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The current cycle of conflict in Northern Ireland began over 11 years ago. As a practicing politician in Northern Ireland throughout that period, I have taken a particular interest while traveling abroad in following the world media coverage of the problem. For the most part, this has been a chronicle of atrocities reported spasmodically from London or by "firemen" visiting from London. It has struck me that, for the outside observer, it must have been difficult during these years to avoid the impression that Northern Ireland was hopelessly sunk in incoherence and its people the victims of a particularly opaque political pathology. There have, it is true, been a few brief interludes when some measure of clarity seemed to take hold, only to be swept away in the inevitable swirling clouds of violence, intransigence and misery—in other words, the normal political climate.

The people of Northern Ireland, however divided, share a keen awareness of the bewilderment of outsiders, which occasionally finds expression in the mock-heroic couplets of the street: "To Hell with the future and long live the past/May God in His mercy look down on Belfast."

The cynicism and dismissiveness of the Irish style (Churchill's Dunkirk exhortation, "The situation is serious but not desperate," is said to have evoked the somewhat bleary comment from an Irish listener, "Over here the situation is always desperate but never serious") often conceal, as the readers of Swift and Joyce know well, a quite serious desperation. Nevertheless, in its superficial manifestation the hopeless wit of the people proved congenial to those who are currently responsible for the affairs of Northern Ireland, and who, of all "outside" observers, often seem the most puzzled and wearied by its problem, i.e., the British political establishment. This is nothing new. It was, in fact, Churchill, speaking in the House of Commons in 1922, who most eloquently caught this feeling of his colleagues, then and since:

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> Then came the Great War.... Every institution, almost, in the world was strained. Great empires have been overturned. The whole map of Europe has been changed.... The mode of thought of men, the whole outlook on affairs, the grouping of parties, all have encountered violent and tremendous changes in the deluge of the world, but as the deluge subsides and the waters fall, we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that have been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world.

Other cataclysms have since supervened, and are themselves now forgotten, but "their quarrel" endures, now in a more grisly form than ever. Politically motivated violence is on the increase. Northern Ireland (population 1.5 million) has two new prisons and a third under construction. The skilled and the professionally trained emigrate while the economy stagnates, and the semiskilled and unskilled swell the unemployment lines as well as the ranks of the paramilitary organizations.

Some weeks ago, to coordinate its security efforts in Northern Ireland, the British government recalled from his retirement the man who reputedly furnished the model for George Smiley in John Le Carré's entertaining spy novels. This may be symptomatic of a long-standing British inability to take the Irish seriously (it should be admitted that the reverse tradition also exists). However, events recently unleashed a chilling shower, drenching Irish and British alike, from which the flippant, patronizing and slightly amused attitudes of the past afforded no refuge whatever. It is beyond high time the British and the Irish took each other—and our common crisis—seriously. There is, I believe, urgent need for the friends of Britain and Ireland to do likewise, and there is heartening evidence in fact that some of them have begun to do so.

It is my strong conviction, as well as that of my party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party of Northern Ireland, that the politics of Northern Ireland are not hopelessly irrational. They do have a meaning and a structure. The protagonists do act in the light of their interests as they perceive them, though their perceptions are sometimes mistaken. Events are, in fact, predictable—often, it must be admitted, depressingly so.

My conviction that there exist structure and meaning, and therefore hope, is not based simply on Henry Kissinger's moral injunction to statesmen that they must at all costs believe in the possibility of solutions to the most intractable impasses. I believe, as the title of this paper suggests, that the perennial British view of the problem as "their quarrel" and not "ours" is fundamentally

wrong: Britain is, in fact, included in the quarrel as a central protagonist, and must be centrally involved in the solution. It is for the acceptance of this principle that I and my party worked for years. There have, as I have implied, been moments when we seemed to have achieved a breakthrough. This does not seem to be such a moment, alas. All the more reason for putting the case again.

