

Constitutional Uncertainty and Political Deadlock: Overcoming Unionist Intransigence in Northern Ireland

by
William A. Hazleton

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-five years of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, commonly known as “the Troubles,” have presented the United Kingdom with the challenge of devising arrangements that give voice to the population’s diverse political aspirations, yet command sufficient cross-community support to ensure their acceptance and implementation. History provides little encouragement for such an endeavor, a fact that successive British governments have recognized in distancing themselves from the conflict. Crisis management and costly subsidies have been used to contain the violence, but the larger and more important question of Northern Ireland’s constitutional and territorial status remains unresolved.

Northern Ireland’s relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom, not an anachronistic seventeenth-century religious battle between Protestant and Catholics, is the essence of this conflict, which has claimed over 3,000 lives. Persistent efforts to change the constitutional status quo, either by violent or peaceful means, has reinforced the siege mentality of the Protestant majority and contributed to the political deadlock that has prevented progress toward a political settlement.¹

As found elsewhere in the post-colonial world, Northern Ireland’s population is comprised of two groups with different cultural identities, their principal distinction being ethno-religious, i.e., Protestant and Catholic. But it is their competing political aspirations that have brought Northern Ireland’s legitimacy into question and resulted in conflict. The Protestant majority’s support for the continuation of the union with Great Britain finds expression in a variety of political affiliations ranging from the nonsectarian Alliance Party to loyalist paramilitary units, but its dominant voice has been through the Ulster Unionist and Democratic Unionist parties. Protestants, in other words, are not a monolithic bloc, nor are they necessarily of one mind on devolution, power-sharing, minority rights, and expanded cross-border cooperation. However, the one issue on which there is near unanimous agreement among Protestants is opposition to unification with the Irish Republic.

Given Northern Ireland’s historical experience, cultural differences, and competing aspirations, “the Troubles” are not solely a United Kingdom problem nor have they been treated as such. The inability of unionist and nationalist politicians to reconcile their differences has stimulated increased Anglo-Irish cooperation in a bid to bridge the impasse and bring the two communities together. An expanded role for the Republic of Ireland in determining the future of Northern Ireland is justified as making a settlement more acceptable to the nationalist minority through

the incorporation of an all-Irish dimension. Unionists, however, fear that the intention is to diminish British sovereignty and lay the groundwork for eventual withdrawal.² As London experienced with the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA), the consequences of elevating political discussions to a higher plain, and working around the question of sovereignty, are likely to yield disappointing, if not counterproductive, results.³

This article examines the cultural identity of Protestants in Northern Ireland and how its different elements have been given political expression by unionist parties, both confessional and nonsectarian. Differences between British and loyalist identities, and the rivalry between the major confessional parties, are cited in explaining part of the reason for the intransigence demonstrated by unionist leaders. Another, and more important cause, is that for most unionists, increased external involvement, especially from the Irish Republic, places not only Northern Ireland's future, but their sense of identity as Protestants at risk, thus enhancing the prospects that violence will become the most likely arbiter of the region's future.⁴ The article concludes that progress toward reducing unionist intransigence is likely only if Northern Ireland's conditional position within the United Kingdom becomes less ambiguous and is accepted as part of the framework for cross-party negotiations.

COMPETING CULTURAL IDENTITIES AND POLITICAL AFFILIATION

And we read black where others read white.
His hope the other man's damnation.
Up the rebels, to hell with the Pope.
and God Save — as you prefer — the King or Ireland.⁵

As captured in the lines of Louis MacNeice's "Autumn Journal," Northern Ireland contains two different cultural identities that many, although not all its inhabitants, regard as mutually exclusive. To the outsider, the differences are often too subtle to appreciate. Indeed, former-MP and civil rights activist Bernadette Devlin McAliskey has commented:

If you want to see racism distilled to its ultimate obscenity, you must see it practiced between two groups that any rational human being cannot tell apart. That's how it exists in Northern Ireland. They know us [i.e., Catholics] by where we live, by the schools we go to, by the detection of our accent, and by the names we have.⁶

In Northern Ireland, the importance of knowing whether someone is Protestant or Catholic stems from the prevailing, and largely accurate, presumption that religion correlates with one's position on Irish unification. In other words, religion is a crucial indicator in determining whether or not a person may share your views on the issue that fundamentally divides North Irish politics.

What is found today in Northern Ireland are two opposing, yet geographically linked ethno-political groups, whose identities have been forged from differ-

ent myths in Irish history. After decades of continuous sectarian violence, it is hard to imagine that these two groups, one Catholic and the descendants of native Gaels and the other Protestant and descended from Scot and English planters, could ever have coexisted on the same “narrow ground.” But the truth is that they have lived together, and influenced one another, for the past 300 years.⁷ The result has been that these are not two rigid and immutable blocs, traditions or communities — one Protestant, unionist, loyalist, or British and the other Catholic, nationalist, republican or Irish — that stand in total exclusion. Rather, considerable diversity and variation are found within both communities, a product of centuries of interaction.⁸

While the mixture of cultural variants offers hope for conciliation, Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society whose population is acutely aware of its cultural and political differences. According to Anthony Smith, the concept of collective cultural identity embodies “a sense of shared continuity on the part of successive generations of a given unit of population, and to shared memories of earlier periods, events and personages in the history of the unit.” From these elements derives a third: “the collective belief in a common destiny of that unit and its culture.”⁹ In certain situations, cultural identities are “forged through opposition to the identities of significant others, as the history of paired conflicts so often demonstrates.”¹⁰

The sense of continuity and belonging that individuals draw from ethno-religious communities gives their collective identity a pervasiveness, intensity, and durability that can withstand periods of dramatic change and great uncertainty. But fear and adversity can also cause cultural identities to become dangerously politicized. Bernard Crick has written that “political prudence calls for good judgement and rational calculation which is not always present when communities come to believe that their own distinctive values, indeed their very identities, are threatened by political compromise.”¹¹ For those not directly involved in Northern Ireland, it has been very difficult to appreciate the determination of Ulster Protestants and Irish Catholics to protect their respective cultural identities in a political environment where reason and rationality are continually overshadowed by insecurity and violence.

