

1 February 1996

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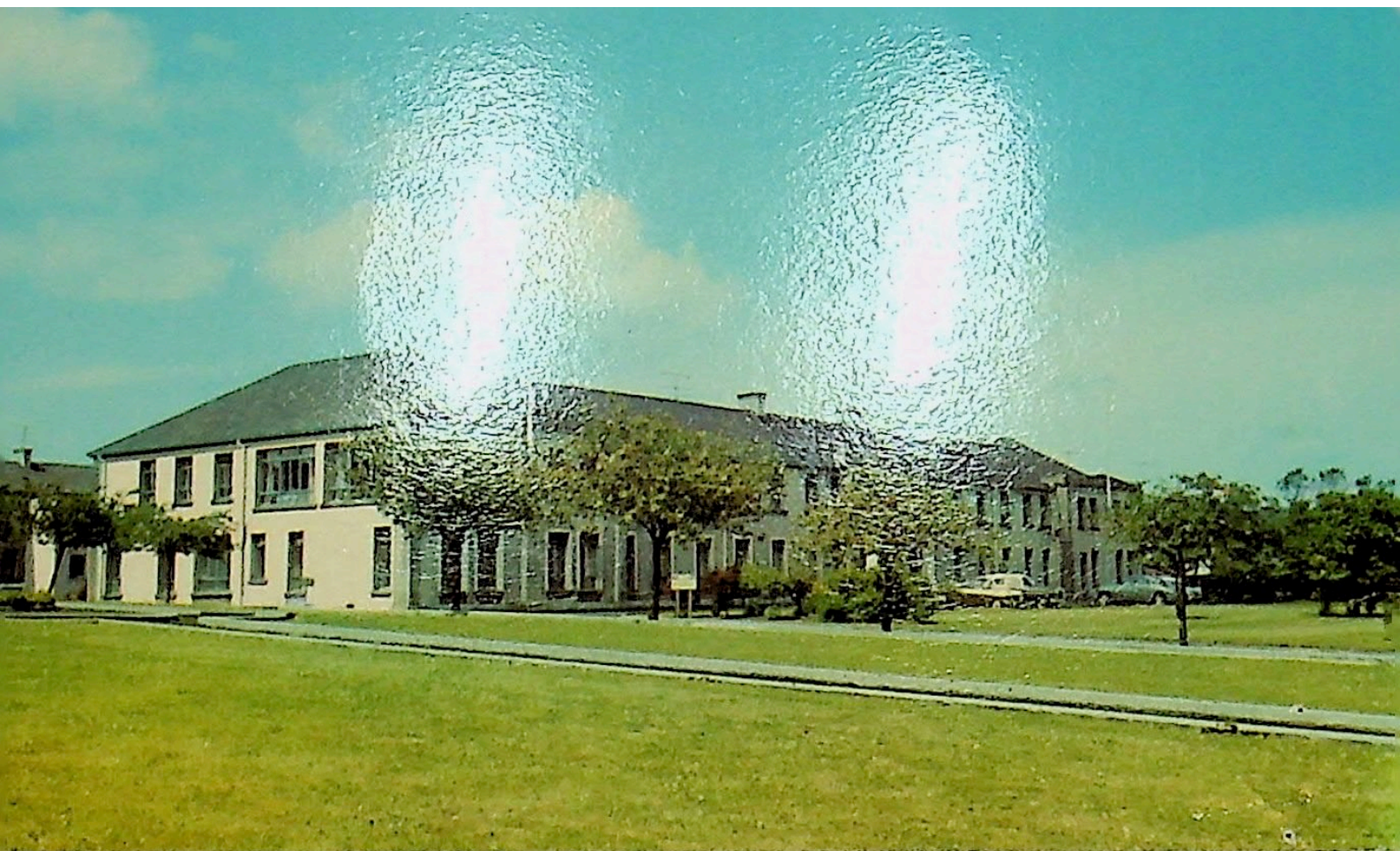
Dear John

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of the New Ireland Group's submission to the International Body on Decommissioning. Yours was one of a number which were sent to me, and was most interesting and useful in guiding our own thoughts and understanding those of others.

Best wishes for your on-going search for answers to the many questions which will no doubt arise in the coming months!

Kind regards

Dr J T Alderdice
PARTY LEADER



Route Hospital, Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, N.I.

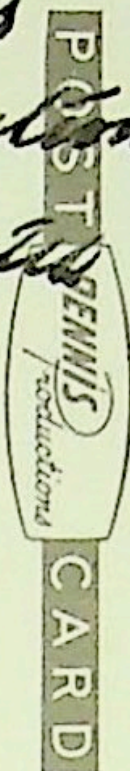
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12-1-96

Dear John,

Someone in your execution
might have time to
consider the enclosed
which are an update
on some previous consideration
of the difficulties associated

with
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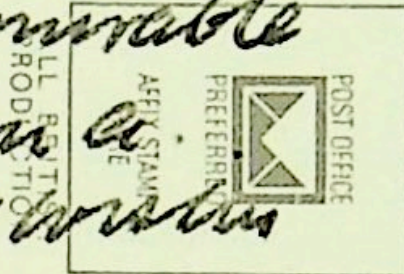


I DEMILITARISATION

II DIALOGUE ON LEVEL
PLAYING FIELD

III AMNESTY + ACHIEVING
VICTIMS + PRISONERS

Your tenacity is admirable
Congratulations from a
non unionist
Best wishes
John



I

NEW IRELAND GROUP'S SUBMISSION
TO
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DE-COMMISSIONING.

