

Analyses: "ULSTER WHAT NEXT"

Gerald Priestland

B.B.C. Radio 4

Thursday, October 30, 1975

8.45 p.m. - 9.30 p.m.

The stately palace of Stormont stands on its autumnal hill outside Belfast waiting for a reason to be there. Inside the 78 delegates of the northern Irish people have been looking for a constitution, one which might restore to the Province a responsible and responsive Assembly.

Looking down on the Convention familiar faces help to pick out the Party fractions: farmer Harry West and his Official Unionists; preacher Ian Paisley and his Democratic Unionists; William Craig and his now divided Vanguard; Brian Faulkner and his 5-man Unionist Party of Northern Ireland; Gerry Fitt and his Social Democratic and Labour Party. So far as such arithmetic is reliable there are some 43 delegates pledged to maintain the Unionist supremacy and 35 amenable to some form of compromise with the Catholics.

As I folded myself into the Press Gallery the Leader of the moderate Alliance Party, Mr Oliver Napier, was remarking that in almost six months the Convention had got nowhere. The Report of the United Ulster Unionist Coalition, the U.U.U.C., was going to Westminster as the majority opinion and it was only to be hoped that when it was rejected by London, as he expected, serious negotiation could begin at last. Mr. Napier observed, wisely it seemed to me, that the question was not how to construct the most effective form of government in some ideal society but how in Northern Ireland, with its deep historical divisions could they create institutions which all Ulstermen, Protestant and Catholic alike, could identify with and support. To Mr David Bleakley too, the solitary delegate of the Northern Ireland Labour Party, the debates of the past six months seem just the first round.

"MR. BLEAKLEY (N.I.L.P.): I think the politicians are at fault here but it was very much what we expected. They feel they have a commitment to their electorate and they must work through that commitment before anything can be done. I think the other difficulty was that the northern Irish people were asked to do in five or six months what the whole British people have not been able to do in seven or eight

hundred years of constitutional history: to produce a written constitution. I think it was asking too much for northern Irish people in the present climate of opinion to, in six months, come up with a splendid formula and for that reason in a sense you needed five or six months to get to know one another, to go through the preliminaries, to find out the techniques of dialogue, to find out - this great difficulty in Ulster - to find out how planter and Gael who really do not know one another, could get to know one another and get to trust one another. I have been one of those people, Mr Priestland, who believe that until we get trust, structures will not evolve."

MR. PRIESTLAND: And in that respect perhaps the six months of the Convention have not been a complete waste of time which is why in spite of defiant statements about sticking to principles it is important that nobody should regard the present situation as a full stop; rather its a semi-colon, for there are objectives that delegates on all sides share. They all want a regional parliament restored. They all want the scandal of hooliganism and extortion tackled. They all agree that nobody else really cares about Ulster and that nobody is going to solve their problems but themselves, Protestant and Catholic. Or as David Bleakley put it in much more discerning terms, planter and Gael. It seems to me that if one is looking for the root of the Irish problem it has to be found in the strategic, not even economic interests, of England. Interests which imposed on the native Irish who happened to be Catholic, Scots and English colonisers who happened to be Protestant. Over simple if you like but essential and, David Bleakley thinks, almost indestructable.

"MR. BLEAKLEY: There is a sense in which Ulster people both Protestant and Catholic alike, unlike English people, have very long memories indeed and it is often said that the English preserve their old buildings and the Irish preserve their old memories. Now that is exactly true of the north Irish position. There are people here who still talk as though they themselves have been put off the land by the incoming planter. I know people in County Antrim who still hold bits of paper which they say gave them the right to possession of the land which was taken off them three or four hundred years ago. So there still is that sense of economic alienation. But above all else of course the way in which the Ulster man and woman has been separated has underlined this division."

WHAT NEXT"

MR. PRIESTLAND: One thing about the religious identities which both communities have cultivated is that they are much harder to modify than mere political identities. Politicians, thank goodness, are constantly adjusting their policies in the light of changing circumstances, but who dares tinker with the eternal truth.

