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**Northern Ireland since 1968 - Problems without  
Solutions ?**

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## 1. Semester, Lehramt an berufsbildenden Schulen

**Contents**

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Important Aspects.....	5
2.1. Understanding " <i>the Northern Irish Problem</i> "....	5
2.2. About Unionists and Nationalists.....	6
2.3. Figures.....	8
3. The Stormont Era.....	8
3.1. The Basis for the new State.....	8
3.2. The Civil Rights Movement.....	10
4. Direct Rule.....	12
5. Interruptions.....	13
5.1. The 1974 Power-sharing Executive.....	13
5.2. The 1975 Constitutional Convention.....	15
5.3. Searching Consensus by a tough Policy.....	15
6. Rolling Devolution.....	16
7. The New Ireland Forum 1973/74.....	17
8. The Anglo- Irish Agreement.....	18
8.1. General Restrictions.....	19
8.2. Reactions.....	19
8.3. Results.....	20
9. New Initiatives since 1985.....	21
9.1. The Brooke Initiative.....	21
9.2. The Mayhew Initiative.....	22
9.3. Latest Developments.....	23
10. Future Prospects.....	24
11. Conclusion.....	26
11.1. Comparison with successful Settlements.....	26
11.2. The Roots of the Problems.....	27
11.3. Successes.....	28
11.4. Remaining Problems.....	29
12. Tables.....	31
13. Bibliography.....	33

## **1. Introduction**

The troubles in Northern Ireland have kept the British government in suspense for almost thirty years now and still no durable solution has been found. For a long time the conflict has only been seen as a religious one caused by the different denominations of the people living in the northern part of the Irish island.

At the latest in 1968 politicians as well as scientists recognised that the troubles were not only locally important but generally influenced any relationship within the European Community and those between Great Britain and the USA. Since that time international scientific research has been set over the province of Ulster to deliver data on the roots of the problems, the situation of the Catholic population, education and economy and to find a basis for a long-term solution for durable peace and stability there.

Today a huge number of books and essays provide several approaches to the topic of Northern Ireland. In general writers try to explain the historical events which lead to the conflict. They show each important initiative since 1968 and comment on the reason of failure. In all those books authors examine possible solutions to the problems, but none has been practicable yet. Eventually it is very difficult to find a homogeneous line of argumentation throughout available literature. Quality very much depends on from which view scientists have a look at the conflict.

I especially concentrated on the question which pro-proposals have been introduced to Northern Ireland since 1968, which aspect of the problems they were supposed to change and which positions the involved parties held in the negotiations. My aim will be to explain why those

initiatives had to fail anyway in the context of the political situation in Ulster. For that purpose it could be helpful to compare some political settlements to achievements which have been reached on the continent and to stress the differences of the nature of the conflicts in the Province and in other European countries.

I decided to work on my question from the internal approach being supported by using material provided by native Northern Irishmen mainly.

Dermot Quinn, author of the book "Understanding Northern Ireland" is a native and professor in the Department of History at Seton Hall University, New Jersey, USA. Seamus Dunn is Professor of Education and Director of the Centre for the Study of Conflict at the University of Ulster at Coleraine. He has been much involved in research into many aspects of the conflict.

John Darby is Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of Ulster and Director of the Joint International Programme on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity. His books can be found in any bibliography on the topic of Northern Ireland. As a last author I would like to mention John Whyte. He taught in the Political Science Department of the Queen's University of Belfast from 1966 to 1984 and was Professor of Politics at University College in Dublin from 1984 until his death in 1990. He published a number of books which cannot be left out in any bibliography.

The first part of my essay is supposed to explain some fundamental terms occurring constantly in any research on this topic. Then I considered it important to give a short summary of the situation in Northern Ireland from 1920 to 1968 to stress the factors which lead to the breakout of open violence on the streets of Belfast and Londonderry. My analysis will follow the sequence of negotiations on political settlements until the 1990's and line out special concerns of each party in the

conflict. At the end the reader should get an overall view on possible future prospects in Northern Ireland as well as improvements since 1968 and remaining problems for the governments of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland to provide long-term peace in the troubled country.

## **2. Important Aspects**

### **2.1. Understanding "*the Northern Irish Problem*"**

With reference to John Darby's publication in "Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland" the term "*the Northern Irish problem*" is widely used all over the world although there is no clear general definition of the meaning. Darby states the word "problem" indicates that there is a simple solution to it, but history has proved the opposite to that. In other words *the problem* is not only a problem in the narrow sense but a set of interrelated difficulties which affect each other.

