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PAUL ARTHUR

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- 1 The People's Democracy 1968-73. Published Belfast 1974.
- 2 The Government and Politics of Northern Ireland. Published by Longmans, London 1980.

As a political analyst Mr. Arthur has written on Ireland for several journals and is a reviewer of books.

FOR: WHELAN

FROM: COLLINS

AS DISCUSSED TEXT OF ARTICLE
BY P. ARTHUR SCHEDULED FOR
NEXT WEEKS NYTIMES

M. (name) 23/7

Proposed Op-Ed piece by Mr. Paul Arthur on Northern Ireland

"I long for the time when I can go to the United States and say, look at what we have accomplished. We've got political stability and put some money in". This is what James Prior, Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary, told a London newspaper last February. Mr. Prior finally visited the United States last week but is political stability any closer in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Prior is Britain's sixth Secretary of State with responsibility for Northern Ireland in a decade. He inherited a very tense security problem because of the IRA hunger strike but he managed to end it successfully. There followed in November 1981 the assassination of Rev. Robert Bradford, an Ulster Protestant member of the British Parliament, by the outlawed Provisional Irish Republican Army. In retaliation Rev. Ian Paisley formed a "Third Force", an unofficial militia of hardline Protestants. Once again civil war became a real possibility in Ulster. But Prior proved unflappable and decisive in defusing a very dangerous situation.

On the economic front Prior has worked mightily but with very limited success. Last January he extracted an extra 90 million pounds from the parsimonious British Exchequer for the financial year but it has only been a drop in the ocean. "The Northern Ireland economy is not in recession", he concedes. "It is actively in decline". With about 1 in 4 of the province's adult males unemployed (higher percentage of Catholics) he has a monumental task. But while he can be given high marks for crisis management and praise for his

efforts to help the economy Mr. Prior has done little to achieve the more important goal of political stability.

Every British Government to date has failed to achieve an internal political settlement in Northern Ireland because they cannot persuade the political leaders of the two thirds Protestant majority to share power with the one third Catholic minority. Prior hoped to succeed where others had failed by offering an elected Assembly, composed of both Protestants and Catholics, a shot of real powers over matters of great local concern which are now exclusively London's province. With these inducements he hoped to turn ^esetarian foes into common allies. The first atage of Mr. Prior's plan will be an election for a 78-seat Assembly next October. Initially the Assembly will scrutinize the British Government's policies on Northern Ireland but if there is enough cross community agreement between the Nationalist Catholic population (who identify with the Republic of Ireland and aspire to a united Ireland) and the Protestant Unionist community (who staunchly support the link between Northern Ireland and Britain) then genuine authority would be given to the new Assembly. But Prior's proposals can't and won't work. His plan is gravely flawed.

The British Government themselves have quite correctly stated that the clash of identity and aspiration between the Nationalist and Unionist communities goes to the heart of the problem in Northern Ireland. Recognition of the differing

identities and aspirations should be the key elements on which a solution is based.

Ulster politicians are concerned with the fundamental problem of national allegiance and they will not set that concern aside to work together on economic or social issues. Only the non-sectarian Alliance Party (the fourth largest in the province) has shown any enthusiasm for Prior's proposals. Even a section of Prior's Conservative Party mounted a filibuster against the bill in the British Parliament last month. Furthermore an increasing number of critics believe that the whole exercise has deflected what appears to be a promising effort to break down decades of suspicion between London and Dublin, an effort that would bring the full weight of authority of both the British and Irish Government to bear on the problem of the North. Finally the Assembly idea may give a new lease of life to the IRA's political wing Sinn Fein which will now be able to contest the Assembly elections on the platform that modern nationalism has failed to secure any real powers for nationalists in Northern Ireland.

So what for the future? Clearly the prospects of the proposed new Assembly in Northern Ireland offer little if any hope of stability in Northern Ireland and may indeed be an opportunity for a naked power play not only by the IRA extremists but also from Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party. It is worthwhile recalling that in 1980 and again in 1981 the Irish and British Governments embarked on the development of better relations between the two countries and between Northern Ireland and

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the Republic and agreed on the need to further this relationship in the interests of peace and reconciliation. It is only through the development of this relationship that long term peace and stability in Northern Ireland can be achieved. All parties to the issue - Dublin, London and Belfast - must eventually sit down and work together to achieve a solution.