Mr. John Hume of the Social, Democratic and Labour Party, or S.D.L.P., believes the sole objective of the Unionist movement is to preserve the Protestant domination and that loyalty to the British Crown and Parliament comes second. It may indeed be dumped altogether if that is in the interests of the ascendancy.

"MR JOHN HUME (S.D.L.P.): For 50 years we have heard them tell the electorate here that union was the first principle of their political philosophy but once the other side of the union, the British Government and Parliament, say: "Yes, but you must share power", that threatens Protestant domination and ascendancy and immediately you find a movement developing amongst them for an independent Northern Ireland which is the only final way it would seek and maintain that ascendancy. So I think that is the approach they have taken, I think it is tragic that they have done so because I think that the real protection of the Protestant population in Northern Ireland rests in their own numbers. There can be no solution which does not protect their rights and traditions and attitudes.

Similarly the other tradition in Ireland has tended, particularly in its more violent forms, to preach an 'ourselves ^{alone} along' attitude as well and to try and put forward a ^{Notion} ~~notion~~ - a romantic notion - of Ireland which bears no relation to the reality of life here and which tries to put forward a notion that we could have a united Ireland and an independent Ireland which ignores the wishes of a million people who live in the northern part of it. That suffers from the same weakness and until we get to the stage where both traditions in this island agree on partnership and agree that that partnership expressed in institutions will through time by evolution develop understanding and common concern and replace the prejudices and the fears that have dominated our past, that is the only way forward. ^{UNFORTUNATELY} Unfortunate to most Irish people of either tradition it is not instant enough."

R WHAT NEXT"

MR PRIESTLAND: "Not instant enough" says John Hume of the Catholic S.D.L.P., which, incidentally, is claimed by the Provisional Sinn Fein to represent little more than one-third of the Catholic population, but that is based on the Provisional's own survey.

To most Ulstermen I suppose the arch Protestant must be the Rev Ian Paisley whose own Free Presbyterian Church is booming with high pressure revivalism, a technique which Dr Paisley learnt in the United States and which has a peculiar appeal in Northern Ireland. It reminds me strikingly of the style I have seen among the poor whites of Tennessee and the Carolinas. Dr Paisley with his dozen Democratic Unionists has become an increasingly dominant figure in the Convention driving ^{THROUGH} the U.U.U.C. a resolution prohibiting any participation in government by the S.D.L.P. on the grounds that it was essentially Republican. Mr Paisley strongly denies that this is being anti-Catholic.

"MR. PAISLEY (U.U.U.C.): It is wrong to say that we want Protestant supremacy. We want Unionist supremacy in order to keep our country where it is. But by that supremacy I am not talking about jack boots, I am not talking about pushing into the ground any section of the community, I believe all sections of the community must have a fair crack of the whip, but that has to be done by the votes of the electorate. If they can win a majority they will form the government. If they cannot I ask the simple question, "Why will they not form the Opposition as I am prepared to do?" "

MR PRIESTLAND: But what in fact are the majority Unionist proposals for the future government of the Province?

The Ulster position says the document does not lend itself to any solution based on some contrived constitutional formula. The U.U.U.C. remains convinced that maximum stability will be maintained with the Prime Minister and Executive chosen on conventional parliamentary lines. Other groups favour a power-sharing or coalition system. This is the basic difference. The Unionist Report goes on to describe any institutionalised link with the Republic of Ireland, the so called Irish Dimension, as undesirable window-dressing. It goes on to propose the development and strengthening ^{of} powers of opposition, implying that if the Catholics have little hope of being elected to govern at least they might oppose more effectively and more profitably. This would be done by creating a committee

ER WHAT NEXT"

system covering every department in government and offering well paid chairmanships to Opposition members. In addition there would be a Bill of Constitutional Rights to protect Stormont against interference from Westminster and a Bill of Citizens Rights and Duties, including the duty to abide by the law. Clearly all this is fine if you see things the Unionist way, but as the S.D.L.P. has made clear, it is no substitute for guaranteeing power-sharing. It is true that deeply partisan term is no longer prescribed as such by the Act setting up the Convention but the White Paper and the Secretary of State made it equally clear that London expected something more generous to the minority than what is being proposed.