II

The problem, as I know from years of talking to foreign visitors, is at first sight a mass of contradictions. Some of the contradictions are real. London, for its part, exercises a reluctant sovereignty in Northern Ireland, while Dublin maintains a somewhat reluctant claim to that sovereignty. The "loyalists" are those proponents of the union with Britain who, while they are avowedly the most patriotic of all Her Majesty's subjects, put up the most stubborn resistance to her government's designs. The Provisional wing of the Irish Republican Army believes Irish unity will be secured by waging war against a British establishment which clearly has no fundamental opposition to unity, while they ignore (and, in their campaign against Britain, further incite) those who must adamantly resist the imposition of unity, the one million Protestant majority. Does this mean things are hopeless? No, but it further underlines the necessity, reinforced by horrific events, that all major parties to this crisis should rigorously reexamine their own roles, responsibilities and room for maneuver.

The basis of British policy is concealed under layers of good intentions, ingenious initiatives, commissions of enquiry, attempted reforms, financial aid and a good deal of genial bewilderment. I do not use the word "concealed" maliciously. Many sincere and concerned British politicians and observers have the impression that they have tried everything possible to get the Irish to agree together: that is a measure of the extent to which the basic assumption of their policy has become imperceptible to the British themselves.

The ground of their policy is the reiterated guarantee that Northern Ireland shall remain a part of the United Kindgom so long as a majority of the electorate of Northern Ireland so desire. That would seem, at first reading, to be an eminently democratic and responsible undertaking. The fact is, however, that it has not worked. It has not produced peace or stable government in Northern Ireland. Moreover, it has provided the basis for a half

century of injustice, discrimination and repressive law, a situation in which the minority community (the one-third Catholics) have been the persistent losers and victims.

Northern Ireland is a divided community, divided not by theological differences but by conflicting nationalist aspirations. The Unionist majority historically favor maintenance of the union with Britain, while the one-third Catholic nationalist minority by and large favor a united Ireland. In 1921, when the overwhelmingly Catholic nationalist Free State was established in the south, the area of Northern Ireland was excluded from the arrangement because of British hesitancy (which proved to be an enduring feature of British policy) in the face of militant Protestant Unionist resistance.

"The British guarantee," as it is called, proved to be a guarantee of permanent exclusive power to one side, the Unionists, and a guarantee of permanent exclusion from power to the other, the Catholic minority. Its existence undermined any hope of political negotiation between the two sides in Northern Ireland. It guaranteed the integrity of "their" quarrel. While this guarantee exists, there is no incentive for Unionists to enter into genuine dialogue with those with whom they share the island of Ireland. The suffering and frustration of the people of Northern Ireland overwhelmingly attest to the fact that the guarantee was, to put it very bluntly, a tragic mistake. The price has been paid too long, and in too many lives.

The many attempts at reform, in which so much British as well as Irish energy was invested, all failed. The one initiative that almost succeeded was the Sunningdale Arrangement of 1973 between the British and Irish governments and the principal parties in Northern Ireland. This established a power-sharing government containing representatives of both sections of the community in Northern Ireland and accepted the principle of a Council of Ireland, which would provide a forum for north-south cooperation as well as a means of expression for the Irish nationalist aspiration, while Northern Ireland would continue to be a part of the United Kingdom. The establishment of power-sharing was a tribute to the political courage and imagination of the last Conservative government in Britain. Unfortunately, the Labour administration, which succeeeded it early in 1974, showed no similar courage, and in May of that year, in what was one of the most squalid examples of government irresponsibility in our times, surrendered its policy in the face of a political strike organized by a paramilitary minority on the Unionist side. As a result, the

guarantee was not alone seen to be restored, it was seen to be reinforced: extreme Unionism or loyalism was encouraged in its belief that it could henceforth resist and jettison any British policy for Northern Ireland which involved conceding power to the minority.

The politics of Northern Ireland have not yet recovered from that setback, and, because of it, the problem for the British is even greater today than it was in 1973. Will the new Conservative government find the considerable courage it needs to face this compounded challenge? My hope is that Prime Minister Thatcher, in coming to grips with the problem, will commit all her vaunted capacity to reversing the blind momentum of British public policy, all her vaunted steadiness of nerve in the face of contrary pressure to secure and maintain a success. Failure, however, be it the failure to attempt a serious initiative or the failure to sustain an initiative under pressure, will only reinforce the difficulty, and the measure of failure will again be in the spreading field of white crosses in front of city hall in Belfast commemorating those who have died at the hand of political violence.

