

Northern Ireland: Four Fatal Errors

Talk given by Francis Bennion at Oxford Town Hall on 24 July 1990. In the chair: Norris McWhirter CBE.

Text of pamphlet published by the Ulster Conservatives Mainland Support group

Prelude

Some of you may have seen the programme on Northern Ireland broadcast last Wednesday (18 July 1990) in the BBC 1 *Frontiers* series. The presenter Ronald Eyre is an Englishman. His way of discussing the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic typified all that is wrong in mainland attitudes to Northern Ireland. I shall be attacking those attitudes in this talk.

To show I am not alone in my view, before starting the talk I will read out some extracts from Mark Steyn's review in *The Independent* (19 July 1990). The programme was broadcast in the evening of the day I finished writing the text of this talk. I was pleased to see that Mark Steyn echoed the feelings I myself had when I watched the programme. This is what he had to say.

'*Frontiers* (BBC 1), a pretty hit and miss affair, concluded last night with Ronald Eyre meandering through that boggiest of terrains, the Irish question . . . as Eyre snaked his way down to the bandit country of South Armagh, you began to notice something odd. In, say, the Mexican/American *Frontiers*, the presenter had analysed the frontier between Mexico and America. But, apart from a reference to 'the red, white and blue tide mark', the British/Irish border was never discussed as the border between the British and Irish. Eyre took it for granted that this was not the frontier of his native land but the frontier between two types of Irishmen. [He treated] the British as remote policemen of an ancient dispute. [British mainland] attitudes implicitly endorse the Republican viewpoint - that the British are 'in' Ireland, whereas in reality what's happened is that the Southern Irish have stopped being 'in' Britain . . . the scepticism of Eyre and the English establishment has become a self-fulfilling prophecy: what De Valera saw as the ratchet effect of Irish nationalism means that this frontier no longer symbolises the clear division of the Republic from the Union but rather the haemorrhaging of British will.'

It is that haemorrhaging, or draining away, of British will that must be checked. On that note, I begin my talk . . .

Introductory

You have been lured into this hall by the promise of an answer to a conundrum usually regarded as insoluble. Is there really a solution to the problem of Northern Ireland? You will judge that for yourselves, when you have heard what I have to say. I believe there is, but of course I may be wrong.

A lot is going on just now over Northern Ireland. In some of it, I have been personally involved in a very minor capacity. Tonight I want to report to you about these current doings.

So there are two topics for us. What is the solution that has yet to be tried? What is currently going on? Of course the two are interconnected. The third topic we must tackle, if only very briefly, is the history.

Nothing about Ireland makes any sense unless you bear in mind the history.

Would anyone here like to say in which century our Irish problem started? Someone suggests the seventeenth century. Let us get some help. Since we are here in Oxford, let us get help from that learned series known as *The Oxford History of England*. This divides English history into fifteen successive periods, each with its own volume. Which period should we look into to find the answer to the question of when did our Irish problem begin?

I will tell you straight away in which volume of *The Oxford History of England* we need to look. It is the third of the fifteen volumes, dealing with the period from the Norman Conquest of England in the year 1066 AD to Magna Carta in 1215. The author of this third volume, Dr Poole of St John's College, says flatly (page 310): 'The Irish problem dates from 1172'. That was more than eight centuries ago, and the problem is not solved yet.

In a short talk, with other matters to discuss, I cannot adequately survey eight centuries of history. (Do I hear sighs of relief?) Yet I cannot altogether ignore them. So what I propose to do is this. To begin with, so as to set the scene, I will pick out and very briefly describe ten crucial historical points. My aim is to do it in a neutral way, as an objective commentator must. I am sure there are many different viewpoints in my audience tonight. I have to be fair to them all.

So imagine an exhibition like *The Oxford Story* in Broad Street, where you are taken from point to point in a little wheeled carriage on a metal track. This is *The Northern Ireland Story*, and we haven't got any wheeled carriage. Just our imagination.

Geographical Factors

Just before I come to the ten historical points I need to say two very brief things about geography, for in a way it is geography that makes history.

