

democratic dialogue

Patrons

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield
Eilis Gallagher
Dr Maurice Hayes
Jennifer Johnston
Ellis McDermott
Sir George Quigley

5 University Street, Belfast BT7 1FY

~~Tel: 01232 232230 / 232228 Fax: 01232 232228~~

~~E-Mail: ed@dem.dial.demon.co.uk~~

~~Web site: <http://www.dem.dial.demon.co.uk>~~

NEW AGENDA

Tel: 01232 232525 Fax: 01232 232228

E-Mail: keepukijw@gn.apc.org

Monica McWilliams
Women's Coalition
52 Elmwood Ave
Belfast BT9

5 September 1997

Dear Monica

For the past few months a group of individuals have been exploring how civil society can help to underpin the coming talks process. This culminated in a meeting, last week, of forty five people who might be broadly described as leaders in their own sectors - business, the churches, voluntary and community groups, trades unions etc. We also invited representatives from the SDLP and the UUP to that meeting by way of ensuring that what was discussed was consistent with political realities.

We are keen to discuss this process and its prospects with you and I wonder might you be available for a meeting comprising the Women's Coalition, the UDP, the PUP and the Labour Coalition and representatives from New Agenda (the name for this new initiative)? Could I suggest one of the following dates:

Thursday 11 Sept: am

Monday 15 Sept: am

Monday 15 Sept: pm

Thursday 18 Sept: am

Thursday 18 Sept: pm

Friday 19 Sept: pm. ✓

2.P.M. Forum.

2.P.M.

I enclose a copy of a discussion paper which we hope may act as a catalyst for exploring how some new thinking might be brought to the political process. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

John Woods
John Woods
Acting Director
New Agenda

A New Agenda

revised, 4/9/97

SUMMARY

Hopes of political progress in Northern Ireland have been raised once again by the renewal of paramilitary ceasefires and the establishment of all-inclusive political talks. But the atmosphere is intensely polarised and there remain issues of real difficulty in constructing a political settlement: there is neither agreement on the goal nor on how civil society is to be associated with the process. A break with past mindsets is required if we are to avoid repeating past failures: a 'new agenda' is necessary.

In terms of defining the goal, while there is widespread agreement that a settlement will include both 'internal' and 'external' dimensions, what has fundamentally bedevilled a substantive accommodation since 1973 (or 1920) is that unionists privilege the first and subordinate the second, and vice versa for nationalists. Political identities, meanwhile, have been presented as a stark, polarised choice and negotiations have taken the form of a tug of war.

This paper rethinks these conundrums, using recent international experience to suggest there are new and more productive ways to approach Northern Ireland's old problems. It works through the values and principles that must underpin any settlement, as well as the language required to express it. It argues that it is possible to redefine the 'internal' and 'external' dimensions of the conflict in a manner all can live with, and to free up notions of identity, with a view to arriving at an honourable draw.

As to the substance of a settlement, the paper sets out the following parameters:

- democratic governance with maximum autonomy;
- dialogue and negotiation to resolve difference;
- parity of esteem for all cultural identities;
- maximum relationship with the republic;
- human and minority rights as a touchstone;
- an enhanced role for citizens in governance;
- an interventionist approach to the European Union; and
- inter-relationships amongst all regions and nations on these islands.

It points out that this approach derives solely from universal norms of liberal democracy and human rights and so does not require unrealistic political conversions on the part of either nationalists or unionists: rather, it can be seen as fair and reasonable to all. It heralds an end to the congeries of inequalities encapsulated in the 'nationalist nightmare' while not activating the 'slippery slope' unionists fear.

As to the process of getting there, the paper stresses that negotiations based on a 'balance of power' politics can not deliver any agreed outcome. It suggests that crucial to securing an honourable draw is the ability of civil society to develop a cohesive view, encouraging the emergence of a 'sufficient consensus' amongst the talks parties.

48 In sum the paper sets out a new agenda for both politicians and civil society, which has the
49 potential to secure widespread acceptance.
50

51

52 **New hope?**

53

54 As so often in the past in Northern Ireland, hope and expectation are finely balanced in the
55 current round of talks at Stormont.
56

57

58 The precedents, after all, are not encouraging. Six prior talks rounds and six forums,
59 organised under the auspices of one or other government, have since 1972 failed to generate
60 a durable political settlement.

