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Power-Sharing: the future for Northern Ireland?

(A Discussion Document for internal circulation only: Strategy & Executive)

The more grave and important the questions discussed, the nearer should the opinion that is to prevail approach unanimity - Jean Jacques Rosseau

Introduction

In this paper, I seek to play the role of devil's advocate with respect to one of the Alliance Party's major policies - power-sharing. This concept has long been advocated by the party as an integral feature of any future political institutions created in Northern Ireland. This paper assesses the validity of this consociational approach to the future of Northern Ireland.

It suggests that there are major drawbacks and dangers associated with power-sharing but ultimately concedes that, as in other deeply divided societies, it may provide the lowest common denominator of acceptability to the people and politicians of Northern Ireland. Nevertheless the feasibility of power-sharing, both theoretically and practically, is very much in doubt.

It is argued that if the Alliance Party is to continue to advocate power-sharing, it should clearly be done on the basis of the means to an end rather than to an end in itself. The aspiration of the party should be the creation of a genuinely liberal society for the people of Northern Ireland. Power-sharing if structured properly can contribute to this end. There is a clear function that a party such as Alliance can play in overcoming divisions in a society. Specifically while it may argue for the establishment of power-sharing arrangements, it should position itself to take advantage of the inevitable dissatisfaction with any resultant structures by portraying its support as the indicator of to what extent the need for power-sharing has been eroded. This is the central thesis of this paper.

However, it must be noted that not every conflict has a solution, or even the route to a solution. If power-sharing does prove to be unrealistic, there is a power-broking alternative despite all its drawbacks.

Range and Typologies of Policies of a Plural Nature

It is a moot point as to whether conflicts can actually be resolved, or whether it is more realistic to talk about conflict management. Indeed, it is difficult to satisfactorily define conflict resolution and conflict management, and furthermore to distinguish the terms.

The record of talks processes throughout the world, both contemporary and historical, in terms of the parties concerned freely negotiating new arrangements is poor. In reality most conflicts have been dampened by one party or more parties to the dispute becoming dominant and subjugating their opponents, or by the underlying issues behind the conflict changing to such an extent that the conflict naturally dies out. 'Successful' talks processes have often been examples of:
1. one party negotiating from a position of strength;
2. one or more parties having burnt themselves out;
3. the conflict losing its raison d'être due to changed circumstances; or
4. 'carrots and sticks' being applied to one or more parties by external players.
The notion that through sheer force of argument one's opponents will collapse and dramatically alter their position is fanciful.

Victory rather than accommodation does not address the fundamental causes of conflicts, and frequently only creates the potential for further violence in the future. However, it can deliver the impression of peace and stability in the short term. This approach has been the norm throughout most of Irish history, and explains long periods of superficial peace between periods of conflict.

Nevertheless, while emphasis should fall upon the above reality, it should not be ignored that in a minority of conflict situations, solutions have been found that mutually address the needs of the competing sides without creating the impression of an obviuos victory for either.

There are a number of different policies that can be applied in deeply divided, or plural, societies. (Note, the term pluralism does not apply exclusively to societies that are plural in the divided sense.) Northern Ireland undoubtedly constitutes a deeply divided society.

Sammy Smooha and Theodor Hanf, "The Diverse Modes of Conflict-Regulation in Deeply Divided Societies" in *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, XXXIII, 1-2 (1992), pp. 26-47 conclude four strategies of conflict resolution constitute acceptable and workable options in the context of the modern world, and especially international standards of human rights. They note that not all of the strategies are appropriate in every context, and that some are more suitable than others.

1. *Partition.* Of the four, this is the least acceptable or feasible. It is firstly impractical, if not impossible, to draw political borders that correspond to ethnic groups distributed on a homogenous basis. Partition can rarely be implemented without large transfers of population, and usually substantial associated violence. It furthermore makes little economic sense. In the modern world, partition could only be acceptable when it is agreed voluntarily by all concerned, and it is endorsed by the international community. It is only a credible option in extreme situations where populations clearly do not want to live together, and the other options below are not workable.

A classic case is the Israeli-Palestinian question: most solutions advocated for this problem are premised on the creation of a Palestinian state. Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union are two recent examples of states that were partitioned on a largely

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peaceful basis, though the latter did experience bitter ethnic conflict in some of its successor republics.

Partition in this sense refers essentially to territorial dismemberment. A much more benign is territorial sub-division, for example federalism. The logic of granting such autonomy in a divided society (as opposed to any administrative/governance logic) is that if a minority at a national level constitutes a majority in a sufficiently coherent section of territory then certain government functions can be exercised at that level. In such federal or autonomous systems, the common domain of equality for the individual created at the national level would be replicated at the sub-national level. (The specific issue of partition in the Irish context will be specifically addressed in a forthcoming paper on the principle of Consent.)

2. *Ethnic Democracy*. An ethnic democracy is one in which the dominance of an ethnic group is institutionalised. It is not one in which political and civil rights are limited to members of the dominant ethnic group only, as was the case in Apartheid South Africa. However, ethnic democracy is different from liberal democracy as one ethnic group are accorded a superior status and have their culture closely associated to the symbolism of the state, while other groups have a relatively lesser claim to the state and are seen as not fully loyal. The state is seen as the expression of national aspirations of the dominant group. Expressions of the national or cultural identity of minority groups may be restricted. An ethnic state differs from a consociational state as in the latter, the state is neutral between the competing claims of different groups.

Three examples of such states are Egypt, Israel and Northern Ireland (under Stormont). In Egypt, the state reflects the dominant position of the Moslem majority, not the Coptic Christian minority. However the latter seem to accept this position. Israel is an ethnic democracy as while the Arab minority have considerable political and civil rights (indeed much more than they would have under the Palestinian Authority), the symbols of the state of Israel are exclusively Jewish. Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1972 provides the classic case of an ethnic democracy.

The authors see ethnic democracy as a viable option in certain non-democratic deeply divided societies as they move towards democracy.

3. *Consociational Democracy* (examined below).

4. *Liberal Democracy*. Here the individual is taken as the cornerstone of the deeply divided society; ethnic affiliations are ignored by the state. All individuals are accorded equal civil and political rights and judged by merit. They are free to mix, integrate, assimilate, or alternatively form separate communities provided they do not discriminate against others. Liberal Democracies can exist in what are commonly called 'deeply divided societies'.

Ethnicity in liberal democracies are essentially privatised; individual rights are maximised but collective rights are minimised. Educational systems or other communal organisations exclusively based on ethnicity are legal, but the groups concerned must bear the costs rather than the state.

'Liberal democracy foster civility, namely, a common domain of values, institutions and identity, at the expense of communalism. It equates nationalism and citizenship and the state with civil society. All citizens, irrespective of their national or ethnic origin, are considered equal nationals. Although sub-cultures are allowed within a common core-culture, liberal democracy has a clear bias toward ethnic integration and assimilation.' As a strategy in a divided society, liberal democracy 'has better chances to succeed in an immigrant society where discontinuity with the past and willingness to trade culture and identity for social mobility are much greater than in a society composed of indigenous'.

Liberal societies are the norm in much of the western world. The term 'liberal' is currently used in a number of contexts. In British politics, liberals are generally regarded as left of centre, in Continental Europe they are seen as regarded as mostly free-marketeers to the right of centre, and n the United States, the term is one of abuse applied to those who would ordinarily be called social democrats within a European context. Furthermore in economics, 'liberal' refers to a free-market approach. However at the lowest common denominator, all these divergent strands share a believe in the individual as the basis of society rather than the group. This is the basis of liberal democracy. Indeed this concept is so widely accepted that it covers most of the political spectrum in many societies, not merely those who actually label themselves as Liberals. In Great Britain all Liberal Democrats and most Labour and Conservative politicians fall under its umbrella, as do most Democrats and Republicans in the United States. While such a wide definition may seem worthless in most situations, in Northern Ireland the political spectrum that can be identified with the promotion of liberal democracy is very narrow. Most Unionists and Nationalists would not qualify as they are better described as corporatists more concerned with the interests of their respective groups. (See my article in February 1997 *Alliance News*)

The two drawbacks to liberal democracy in divided societies are identified by the authors. The first, which could occur even in non deeply divided liberal societies, is a failure to deliver equality or non-discrimination. The second and much bigger problem is that it may fail to adequately address the demands from different groups for autonomy and/or the institutionalisation of collective rights.