The political aspirations of the overwhelming majority of Protestants is expressed in unionism, whose central tenant is the preservation of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom. The unionist movement originated in the nineteenth century in opposition to Home Rule for Ireland.¹² When Ireland was partitioned in 1921, home rule, in effect, was granted to the six Northern counties through the creation of a devolved parliament at Stormont. Support for the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), like its early anti-partition rival, the Nationalist Party, was based almost exclusively along confessional lines, and a sizeable Protestant majority guaranteed Ulster Unionist control of Stormont governments until the imposition of direct rule in 1972.¹³

Different socioeconomic interests and political philosophies were found in unionist ranks, but the need to defend the border with the Irish Free State (later the

Republic of Ireland) made party unity a paramount objective. The border secured not only territory and political control, but a threatened sense of identity. Northern Ireland was, in the words of its first prime minister, James Craig, “a Protestant State.”¹⁴ Unionists influenced local government in areas where Protestants did not constitute a clear majority through the manipulation of electoral boundaries and restrictions on the franchise, leaving Catholics an alienated and insecure minority. Yet, underlying the arrogance and triumphalism found among many unionist politicians was the stark realization of the minority status of Protestants within Ireland as a whole.

The onset of “the Troubles” brought fragmentation and disarray to the Ulster Unionists.¹⁵ Calling for stricter security measures and rejecting reforms initiated by Prime Minister Terence O’Neill in the 1960s, hard-line Protestant dissidents began organizing around William Craig, leader of the Vanguard movement, and Dr. Ian Paisley, whose Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) was formed in 1971. Meanwhile, the UUP’s moderate wing lost strength as those favoring anti-discrimination measures and social reforms coalesced with the Northern Ireland Liberal Party to form the nonsectarian Alliance Party in 1970. Opposition to direct rule weakened the organizational ties that had historically existed between the Ulster Unionist and Conservative parties, with all remaining links being abruptly severed after the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. In 1989, the Conservatives became the only major British party to contest elections in Northern Ireland.

At present, unionism is embodied in the constitutional positions of four Northern Irish parties, plus those of a relatively small number of individuals running for elected office as Independent or Popular Unionists. The two dominant parties, the Ulster Unionist and the Democratic Unionist, are confessional (i.e., Protestant) in nature, while the smaller Alliance Party and Northern Ireland Conservatives are nonsectarian.¹⁶ While these parties differ on issues relating to closer integration with Britain, devolved government for Northern Ireland, and power-sharing with the Catholic minority, they do so within a common frame of reference; that is, Northern Ireland’s union with Great Britain remains in the province’s long-term, best interest. Thus, unionism finds expression through various political affiliations, and particularly in the case of the two main confessional parties, it is endowed with distinctive cultural characteristics.

The broader relationship between competing cultural identities and political affiliation can be found in the “dual character” of Northern Ireland’s multi-party system.¹⁷ The only issue of any importance in Northern Irish politics is the region’s constitutional status. Political opinion does not differ significantly over economic programs, educational reforms, or foreign policy (except for the border), and none of the parties, except perhaps the Northern Ireland Conservatives, can ever expect to share governmental responsibility at Westminster. Consequently, cultural identity, particularly religion, and not social class, acts as the principal mobilizing agent in Northern Ireland’s elections.

Since the position of most voters on the constitutional question is, like their religious convictions, quite firm, anti-partition parties see little advantage in wooing votes from unionists or vis-a-versa. Moreover, the confessional parties are usually reluctant to appeal across the sectarian divide.¹⁸ Therefore, real electoral competition is within each ethno-religious grouping, with the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) pitted against Sinn Fein (the political wing of the IRA) for the Catholic or nationalist vote and the UUP and DUP as the chief contenders for Protestant or unionist support.¹⁹

In such a system, the political fortunes of the smaller parties, Sinn Fein and the DUP, can only improve at the expense of their larger co-confessional rival. This creates an incentive for “ethnic outbidding” or “flanking” by adopting more strident and extremist positions. As echoed in Paisley’s cries of “not an inch” and “no surrender,” any hint of concession or compromise is branded as a sign of weakness or, worse yet, treason. This dual system tends to reduce politics in Northern Ireland to a zero-sum game.²⁰ Parties, like Alliance and the Northern Ireland Conservatives, which seek to construct a nonsectarian alternative, find themselves trapped because there is little middle ground. After consistently failing to attract significant electoral support, Alliance’s chair, Philip McGary, lamented that Northern Ireland was certainly not unique in this regard:

As a liberal concerned principally with minority and civil rights, and not emotionally attached to flags, borders, or territories, I could wish that nationalism didn’t exist. But that would be denying reality. The current events in Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia prove that nationalism (particularly when associated with religion) is one of the most potent forces in the world.²¹

PROTESTANT, BRITISH, AND LOYALIST ELEMENTS OF UNIONISM

Ulster is surrounded by enemies: the Republican enemy, both constitutional and militant within its borders, the hostile power to the South, and the governing power which is desperately looking for a way out, but which doesn’t have the moral courage to say outright what its intentions are, although we can be sure that they are not honourable.²²

This statement by a Protestant loyalist illustrates how little the landscape of “the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone” has changed since Winston Churchill vented his frustration over Ireland’s religious divisions and “the integrity of their quarrel” that resulted in the partition of Ireland.²³ However, the contest has never been strictly one of “us” and “them” in the sense that Protestants, more than Catholics, have experienced difficulty in articulating their distinctive cultural identity. Multifaceted and overlapping characteristics are found in each community, which in the context of this essay make the differences among Protestants with unionist aspirations an important question.