61

62 So can hope triumph over experience? The difficulties should not be underestimated, and
63 many other long-running nationality conflicts—take Cyprus or Sri Lanka for example—have
64 proved impossible to resolve on the basis of democratic co-existence. In Northern Ireland, a
65 deeply embedded sectarian ‘force field’ constantly magnetises politics towards polarised
66 positions and makes movement towards common ground extremely difficult.

67

68 Yet the prize of peace is a great one. Peace is more than the absence of violence we currently
69 enjoy, with the lurking fear that at some point it may recur. Nor is it a utopian state where all
70 weapons are handed in: rather, the widespread possession of weapons is a symptom of fear
71 itself.

72

73 Peace is a real state of well-being, where it is widely recognised that any outbreak of
74 violence will be punished by what are broadly perceived as legitimate authorities, with the
75 support of the majority of the community from which such violence comes. It is a feeling of
76 genuine *security* that one can look forward with hope to the prospects for this generation and
77 those to come.

78

79 In this, more profound, sense, peace can only be guaranteed by a broadly based political
80 dispensation, which defuses the force field and allows new intercommunal relationships of
81 trust and co-operation to flourish.

82

83 A political settlement is also a key requirement for sustained economic and social progress,
84 as for the reallocation of funds from the law and order budget to pressing social needs so
85 that all can enjoy a decent quality of life. Governance—the form and business of
86 government—directly affects life chances, and the opportunity to replace ‘remote control’
87 administration by an innovative and accountable alternative must be seized.

88

89 The cost of renewed failure is, meanwhile, substantial. There is a danger after the political
90 gyrations of recent years that over time many able people will simply give up on Northern
91 Ireland as a political basket-case and take their talents elsewhere; conversely, external
92 investment and commitment may drain away. The region would then be left as a backwater
93 unable to adapt to a highly competitive European context, increasingly dependent on its
94 Westminster subvention and lagging behind a more go-ahead southern neighbour.

94

95 So how can we ensure that the malign scenario does not prevail? A benign future *can* be
96 constructed, driven by a new dynamism and commitment. But it first of all requires the
97 embodiment of a different set of values than have been manifested in abundance hitherto:
98 values of responsibility, dialogue and participation.
99

100 101 **New values** 102

103 There is no denying that there is serious dissatisfaction with the exercise of responsibility by
104 politicians in Northern Ireland: many within the business community have expressed this
105 openly. This often mystifies politicians who, not unreasonably, point to their electoral
106 mandates. But the point is a separate one: it is a sense of failure adequately to *act upon* those
107 mandates, to deliver deals with *other* politicians once elected. While it is true in these times
108 that the idea that politicians can themselves produce a better world for all is increasingly
109 doubted, a special onus does still fall on those who stand for public office to exercise
110 statesmanlike qualities.
111

112 Many in public and political life have legitimately claimed rights of various kinds on behalf
113 of various groups; embrace of concomitant responsibilities has not, however, always been
114 so evident. Yet in a society with a 'democratic deficit' where no one holds real
115 responsibility, the path of least resistance is of course to pass responsibility for failure to
116 someone else, in a spirit of mutual recrimination. On the other hand, it is possible to create
117 an environment of *mutual* responsibility where the challenges facing politicians, and their
118 real achievements, can be shared. To achieve that, government itself has a bounden duty to
119 discharge—or rather the British and Irish governments have shared, if differentiated,
120 responsibilities in that regard.
121

122 Dialogue, conversely, is a much-used word in Northern Ireland. But its substance has been
123 much rarer. And the implications of dialogue are genuinely challenging: real commitment to
124 dialogue means accepting a need to persuade and a willingness to be persuaded; it means
125 entering a world where deals are struck and stood over. Dialogue is unavoidable between
126 politicians who exercise power: if they can not deliver, government grinds to a halt. But
127 politicians in Northern Ireland do not exercise power; they lobby those who do. In that
128 context, there is every incentive to resort, not to dialogue, but to exerting political clout, even
129 violence. What is needed is the reverse: rewarding those who make efforts at co-operation
130 and compromise. And dialogue can mean that zero-sum games become win-win games for
131 all, as the experience of the European Union 'peace package' district partnerships confirms.
132

133 Participation is a much more foreign idea. And so there is considerable annoyance within
134 politics about those seen as sniping from the sidelines, just as there is alienation on the
135 ground—especially amongst women and young people—about the limited avenues of
136 participation on offer. But ownership of the political process can be widened in a variety of
137 ways, which can inject new energy into the political arena and may in turn make the
138 dilemmas of politicians more widely understood. Above all, everyone with a stake in a
139 particular outcome will defend it democratically against those who would use force or
140 muscle to bring it down.
141

142 These three values—responsibility, dialogue, participation—encapsulate the aspirations of
143 the majority from all social groups in Northern Ireland who genuinely want a settlement and
144 a better future. If they came to define the political culture of the region, we would be well on
145 the way to just such a development. But it is not just a matter of political will: the many
146 politicians who do have the will to achieve an outcome still have to grapple with genuinely
147 difficult and complex issues. Clear principles can provide a roadmap.