III

The Unionists of Northern Ireland are justly proud of their heritage and their contribution to the world. As many as eleven American presidents came of their stock. They number field marshals, captains of industry and colonial governors among their great men. They see themselves as a pragmatic, hardheaded, skeptical, robust people, and there is much in their history to justify their view. They have shown a corresponding tendency to regard their nationalist Catholic neighbors throughout the island as a more fanciful and less realistic race, and indeed there may be much in the history of the dispossession and enforced illiteracy of the Catholic community to give color to that view.

History has changed the face and condition of Ireland, and these opinions have been overtaken by events. The south started from a platform of no industry and relatively primitive agriculture in 1921, while the north was the only part of Ireland seriously affected at that time by the Industrial Revolution. Now the south has caught up with and will shortly overtake the north economically. Northern industry is in decline and is for the most part owned by outsiders. The North has no sovereign voice in the world, nor, significantly, in the European Community. Unionists watch with envy tinged with resentment as Dublin, for the second

time, exercises the presidency of the Council of the European Community during these months. Unionists are, furthermore, dismayed at the decline of Britain's greatness to a point where, most galling of all, London must now treat Dublin as an equal in the councils of Europe. A hardheaded people should logically draw the conclusion that an arrangement with the south is in its best interest. I have no doubt that they would do so now were the problem of Northern Ireland purely economic. Of course, it is not.

The Unionists are a majority in Northern Ireland, but their political behavior there can only be understood if they are seen, as they feel themselves to be, as a threatened minority on the island of Ireland. Theirs are the politics of the besieged. Hence their stubborn refusal to share power with the minority in Northern Ireland, whom they fear as the Trojan horse of the "real" majority in Ireland, the Catholics. Hence, the similarity between their attitudes and those of the whites of southern Africa.

Can this attitude be unfrozen? There are some grounds for believing that it can. I have mentioned the Sunningdale experiment, the most promising attempt so far to solve the problem. The main Unionist political group at that time, and particularly its leader, the late Mr. Brian Faulkner, showed courage and political agility, and the response of most Unionists to the experiment was by and large benign. The pusillanimity of the Labour government in London, in failing to resist the predictable destructiveness of the demagogues and paramilitaries on the extremes of Unionism, set back the situation almost irremediably; Unionist opinion, it must be admitted, shifted further to the Right as a result, as evidenced by the growing electoral strength of Ian Paisley. Nevertheless, the reality of power-sharing did exist, however tenuously. Unionists, given the right leadership, were seen to be capable of magnanimity. The problem now is to create the conditions where magnanimity can again take hold, this time more securely.

I am also encouraged by what I take to be a resurfacing of traditional Unionist realism. There is a growing suspicion among Unionists that their dependence on the British guarantee as the sole foundation of their political survival may in the long run be a risky and unprofitable enterprise. No leader of present mainline Unionist opinion has yet found the courage to put this squarely to his people, but several have expressed concern about the trustworthiness of the British.

Now is, as I have suggested, the moment when political leaders in Northern Ireland, in the Republic, and in Britain must radically

reexamine their own fundamental assumptions. As I see it, the two greatest problems in Northern Ireland are the British guarantee, which inhibits such reexamination, and the Unionist dependence on it. Given economic developments in the Republic and the growing suspicion about Britain's long-term intentions on the part of many Unionists, this would seem a propitious juncture at which to take a serious initiative. Only Britain can create the conditions in which Unionists can perceive and pursue their true interests.

I believe that the true interest of Unionists depends precisely on the exercise of their traditional gifts of self-confidence and self-reliance. The time has come for them to believe in themselves as their own best guarantors in a future shared with the other people of the island of Ireland.

IV

As it is now, Unionists see themselves as a threatened minority on the island of Ireland. If you ask a Unionist how real the threat is, he or she will tell you of friends or relatives who have been murdered or injured by the Provisional IRA. What threat could be more real? That, however, is only a vivid and chilling expression of an even deeper sense of intimidation. Unionists fear that they would be culturally and racially overwhelmed by the Catholic nationalist majority if they were to join with the rest of the island. Would they? This is the challenge to Irish nationalism, to Dublin, to the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, and to the friends of Irish nationalism around the world.