First of all there is the question about the constitutional status and the political context for the region with integration in the UK, unity with the Republic or independence as possible options. Constant social and economic inequalities in the field of employment and housing form the second difficulty in the long list to follow. Thirdly has the problem of cultural identity connected with education, the Irish language and more general variances in habits to be taken into consideration when looking closer at divided communities. The problems of security and religious difference complete the list to only one missing factor which is the relation between the people in everyday life.

None of the aspects does clearly dominate the others and what makes the situation even more complicated is that

all have to be paid attention to when searching any political solution for Ulster.

## **2.2. About Unionists and Nationalists**

Going deeper into the problem requests basic understanding of terminology used in literature, politics, national and international negotiations and everyday speak either, although there are different terms for one thing anywhere.

Broadly speaking the society of Northern Ireland consists of two antagonistic groups. One is referred to as "nationalists", which include the Catholic minority being original Irish and seeing themselves not as British. They are represented by the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) which want to achieve the unification of Ireland by consent. Therefore they consider power-sharing as a long-term step towards a united Ireland, demanding any agreement being accompanied by an all-Irish political institution or a so-called "Irish dimension". The party campaigns for internal reforms. As a counterpart there is Sinn Féin as the political arm of the Provisional IRA, which think that force will be necessary to remove British troops from Ulster's streets. Sinn Féin has not been involved into any political talks until 1993.

The second group is named "unionists" or "loyalists", they are loyal to the Queen of England and traditionally opposed to any institution which might lead to a united Ireland. Thus they have consistently ruled out any all-Ireland political establishment.

When Ireland had been brought under English control in the 17th century the land had been distributed to colonists from Britain. Those were understandably

Protestants and then formed a majority in the northern counties of the Irish island. To secure their position they discriminated against the Catholics and a gap developed and deepened more and more.

Protestants are represented by several parties such as the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) under James Molyneaux and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) under Ian Paisley. Equally to the nationalist side there are some paramilitary organisations. The most important is probably the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) which has killed many Catholics and has been instrumental in organising the general strike in 1974 which destroyed the power-sharing settlement.

In conclusion paramilitaries on both sides do not fight for "their religion", they only represent an alternative source of authority to the churches. Not very seldom do they have a youth force and special women corps either. To a certain extent they are feared, violent men that fight in the streets.

The next issue it is important to concentrate on are the positions of the two states which Northern Ireland lies inbetween. The United Kingdom considers it part of the UK and this opinion is shared by all parties. Only Labour supports Irish unity when a majority demands it. Recent talks aim the establishment of devolution with power-sharing between both groups. They more and more concede Dublin the right to be consulted on Northern Irish affairs.

The constitution of the Irish Republic claims Ulster as original Irish territory referring to articles two and three. Indeed they signed and accepted the Anglo-Irish agreement that weakened the claim to a certain degree.

To specify the character of the relationships around Northern Ireland they can be explained as a kind of triangle between the Republic, the UK and Ulster itself. Each nation has a certain right to be involved into

finding a long-term solution, but the more parties are responsible for one issue the more different opinions will probably occur. Both external powers give legitimation to one group within Northern Ireland. This factor, namely the division within the nation, even adds to the existing impossibility of finding any solution satisfying each party in the conflict.

### **2.3. Figures**

The country of Northern Ireland, also called Ulster, consists of six counties: Antrim, Armanagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone (Table 2.3.1.). This extension was declared by the well-known partition in 1920. It was the consequence of the Easter Rising in 1916 and the following Civil War.

As another result population in both parts disarranged. About one million Protestants, but only more than half-a-million Catholics then lived in the new state. Compared to the figures for the Republic, which had three-and-a-half million Catholics and only 150,000 Protestants, this is the classic example for a "double minority" (Kevin Boyle, Tom Hadden; "Options for Northern Ireland"). What this means is that the majority in Northern Ireland forms the minority in the Republic and the minority in Northern Ireland belongs to the majority in Ireland.

Boyle and Hadden found out that in the Republic a very large majority supports unification while Ulster only holds a slightly smaller majority supporting the *status quo*.

The situation in Northern Ireland costs Britain over one-and-a-half-thousand million Pounds per year for security and the British level of social service (Boyle and Hadden). This is followed by compensation for personal injury and property damage of Northern Irishmen.

Thus it is understandable why they see a pressing need for durable peace on the island.

### **3. The Stormont Era**

#### **3.1. The Basis for the new State**

After Ireland declared its independence in 1920, Ulster got its own parliament on 22 June in 1921. It was called the Stormont and it brought along a great deal of dissatisfaction for the citizens of the six counties. Cabinet ministers had often held their posts for ten, 15 or even 20 years. Nationalists frequently abstained from participation and the quality of any debates was more than low. Often discussions reminded one of just being an exchange of slogans. Most of the time Stormont was seen as "a place of ghosts" (Dermot Quinn, page 21).