15 - 12 - 95
I December 1995.

DEMILITARISATION

The Executive Panel[†] of the New Ireland Group has published a number of comments and position papers on the vexed subject of arms de-commissioning. Our observations on this matter were included in our Submission to the Forum for Peace & Reconciliation (December 1994), in an article to the Irish News (27.3.95) and in the pamphlet, Prisoners, Arms, Victims - Peace (published 25.8.95).

Only one person gave to us an in depth critique of the views expressed in the pamphlet. In taking the trouble to write and to speak with us we therefore wish to acknowledge his role in the formulation of our response to the on-going challenge of de-commissioning.*

Thus, the position which we held earlier has been qualified by the changing context in which the issue of de-commissioning is being addressed and also by further insight into its ramifications. We therefore, have pleasure in submitting the following synopsis of a proposal which we hope that the International Commission for De-Commissioning may be prepared to consider.

* Thomas McDowell , Jordanstown, Newtownabbey.

† EXECUTIVE PANEL

FRANCIS GALLAGHER

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History of Arms in Ireland

In April 1914, 25,000 illegal guns and 3,000,000 illegal rounds of ammunition were landed with Sir Edward Carson's approval at Larne and then distributed among the UVF. Within 15 months, Sir Edward was in the Westminster Cabinet and Attorney-General of England.

In June 1914, 1,500 illegal rifles and 45,000 illegal rounds of ammunition were landed by Erskine Childers at Howth and then distributed among Eoin McNeill's National Volunteers.

The question may well arise as to what happened to all these arms? It seems reasonable to surmise that many of those distributed among the National Volunteers were eventually transferred to the Irish Volunteers and from them to the IRA after 1918. With regard to the Ulster Volunteer Force (U.V.F.) weapons it is recorded that James Craig (leader of the Ulster Unionists) refused to allow them to leave Ulster even when they would have been of value to the First World War effort; subsequently, the military authorities approached the U.V.F. leaders to request guns be handed in but they were told that "any attempt to seize the rifles would be resented and obstructed". Eventually it was arranged "that all the rifles should be concentrated in stores under military protection chiefly in Belfast and Londonderry and receipts issued that they were being held in trust for their owners" (The Ulster Crisis, A.T.Q. Stewart, p.248). Many of these weapons were later used to arm the Ulster Special Constabulary though some "disappeared"!

Three months after the landing of arms at Larne (1914) it has been recorded that the total number of rifles in the possession of the U.V.F. was a little over 40,000. By Easter Sunday 1915 it is also recorded that a massive review of National Volunteers held in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, was attended by some 27,000 men "almost all armed and many with rifles, even bayonets".

By 1915 there were approximately 80,000 catholic Irishmen and 50,000 protestant Irish men enlisted and trained in the use of arms in the British Army. What happened to all these weapons when the First World War was over?

Weapons were also in abundance during the war between the Black & Tans and the IRA (1919 - 21) and in the subsequent civil war of 1922 - 23.

Then, during the 1939 - 45 war, it has been estimated that some 60,000 Southern Irishmen and some 40,000 Northern Irishmen joined the forces of the British Crown to fight with the Allies.

As recently as 1969, Home Secretary James Callaghan said that there were far too many civilians licenced to hold firearms in Northern Ireland. There were then, according to official statements, 65,000 guns held legally by civilians in Northern Ireland. Less than two years later when the Northern Ireland Parliament and Government were abolished, the number of legally held guns had increased to 110,000. It is estimated today, that there are between 125,000 and 130,000 'legally' held guns in circulation. During the clandestine meeting held in the Antrim hills in the 1980's, followers of Dr. Paisley were able to hold high firearm certificates for such legally held weapons, the implication being that they could be used in a 'doomsday' scenario.

To the historical legacy of such a tangled mesh of armouries must be added the accumulation of arms by paramilitary organisations throughout the past 25 years. It is also estimated that there are at least 30,000 British Army rifles in Northern Ireland.

The enormous arsenals extant in Northern Ireland in conjunction with others across the border are a product of negative folk memory and unresolved conflict causing generation by generation, anxiety, fear and worse - the desire for retaliation and revenge.

Present Background

Sinn Fein suggests that the IRA will not deliver de-commissioning prior to all-inclusive, all-party talks and many Unionists do not want to be at those talks along with Sinn Fein unless 'de-commissioning' has taken place. More moderate Unionists cry out for a gesture, the more hard-line claim that they will not talk to Sinn Fein at all! The British Government, in acknowledging its position regarding this impasse, has, nevertheless, suggested that it would be willing to move if someone can come up with an idea which makes movement possible.

By their separate admissions before the ceasefires, the IRA could not defeat the British Army and the British Army was not going to defeat the IRA. The combined Loyalist Military Command was not going to call a ceasefire unless and until the IRA did so. No one gained a victory and no one was defeated. All talk of 'surrendering' weapons against the background of our historical legacy in weaponry is both unreasonable and unrealistic (pamphlet published 25.8.95 - 'Prisoners, Arms, Victims - Peace').

Furthermore, the ceasefires would not have come about had it not been for the positive contribution made by politically motivated prisoners; it is doubtful if the ceasefires would have been delivered had there been a prior demand for the handing over of weapons.

