

# The Political History of Northern Ireland since Partition: The Prospects for North-South Co-operation

PAUL BEW

## Introduction

THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF NORTHERN IRELAND since partition is perceived to be the weakest point in the efforts which have recently been made to present a ‘modernising’ or even ‘liberal’ case for Ulster unionism.<sup>1</sup> It is widely presumed that fifty years of unionist misrule in Northern Ireland (1921–72) constituted an appalling and discreditable story; revealingly even Roy Foster’s (1988) revisionist *Modern Ireland 1660–1972*—the most influential general work of Irish history in this generation—accepts this consensus and it was, in turn, the only section of that book to be praised by *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, the organ of Provisional Sinn Féin. It is too early, in fact, to offer a definitive account of this period, but is worth pointing out one stultifying effect of the present consensus. It actually inhibits the possibility of an historic compromise in Ireland by failing to situate accurately what was at stake at moments of potential North-South understanding, such as the Craig/Collins pacts of 1922 or the O’Neill/Lemass meetings of the mid-1960s. Unionists are presented with an exaggeratedly intransigent version of their own history while nationalists are encouraged not to reflect seriously on their own stance. These remarks have an historiographical context. Following the release of a massive amount of the material in 1977 (under the new, less restrictive public

<sup>1</sup> This paper does not attempt to deal with the ‘core’ historic experience of the unionist state after 1925—when it was formally recognised by Dublin in an international treaty, though this recognition was unilaterally withdrawn by the Irish constitution of 1937. There is no doubt that from 1925 to its abolition in 1972 the unionist state was responsive to populist sectarian Protestant pressures—though there were always elements in the elite who resisted the worst excesses—and this contributed mightily to Catholic alienation. This is the thesis of Bew *et al.*, 1979, and now published in a revised and extended edition, Bew *et al.*, 1996.

records regulation), the early landmark publications were by the academic historian Patrick Buckland, *The Factory of Grievances: Devolved Government in Northern Ireland 1921–39* (1979) and James Craig (1980); and self-confessed socialist republican Michael Farrell, *Arming the Protestants* (1983), which is considerably more interesting than his earlier, more polemical, but still useful *The Orange State* (1975), which was written before the release of documentation. Finally, there was the work of Paul Bew *et al.*, *The State in Northern Ireland: Political Forces and Social Classes* (1979), recently released in two heavily revised and extended editions, *Northern Ireland 1921–94* (1994) and *Northern Ireland 1921–1996* (1996). All these works took as their principal object the ‘old Stormont regime’—though, of course, Stormont itself was not built until the 1930s. All were critical, with varying degrees of emphasis, of the sectarian rigidity of the regime. Post-1983, it has to be said that this historiographical debate, such as it then was, went to sleep rather for at least five years. Nor is there any evidence of this work’s impact on public policy; it is, for example, quite likely that the framers of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 on either the British or the Irish sides, had not read any of it.

In recent years, however, the rate of publication within the field has begun to intensify again. In 1988 Dennis Kennedy published his *The Widening Gulf: Northern Attitudes to the Irish Free State 1921–48*. Kennedy clearly demonstrated—more decisively than any other writer—that unionist attitudes in the North were seriously affected not only by the nationalist violence directed against Southern Protestants in the period 1920–22, but also by their general treatment thereafter as Dublin moved ever more explicitly towards the adoption of the Catholic constitution of 1937. In 1993, the present writer (along with co-editors K. Darwin and Gordon Gillespie) published *Passion and Prejudice*, a collection of documents designed to illuminate both nationalist and unionist attitudes in the 1930s. In 1994 Eamon Phoenix published *Northern Nationalists: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland 1890–1980*—which together with important new books on educational matters by Mary Harris (1993) and Sean Farren (1995)—helped to fill in the Catholic-nationalist world view. More recently, Colm Campbell’s *Emergency Law in Ireland 1918–1925* (1995) and Bryan Follis’ *A State Under Siege: The Establishment of Northern Ireland 1920–25* (1995) have offered new documentary material on the 1920s. Most recently of all Brian Barton’s *Northern Ireland During the Second World War* (1995) with its revelation, based on the Dublin archives, that leading Northern nationalists placed their community under the protection of the Third Reich, is of great interest.