Steve Bruce believes that the only available source of shared identity for Ulster and Democratic Unionists is religious identification, more specifically, evangelical Protestantism; for it provides a “coherent set of ideas that explain the past, which gives them a sense of who they are, which makes them feel justifiably superior to Catholics, and which gives them hope that they will survive.”²⁴ The fundamentalist outlook of Paisley’s Free Presbyterian Church, which has been given political expression in the DUP, fits this image.²⁵ Another example is the UUP’s historic relationship with the Protestant Orange Order. Rev. Martin Smyth, Orange grand master and UUP MP, has defined the order’s mission as protesting “the unscriptural errors of the Roman Church” and has defended Orangeism’s links with his party by pointing to the Catholic Church’s powerful political voice in the Republic of Ireland.²⁶

But simply equating unionism with Protestantism ignores the fact that while religion underpins affiliation with the confessional parties, it is the constitutional and territorial issue, not theological questions, which determines Unionist policies and positions. In the early 1980s, James Molyneaux, leader of the UUP, issued an invitation to Catholics to join his party, promising that applicants would not be asked “at which altar do you worship,” but “to which nation do you wish to belong?”²⁷ While the UUP has yet to shed its confessional identity, Molyneaux has maintained that more Roman Catholics are voting for UUP candidates because they support the constitutional status quo.²⁸

Historian A.T.Q. Stewart has observed that Protestants of all persuasions have tended to close ranks against any perceived threat from the Roman Catholic population. He attributes this defensive posture to a turbulent and bloody religious past, which imbedded a siege mentality deep in the Protestant mind.²⁹ Northern Ireland’s Protestant population, however, is far from monolithic. In a survey among churchgoing Protestants in Belfast, those of liberal theological persuasion indicated they were more likely to support the UUP or Alliance than DUP, whereas conservative evangelicals decidedly favored the DUP or UUP, but not Alliance. Yet, on the crucial question of Irish unification, these Belfast Protestants were unanimous in their opposition.³⁰

As if to reinforce this position, most Protestants today classify themselves as “British.” “The Troubles” have resulted in a marked decline in the percentage of Protestants claiming to be “Irish,” although a small percentage still prefer to use “Ulstermen” or “North Irish” as a geographical point of reference.³¹ But what does it mean to be “British” in the context of living in Northern Ireland? During unionism’s formative stages it was possible to conceive of a British nation;³² however, “Britishness” is no longer associated with common nationality anywhere in the United Kingdom. Rather, being British is felt and expressed in several ways by Ulster’s Protestants. It may take the form of an affinity for Britain’s rich cultural heritage or an attachment to particular values and institutional norms associated with the British state. Or, in a purely negative sense, Britishness can profess one’s rejection of all things Irish.³³

The link with Britain that many Protestants cherish most and wish to preserve is more metaphysical than real. It idealizes the common values and institutions that Ulster shares with the rest of the United Kingdom. As unionists, they favor closer, if not total, integration with Great Britain, and their acceptance of a distinctive British culture, shared political aspirations, and territorial citizenship reflects the type of nationalism traditionally associated with the political aims of unionism. A second form of Protestant attachment to Britain is much more conditional and sectarian in nature. "Loyalists" direct their allegiance to the more symbolic manifestations of the union, i.e., the flag, the monarchy, and a Protestant line of succession, and not to British institutions or laws *per se*.

The cultural community of loyalists is Protestant Ulster, and only secondarily the United Kingdom. More akin to ethnic nationalism, loyalism contains the seeds of domination and separatism, which can be found in the desire to return to the old Stormont parliamentary system and in the violence of Protestant extremists striving for an independent Ulster. For many loyalists, "Britishness" symbolizes "non-Irishness," and as Protestant strikes and paramilitary activity demonstrate, loyalists are willing to defy London's authority in order to keep Ulster "British."³⁴ For what Protestant loyalists fear most is not the loss of British citizenship or civil liberties, but losing their ethnic identity should they ever come under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in a united Ireland.³⁵

As seen from the often confusing, if not contradictory, relationship between loyalism and being "British," there is no Protestant consensus on the nature, extent, or intensity of their cultural and political ties to mainland Britain. This creates a dilemma for Ulster Protestants. On the one hand, the Britishness felt by many, if not most, is not an impediment to incorporating the Catholic minority more fully into the political and cultural life of Northern Ireland. But on the other hand, hard-line loyalists suspect all Catholics of associating with the IRA and view any form of political accommodation as potentially dangerous. The desire for security makes the United Kingdom an attractive safe haven for Protestants, and when confronted with mounting political pressure and uncertainty, the distinction between British unionist and Ulster loyalist becomes dangerously blurred.

LONDON'S VIEW OF ULSTER

In the impatient English imagination, Ireland is unified already — a unity of intractable unreason and murderous convictions.³⁶

Mainland Britain has shown a pronounced disinterest in Northern Ireland, with much of the population either incapable of relating to the issues involved and/or preferring to ignore that sectarian terrorism is taking place in their own country. As one English commentator noted:

. . . we feel the tedium of the centuries over an issue which combines the excitement of local government with the charm of slow self-loathing. Only Ulster could make murder boring.³⁷

Britain's strategic and economic reasons for remaining in Northern Ireland have largely disappeared,³⁸ only to be replaced by the desire to avoid surrendering to IRA terrorism and initiating a sectarian bloodbath by too precipitous a withdrawal. But dwindling support for a continued British presence reflects increased public frustration with the inability of either unionists or nationalists to get down to the business of finding ways to live peacefully with one another.³⁹

Except for a dozen or so Conservative MPs,⁴⁰ mainland politicians have displayed little desire to get involved in Northern Ireland, and even during the conflict's most violent moments, it has sparked little debate in the House of Commons. Described by one observer as a "conspiracy of silence," Northern Ireland is considered "scarcely a polite subject" in British politics.⁴¹ When Parliament does take note of the situation, unionists are often condemned for their ignorance, insularity, and bigotry, which is said to be the root of their problems.⁴² Northern Irish MPs are generally dismissed as totally lackluster and inept, evidencing a single-minded preoccupation with the border which causes them to be treated more like envoys from a foreign land.⁴³ The English political establishment, which prides itself for exercising moderation and pragmatism, has not proved particularly adept at resolving the conflict, but what, they ask, could one expect given the unreasonable nature of Ulster's feuding tribes?⁴⁴ Perhaps, as former Irish Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald has observed, the English are too secure in their own national identity to fully understand or sympathize with those whose identity has been constantly called into question.⁴⁵