Fundamental in the arms issue is the question of legitimacy in holding arms. While it is true that Sinn Fein has only a small mandate, the legitimacy of Crown Forces holding arms in Ireland is not as straightforward as it may seem to be. Straightaway we think of the independence afforded to the Irish Parliament by the English Parliament in January 1783, its rejection through the subsequent enactment of the Act of Union by 'bribery and intimidation as well as by persuasion (The Making of Modern Ireland by J.C. Beckett), the outcome of the 1918 General Election and so on. Whether we like it or not, questions arise before the legacy of Anglo-Irish and Irish sectarian history as to how 'the Crown in Parliament' has come to have sovereignty in Ireland and how, over centuries, it has used both violence and force in its imposition?

Even if Sinn Fein were to make the much sought-after gesture on arms - one which did not imply surrender - such would be little more than a public relations exercise smacking of window dressing.

Even if Sinn Fein - or anyone else for that matter - found the formula of words -
- to satisfy parties and peoples - not least those who actually hold the arms - to come to the table, what optimism is there - without fundamental change in the context in which the dialogue takes place - that it will lead anywhere?

If the contentious issue of all-party dialogue is to have any realistic prospect of resolving the constitutional issues which lie at the root of our divisions, then it is our view that - without compromising democratic principle - there must be a fundamental change in the context in which the dialogue takes place. In arguing for this change of context, the New Ireland Group has, for many years, been advocating a means of enabling the peoples living here, on a level playing
* (1-2)
field, to engage in a democratic consensus-seeking process. This latter is, of course, beyond the remit of the International Commission on De-Commissioning.

* See bibliography.

De-Militarisation

Like it or not, 'de-commissioning', in its present context, has developed overtones of 'surrender'. We therefore urge a complete change in emphasis from de-commissioning to de-militarisation and accordingly, we respectfully suggest that the International Commission should give serious thought to the following:

1. The setting up of a neutral agency - widely acknowledged for its experience, impartiality and proven record in conflict resolution - acceptable to the recognised participants in the "Peace Process" and fully endorsed by the Governments of Canada, U.S.A. as well as by the United Nations and European Community, to oversee and regulate a de-militarisation strategy.
2. The de-militarisation strategy would be pursued at three levels:
 - i. IDENTIFICATION and LISTING OF ALL ARMS AND EXPLOSIVES.
 - ii. Secure storage in 'sealed armouries' of all arms and explosives - save those given legitimacy by the neutral agency - to be guarded by their owners.
 - iii. On-going monitoring with public information by the neutral agency.
3. Commitment to 'no first strike' to be confirmed at the outset.

We believe that given the bona fides of the neutral agency that somewhat different approaches, at this stage, could be adopted towards the military, the police, the paramilitaries and civilian weapons and in this context, we suggest the following:

i. British Army:

The British Army to leave only a token skeleton maintenance force to service its property and to protect it with the minimum number of weapons required to do so; military weapons in excess of those needed for such duties should be returned with soldiers to Britain or be sealed in armouries in Northern Ireland guarded by the skeleton maintenance force under the supervision of the neutral agency. There should be no armed soldiers to be seen outside of military property without knowledge of the neutral agency.

ii. Policing:

Regardless of the form which the police service will take as the situation evolves, commonsense would confirm the need for the police, during this interim period, to be adequately armed to deal effectively with sophisticated crime. All weapons deemed superfluous to police requirement for such should be stored in sealed armouries there to be guarded by the police

under the supervision of the neutral agency.

iii. All paramilitary weapons:

All paramilitary weapons and explosives to be identified and stored in sealed armouries there also to be guarded by their owners under the supervision of the neutral agency.

iv. Civilian weapons:

Initially all civilian weapons to be identified and stored in sealed armouries until an appropriate process of re-licencing or compensation can be drawn up. The guarding of such civilian weapons should be in the hands of agents nominated by the neutral agency.

The neutral agency would be required:

- i. To compile itemised lists of weapons and explosives placed in the armouries and to make these lists freely available for public inspection.
- ii. To monitor any ^{approved} movement of weapons to and from the armouries so that re-location is automatically recorded.
- iii. To exercise right of movement, enquiry, entry and search; this right being consistent with the citizen's rights under the law in general and those set out in a 'Bill of Rights' in particular.
- iv. To account for all aspects of its activities in pursuance of de-militarisation and to have these published regularly for public scrutiny.

Conclusion

As citizens and as democrats we should be entitled to know about the deployment of all weapons and explosives in the country in which we live - what they are and where they are, regardless of who has custody of them.

The proposal which we make and which we urge the International Commission to consider would ensure that all arms and explosives are identified, listed, stored in sealed armouries - albeit with sanctioned exception - guarded by their owners and strictly monitored by the neutral agency.

Thus we would be respecting the citizen's right to know about the deployment of arms. No weapons would have been 'surrendered' and provided the process had been

endorsed by the United Nations and European Community and supported by 'outside' governments to which our people relate such as Canada and the United States of America, pressure and obligation to sustain 'no first strike' would be compelling.

The process would have strong and persuasive guarantors and there would be little likelihood of the neutral agency being perceived as other than honest broker for the guarantors and acceptable referee to all parties here.

We would propose that the neutral agency be located in Northern Ireland for at least a five-year period in the first instance.

The ultimate objective of total de-commissioning must await the day when, through dialogue on a level playing field, ^{*(1-2)} sufficient trust has developed to enable this vexed issue to be resolved to the satisfaction of us all and not just the parties who hold the weapons.

John Robb 15-12-'95

Francis Gallagher, Jack McDowell, John Robb,
Executive Panel, New Ireland Group, December '95.

