

REVIEW ESSAY

McGarry, John, and Brendan O'Leary, eds. *The Future of Northern Ireland*. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1991.

This book appeared shortly before the start of the Talks between the major constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland, which Secretary of State Peter Brooke had long been seeking. One might have expected a book about the future of Northern Ireland to steer between what contending groups would like to happen and what is likely to happen in practice. But as it is largely made up of essays advocating particular proposals, it tends more to prescription than to analysis. Should an option for the future be given a chapter because significant groups in Northern Ireland want it? This is the only possible explanation for including the chapter on the unitary Irish state, but in that case why not one on the mainline unionist options, the "Way Forward," or the majority report of the 1975 Convention? By contrast a quite small Loyalist group, whose mentor was the murdered UDA leader John McMichael, effectively gets two chapters because it changed its policy from negotiated independence to codetermination. It is a strange book. After this reviewer had sketched some review comments on the individual chapters, I came to the editors' concluding chapter and was a little astonished to find them criticizing their chosen contributors' essays rather more harshly than I was moved to do myself. Having started off taking issue with Richard Rose's view that the problem is that there is no solution, and having presented lots of solutions, it then faults most of them without leaving enough space for their alternative.

In their introduction O'Leary and McGarry conclude that both Britain and Ireland have sought to prevent the spill over of Northern Ireland affairs into their domains. They describe Northern Ireland as a failure of nation building and of state building by both countries. The North was claimed by both but fully incorporated in neither, with the result that hegemonic control was exerted by one segment (unionists) over the other (nationalists). This is all true and at the same time, as we are trying to look at what these external powers might do together in the future, the other face of these negatives needs to be presented. The North of Ireland missed out on the great European upheavals which moved millions of people and drew frontiers so that homogeneous nations appeared (state building). Nor was this ethnic frontier subjected to any of the ultimately unsuccessful nation building exercises practised under Communism in Eastern Europe. But as ethnic conflicts erupt in Eastern Europe, most notably in Yugoslavia, a different unique aspect of Northern Ireland will be highlighted. Britain and Ireland, because they are concerned to prevent Northern Ireland souring relations between them, constitute a containing framework against the escalation of conflict. It is nearly impossible for paramilitary confrontationists to draw "their" external power into collision on their own terms, as it was, for example, militias on Cyprus in the 1960s. But another aspect of this is that the Irish — mostly Catholic — and

more especially the British — mostly Protestant — complain of the lack of support from their respective external allies. Indeed they often argue that this lack of support is tantamount to betrayal. So it is inevitable that any move Britain makes to break up the parameters of 'democratic' hegemonic control provokes charges of thoughtlessness and lack of understanding. This is reflected in several chapters of this book.

Hugh Roberts claims that the refusal of mainland UK parties to organize "is the single most important fact about the Northern Ireland Question." In a way he is right. But once British parties accepted that formal democratic mechanisms in Northern Ireland had been discredited by their association with Unionist control, neither party wanted a local wing attempting to shape its policy. So long as the Conservative and Unionist Parties were happy to uphold majority rule in Northern Ireland, this was not an issue. East Belfast Conservatives pleading for the introduction of the poll tax may be a touching demonstration of the possibilities for integrationism, but what of a Northern Ireland Conservative demand for the abrogation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA)? How would the Labour party go about forming a West Belfast branch around its policy of united Ireland by consent? The real issue here is the parties' very understandable refusal to give any encouragement to integrationism or to run the risk of attaching a local affiliate drawn from one community and articulating its constitutional preferences. They may not have said it as clearly as they could have done, but the chances that any such local branches of nationally based British parties might transcend local ethnic cleavages is very unlikely. It was tried by the French in Algeria with results that would justify the British parties' caution.

The editors' view is that consociation or power-sharing is the best means of stabilizing Northern Ireland and that the Anglo-Irish Agreement has been a device intended to coerce reluctant unionists in that direction. My main disagreement with them is that I believe the ground for eventually achieving this has to be created by deeper prior cooperation between the British and Irish governments. Can anyone claim that Southern irredentism towards the North has been strengthened since the Anglo-Irish Agreement? Are we nearer or further from seeing an end to Articles 2 and 3? In a recent article in *Fortnight*, Brendan O'Leary spoke of a strengthened Anglo-Irish Agreement ("with knobs on," as editor Robin Wilson put it) as a kind of punishment for the Unionists when they are seen to have caused the breakdown of the Talks.¹ The theme that involvement of the Irish Republic is a punishment runs through several chapters of the book. Paul Bew and Henry Patterson speak of a new method of managing the conflict "which takes as its prime concern the manipulation of communal identifications. But there is a real limit to the degree to which Catholics can be satisfied by the humiliations and discomfitures of Protestants." They juxtapose "reform" (good) and "creeping nationalism" (bad) without looking at what is involved in restructuring relations between the Nationalist community and state power. Until they have sufficient power in the North to secure changes in the system of law, order and justice, constitutional nationalists will not be able to take responsibility for measures

needed to counteract Republican violence. Only when unionists can see the Republic or northern nationalists with power using that power responsibly will they have the possibility to put aside their fear that they are an enemy. This issue is fundamental and touches all the serious chapters in this book.