149 150 **New principles**

151
152 It's easy to be dismissive about the political failure of Northern Ireland—to blame its
153 personalities rather than recognise that the challenges it faces are at least as difficult as those
154 in many parts of the globe in the 1990s where communal identity and allegiance don't
155 coincide with state boundaries. Indeed it could be argued that Northern Ireland has made a
156 rather better fist than some others—most disastrously, ex-Yugoslavia or Rwanda—at
157 preventing the vicious circles of polarisation and violence from spiralling beyond all control.
158 This may provide tangible clues as to how to turn the tide.

159
160 So what principles have prevented Northern Ireland from tipping over into the abyss? The
161 first is that again and again citizens in Northern Ireland have shown their preference for a
162 society based on co-existence rather than apartheid. Opinion surveys recurrently show
163 massive support for integrated education and mixed housing. It might seem that people are
164 lying to pollsters while voting with their feet. More plausible is that such suggestions do
165 touch a widespread *individual* aspiration for a society in which, if only a more *socially*
166 supportive environment existed, more convivial intercommunal relations could be
167 developed.

168
169 At crucial times, this aspiration has met the threat of 'ethnic cleansing'—as after Shankill and
170 Greysteel in 1993—with a willingness to demonstrate opposition on the streets, acting as an
171 effective brake on a descent into hell. And from day to day it has prevented enemy images in
172 one community of the other becoming so embedded as to legitimise prosecution of conflict
173 by the protagonists on a Bosnian scale.

174
175 Secondly, a majority of people in Northern Ireland have remained committed to liberal-
176 democratic norms and so have rejected totalitarian methods—whether those be resorting to
177 violence or enforcing renewed communal oppression—in favour of the requirement of
178 consent. It is widely accepted, in other words, that any settlement proposals from any party
179 must win the consent of others, not from the same community (though that in turn implies
180 representatives of each community must be prepared to consider seriously proposals from
181 the opposite camp). There is also a widespread acceptance, at least in terms of political
182 reality, that any new dispensation must win the endorsement of governments in London and
183 Dublin if it is to be a runner. Indeed 94 per cent of people in Northern Ireland support the
184 notion of a negotiated settlement.

185
186 Thirdly, it is universally accepted that human rights are integral to progress. Indeed, while
187 successive British governments have been embarrassed by discrepancies highlighted
188 between their behaviour and the demands of international human rights conventions, all
189 parties in Northern Ireland agree that a bill of rights of some sort should be enacted. And it is

190 further widely recognised that this need not await agreement on an overall settlement. What
191 the content of such a bill or bills, of course, should be is a matter for further debate, but
192 entrenchment of both the rights of individuals in general and of members of minorities in
193 particular is accepted in principle. The current government is of course committed, as a
194 minimum, to incorporating the 'main provisions' of the European Convention of Human
195 Rights into UK law.

196
197 These three principles—of co-existence, liberal democracy and human rights—again widely
198 endorsed, take us a further step along the road towards an achievable settlement, where
199 extreme solutions like cantonisation or repartition are rejected, no protagonist is allowed to
200 ride roughshod over whole communities and universally recognised standards of human
201 rights are upheld. Yet political talks in Northern Ireland have been ill-starred: in getting
202 down to negotiation, the initial appearance of a common language has translated, arguably
203 inevitably, into talking past one another. A new language is needed.

204 205 206 **New language**

207
208 The language of the political debate in Northern Ireland has been of sovereignty, self-
209 determination, territorial integrity and majority rule—just like in every other such conflict
210 around the world. Each side, quite legitimately by its lights, has told a story of a people
211 denied a right to self-determination, understood as majority rule, and translated into a
212 sovereign polity with secure boundaries. It is always difficult to resolve situations where
213 rights collide. And Serbs and Croats, Greek and Turkish Cypriots, Armenians and Azeris—
214 to name but a few other communities to whom history has bequeathed the painful legacy of
215 co-existence—have found this conundrum no more easy to crack.