Unionists quickly realised their chance being the majority in the new state and helped to make it work while nationalists never imagined it could work anyway. By 1921 they were declared being a minority in all cases. When they lost support from their partners in Ireland they were considered subversive by Unionists and as a peak they also had to accept the new state. This partly seems to be the reason why Catholics did not participate in early politics. But without participation there was no platform for fighting for their rights politically.

In addition to the bad situation in general there was an even worse financial situation in the state of Northern Ireland. Most of the money was to come from Westminster, only minor taxes could be set within the country.

As a clear consequence the Northern Irish government lacked economic sovereignty. They had to maintain social services on mainland level but there was no money (Table 3.1.1.a & b).

Further polarisation of both communities occurred as a result of that fact. Sectarianism as a strong belief and

feeling of people towards their own religious group eventually developed to one of the main problems.

Research data cover that general economic decline causes difficulties for minorities in any case which means it caused a very negative effect on the Catholic population. Ulster moreover suffered from three explicit weaknesses. Firstly or politically a substantial minority held objections against the state. Secondly or financially revenues and expenditures were determined by Westminster only and finally or economically the major industries such as linen, agriculture and ship-building were unable to employ enough people. Following the old system Catholics only employed Catholics and Protestants only employed Protestants. The bigger problem was that mostly Protestants owned and still own companies which make it possible to employ people. Thus there was an insistent higher, namely about 2.5 times, unemployment rate among Catholics. Normally these people are overrepresented in construction, seasonal trades, lower-paid, semi-skilled and manual work and underrepresented in police force, higher civil service and university teaching (Table 3.1.2.). They seem to be caught in a vicious circle of low education and bad location in the periphery which obviously leads to a clear structural disadvantage for the minority.

What made their situation worse were horrible housing conditions in connection with a lower income and a traditionally higher number of family members in Catholic households (Table 3.1.3.). Furthermore there was a great deal of discrimination in electoral practise. Those procedures have been defended by the government to protect unionist overrepresentation in Catholic dominated areas. It got the name gerrymandering for the Protestants changed the sizes and borders of those areas to deliberately deliver themselves an unfair advantage over the Catholics in election purposes.

### **3.2. The Civil Rights Movement**

The whole situation started to break into pieces at the end of the 1960's. In the middle 60's a spirit of change occurred, post Civil War situation had been neutralised and improved, politics had normalised, only sectarianism built the biggest problem.

In 1967 the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) formed a civil rights movement similar to the American campaign under Martin Luther King. It demanded liberal reforms namely removal of discrimination in housing and employment as well as of permanent emergency legislation and electoral abuses. They tried to reach their aims by protests, marches, sit-ins and appearance on media to emphasise grievances publicly.

In October 1968 civil rights marches in Derry lead to widely reported riots which as a result caused British awareness of the problem of discrimination. Nationalists wanted to show the pressing need for reforms but unionists needed to reject any changes of the system. As a reaction they held counter-marches lead by Ian Paisley. Prime minister Terence O'Neill soon proposed a five-point reform programme. His proposals were too modest to deactivate the situation. Extended discussions lead to a split within the party and the cabinet. So general elections took place in February. O'Neill had a narrow victory over Paisley but his policy had been damaged and he had to resign in April 1969.

At this point of time three problems dominated the view of the troubles, the demand for civil rights expressed by riots on the streets, the split within unionism between reformers and resisters and the pressure from Britain to hasten reforms.

O'Neill's successor James Chichester- Clark first tried to enforce reforms but he quickly reverted to a law-and-order policy.

Serious riots in Belfast and Derry in August 1969 brought British troops to the streets of Ulster for the first time. As a response to the fear of any loyalist reaction against reform of civil rights the IRA developed new tactics calling themselves „the nationalists' only protector“ (Dermot Quinn, page 24) and violence worsened immensely. From January to June 304 explosions shook the country.

In March 1971 Chichester- Clark asked for more troops, but Heath offered far too few. After Chichester- Clark had resigned Ulster seemed to run towards chaos. He was replaced by Brian Faulkner who should be the last Prime Minister. But violence continued to escalate.

In August 1971 internment without trial namely "regular arrest and interrogation of [...] ordinary people in suspect areas" (Boyle, Hadden) was introduced. Now more people tended to support the IRA. Most internees had been republicans, few loyalists. Real dangerous fighters could not be caught and kept their freedom.

By early 1972 Northern Ireland appeared to be near to anarchy as parliamentary democracy had broken down, civil disobedience and sectarian killing dominated the streets. On "Bloody Sunday", 30 January, 13 civil rights marchers were shot dead by the army in Derry. This later led to the burning of the British embassy in Dublin. On February 22nd seven died by an IRA bombing, three days later a Stormont minister was shot and badly wounded. On March 4th two people died and 130 were injured by a restaurant bombing in Belfast.

