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Part IV

Possible Reconciliation between North and South

I. Pre-conditions for a 32-County set-up

(a) Economic and Welfare

(i) General Growth. It is important that a satisfactory rate of economic growth in the South should be evident. Generally it would be preferable if both areas were at an equally advanced stage of economic development but as an alternative it might be sufficient if we could show an acceptable rate of growth over a previous sustained period. This is a question of general policy which does not affect directly the wider issue of North/South policy.

(ii) Trade. A 32 County set-up would involve a review of our external trade policy to take account of the particular interests of Northern Ireland. This might involve for us membership of EFTA and changes in our customs duties on imports from other third countries. The question would be solved by joint membership of the EEC

(iii) Agriculture. It will be important to maintain for the North her existing subsidies and benefits in agriculture. If it were possible for us to participate more fully in the British agricultural policy this would, of course, facilitate harmonisation with the North. So too, of course, would membership of the EEC.

(iv) Social Welfare Benefits. The North would wish to continue her present level of Social Welfare Benefits (including health and education) and perhaps keep in line with any future developments in Britain. It might not be necessary in the short run to align the social welfare systems North and South.

The maintenance by the North of her present standards in agriculture and social welfare presupposes (at least in

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the foreseeable future) the continuance of British subsidies which at present amount to £100 m. a year. At the moment parity of social services with Britain requires on Northern Ireland's part parity of taxation, etc., and deviations from the latter must involve deviations from the former. Some form of economic union with Britain may, therefore, be necessary.

(b) Social

Beyond recognising the existing social differences and hoping for their removal, there is no social pre-conditions for unity.

(c) Cultural

The only area which might have to be dealt with in advance is the question of the Irish language. The North would probably have to be permitted to continue here existing policy on the language. There should also be safeguards against discrimination on the grounds of language in new institutions set up for the 32-county entity.

(d) Religious

There must be guarantees that the North would not have to accept our standards on divorce and censorship. There must also be specific safeguards against religious discrimination in new institutions set up. Most of all there must be some change in the religious climate in the North and this may involve some rethinking by the Catholics in the North especially the Catholic hierarchy (e.g., in relation to education.)

(e) Political

(i) Autonomy

There should be no need for a major change in the amount of autonomy which Northern Ireland has, both as regards her functions and her area of jurisdiction.

(ii) U.K. Link

/Theoretically

Theoretically an arrangement acceptable to Northern Ireland could be made which would involve severance of the political link with Britain. However, in view of the South's inability to subsidise the North on the U.K. scale an arrangement would not be acceptable to the North, which did not provide for the continuance, to a substantial degree, of the present close economic links with Britain. This might not be possible without some political relationship with Britain but again joint membership of the EEC might solve the problem.

(iii) Harmonisation of Political Systems

A comparison of the political, legal and administrative systems in the two parts of Ireland appears in Appendix III which concludes that the differences would not create any great problems in a 32-county set-up.

(f) Constitutional

A number of changes in our Constitution of relevance to North/South policy have been recommended in the Report of the Committee on the Constitution made in 1967. Some of them, if accepted, would remove religious difficulties; particularly the recommendation on divorce and the special position of the Catholic Church. The main change, however, in this context is the amendment of Article 3 to remove the implication that we have de jure control over the North. This change would be desirable in the light of any rapprochement, and may in fact help in achieving such rapprochement.

(g) Summary

The analysis above shows that any solution to the question of partition would be greatly facilitated by

(a) the maintenance of a satisfactory rate of economic growth in the South which should, if possible, exceed the rate of growth in the North;

(b) membership of the European Economic Community on the part of both Ireland and the United Kingdom;

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(c) closer economic integration between Ireland and the United Kingdom especially in agriculture (this involves political considerations, especially in the context of our not becoming members of the EEC in the near future);

(d) an attempt, on our part to recognise the difficulties that would be caused for the North in any 32-county set-up and to take steps to reduce these difficulties where possible.

The type of structural set-up which would give effect to a union or which would tend to bring about conditions in which some form of union would be possible are considered in the next section.

II. Types of Structural Set-Up.

In considering the possible solutions in practical terms, it is necessary to have regard to the factors set out in the previous section, all of which limit the type of structural set-up which would be satisfactory to Northern Ireland. On the basis that any structure would have to be agreed between North and South, it has been decided to rule out of consideration, in so far as this exercise is concerned, any solution such as an All-Ireland Republic either unitary or federal, which maintained no link at all with Britain and which, as a result, involved the North in an acceptance of lower standards of living and of welfare services. In this context it is noteworthy that a Belfast Telegraph Poll in 1967 showed that 56% of the population of Northern Ireland favoured a United Ireland and that the majority of these (44%), both Nationalists and Unionists, favoured a United Ireland linked with Britain.

A range of possibilities - some of which may be somewhat impracticable - are examined below. An attempt has been made in each case to maintain some link between Northern Ireland and the U.K.

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They fall into two categories:-

- (a) those involving no closer links between the Republic of Ireland and Britain;
- (b) those which would involve closer links between the Republic of Ireland and Britain.

It must be borne in mind that any relationship will evolve over time and a loose form of relationship should not necessarily be rejected.