A liberal democracy as opposed to an ethnic democracy was created in post-Apartheid South Africa. The Pan African Congress (PAC) on the one had wanted a black ethnic democracy, while the AWB and Conservatives wished to continue with a white ethnic democracy. In the middle, the National Party, which had come to the conclusion that white majority rule was no longer sustainable, wanted a power-sharing consociational arrangement to preserve at least a share of power for whites, while the African National Congress (ANC) perhaps surprisingly wanted to create a liberal democracy.

Their reasons for this were threefold. Firstly, they were reacting against the concept of group rights and creating racial group affiliations as this was too reminiscent of Apartheid. Secondly, consociational democracy had been discredited by the sham constitution of 1983 in which the National Party gave Indians and Coloureds a nominal access to power. Thirdly, as whites only constituted about 15% of the population power-sharing was regarded as being too unfair on the black majority in the long-term. A brief consociational transitional period was created to assuage white fears, but this

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came to an end in 1996 with the adoption of a new constitution, and also the withdrawal from government by the National Party. This includes an extensive Bill of Rights that includes not only the traditional western political and civil rights, but more controversial economic and social rights. The rights of individuals to practice their language and culture is strongly protected. Other devices designed to deal with ethnic differences include federalism and proportional representation.

Asbjorn Eide in *A Review and Analysis of Constructive Approaches to Group Accommodation and Minority Protection in Divided or Multicultural Societies* which was presented to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in July 1996, includes the following typology of processes that can be used make a society more homogenous.

1. Fusion is a process whereby a combination of two or more cultures, on an equal basis, produces a new overarching culture. It corresponds to the popular notion of a melting pot that occurs mainly in immigrant settler societies. (However indigenous peoples in such situations rarely participate as equal partners.)

2. Assimilation is homogenisation with a dominant culture, to which other groups are expected to conform.

3. Exclusion is a much more sinister form of homogenisation by which ethnic or religious groups are excluded. A more popular term is *ethnic cleansing*. There are different forms of exclusion ranging from (i.) the denial of citizenship, rights to property etc.; (ii.) terrorising the population of a group to make them leave a territory; (iii.) large scale population transfers; and (iv.) genocide.

Arguably, the creation of a *liberal democracy* by a process *fusion* could be regarded as the ideal goal to be strived for. Any divided society in which a fusion of cultures occurs, no longer remains divided along ethnic, religious or linguistic lines. No one culture wins through or dominates, and a new culture that reflects all its predecessors emerges. The creation of a new overarching identity or national culture need not restrict the persistence of any sub-cultures. Their existence is fairly benign provided they are not linked to alternative national aspirations.

However, it is questionable if fusion is actually achievable in most societies. The United States was regarded as the classic example of a melting pot: To a large extent, this was successfully achieved for European settlers, but arguably not for African and Native Americans. American culture (if one believes that such a concept actually exists) reflects the product of the cultures of its many immigrant groups. The sub-cultures of these groups persist to greater extents: e.g. Irish America compared to Ulster-Scots America. There is now an active debate as to whether the United States is truly a melting pot or alternatively a multiethnic society. The politics of multiculturalism based on the presumption of the latter have become the subject of great controversy; one particular problem concerns the classification of individuals into different groups.

Australia is perhaps a further example of a partial melting pot with respect to European settlers, but a multicultural society when Asian immigrants and Aborigines are taken into account. In both the USA and Australia, the indigenous peoples were not fused

into the common culture. Canada is an example of a settler country that did not generate a common culture, remaining split between English and French cultures. A combination of the policies of egalitarian integration and federalism were historically pursued, with the addition of increased autonomy to Quebec in recent years. Canada is otherwise trying to create a melting pot for its more recent immigrant population. Attempts to create a common fused national identity in the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia both proved to be illusory.

What are Power-Sharing and Consociational Democracy?

Power-Sharing

Power-sharing can be used to describe any situation in which power is shared between the political representatives of two or more political parties/traditions. It occurs for example when different branches of government are controlled by different parties, as in the United States where the Democrats currently control the Presidency and the Republicans the Congress (or the opposite as has been the case frequently since World War II), or where no political party obtains overall control in a legislature, as is necessary to form a government in a parliamentary democracy, and is forced to form a coalition with another party(ies) in a similar position.

It can however be institutionalised, or entered into voluntarily, in order to encourage the representatives of a wider group than what would normally constitute a simple majority in any situation to be part of decision-making processes. It need not necessarily be applied in a divided society but is normally of most relevance in such situations as it aims to ensure that one section of any community cannot dominate decision-making and consequent outcomes, thereby helping to manage deep divisions. However, qualified majorities are used in most liberal democracies in certain circumstances when the decision-making stakes are particularly high, for example when constitutions are being amended.

Proportional Representation is not by itself power-sharing, but proportionality on representative bodies is certainly a prerequisite for it. (Note proportional representation is needed in all electoral circumstances, not only those intended to produce a power-sharing outcome.) The creation of any body, whether legislative or executive in which individuals or groups are represented on a proportional basis is not power-sharing if decision-making still proceeds on a majoritarian basis.

Institutionalised, power-sharing refers to a set of political arrangements designed to ensure that political power and responsibility are shared among the political representatives of different groups, and that views of all sections of the community are taken into account at certain, if not all, levels of government. It can take a variety a precise institutional forms that either recognise directly or indirectly the existence of such groups.

Institutionalised power-sharing in a legislative sense, provided the body was elected on a proportional basis, can be achieved in one of two main ways:

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1. **A weighted majority** rather than simple majorities can be used in decision-making. When decisions are usually split along majority-minority lines, provided the weighted majority required is of sufficient size to encompass the support of one or more of the parties representing minority interests, decisions cannot be taken without their support. This approach has the advantage of not having to specify the composition of any minority. This provides flexibility in two respects. Firstly the system is not fractured if the political representatives of any minority group change, and secondly if the size of any minority changes over time. Weighted majorities can also be advocated in the sense that important decisions, e.g. constitutional, should have overwhelming support. This logic is applicable in all societies, not only divided ones.

2. **A minority veto** can be given to a specifically named party or set of parties to ensure that decisions which could adversely affect the interests of a particular group are not taken. This route carries several problems: it is much less democratic as parties representing minority interests are given an equal share in decision-making out of proportion to their actual strength, and the system does not have the built in flexibility to cope with either a change in the size of any minority and which political parties they choose to represent them.

Institutionalised, power-sharing in an executive sense, can be achieved in two main ways:

1. A single executive could be proportionally elected by a legislative body, with portfolios divided up among the participants according to a specified formula, with specific non-departmental decision-making and overall supervision carried out in a collective manner using either the weighted majority or minority veto approach as outlined above.

2. A committee could be proportionally formed out of the legislative body to collectively manage a specific government department in which decision-making could again proceed on a weighted majority or minority veto basis.

Current Alliance proposals on power-sharing are based upon its document, *Governing with Consent* (1988). The relevant sections were tabled as Alliance proposals in the Strand One phase of the 1991/92 Brooke-Mayhew Talks.

Alliance proposed that legislative powers be exercised through a unicameral Assembly elected by proportional representation, for a fixed term period. Assembly committees would be established, not to exercise executive functions, but to scrutinise the work of different executive departments, and to conduct debate on certain stages of legislation. The composition of each committee would reflect the balance of parties in the Assembly, as would the distribution of chairmanships and vice-chairmanships as a whole.

It is proposed that the Executive be appointed by the Secretary of State, according to a series of criteria of 'acceptability'. This differs from a model in which the Assembly itself would determine the composition of an Executive, perhaps according to its own formula of acceptability. Alliance suggests that it would transfer powers to an Executive provided it:

(a.) is widely representative of the community as a whole; and

(b.) reflects, so far as practicable and subject to (c) below, the balance of the parties in the Assembly; and

(c.) includes no person who supports the use of violence for political ends.

The acceptability of the Executive would subsequently require the support of at least 70% of the Assembly. This could be retested upon the petition of at least 15% of the Assembly. The desirability of further requiring a weighted voting system in the Assembly in areas where 'fundamental issues' are at stake, provided this could be adequately defined, was expressed. There would be contingencies for the continuation of an Executive in the event of loss of confidence from the Assembly and ultimately the resumption of direct rule with a total breakdown of the system.