Claire Palley expects that the Europe of 1992 is going to dissolve national conflicts, including eventually Northern Ireland's. She argues that Unionists should go for power-sharing and then turn the AIA into a framework for confederation. But she states that "much depends on whether the Republic continues to be perceived [by Unionists] as a base for terrorists and as unwilling to act against them." I think this important reservation about Euro-federalism may soon turn out to have more general application as national conflicts in Eastern Europe over territorial claims debunk any claims about the primacy of economic rationalism. For Unionists the IRA is their enemy. All concessions to Nationalists will seem to be heading down a single track, until the difference between wanting acceptance as equals in Northern Ireland and seeking victory over Unionists becomes clear. This is a chicken and egg problem, and the kernel of the dilemma is that the advantages of any new cooperative arrangement will not materialize until nationalists have the power to benignly surprise unionists. Some of the chapters are concerned with the negative effects the AIA has had upon the Unionists. I sympathize with Tom Hadden and Kevin Boyle's point that the AIA may need to be made more accessible to the unionists. They argue that long-term joint authority is inherently unstable because pressure would be put upon both governments to seek or concede further constitutional changes and it would also be inherently undemocratic because local politicians would have so little say. The Anglo-Irish Agreement may have fallen between two stools. It has contained enough to anger Unionists without seeming substantial to nationalists. Without making any claims that bigger changes were possible in 1985, it seems nonetheless that it has been the timidity as much as the supposed radicalism of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that is undermining it.

It is extremely difficult to devise any institutional consociational arrangement which can overcome a simple majority-minority segmentation. The only really good reason for thinking it might be possible is that both the British and Irish governments may be deeply committed to achieving it. The article on codetermination by Charles Graham and McGarry is very important because it highlights the difficulty of reconciling Unionist dislike of the involvement of the Irish Republic with the need to entrench the position of the Nationalists in Northern Ireland. They see the Republic's influence as the main reason why injuries were inflicted upon Catholics by Unionism in the first place. Their scheme involves a central role for a supreme court, which would fulfil the guarantor role for the Catholic minority usually accorded in other schemes to the Irish Republic. But what this proposal does is to shift the main area of tension and conflict from the work of the local executive to the judiciary. What power will anchor the authority of this supreme court? What will happen when it takes anti-discrimination decisions which are objectionable to Loyalists or pro-security forces decisions objectionable to Nation-

alists? This ingenious proposal's attraction like so many is to displace the focus of conflict.

There is in fact no substitute for the Republic having some kind of executive power in the North, especially in the formative stages preceding consociation. Without some kind of Republic executive power and probably police function in Northern Ireland it is hard to see how Catholics will ever see the state as their state. The absence of joint policing is what most firmly distinguishes where we are now under the Anglo-Irish Agreement from something more like a joint authority. The conditions under which local parties might have a real interest in consociation have not been created. It needs to be an alternative to something which is roughly equally objectionable to both communities, and something which is objectionable in symmetrical ways to both communities so that their unity becomes more than a convergence of negatives. That is to say a joint rule of London and Dublin. Apart from the value of power-sharing as an end in itself, there are few strong reasons why local politicians might want the responsibilities of government. Now that Northern Ireland is so heavily dependent upon infusions of UK money, any policy departure from UK norms will open up unwelcome issues about the levels of that support. So how might they be encouraged?

Despite their opening claim that there are many possible solutions for Northern Ireland, in their concluding chapter the editors say that the only two long run stabilizing solutions for Northern Ireland are consociation and repartition. They suggest that threatening repartition might generate a consociational settlement. Curiously, they mention the possibility of threatening joint authority to achieve a similar result only in the last footnote. (p. 303, fn. 24) When dealing with repartition, Liam Kennedy writes of the need for close intergovernment cooperation and indeed for joint policing. To the best of my knowledge no human partition has ever been carried out according to a plan. I certainly would have no faith in the lines on Kennedy's maps or the use of the M1 as a free passage for the Republic's army to West Belfast in its aftermath. If such overt inter-government cooperation in Northern Ireland is possible in the chaotic prelude to a repartition, then it should rather be done to stabilize coexistence. The editors object to joint authority on the grounds that when the Unionists accused the AIA of being such a thing, it was denied. Yet the failure of the Talks changes the situation as O'Leary himself implies.² The big asset of Northern Ireland is the possibility of developing inter-government cooperation between Britain and Ireland to an unprecedented degree. If joint authority is to be possible for ethnic frontiers, here is the place to create the precedent. Consociation would then be a process of eventually democratizing it. Anthony Kenny's proposal to have British sovereignty as the fall back for a joint authority misses the point that it is resorted to because it is an alternative to repartition. So the fall back would be a repartition of the shared territory, which is why it would not be resorted to lightly. Joint authority might create the ground work for consociation whereas repartition would end the possibility forever. The scars of mass human uprooting do not heal quickly.

This work does not consider the real ominous danger of how Britain would start shedding its responsibilities if that was what it meant to do. The treatment of repartition by Kennedy and then by the editors suggests they have not thought this through. They needed to pay serious attention to the prospects of a British withdrawal. In fact a repartition far from following this benign path is likely to be a side product of a much more malignant dereliction of British responsibilities.³ The Talks have a high probability of failure in the short/medium term. To deliver results the Unionists will have to agree to an entrenched Nationalist position in the administration, something which probably cannot be operationalized without some formal role for the Republic's government. In exchange they will need a clear acceptance of the existence of Northern Ireland — repeal of Articles 2 and 3 — and a commitment from the Republic and from constitutional nationalists to suppress political violence. This is a huge task for both Unionist and Nationalist leaders. If they are to be threatened in order to get them to share power and responsibility, then it should be with having external powers do what they will not do, and not with the turmoil of repartition. If British-Irish cooperation is to show its worth, then there are far more steps between the failure to get power sharing off the ground and repartition.

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Endnotes

1. Brendan O'Leary, "Unionists must give much more than an inch," *Fortnight*, no. 297 (July/August 1991).
2. *Ibid.*
3. See Adrian Guelke and Frank Wright, "The Option of a 'British Withdrawal' from Northern Ireland: an Exploration of its Meaning, Influence and Feasibility," *Conflict Quarterly*, X, no. 4 (Fall 1990), pp. 51-72.