*

1. NEW IRELAND GROUP'S SUBMISSION TO NEW IRELAND FORUM ED NO 2. P 26 + 88 (1983)
2. " " " " TO DEVOLUTION COMMITTEE. N.I. ASSEMBLY
3. A PROPOSAL FOR CONSENSUS (PAMPHLET) 1985
4. " " BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF CONSENSUS (PAMPHLET) 1989.
5. A NEW NORTH FOR A NEW IRELAND (PAMPHLET) FOR ONSHAL COMMISSION 1992
6. LONDON AND DUBLIN MUST FREE THE NORTH IRISH NEWS 22-8-94
7. A NEW IRELAND CANNOT BE AN OLD ONE IN DISGUISE IRISH NEWS 15-8-94
8. SUBMISSION TO FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PAGES 46-60 1995

II

NEW IRELAND GROUP'S SUBMISSION
TO
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DECOMMISSIONING

16 DECEMBER 1995.

II

II ALL INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE

following on

I DE-MILITARISATION

(15 - 12 - 95)

Yesterday we forwarded to you our proposal for 'de-commissioning' / de-militarisation
Today we forward to you our proposals to enable meaningful dialogue with the
future in mind and in conjunction with a de-militarisation strategy.

This, then, is the second tract of our twin-track approach.

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CO ANTRIM

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EXECUTIVE PANEL NEW IRELAND GROUP

1.

CONFLICT OF SOVEREIGNTY OVER NORTHERN IRELAND :

CONFLICT OF LOYALTY WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND

Guns Kill; guns are intimately associated with the issue of sovereignty. We alluded to this issue in yesterday's submission No. I when we said, "Fundamental in the arms issue is the question of legitimacy in holding arms. While it is true that Sinn Fein has only a small mandate, the legitimacy of Crown Forces holding arms in Ireland is not as straightforward as it may seem to be".

At this stage it is not a gesture on de-commissioning and fine words that are needed, rather it is lateral thinking from de-commissioning to de-militarisation that is required and we outlined our strategy in this respect in Submission no. I.

If the equally contentious issue of all-party dialogue is to have any realistic prospect of resolving the constitutional issues which lie at the root of our division then it is our view that - without compromising democratic principle - there must be a fundamental change in the context in which the dialogue takes place. In arguing for this change of context, the New Ireland Group has, for many years, been advocating a means of enabling the people living here, on a level playing field, to engage in a democratic consensus-seeking process.*⁽¹⁻⁸⁾

Because that process involves action by the two sovereign Governments and because one, other or both may feel unable to move to provide the level playing field which we advocate, we would also offer an alternative means of re-charging the Peace Process.

CATALYSTS

Catalyst No. 1 - Communitarian Action

Sinn Fein and the two Loyalist parties (PUP and UDP) could be encouraged to enter into discussions together on a common programme of agreement for non-violent social action on issues which affect their constituents. Some such issues have already been identified as areas of priority concern by both the Loyalist parties and Sinn Fein:-

- a. A Bill of Rights both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- b. An enlightened programme for the release of prisoners.
- c. The unbanning of all proscribed organisations.
- d. An economic recovery plan.
- e. A programme for cultural celebration - one which encourages expression to the full of cultural diversity.

* See bibliography

f. Some all-Ireland agencies.

To these might be added the drafting for ratification of a Local Community Charter[†] to confirm that citizens are ^{sufficiently} empowered to ensure that their participation shall be an effective means of discharging their responsibilities and of changing reality for the better wherever they live or work. Such a Charter should keep clearly in focus the greatest discrimination of all - the discrimination that exists between those who have a job and those who do not, those who have the space, training and resources to do creative work and participate in creative activity and those who have not.

It would be surprising indeed if the powers that be - Irish Government, British Government, European Community and United States administration could not endorse an agreement between Sinn Fein and the Loyalist parties on such matters.

Failure to respond positively to an enlightened programme of agreement between those who, not so long ago, were attempting to kill each other yet who had now forsworn violence as a means of political movement would be indefensible.

Agreement between the 'hard-line' grass roots members of the most socially deprived communities could provide a dynamic for progress which would breathe momentum into the Peace Process. The danger that movement in socially deprived areas can be all too easily draped in green or orange colours would have been addressed ^{at least to a significant degree.} The development of mutual trust arising from co-operation in implementing a programme together would create a political environment in which other politicians might at last be persuaded to come together to discuss a better future for us all.

It would indeed be an irony if the people, because of frustration with the present state of affairs, were to take up this challenge in a manner recently adverted to in the Andersonstown News (Saturday, 28th October).

In other words, politicians beware! While you continue to focus so much of your undoubted talent and energy on arms and 'the Holy Grail of round table, all-party talks' the people might decide, in their impatience (Loyalist as well as Republican) and especially the womenfolk, to move the debate - and ultimately the action - into more productive areas - more relevant to life as they experience it. Well disciplined, non-violent protest on social, economic and cultural disadvantage could - if politicians do not soon deliver - become more acceptable as an alternative to the increasingly sterile debate about arms de-commissioning and all-party talks.

† Submission to Forum for Peace and Reconciliation p. 75-83.

No matter how many arms are handed over, more can be obtained; no matter how round the table or how fully occupied its seats, no amount of dialogue without fundamental change in the context in which it is taking place will deal effectively with the deep-seated constitutional issues at the heart of our divisions and some day we will have to face up to them.