I asked Dr Cornelius O'Leary, Reader in Political Science at the Queen's University, if the Unionists had really learned so little.

"DR CORNELIUS O'LEARY: So it would appear but it is possible that there is a certain amount of shadow-boxing here. As you know one leader, William Craig, who was a hardliner for many years and who seems as recently as May of this year to be committed to the policy of integration. That is to say that if the Convention did not set up institutions which commanded the acceptance of both groups here, well then the British Government would just dissolve the Convention and carry on with Direct Rule or perhaps strengthen the links with the United Kingdom. Now William Craig has seen that this is not viable. This is the reason for his conversion. He believes that the trend in British thinking is towards disengagement rather than integration and that it is much better for Northern Ireland to have its own Parliament back and he believes that to concede a share in the running of the government of Northern Ireland to the S.D.L.P. would not be too high a price to pay for this."

MR PRIESTLAND: Mr Craig's penalty for suggesting this was to be expelled from the U.U.U.C. along with three of his colleagues. It should be added that Mr Craig does still support the blocks proposals. So does another significant figure, Mr John Taylor, who is probably the most intelligent theorist of the biggest Official Unionist group. He disagrees that their Report is just old Stormont writ new.

"MR JOHN TAYLOR (U.U.U.C.): I personally, as a former Cabinet Minister in the old Stormont Parliament and Government, would see many differences now on the question of finance definitely we are looking for powers now which did not exist in the old Parliament. On the question of human rights we are proposing a Bill of

TER WHAT NEXT"

ghts for the community here, and then coming to this all-important question of the actual membership of government. Well we are providing a role for the Opposition, be they S.D.L.P., or Alliance or Faulkner Unionists. In the system of decision making which did not exist in the old Parliament these committees, in which 50 per cent of the positions will be held by members of the Opposition, do give the Opposition almost a stranglehold grip on the progress of legislation through the House. It gives the Opposition tremendous influence and in a committee where they have 50 per cent of the seats there must be give and take by both sides if an agreed decision is to emerge."

MR. PRIESTLAND: Mr. Taylor seeks to explain the row about William Craig by drawing a distinction between the present function of Convention delegates that of proposing a constitution and their future quite a separate task of deciding party policy under that constitution.

"MR. JOHN TAYLOR (U.U.U.C.): Strictly speaking you can say the U.U.U.C. Members are in fact voting for a voluntary coalition system of government. It is in 1976 once you have got your constitution approved by the British Parliament that the different parties here ~~and only then~~ should they debate what their policies towards a voluntary coalition should be and it could well be then that several of the component loyalist parties in the U.U.U.C. would decide that they would be against joining in a voluntary coalition. But that is a policy decision to be made in 1976; it is not one which we should be debating now during the term of the Convention."

MR. PRIESTLAND: Do you think many Members of the U.U.U.C. realise what they may be letting in?

"MR. JOHN TAYLOR: No, I think there are very few members of the U.U.U.C. Coalition who realise that in fact they are voting for a system of government from which a coalition could emerge.

MR. PRIESTLAND: So as John Taylor sees it Mr. Craig may have damaged the cause of an eventual coalition by making too much noise and frightening the people away but there may be blame elsewhere. Mr. Craig himself describes the discussion that he and other Unionists were actually holding with the S.D.L.P.

'ULSTER WHAT NEXT'

"MR. WILLIAM CRAIG(V.U.P.): We were talking about setting up a devolved parliament of Northern Ireland along the accepted and traditional lines of any British Parliament and governments would be formed in exactly the same way. In order to get agreement to our proposals, in order to get confidence in the new institutions I was certainly willing to explore the clause that led to a voluntary coalition under the British system. I am sorry that we did not follow through our discussions with the S.D.L.P. No one knows whether we could have got an agreement or not but they did say a number of significant things. They were accepting the document in its entirety as a basis for discussion leading to a settlement. They were prepared to say that if we reach agreement we will not only accept the new institutions for Northern Ireland but we will uphold and defend them. They said if we reach agreement we are prepared to give unreserved backing to the forces of law and order and we believe that security should be in the hands of a parliament and government of Northern Ireland and that the security forces should be Ulster security forces. Now that was a remarkably big step forward and for Unionists not to have explored all the possibilities of that is a reckless thing to do."