First, in its geological structure and physical habitat Ulster looks towards south-west Scotland rather than the South of Ireland. That is the way the contours are inclined. As a result, from the earliest times people moved freely to and fro by boat across the narrow channel (in places no more than a dozen miles across) that separates Ulster from Scottish areas such as Argyllshire.

The second point is that until modern times the nine counties that made up historic Ulster were cut off from the South of Ireland by 'the necklace of Ulster', a chain of mountains, lakes, bogs, drumlins, rivers and forests. It was a natural barrier, that led many Ulster folk to regard Scotland as closer to them than the South. It produced contrasts still noticeable today. In 1756, on a journey from the South, John Wesley wrote in his journal: 'No sooner did we enter Ulster than we noticed the difference. The ground was cultivated as in England, and the cottages not only neat, but with doors, chimneys and windows'.

So much for the geography. I now turn to the ten crucial points concerning the historical relationship between Britain and Ulster.

Ten Crucial Historical Points

Point One: Coming of Christianity to Ireland

As most of the troubles of Northern Ireland are attributed to the division within the Christian Church between Protestants and Roman Catholics, it is worth reminding ourselves that this division has existed for less than five centuries. During the thousand years before that the Christian Church, in Ireland as elsewhere, was undivided. In what is now the town of Armagh in Ulster, the seat of the Irish church was

established in 444 AD. There it remains, both for Roman Catholics and for Protestants. Each now have their own Cathedral and their own Archbishop of Armagh.

Point Two: Norman Invasions of Ireland

The successful Norman invasion of England in 1066 AD was followed by Norman incursions from England into Ireland. Dr Poole's date of 1172 for the beginning of our Irish problem relates to the invasion of Ireland by King Henry II, great-grandson of William the Conqueror. From that time, Henry called himself Lord of Ireland. He passed this title to his youngest son, who became King John. The latter completed the Norman conquest of Ireland by overcoming Limerick, where his castle still stands. The Norman knight John de Courcy seized control of much of Ulster in 1177. It is worth remembering that although we call these people Normans (or Anglo-Normans) much more than Normandy was comprised in the Angevin Empire controlled by Henry II. It occupied the western half of modern France, from the Channel to the Pyrenees.

Point Three: the Reformation

We jump to the sixteenth century, when the Reformation exacerbated our Irish problem because, rightly or wrongly, the Gaelic Irish mostly remained faithful to the old religion. They ignored papal abuses such as the sale of benefices and indulgences. They ignored the fact that Europe was breaking up into national territories which resented rule from Rome. They ignored Protestant objections to being dictated to by the priesthood in the way they led their lives, a factor still potent in today's cultural conflict between Northern Ireland and the South. They passed by the great movement known as the Reformation, which was the consequence of these things.

Point Four: the Stuart Plantations

On the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, the English and Scottish thrones were united under King James I and VI. He reinforced the existing Scottish and English settlements in Ulster by organised plantations. The most famous of these was promoted in and around the town of Derry by the twelve great livery companies of the City of London. The town was then renamed Londonderry.

Point Five: Ulster Rising of 1641

In 1641 the native Irish in Ulster rose and massacred many English and Scots settlers. This was one cause of Oliver Cromwell's notorious expedition in 1650, when he reconquered Ireland with great cruelty (notably in the town of Drogheda). We British think of Cromwell as the saviour who preserved us from the autocratic rule of King Charles I and paved the way for parliamentary government. For that his statue stands proudly outside our House of Commons. The Irish on the other hand think of Cromwell as a barbarous oppressor. Two views of history.

Point Six: Battle of the Boyne

On 12 July 1690 the Protestant King William III, the Dutchman who was Prince of the town of Orange in southern France, won the Battle of the River Boyne at a spot near Drogheda. This victory cemented the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and ensured that he and not the Catholic King James II thereafter ruled Britain and Ireland. Catholics and their religion were at that time widely thought of as highly dangerous to the British state because they favoured papal rule. Hence the notorious penal laws, which aimed to prevent Irish Catholics from practising this dangerous religion.