CATALYST NO. 2

Joint Government Initiative

Fearing that present stances may not bring all of the public representatives in Northern Ireland into all-inclusive dialogue or that such dialogue might yet again result in stalemate and disappointment, the New Ireland Group continues to advocate - at the very least as a fallback position - a means of progress which may yet provide, or be required to provide, the catalyst which would oblige all parties to enter all-inclusive dialogue.

This position is predicated on the following:-

1. A high proportion of Britons wish to disengage from Northern Ireland.
2. The creation of a truly New Ireland implies the dissolution of the present 26-county state and Constitution.
3. Voices calling for a United Ireland in terms of an exclusive form of majoritarianism have almost disappeared.
4. Democracy implies "taking the people into partnership".
5. Partnership implies the achievement of consensus and rejects any form of majoritarianism - be it in an all-Ireland or Northern Ireland context.

MEANS OF PROGRESS OR A FALL-BACK POSITION?

Referenda:-

Back in 1980-81 Dr. Paisley called for a referendum in Britain on the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

Alteration of the Irish Constitution with regard to the prevailing relationship with Northern Ireland would require a referendum within the Irish Republic.

People living in Northern Ireland have, from time to time, called for a referendum of their own yet have not addressed the context in which such a referendum should take place, e.g. a level playing field.

The following proposal seeks to promote a democratic process in Northern Ireland which should, quite correctly, take into account the signals coming from the people of Britain and the Irish Republic, both of whom have also democratic rights with regard to how they in turn would wish to relate to us.

The process to be outlined would be most likely to succeed if it were known in advance that a consensual outcome could not only be endorsed by the two sovereign Governments but would also receive full North Atlantic and European support.

THE PROCESS

The process would be initiated by the London and Dublin Governments affirming jointly that they intend to promote and will act as joint guarantors of, a consensus-seeking process whereby the people of Northern Ireland, on a level playing field, may determine their future internal and external relationships.

Such a process would be initiated by inviting the people of Britain and the people of the Irish Republic, on an agreed day, to vote in a referendum indicating their endorsement or rejection of the following proposition:-

"That the two sovereign Governments (with appropriate safeguards firmly in place) make a joint declaration of intent to withdraw in due course and simultaneously all claims to sovereignty over Northern Ireland and in the meantime - for as long as that might be - to act as joint guarantors of a democratic process that would enable the people of Northern Ireland, in the pursuit of consensus, to determine their future relationships".

Affirmation by referendum of this proposal would create strong impetus for debate concerning the way forward and would inevitably oblige people to face up to the most significant issues at the root of our division.

Such enabling process has already been outlined in the New Ireland Group's

Submission to the New Ireland Forum (1983), in its Submission to the Devolution Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly (198) and in pamphlets 'A Proposal for Consensus' (1985), 'A Process Based on the Principle of Consensus' (1989), 'A New North for a New Ireland' (1992), Irish News, 22.8.94 and in the Submission to the Forum for Peace & Reconciliation, p.46-50 (1995).

The process does not pre-empt any outcome provided it is based on consensus. What is meant by consensus, the means of achieving it and the methods of assessing it have been outlined in the publications mentioned and have been discussed and debated widely. In particular, the need to qualify the affirmation of the right of all peoples to self-determination (Article 1, Clause 1, U.N. Covenants on Human Rights) is emphasised. Qualification which we have urged is that democratic self-determination is derived from the achievement of consensus.

Thus, the process is based on fundamental principles of democracy that respect the human rights of citizens; the process is open-ended and seeks to neutralise the imperialism and irredentism inherent in the unresolved conflict about the sovereignty issue. The process would be taking place in a novel context where, as that most venerable of retired politicians, Paddy Devlin, used to say, 'The symbols would be neutralised'.

The process starts with the joint declaration of intent to be ratified by the people of the 26-county Republic and of Britain and would, in the event of a positive outcome, be followed up by:-

1. An open public forum.

In a sense we have already had opportunity of attending such a forum by courtesy of the Opsahl Commission (1992-93). The people's forum, Opsahl Mark II, might be necessary to provide further opportunity of ensuring the free participation of that broad spectrum of citizens who did not make a submission to Opsahl Mark I or who may wish to enlarge upon any submission which they have already made.

2. A Constitutional Convention.

Elected by such as the unitary list system which would evolve in three phases:

- i. Discussion and debate concerning the findings of the forum or even simply of the Opsahl Commission's Report.
- ii. A debate to develop understanding of what is meant by consensus, what are the means of achieving it and the methods of assessing it.
- iii. A discussion about and listing of all possible options and amendments to them leading to the determination by Referendum as to which of these options may claim the greatest degree of consensus.

- iv. The option claiming the greatest degree of consensus as judged by Preferendum in convention then to be put to the people for their vote in a referendum seeking a weighted majority in favour of the proposal.

CONSENSUS ACHIEVED : CONSENSUS STILL TO BE ACHIEVED?

A consensual outcome which clearly acknowledges the fundamental human rights of the citizens should be the only pre-condition for obtaining the endorsement of the guarantors. Failure to obtain an outcome would put the process on hold until such time as it could be re-engaged. Pending such re-engagement, joint authority or European Protectorate Status could be invoked as an interim measure to promote on-going, secure, day-to-day government. Such a development should not preclude the possibility that the people, given time and under the conditions outlined already, will be able to ^{re-engage the consensus-seeking process to} determine their own inter-relationships democratically.