216
217 Indeed, put in these terms, such conflicts are simply intractable—a zero-sum game in which
218 somebody wins and somebody loses, or an endless war of attrition continues. Far from
219 scapegoating the participants, it could be argued that it is no wonder negotiations go
220 nowhere. No one is going to accept the indignity of being walked over; stronger still, no one
221 is going to accept even being pushed.

222
223 Yet, for all the depressing features of the world in the 1990s, it is an order in which many
224 old intractables have been loosened up—not always for the better, of course. The old order
225 in which homogeneous nationalities and sovereign states collided with each other like billiard
226 balls is no more. That's more frightening in one way, yet, in another, it creates
227 unprecedented opportunities. But those opportunities can only be grasped by embracing the
228 new thinking which has emerged to match this more complex global environment.

229
230 Democracy in an ever-more differentiated world, it is increasingly recognised, does not end
231 with the expression of mandates, where one political tribe automatically prevails. On the
232 contrary, as relationships between social groups everywhere become more and more
233 demanding, the practice of democracy becomes an increasingly skilful exercise in dialogue
234 and deliberation between equals, in which the force of argument is required to replace the
235 force of numbers—and to forestall resort to the argument of force.

237 For those attuned to seeing themselves as majorities, this can be an added-value experience
238 of democracy in which they share ownership, whose *raison d'être* can therefore go beyond
239 the defence of 'their' majority. For those traditionally in a minority, this route can represent
240 an escape from subordination into equal citizenship, a credible alternative to violence. For
241 representatives of both, it can make democracy a dignified, indeed rewarding, exercise in
242 these times of widespread cynicism about the art of politics.

243
244 Nor is identity so simple a matter as it used to be. Traditionally, people gleaned their identity
245 from their family background, without giving the matter much conscious thought, and they
246 lined up in one community—class, national or whatever—or another. In today's world, by
247 contrast, individuals want to be able to choose how to define themselves, in everything from
248 the clothes they wear to the language they speak—including, of course, the right to reinvest
249 in traditional identities if so wished.

250
251 It is a multicultural world where, far from representing a threat, on the contrary, diversity
252 can become a source of richness and positive exchanges. Civil cosmopolitanism, not a
253 cramped conformism, becomes the order of the day. Of course, this requires tolerance and
254 acceptance of lifestyle choices different from one's own. But recognition that different
255 identities can thrive equally in a pluralistic state is a crucial breakthrough towards peaceful
256 co-existence.

257
258 Lastly, nor are relationships between states anything like what they were, as the experience
259 of the European Union indicates. A defensive independence guarded by hard borders is
260 giving way to co-operative interdependence in which borders are porous—even irrelevant—
261 and power is diffused. Yet this does not mean a loss of 'national sovereignty' for citizens of
262 one state against gain for another. Again, it can be a gain all round, in a spirit of mutuality
263 and reconciliation where there is nothing to fear—except fear itself. True, it is a path into
264 uncharted territory, but it is a co-operative venture in which trust and understanding are
265 gradually built, and from which real material benefits can accrue to all.

266
267 Traditional thinking can not reconcile majority-minority conflicts which straddle borders:
268 internal majoritarian democracy is demanded as a democratic right by one side, external
269 support for self-determination in the name of a larger majority is claimed as an equally
270 democratic right by the other. This is as true of the situation of Hungarian minorities in
271 various countries beyond the attenuated border of Hungary itself as it is of Northern Ireland.

272
273 Freed up from thinking only in terms of monolithic states with hard borders and absolute
274 power, the legitimate aspirations of minorities to parity of esteem can be fully realised—
275 through application of political pluralism, recognition of multicultural identity, entrenchment
276 of minority rights and transfrontier interdependence—without movement of borders being
277 required. At the same time the latter should become increasingly of no consequence.