Britain's three main parties have endorsed the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement and remain committed to a negotiated settlement. The Conservative Party's position is that there should be no change in Northern Ireland's constitutional status without the consent of the majority. However, Tories have shown less emotional attachment to the province in recent years and increasingly regard Northern Ireland as an international rather than internal problem. On the other side of the aisle, Labour's call for a united Ireland by consent has never been spelled out in detail, primarily because it is designed to appease nationalist sympathy and demands for British withdrawal amongst Labour's constituents. Consequently, there is no clear indication how a Labour government would respond differently in Northern Ireland.⁴⁶ In early 1993, Liberal Democrats began a policy review of Northern Ireland. While the party has endorsed major constitutional reforms for parts of Great Britain, whether or not the Liberal Democrats will support devolved regional government for Northern Ireland remains open to question.⁴⁷ Northern Ireland has never been a high priority for the mainland parties, and thus the parliamentary path of least resistance has been to soldier on in search of some type of democratic settlement.

This desire to remain detached from the region is also reflected in Labour's refusal to organize in Northern Ireland, ostensibly because it is already represented by the SDLP.⁴⁸ Similarly, Liberal Democrats have preferred to stay at arms-length from the conflict by supporting Alliance. The Conservatives became the exception

after reluctantly bowing to local constituency pressure in predominantly Protestant, middle-class areas outside of Belfast. Little support has come from either John Major's government or the Conservative Central Office, and Dr. Laurence Kennedy, a leading Northern Ireland Conservative, has warned that "the fledging party could become a 'spent force' in the Province."⁴⁹ While a few commentators in England have called for a full-fledged debate, and possible referendum, on Northern Ireland,⁵⁰ the near-term prospects for a showdown on the constitutional question seem just as remote as Ulster is for most British voters and their party leaders.

NORTHERN IRELAND AS A FACTOR IN ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS

[The] larger and still outstanding question is how to achieve a settlement between two islands which will ensure good relations between them — granted that Union did not work; that the division of Ireland has not worked; and that the incorporation of Northern Ireland, or any part of it, fully within the United Kingdom cannot work.⁵¹

Twenty years ago, then Irish Prime Minister Jack Lynch made the case for an international (i.e., Irish) dimension in resolving the Northern Ireland conflict. Since then the question has become internationalized, in part because successive British governments have placed a higher priority on maintaining good relations with the Irish Republic, the United States, and the EC than on retaining sovereignty over this troublesome part of the realm. In response to international pressure for an "Irish" dimension, Whitehall and the Northern Ireland Office have carved out a role for Dublin in seeking an internal settlement, winning encouragement and support from Washington and European capitals along the way.⁵²

Finding Dublin to be more reasonable and accommodating than the warring parties in Belfast and Derry, the Thatcher Government decided Northern Ireland's political impasse could only be broken by creating a direct role for the Irish Republic in the process. The result was the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which gave Irish officials a voice in Northern Ireland's affairs through an Intergovernmental Conference. Unionists saw the AIA as the worst form of betrayal, and it mobilized the patriotic emotions of the Protestant population in near unanimous opposition. Refusing to accept the AIA diktat, "Ulster Says No" posters were plastered on lampposts and billboards, and groups of loyalists took to the streets in violent protest. UUP and DUP MPs resigned their seats at Westminster; unionist-controlled local district councils adjourned; unionist officials boycotted the Northern Ireland Office; and there were demands for a referendum on the AIA, and even a petition to the Queen.⁵³ Beyond expressions of outrage and frustration, the unionist parties could only create a political deadlock within Northern Ireland. With British public opinion overwhelmingly in support of the AIA, Thatcher found no reason for conceding to unionist pressure to terminate the Agreement.

The AIA should have alleviated some of the unionists' worst fears because in it the Irish Republic recognized what repeated British governments had prom-

ised: there would be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority. But diplomatic considerations had prevented the British and Irish governments from defining what Northern Ireland's status actually was, for the obvious reason that Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution lay territorial claim to the entire island. Moreover, the AIA had, in effect, interjected Dublin as the guarantor of the Catholic population in the North. Placed on the defensive, and without London's support, the UUP and DUP saw withholding cooperation as the only means for preserving the status quo. But outside Protestant Ulster, their refusal to accept the AIA was perceived as a unionist "veto" that should not be allowed to stand in the way of new initiatives.

What London and Dublin apparently expected in signing the AIA was that self-interest would lead unionist politicians to accept a larger role for the Catholic minority in determining Northern Ireland's future, and to recognize that the Republic had a legitimate interest in Northern Ireland's affairs. But with most Protestants and Catholics paying allegiance to two different sovereign entities, there could be no consensus on internal power-sharing arrangements, or means for enhancing North-South Irish cooperation, because of their constitutional and territorial implications. Although not opposed to exploring alternatives to direct rule, unionist long-term objectives were predicated on preserving the link with the United Kingdom, whereas SDLP and the Irish Republic saw change and reform as transitory rather than permanent, with gradual movement toward an all-Ireland solution.

Unionist participation was further complicated by London's neutral stance and its self-professed desire to serve as an "honest broker" in negotiations even though a portion of its own national territory was the central issue. Long distrustful of the South's territorial aspirations, unionist and Protestant loyalist leaders seriously questioned British intentions and resolve. The SDLP and Sinn Fein, although surely not convinced of Britain's altruism, interpreted this move as a hopeful sign that Britain, under continuing pressure, might eventually give up and withdraw. Thus, without a firm commitment from Britain to assure the majority in Northern Ireland that they could remain part of the United Kingdom, or from the Republic to rescind Articles 2 and 3, the region's contested status was freely exploited by loyalist and republican gunmen who believe that violence rather than political accommodation is the only way to break the constitutional logjam.