These proposals should be viewed in the context of a wider range of constitutional protections to protect individual rights through the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law, and a possible right for an aggrieved minority constituting 30% of the Assembly to petition against a decision of the Assembly thereby triggering consideration by the national government within a specific timeframe.

The proposals within *Governing with Consent* remain an excellent basis under which to establish a devolved power-sharing regional government in Northern Ireland. However, there is now an issue as to how qualification (c.) in terms of the composition of any Executive can be established. If it based of nominal support for the Mitchell Principles, then every party would seem to qualify, whereas if it is based on actual respect for the Principles, then arguably government could be a very lonely place for the Alliance Party. Furthermore the threshold of 70% could be lowered given demographic chances since 1988. Such a move could improve the prospects of a scenario of power-broking emerging. Alternatively, instead of seeking a 70% affirmative vote, the ability of 30% to block would equate to the same outcome but also provide protection against a boycott or low attendance making the system unworkable.

Consociational Democracy

Consociational Democracy is a model developed by a Dutch political scientist, Arend Lijphart, to explain how democracy was able to function inside plural or divided societies, i.e. those with a fragmented political culture. The model is essentially a way of explaining a set of political phenomenon.

Lijphart cites four main features that normally characterise consociational systems:

1. Grand Coalition;
2. Mutual Veto;
3. Proportionality; and
4. Segmental Autonomy.

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Grand Coalition

A Grand Coalition is formed when parties that represent a substantial majority in any legislature join together to form a government. This approach to government differs from the 'British' model in which there is a government, drawn usually from one party, with a simple majority in Parliament and an opposition. It also differs from the normal sense of a coalition, in which parties coalesce in order to achieve a simple majority in any legislature, as is the case in the Republic of Ireland. Furthermore, grand coalitions are not exclusive to consociational situations. The UK had a grand coalition during both World Wars and the United States has occasionally had bipartisan elements to its executive. A grand coalition is not necessarily institutionalised, even within a consociational sense.

While the more normal government v opposition approach superficially seems to exclude a large section of political opinion, that opposition has a realistic hope and chance of becoming the government or part thereof in the short to medium term, due to either floating voters or floating parties. The justification behind a grand coalition is that in a divided society there is a great danger of one section of the population being permanently excluded from government. The Grand Coalition approach is therefore used to ensure that there is a balance of power between the representatives of different segments of a divided society within one government.

The threshold of support for the creation of an executive in any legislature can be manipulated in a divided society to ensure that the necessary segments are represented in that executive.

The Mutual Veto

A Grand Coalition by itself continues the idea of government based on simple majority rule, as it only allows the minority to voice its opinions within a government. The mutual veto takes consociationalism a step further. It aims to stops decisions that constantly frustrate the will of any minority from being taken. Lijphardt argues that any veto must be genuinely mutual and that its real purpose is to force each segment in a plural society to recognise the dangers of deadlock and consequently reach consensus.

Proportionality

The electoral system used to determine the make-up of any legislature/assembly should be proportional to ensure that all segments in a plural society have fair representation. Even in a strictly bi-segmental situation, first past the post systems are dangerous due to the distortions that such a system is likely to create.

Segmental Autonomy

This specifically refers to minority control over areas of exclusive concern to that minority. This could theoretically be on either a territorial or non-territorial basis. The former is virtually impossible outside homogenous areas, the latter is much more feasible, e.g. the control of Catholic education by the Catholic Church. The concept of

federalism or political autonomy is closely related to this element. Political power could be exercised at a regional level giving a minority at a national level de facto control in a region in which they constitute the majority provided that minority extends to any further minorities (including those who form part of the majority segment at a national level) similar consideration to that that the majority at a national level gives to minorities.

Conditions

Lijphardt identifies several factors in any society which increase the chances of successful application of a consociational approach.

First of all, a society should be a divided society in which the population is clearly divided into segments and cleavages that act in a politically coherent manner. There should be a balance of power between the segments. It is preferable if this balance is multipolar rather than bipolar. In a bipolar situation, especially when the opposing sides are roughly equal in size, there is a tendency for both to hold off on compromise given the hope that they will be able to achieve domination. The presence of 3 or 4 segments seems to be optimal for successful consociational democracy. Segmentation beyond this level tends to make consociational approaches less necessary, or would challenge the justification in labelling any society consociational.

Consociational democracy depends on the leaders of political parties from the different segments being prepared to reach a political accommodation and/or to co-operate in government. Emphasis falls on the attitudes of the political elites rather than their followers who may or may not be more moderate than their political leaders. Political leadership is a key element. It is further helpful if the masses are deferential towards the elites.

The consociational approach requires that political parties reflect the social divisions within a society. It requires a tolerance of parties organised on a segmental basis. While this is seen as necessary to provide stability in a divided society, it is not conducive to making a society any less divided. It is also important in a multiparty system that centripetal rather than centrifugal forces are at work. It is helpful if moderate parties rather than extreme ones are the dominant political forces in different segments.

Consociational democracy has usually occurred in small countries, in terms of population. It is helpful if the political elite is very familiar with each other. However if the elites are too small, there can be a shortage of the necessary political skills to sustain accommodation. Consociationalism has also often arisen in the context of a foreign threat to a state.

The nature of the divisions in most successful consociational democracies are based on class, ideology, religion or language. Instances of success in mainly ethnically divided societies are rare.

It is further helpful if the divisions or cleavages in a divided society are cross-cutting rather than reinforcing. For instance if religious, linguistic and class divisions tend to

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correspond a bipolar situation is produced, while if they intersect a more conducive multipolar situation is the outcome. The more a society has such cross-cutting cleavages, the less divided a society becomes. Over-lapping between segments tends to substantially moderate attitudes.

Finally and crucially, there must be agreement on the boundaries and existence of the state itself; a common sense of loyalty to one national identity or a common set of values is necessary. A commitment from the elites to the maintenance of the system is important.

Given the loose nature of consociational theory, few of these conditions are seen as being individually necessary for successful consociationalism. They are perhaps best viewed as an aggregate; the more of the conditions that are favourable the better are its chances.

Identification

There is a serious problem of the testability consociationalism. Consociationalism is by definition successful - it refers of situations that are working democracies. It is difficult to determine, however, if consociational methods were ever actually needed to maintain stability in situations that have always generally been so characterised. Consociationalism is perhaps testable when it is applied to a deeply divided society that has failed under the application of other forms of democracy. If consociationalism eventually fails, it can then be argued that the conditions were not correct. Further problems surround the definition of what constitutes a cleavage or a segment. It is arguable that if a substantial number of the people who nominally constitute part of a cleavage do not support the political representatives of that cleavage, then a political division based around the relevant issue does not exist.

Nevertheless, consociational theory does have some validity as a means to explain how certain deeply divided societies have remained democratic. Largely depending on the intensity and sharpness of divisions, different societies have varying claims to the label consociational. Such situations in which power-sharing is institutionalised, or where accommodation is voluntarily entered into an attempt to manage deep divisions with a society can legitimately be analysed in consociational terms.

While there is a considerable overlap between the two concepts of power-sharing and consociational democracy, they are not identical. Specific power-sharing structures can be established in any context, not only consociational ones. Consociational democracy does not necessarily have to contain specific power-sharing institutions. However when power-sharing is promoted in a divided society it essentially a consociational phenomenon.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Consociational Democracy/Power-Sharing

The Argument For

The main argument used to justify the application of power-sharing in a consociational sense, or any of the specific consociational devices, is that there is no other means of creating a functioning democracy within a divided society; it provides the lowest common denominator of acceptability. It is based on the assumption that it is unrealistic to expect divisions to simply disappear. Consociational democracy's advocates argue that there is little chance of liberal democracy emerging, and that the only other possible alternative is domination by one or more segment which will increase the potential for violence and further breakdown within that society. Furthermore successful consociational democracy promotes consensus and political stability as successive governments tend to have the same participants.

The Arguments Against

There are a host of problems with consociational democracy that can be identified from the model alone; many of these have materialised in the practical examples.

Consociational democracy has democratic limitations in two senses. Firstly, it can tend to place too much emphasis on the interests and rights of groups rather than individuals; liberal democracy is founded on the cornerstone of the interests and rights of the individual ahead of the group. The application of consociational democracy is often associated with the promotion of 'group rights'. Consociational democracy is not the complete antithesis of liberal democracy, but it is clearly divergent from it.