MR. PRIESTLAND: What then has become of the old device of statutory power-sharing?

The Unionist argument is that it is alien to the spirit of British parliamentary democracy to guarantee a party office whether or not it wins election. I might respond that British parliamentary democracy did not evolve in Northern Ireland. John Taylor remains loyal to its spirit but sees that the majority must do something more than just stand upon its rights.

"MR. JOHN TAYLOR: I think the idea of power-sharing as originally interpreted has now been dropped in Northern Ireland politics. Of course there is this new issue of a voluntary coalition and one of the great difficulties in loyalist politics at the moment is ~~is~~ to get it over to the ordinary constituent and voter that there is a great distinction between compulsory power-sharing and a voluntary coalition. Now you ask me what is my attitude to it. My attitude is this that I feel that firstly everyone in Northern Ireland must recognise that the loyalist community are by far the vast majority of the electorate in Northern Ireland.

"LSTER WHAT NEXT"

This has now been proved time after time in an election and therefore they have the power of veto on any institution in Northern Ireland. But likewise the anti-partitionist minority have the power of veto because they are a significant minority; they represent about 25 per cent of the electorate in this province. When you have two great powerblocks that have vetoes they have to learn to work together and live together and therefore I feel that it is important that everyone in the country recognises that the system of government in Northern Ireland cannot survive simply by majority support. It must also have minority consent."

MR. PRIESTLAND: Ian Paisley takes the view that enough concessions have been made already to the S.D.L.P., that the Unionists have gone that extra mile. No other parliament in the world, he says, would allow the opposition such a role in decision making.

"MR. PAISLEY: We are making the opposition permanent ombudsmen who will be paid to keep their eye upon the departments of government and the S.D.L.P. have said to me, "We want to be sure we get a fair crack of the whip in the Government of Northern Ireland". Well what better way could you ensure that all minorities would get a better crack of the whip than giving them the status and authority of permanent parliamentary commissioners to supervise and scrutinise government departments."

MR. PRIESTLAND: We have been looking at the present situation mostly, though by no means entirely, through Unionist eyes. As we have already heard that in itself involves several points of view but the main reason for concentrating on the Unionists is that when all is said and done the really fateful decisions are theirs, or theirs, the I.R.A.'s and the British Government's. From the S.D.L.P. Benches John Hume still doesn't believe the Unionists will ^{VOLUNTARILY} ~~voluntarily~~ give his side any authority and he cites the U.U.U.C.'s vote to ban coalition.

"MR. HUME: That leads me to the view which I suspected anyway that the basic motivating factor is the preservation of Protestant domination here. That in essence was the reason why Northern Ireland was created in the first place; that is why the boundary of Northern Ireland was drawn so as to give them a permanent majority. One would have hoped that time and circumstances would have changed their attitude and would have brought them to the realisation that no society can exist on the attitude of ourselves alone, by one section of it, that it can only exist by the free workings of all sections together and the recognition of the rights and

ULSTER WHAT NEXT"

aspirations of all sections working together. That is not their position. Therefore I am forced to the conclusion that Protestant domination is what they are about as the means to protect their own traditions."

MR. PRIESTLAND: Protestant is a religion itself, it is not really an issue, is it. It is just a sort of coincidental badge which happens to be worn by a certain class, or type of person. What is fundamental to their class or type?

"MR. HUME: In essence religion happens to be the badge of difference in Northern Ireland in a way that colour is in other places although there is a very strong degree within the politics of Unionism, although I might say not all of them, but a very strong degree, represented by Paisley and others of just naked anti-Catholicism and that is very very obvious. I think that is a very strong motivating factor."