CONFRONTING UNIONIST INTRANSIGENCE

Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die;
everyone wants to talk about an agreement, but no one wants to
agree.⁵⁴

With considerable diplomatic persuasion, Peter Brooke, secretary of state for Northern Ireland, coaxed the unionist parties to end their self-imposed exile and engage in cross-party talks on the region's future. While promising neutrality and no hidden British agenda to gain SDLP's confidence, Brooke succeeded in

overcoming unionist demands for the prior termination of the AIA through two important concessions: a temporary suspension in the Agreement's Intergovernmental Conference and a willingness to consider alternatives to the AIA.⁵⁵ But even after the talks began in 1991, the specter of the AIA severely constrained the unionists' negotiating positions on devolved arrangements and future links with the South.

Prior to the Agreement, the return of a Northern Ireland parliament to Stormont, with legislative and administrative responsibilities, was the general preference of most Protestants. But when the AIA allocated a special role to the Irish Republic in establishing such an arrangement, devolution quickly lost much of its appeal, particularly among UUP members. As one such critic, Robert McCartney, explained:

At the center of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is a devolution core. It has been used as bait for the Unionists. You want a devolved government, you can have [one] but it must be with the consent the SDLP and in accordance with a modality approved by the government of the Republic of Ireland. . . . It's dawning on an increasing number of Unionists that devolution is the kiss of death.⁵⁶

Devolution under majority rule still held an attraction for the DUP, and certain elements of the UUP; however, rather than accept "the bait," pro-devolution unionists wanted to replace the AIA so as to exclude the Republic from determining how it would be institutionalized. The problem was that Britain, having sought the Irish government's participation, had no intention of rescinding its invitation.

Other unionists had long supported the integration of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom. After the AIA, this position gained increased support within the UUP and, for obvious reasons, was attractive to Northern Ireland Conservatives. Integration would involve ending the practice of special legislation for Northern Ireland through Orders of Council at Westminster, establishing a parliamentary select committee for Northern Ireland, having the principal British parties contest elections in Ulster, and giving locally elected authorities the same administrative powers as their counterparts in Britain.⁵⁷ The principal obstacle facing integrationists has always been the British political establishment's reluctance to forge closer ties with Ulster out of concern for nationalist opposition and the foreign policy implications for Anglo-Irish and Anglo-American relations.

The lack of workable alternatives, be they devolutionist or integrationist, and visible divisions of opinion within Protestant ranks engendered a lack of unionist enthusiasm for the on-again, off-again, Brooke talks. Keeping to the sidelines and doing nothing proved a strong temptation, particularly when active participation ran the risk of accepting the AIA as a fact of life. When Brooke's initiative collapsed after a few months, most pinned the blame on unionist intransigence, and UUP and DUP leaders found public opinion in Northern Ireland, Britain, and the Republic overwhelmingly in favor of an early resumption of the talks.⁵⁸ But public pressure alone did not bring the unionists back to the table. The Conservative government

began to express its commitment to uphold the constitutional link with Northern Ireland more openly, a move which allayed some of the anxiety and suspicion felt by Protestants.⁵⁹ After the 1992 general election, the appointment of Sir Patrick Mayhew to succeed Brooke at the Northern Ireland Office was seen as offering further encouragement to unionist politicians.⁶⁰

When the talks resumed under Mayhew's direction, the most visible sign of unionist flexibility was their willingness to meet with Irish ministers in Belfast. Molyneaux and his UUP team took the historic step of attending similar meetings in Dublin, but Paisley and the DUP negotiators decided not to go at the last minute citing the party's opposition to Articles 2 and 3. Attempting to capitalize on Protestant prejudice, DUP Press Spokesman Sammy Wilson criticized the UUP decision and called on Molyneaux to "remove the Lundy's [i.e., traitors] from the table before they [did] any more damage to Ulster."⁶¹ The talks ended in November 1992. While Molyneaux and others referred to an improved climate and better channels of communication, the participants were painfully aware that fundamental differences on a devolved government, relations between the North and South, and the replacement of the AIA prevented any comprehensive agreement.⁶²

To a noticeable degree, the gulf separating the two sides widened during the talks. SDLP proposals for a joint authority over Northern Ireland, which included the appointment of commissioners by Britain, Ireland, and the EC, brought negative responses not only from the UUP and DUP, but also from the Alliance Party because it involved a "major change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom."⁶³ Similarly condemned were the Irish Republic's call for new institutions having executive functions for the development of North-South cooperation and Dublin's unwillingness to concede the possibility of a referendum on Articles 2 and 3 of its constitution. Ken Maginnis, UUP MP and a participant in the talks, attacked both the SDLP and Irish ministers for their intransigence, claiming:

there wasn't the slightest vestige of good will or magnanimity from either Nationalist delegation. The Dublin contingent were, and still are, entrenched in a 1937 timewarp.⁶⁴

Paisley predictably blamed failure on the SDLP, Dublin, and London, insisting that the talks were finished unless the offending articles were removed from the Irish Constitution. Although Albert Reynolds, the Irish prime minister, has hinted that changes in the constitution might be part of an overall agreement, he remains a stalwart defender of the Republic's territorial claim, preferring to encourage Britain to accept Irish unity as a long-term solution.⁶⁵ However one might wish to gloss over the issue, Articles 2 and 3 rest at the heart of the conflict between unionists and nationalists. For as one Irish critic has said, the preservation of these articles puts the Dublin government and the IRA "horribly, on the same side in this issue of constitutional territoriality."⁶⁶