The campaign of violence of the Provisional IRA has, more than any recent development, set back and distorted the cause of Irish nationalism in the eyes of Unionists, and of British and world opinion. It is clear that a majority of the people in Ireland as a whole, including a majority of Catholics in Northern Ireland, both favor Irish unity as a solution and reject violence as a means of promoting that solution.

The Provisionals have been relatively impervious to the universal rejection of their methods for a number of reasons. First, they are sustained by an extremely simple view of the Irish problem, and in this simplicity they find strength and purpose. For the Provisionals, the Irish problem consists of the British presence in Ireland—nothing more; remove that presence, they claim, and the problem will quickly be solved by the establishment of a

unified, independent Irish state. This analysis of things not only affords a simple view of a highly complex situation, but it also provides the inspiration for violent action aimed at inducing British withdrawal. The Provisional reading of the problem also gains from its clear affinities with the vision of the partially successful, and widely revered, insurgents of the 1916–22 period, who, in their determination to secure freedom for the greater part of the Irish people, were understandably distracted from the peculiar circumstances which obtained in the six northeastern counties.

A second factor in Provisional endurance has been the encouragement which they—like the loyalist extremists—have been able to draw from British weakness and prevarication. That weakness has so shown itself not alone in the fact of loyalist intransigence but also in the intermittent British dalliance with Provisional "political spokesmen," whose credentials have been forged by bombs and bullets.

Third, I believe that the case for Irish nationalism has not been clearly enough expounded by Irish nationalist leaders. The Provisionals have not hesitated to exploit the ambiguities of policy and the innuendoes of the public debate to seek to claim support of, or justification for, their actions.

Fourth, unjustifiable excesses by British security forces, condemned by the European Court of Human Rights as inhuman and degrading treatment, created an implacable hostility to Britain in the minds of many who were subjected to them. These excesses, together with the introduction of internment without trial in 1971 (it has since been abandoned), did more to gain recruits for the Provisionals than any exhortations to "blood sacrifice" from the patriarchs of the movement.

Fifth, the absence of political activity from the life of Northern Ireland has provided both an opportunity and an argument to the men of violence: they can with some credibility play upon the frustrations of the minority in the absence of political hope, and they can well ask, in the face of British immobilism: Who but we are doing anything about Northern Ireland?

Finally, it can be seen that the Provisionals have hardened into a ruthless terrorist force which can compensate in terms of experience and technique for what it has lost in political support. It is a long time now since commentators invoked Mao and predicted that, as the water of popular approval dried up, the guerrilla fish would have to abandon the struggle to survive. We can now see that the fish need less water than we had thought. The Provisionals

have for several years received only insignificant support from the population of either Northern Ireland or the Republic; yet they retain the ability to disrupt and terrorize.

Indeed, their activities have descended to a level of savagery which has all but numbed the capacity of the public to respond with horror to even their inhuman atrocities. Life has become cheap—and the entire community to some extent dehumanized. "Is there a life before death?" asks a piece of anonymous graffiti on a Belfast wall, with some reason. The writer might also have asked whether there is any childhood left for the battle-scarred children of the ghettos of that city, and of the rest of Northern Ireland.

Aside from the immorality of its actions, the Provisional IRA campaign has no hope of success. It is, I suppose, conceivable that it might eventually frighten a feeble British government out of Northern Ireland before any process could begin. What would undoubtedly follow would be a serious risk of a bloodbath. This would quickly spread to the south, and, after thousands of deaths, would finally resolve itself by the division of the island into two bristling, homogeneous sectarian states, neither stable, both sunk in the obscurantism of their most extreme supporters. No military victory followed by a political settlement is possible in Northern Ireland. That is true not for the Provisionals alone but for the loyalists and the British government as well.