#### **4. Direct Rule**

Government had obviously lost control over security. On March 22nd London took over control over law and order, but Faulkner and the cabinet refused. Two days later Stormont was suspended.

It was replaced by "direct rule" from Westminster and Northern Ireland got a "Secretary of State for Northern Ireland" sitting in Westminster parliament as the Scottish and the Welsh one. This system was supposed to last for only a year being extended on annual basis. Evidently it has worked until today.

William Whitelaw as the first Secretary of State had to face two immediate problems, widespread unionist protest against the end of devolved government on the one hand and intensified IRA activities on the other hand. Both communities were even more polarised than before.

As one step towards a solution Whitelaw increased internment, released 200 prisoners but did not remove it in general. After 1972 unionists lost trust in the British government and Protestant extremism reached enormous heights. Now the need for a workable administration was obviously pressing.

As next step Whitelaw published a green paper suggesting an "Irish dimension", a certain role for the Republic to participate in Northern Irish governance in October 1972. The following White Paper made more specific proposals namely the election of a 78-seat Assembly on a system of proportional representation, a power-sharing Executive, devolution and retention of a Secretary of State with less concerns. The "Northern Ireland Assembly Act 1973" established the Assembly in May and the "Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973" ended the old political system in July.

It was the first time that Protestants and Catholics should share responsibility within a consensual government by power-sharing. Unionists, of course, feared

restoration of devolution and generally rejected power-sharing as well as any Irish dimension.

## **5. Interruptions**

### **5.1. The 1974 Power-Sharing Executive**

Elections to the Assembly were held in June 1973, "Faulkner" Unionists got 23, SDLP 19 and Loyalist Coalition 18 out of 78 seats to label only the bigger parties (Table 5.1.1.). This result meant a turning point for unionists. There was a majority supporting power-sharing but also a strongly resistant minority rejecting. Faulkner exploited the situation to his advantage as he did not participate in the Executive but say he was available if necessary. When the talks almost collapsed Heath flew to Belfast on 28 August and warned of the gravity of failure. If the parties were not able to find a settlement there would be no chance to return to devolution any more. Then Ulster would be fully integrated into the United Kingdom.

At that moment Faulkner reacted because he did not want his opponents to win a stronger position. An agreement from November 1973 formed a three-party Executive between Ulster Unionists, SDLP and Alliance Party.

In the following month British and Irish governments together with the Executive parties met at Sunningdale to finalise the Irish dimension. A new structure, the Council of Ireland, with an advisory role, and the Council of Ministers, seven from north and south, was established. This contract is often referred to as "the Sunningdale". The Executive came into existence on 1 January 1974, Faulkner became "Chief Executive". Although this was not a solution for any problem, both camps did at least co-operate. Difficulties crowded into the new system from its beginning on. There had been a very strong opposition against the settlement by some excluded

unionists. Furthermore did debates in the Assembly have a real bad quality.

As the probably biggest problem at all the Executive was unable to establish its legitimacy as Dublin soon declared that Sunningdale had not altered or weakened their constitutional territorial claim over Ulster.

After two months the existence of the Executive itself was the only available evidence to show that power-sharing could work anyway for there have not been any significant improvement in security matters or any economic or social progress.

The co-operating parties even fought each other in the 1974 general elections and the anti-power-sharing unionists won 52% of the votes. As a result the authority of the Executive collapsed and was never to be restored again.

In protest against the Council of Ireland a general Protestant worker strike was organised in May and escalated within two weeks. Neither Westminster nor the army interfered, two more weeks later unionist members of the Executive resigned.

The 1974 Executive had been the second system of government to fail within two years, Single party rule survived 51 years, power-sharing did only five months. Scientists hold the opinion that this only experience of shared power between the two parties could have achieved more equality for both. For Catholics it could have been the opportunity to get the right to share governmental power with Protestants.

## **5.2. The 1975 Constitutional Convention**

The new Secretary of State Merlyn Rees announced a further proposal in July 1974, a Constitutional Convention similar to the Assembly. For this reason the composition ensured a renewed mutual misunderstanding.

Elections were held in May 1975. Anti-power-sharing unionists, who won 46 of 78 seats, demanded British parliamentary standards while the other former Executive parties sought restoration of a power-sharing settlement. In November a formal report was passed by the government which demanded return to majority rule. The other power-sharing parties passed their own reports about Northern Ireland's future and again situation seemed like running towards chaos. In March 1976 the Convention dissolved, which can be seen as the next failure in the long history of the troubles.

