

speeches by others. ALD2/2/6/10/2/268  
- by Addie  
Monro  
(Party  
President)

## Clarity and Confusion (Conference Speech 1996 Briefing Paper)

In the almost intractable certainties of Northern Ireland political life, there is presently a remarkable air of confusion. Perhaps it began when Sinn Fein, still clutching the armalite and the ballot paper, transformed the word 'peace' into a weapon, making it a central feature of their 'brave new' lexicon. The confusion deepened with the cease-fires. Leading politicians proclaimed that the violence was over for good. Complete meant permanent, they said. The nightmare was at an end. But in the minds of ordinary people there were more questions than answers. It seemed churlish to say so publicly, but how could it be that those who had supported the campaign of violence for a quarter of a century, were now feted as the **real** peacemakers? How did one react to those who had broken the law, and continued to break limbs? Could it be lasting peace when only one side to the conflict seemed to be part of the process? And most puzzling of all, where was the settlement?

As we began to enjoy the benefits of the cease-fires, spirits rose. Hope flickered nervously in a people inured to disappointment, and weary of the grinding 'troubles'. Maybe it was all going away, not with a bang, but whimpering into the shadows again. Then came the bang, at Canary Wharf, and we were all rudely wakened from the pleasant twilight of wishful thinking. The process had run into the stone wall of political reality. What of the phoney war since Canary Wharf? What to do about the Holy Grail of All-Party Talks on June 10th? Why did the Republican Movement demand the Talks and then ensure that it could not itself be represented? How to respond when it becomes clear that the much heralded New Unionism, is still

Orangeism, marching with traditional intolerant shrillness down the unwelcoming roads of Lower Ormeau, and Garvaghy? Could the Irish problem have proved resilient in the face of such optimism? It seems much like the confusion of the Emperor who wonders how he can feel the chill when clad in a fine suit of new clothes, purchased from such a reputable travelling salesman.

It may be frustrating to some, but I prefer to hold to reality. Most people in the north-east of this island see themselves as, to a greater or lesser extent, different in their interests and by their history, from the rest of the island. Many in the rest of Ireland, and in Britain, increasingly regard us in a similar light. Republicans who wish by force to bring about a United Ireland have actually deepened the divisions, and those unionists who pretend that they are not truly of this island impoverish themselves, and obstruct the building of a community where all of us can feel at home in our own place. Instead of running away from these hard issues we must stare in the face the obvious obstacles to a resolution of our ancient feud.

Firstly, neither side can see its wishes entirely fulfilled. Those who speak of agreement to everyone's satisfaction are deluding themselves and deceiving others, if they do not also point out the necessity of sacrificing some cherished desires.

Without sacrifices there will be no settlement.

Secondly we must accept that even the best settlement, fashioned with care and sensitivity, and acceptable to an overwhelming majority right across the community, will still be anathema to those on the extremes whose fundamentalism is impervious



to reason. Those who appeal to the mandate of the past, oblivious of the passage of time, become traitors to their children's future. Regrettably, to make this observation is not to convince them of the error of their ways, but persuades them only of our impurity of conviction.

The argument that everyone must be included, and everybody satisfied, grew out of the unremarkable observation that every previous attempt to resolve our problem has failed. But what of the new strategy? The Forum in Dublin failed to attract unionist involvement, and still was unable to produce a formula which could satisfy Sinn Fein. The proposed Forum in Belfast may find nationalists mimicking the unionist boycott. Is it hopeless? Not at all. I am convinced that we are moving to a settlement. How it comes about, that is the question.

When All-Party Talks begin on June 10 most of the leading participants will be politicians who have been around since the 1970's. This applies even to the new Ulster Unionist Leader, David Trimble. The Talks table itself will be closed to those outside the party political circle. It would clearly help to have some other input, and the election offers the people of Northern Ireland a direct influence which they have not had in this way before. Through their votes on the single issue of All-Party Talks, they can show whether or not they support those who are unafraid to make a fair and honourable compromise. This would send a powerful message to all the negotiators, and have a major effect on the conduct of the Talks.

Better still the establishment of a Forum, modelled on the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin, will create an opportunity for community groups, business organizations, the Churches, the women's movement, and young people, to tell the political parties directly what kind of future they want. This was one of the great contributions of the Forum in Dublin Castle, and the Belfast Forum could learn from it. If the people of Northern Ireland do not use these opportunities effectively, and if their elected negotiators fail to grasp the chance that is offered, the key decisions will move to others. Given their enormous investment of time and political interest, I do not believe that the British and Irish Governments will simply return to a policy of drift. Responsible Governments will have to shoulder their differing responsibilities, and put into place structures which will contribute to the long slow growth towards stability. The form has been prefigured in the Frameworks Documents, and in the absence of an agreed input from the Northern Ireland parties, the two governments will have to proceed to implement those aspects of the Frameworks proposals which are least prone to boycott or disruption.

Time moves on, even in Northern Ireland. We are now being given a chance to have a say about our future. There may not be another such opportunity. If we do not grasp it with both hands, and from both sides of our divided community, our future may well slip into the hands of others.

**Dr John Alderdice, Alliance Party Leader**

**12 April 1996**