- (a) Arrangements involving no closer links between the Republic of Ireland and Britain
 - (i) A federation of North and South

At the moment most of what might be called the "sovereign" powers of Northern Ireland are exercised by the United Kingdom. On the other hand the South is a sovereign state in its own right. A federal solution would, therefore, involve both Britain and the Republic in giving up certain sovereign powers to some federal parliament. For example, the federal parliament (which might be elected on an equal basis by the Stormont and Dublin Parliaments and which might sit alternately in Dublin and Belfast) would deal with some matters that are, so far as the North is concerned, at present "reserved" to the U.K. Parliament (e.g. postal service, taxation including customs duties, excise duties, income tax and profits tax, registration of deeds, public records) as well as some "excepted" matters (e.g., currency). Some matters of common interest (e.g., transport and power, police forces, fisheries, legislation in regards to contagious diseases of animals) might also be included.

Problems would arise in relation to taxation unless a considerable degree of harmonisation had already been achieved. The main problem of principle, however, would be the extent of the powers which would be given to the federal parliament. So far as the South is concerned this type of

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solution might be acceptable as a step towards solving the Partition problem. The difficulty as regards Britain and Northern Ireland would be to get the British to give up enough power to make the federal parliament viable without their reducing their present level of subsidisation of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland would, of course, have to continue to make some sort of contribution towards the services supplied by the United Kingdom Parliament e.g., defence, external trade etc. The question of her sending representatives to Westminster would also have to be reviewed.

(ii) A Confederation of North and South

An arrangement less rigid than federation might be devised whereby a loose confederation of the two areas would be set up involving an institutional super-structure which would not take away from existing sovereignties. Both areas might aim at gradual harmonisation of policies in some spheres and the transfer of matters of common interest to all-Ireland Institutions. The confederation might evolve into a federation on the lines of (1).

This solution is likely to be more acceptable to the North than a federation. The North initially would prefer a loose form of arrangement from which she could opt out if necessary. A confederation would provide the obvious framework for this. It is also better suited for maintaining close links between the U.K. and Northern Ireland and as a basis for developing the South's economic links with Britain.

The South might object to the looseness of the relationships but it would probably be acceptable on the basis that it would evolve into a true federal set-up after some time.

(iii) Condominium

By condominium we mean a set-up whereby two countries exercise control over an area. For example, the "reserved" and "excepted" powers in relation to Northern Ireland might be exercised by some sort of Anglo-Irish Council of Ministers

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instead of by the U.K. Parliament. A problem here would be that of accountability to parliament. Northern Ireland would also oppose it unless they had some representation on the Council of Ministers and even then they might not accept the principle implicit in the proposal that the South had some sort of sovereignty over the North. It is doubtful if the British Government would favour the idea either.

(iv) An EEC or Benelux Type of Arrangement

An agreement might be concluded providing for gradual economic integration of North and South over a fixed period on the EEC or Benelux models. While it would concentrate on economic integration it would probably have to include some form of institutional machinery, with the ultimate hope that these institutions would evolve on a federal basis.

Possible objections to this from the South's point of view are that it might take too long and that in any event the EEC or Benelux models have not been successful in achieving political unity. Economic union with Northern Ireland would involve much closer economic harmonisation with Britain and the implications of this would have to be examined in detail. Still, it would be worth examination.

(v) An OECD/Council of Europe type Agreement

A loose agreement on co-operation, consultation and co-ordination of policies might be devised with institutions as in OECD or Council of Europe.

This would have the advantage of institutionalising existing ad hoc meetings between the two sides, of creating good will and again of being a beginning towards greater integration of the areas. Of course at the moment the Anglo-Irish Economic Committee might be said to perform these functions or some of them. A permanent sub-committee of the Anglo-Irish Committee to deal specifically with North/South matters might be a possibility. Meetings of Parliamentarians on the lines of the Council of Europe would have obvious advantages in

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improving relations between the two areas.

(b) Arrangements involving closer links between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain

(vi) A Federation of the two parts of Ireland and Great Britain.

Some suitable arrangement might be implemented by which the Republic maintained most of its existing autonomy and status while joining a new federation of, e.g., the British Isles or Britain and Ireland.

This might be regarded as a backward step and would certainly be opposed in many quarters. It would, however, be different from membership of the U.K. since we could participate on the basis of political equality. However, it would appear necessary to have new institutions for the federation including a federal parliament with powers in certain fields. Ultimately a substantial loss of sovereignty on our part would have to be accepted unless the institutions were such that we had rights completely out of proportion to our population.

(vii) Federation between North and South -economic integration with Britain

As a follow-up to the Free Trade Area, a system of economic integration with Britain might be developed in parallel with a federation with the North. An EEC-type arrangement between Ireland (North and South) and Britain would be the first step in this process. It would eliminate the customs and excise aspects of the border and generally provide for common economic policies. North and South could both supply representatives to a joint British/Irish institution. It is debatable if economic integration of both North and South with Britain could be achieved without political links as well and this arrangement might end up as a federation on the lines of (vi). As such it would probably

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be politically unacceptable to the South except in the context of a wider European grouping. However, it might be possible to have economic integration of Britain and Ireland without political integration, for example, there might be a federal ~~union~~ of North and South and a loose confederation between that union and Britain. The basic problem would still be to avoid being swamped politically by Britain.

(viii) Federation of North and South - association of both parts with Britain.

A federal union between North and South could be devised with external economic association with Great Britain on the lines of the Greek or Turkish associations with EEC. Again any loose arrangement between Northern Ireland and Britain must involve some financial losses.

Summary: The basic problem in any solution is to reconcile the interest of the North in being economically close to Britain with a loosening or severance of the political links between them. Closer economic links between the South and Britain would go some way to solve this problem but would pose important political questions for the South. In a wider grouping such as the EEC the problem is considerably reduced.

Pending developments on the EEC front slow progress must be accepted. As a first step the confederation solution mentioned at (ii) or the Council of Europe arrangement at (v) appear to be the most worthy of further examination.