Point Seven: the Act of Union 1801

The French Revolution in 1789 encouraged the United Irishmen led by the Protestant Wolfe Tone to try a similar insurrection, with help from the French. The rising centred on Wexford, and the Boys of Wexford became famous in Irish republican folklore. Later there took place the Ulster Rising of 1798, a Protestant movement aiming at an independent Irish republic in alliance with the revolutionary French. This led William Pitt to instigate the political union of Great Britain and Ireland, which was implemented by the Act of Union 1801. The union involved the abolition of the Irish Parliament and was intended to be accompanied by Catholic emancipation from the penal laws. Those who thenceforth called themselves unionists referred to this union of Great Britain and Ireland, and wished to see it preserved or restored.

Point Eight: the first Home Rule Bill 1886

Delays in implementing Catholic emancipation, the great famines of the 1840s, and absentee landlordism, gave rise to the Fenian movement. The disturbances led Gladstone to introduce in 1886 the first of the four Home Rule Bills. (Only the fourth was actually carried into effect, and that not until 1920.) The first three Home Rule Bills all provided for Ireland to be given limited self government under the British Crown. Like former British colonies such as Australia and Canada, Ireland was to have what came to be called Dominion status, with its own government and parliament. This was a plan for Devolution rather than Independence.

Point Nine: Partition in 1921

Because the Ulster Unionists under Carson made it clear that they would if necessary use force to avoid being subjected to rule from Dublin, the fourth Home Rule Bill in 1920 had to provide for the Partition of Ireland. Under the Government of Ireland Act 1920 (as the Bill became on enactment) the six of the nine counties of Ulster with the highest proportion of Protestants, namely Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone, opted to remain within the United Kingdom under the name of 'Northern Ireland'. The remaining 26 counties broke away to become in time the Republic of Ireland. Because the three earlier Home Rule Bills had all provided for Home Rule or Devolution (in relation to the entire island) it was thought right, without any real examination of the issues involved, now to provide *double* Home Rule or Devolution, that is for both South and North. A Government of Northern Ireland was set up, and the region was given its own parliament at Stormont consisting of a Senate and a House of Commons. The alternative of Integration, under which Northern Ireland would have been governed in much the same way as its close territorial partner Scotland, was never seriously considered. This unargued assumption that the North must be given Home Rule for itself because it would not accept Home Rule for the island as a whole was the first of what I suggest have been four fatal errors in our Northern Ireland policy. From 1921 to 1972, when the Stormont parliament came to an end, unionists never held less than 32 of the 52 seats in its House of Commons, and so formed the government for the entire period of just over half a century. Their main opposition came from nationalist parties, pledged to hand Northern Ireland over to the South.

Point Ten: the 1937 Irish Constitution

The current Constitution of the Irish Republic, which was adopted in 1937, lays claim to the territory of Northern Ireland. Under the heading 'The Nation', Article 2 reads: 'The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland'. Article 7 states that 'The national flag is the tricolour of green, white and orange', where orange stands for Ulster, green for the South, and white for the hope of peace between them. Thus every time the Irish flag is flown it is provocatively asserting the right of the South to possess the North.

In the *McGimpsey* judgment in March 1990 the Irish Supreme Court declared that Article 2 in law commits the Irish Government to turning what it says into reality. Under their own constitutional law therefore the Irish Government have no choice but to back the secessionist aim of Northern Ireland nationalists.

What does the British Government say to this? Ever since Partition was effected in 1921 successive British Governments have believed that it would quite soon be ended. It has been rather like belief in the Second Coming, originally supposed to be imminent but in fact endlessly deferred.

In the light of this misguided belief, British Government policy has been to give the people of Northern Ireland a privilege not accorded to the inhabitants of any other part of the Kingdom, namely the right of unilateral secession. This is the right to decide *by themselves* whether the six counties should remain within the United Kingdom or become part of the Republic. The right is currently enshrined in the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 and repeated in Article 1(c) of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, where the British Government accept an obligation to introduce and support the necessary legislation for secession if the Northern Ireland majority at any future time so wish. This yielding of the right of unilateral secession, coupled with the unstated belief that Irish unification would one day inevitably occur, is what I consider to be the second fatal error in British policy towards Northern Ireland.

Modern Times

Those ten historical points bring us to modern times, and events which will be familiar to most people in this hall.

