

THE WAY FORWARD

For most of my life, Northern Ireland has been torn apart by violence and political instability. Many people now despair of a solution. My purpose in entering politics was to help unite this community, to defeat terrorism, and build a just and prosperous society.

Not everyone believes that Northern Ireland is a community. Some maintain that geography determines a community. Nationalists believe that the islandness of Ireland has ordained that all who live on it shall form one community, whether they wish it or not. Pre-partition Unionism similarly held that all who lived in these islands should form one British people. I believe that reality is more complex. Communities are determined by a sense of identity, which grows over a period of time, and is based on established ties and relationships. Over many centuries the people of North-East Ireland developed a sense of separateness from the rest of the people of Ireland, and a strong affinity with the people of Scotland. Despite our many origins, (Picts, Vikings, Celts, Angles, Saxons, French, Dutch,...) we are now completely intermingled and tied more to each other than to anyone else. We are more like each other, than like the English of the South-East, or the Irish of the South-West.

As a community, we have the right to decide our own future, and be fully involved in our own governance. It is an expression of the historic loyalties and relationships with those in Britain, that I and my party support the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom. That position, shared by the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland, is a clear and honourable one.

Not everyone shares this perspective. There are other identities, and tragically these differences have been pushed to the point of violent division. Violence is now so endemic that it can be defeated only by uniting the community against the terrorists. To achieve this unity we must create common institutions of government in which all can participate and with which all can identify. There are two requirements of such community loyalty.

Firstly, equality of citizenship and human dignity. Discrimination and injustice must be replaced by a just and liberal appreciation of the beliefs and fears of all the different members of the community. There must be equality of social, economic and educational opportunity, and the highest standards of participatory democracy. The system of justice and policing must command and receive the respect and loyalty of all sections of the community, for without the rule of law there can be no peace or stability. Only then can we expect complete participation and loyalty at all levels of public life by people drawn from both sides of our present religious divide.

Secondly we must recognize the differing relationships of Northern Ireland people to those who live outside of our province. The territorial claim in Articles 2 & 3 of the Constitution of the Republic will have to be ended, but in return a direct, standing, government to government relationship should be established, perhaps augmented by joint commissions on areas of shared interest (eg agriculture, energy, tourism etc.) This would be of obvious economic value, but it is also part of the vital recognition of nationalist ties with the rest of the people of the island.

The 'totality of relations' in these islands could be recognized by the replacement of the present bilateral Anglo-Irish Conference with a tri-partite council, in which the

people of Northern Ireland would be directly represented by their own Regional Government. Almost nobody at the meetings of the present Anglo-Irish Conference comes from Northern Ireland. It would undoubtedly be uncomfortable to have us there, but perhaps issues could genuinely begin to be resolved.

1992 has become synonymous with the completion of the Single European Market, and the movement to closer European Union is leaving the debate about sovereignty and statehood behind. The time is right to grasp the opportunities offered by this broader framework. Our ancient feud could be superceded by the economic challenge and necessity of representing our people more directly, as a Region, within the wider European Community.

If there is to be peace, there must be give and take. There must be an honourable compromise. Unionists must be prepared to accept a special relationship with the Republic of Ireland, and a form of devolved government incorporating the sharing of power. In return they must get a guarantee of loyalty to the new institutions and full cooperation in defeating terrorism. Nationalists must be prepared to accept that there may be no old-style United Ireland, and that they must give loyalty to the new institutions. In return they must be sure of first class citizenship, and an opportunity to be involved in the exercise of power, democratically, at the highest levels.

There is also a contribution to be made to peace by those who live outside Northern Ireland. Centralists in Whitehall must accept changes in their traditional ways of governing and financing us, the Republic of Ireland must drop its constitutional claim, and establish a new relationship of respect, and Europe may have to shoulder some responsibilities too.

There is price for peace, but it is a price that should be paid. The people of Northern Ireland are demanding with an increasingly strident voice that the representatives of Unionism, Nationalism, the British Government, the Irish Government and the European Community, make the compromises and commitments that will bring us the peace my generation has never known.