MR. PRIESTLAND: But if Mr. Paisley feels it necessary to nail his beliefs through the door like Luther there are others who resent his attempts to nail them down as well. Still whatever one thinks of Mr. Paisley's motives it cannot be denied that he does sound bugles in the blood of a large number of loyalists and never more loudly than when the I.R.A. is active. The Provisionals one might say are the best recruiting agents Mr. Paisley has. There are some who say they need each other. David Bleakley, the Labour Party delegate rings out the Rev. Ian's links both with violence and with a revivalist crusade against sin.

"MR. BLEAKLEY: In fact in some ways the terror campaign has played right into the hands of political reactionaries in Northern Ireland. Substantial political reaction in Northern Ireland is made possible by the terrorist campaign. When people are frightened they can't think straight and the people of Ulster are undoubtedly frightened and I think that if we had not had the terror campaign going parallel with the Convention we might well have had more consensus. But I think there is a fundamental divide inside the present U.U.U.C. and it is represented by the county families who are reflected by Mr. West and the respectable Presbyterian element as it were. Then you have a group which is much more Lumpenproletariat as it were, represented by Mr. Paisley, the big tent gospel kind of thing, the sort of Elmer Gantry approach to life. Now that just

"ULSTER WHAT NEXT"

does not go down well inside the Ulster Unionist ranks and there are many people who suspect Paisley, ~~because~~ ^{BECAUSE} as it were he is not one of the traditional Unionists' camp; he is not Presbyterian and he is not even an Orangeman and those are negative things which do not exactly endear him but Paisley is relevant in our situation today because of the turbulence. Once the turbulence begins to disappear, once Protestant and Catholic alternatives begin to emerge then he will become much less dramatic and he will be like many of our firebrands in the past, I feel he will retire to his pulpit again."

MR. PRIESTLAND: I think it is hard to deny that Mr. Paisley is better in tune with his constituents than most Unionist politicians, largely because his constituency and his church are almost the same thing and he moves continuously among them from one crowded prayer meeting to another. It is widely believed in Stormont political circles that not long ago even Mr. Paisley was convinced that there would have to be a coalition with the Catholics if Northern Ireland was to regain any kind of self government from London. But that he ~~recanted~~ ^{RECALLED} after a stern delegation of elders had warned him that his ecclestical future was at stake. It was only fair to put this to Mr. Paisley and he could hardly wait to deny it.

"MR. PAISLEY: It is absolute nonsense. I never at any time was prepared to discuss coalition government with the S.D.L.P. I was always totally and absolutely opposed to it and as far as my church is concerned, my church never at any time interferes with my political stand. I do not think that ever once has the presbytery of my church said to me, "This is the way that you ought to go", and if they did I would tell them to mind their own business."

MR. PRIESTLAND: We have heard of the gap that exists in the Unionist movement between the traditional gentry leadership like Mr. West and Mr. Craig and untraditional Mr. Paisley but there is yet another rift in the Unionist camp. One that separates Mr. Paisley from the loyalist Protestant working-class people - people who in any other circumstances would probably have tended to the Labour Party. Glenn Barr, one of William Craig's ousted colleagues represents that class as he does the Protestant para-militaries and he feels extremely bitter about the way certain politicians have exploited him and his mates.

'ULSTER WHAT NEXT'

"MR. BARR (V.U.P.): They use emotive phrases to get the people worked up and then when the people take to the streets, as they have done, these people themselves are never around to give them the leadership. As far as the Ulster Defence Association is concerned, and indeed the co-ordinating committee, that is the other para-military organisations affiliated to it, they have made it perfectly clear that they are not going to be used by the politicians any more and that if the politicians, as I have said with their loud mouths and their drum beatings, push us into a civil war situation then they will have to get on their para-military uniforms and get to the front of the fighting this time. As far as we see it they made certain commitments to the electorate of Northern Ireland which they cannot genuinely fulfil. They said they would return a government to Northern Ireland, and all the trimmings with it, and we know for a fact that that cannot be done unless there is some agreement between both sections of the community. They know it as well but they continue to say, "We will demand our rights from Westminster and if Westminster does not give in to us then we will take it", and when they say they are going to take it, they mean that I and people like me are going to take it for them and what we are saying to them is, "No, if you are going to take it this time you take it and you be in the front line to take it."