While unionists remain intransigent in their opposition to the diminution of British sovereignty at Northern Ireland's expense, the talks yielded several propos-

als from the UUP. In a Final Paper, the Ulster Unionists put on the table a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, a Northern Ireland administrative assembly where the SDLP could have a "meaningful" role, and an Inter-Irish Relations Committee that would provide a formal link between the new assembly and the *Oireachtas* in Dublin.⁶⁷ While outstanding differences would have to be overcome in each area, the UUP did respond to nationalist concerns regarding minority rights, a role for the SDLP in the administration of Northern Ireland, and the forging of closer and more visible ties with the Republic of Ireland. An *Irish Times* editorial described the Ulster Unionist's proposals as a "significant" departure, and the Fine Gael opposition leader, John Burton, deemed them worthy of serious consideration.⁶⁸

The Final Paper also indicated a growing acceptance by the UUP of a devolved administration, in which both sides could work toward their respective interests. Though its advocates prefer the term "responsibility-sharing" to "power-sharing," the idea is essentially the same, some form of coalition structure involving minority participation.⁶⁹ In addition, the Alliance Party, Northern Ireland Conservatives, and groups like the Campaign for Equal Citizenship and the Campaign for Labour Representation have provided alternative channels for unionist initiatives on ending direct rule and protecting minority rights in Northern Ireland.

These developments, of course, do not mean that hard-line advocates like Ian Paisley have ceased to be a force in unionist circles or that Ulster Protestant politics has lost its distinctively confessional character, but rather that unionist "intransigence" is confined primarily to the constitutional question. It does not exclude political interaction and cooperation between the Protestant majority and Catholic minority in a variety of areas or between the North and South of Ireland. The vast majority of Protestants recognize that these are necessary ingredients for restoring peace and stability. What they have insisted upon, however, is that all the participants respect the constitutional legitimacy of Northern Ireland.

For unionists, the AIA marked the beginning of a very different relationship with Britain that demanded the reformulation of past policies and approaches. Belatedly perhaps, and certainly cautiously, unionist parties have indicated an increased willingness to discuss alternatives that would secure minority rights and participation within Northern Ireland and promote contacts between both parts of the island. While pockets of diehard resistance will surely persist, Ulster Protestants are unlikely to turn their backs on the need for change and reform so long as they feel reasonably secure about their collective future within the United Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

By early summer 1993, pressure was again building in London and Dublin for the resumption of cross-party talks. This development would, no doubt, be greeted as a sign of progress, but the prospects for achieving a breakthrough in negotiations is virtually nonexistent as long as the participants are fundamentally divided over Northern Ireland's constitutional status. While Britain has granted the

province the unusual right of secession, a majority of the population has consistently refused to exercise it. This has not deterred the SDLP and Irish government from challenging the status quo by pressing for joint Anglo-Irish sovereignty and the possible involvement of the European Community in running Northern Ireland. The intentions behind such proposals are highly specious in that there is absolutely no reason for assuming that the Protestant majority could voluntarily abandon their link with the United Kingdom. As one nationalist from Derry admitted, Protestants see the diminution of British sovereignty not as a political or economic issue, but as one in which their existence is at stake, and a united Ireland is considered the "equivalent to extinction."⁷⁰

As "the Troubles" drag on, fear and insecurity increasingly haunt Ulster Protestants. They see themselves as isolated, vulnerable, beleaguered, unfairly discriminated against, and in physical and cultural retreat. Protestant Church leaders repeatedly warn that the frustration and alienation felt by their members, while not a justification, is contributing to the rising level of loyalist violence.⁷¹ Edna Longley goes even further in describing a "mood of Protestant apocalypse," which can be detected in the withdrawal of Protestants from border areas and "in the quite widespread gloomy defeatism, as well as in the dangerous paramilitary escalation."⁷² Lending credence to this characterization was a Belfast newspaper poll in April 1993, in which 42 percent of the Protestant respondents said they supported loyalist violence.⁷³

Political deadlock in Northern Ireland can only be broken by addressing nationalist grievances and unionist concerns in a constructive manner. This involves providing greater justice, equity and specific guarantees for the minority and greater constitutional certainty and security for the majority. Rejecting Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom does not bring Irish unity any closer, unless Great Britain is willing to relinquish its sovereignty without the consent of the Protestant majority. If Britain is not contemplating a unilateral withdrawal, negotiating proposals and violence to achieve this end will only reinforce the besieged mentality and intransigence of Protestants.

What is needed are not different devices to talk around sovereignty, but a willingness on the part of London, Dublin, and the Northern Irish parties to face up to the constitutional question, for it is here that unionist intransigence and nationalist resistance meet head on. Accepting the unionist position and recognizing the constitutional status quo in Northern Ireland does not have to mean ultimate victory or defeat for either side, although it would surely be heralded as such in many quarters. Rather, it could be an important step forward in creating internal political arrangements that, given time, may bring about the stability and tolerance necessary for long-term solutions to the Irish question. But as long as Northern Ireland's constitutional position is allowed to remain ambiguous, it will impede conciliation between Ulster's two ethno-political communities and will be shamelessly exploited by extremists and paramilitaries to no one's advantage.

Endnotes

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1992 International Studies Association meeting. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Robert Bell and Yvonne Murphy in the Political Collection of the Linen Hall Library at Belfast.