Secondly, consociational democracy is dependent on political elites for its success. They are required not only to 'do the right thing' irrespective of the attitudes of the masses, but to have tight control over those masses. There is consequently little scope for the creation of a broad-based participatory democracy, including the use of referendums (especially on a simple majority basis), and it can furthermore be regarded as a threat to the system. This poses particular difficulties in the Information Age; this revolution has the potential to transform how politics are conducted in the future.

Given its close association with the promotion of 'group rights', consociational democracy has the potential to reinforce the divisions in a divided society by corporatising the different groups of segments within such a community. This is not pleasant for those who do not associate with any group. The main danger is that ethnic identities and therefore divisions would be reinforced, leading to long term polarisation.

Consociationalism is also closely associated with a system of clientism. The deference of the masses to the political leadership of the elites is bolstered by the former's dependence upon the latter for the receipt of certain goods. Arguably the more professionally run a government is, and how effective a welfare state exists, the less the scope for clientism should exist.

There is often a lack of serious opposition in consociational democracy; there is not a readily identifiable alternative government. The same parties, and often individuals, tend to be present in successive governments. Consequently elections carry less significance. Problems with accountability, conservatism and lack of vision or imagination, and corruption can all be anticipated.

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There is a lack of research on to what extent consociational democracy distorts an economy. It is difficult to anticipate whether or not any economy's performance would be better or worse without consociational arrangements. However in a system in which the interests of corporate groups are responded to ahead of the interests of the state as a whole, there is a danger of an over-duplication of services (for example the creation of two playgrounds for different segments within a certain geographical area rather than one), needlessly draining scarce resources. Within government, certain economic inefficiencies could be tolerated, and specific interest groups rewarded, in order to keep a certain political arrangement alive.

Consociational or power-sharing structures can be constructed with differing degrees of flexibility and inflexibility. It should be important to regard them as a temporary response to a particular sense of circumstances, and allow a divided society if and once it has matured to no longer have to depend on such measures. The further danger of too rigid a system is that it cannot cope with changes, especially sudden ones, in the electoral or demographic balance between the segments. Unfortunately, consociationalism can all too easily become inflexible.

Consociational Democracy/Power-Sharing in practice

Austria - Austria experienced bitter adversial politics during the inter-war years between Catholics and Socialists. The main cleavage in this otherwise homogenous country was a religious-secular one. A bitter civil war between paramilitaries occurred in 1934. Between 1945 and 1966, Austria was regarded as a consociational democracy as Socialists and Catholics co-operated in government. It has since become superfluous. Because the cleavages in Austria were never that clear-cut or deep and given the ease from which it moved on from the consociational phase, Austria's status as a consociational democracy has been challenged, but the fact that the bitter violence that Austria experienced in the 1930s was eventually overcome with both sides becoming represented in government should not be overlooked..

Belgium - Belgium is the most clearcut of the mainland European consociational democracies. The main cleavage is that of language, but there are further cross-cutting cleavages based on religion and class. Belgium until the middle ages had been part of the Netherlands. However in the sixteenth century, Spain (which inherited the territory from the Dukes of Burgundy) managed to hold on to what is now Belgium as the modern Netherlands gained its independence. Napoleonic France which conquered Belgium from Austria (which had inherited it from Spain) pursued a policy of assimilation. At the end of the Napoleonic wars, Belgium passed to the Netherlands who promoted Flemish (Dutch) in the northern provinces. The French revolt of 1830 led to independence. The Francophone elite dominated Belgium for most of its history; it is only in the twentieth century that the Flemish population have become more wealthy and politically powerful than Francophones. About 60% of the population are Flemish and 40% Francophone.

In the early 1960s, language frontiers were fixed within Belgium. In 1970, amendments to the constitution divided the country into 9 provinces and four linguistic regions (Flemish, French, German and a bilingual region for Brussels). Furthermore, these

main communities were awarded their own Cultural Councils composed of their respective members of the National Parliament. These have functionally autonomous control over culture and education. Within parliament itself the opposition of ¾ of either of the main linguistic groups is sufficient to bloc legislation that has otherwise majority support. Most institutions in Belgium are divided along linguistic lines, including political parties.

Not only does this system entail cross-linguistic co-operation in government, but there is also consociational co-operation between Catholic, socialist and liberal factions. Similarly to the situation in the Netherlands, coalition governments between two or more of these political groupings has been the historical norm.

The rigid linguistic divisions in Belgium provide strong centrifugal forces. Arguably, it is only multi-lingual Brussels which gives the country unity. The constitutional system requires members of parliament to indicate which community they belong to. This could provide an alarming precedent for any Northern Ireland Assembly.

Bosnia-Herzegovina - The Dayton Agreement must surely set out the most complex set of institutionalised power-sharing yet to be devised. The division of Bosnia into two Entities: 1. the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (which combines Croat and Bosniac (Muslim) cantons); and 2. The Republika Srpska is formally recognised. Each is given substantial self-government and more significantly the right to form 'special relationships' with Croatia and (rump) Yugoslavia respectively.

The Dayton Agreement establishes a bicameral legislature for Bosnia. The 15 member House of Peoples has five members from each of the three main ethnic groups. The Assembly of the Republika Srpska elects 5, while the Croat and Bosniac members of the Federation Assembly each elect 5. The lower House of Representatives has 42 members, 28 elected from the Federation territory. Decisions can be taken by majority vote but every effort should be made to ensure that at least a third of the delegates from either entity are in agreement. The decision nevertheless stands unless 2/3 of the delegates from either entity object. There is yet another check as a majority of the delegates from any of the three communities may declare a decision to be 'destructive to their interest'. In this eventuality, the decision can either be ratified by the majority of all three communities in the House of Peoples or referred to the constitutional court.

There is a three-member Presidency comprising two members elected in the Federation and one from the Republika Srpska. The presumption was that one Serb, one Croat and one Bosniac would be elected. The candidate who receives the most votes becomes the first to become chair. Such a system did not encourage Nationalist blocs to break up; any ethnic group which split its votes was penalised. This was hardly conducive to fostering moderation. Any member of the Presidency may declare a decision to be 'destructive to interest' but the decision stands unless either 2/3 of the Assembly of the Republika Srpska or 2/3 of either the Croats or Bosniacs in the Federation Parliament ratify the veto. No more than 2/3 of the Council of Ministers can be from the Federation. Power-sharing at across Bosnia-Herzegovina has poor prospects given the strength of centrifugal forces and the lack of over-arching loyalties to a shared concept of the state.

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Cambodia - The Paris Peace Agreements (1993) which ended Cambodia's long-running civil war was externally brokered by a host of international actors including the United States, Russia and China. There were three main factions to the conflict: the Vietnamese backed Communist Government, the Khmer Rouge and the royalist FUNCINPEC. The latter two were allied to each other, while the former was led by a defector from the Khmer Rouge, Hun Sen. The Khmer Rouge were at best half-hearted about the peace process. The international community went ahead with elections despite the attempted disruption from this party. The PR election produced a clear victory for FUNCINPEC but the threat of the communists not accepting the results was so great that they were offered an equal share in government. The leaders of these two parties became co-Prime Ministers.

Superficially, the prospects for power-sharing should have been good as there is a shared sense of national identity in Cambodia. Strains persisted in the coalition as the communists had overwhelming control over the bureaucracy and the army. However, the main problem was how to deal with the Khmer Rouge. The Communists took the view that once a legitimate government had been created that a military solution could not be deployed against the rebels. FUNCINPEC however still yearned to bring at least some elements in from the cold. Splits in the Khmer Rouge led to FUNCINPEC exploring the possibility of including Khmer Rouge elements in the government, but the price was a coup by the communists who ousted the FUNCINPEC co-Prime Minister from Office. The position of FUNCINPEC mirrors the SDLP; the party is caught between the notion of sharing power with former opponents and at the same time making a process all-inclusive by trying to bring in the extremes. The two are not always compatible.

Canada - Canada superficially operates according to the Westminster model of majoritarianism at a federal level. However, federalism is used not only to deal with the problem of governing such a vast country but to give Francophone Canadians who are concentrated in the Province of Quebec a considerable level of self-government. There is a substantial cleavage of Francophones from the rest of Canada. French Canadians largely, but far from exclusively, support the Bloc/Parti Quebecois. Canada is currently struggling to cope with separatist tendencies from Quebec. The Federal Government has a difficult task in balancing the devolution of sufficient extra authority to Quebec to address separatist pressures without alienating other provinces.