MR. PRIESTLAND: The choices facing Ulster are by no means limited to power-sharing devolution or colonial direct rule as at present. In theory at least there are the possibilities of complete integration into the United Kingdom, though that would be swimming against the tide of devolution or independence. Cornelius O'Leary assessed them both for me.

"MR. O'LEARY: The objections of the British Government to integration with Northern Ireland are first of all that it would commit the British Troops here permanently or indefinitely and that they would much prefer to reduce the military commitments anyway as part of this general cutback in expenditure and secondly it would strengthen the position of the I.R.A., particularly the Provisional I.R.A. The Provisional I.R.A. is officially committed to extracting from the British Government a pledge to disengage from Northern Ireland within a certain period. They are not likely to get this pledge but on the other hand if the trend of British policy is the other way towards increasing the British presence in Northern

ULSTER WHAT NEXT"

Ireland rather than diminishing it well then this would give the I.R.A. a propaganda lever which they would not be slow to grasp and utilise."

MR. PRIESTLAND: Why isn't there more support for the idea of negotiated independence for Ulster?

"MR. O'LEARY: The British Government has made it plain that if there is to be negotiated independence they withdraw both their troops and their subsidies. That is the first point. The second point is one which everyone knows but every few people are prepared to admit; that an independent Ulster under the terms of the Treaty of Rome have to reapply for admission to the European Economic Community. There is no question of having a package deal in advance and any individual Member of the Nine could veto its application. I do not think the British or Irish governments might but the French government would be quite likely to because they are already troubled with separatist movements in Brittany and Corsica and if part of the United Kingdom could hive itself off and enter as an independent state with the concomitance of membership of the Council of Ministers and of the Commission and so forth that would be a very bad precedent.

MR. PRIESTLAND: Nevertheless, the more Britain is seen as letting Protestant Ulster down the more Ulster Unionism becomes like Ulster Nationalism. Paradoxically, most Loyalist homes now fly the Red Hand of Ulster rather than the Union Jack. Inevitably Nationalism does lead, however unrealistically, to talk of going it alone preferably on negotiated terms. There are those who believe that a fed-up Britain might even pay Northern Ireland to cut the union link. Both Mr. Paisley and Mr. Taylor have insisted to me that an Ulster U.D.I. is unthinkable. But Mr. Taylor has pondered the idea of Ulster on its own and explained to me what its advocates meant.

MR. TAYLOR: What they are talking about is something that is more acceptable and that is a form of negotiated independence whereby a new constitution emerges as a result of agreement between the Catholic and Protestant democratically elected representatives here. Of course, anything they can agree will be approved automatically in both London and Dublin. If we had an independent Ulster we would have a new situation because we have Catholics and Protestants in the same government and they would share the same constitutional aspirations in that they would both support the state, the constitution of the state, the symbols and emblems

ASTER WHAT NEXT"

of the State. There would not be this political division on constitutional issues which there is at the moment and so the negotiated independence definitely is a formula which would bring Protestants and Catholics freely together in a system of government.

MR. PRIESTLAND: But that I'm afraid explodes the moment it touches the thorny facts of the Catholic attitude. To John Hume as we have heard, independence is just another dodge for preserving the Protestant ascendancy. So given the arrival in London next week of the U.U.U.C.'s draft constitutional proposals; what happens next?

As we have noted the 1974 Northern Ireland Act made no specific provision either for power sharing as a right or for an Irish Dimension. The Act provided for a Convention to be elected to consider what provision for government was likely to command the most widespread acceptance throughout the Northern Ireland community. Claiming to represent 58 per cent of the vote the U.U.U.C. maintains that its proposals meet that requirement. John Taylor maintains there is no reason why their document should in those circumstances bounce back.

MR. TAYLOR: I think there is a chance that the Report will be accepted. But let us assume it is not. If it is not then it could be sent back to Northern Ireland to the Convention for further consideration. There the first decision lies with the Members of the U.U.U.C. as to whether ~~they~~^{THEY} are prepared to even reconsider it. My own personal attitude would be that because of the very dangerous situation that we have within Northern Ireland - there is a widespread conviction amongst all political parties in the Convention that the best answer is a devolved system of government at Stormont - we ought to be open minded and to further reconsider that Report to see if it is possible to meet some of the requirements of the British Government. That is my personal view. It may not be the view of the U.U.U.C.