278
279

280 **New thinking**

281

282 Yet the constitutional framework for negotiations on the future of Northern Ireland, as set
283 out in numerous intergovernmental documents, has defined the options only in the context of
284 the old dichotomy. *Either* it is part of a sovereign UK *or* it is part of a sovereign Ireland,

285 with the 'consent principle'—the views of a majority in Northern Ireland—to arbitrate. Yet
286 far from guaranteeing security to all, this majoritarianism leaves nationalists currently feeling
287 they face a 'unionist veto', while unionists simultaneously fear demographic shifts will drive
288 them into a united Ireland.
289

290 Moreover, these stark conventional constitutional alternatives do not match the complexity of
291 today's realities, and in many ways foreclose possibilities. For example, they take no
292 account of the process of decentralisation of UK governance now in train, especially to
293 Scotland, which can not but affect constitutional perspectives on Northern Ireland.
294

295 In the absence of new constitutional thinking, inter-party negotiations can only be based on a
296 'balance of power' politics, resembling a tug of war. It is clear that these can not be other
297 than a series of mutual pressures and external mobilisations, and that out of it no non-
298 antagonistic relationships can be developed. Hence the recurrent failures of the past.
299

300 The substance of the tug of war has been between the 'internal' and 'external' aspects of
301 Northern Ireland, with unionists obviously favouring politics confined to the former and
302 nationalists privileging the latter. In the 1992 talks, the most substantive since 1973,
303 unionists presented a schema for qualified internal majority rule, with the external dimension
304 attenuated to good-neighbourliness between north and south. Conversely, nationalists
305 advocated a restricted internal democracy of joint commissioner rule, while pressing a
306 powerful north-south council of ministers. Months of discussion led nowhere.
307

308 In the light of new thinking, however, this can now be seen to be a sterile counterposition.
309 Both the 'internal' and 'external' can be positively embraced, on an equal basis—democracy
310 and multiculturalism on the one hand, rights and interdependence on the other. Either/or can
311 become both/and—to everyone's benefit.
312

313 The challenge identified here is to ensure nationalists feel reassured about institutions in
314 Northern Ireland, unionists equally at ease with island-wide ones. So the former must
315 represent democratic engagement, not unionist power; the latter must represent co-operative
316 reconciliation, not nationalist power to come.
317

318 For the first time this holds out the possibility 'internally' of a genuinely shared and
319 collaborative project in which all can enthusiastically partake—a politics no longer redolent
320 of 'majority rule' and its inevitable corollary, minority exclusion. And it holds out the equal,
321 and equally unprecedented, adventure of building bridges between the two parts of the island
322 in a committed and open-ended manner, yet not heralding 'Dublin rule' in its turn.
323

324 Paradoxically, this approach represents the best strategy *both* for unionists to preserve the
325 union (through Catholic trust, unprecedentedly, being sought) *and* for nationalists to pursue
326 a united Ireland (through Protestants, again unprecedentedly, being effectively wooed). But
327 for many the hope would surely be that this 'internal' v 'external' dichotomy would become
328 increasingly irrelevant in the new global environment.
329

330 In terms of identities, in this loose, indeed empowering, political framework, one can be
331 British or Irish, or British and Irish, or neither (or European)—equally. A new basis also
332 emerges for rethinking the wider variable geometry of relationships within these islands,

333 again on an equal footing. Looking at this broader canvas, there is a need to challenge
334 misunderstandings and misperceptions as well as the potential to develop a wider web of
335 interdependent relationships to the benefit of all.
336

337 This is the basis for conceiving a political way forward which can end the tug of war in
338 favour of an honourable draw. Short of mass ideological conversions, no alternative is
339 credible which can command consent: if members of one or other community feel they are
340 being pressurised they are more likely to withhold than grant that consent. More positively,
341 this approach heralds the real equality—in every sense—for which nationalists have always
342 struggled, while ending for unionists the insecurity which has made them resist change.
343

344 345 **New politics** 346

347 The elements of a new dispensation are now hovering into view. The details are a matter for
348 the parties to spell out and for the constitutional lawyers to write down, but the following
349 features follow on from the above discussion:
350

- 351 • democratic governance, exercised collectively by representatives of free and equal citizens,
352 with maximum autonomy for the region in the context of a decentralising UK government;
- 353 • dialogue and negotiation as the means required to resolve day-to-day, as well as
354 constitutional, differences;
- 355 • parity of esteem for all cultural identities, as individually chosen and no longer constructed
356 as antagonistic one to another;
- 357 • maximum development of the relationship with the Republic of Ireland, based on mutual
358 interest, enhanced trust and a commitment to reconciliation;
- 359 • human and minority rights as the touchstone of all policies and structures impinging on
360 personal security;
- 361 • an enhanced role for citizens and organisations within civil society in the business of
362 governance;
- 363 • an innovative, interventionist approach to engaging with the wider European Union; and
364 • recognition of the inter-relationships amongst all the regions and nations on these islands.
365