John Robb

16-12-95

* Bibliography see Submission I (1-8)

Add ① Submission to New Ireland Forum (1983) p19-22 2nd Ed.
'Democracy, Consensus, Self-Determination'

② Submission to Forum for Peace and Reconciliation (1995) p.35-39.
'Consensus, Democracy, Self-Determination'

III

ADDRESS TO BALLYWILLAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Thursday, 7th December 1995.

Talk by John Robb,
New Ireland Group.

AMNESTY & AMNESIA

Wounding : Guilt, Grief & Resentment :

Healing & Renewal

VICTIMS AND PRISONERS

Attitudes to Violence : Collective Guilt

Condemnation of violence is frequently determined by who was the perpetrator and who was violated rather than by the act of violence itself. This is highlighted by the different feelings of sympathy and censure which many of us have experienced depending upon how we identified violator and violated, be they soldier, policeman, Republican paramilitary, citizen-activist, Loyalist paramilitary, member of the general public, political representative, significant public figure, etc.

At the same time as we condemn violence we retain elements of unresolved social, sectarian and ethnic conflict within ourselves. By failing to engage these unresolved feelings, by failing to engage the political process to deal with what we have failed to resolve within ourselves, we are guilty by default of sustaining the very conditions which have encouraged others to go out onto the streets and country lanes to fight. Attitudes in this respect are as significant as actions. 'Our' attitudes cannot be divorced from 'their' actions.

Personal Choice : Individual Guilt

Having alluded to collective responsibility, it is vital to emphasise individual responsibility as well. Every act involves personal choice, the choice to say yes or to say no, the choice to affirm or to deny - to grow with truth or become diminished through falsehood. The late Erich Fromm, the philosopher, held that the price of freedom is choice - the choice in favour of civilisation through the affirmation of life as distinct from the choice of undermining civilisation by denying life.

"The problem of man's freedom is his choice, not the choice of any group but the choice of the individual himself" (New Ireland Sell-Out or Opportunity, 1972).

Atonement :

The Irish and British people have a deep need to exercise guilt and remorse as we work through the resentments associated with our cycle of recurring violence and the attitudes which have kept it alive. Political solution without repentance and forgiving will not rid Ireland of the ancient curse of its division.

Christians who, in the past, focussed so exclusively on the vertical limb of the Cross seemed, until comparatively recently, to overlook its horizontal limb. For centuries, our different Irish religions chastened people to get down on their knees to ask their Creator for forgiveness. How often, however, did they insist that the

same people get up off their knees and, with humility and courage, reach across in repentance asking forgiveness of their offended fellow creature, be it the neighbour across the street or the family of the bullet and bomb victim in the other community?

At the height of the hunger strike it seemed worth recalling the experience of Laurens Van der Post when he travelled thousands of miles to the cell of the Japanese guard condemned to death by one culture because he had been responsible for death on behalf of another. By way of atonement he wrote:-

"There is room for both, for ariel and calaban, for Cain and Abel, there is room for all, without murder, at the centre in the heart, without circumference. Could daylight and darkness, night and morning, but understand the language they speak to each other across the dark gulf of unawareness they would fall into one another's arms and embrace".

Twentyseven years on since Austin Curry sat in the house in Caledon, 26 years on from the riots in Derry and Belfast, 24 years on since internment, 23 years on from Bloody Sunday and Bloody Friday, with so many dead and so many more maimed, one way or another, who would not plead that we try to find in the Heart "without circumference" the forgiving spirit without which the death wish in the Irish curse will never be exorcised?

Prisoners & Victims :

The prisoner reflects some of the guilt of the rest of us in relation to our attitudes, action and in-action during the past 25 years. There cannot be too many people in a position to stand aloof from a share of responsibility for failure to resolve a conflict which has taken such a heavy toll of life and limb.

Healing will be incomplete unless 'the prisoner' can be re-integrated into society. In a sense we are all prisoners of our very violent history. Healing requires acknowledgement of roles and attitudes ^{as well as actions} and also a willingness to admit regret, show remorse and indicate repentance for what we have done to each other. Perhaps, hardest of all, healing demands a forgiving spirit.

If we are to deal effectively with feelings of unease, resentment, anger and guilt for what has taken place, the issue of prisoners becomes central to 'the healing process'.

Does this mean that we are prepared, for the sake of expediency, to overlook the terrible suffering of victims and families? Certainly not, for their feelings,

bottled up, will also keep old wounds open. In any case, there are victims among the prison population too.

In the Corrymeela News, August'95, in an article headed Liberty to the Captives, the following is written:-

"There is a deep anger about injuries done to us. This is not only to do with loss (e.g. of property, physical injury, death of a loved one). Importantly, it is also our response to the fact that we have not been respected as persons by someone else. Someone has rejected us or treated us as a thing or tried to destroy us. So our anger is not only a reflection of the injury itself; it is also a reflection of our being de-humanised by others. Our anger is a defense of our humanity, at bottom, expressing our right to exist. By punishing the one who has injured us, the community is saying that the injury matters and more fundamentally, we matter. The trial and the sentence give expression to a legitimate anger in ways that are disciplined by law. Our story is told, we get 'justice', our humanity is re-affirmed and we can let go of our anger. Without an adequate criminal justice system, people ~~would~~^{would} often feel compelled to express their anger in unrestrained ways, e.g. through vengeance. The continued functioning of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland - no matter how inadequately - preserved us from even worse excesses of retaliatory violence and an even more divided community".

