights, and with its own Constitutional Court to guarantee them.

It is possible to envisage such measures extending beyond just individual rights to communal rights and encompassing judicial control of administrative, and legislative acts. Such a judicial arm of state would be immensely more attractive to a Nationalist minority.

Indeed, if Northern Ireland, while part of the United Kingdom, were given a Constitution, which not only created a Bill of individual rights, but also recognised the majoritarian principle set down in Article 1 of the Hillsborough Agreement, and in the Downing St. Declaration, and expressly acknowledged the legitimacy of both Unionist and Nationalist aspirations, there would be more hope that both communities would give their loyalty to shared institutions.

Such a Constitution would have to be adopted in a plebiscite held in Northern Ireland.

DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT.

6. Another principle underlying a resolution of the problem is devolved government for Northern Ireland.

Models for devolution are well known, and are feasible. They need not be elaborated here. Suffice it to say that the process of reconciliation, and the evolution of responsible representative politics, is likely to be encouraged by the creation in Northern Ireland of an Assembly, with a representative power-sharing Executive, exercising that power in a manner that prevents the political exclusion of either tradition. Twenty-two years of government from abroad is enough.

ARTICLES 2 & 3.

7. While many may feel that the Unionist preoccupation with Articles 2 and 3 is a mere device to avoid other political change, and that their elimination would not alter Unionist attitudes or sentiment, the Progressive Democrats believe the maintenance of a claim of right by the people of the Republic to enforce their Constitution, Parliament and Government on the people and territory of Northern Ireland is not consistent with a whole-hearted, unequivocal acceptance of the majoritarian principle set out in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and in the terms of the Downing St. Declaration.

We do not accept that the Nationalist viewpoint and ideal can only be given Constitutional expression by such a claim of right. As was shown in 1967, it is possible to recast Article 3 (even without changing Article 2), so as to espouse the principle of Irish unity by consent.

We believe that if a new political settlement gave rise to a restatement of the "three relationships" within these islands, including the legitimacy of the aspiration of Irish unity, then the voters of the Republic would agree to a Constitutional clause ratifying those arrangements in substitution for the present wording of Articles 2 and 3.

NEW NORTH-SOUTH INSTITUTIONS.

8. The emergence of an entirely new relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic would be another key principle of any durable political solution.

If the "majoritarian principle" governing the current Constitutional status of Northern Ireland is accepted de jure by the Republic through changing Articles 2 and 3, the basis for rejecting close North-South links and institutions by Unionists as the "thin end of the Nationalist wedge" falls away.

A new North-South relationship, with accompanying institutions and agencies, would be immensely more achievable if the "constitutional status" issue was resolved. The benefits of such closer co-operation and such North/South bodies are so obvious in both the economic and social spheres to both parts of the island, that their continued absence is an avoidable tragedy and damages all Irish people.

Ends.