366 Each of these aspects is in principle acceptable to all fair-minded and reasonable people.
367 None requires that one be a unionist or a nationalist, or that one *not* be a unionist or a
368 nationalist, to endorse it. None contains any hidden agenda or *double entendre*. Modern
369 unionists whose commitment is to be part of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society will find
370 nothing inimical here; nor will modern nationalists who want to embrace an island
371 community whose predominant component is a fast-changing, dynamic society. All that is
372 required is acceptance of universal liberal-democratic norms and recognised human rights
373 standards.
374

375 As each element in this outline of a benign scenario stands on its own as a 'good' which all
376 can value, rather than a set of unionist and nationalist goods which require an elaborate
377 trade-off, progress towards agreement on each need not depend on prior progress on any
378 other—a recipe for endless stasis. Dialogic democratic institutions for Northern Ireland
379 would represent a reduction of the democratic deficit for all, not just unionists. The hand of
380 friendship extended across the border is worthy of being grasped by all, not just nationalists.

381 In Northern Ireland's complex combination of religious and political minorities, human and
382 minority rights are also a safeguard for everyone. None of these propositions would leave
383 any individual or community feeling their allegiance or identity was being disparaged,
384 neglected or excluded.

385
386 Already, it is worth stressing, the *Belfast Telegraph* opinion survey of April 1997 showed
387 that 'devolved responsibility-sharing' institutions were at least tolerable to all but 7 per cent
388 of Catholics (indeed more than twice as many preferred it as offered a united Ireland
389 as their preference) and that north-south institutions were at least tolerable to all but 36 per
390 cent of Protestants (even if 60 per cent preferred no special relationship at all). That is by no
391 means a hopeless base from which confidence can be built.

392 393 **New agenda**

394
395 What has been lacking in the failed political initiatives of the past has not only been political
396 consensus, as is obvious, but also a proper relationship between the political parties and the
397 arena of civil society. Politicians have on the one hand lacked the certainty that they could
398 lead in making cross-communal overtures without risking losing the led, and so, with
399 notable exceptions, have tended to resort to the lowest-common-denominator politics of
400 communalist conformism. On the other hand, voices from within the wider community,
401 often urging more moderate and/or less conservative approaches, have felt excluded or
402 ignored.

403
404
405 Meanwhile, the media have been left by default to provide the forum for communication. Yet
406 adversarial political and media conventions have often led to a repetitive and alienating
407 coverage of politics, which has fostered fear and mistrust rather than confidence and
408 understanding.

409
410 Northern Ireland's future is a collective project—albeit a pluralist one in which different
411 players have different roles. To achieve the benign scenario of peace and prosperity requires
412 a pulling together, not a tug of war. It requires not only that politicians co-operate but also
413 that civil society provides a lively vehicle for political renewal and democratic participation.
414 It requires that the values and principles of a political settlement, and the language in which it
415 is cast, are widely understood and respected.

416
417 This paper has radically rethought how that settlement might be conceived and the features it
418 will comprise—the product, if you like. It has simultaneously addressed how that settlement
419 might win support in diverse constituencies while being broadly seen as fair and
420 reasonable—the process of securing 'sufficiency of consensus' both among the parties and
421 civil society.

422
423 It has secured a number of breakthroughs to the future, in terms of unlocking the clichéd
424 'political logjam'. Firstly, it breaks the 'internal' v 'external' deadlock, by presenting the
425 institutional expression of both in positive terms and looking beyond this old dichotomy.
426 Fundamentally, it is the constitutional equivalent of replacing Either/Or by *And*, placing
427 unionism and nationalism thereby for the first time on a par in the process. Yet, second, it
428 does not require unrealistic political conversions, since nationalists don't have to become

429 unionists to accept collaborative institutions within Northern Ireland and unionists don't
430 have to become nationalists to accept co-ordinating north-south bodies.

431
432 Third, it offers to everyone security rather than threats: to nationalists it offers security that
433 the northern 'nationalist nightmare' where they are left at the behest of unionist
434 majoritarianism will never recur; to unionists it offers the security that there is no 'slippery
435 slope' down which they must slide willy-nilly to a united Ireland. Fourth, and perhaps most
436 importantly, it portends a dispensation which can be widely perceived—including by the
437 many who refuse any unionist or nationalist self-definition or betray no interest in politics
438 whatever—as fair and reasonable to all.

439
440 The paper has thus set a course for a new agenda, taking Northern Ireland out of the vicious
441 circle of polarisation and violence and into a virtuous circle of co-existence and peace. It is a
442 baton towards the next millennium which neither its politicians nor its civil society can afford
443 to drop.