The writer goes on:-

"The problem with early release - particularly with amnesty - is that it suggests that what was done and the suffering of the injured and their families are not of serious account. Very real burdens will be put upon them. All the hurts, anger and injustices of what happened may come flooding back. There is no early release for them. For many there can be no adequate compensation, reparation or justice - that is part of the tragedy of the situation. There is no pain-free way forward. Wounds will continue to be carried. It is, however, important that hurts, pains and wounds are acknowledged and allowed to be acknowledged. ^hThat, too, is part of the peace process".

Only through developing a much more courageous and imaginative way of expressing repentance and forgiving will we ever exorcise those negative feelings which have developed across our divisions.

The Loyalist paramilitary spokesmen, at the time of their ceasefire, gave a lead in this respect. Likewise, Gerry Adams has indicated sorrow for the violence inflicted by Republicans on others (Irish News, 15.9.94). The Archbishop of Canterbury has added his own words in relation to the imperial violation to the people of Ireland in the past and Cardinal Cahal Daly has, in spite of exposing himself to much criticism, been prepared to respond in kind. However, the secular English establishment, who might speak for such as the parachute regiment, has been remarkably quiet in this respect.

Board of Reconciliation :

It is to South Africa that we might now look for a lead. Acknowledging that security forces, paramilitaries and others have been responsible for violation of the human rights of fellow countrymen and women and anxious to expurgate the negative longterm effect of such violation, a Board of Reconciliation has been set up. In general terms, all those guilty of the violation of the human rights of others, all those guilty of violence - whether they were in uniform or out of it - who decide to come before the Board and disclose what they did will obtain a State Pardon.

In the Europa Hotel at the Conference on Reconciliation & Community (6-8 June '95) the pardoning process was summarised by those attending from South Africa as 'amnesty without amnesia'.

The cycle of recurring violence which has plagued us for so many centuries will not be broken once and for all unless we are able to anticipate more than consensus-seeking politics, individual and collective empowerment and constitutional re-arrangements. Healing of the deep wounds will remain incomplete if prisoners cannot be re-integrated ^{and} if we fail to make good the payment of what we can of the debt which we owe to those many people, on all sides, who have been hurt through injury or loss during these bitter years. The de-commissioning of all arms and explosives in the context of an all-embracing de-militarisation programme is also an essential element in the healing process. ^{On 26th July Seven weeks after} the conference in the Europa ^{Hotel,} the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, 1995, was ratified by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa. ^{At} the end of August ^{it was possible} to obtain a copy of that Act from the South African Embassy in London and ^{as a result to consider its implications}

The New South Africa has set out to forgive but not to forget, to establish and publish the truth, in as far as it can, with regard to the violation of its citizens.

South Africa is encouraging the perpetrators of such violation to avail of opportunity to confess to the new state what was done either on behalf of the old state or on behalf of those wishing to overthrow it. Provided complete disclosure is made of all the facts in cases involving gross violation of human rights in the political context of the conflict, the New State will grant a pardon. In doing so, the New State is recognising the 'global' context of an historical legacy in which human rights violation had been such a marked feature of the old state. There is no suggestion that the individual citizen who suffered is in any way obligated towards a bogus expression of forgiveness nor is it suggested or implied that those against whom a prima facie case can be made with regard to human rights violations will not be tried before the courts. It does mean, however, that whether guilty or not guilty before the courts, the individual has the right of application to the Commission for a pardon from the New State.

South Africa also seeks to restore the human and civil dignity of all victims and their families by granting them opportunity to relate their own account of the violations to which they were subjected; the New State has no desire to sweep the hurt, pain, anger and loss of victims under the carpet.

By deciding to publish its individual memories in the context of its legacy of historical violence, South Africa is setting out to try to explain itself to itself. It has recognised that both State violence and anti-State violence in the old South Africa were the product of a long history of violence and it desires for the New South Africa - in as far as it can - to exorcise the effect of past violation and to make it less likely that it will again be visited upon by the generations who follow in the New South Africa.

In Northern Ireland many killings and much serious injury have occurred in which the perpetrators have never been identified; both victims and their relatives have been left in the dark with regard to the circumstances of their loss or their disability. Both justification and effect are compounded by history in which violence has returned generation after generation. Much fear and resentment is fuelled by negative folk memory. For some families the pain and hurt has been accentuated by not knowing where their loved ones have been buried let alone what happened to them!

Father Raymond Murray, describing the known cases of Loyalist paramilitary murders over a four year period (Collusion, 1990-94) states that, in at least 95 of 185 killings, no one was charged. Similarly, there must be many people who have been injured or killed by Republicans where the full circumstances and persons responsible remain unknown. Three hundred police officers have lost their lives and thousands

The Right Reverend Dr John

have been injured. Dunlop, in his book 'Precarious Belonging' refers to a "mountain of memories" associated with at least 69,000 people traumatised by events here in the last quarter century.

Conscience - the great intruder - is a formidable companion and guilt must seek justification to suppress its effect. Justification claims falsehood for ally;

Alexander Solzhenitsyn pointed out in his Nobel Prize-winning Lecture,

(1970), falsehood is the forerunner of violence:-

"But let us not forget that violence does not live alone and is not capable of living alone; it is necessarily interwoven with falsehood. Between them lies the most intimate, the deepest of natural bonds. Violence finds its only refuge in falsehood, falsehood its only support in violence. Any man who has once acclaimed violence as his method, must inexorably choose falsehood as his principle".

South Africa is now seeking to exorcise the falsehood associated with so much of the guilt, resentment, fear and anger *associated with its past.*

South Africa, through its Truth & Reconciliation Commission, is indicating that the most effective antidote to falsehood is truth and that is what the 'Promotion of National Unity & Reconciliation Act' of 26th July 1995 sets out to establish.