1. See John A. Oliver, "Constitutional Uncertainty and the Ulster Tragedy," *Political Quarterly*, 59 (October-December 1988), pp. 427-36.
2. John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, "Northern Ireland's Future: What is to be Done?" *Conflict Quarterly*, 10, no. 3 (Summer 1990), p. 54; Adrian Guelke and Frank Wright, "The Option of a 'British Withdrawal' from Northern Ireland: an Exploration of its Meaning, Influence, and Feasibility," *Conflict Quarterly*, 10, no. 4 (Fall 1990), pp. 58-59.
3. Tom Wilson, *Ulster: Conflict and Consent* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 199-200; Michael J. Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland 1969-89: Its Nature and Execution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 194.
4. See Adrian Guelke, "British Policy and International Dimensions of the Northern Ireland Conflict," *Regional Politics and Policy*, 1, no. 2 (1991), p. 158; Bernard Crick, "For Now, Irish Unity is a Step too Far," *The Independent* (London), 9 June 1993, p. 25; and Conor Cruise O'Brien, "First Remove the Offending Articles," *The Independent* (London), 11 June 1993, p. 26.
5. Louis MacNeice, "Autumn Journal," *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 132.
6. Laurie Udesky, "The Progressive Interview: Bernadette Devlin," *The Progressive*, July 1990, p. 32.
7. A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), pp. 180-81; also see Maurice Hayes, *Whither Cultural Diversity?* (Belfast: Community Relations Council, 1993), p. 14.
8. See Simon Lee, "Lost for Words," *Fortnight*, 316 (April 1993), pp. 22-25.
9. Anthony D. Smith, "National Identity and the Idea of European Unity," *International Affairs*, 68 (January 1992), p. 58.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
11. Bernard Crick, "The High Price of Peace," *History Today*, 41 (October 1990), p. 7; also see David Welsh, "Domestic Politics and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival*, 31 (Spring 1993), pp. 66-67.
12. See Peter Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism: The Formation of Popular Protestant Politics and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975); D.C. Savage, "The Origins of the Ulster Unionist Party, 1885-6," *Irish Historical Studies*, 12 (March 1961), pp. 185-208; and Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster Party: Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, 1884-1911* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
13. See John F. Harbinson, *The Ulster Unionist Party, 1882-1973: Its Development and Organization* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1973).
14. Cited in Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London: Athlone Press, 1993), p. 107.
15. See Sydney Elliott, "Voting Systems and Political Parties in Northern Ireland," in Brigid Hadfield, ed., *Northern Ireland: Politics and the Constitution* (Buckingham, England: Open University Press, 1992), pp. 76-93; and Ian McAllister, "Political Parties: Traditional and Modern," in John Darby, ed., *Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1983), pp. 61-78.
16. As measured by the percentage of votes won in the 1992 Westminster parliamentary elections, the parties rank as follows: UUP (34.5 percent), DUP (13.1 percent), Alliance (8.7 percent) and NI Conservative (5.7 percent). See Rick Wilford, "The 1992 Westminster Election in Northern Ireland," *Irish Political Studies*, 7 (1992), p. 107.
17. See Ian McAllister and Sarah Nelson, "Modern Developments in Northern Ireland's Party System," *Parliamentary Affairs*, 32 (Summer 1979), pp. 279-316.

18. A notable exception occurred in the 1992 Westminster parliamentary election for West Belfast when Dr. Joe Hendron, the SDLP candidate, persuaded enough unionists to vote tactically to unseat Gerry Adams, the president of Sinn Fein.
19. See Paul Mitchell, "Conflict Regulation and Party Competition in Northern Ireland," *European Journal of Political Research*, 20 (July 1991), pp. 67-92; Michael Diskin, *The Development of Party Competition Among Unionists in Ulster, 1966-82* (Strathclyde, Scotland: University of Strathclyde Centre for the Study of Public Policy, no. 129, 1984); Cynthia Irvin and Eddie Moxon-Browne, "Not Many Floating Voters Here," *Fortnight*, 295 (May 1991), pp. 7-9; and Brendan O'Leary, "More Green, Fewer Orange," *Fortnight*, 281 (February 1990), pp. 12-15.
20. See Welsh, "Domestic Politics," p. 68.
21. Philip McGary, "Bloc-ed Thinking," *Fortnight*, 316 (April 1993), p. 27.
22. "Alternative Ulster," *Warrior* (Belfast), March 1993, p. 9.
23. See Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1918-1928: The Aftermath* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 336.
24. Steve Bruce, "Prods and Taigs: The Sectarian Divide," *Fortnight*, 243 (7 July-7 September 1986), p. 6.
25. See Steve Bruce, *God Save Ulster!* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
26. Martin Smyth, "The Meaning of the Twelfth," *Fortnight*, 130 (July 1976), p. 5.
27. James Molyneaux, "An Invitation to Ulster Unionism," *Fortnight*, 198 (October 1983), p. 4.
28. Interview with James Molyneaux, House of Commons, London, 29 June 1993.
29. A.T.Q. Stewart, "The Mind of Protestant Ulster," in David Watt, ed., *The Constitution of Northern Ireland: Problems and Prospects* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 34-38.
30. Fred Boal, John A. Campbell, and David N. Livingstone, "The Protestant Mosaic: Majority of Minorities," in Patrick J. Roache and Brian Barton, eds., *The Northern Ireland Question: Myth and Reality* (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1991), p. 128.
31. See Edward Moxon-Browne, "National Identity in Northern Ireland," in Peter Stringer and Gillian Robinson, eds., *Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland, 1990-91 ed.* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1991), p. 25.
32. See Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (October 1992), pp. 309-29.
33. See Arthur Aughey, "Recent Interpretations of Unionism," *Political Quarterly*, 61 (April-June 1990), p. 191; and Jennifer Todd, "The Limits of Britishness," *The Irish Review*, 5 (Autumn 1988), pp. 11-16.
34. See Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
35. See Jennifer Todd, "Two Traditions in Unionist Political Culture," *Irish Political Studies*, 2 (1987), pp. 1-26; and Anthony D. Smith, "The Ethnic Sources of Nationalism," *Survival*, 31 (Spring 1993), pp. 55-59.
36. Bryan Appleyard, "Ireland's Voice is being Drowned by the Din of Myth," *The Sunday Times*, (London), 26 January 1992, p. 2.
37. Edward Pearce, "One Long Piece of Perplexity," *Fortnight*, 307 (June 1991), p. 15.
38. This has been recognized by both SDLP and Sinn Fein. See "Nationalists Remain Split Over Bullet or the Ballot Box," *The Independent* (London), 19 May 1993, p. 4.
39. "British Trapped by Historical Ties to Ulster," *The Independent* (London), 12 November 1992, p. 6; see also Guelke and Wright, "The Option of a 'British Withdrawal'," pp. 51-72, on the meaning, scenarios, and likely consequences of withdrawal.
40. See Conor O'Clery, "After the Vote, What Will Thatcher Do Now?" *Fortnight*, 233 (10-23 February 1986), pp. 13-14; and Richard Ford, "Speaking to a Sea of Green," *Fortnight*, 303 (February 1992), p. 25.