During World War II the fact that for more than five years (1939-45) Northern Ireland played its full part in the United Kingdom war effort while Eire remained neutral emphasised that the two were quite different territories. It reinforced the border as a genuine rather than arbitrary line of division, and further entrenched Partition.

After the War, devolved government continued in Northern Ireland until it broke down over what were seen as infringements of the civil rights of Catholics. On 24 March 1972 the Conservative Government of Edward Heath assumed what is called *Direct Rule* over Northern Ireland on the resignation of Brian Faulkner's Stormont government through the worsening security position, which it was unable to control.

Characteristics of Direct Rule

Direct Rule still continues, nearly 20 years later. Its main characteristics are as follows.

1. The region is governed by the Northern Ireland Office, which is headed by the Secretary of State Peter Brooke and five other ministers. Not one of these six ministers is the Westminster MP for a constituency in Northern Ireland. Not one of the 17 Northern Ireland Westminster MPs takes any part in administering their region, because not one represents the present Government Party, the Conservatives. The only effective parties of government in the United Kingdom today are the Conservatives and Labour. Some may wish to add the Liberals, now known as Liberal Democrats, to this list. Until this year, none of these three parties, during the entire period from 1921, has put up a single candidate in any Northern Ireland election. That is the third of the fatal errors in British policy towards Northern Ireland.

2. Legislation dealing with most Northern Ireland matters is not carried through by Act of Parliament (as it is for the rest of the United Kingdom) but by Order in Council. These Orders are debated in Parliament only once for a maximum of three hours in each House (whereas Bills are debated at three or four stages in each). Unlike Bills, the Orders cannot be amended by MPs. So none of the 17 Northern Ireland MPs is able even to put down an amendment to this Government legislation.

3. There is no *settled* system of government for Northern Ireland. Direct Rule is temporary. Each year, for the past 20 years, it has had to be renewed by the Westminster Parliament.

4. Because of a change made shortly before the Stormont parliament was abolished, under which top-tier local government functions were passed to it rather as if it were a county council as well as a legislature, the 26 district councils now have only very modest powers. Many normal local government functions, relating to such matters as social services and housing, are exercised by non-elected area boards. Others, relating to health, education, agriculture, the environment etc, are exercised by the Northern Ireland Office.

Attempts to restore Devolution

Since 1972 there have been 5 Government attempts to go back from Direct Rule to a system of Devolution. The first 4 all failed. The fifth attempt is still going on.

In 1973-74 the Sunningdale Agreement led to the creation of a power-sharing executive including both unionists and constitutional (that is non-terrorist supporting) nationalists. After 5 months it was brought down by a pro-unionist Ulster Workers strike. Direct Rule resumed.

An elected Constitutional Convention was set up at the instigation of Merlyn Rees in 1975. It failed, and Direct Rule resumed.

A Constitutional Conference was established at the instigation of Humphrey Atkins in 1980. It failed, and Direct Rule resumed.

James Prior's system of 'rolling devolution' was set up in 1982 and continued until 1986. It failed, and Direct Rule resumed.

Now Peter Brooke is trying yet again. The new factor is that the Irish Government was given a right to intervene by the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. This was entered into between the British Government and the Irish Government without any consultation with the 17 Northern Ireland MPs or any of the local political parties. There was one exception. The Social Democratic and Labour Party, representing constitutional nationalists, was consulted in advance. But the consulting was done not by the British Government but by the Irish Government.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was the fourth fatal error. It is a constitutional monstrosity, because it cuts across the reality of democratic power. It gives Irish Government Ministers, unelected by any inhabitant of Northern Ireland, a say in how the territory is to be governed. The continuing Conference of UK and Irish Ministers it sets up meets in closed session. A report issued this month by the Northern Ireland Conservatives Advisory Committee on Policy says of the working of this Conference-

'It cannot be determined what influence the Irish Government has exerted on the formulation of policy for Northern Ireland. Its influence may have been marginal. Alternatively it is conceivable that every detail of government policy on Northern Ireland has been heavily influenced by undemocratic pressure from Dublin. We simply do not know. What we do know, however, is that Irish Government Ministers, neither elected by nor accountable to the people of the United Kingdom, have enjoyed an undemocratic position of influence altogether greater than that enjoyed by elected representatives from Northern Ireland.'