The Commission consists of 11-17 members and they are charged:-

- i. To establish as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of human rights violations since 1st March 1960.
- ii. Granting of amnesty to persons who make a full disclosure of acts associated with a political objective and who comply with the requirements of the law.
- iii. Establishing and making known the whereabouts of victims of gross violations of human rights and restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them opportunity to relate their own account of the violations of which they were victims and recommending reparations.

In order to achieve these objectives, three sub-committees have been set up:-

- a. A Committee on Human Rights Violations.
- b. A Committee on Amnesty.
- c. A Committee on Reparation & Rehabilitation.

The Committee on Amnesty will consider applications in respect of gross violations of human rights associated with a political objective. Where such gross violations have occurred the Committee will hold a hearing at which victims shall have the right to be present.

The Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation will provide victims with the opportunity of telling their stories and will consider steps to be taken to restore their dignity and provide appropriate reparation.

It is not the intention in South Africa to forget what happened. The New State will provide a pardon only to those who make full disclosure of the facts surrounding their actions. There will be no amnesty on the back of amnesia!

The Act of Parliament emphasises that the independenceⁿ of the courts will not be compromised in any way by the Commission.

The State must be able to acknowledge truthfully what happened if it is to communicate its shame and its sorrow; it is determined to confirm the genuine nature of such sorrow by learning from past experience in its aim to never allow such things to happen again.

The objective is to enable South Africa and its victims to forgive but not to forget.

Northern Ireland is not South Africa

In referring to what has taken place in South Africa it is important to indicate that the position, with regard to human rights violations and the need to create anew by exorcising the effect of negative memory is in one respect, at least, fundamentally different from that pertaining in Northern Ireland at this time. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 1995 was anticipated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa already ratified in 1993. We have not thus far created the conditions in which it would be possible to have a constitutional convention let alone a constitutional resolution of our differences.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993, (Act No. 200 of 1993) states that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for identification but not victimisation and that, in order to advance reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in respect of ^{Full disclosure of} acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives committed in the course of the conflicts of the past.

If we are ever to reach such a point, a constitutional settlement is imperative and

the sooner we get down to the business of establishing it the better.

Victim Acknowledgement and Support :

People maimed and families bereaved must now be generously supported in on-going manner by the rest of us for the remainder of their lives. All of those who have been affected, primarily or secondarily, directly or indirectly and who are in need of support, should have access made easy for them to such as post-conflict counselling arrangements of the highest order and much else besides. The possibility of a state-run residence in extensive parkland comes to mind. The dead were well remembered after the First World War but I am not so certain that the severely injured received the support, encouragement and empowerment that they deserved for their great sacrifice. As far as our own hurt people are concerned, we should at the very least be prepared to listen to their story *so that we may better understand their need for our support.*

In 'A Precarious Belonging' in the chapter dealing with Scars of the Troubles, the Rev. John Dunlop writes:-

"One of the most moving services I was ever involved in was connected with the Disabled Police Officers Association broadcast from Rosemary Street Presbyterian Church by Ulster Television on 7th November 1993. Some of those officers will spend the rest of their lives in wheelchairs; others have lost their sight and some their arms and hands. The courage and faith of those people was very evident".

Then he went on:-

"If it is the case that at least ten people have been very closely associated with each of the over 3,200 people who have been killed, there are 32,000 traumatised people. When the 37,000 who have been injured are added to that, along with those who have seen their premises destroyed, we are talking about a mountain of memories".

Elsewhere in the chapter he states the obvious:-

"Forgiveness is not easy. It is not simply a case of pressing a 'delete' key which, without cost, wipes out the past".

Whatever direction our future takes, whatever arrangements will now come about, we should never ignore the sacrifice in limb and peace of mind which has been made by so many people and by so many families. We must strive to give the disabled and the bereft their fair share of peace too.

Advocacy of victim support should indicate willingness to make some sacrifice in the promotion of such support; at the very least we can listen to their story and respond.

Release from the Prison of History :

Phased release of prisoners in response to sustained ceasefire would make a significant contribution to the development of bone fidas in which all sides are looking for signals and reading the signs of the others. Phased release will undoubtedly contribute to the peace process yet phased release is less than adequate if we are to exorcise the effects of the violent actions and false attitudes which have returned to haunt us generation after generation. Phased release on its own will be insufficient to liberate us from the bondage of historical folk memories in which are deposited so many bitter resentments. If we sincerely wish to exercise, once and for all, the effects of attitudes and actions which have kept the Anglo-Irish and Irish sectarian conflict alive for so long we must at least ask ourselves if the South Africans have not something fundamental to communicate about 'release' when they urge 'amnesty without amnesia?'

If we are not able to address these issues, however hard and hurtful it may be, all talk of 'change of heart' or re-birth is false. It would indeed be tribute to the nobility of the late Senator Gordon Wilson if, struggling with grief, hurt and doubt, we could find it in our hearts - on all sides - to pardon and to change as we seek to tread a path towards a new future together.

Likewise, we might strive to find the courage to ask for forgiveness of those whom we have hurt by attitude as well as by action. Until we can listen to their story we may never know just how hurtful we have been to them. Until they can listen to ours they may never know why we felt and acted the way we did. No particular section has won a victory - for which we should be thankful. In a sense, we will all have the victory if it becomes possible to build a new society liberated from negative memory.