All of the books so far mentioned have a solid documentary basis. It is obviously more difficult to provide for the more recent period since the accession of Terence O'Neill to the position of Prime Minister for which, at best, only some cabinet papers, for example, are available. The historian has thus to rely rather more on interviews and the press. Nevertheless, some recent articles may be said to belong to a certain recognisable field of contemporary history—as opposed to political science or journalism. I have myself been involved in three books which cover the period from 1964 to the present day (Bew and Gillespie, 1993; Bew and Gillespie, 1996; Bew *et al.*, 1997) but pride of place must go to the recent Institute of Contemporary British History (ICBH) collection of papers, *The Northern Ireland Question in British Politics* (edited by Peter Catterall and Sean MacDougall) and a superb essay by Anthony MacIntyre 'Modern Irish Republicanism: The Product of British State Strategies' (1995).

This was the state of play before the release of a second most recent wave of documents. This new evidence is of two sorts—the normal release under the 30 year rule of material which now illuminates a part of the O'Neill/Lemass era, and secondly, in the autumn of 1996, some hundreds of documents relating to the earlier period of 1921–47 which had been withheld previously, largely for reasons of security sensitivity. These new security related papers (both of these in Kew and Belfast) reveal that there was rather more reason for unionist paranoia in the early 1920s than has traditionally been acknowledged by historians. Let us consider the nature of IRA violence throughout Ireland in the 1919–21 period. The new Public Records Office (PRO) files, released in November 1996, support the recent thesis of Peter Hart (and go rather against the comments in Campbell, 1995, on this point) that IRA violence was much more sectarian than has been acknowledged by scholars.<sup>2</sup>

Campbell advances some evidence which implies that a Southern Protestant willingness to act as British 'spies' might explain their casualty rate. Hart disagrees and is supported by the most important of the recently released files. Referring to the execution of so many so-called spies, the final 'end of term' lengthy report on the work of British intelligence services in Ireland makes it clear that the Southern Protestant community had long since been frightened into silence; in consequence it provided little information. This document offers a different explanation for the IRA's *modus operandi*:

Numbers of ex-soldiers and others have been murdered during the rebellion, not so much because they were discovered in active espionage—indeed, few of these had ever given information—but they met their deaths partly

<sup>2</sup> See for a foretaste, Hart (1996).

because there was a possibility that they might become informers and partly in order to keep alive the reasons in which it was considered desirable to impose. The outside public knew not whether or not the man foully done to death was an agent or not. In the customary notice found pinned on his back, it was inferred that he was, and, when cases of this kind were numerous, the layman concluded that the rebel organisation had almost miraculous facilities for tracing a betrayer.<sup>3</sup>

However, perhaps the most important aspect of the new documentation is that it permits a more complete assessment of those conjunctures when it appeared that a new and more harmonious North/South relationship might be worked out. This is of particular relevance in the immediate aftermath of the Framework Documents of February 1995 which were designed to provide a model for such a transformed relationship. To a remarkable degree the language, and, more importantly the concepts underlying all three efforts—the Craig/Collins pacts of 1922; the O’Neill/Lemass meetings of the mid-1960s and the Framework Document of 1995—are similar; yet so far, no such effort has succeeded and in such a context there may be a lesson to be learnt from previous failures.

### **The Craig/Collins Pacts of 1922**

The 1922 meetings between Sir James Craig, staunch Ulster Unionist Prime Minister, and Michael Collins, IRA leader and head of the new provisional government in Dublin, surprised many contemporaries. Yet, the immediate context is clear. Craig’s intelligence services had told him that on the eve of the Anglo-Irish truce of July 1921 it had been ‘the intention of the Sinn Féin authorities to send 500 men to Ulster to carry on guerrilla warfare’.<sup>4</sup> This latent danger obviously created a predisposition on Craig’s part to deal with the new government in Dublin—perhaps its intentions since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in late 1921 were now peaceable? Craig later explained that he wanted to get on to the ‘ground floor’ before some damaging proposition was advanced on either side or indeed before the London and Dublin governments approached him with some unsatisfactory initiatives of their own. In the light of these considerations, the fact that Craig and Collins reached an agreement is perhaps less surprising than has sometimes been suggested. For as Collins’ most sympathetic and well-informed biographer, Tim Pat Coogan, has argued, whilst Collins himself was a die-hard nationalist, he was well aware

<sup>3</sup> PRO 904/156/24. This document is clearly the work of Sir Ormonde Winter; see his *A Winter’s Tale* (1955).