Summer 1993

41. Appleyard, "Ireland's Voice," p. 2.
42. See Charles Moore, "A Question of Allegiance," *The Spectator*, 13 July 1991, pp. 18-19.
43. See Matthew Parris, "The Irish Question," *The Spectator*, 25 January 1992, p. 6; and Ford, "Speaking to a Sea," p. 24.
44. For example, see Ben Whitaker, "The Human Right to Intervene," *New Statesman & Society*, 5 February 1993, p. 29.
45. Garret FitzGerald, "Thoughts on Two Cultures: Learning to Live Together," Annual Memorial Lecture, David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies, London, 25 February 1988, pp. 10-11.
46. See Paul Arthur, "Labour's Policy," *Fortnight*, 218 (29 April 1985), pp. 11 and 18; Paul Dixon, "Labouring Under an Illusion?" *Fortnight*, 303 (February 1992), pp. 21-22; Paul Dixon, "McNamara: The Rhinoceros Solution," *Fortnight*, 304 (March 1992), pp. 20-22; and Ralph Atkins, "Ulster is Well Over the Horizon," *Fortnight*, 303 (February 1992), p. 23.
47. See David Steele and David Alton, "The Liberal Interpretation," *Fortnight*, 251 (May 1987), pp. 6-7; and Nicholas Whyte, "Rethinking," *Fortnight*, 315 (March 1993), p. 11.
48. SDLP MPs take the Labour whip at Westminster. See Hugh Roberts, "Sound Stupidity: The British Party System and the Northern Ireland Question," in John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, eds., *The Future of Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 100-36.
49. "Top Tory Lashes Mayhew," *Newsletter* (Belfast), 22 May 1993, p. 8.
50. See Parris, "The Irish Question," p. 6; and Edward Gorman, "Laying Down the Law Could Offer Route to Peace," *The Times* (London), 20 January 1992, p. 2.
51. John M. Lynch, "The Anglo-Irish Problem," *Foreign Affairs*, 50 (July 1972), p. 613.
52. Guelke, "British Policy," p. 148.
53. See A.T.Q. Stewart, "The Siege of Ulster," *The Spectator*, 11 January 1986, p. 16; James Downey, "London: Soldiering On," *Fortnight*, 256 (November 1987), pp. 15-16; John Harbinson, "The High Price of Council Suspensions," *Fortnight*, 236 (24 March - 20 April 1986), pp. 10-11; and James Naughtie, "The View from the Other End of the Telescope," *Fortnight*, 245 (November 1986), pp. 4-6.
54. Interview with Rev. John Bach, Church of Ireland Chaplain, University of Ulster, Coleraine, 26 November 1991.
55. See Paul Arthur, "The Brooke Initiative," *Irish Political Studies*, 7 (1992), pp. 111-15.
56. Cited in Padriag O'Malley, *Northern Ireland: Questions of Nuance* (Belfast, Blackstaff Press, 1990), p. 28.
57. See J. Enoch Powell, "Slam the Door, Enforce the Union," *The Spectator*, 25 January 1992, p. 18.
58. See Brendan O'Leary, "Then Talk Some More," *Fortnight*, 298 (September 1991), pp. 18-19.
59. See Paul Bew, "Changed Tory Policy Holds Key to Unionists' New-Found Courage," *The Irish Times* (Dublin), 9 July 1992, pp. 12-13.
60. See "Profile: Sir Patrick Mayhew, MP, Attorney-in-Question," *The Independent* (London), 29 June 1993, p. 16.
61. *Belfast Telegraph*, 26 October 1992, p. 12.
62. See *The Financial Times* (London), 11 November 1992, p. 12; *The Times* (London) 11 November 1992, p. 10; and *The Guardian* (London), 12 November 1992, p. 8.
63. John Alderdice, head of the Alliance negotiating team, cited in *The Irish Times* (Dublin), 10 December 1992, p. 9.
64. Ken Maginnis, "Reynolds Spiked the Cocktails," *Newsletter* (Belfast), 29 March 1993, p. 10.
65. See "Reynolds Defends Ireland's Record on Fighting Terrorists," *The Independent* (London), 2 April 1993, p. 3.

66. Peter Cunningham, "Dreaming of Ireland as Children are Coffined," *The Guardian* (London), 24 March 1993, p. 18.
67. See *An Ulster Unionist Paper to Clarify and Develop Issues Arising from Bi-Lateral Discussion with the Irish Republic's Government and the S.D.L.P.* [Belfast: photocopied, n.d.].
68. Editorial, *The Irish Times* (Dublin), 22 May 1993, p. 13; and "Burton Calls for a Fresh Look at Unionist Peace Plan," *The Irish Times* (Dublin), 26 March 1993, p. 5.
69. Interview with Christopher McGimpsey, Ulster Unionist Party, Coleraine, November, 29, 1992.
70. Frank Currans testimony before the Opsahl Commission, cited in Lionel Shriver, "Derry's (Various) Heirs," *Fortnight*, 315 (March 1993), p. 26.
71. See "Protestants Haunted by British Withdrawal," *The Independent* (London), 9 January 1993, p. 4; "Protestant Fear Used as a Excuse for Killing," *The Independent* (London), 12 May 1993, p. 2; Lionel Shriver, "Role Reversals," *Fortnight*, 316 (April 1993), pp. 28-31; and Steve Bruce, "Alienation Once Again," *Fortnight*, 317 (May 1993), pp. 18-19.
72. Edna Longley, "Challenging Complacency," *Fortnight*, 315 (March 1993), p. 23.
73. *Newsletter* (Belfast), 1 April 1993, p. 1.