### **5.3. Searching Consensus by a tough Policy**

In September Rees was replaced by the tougher Roy Mason. He followed a different policy, brought fresh impatience with initiatives and not at least gave commitment to making direct rule work. For emphasis on stronger security he substituted police and Ulster Defence Regiment for army in counter-terrorism. His time seemed right for unsentimental neo-colonial governorship. As a result Mason knitted Northern Ireland more closely to British legislation which, of course, pleased unionists very much.

Ian Paisley strongly disliked direct rule but there was no chance to return to any form of local government. In 1977 he tried to repeat the 1974 strike but Mason brought it to collapse within a single week. His emphasis on law and order as well as his security policy weakened the IRA to a great extent. Mason deeply reformed the court system. His whole policy has been mainly referred to as a kind of crisis management and another wasted chance for Northern Ireland.

Both the Executive 1974 and the Convention 1975 already assumed the consensus they have been supposed to build. The concept of rolling devolution with a limited increase

of powers being given to local power-sharing institutions orientating at the state of consensus had been erased twice. The real problem was "to create consensus within political structures which by nature are designed to reflect divergence" (Dermot Quinn, p.34).

When the Fair Employment Agency was established to analyse the economic situation in 1981 this brought no immediate change of the problems but at least data were made available to measure progress.

## **6. Rolling Devolution**

The next significant initiative was introduced by James Prior in 1982 and it brought fresh thinking to the whole thing. He proposed that devolved administration should return to Northern Ireland gradually, responsibilities should be given according to political consensus. This was legitimated in the Northern Ireland Act 1982, which introduced rolling devolution.

Again a 78-member Assembly with an initially consultative role should be established. Powers could be expanded if 70% of the members, to ensure cross-party support, petitioned Westminster for devolution. The value of this initiative lay in the fact that Northern Irish politicians could decide themselves how far devolution would go. But as always there was no consensus, neither about the plan itself.

Each party raised objections, unionists wanted to return to power-sharing, the SDLP missed an Irish dimension and the Conservatives finally feared that devolution endangered the union with Britain. Being attacked from all sides the bill suffered the fate of all previous initiatives.

With SDLP and Sinn Féin not participating in the Assembly it only reflected unionist opinions. SDLP had effectively exercised a nationalist veto although they

always called the unionist veto "chief obstacle to political progress" in Northern Ireland (Dermot Quinn, page 35).

At least some value had been achieved. From May 1983 to November 1985 committees of the assembly examined the tasks of the departments on a range of matters from agriculture over education to industrial strategies. This meant direct rule to local offices. Those committees had political influence and politicians entrusted with responsibility had acted maturely.

But situation radically changed after 1985 when a new initiative came into existence.

### **7. The New Ireland Forum 1973/ 74**

The 1983 New Ireland Forum consisting of delegations of the three Irish main parties Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Irish Labour Party and the SDLP had the task to search a solution for durable peace and stability. They gave two possible options, the unitary state on the one hand and a federal Ireland with joint authority between Great Britain and the Republic on the other hand. Their decision fell on the first proposal but there still was enormous protest against it. Even Catholics felt secure within the UK which guaranteed certain rights. Unity would challenge riots and violence by the UDR and other paramilitaries. Thus unification would not be by consent but by force.

The concept of Joint Authority would give London and Dublin equally shared responsibilities for governing Northern Ireland. But in the proposal there were no instructions on the deeper structure.

The Forum declared that as a first step the constitutional claim had to be removed and then a "co-operative devolution" on the basis of proportional

representation should be introduced. Eventually those proposals turned out to be impossible to be realised.

## **8. The Anglo- Irish Agreement**

Douglas Hurd, Secretary of State, initiated the signing at Hillsborough castle on 5 November 1985. This is called the Anglo- Irish Agreement, which guaranteed the Republic's government some consultative rights in the governance of Northern Ireland.

As one consequence the Assembly became a vehicle for protest and it was dissolved on 23 June 1986. It could probably have been successful if SDLP had participated and the Agreement not been signed. This failure furthermore revealed a deeper problem for politicians. To confront British rationality with Ulster fierceness is not very helpful in finding any durable settlement.

The Agreement has been the most significant change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland since 1920 and it established for the first time structures for the Republic's participation. It was moreover the only logical development of the British-Irish Inter-governmental Council of 1981 transforming the area into a British- Irish condominium.

### **8.1. General Restrictions**

In the first article British government declare that "the constitutional status of Northern Ireland could be changed only with the consent of the majority of its people ..." (Agreement Article 1, Dermot Quinn, page 38). At least this proposal was more just than its main alternative, the Westminster model which is only suitable when the main political divisions are over economic matters and an opposition has a real chance to take over government after electoral campaigns. It is not suitable

for a society where the party system is split along communal lines and one party has no chance to get off the minority role.