Cyprus - Cyprus between 1960 and 1963 provides the example of a failed consociational experiment. There are deep reinforcing cleavages of language, religion and culture between Greeks who make up about 76% of the population and Turks who comprise about 18%. At its independence in 1960, Cyprus was given a constitution that provided for government by grand coalition. A Greek President and Turkish Vice-President, each of whom were elected separately by the Greek and Turkish communities respectively, were given a veto. The Cabinet and legislature respectively were split on a 7:3 and 35:15 ratio. The Greeks never really embraced the concept as it gave Turks proportionally more power; the Turks overplayed their hand. In November 1963, Archbishop Makarious proposed amendments to the constitution which were rejected by the Turks. This sparked civil strife which endures to today. In 1974, the Greeks tried to unite Cyprus with Greece sparking a Turkish invasion. This led to the establishment of an unrecognised Turkish Republic in the north of the island.

The solution to the Cyprus problem will now inevitably fall along partitionist/federal lines. Cyprus provides an interesting lesson for Northern Ireland. One reason why consociationalism failed was the lack of an overarching loyalty to the concept of Cyprus. Instead the Greeks and Turks retained strong ethno-nationalist desires to be united with their perceived 'motherlands'.

Lebanon - Lebanon provides two periods of rigid consociational democracy, 1943-1975 and 1989-present. However, while such rigidity may be undesirable, it is not regarded as the main reason as to why the first experiment ultimately failed. Lebanon is split into four main groups, Maronite Christians (30%), Sunni Moslems (20%), Shiite Moslems (18%), and Greek Orthodox (11%). Religious and linguistic divisions are deep, clear-cut and mutually reinforcing. The 1943 National Pact (based on the 1932 Census) agreed that their would be a Maronite President, a Sunni Prime Minister, a Shiite Speaker of Assembly, and an Orthodox deputy to latter), proportionality in Cabinet (sometimes necessitating large Cabinets), and a 6:5 ratio in Assembly between Christians and Moslems. A complex electoral system, in which communities, voted separately, determined who held these posts. The system held together until 1975, though there was a minor readjustment in the late 1950s after the United States had to intervene. Some tensions were caused by the rigidity of the system as Moslems, who had a much higher birthrate, resented the advantage given to Christians. However, it was external interference in Lebanon that undermined the system.

After the PLO had been expelled from Jordan, they fled to Lebanon and began to interfere in its domestic politics. Their use of southern Lebanon as a base to attack Israel led to retaliation by the latter. Syria also intervened for security reasons. Disputes between the main communities were rekindled as each moved away from the internal status quo and began allying themselves to external players - Maronites (Israel, United States and Iraq), Sunnis (Palestinians, Libya and Saudi Arabia) and the Shiites (Syria and Iran). Open civil war raged from 1975-1989.

The Arab League finally successfully reconvened the Lebanese Parliament in Saudi Arabia in 1989. The resultant Taif Agreement led to a renewal of the 1943 National Pact, albeit with a weakened Christian element. There is widespread support for the creation of a liberal democracy in Lebanon, but consociational democracy is regarded as necessary in the interim. The Syrian presence however continues to provide a complication.

Macedonia - Macedonia has a population of about two million, of whom about two-thirds are ethnic Macedonians (their language is closely related to Bulgarian and Serbo-Croat), around a quarter are ethnic Albanians, and the remainder are of other minorities (Turks, Serbs, Romany). Despite this volatile mix, and the instability of neighbouring Albania, Macedonia has managed to avoid conflict partly because of its power-sharing government.

Macedonia declared independence from the former Yugoslavia in late 1991, and was the only state to secede from Yugoslavia peacefully. At that time the government, which had been elected in 1990, was a coalition between the nationalist VMRO, the ex-Communist Social Democrats, and the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) which is the main voice of Macedonia's Albanian-speaking minority. There have been

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two changes in the government since then. In 1992 after VMRO, then the largest single party in parliament, left the government and the Social Democrats formed a new coalition with the hard-line Socialists, the Liberals and the PDP. This coalition won the parliamentary elections of 1994 partly due to a boycott by VMRO and the other strong opposition party, the Democrats, who claimed that the polls had been rigged (incompetence rather than conspiracy seems to have been the consensus among observers). The Liberal Party then left the coalition government in 1996, complaining of corruption, but the government retains a strong majority in Parliament. The Liberal and Democratic Parties merged in April 1997.

Although the participation of the PDP in government has given Macedonia's Albanian minority four or five ministers in the cabinet, big problems remain. Some of these will be familiar: the police force is 98% ethnic Macedonian; it is illegal to fly flags other than the Macedonian flag from public buildings; it is impossible to get a university education in Albania; the gerrymandered electoral system, which under-represents Albanians in parliament, has not been replaced. The PDP's ministers and MPs have often voted against government measures even though they are part of that government themselves. The ethnic Macedonian parties have been unwilling to bring in reforms because they are worried about a backlash of support for VMRO, which although it has no MPs is probably the largest single party in the country.

Corruption is rampant, and the power of patronage presumably explains why the PDP have stuck so tenaciously to government over the past seven years. The foundations of a healthy society have not really been laid. Albanians and other minorities remain second-class citizens in their own country.

The Netherlands - The Netherlands was used by Arend Lijphardt to develop the consociational model. Consociational democracy was allegedly present between 1917 and 1967. There were four main segments in Dutch society: Catholics (24%), Calvinists (21%), Socialists (32%) and Liberals (13%), the political parties of which accounted for 80%-90% of the votes cast in Dutch elections between these dates. Consociational democracy in the Netherlands supposedly manifested itself through non-institutionalised accommodation between the leaders of these segments in government. A clear sense of national identity helped keep the country united. After 1967, Dutch politics became more competitive than accommodative. Doubts have been expressed as to whether the Netherlands was in fact consociational. The segments were not as coherent as in other examples, and there is much evidence of competition between the parties between the above dates. For example, the other parties often colluded to keep the Socialists out of power.

Rwanda - Rwanda was historically 85% Hutu and 15% Tutsi. The Tutsi-based RPF (Rwanda Patriotic Front) was fighting the majority-rule Hutu Government. The 1993 Arusha Agreement (externally brokered by Tanzania) agreed a power-sharing formula to end the conflict. The Hutu coalition government stalled on its implementation, due to the threat of Hutu extremists. In April 1994, after it seemed that the international community had forced the government to implement the agreement, Hutu extremists launched a campaign of genocide against moderate Hutus favouring power-sharing and Tutsis. Ultimately the RPF seized power that summer and set up a nominal power-sharing, but in reality Tutsi-dominated, government.

South Africa - see above

Switzerland - Switzerland is divided along religious, linguistic, and class/ideological lines. The cleavages are reinforcing. Religious and linguistic differences that contributed to substantial civil strife in Switzerland's history were largely settled through the canton system. Each of the 25 cantons and 6 half-cantons are religiously and linguistically homogenous; one exception was the Bernese Jura which was split after a plebiscite in 1974. At a federal level, the three main political divisions: Socialists, Catholic (Christian Democrats) and Radicals (European-style market liberals) co-operate through a 7 member Federal Council with a rotating Presidency. The Swiss cantonal system is of limited relevance to other situations as it evolved naturally and created the Swiss con-federation. It would be difficult to split countries that already exist into homogenous cantons.

In few of these examples was power-sharing actually institutionalised. Where it was institutionalised, there are examples of this move coming both from the parties involved but more usually from external powers. The situations in which power-sharing was externally imposed were often the examples in which divisions were most clear-cut and where the experiment ultimately failed. Consociationalism does tend to reflect a voluntary spirit of co-operation - those examples where the phenomenon emerged do tend to be those in which the model seems to have best worked, but they are also the situations in which the divisions where the least obvious. Such societies have also proven to have been those in which consociationalism have eventually proven to be unnecessary. Are these examples of desirable situations in which consociationalism has been a victim of its own success, or do the last two observations give rise to the question as to whether consociationalism ever really existed as a meaningful phenomenon in those societies? Donald Horowitz has argued that: "We cannot quite be sure whether the Western cases are conflicts that are moderate because they have effectively been controlled, or whether they are effectively controlled because they are moderate conflicts to begin with." But it is clear that there is something at work in certain situations, such as Austria and Switzerland, which were deeply divided and violent societies that created peaceful societies without one or other parties to conflict being perceived as victorious. Horowitz however points out that Northern Ireland is an example of the more intractable conflicts untypical of the Western experience. This means that the task is of an unprecedented magnitude rather than that the conflict is necessarily intractable.