Peter Brooke's current aim is to set up a series of meetings between the various parties, including the Irish Government. These he hopes will lead, and I am quoting his own words, 'to a system which is workable, durable, widely supported, and gives a role for both sides of the community'. The only role the nationalist side seek is to lead the territory into the Republic. The only role the unionist side seek is to keep it within, and make it a fully-working part of, the United Kingdom. One or the other of these you can have, but you can't have both. It is a logical impossibility.

There have been many instances in history of well-meaning people earnestly seeking to achieve what to the onlooker is manifestly impossible. Here in Oxford Roger Bacon, one of our cleverest medieval scholars, spent years of his life trying to find the philosopher's stone, which would at a stroke turn base metal into gold. In a later century the mathematician Longomontanus squandered his energies in vainly trying to square the circle. The worthy Mr Brooke reminds me of Friar Bacon and Longomontanus. In amiably striving to find a formula that will satisfy all parties he is seeking the philosopher's stone. He is trying to square the circle. It is impossible.

It is impossible to satisfy all the parties concerned with Northern Ireland because they want mutually inconsistent things. Mr Brooke's hoped-for 'talks' cannot solve this conundrum. A territory cannot both be within and not be within a particular state. He is defying logic when he says that the hoped-for 'talks' could lead to a system which is workable, durable, widely supported, and gives a role for both sides of the community.

So what is to be done? Since the United Kingdom was set up two centuries ago the six counties have been part of it. That's the way some two-thirds of its inhabitants, who regard themselves as in every sense 'British', have wished, and still wish, things to be. So far as we can tell, that situation will continue indefinitely. The British can't 'leave' Northern Ireland because they live there. It is their home and their country. So what are we arguing about? More important, what are we fighting about?

Rectifying the Four Fatal Errors

I believe the answer to this conundrum lies in rectifying at long last what I have called the four fatal errors in British policy towards Northern Ireland. These, you will remember, are *first* that Integration with the United Kingdom was, and still is, rejected in favour of Home Rule or Devolution, *second* that mainland parties of government refuse to offer themselves to Northern Ireland electors, *third* that the British Government has all along secretly held, and from time to time hinted at by its actions, an underlying belief that one day the territory will be handed over to the South, and *fourth* that in entering into the Anglo-Irish Agreement the British Government yielded power to another Government in an undemocratic way unfair to the inhabitants of the North.

In calling these *fatal* errors I do not exaggerate. They are literally fatal, because they have cost many lives. One of these lives, Mr Chairman, was that of your own twin brother, and my friend, Ross McWhirter. He was assassinated by the IRA on the very doorstep of his home in London. So I am not speaking lightly when I talk of fatal errors. Indeed no one should speak lightly, and certainly not from a public platform, about any aspect of the problem of Northern Ireland.

How can we rectify these errors? A start has been made with one of them.

Organising by mainland parties

That the Conservative Party should begin to organise in Northern Ireland was approved by the Party Conference held at Blackpool in October 1989. The motion was moved, much against the wishes of the Party's hierarchy, by the Ayr Conservative Association. This was appropriate in view of Northern Ireland's historical and geographical links with south-west Scotland. The motion was passed by acclamation, much to the surprise of those who believe that a Conservative Party Conference is merely a rubber-stamping assembly. Since then Conservative Associations have been set up in most Northern Ireland constituencies, and one by-election has been fought.

What about the Labour Party? In 1920 it decided not to organise in Northern Ireland, and has never done so. The Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) has never been granted affiliation to the British Labour Party, although it unsuccessfully sought this in 1942, 1949 and 1970. The Liberal Democrats also refuse to

put up candidates.

As a constitutional lawyer I would say that if in a parliamentary constituency a particular party of government fails to put up a candidate at a general election the electors are thereby deprived of the opportunity, which may be looked on as a right in terms of current constitutional conventions applicable in Great Britain, of indicating whether or not they wish that party to form the next government. If *no* party of government puts up candidates in the constituency its electors are effectively disenfranchised as respects their right to have a say in what is to be the incoming government's political complexion. They are deprived of any chance of being governed by elected politicians whose constituents they are.