Power-sharing has worked very well in other regimes, but any successful settlement requires consensus between two groups with fundamentally different views on the constitutional status of the country in the future.

## **8.2. Reactions**

Both governments hoped to win unionist approval for the agreement and make it easier for them to accept power-sharing with nationalists by certain concessions. Article one was supposed to destroy fears against rapid restoration of any power-sharing system. Approval would furthermore secure cross border co-operation on security matters. The Conference would stay in existence but being reduced as soon as devolution would be established.

Nevertheless unionists rejected in the end. They required a clear definition of the present status since every party could define it itself. For that reason they feared it may appear to the Republic as part of it and not part of the UK.

Even if there was the guarantee for Ulster being British, articles two and three would still exist and claim it Irish territory. Eventually unionists offered co-operation in building a power-sharing settlement outside the terms of the Agreement just to get rid of it. Again SDLP claimed a strong Irish dimension being connected with power-sharing and demanded that unionists should not have a veto over the constitutional development any more. They could hardly take the risk to abandon the Agreement in return for a new try with power-sharing which might go wrong again soon. Thus they also resisted a settlement outside the Agreement offered by unionists.

Even if they could be persuaded to give it up, the Agreement stayed a treaty between two sovereign governments and they would have to approve any changes. Neither the Prime Minister of the Republic nor could Margaret Thatcher be easily persuaded to throw in the towel as both fronts considered it a progress.

### **8.3. Results**

It moreover received international acclaim removing the bitter taste of the Northern Ireland problem in British foreign affairs and it even stopped complaints from Dublin. The Agreement was supported by an all-party consensus in Westminster which raised the question of why risking all the advantages in return for the risk of another failure. The reality of the Agreement has not been as successful as proved for it weakened the union into something like creeping federalism. Union normally means equality for all participants but what about the Catholics? Finally there was no real success, no devolution at any point of time. The 1981 Fair Employment Agency had only been established out of strong American pressure politicians have not been able to resist. As two steps forward co-operation in border security and economic matters have to be mentioned.

### **9. New Initiatives since 1985**

In November 1987 the bombing at Enniskillen killed 11 people and injured many more. For the first time polls showed a majority supporting *keeping* British troops in Northern Ireland, but this opinion soon disappeared again. 1988 was "the year politics stood still" according to the Irish Times. Only two developments were detectable then. Unionist leaders presented proposals for an

administrative devolution to offer a chance to abandon the Agreement and introduce power-sharing outside the terms of it.

Secondly John Hume (SDLP leader) met Gerry Adams (Sinn Féin leader) to establish a system of committees corresponding to existing departments answerable to a new Stormont Assembly, but this idea was too modest for nationalists.

### **9.1. The Brooke Initiative**

Tom King was replaced by Peter Brooke in 1988. Brooke possessed a rare quality with infinite patience and being unburdened by high expectations. He understood something of political psychology. His initiative did not mean talks, but talks about talks. In January 1990 he started conversations with all parties to find common ground to talk about devolution later. After ten months it seemed there was no common ground at all.

What had gone wrong was that unionists demanded to end the Agreement before they opened for any talks. SDLP demanded it to stay although they admitted that it was not a final answer but the basis for one. This disagreement built more than just a procedural difficulty. The role of the Republic turned out to be the central problem.

Although all sides declared willingness there was no concrete proposal to talk about. While unionists wanted devolution, nationalists fought for keeping the Agreement. Pressure to continue the talks appeared soon, especially from the unionist camp. No party wanted to be the reason for a failure of the talks, but Brooke himself was the most compelling reason for continuing. He allowed each side to derive support for their own position. So each side feared that not talk could deliver advantages

to the other one. All recognised the greater danger in non-negotiation than in negotiation.

New talks should have begun considering three certain relationships, namely the internal one and the relations between north and south, the Irish island and the United Kingdom. Their aim was to achieve a "new and more broadly based agreement to give adequate expression to the totality of relationships" (Brooke to the House of Commons, Dermot Quinn, page 95).

Finally unionists did not take part in the last minute as a scheduled meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference had not been cancelled but held. That was the end of the initiative as there was no chance for continuing any talks.

## **9.2. The Mayhew Initiative**

Peter Brooke was immediately replaced by Sir Patrick Mayhew in 1992 who resumed the talks for half-a-year. Some progress could be recorded but it was more a symbolic victory. In July a delegation from Dublin met unionist leaders to introduce the idea of regular meetings in the future. The motto of that period seemed to be that good will normally causes progress.