The Irish government and most nationalists in Ireland have repeatedly given convincing evidence of their repudiation of the violence of the Provisionals—the public by its consistent rejection at the polls of those who support violence, and the Irish government by its active pursuit of the men of violence, its commitment of additional police and army units to the border areas, and the introduction of draconian legal measures to secure convictions in the courts. Dublin and Irish opinion generally clearly intend no threat to Unionists; on the contrary, the leaders of Irish-American opinion, which was generally seen by Unionists to be hostile to their interests and indeed supportive of violence, have in recent years repeatedly condemned support for violence from the United States. This has had the double effect of reducing material assistance for the Provisional IRA from the United States and of going some way toward assuaging one source of Unionist anxiety.

Despite these positive elements, there is an important sense in which the principal source of Irish nationalist sentiment, i.e., Dublin, has not yet fully clarified its intentions. Unionists will not be able to bring themselves to entertain seriously the notion of

Irish unity unless Dublin unambiguously spells out what it understands by unity and gives clear evidence of its commitments.

The southern state is seen by many Unionists (in varying degrees by the majority) as a lay expression of sectarian Catholic values. As such, it is unacceptable to them. The reality, as I encounter it, is that the Republic is a modern state struggling to develop its economy and society within a European framework. The partition of Ireland, 50 years ago, created a state in the south with an overwhelmingly Catholic population. Inevitably, Catholic values were enshrined in some areas of law, particularly family law, although the state is in other respects one of the least confessional in Europe, with no official church. Unionists have a right to be convinced that the south is serious when it declares its intention to embody pluralist values in the law of the United Ireland to which it aspires. So far, the evidence for these intentions is inadequate.

Even more seriously, those who avow a nationalist solution must clarify how they would implement this. Statements which contain hints of irredentism, of conquest, of compulsion, do not promote a policy of unity; moreover, they give comfort to the men of violence. The Irish government repudiates violence and by its action is seen to do so. It should, nevertheless, in claiming the ground of nationalism, clarify, if necessary ad nauseam, its commitment to unity by agreement, only by agreement, and through reconciliation.

V

One of the difficulties about Northern Ireland which existed until recently was that the problem seemed to matter little, if at all. It mattered very little to the British. It seemed incapable of sustaining the attention of any but the most committed fanatics. Governments and serious observers, if they looked at it, had a feeling of impatience with its complexities, its anthill of competing eccentricities. There was a feeling that it ought to be like the pieces of a jigsaw, needing only to be placed in a certain arrangement for tranquillity to ensue. Unfortunately, the pieces did not seem to fit, and the puzzle quickly lost its interest.

The time has come for a positive and decisive initiative. It must be taken by both Dublin and London acting together. They should first make it clear that there are no longer any unconditional guarantees for any section of the northern community. There is only a commitment to achieving a situation in which

there are guarantees for all.

Second, they should make it clear that there is in fact no pat solution as such, but only a process that will lead to a solution. They should declare themselves committed to such a process, a process designed to lead to an agreed Ireland with positive roles for all. They should invite all parties to participate in this process, the process of building a new Ireland. Some groups will undoubtedly react with an initial refusal, but the process should continue without them, leaving the door always open for their participation at any stage.

Indeed, on embarking on this process we ought to be encouraged by the example of both the United States and the European Community. In the United States, in spite of deep differences of origin and background, they have formed a constitution which is able to harness great differences for the common good. Yet the Italians remain Italian, the blacks are still black, and the Irish still parade on St. Patrick's Day. They have created a unity in diversity.

Europe itself has suffered centuries of bloody conflict. In this century alone, the peoples of Europe have been locked in the savagery of two world wars with a bitterness and slaughter that goes far beyound anything that we have experienced on this island. Yet 34 years after the Second World War, as a result of an agreed process, they have been able to create one parliament to represent them, one community—and the Germans are still Germans, the French are still French. They, too, have a unity in diversity.

Is it too much to ask that we on this small island do precisely the same thing? Is it too much to ask that these two responsible governments begin to declare themselves now in favor of such a process? Can we too build a unity in diversity?

VI

One of the few developments which has cheered those who believe that moderation and reason must prevail in Northern Ireland has been a growing interest in the problem on the part of responsible political leaders outside of Ireland and Britain. This is particularly true of the United States, and, to a significant extent, of the European Community.