Consociational Democracy/Power-Sharing for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is clearly a divided society. There is a clear segmentation along principally ethno-nationalist grounds (i.e. the people of Northern Ireland are split in terms of their identity and national aspirations) which corresponds to the religious division. There is a very strong correlation between these divisions and support for ethno-nationalist parties. The DUP ,UUP, SDLP and Sinn Fein collectively achieve approximately 90% of the votes cast in most elections. It is a moot point as to whether votes for Alliance represent support for a distinct cleavage, the anti-system vote or merely the most moderate manifestations of unionism and nationalism..

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Several features in Northern Ireland, however, do not make it fertile ground for power-sharing. Firstly, there is a fundamental lack of consensus over which state, the territory of Northern Ireland should belong to; overarching loyalties to any concept of the state do not exist. Such differing aspirations among both the elites and the masses not only do not foster trust, but mean that any commitment to work consociational arrangements is half-hearted and intended to be temporary. The continued ethno-nationalist nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland undermines its suitability for consociationalism.

While consociational democracy does need clearly defined segments within a society, it does help if any divisions (such as religion, language, class or ideology) are intersecting rather than reinforcing. In Northern Ireland, the main divisions within society, i.e. ethnicity and religion, strongly coincide with each other. Only the relatively minor cleavages of class and ideology cut across the main divisions.

For consociational democracy to work, political elites need to be committed to accommodation. It is questionable whether this is currently the case in Northern Ireland. In the 1970s, unionists, wedded to the unrealistic notion of retaining majority rule, had resisted power-sharing and giving nationalists a share in government as of right. In contrast nationalists, who had previously been marginalised, warmly embraced the concept. More recently, unionists, chastened through having been denied effective power for a quarter of a century and seeing a series of initiatives inimical to their interests introduced, have been much more receptive to the idea. Meanwhile, nationalists, having grown in confidence, have more ambitious schemes of joint authority in mind. Sinn Fein are committed to majoritarianism, albeit on an all-Ireland basis. The talks process will ultimately prove if both elites will be prepared to accept power-sharing institutions. However, there is a decreasing prospect of the parties agreeing to power-sharing. Paradoxically, as inclusive substantive talks seem set to begin the chances of the parties actually agreeing to a power-sharing framework are in decline.

The attitudes of the masses are normally not a direct factor on the feasibility of consociationalism. People can however, through elections, determine the characteristics of the elite. They can either reward or punish politicians that seek accommodation. There is a structural problem in the Northern Ireland political process, in that extremism is rewarded while accommodation is not. Electoral threats to the more moderate unionist and nationalist parties come from the extremes rather than the centre. The electorate do not punish these elites for not making an agreement, but they can do if they perceive a sell-out. There are therefore no electoral incentives to compromise; indeed the opposite is the case. It is a moot point if the population of Northern Ireland is more moderate or extreme than their politicians, but they are easily swayed by demagogues.

In many cases, an external threat helped produce consociationalism. However, while an external threat is present in the Northern Ireland case through the claim by the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland's territory, it does act in the anticipated manner as only part of the population feels threatened by it.

Both the elites and masses in consociational democracy need to be committed to the maintenance of the status quo. It is arguable that both Unionists and Nationalists would view any power-sharing arrangement in different terms. Nationalists, and certainly Republicans, would view power-sharing within a Northern Ireland context, as a mere way-station on the road to a United Ireland. Unionists would view it as a concession by them to give Nationalists in Northern Ireland fair access to power in return for remaining part of the United Kingdom. Even Alliance activists could be disappointed if they view power-sharing as a means of overcoming both unionism and nationalism by creating a system that makes both superfluous. Such a clash of expectations would make further conflict seem likely.

Power-sharing in Northern Ireland, in practice, would be dependent upon the continued participation in government of at least both the moderate unionist party and the moderate nationalist parties, plus in most circumstances Alliance. Furthermore these parties would need to be able to constitute the threshold of support necessary for decision-making in any Assembly. If the more extreme forms of either unionism or nationalism became bigger than their more moderate rivals, then enormous pressure would be placed upon the continued existence of power-sharing arrangements. Furthermore if all the parties associated with the broad centre do participate in power-sharing, the only outlet for dissatisfaction with the decisions taken by the government would be extreme anti-system parties, such as Sinn Fein. Consequently, the level at which the above threshold is set will be crucial.

It is furthermore a moot point as to whether Northern Ireland is the appropriate size for consociational democracy and whether is a sufficiently large pool of political talent to operate the system. The quality of debate in the *Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue* does not give rise to optimism.

Dilemmas For Alliance

The superficial paradox for a party such as Alliance is that the maintenance of power-sharing arrangements requires the tolerance of parties that clearly represent only one section of the community and furthermore requires the protection of the more moderate versions of these traditions at the expense of more extreme versions.

Power-sharing in Northern Ireland is therefore dependent not only on the existence of ethno-nationalist parties such as the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP, but their relative strength vis-à-vis the DUP and Sinn Fein. This poses a huge dilemma for Alliance as both the UUP and SDLP are its closest electoral rivals. There is a contradictory desire amongst Alliance activists to oppose Unionist and Nationalism to the point of their annihilation, but if Alliance does overly well in elections it risks undermining the support of both these parties to the extent that the more extreme versions of Unionism and Nationalism become dominant, making power-sharing further unworkable..

There are two distinct trains of thought within Alliance which are reflected to differing extents in the statements and attitudes both of the party leadership and membership. They are not mutually exclusive but need to be adequately reconciled into a coherent party strategy.

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The advocates of the first perspective can be called the *bridge builders*. Bridge builders fully accept a consociational approach to solving the problems of Northern Ireland, including power-sharing. They tend to more readily adopt a two-community/tradition analysis and see themselves as essentially moderate Unionists or moderate Nationalists. The role they see for Alliance lies in helping to facilitate co-operation between Unionism and Nationalism within a consociational framework. While the participation of Alliance is not necessary for SDLP and UUP co-operation, bridge-builders believe that an Alliance role would greatly facilitate accommodation.

Advocates of second approach could be called the *civic liberals*. Instead of trying to act as a bridge between the two main traditions in Northern Ireland, they believe that Unionism and Nationalism are the problem. They ultimately seek to replace the domination of Northern Ireland politics by Unionism and Nationalism with a common loyalty to a set of liberal non-sectarian values. This need not be at the expense of undermining cultural diversity. This group strongly opposes a two tradition or two community approach and the related use of such language. They believe that there is a relatively small, albeit growing, number of people who refuse to identify with either the unionist or nationalist traditions. Therefore they prefer to see Northern Ireland presented as one community composed foremost by individuals rather than groups, or failing that the presentation of more than two main communities. Such an approach would put the electoral interests of the Alliance Party ahead of the preservation of the moderate Unionism and Nationalism. Arguably if a non-sectarian party moves into such a dominant position, then the need for consociational arrangements is not obvious.

Unless Alliance is prepared to imagine a strategy to fashion its ideal society beyond power-sharing, it is imposing an artificial ceiling on its support. There is a contradiction between portraying the party as the alternative to sectarianism and the two versions of nationalism, and at the same time being the strongest advocate of power-sharing. These countervailing desires, therefore, need to be reconciled to form part of a coherent strategy.

The goals of the civic liberals are worthy ideals, but perhaps unrealistic, whereas the bridge-building approach unnecessarily accepts a reduced and unambitious role for the party. One possible means of reconciling these two trains of thought is to clearly portray the creation of a liberal democratic society as the ultimate goal of the party, whereas power-sharing is little more one possible means to that end. Furthermore, while the party could continue to advocate the creation of power-sharing institutions, once they created them, it should **not** advocate their maintenance. The continuance of consociationalism is distinct from the aspiration of a liberal society. Alliance could play a part in any power-sharing government but play the role of opposition from within. If the Ulster Unionists and SDLP make a mess of power-sharing as I suspect they will, Alliance has the opportunity to argue that power-sharing only has to be tolerated as long as unionism and nationalism persist as political movements. It could portray its support and that of other parties organised on a non ethno-nationalist basis as a barometer of the extent to which Northern Ireland society has matured, and finds the need for institutionalised power-sharing to be superfluous.