Discussions were held on matters of substance but two issues could not be resolved anyway. Firstly unionists demanded the end of Dublin's territorial claim over Northern Ireland, but, of course, Dublin refused to alter the situation. Secondly nationalists wanted to give the Republic more extended rights to influence Ulster politics what unionists never would accept.

Eventually the talks did not bring any real progress. Scientists tried hard to find out why any talks or initiatives always failed and they finally saw four main points. Firstly they mention the disagreement about the constitutional status as a part of the United Kingdom

which is non-negotiable for unionists and the most serious question for nationalists. Secondly participants talk on cross purposes which causes mutual misunderstanding and further problems in political talks. Thirdly the very structure of the talks themselves had certain gaps following the formula that nothing would be agreed until everything was agreed in all details. So it was more likely that nothing would be decided in the end. Fourthly scientists see the formality of the sessions as another main problem since anyone has to behave formally and rationally not to lose his face towards any other party.

### **9.3. Latest Developments**

In July 1993 the Conservative government under John Major turned to OUP (Official Unionist Party) leader James Molyneaux for support in negotiations on the Maastricht Treaty which offered unionists an ideal opportunity to rebuild links with the Conservative Party. The latter had to pay a high price for nine unionist votes, namely increased regional aid, a special committee on Northern Ireland matters in the House of Commons, devolution of a few extra powers to local councils and new talks between Hume and Adams in Summer 1993.

The following Downing Street Declaration gave Sinn Féin the possibility to take part in talks for the first time. But this right was connected with the condition to end violence for at least three months.

Dublin finally declared a change in the recent status of Northern Ireland would only take place if a majority wish it to happen at any point of time.

### **10. Future Prospects**

Examining possible options for the future of Northern Ireland requires a whole set of aspects one has to consider in the difficult history of the troubles. Almost all authors writing on this topic offer different views for future prospects but all see the problem in far too divergent traditions of both groups. Each attitude has the right to be seen as a tradition and first when both groups co-operate and accept the other durable peace will be achievable. The real problem is that both traditions exclude each other and each group only solves its own problems making it difficult to make them work on the same problem anyhow.

Dermot Quinn proposes to create "a new political language" and what people in Northern Ireland needed was "a common enemy" such as "inflation", "Communism or unemployment" in other regimes. But he also underlines that the troubles are too hard to be solved by language or finding another scapegoat for the problems (pages 107/108).

John Whyte offers a very detailed description of any possible solutions for the problems. His first conclusion stresses the need for integrated education of Catholic and Protestant children. This would give both the chance to get used to traditions and attitudes of the other group. As a result young adults would be more tolerant and struggles could be prevented by mutual understanding. As a second main aspect Whyte labels solutions following any compromise. Unity by consent were able to benefit both nationalists and unionists, but among unionists a strong opposition towards every proposal on unification is the normal attitude. Thus unionists would never agree on such a suggestion even if there were clear advantages. This thinking has dominated unionist reactions and politics for the last twenty years and will probably not change soon.

Immediately following the idea of full integration into the United Kingdom has to be mentioned. Both are no solution for the problems since one side would have to give up its strongly defended position.

Independence would mean no more money from Westminster and for that a lower status of any services. Power-sharing with an Irish dimension has already proved to be impossible within Northern Ireland. Both are no preferred solutions.

The third block of prospects can be characterised as settlements without compromise.

Firstly repartition is a widely discussed option. This meant to re-arrange both communities to form a more exclusively Protestant population within Northern Ireland. The area around Belfast is called unionist "heartland", clearly dominated by Protestants (Table 2.3.1.). In the border districts mostly Catholics have their residences. Finally repartition meant a very substantial exchange of Catholics from Belfast to cities in the Republic, farmers had to exchange land and those transfers would be very difficult and expensive.

For the big expense none of both governments showed interest in realising the suggestion.

As another widely discussed solution some still see unity by coercion. When the 1983 Forum already tried to make it reality they failed at a strongly resistant unionist majority who did and do not want their country to be unified with the Republic. The Forum could have delivered a framework in which both communities could have got along in one state and barricades finally brought down. For that a more precise formulation of democratic rights for unionists as well as nationalists would have been necessary.

Its second proposal, namely joint authority, raised the question of how to share power and responsibilities equally between Great Britain, the Irish Republic and

Northern Ireland itself. As already mentioned, the Forum was not successful with its work to find any framework. At this point of the analysis it could be a normal reaction to state that there is *no* solution and simply give up to search any longer. People should moreover alter their attitude towards the situation. As there is nothing like *the* Northern Irish problem it is impossible to find *the only* solution to it.

