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to file

A Proposed Article for John Hume for inclusion in certain
Sunday Newspapers. A reply to Conor Cruise O'Brien.

The reaction in Britain to the Brighton bombing has been quite different from what one would have expected some years ago. There has been a very noticeable change in British thinking about the nature of the violence in Northern Ireland, and the purposes and aims of Ireland organisations. Comment on the Brighton atrocity has been much more sophisticated and thoughtful than it has been in similar circumstances in the past.

There was a universal belief that the incident should not either freeze or accelerate political movement, that it should have no effect at all on the Government's Irish policy. There was also a widespread recognition that the real purpose of the bomb was not to frighten the British Government into withdrawing from Ireland - the IRA are not so stupid - but rather to generate a negative political reaction in Britain, which would reduce the Prime Minister's freedom of movement when she meets the Taoiseach next month. This comment was made most cogently by the former Secretary of State, Jim Prior, when he suggested that the bomb was aimed at the November summit, and was intended to destroy any hope of political advance.

There is a developing awareness in Britain that the violence in Northern Ireland arises not just from political discontent. If that were the case every country in the world would be torn apart. The violence in Northern Ireland derives from the hopelessness which is caused by political stalemate and stagnation.

There are clear signs of recognition in Britain that what violent organisations in Northern Ireland fear most is political movement, the breaking of the stalemate, and the creation of a fluid political situation. They fear that the November meeting between Prime Minister and Taoiseach could bring fresh political development. Above all, that was what they were trying to explode when they made an attempt on the lives of the British Cabinet.

Surprisingly the only true negative comment in the British press came from Conor Cruise O'Brien writing in the Observer. His article was built around the statement "There is no political compromise which will induce the IRA to stop killing people", a statement he advised every British politician to paste on his bathroom mirror! His argument was that there is no political solution in Northern Ireland, and that talk of political solutions encourages the IRA. Direct Rule and a tough security policy are the only possible options for the British Government in his view.

Dr. O'Brien's reasoning is both faulty and dangerous, faulty because it is based on a series of non sequiturs, dangerous because it encourages British politicians and British Governments to do nothing to break the stalemate which generates the violence.

Now, it is true that no political compromise will induce the IRA to cease fire. But it is wrong to adduce this as a reason for doing nothing. To do so is to make the IRA the only real consideration in determining policy on Northern Ireland. The

result is the reduction of the Northern problem to a contest between the British and the Provos. This is of course what the Provos want, because it makes politics and politicians peripheral to the military struggle. Political movement reduces their importance and their support and they will do all in their power to prevent it. They know that if political institutions are developed here, which nationalists can support, their days are numbered.

Dr. O'Brien is also right in asserting that a United Ireland cannot be forced upon the Unionists by Britain. He is wrong in implying that there can be no political change short of a United Ireland. It is right that a united Ireland could only be brought about with substantial consent from Unionists. It is wrong to suggest that any political change, however large or small, is impossible without Unionist consent. There have been many changes in Northern Ireland over the past fifteen years without Unionist consent, one man one vote, fair allocation of public authority housing by a centralised independent Housing Executive, the Fair Employment Agency, the abolition of the Special Police, the abolition of the old Stormont Government, all were vigorously opposed by the vast majority of Unionists, yet they were accomplished by government.

The changes which have taken place in Northern Ireland, however, have been largely negative. An old discredited political hegemony was dismantled, but apart from functional agencies, no new political structures were created to take their place. Remote

control from London is unsatisfactory - most of all to the London Government. It is time to begin the work of building new structures. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach ought not to be deflected from that course when they meet in November. If they are deflected or distracted the IRA will have won a round, and everybody else will have lost.