This is undemocratic. It is a recipe for sectarianism and strife, as history has shown. It is time we allowed electors in Northern Ireland to vote Conservative, or vote Labour, or vote Liberal Democrat, if that is what they wish to do. It is time we gave them the chance to break away from local parties whose only policy is either to support the union or break away from the union.

Organising by the mainland parties in Northern Ireland will also have another valuable consequence. In relation to the Conservative Party this is expressed in the following statement issued earlier this month by the Northern Ireland Conservatives Advisory Committee on Policy-

'The decision of The Conservative Party to enter into a constructive engagement with the Northern Ireland electorate means that the Party can no longer be neutral with regard to political developments in the region. In the past the attitude of the Conservative Party has been one of benevolent neutrality as between warring factions and the attitude of successive Secretaries of State has been to use that position of neutrality in order to reconcile the incompatible commitments of Unionists and Nationalists. This has undoubtedly impoverished political debate on the Northern Ireland problem. When taken to extremes it comes dangerously close to a dereliction of sovereign responsibility by the government.'

Unification of Ireland

Next, the British Government should abandon its unstated belief that one day the territory will be handed over to the Republic. This belief flies in the face of all the evidence, and is what keeps the IRA's armed struggle alive. There is talk of the oxygen of publicity. This gives a more potent boost, the oxygen of expectation. All mainland political parties share the blame for pumping out this oxygen of expectation. The Conservative Campaign Guide for the 1987 general election stated of the Unionist policy of Integration of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom-

'Integration could lead to greater instability. For instance, it could appear to Constitutional Nationalists that the British Government refused to recognise their legitimate aspirations and that the only means to achieve change was through violence. In this way, by ignoring the aspirations of a significant minority of the population, Britain would be playing into the hands of the IRA.'

What I am arguing directly contradicts that. We play into the hands of the IRA by encouraging them to believe they will one day be successful.

British Government attempts since 1972 to restore Devolution on power-sharing lines have all failed for one reason. Mr Brooke's current efforts will fail for the same reason. The reason is that unionists loyal to the link with Great Britain, who are in a majority of two-thirds to one-third, refuse to share political power with those they see as disloyal to their country. It is for nationalists therefore to accept at long last that it would be right for them to give up their desire for union with the South. Speaking again as a constitutional lawyer I would argue, as a general proposition quite apart from the question of Northern Ireland, that people who all the time want to hand their territory over to another state cannot expect to share in

governing it. They are bound to disagree with loyal citizens over points concerning finance, future planning, security, international relations, and many other things. That is a recipe not for sound government but for chaos and anarchy.

There is a precedent for sensibly giving up an aspiration of this kind. Following Partition in 1921, unionists in the South, and there were many of them, gave up their aspiration to remain linked to Great Britain. The 'Troubles', and the unhappy history of the past 70 years, spring from the refusal of nationalists in the North to reciprocate. For this I blame the British Government for keeping on tap that oxygen of expectation. The tap must now be turned off.

An ongoing effort should be made to convince nationalists that they will be more prosperous and enjoy better living conditions generally if Northern Ireland continues to be part of the United Kingdom. This should be accompanied by stringent safeguards against religious or ethnic discrimination, and other measures to improve the living conditions of the Catholic population. It's not such a bad thing, living in the United Kingdom. In fact more Irish-born people now live in the United Kingdom than live in the Republic. They have voted with their feet.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement

The British Government should declare that it is their function alone to look after the interests of all citizens of Northern Ireland including nationalists. They should therefore re-negotiate the Anglo-Irish Agreement so that it deals only with matters that are the legitimate concern of the Irish Government, such as criminal law, security, cross-border trade and joint commercial enterprises.

Integration

Finally, the British Government should embark on the solution that has yet to be tried - Integration. Northern Ireland should be governed in a similar way to its near neighbour Scotland. What does this mean? Briefly it means the following.