Probably politicians and scientists could find durable options step by step introducing smaller, more achievable ideas for lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

## **11. Conclusion**

### **11.1. Comparison with successful regimes**

British insistence on an internal power-sharing settlement is mainly influenced by the successes of other divided regimes on the continent. The situation in Northern Ireland is often compared to Switzerland and Belgium, but the most frequent analogy can be found in comparison with the Netherlands. There society consists of the same religious groups as Ulster and it was possible to make power-sharing work there. British government even organised a visit for politicians of both antagonistic parties to give them an idea how institutions could work in reality.

Scientists have considered those comparisons superficial and misleading.

In those European countries settlements developed organically and were not imposed by an external force like the 1973/ 74 power-sharing in Northern Ireland.

Showing some more differences power-sharing needs multiple balance of power within the country, which means that there should not be a one-majority-one-minority relation. Are there more than three subcultures or

minorities in one state they should declare one system of government the normative model.

The Protestant majority is considered the underlying reason for the failure of 1974 and the biggest obstacle to find any solution for Northern Ireland. Generally there are two main alternatives for any future settlement, namely the Westminster model with competitive majority-minority relations and the Dutch model of power-sharing without an opposition.

Practically this means the more people tend to see the British system as the normative the more will reject power-sharing. Frankly speaking if the Protestant majority defend the British pattern power-sharing has no chance to turn out its feasibility. As so many people consider power-sharing *un-British* and *undemocratic* the 1975 Convention and the Assembly 1984 had to fail anyway.

### **11.2. The Roots of the Problems**

Searching the fundamental problem scientists labelled it as unwillingness of the unionist subculture to share power with nationalists in any framework. Thus they insistently rejected any coalition.

The nature of the conflict is more and more seen as not primarily religious but between nationalists who want to build links with the Irish Republic and unionists who strongly oppose this and want to remain British. The central question now lies on national loyalties. It is considered strange that one group wants its country to be integrated into a neighbouring state and another group wants the same country to remain something like the last colony of the British Empire.

All facts lead to the conclusion that there is no good climate for a power-sharing settlement having already been proved by several failures in history. Although power-sharing is extremely attractive for divided

societies it is unfortunately very unrealistic for Ulster as well.

Majority rule from 1921 to 1972 was unacceptable for both governments and the nationalist minority as well as integration with the British mainland. On the other side a declaration of independence and integration into the Irish Republic were unacceptable for the unionist majority whose resistance worked very effectively.

So how should Ulster be governed in the future? The Agreement with direct rule from Westminster and input from Ireland will probably survive finally. It is a durable treaty registered at the United Nations, supported in the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic and relatively immune from the tactics of its opponents. To some it may seem undemocratic but democratic proposals did not work either and the Agreement perfectly recognises the nature of the conflict.

### **11.3. Successes**

Having examined only negative consequences through history, also some successes have been reached. Firstly discrimination in the allocation of housing for Catholic families has been removed to a satisfying extent. Secondly integrated schooling has been encouraged by a great deal of research. By 1993 21 new integrated schools, attended by 3,500 pupils, and new language schools have been established. Segregated schools have been required to include the concepts of cultural diversity and mutual understanding into the curriculum.

The Catholic minority was given opportunities to express their culture especially through their Irish language which was allowed to be used again and even encouraged.

At local government level eleven of 26 councils operate a power-sharing system and 18 of all had agreed to realise a community relations programme.

#### **11.4. Remaining Problems**

A troubled society like Northern Ireland will always have serious problems to solve. On the one hand there are open grievances like violence on the streets and the missing future perspective but, on the other hand, there are always hidden problems such as living conditions for Catholics, discrimination against women in everyday life and the role of children in society. Scientists have already spread their research on those areas but it is, of course, very difficult to blame the government for neglecting gender equality in front of the background of the troubles.

Women still lead a very traditional life working in traditional areas like service industries, clerical work, education and health-related occupations, if they were able to find work anyway. Situation is very difficult on both sides. Although only 200 have been killed in explosions women were the victims of some of the bloodiest attacks like Enniskillen 1987 or Shankill Road 1993.

Perspectives for Northern Irish children have been pretty bad either, being considered a generation of violence or zombies needing psychiatric help. Unintentionally they get direct and indirect experiences with violence and its consequences as 20% have a friend or relative injured or even killed in the troubles. Lots of tests should find out about moral and mental health of the children but they mostly recorded standard developments without serious objections. Most children wish peace for their future although they know it is most unlikely either. Children are moreover not directly influenced by the troubles but by the generally bad situation for Catholics and Protestants as well. Problems like unemployment, low wages, poverty and missing future perspectives should

probably become a challenge for politicians of tomorrow to offer the children and their parents a better life.





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