I believe that the friends of Britain have been dismayed at evidence in recent years of a British retreat from a world view. Many have felt that this contraction of vision has been accom-

panied by, if it is not symptomatic of, a weakening of Britain's political psyche. That in itself, if true, should concern those who hope for a solution to Northern Ireland's problems which, as I have argued, will require considerable political courage on Britain's part.

Mrs. Thatcher, in recent speeches and indeed in her post-election approach to the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia problem, has shown some willingness to reverse the decline. All the more reason why she should be serious about the problem of Northern Ireland, a strategically placed area in the Atlantic approaches to northwest Europe, potentially ripe for subversion if political neglect continues. The growing serious unrest of American and European leaders reflects, I believe, an awareness of this threat. Several responsible American leaders have implicitly questioned Britain's capacity to meet the political challenge and, on Britain's record so far in Northern Ireland, they are right to have this concern.

VII

The interest of the West in the problem is not only strategic. History has made of Ireland one of the most "internationalized" communities in the world. The foundation of her relations with the two wings of the Western world lies in the emigration of the past centuries: in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to France and Spain; in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries to America; and again, more recently, to Britain. The basis is people, the Irish diaspora.

The situation today is intriguing: the earlier links with the continent have been renewed but now rest on the solid foundation of the treaties of the European Community. The links with America are founded on the old connections of blood, friendship and heritage between the four and a half million people on the island today and upwards of 16 million people in the United States. The relationship has deepened and matured as the Republic has developed politically and economically, and as the Irish in America have prospered and built on their extraordinary political achievements of the past hundred years.

These two global relationships have played major roles in the fortunes of Ireland in recent years. From America came much of the industrial investment which created the impressive economic development of the Republic in recent years. From Europe have come the economic benefits of membership in the Community which have transformed life, particularly in the Republic, and

also created a sense of political dignity and statehood, again in the Republic, which, prior to membership, had been stifled by a claustrophobic bilateral relationship with the neighboring island.

Since the great tides of Irish emigration began to flow to America in the nineteenth century, the Irish in America tried without success to interest Washington administrations in the "Irish question." Great names such as John Devoy, editor of *The Gaelic-American*, and Eamon De Valera were energetically involved in this endeavor, but in vain. This is not to fault these men: it was a function of the nature of Irish political power in America during these generations, which was confined to the leadership of some of the great cities and states. It remained largely excluded from Washington. That situation changed dramatically in 1960 with the Kennedy presidency.

VIII

In recent years the influence of powerful American leaders of Irish extraction in Washington, notably Senator Edward Kennedy and House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, has brought the issue to a point where the Carter Administration has taken a position on Northern Ireland. As a result, the support for violence from the United States has been contained and has in fact dropped. That this should have been maintained during the past years of political vacuum in Northern Ireland is an extraordinary achievement. There are many men, women and children in Northern Ireland who are alive today, I am convinced, because of the political courage and concern of these men.

President Carter has committed himself to providing economic aid in the event that a solution acceptable to both sides in Northern Ireland, and to the British and Irish governments, can be found. That was a generous, humane and unprovocative commitment. It was welcomed by the Irish and British governments as a major incentive to reconciliation, and they were both consulted about it. The Irish question has become a legitimate and serious issue in the Atlantic relationship between London and Washington.

The responsible interest of American leaders is welcome. Less welcome is the exploitation of the issue by a few less distinguished politicians. Violent men in Ireland invoke their names as certifying their own respectability and as an indication of support for their cause. The votes of Americans should not be purchased at the expense of Irish lives.

The European Community, because of its name, because of its primary historic commitment to reconciling the enmities of generations of Europeans and averting the recurrence of armed conflict, could not stand aside from the conflict between two of its own peoples. Several European leaders have expressed concern and interest. It is my hope that the European parliament will soon hold a full-scale debate on the issue, and that the Community will match America's generous incentive to peace.

The interest of the United States and of the European Community in Northern Ireland is historically inevitable and perfectly legitimate. This need not involve direct intervention or support for particular partisan policies. It should be taken as an encouragement by London, by Dublin and by parties in Northern Ireland to have the courage to resolve this old quarrel that involves them all.