It therefore follows that any power-sharing institutions created should be sufficiently flexible to allow the consociational approach to become obsolete. Power-sharing should be not be entrenched. A veto should not be explicitly given to one party or named group. Furthermore group rights should be minimised, and a two community analysis opposed. The promotion of the concept of a third tradition is useful in this respect. However the concept is not similar to the Unionist and Nationalist ethno-national segments, but their opposite. The third tradition is not about creating a third bloc but preserving space for those who refuse to align themselves with either segment. The third tradition is therefore qualitatively different from the other two. Focus Groups engaged by Alliance confirm that views that entail this approach are consistently present among core party voters.

Alliance is accordingly primarily a liberal party with a small 'l' sharing a common demand for a liberal society but containing many Liberals with a big 'L'. Any other parties who share this basis aspiration would share the former characteristic.

However, Alliance needs to appreciate that although it has been the loudest voice advocating power-sharing, its existence, while most helpful, is theoretically not necessary either for the establishment of such arrangements or their maintenance through government. The Ulster Unionists and SDLP, as the representatives of unionism and nationalism, can advance power-sharing independent of others.

Liberal, non-ethnic, parties do not hold a central place in consociational theory. They play the role of reflecting the degree to which segmentation is breaking down. Indeed in practice the sharper the lines of cleavage, the more unusual such parties become. It is arguable that since 1969 that Northern Ireland has become more polarised and that consequently the non-ethnic space has been shrunk. Alliance's continued existence therefore is confounding. Our reality is that we are in a defensive mode consequently battling to maintain our vote share.

The difficulties in achieving power-sharing let alone aspirations of the creation of a liberal society should not be underestimated. Therefore it is worthwhile considering an alternative.

Power-Broking

Belfast provides a useful experiment to see if power-sharing is feasible in Northern Ireland. A working power-sharing arrangement in Belfast makes a similar approach in Northern Ireland slightly more likely but not guaranteed. On the other hand, if power-sharing can not work in Belfast, it can not work in Northern Ireland as a whole. Most of the barriers to power-sharing throughout Northern Ireland are present in Belfast, but the key exception is that there is no a major disagreement on whether or not a City Council should exist or not. The council as an institution already exists and the parties elected to it have no option but to find some way of operating it. A similar rationale could lead the political parties to work any Northern Ireland wide institutions that are ultimately imposed.

Despite the favourable circumstance arising in Belfast out of the 1997 Local Government Elections (of neither Unionists or Nationalists having an overall control of

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the council), power-sharing did not materialise. The Ulster Unionists and SDLP could not agree a package with the Alliance Party to rotate key offices over the four year term of the council.

A power-broking strategy emerged as an alternative. With the Alliance Party holding the balance of power, it was in a position to determine office-holders and the outcome of decisions that fall along unionist-nationalist lines. It could use its influence to ensure fairness both in decision-making and that offices were rotated among the parties in a reasonable manner. Presumably if one or other side became overly intransigent, they could be cut out of office until they moderated their stance. Could such an approach be applied to Northern Ireland as a whole?

Power-broking can originate by two different methods. It can firstly arise by accident rather than design in any existing institutions or those set up with some other outcome in mind. Secondly, the two governments could set up institutions with the expectation that a power-broker would emerge.

A strategy of power-broking on a Northern Ireland wide level depends on a number of conditions being present and carries several dangers.

If political momentum continues to favour the extreme versions of unionism and nationalism, power-sharing becomes more unrealistic. However a power-broking strategy is not as dependent upon a favourable balance of forces between the moderate and more extreme versions of unionism and nationalism. The important factor is the balance of forces between unionism and nationalism, i.e. that neither has the ability to take decisions independently of others.

In practice, this requires a substantial non-unionist, non-nationalist bloc to exercise the balance of power. The centre bloc would have the capacity to do alternate offices between any other parties it chooses, and to itself effectively decide the outcome of decisions which fall along unionist and nationalist lines. There is no longer any requirement for UUP and SDLP to co-operate for government to function.

Power-broking works best within a legislative context were the threshold of support that any resolution needs to be passed is greater than the votes that either unionists or nationalists can muster by themselves but less than the threshold at which both unionist and nationalist support are necessarily required for passage. In practice, a majoritarian based system would provide a sufficient framework for this to work. It could also work in a weighted majority system, provided it does give either unionists or nationalists a veto. In practice, this entails a threshold much less than the 70% or 66% that the conventional wisdom on any new devolved arrangements had previously assumed.

The adoption of a strategy of power-broking would solve one big dilemma for Alliance. It could seek to maximise its own share of the vote without any concern for the fate of the UUP and SDLP. However, there is a heavy burden upon the Alliance Party, as the principal representative of the centre ground: to ensure not only that it has sufficient strength to be the power-broker, but that it also effectively monopolises

that centre ground; any fracturing of the centre vote would seriously undermine the ability of its main representative party to broker power.

Power-broking in this context is a form of limited democracy. It could arguably be labelled as a benevolent dictatorship. The centre power-broker would be frustrating the ethno-nationalist aspirations of Unionism and Nationalism. The system would not be geared towards mass-participation of the public but a benevolent elite.

Any power-broker would be in a situation analogous to the role played by the British Government under direct rule. It would have the ability to take and implement decisions but would have a frustrating time dealing with the competing demands of Unionism and Nationalism, in addition to the normal problems of government. For example difficult decisions with regard to public expenditure would have to be taken and potentially crucial decisions over marches. The power-broker would become the focus of a range of frustrations that it may not be able to address. The short terms benefits of nominal power may not compensate for any long term loss of support and/or credibility that could come from being 'in office, but not in power'.

Two specific dangers confront the power-broker that the British Government did not have to face. The first is the potential for a challenge to its hegemonic position in the centre; this could arise as the consequence of unpopular decisions being taken. While this measure of accountability may seem attractive, any threat to the hegemony of the power-broker could be fatal to the system. Secondly, it is conceivable for Unionism and Nationalism to co-operate on certain issues, such as those in which they both have a common agenda of maintaining separation, and outflank the power-broker.

Power-broking is clearly a conflict management technique. It could only be justified on the grounds that a power-broker based in Northern Ireland could be more responsive to the needs of the community than the continuance of direct rule or the establishment of joint sovereignty. However, it is important that any conflict management technique is applied with at least a vision, if not a strategy, to eventually implement a genuine settlement. While it can be argued that power-sharing can eventually prove itself superfluous, it is much harder to identify by what means a power-broking approach could eventually lead to a solution. There does not seem to be a natural evolution out from a power-broking scenario.

Furthermore, power-broking is dependent on a balance of power situation arising between unionists and nationalists. It could only be a short-medium term strategy subject to at what rate changing demographics make it unworkable. The two governments would need to be prepared to prorogue any Northern Ireland Assembly if power-broking collapsed with either Unionists or Nationalists obtaining a working majority.

There is a major practical difficulty in that it is very difficult to envisage a scenario in which the Northern Ireland parties themselves would agree to a set of institutions in which power-broking would determine outcomes. The governments could opt to create the necessary framework if they were convinced that power-broking would produce their desired results, but it is unlikely that they would create anything that overly depended on the good conduct and fairness of one party. Power-broking could

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arise in Northern Ireland wide institutions accidentally, including those that were constructed with power-sharing in mind. Indeed the day is coming when neither Unionism nor Nationalism will represent over 50% of the population of Northern Ireland. However the conventional wisdom has become that a threshold of around 60%-70% should be used in any new institutions created.

Public Policy Choices

Once the reality that Northern Ireland is a deeply divided society is accepted, the choice facing policy-makers is essentially one of creating institutions based upon sharing or upon separation. Notions that the conflict can be solved or managed exclusively on the basis of a British withdrawal, or the removal of Articles 2 & 3 from the Irish Constitution, total integration into (a decentralising) British State or even the eradication of terrorism can be dismissed as they don't address the core problem of the failure of at least two distinct identities to lie together peacefully.

Policies based upon separation range from repartition, to increased functional self-autonomy for the 'two communities' to the much more superficially benign return of powers to local government. Politics based upon sharing essentially entail the creation of Northern Ireland wide structures based upon partnership.

