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cc PS/Mr Bloomfield ✓  
Mr Parkes  
Mr Chesterton  
Mr Elliott  
Mr Spence  
Mr Warburton, DOE  
Mr Blackwell

Mr Bell

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I was very interested to see your note of 22 December to (the late!) Miss Elliott, not so much because I agreed with some of its detailed arguments (eg that street names in Irish are a kind of human right if people seriously want them) but because you open up debate about how to give the Agreement some constructive value.

We all have our instinctive presuppositions. You feel able to speak about a community as 'the other lot', and to write about the 'intolerance and bigotry' (of those who oppose more public use of Gaelic) which it would be cowardly not to resist. Anyone in NI public administration over the past 60 (or indeed 150) years will understand what you mean, and I myself was the first contemporary NI Civil Servant to identify publicly with criticism of the Unionists: the language of the Cameron Report was often Lord Cameron's but its thinking was mine and so very often were its words. The same is true of the Scarman Report. In taking that line I was reflecting the ordinary views of most NI Civil Servants.

But circumstances have changed. If the Ulster Unionists were to be criticised in 1969, so the main culprits now, and for many years, have been Irish Nationalists. The 'intolerance and bigotry' of the Irish Republican tradition is not a matter of back street or rural politics: it is implicit in the separatist ethos of the ROI. It should now be clear to everyone that NI tensions exist because British/Irish tensions exist, and that it is time to take a less moralistic and more constructive view of the problems we face.

I think you seriously underplay the UK's proper stance. It should not be a question of detached observers playing games; nor should it be a question of regarding ROI attitudes as independently valid. The only perspective which would do justice to the situation is bi-insular, because it correctly presupposes that the British Isles form a social and economic sub-system, and that in modern conditions the cultural differences between its various communities will increasingly diminish, and should do so. In historical terms the fragmentation of 1912-22 should be seen as a disaster to be mitigated rather than as a process to be further encouraged.

The topic is a large one and I think I should refer you to my 1983 Harvard paper. Since it deals with presuppositions it is not yet quite out of date.

The Conference system does not precisely meet the public needs of the situation so analysed. It is designed too much for diplomatic purposes, and it presupposes an unreal equivalence between the value of UK and Irish perspectives. Its local consequence (as you imply in your note) is to divide the NI communities even further. Worse still, and unless it is handled very carefully, the conventional pluralism of NI public policy will be shattered, and we shall end up with two rabidly 'British' and rabidly 'Irish'

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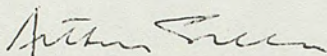


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communities. From there it is only a step to Conor Cruise O'Brien's celebrated (and dreadful) Model B. To hope that policies of 'equal recognition' will ultimately bring both communities together is the UK equivalent of the SDLP's strange faith in the harmonising qualities of Gaelic

I see no reason to believe that there is any route to internal harmony which does not involve wider, indeed post-national, identities. On linguistic and cultural issues the views of the ROI cannot help but be reactionary. Because Irish nationalism is reactionary, Ulster nationalism is doubly reactionary. It is only the UK which is in a position to take a properly comprehensive view and it really cannot do so if we sentimentalise about the value of Irish language and culture. The reality - and a very good thing too - is that Ireland and Britain are both sharers in mid-Atlantic society. It is always possible for the Robin Flowers (or indeed the Peter Bells) of this world to love romantic Ireland dead and gone. But it would be disastrous if that spirit played any part in UK public policy making.

Happy New Year (as we say in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Dublin and Belfast).



A J Green  
30 December 1986