ULSTER WHAT NEXT"

The U.U.U.C. may simply put a first class postage stamp on the Report and return it to Harold Wilson and we will then have a situation where there will be direct conflict between the majority of the people in Northern Ireland and the British Government. We could very quickly find ourselves going back to the situation that we were in in the Spring of 1974 with an industrial stoppage and the paramilitaries and so on. I fear that that type of development could now emerge if the British Government in the first instance mishandle the Report and secondly if the U.U.U.C. leadership in Northern Ireland have not a flexibility of attitude at the time that that Report comes back if it does come back here.

MR. PRIESTLAND: What of Bill Craig? Perhaps the most enigmatic figure in the whole confusing drama. There are some who think that if the Report does come back from London there will be enough defectors from the hard line Unionists to help him put together an emergency coalition with the S.D.L.P. There are others who think that the votes just are not there and that Mr. Craig would rather go to Strasburg. When I asked him if he would care to supply the leadership which Northern Ireland lacked he certainly did not decline the honour. Nor did he dismiss the Unionist Report as a basis for further talks.

MR. CRAIG: The proposals that are going forward in the majority Report are indeed very sound proposals for devolution in Northern Ireland. What they lack is the capacity to obtain the confidence of the minorities who have disagreed with us in the past. I was satisfied during the talks I had with the S.D.L.P. that they saw very considerable merit in the new committee structure that has been proposed for the Parliament. It is a pity that we have not been able to debate further with them the real strength of the actual mechanical proposals that are going forward. This will I hope be done when it comes back but I still believe that in order to give those proposals a fair chance and to get the Parliament off the ground effectively there would have to be an agreement and the only glimmer of hope of agreement that exists now or is likely to exist in the future is some form of voluntary coalition.

MR. PRIESTLAND: And coalition voluntary or otherwise with the Social and Democratic Labour Party is beyond the pale of Mr. Paisley's and most of Mr. West's unionists. As far as they are concerned there are only two options. Total integration in the United Kingdom with an increase of Ulster representation in the House of Commons or a 100 per cent Unionist provincial government. But to quote Alan Kerl, Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford the present structure

TER WHAT NEXT"

ensures that the Unionists will retain power. The question is: Does this assure security. The Professor answers himself that it would guarantee continued resentment, conflict and probably violence. I put much the same proposition to Dr. Paisley and got this reply.

MR. PAISLEY: Could I just say to you that no government in Northern Ireland will bring peace here. We had this glorious power-sharing exercise. Look back, see what happened. Where did the trouble come from? From the minority population - from the Irish Republican Army - and strange to relate the calm part of Ulster was when there was an Ulster Workers' strike because people could not get about. To say to me today that a power sharing government will bring peace is not just on. There will be no peace in Northern Ireland until the rule of law is restored. My party came into existence with one firm principle: 'All men equal under the law'. All men equally subject to the law. That principle has got to be applied ruthlessly - and I use the word deliberately - across the board whether it be Protestants and no one has condemned Protestant paramilitary atrocities more than I have, and no one has condemned I.R.A. atrocities more than I have, but both sections of the community must keep the law.

MR. PRIESTLAND: So it is perfectly simple. Wrong doing is due to wickedness and the cure for wickedness is to enforce the law. The real trouble is Dr. Paisley thinks the British authorities are not doing so. There is a strong whiff of betrayal in the air. The Ulster people have been kidnapped, intimidated and imprisoned by the terrorists says the Paisleyite journal 'The Protestant Telegraph' and goes on: "The ransom to be paid has already been negotiated by Merlyn Rees' staff and meantime they wait to hand us over to the enemy". Elsewhere the paper proclaims: "Rome condemned the Protestant people of Ulster and the I.R.A. were the executioners".

Glen Barr thinks neither this nor the Union Jack will rally the working class round the Unionist leadership any more.