The means by which institutions can be established are agreement between the parties or imposition by the British and Irish Governments. The latter course of action is less desirable and more risky, but is perhaps the more realistic option given the likelihood that the parties will be unable to reach a 'sufficient consensus' in the Talks. Structures can be imposed by either firstly going over the heads of local politicians straight to the people in a referendum, or secondly establishing them directly or in the face of rejection in a referendum. The underlying premise would be that politicians would eventually work the institutions that exist on the ground. There is no theoretical reason why imposed power-sharing structures would fare any better or worse than mutually agreed ones. If all this fails, the creation of a framework for centre-ground power-broking stands alongside Anglo-Irish Agreement II/Joint Authority as the next if less desirable alternatives.

Ultimately, the creation of institutions acceptable to the whole community is of little value without a strategy to create and maintain long term stability in Northern Ireland through addressing the divisions among the people at a community level. Policies, premised on sharing, can only work if the underlying forces at work in Northern Ireland are centripetal rather than centrifugal.

Conclusion

Alliance should not advocate or support policies or institutions that would entrench divisions or further divide Northern Ireland. How the public policy choices outlined in this category above would contribute to the Balkanisation of Northern Ireland will be addressed in a forthcoming paper.

Ideologically, Alliance can only operate within the options that fall under the umbrella of sharing. Two different concepts of democracy are acceptable: liberal democracy and

consociational democracy. Ethnic democracy, with the 1921-1972 Stormont regime as its seminal model, can be easily dismissed. The institutionalisation of power-sharing, in the context of a divided society in Northern Ireland, falls under the consociational heading. The tactic of power-broking is much more difficult to categorise. It is not consociational as the underlying spirit of accommodation between the parties does not exist. The democratic context in which it could operate would be dependent upon external guarantees, and could be nominally liberal democratic.

The Alliance Party should ideally retain the goal of ultimately creating a genuine liberal democracy in Northern Ireland, through a process of fusion. In terms of the values of its activist and voters, it is a liberal party which seeks to address the interests and needs of the individual within a neutral civic environment ahead of those of groups.

The question then arises for both the party and for Northern Ireland society in general as to whether this can be established directly or must have to await the conclusion of a transitional phase based upon different concepts.

In practice, a liberal democracy can be only be created if the correct political conditions exist. The direct creation and maintenance of a liberal democracy in the current political climate is unlikely to address the ethno-nationalist demands of unionism and nationalism; centrifugal forces are too strong relative to centripetal forces. The prospects for liberal democracy in Northern Ireland would be increased by a stronger performance by the political centre (there wouldn't be much of a problem in Northern Ireland if the Alliance Party was able to form a majority).a stronger sense of a common identity (this would inevitably have to be by a process of fusion as there is no commonly acceptable culture for others to assimilate into), and an erosion of the importance placed upon opposing national aspirations, ahead of prosperity or good neighbourliness. South Africa was able to make the move from an ethnic democracy under Apartheid to a liberal democracy, with only a short consociational period, because strong ethno-nationalist forces were not at work.

While the creation of a liberal democracy should be portrayed as the Alliance solution, in reality conflict management techniques, which recognise the persistence of deep divisions in Northern Ireland, will have to be adopted in the short to medium term, until the underlying problems that sustain conflict are sufficiently minimised.

The power-broking approach (in the context of Alliance being smaller than the representatives of unionism and of nationalism) is appealing to the power-broker but to few others. The circumstances in which it could happen on a Northern Ireland wide scale are unlikely to be agreed by the parties; the governments would not consider creating those circumstances unless they were guaranteed that it could at least produce stability. It is dependent on the centre party being both the beneficiary of favourable electoral circumstances and having the ability to maintain a hegemonic position within the centre. It finally has little scope for participatory democracy, unless the underlying voting habits of the population change, nor lends itself towards a strategy for moving towards a solution. Essentially a power-broker would be assuming the responsibility for governing Northern Ireland from the British Government. It would have to weigh up the advantages of being able to put its policies into practice against setting itself up as the scapegoat for every grievance.

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It remains an option for the Alliance Party to seek but only on the basis of power-sharing demonstrably being unfeasible. Power-sharing provides a clearer route to the establishment of a liberal society than power-broking.

Any advocate of power-sharing should however be conscious of the limitations and distortions set out in this paper, and the unfavourable conditions for its application in Northern Ireland. It is right that Alliance portray power-sharing as an honourable compromise rather than a final solution, a means to a greater end rather to an end in itself.

However, power-sharing can be structured in such a manner as to not only make its chances of success in the short term more likely, but to improve the chances that the system could eventually become superfluous. Like affirmative action, power-sharing should only be regarded as a temporary arrangement to manage particular problems; it is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

The following list of guidelines are therefore useful in this respect:

1. Institutions that require the de facto power-sharing can be premised upon the basis of the existence of divisions, but should not institutionalise or in any other way reinforce their existence (there may, for example, be demands to give unionism and nationalism equal shares in decision-making, which amongst other difficulties, creates substantial problems of definition).
2. Similarly, the institutionalisation of group rights as opposed to individual rights should be minimised (see forthcoming paper on Bill of Rights).
3. If the first two principles were breached, then detrimental effects could be minimised by institutionalising at least three political traditions rather than two.
4. Any power-sharing structures should be clearly linked to the Principle of Consent; it should be made clear that such arrangements would remain in place, as long as they are needed, irrespective of which sovereign jurisdiction the territory of Northern Ireland belongs to.

The first two points are aimed at preventing the rigid institutionalising of a system that could not cope with demographic changes or an electoral re-alignment, and not reinforcing a rigid bipolar approach which is unhelpful for successful consociationalism. There is only an implicit assumption that the representatives of different groups will be present. It is most noteworthy that in South Africa there was a strong reaction against the pigeon-holing of individuals into different groups due to the legacy of Apartheid. The last guideline is an attempt to reduce the destructive potential of the absence of an overarching loyalty, and pull of different ethno-nationalisms. It would be agreed that power-sharing would continue, as long as is necessary, irrespective of which jurisdiction the six counties belong to; Northern Ireland is likely to remain a divided society in the short term no matter where the border is drawn. Power-sharing will remain necessary if Nationalists achieve a united Ireland. Essentially, we should try to decouple power-sharing from the ethno-nationalist demands, portraying it as the necessary response to the divided society that will exist no matter how the border is drawn. *Governing With Consent* largely meets these requirements. The use of a threshold of support in decision-making wisely avoids the

need to give a veto power to a named minority while essentially producing the same result. Guideline 4 could additionally be considered.

In the background, strategies to undermine the dominance of unionism and nationalism plus nation-building techniques need to be pursued. The concept of the third tradition needs to be promoted, to undermine the notion of two communities. One of the main tasks for Alliance in any political talks should be to ensure that there is sufficient space created for the third tradition consisting of those who do not want to be categorised as Unionist or Nationalist; arguably it is uniquely placed to achieve this. Efforts to build up a common Northern Ireland identity, while maintaining diversity should continue. Alliance's analysis of identity and community at the Brooke-Mayhew Talks was useful in this respect. Policies aimed at increased sharing within Northern Ireland, such as integrated education, need to be intensified. Essentially, centripetal rather than centrifugal forces need to become dominant. Within the current context, the British and Irish Governments need to abandon their courtship for the extremes at the expense of the centre. A strong centre in Northern Ireland politics is vital to create any power-sharing arrangements; the result of this courtship of the extremes has been further polarisation and an undermining and neglect of this important centre.

Paradoxically, the conditions that could help make power-sharing a reality can also lead to it eventually becoming superfluous. The promotion of a third tradition and therefore a multiple balance of power, plus a common identity would lay the groundwork for a successful liberal democracy. Alliance has a strong and coherent role through portraying any sizeable increase in its support as indications of such positive developments.

This theoretical study of power-sharing has shown that there are major dangers and distortions with power-sharing, in the event of a framework actually emerging. Unless Alliance acts otherwise the beneficiaries of any public dissatisfaction will be anti-system parties, potentially Sinn Fein and the DUP/UKUP.

Alliance should be the opposition from within. Radically, once we have established power-sharing we should start campaigning for its abolishment. We can argue that Unionists and Nationalists were together misruling the country and that power-sharing was only necessary as long as Unionism and Nationalism persist as dominant political forces. The Alliance Party's vote, alongside that of other non-ethnic parties, should be portrayed as the indication of how ready Northern Ireland is to forgo power-sharing and the creation of a genuine liberal society. While this may well be a very ambitious programme, it provides a coherent aspiration for the party.

Stephen Farry
August 1997