1. A permanent system for the government of Northern Ireland should be set up as soon as possible in place of the present annually-renewable system.
2. The Irish Government should be pressed to secure the removal from its Constitution of the untrue and unlawful assertion that Northern Ireland is part of the Republic. The British Government should declare unequivocally that the region will remain a dominion of the Crown in the same way as the other regions of the United Kingdom.
3. The number of MPs for Northern Ireland sitting at Westminster should be increased from 17 to 21, in line with present Scottish standards of representation. (In 1918 the six counties had no less than 30 Westminster MPs.)
4. Government Ministers with Northern Ireland responsibility should be selected where practicable from the region's own MPs. It is to be hoped that fairly soon these will represent mainland parties of government rather than sectarian parties of non-government, and that sectarianism will wither away, giving place to politics on the same lines as in the rest of the United Kingdom.
5. Legislation on all subjects should be by a fully-amendable Bill in the Westminster Parliament considered in detail by a new Northern Ireland Grand Committee, instead of (as now in relation to most subjects) an unamendable Order in Council approved after only brief debate. This Committee would have power to sit and debate in Northern Ireland, as the Scottish Grand Committee does in Scotland.
6. In the House of Commons a Northern Ireland Select Committee, similar to the Scottish Select

Committee, should be set up.

7. A Northern Ireland Regional Council should be established with local administrative powers similar to those held by Scottish regional councils (and county councils in England).

A final word

The last word on the Northern Ireland problem lies I believe with Europe. Whether we like it or not, we are moving irresistibly towards European unification. Even those British people who do not like it are forced to admit there is no alternative. If the other countries of the Community are determined, as it seems they are, to press forward to unification, we must press forward too. We have no choice in the matter, because the alternative of being left all alone outside a united Europe is seen as unthinkable by everyone.

In the face of that fact, the argument about Irish unification is likely to become more and more remote from reality. Already the entire territory of the island of Ireland is within the European Community. Unification of Europe, with more and more economic and political power being drawn inevitably to the centre, will drain the old argument over who should govern the six counties of any substantial content.

As far as we can judge, the unification of Europe will happen long before there is any likelihood of a majority in Northern Ireland voting for unification with the Republic - if indeed that day ever comes. So it makes sense for the nationalists in the North to accept at long last what the unionists in the South accepted more than half a century ago, that Partition will continue until it fades into insignificance through the rise of a united Europe.

I do not believe that lessens the cogency of the arguments I have put forward in this talk. But it might make them more congenial to those who still yearn for the unification of North and South in Ireland.

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The Group is unofficial. It aims to organise support by Conservatives in Great Britain for their colleagues in Northern Ireland. It does not itself hold any views, but publishes contributions intended to assist in the formation and development of Conservative Party policy. Views expressed in any of the Group's publications are personal to the writer, and are not to be taken as those of the Party.

Note On 31 January 1991 the Northern Ireland Office in Whitehall issued the following reply to the author of the above pamphlet, written by Dr K G Donnelly:-

The pamphlet makes many interesting observations, although it will come as no surprise to you that the Government does not share either your analysis or your views on the way forward. I have no doubt that you are familiar with the Government's position. You will have heard Dr Mawhinney¹ speak on this when he met you last year as part of the Conservative Political Centre delegation to Northern Ireland. But I might make a couple of points about your suggestions for rectifying what you perceive as the 'four fatal errors'. (I cannot comment on your proposal about the GB political parties organising in Northern Ireland, as this is a matter for the parties themselves, and not for the Northern Ireland Office.)

You suggest that devolution as a policy is wrong, and that instead NI should be fully integrated

¹ Then Minister of State for Northern Ireland, later Sir Brian Mawhinney MP.

into the UK. This ignores the fact that there is a substantial amount of support on both sides of the community for a devolution settlement - you will be aware that one of the Unionist parties has recently been using the subtitle of 'the devolution party'. The crucial factor is clearly developing a devolutionary framework that respects both traditions in NI and to which both sides of the community are happy to give their full support. It is to this end that the Secretary of State has been directing the discussions he has been having this year. No matter what the outcome of those particular discussions, some such process must lie at the heart of any resolution of Northern Ireland's problems.