GLEN BARR: A lot of the Loyalist working class now have started to question this type of politics. It is not sufficient to put a Union Jack on the food table any longer. People are now looking for bread and milk and foodstuffs to be placed on the table. When we see the present economic situation that has taken place, whilst the border issue is still very relevant to us, it is as far as we are concerned not the only issue. We will maintain the border ourselves if need

STER WHAT NEXT"

be. But in maintaining the border we will also be looking forward to social and economic progress. Not just the border issue and everything else forgotten. Those days have gone.

MR. PRIESTLAND: But have they? Who can be sure there won't be one more day of wrath which however it leaves the people of Ulster may at last prove too much for the people of Britain. At present it is my guess that the I.R.A. is mistaken in thinking the British people are about to cry, "Hold, enough". I suspect what would be too much would be a demonstration that the Ulster Protestants themselves had stopped caring about the violence. That they absolutely refused to see that power does not assure peace. Yet after seeing things these past few days from a Northern Ireland point of view I would be the last to lay down a deadline for patience. David Bleakley put the case most eloquently.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Far too often Irish politics has been bedevilled by the timetable of England. I have often said that we have got to remember that there is Irish people's time and English people's time. We are a historic people; we are trying to deal with the problems of 700 years. This is not another little local British difficulty. This is one of the great historical watersheds in the small pattern of islands to which we all belong. If Britain or the British government sees the Convention outcome in those terms then it will evoke a response appropriate to the historical dimension and it must be one which says this is a long term problem. This is a problem demanding patience. This is a problem demanding all the subtleties which are required in a perilistic situation. If we get that kind of approach then they will say: "Have another look at this position. Work on the basis of what you have done and see if we can take it a step firther." The real calamity would be for the British Government to say: "They have had their chance. Let us try a new initiative." And a new initiative in which the Ulster people play no part would be of course a disaster.

MR. PRIESTLAND: However dead the end the Convention may seem to have reached it must be encouraged to find its own way out and not be towed away by Westminster.

Behind the scenes there is more readiness to compromise, better personal relations than meets the eye. Talks between the parties had in fact made progress when the Craig-Paisley collision sent everyone/^{scampering}back to the prepared dugouts of their election manifestos where they now await the all clear. If there is an air

ULSTER WHAT NEXT"

of unreality about so much of what we have heard it is because lurking beneath the stage all the time are those whose language is not politics but violence. Men of both communities but more immediately the Provisional I.R.A. to whom any agreement short of their demands or no agreement at all may be the cue for violence.

It was fair enough, I think, for William Craig to urge me not to allow all the blame for any failure to pile on Loyalist shoulders. He looked forward grimly to a future of suffering for us all.

MR. CRAIG: We are now on the eve of a very big I.R.A. push. We can expect from now on at least one major incident a week and a number of minor ones. But when this Report goes to the Parliament of the United Kingdom there will I think be a slight escalation to intimidate the United Kingdom Parliament and when the Parliament proposes to send it back here there will be an even further escalation. If it does come back here and there are prospects of agreement they really will pull out all the stops to try to prevent agreement but if we can reach this political agreement then the United Kingdom government is in the strongest possible position to defeat the I.R.A. and I think when the I.R.A. is defeated it is only a matter of time until you get everybody back to accept the normal standards of law and order.

MR. PRIESTLAND: So we are going to have to learn to not tolerate but to endure a certain continuing level of violence whatever sort of political agreement is arrived at.

MR. CRAIG: That is exactly it. We have got to endure it. The Ulster people have endured a lot since 1968. I hope our fellow citizens in Great Britain can endure the pain and suffering that we must go through for the next six or seven months and our duty is to help by genuinely seeking out some sort of political settlement and agreement here.

MR. PRIESTLAND: But what settlement. What agreement.

I can only diversify and perhaps instruct you with a quotation from the great Ulster epic of Cuhoulán, the bronze age warrior, who single handed held off all the heroes of the South. At last the men of Connaught sent to ask if he had any terms for a truce. "That I have" said Cuhoulán, "But I shall not tell you what they are". "However if you can find anyone who does know them I shall be

ER WHAT NEXT"

glad to accept."