<sup>4</sup> PRONI SB 24/4710. Divisional Commissioner’s report signed E. Gilligan and dated 2/12/1921.

of the fact 'that the bulk of the people in the twenty-six counties wanted a return to peace, not adventures across the border' (Coogan, 1991; see also Staunton, 1997). Collins also had particular and immediate concerns about the release of IRA prisoners. Both men wanted to sort any possible changes in the territory of Northern Ireland as quickly as possible; though they had very different views as to how extensive these might be. Craig wanted small adjustments whilst Collins was looking for something more radical. Collins wanted to see Catholic workers in Belfast receive better treatment; Craig wanted an end to the economic boycott of Northern businesses by the South—though largely for reasons of 'political atmosphere' as perhaps only 10 per cent of Northern businesses were affected in an economic sense. They were both willing to consider measures of practical cooperation on an 'all Ireland' basis. The terms of the agreement between the two men were published in the press:

1 The Boundary Commission as outlined in the Treaty to be altered. The governments of the Free State and of Northern Ireland to appoint one representative each to report to Mr Collins and Sir James Craig, who will mutually agree on behalf of their respective governments the future boundaries between the two.

2 Without prejudice to the future considerations of his government on the question of tariffs, Mr Collins undertakes that the Belfast boycott be discontinued immediately, and Sir James Craig undertakes to facilitate in every possible way the return of the Catholic working men—without tests—to the shipyards as and when the trade revival enables the firms to absorb the present unemployed. In the meantime a system of relief on a large scale is being arranged to carry out the period of distress.

3 Representatives of both governments to meet to facilitate a settlement of the railway dispute.

4 The two governments to endeavour to devise a more suitable system than the Council of Ireland for dealing with problems affecting all Ireland.

5 A subsequent meeting will take place at a subsequent date in Dublin between the signatories to discuss the question of prisoners. (*Irish Times*, 22 January 1922)

This result was 'a sensation', in the words of one journal, 'scarcely second in importance to the Treaty . . . Sir James Craig and Michael Collins can never again be to one another as they were' (*Co. Cork Eagle*, 11 February 1922). The joy of Southern unionism, in particular, was unconfined; Southern unionist opinion stressed that the provisional government was now likely to enjoy a better relationship with influential Protestants—particularly in the banking and financial sectors—within its own state. There was delight also that Craig and Collins had agreed some mechanism for mutual cooperation. The same journal noted that the agreement involved discarding the vague and ineffective Council of

Ireland—which was the only device the British parliament could invent for bringing North and South closer together. In its place there would be a more suitable system ‘evolved through the combined efforts of the Irish governments’. The *Co. Cork Eagle* insisted: ‘Whatever Mr Collins and Sir James Craig may design, it will have the supreme advantage over the discarded Council of Ireland, that it will be of Irish manufacture—racy of the soil and so better fitted for its work than the imported model’ (28 January 1922). In his press conference afterwards, Sir James Craig declared that he had no idea in his mind of coming to a specific agreement on anything but as time went on he saw his opportunity and Mr Collins saw his. Craig added:

For the credit of our land we were able to put our joint names to a document which, on the one hand, is an admission by the Free State that Ulster is an entity of its own, with a head with whom they can at any rate confer . . .

At any rate, I think, our meeting has reassured the loyalists throughout the south and west, that we, by recognising the government formally, will greatly aid the unionists, loyalists and level-headed men throughout the country to rally to that government—which at all events is endeavouring to restore order and stave off separation and ‘the Republic’, which is the party cry of the other side. (*Co. Cork Eagle*, 4 February 1922)

To this end he was prepared to have a settlement which left the road open, at some future date for ‘Ulster’ to decide whether it joined the ‘Free State’ or not. This explained why he had not vetoed Collins’ proposal for a constitutional conference for Ireland as a whole. Addressing 500 key members of his own party on 27 January, Craig was unrepentant: ‘My duty was, in effect, to lead’. He added:

What I was aiming at is Ulster’s security, Ulster’s close ties with Great Britain and the Empire, but as part of Ireland that it should be a free part of Ireland and not an Ireland at war. I have kept before my eyes all the time that in the long run it is better for the south and west and the Empire that we should be in the condition I have stated, because it seems to me we will be some little check on the hotheads in the south, if they know that by proclaiming the Republic, by trailing the Union Jack in the dust, by causing harm to the loyal people who belong to us—kith and kin of ours, that they only put the clock back for a century as far as any hope of getting Ulster in, whereas, as Lord Carson said in the House of Commons on a famous occasion: ‘Ulster might be wooed by sympathetic understanding, she can never be coerced’.<sup>5</sup>

The more remarkable aspects of Craig’s stand requires some analysis. In the first place, it is clearly predicated on the assumption—to use modern

<sup>5</sup> *Irish Times*, 28 January 1922. The reference is to the Carson speech of February 1914 discussed in Bew, 1994: 103.

Framework Document or Downing Street Declaration parlance—that Britain had no selfish strategic or economic interest in partition; in other words, it was for ‘Ulster’ and ‘Ulster’ alone—‘Ulster’ here meaning the six counties of Northern Ireland—to decide whether or not it chose to join up with the South. All that really matters for Craig is that the principle of consent be respected; this can be achieved most effectively through Dublin’s recognition of the Northern parliament. There is also the willingness to take up the ‘Council of Ireland’ idea—purged of the unwieldy bureaucratic machinery proposed in the Government of Ireland Act of 1920—as a means of providing a forum for North/South contact in matters with an ‘all-Ireland’ dimension. Craig was challenged by angry grass-roots loyalists who argued that he had conceded too much, but he was able to carry the bulk of Ulster unionist opinion—especially business opinion—with him. As Craig himself said at the time—his duty was to lead, not to follow. It is, however, also worth noting that Craig laid great stress on the position of Southern protestants—in this he was, of course, strongly supported by Lord Edward Carson, whose roots were in that community. He signalled that this community should rally to the support of the Free State government as the least unpleasant available option—but he also argued that the North should signal a possible long-term willingness to come in with the South, in order to protect that community from republican onslaught in the South. In later years, as the Southern Protestant community went into rapid decline by the end of the 1920s—as a result of policies of violence, ‘control’ through language policy and breaking of professional links with the rest of the UK—this consideration ceased to have significant impact on Craig’s approach.<sup>6</sup>

However, there was no corresponding satisfaction on the part of Michael Collins. Immediately after his meeting with Craig, he confessed his unease about the overall political situation in a letter of 27 January to one of his girlfriends, Kitty Kiernan (O’Broin, 1996). Even after this meeting with Craig, Collins at a cabinet meeting on 30 January still considered himself to be carrying out a policy of non-recognition of the Craig regime;

<sup>6</sup> Thus Craig, who had managed a rhetoric of ‘minority rights’ and ‘North-South cooperation’ in the difficult period of 1921–26, lapsed into a more stale vocabulary. By 1933 Craig was ignoring the complaints of Southern Protestants, in favour of the more simplistic notion of a confessedly Protestant state in the North and a confessedly Catholic state in the South. His patriarchalism with regard to the Protestant community, always an element of his political style—he furnished the Co. Down men under his command in the South African war with special rations, paid out of his own deep pockets – became his whole style. On the role of violence in reducing the size of the Protestant community, see Hart (1998), McDowell (1997), on matters such as language policy, intellectual life and the attacks on UK professional links see the material presented in Jones (1997a) and on professional links see Jones (1997b).

he was prepared to support school teachers and local bodies who refused to recognise the new state.<sup>7</sup> On 1 February, Collins and Griffith met a delegation of Northern nationalists and assured them they would insist on the transfer of large territories from the six counties—he reassuringly insisted that Northern nationalists were pushing at an ‘open door’ on this point. Even more ominously, Collins assured this deputation: ‘There were only two policies—peace or war. He and his colleagues were going to try the peace policy first’ (*Irish Times*, 2 February 1922).

Sir James Craig balefully noticed this delegation: he argued that the impact was a negative one. ‘Yesterday’, said Sir James Craig, ‘Mr Collins adopted a very different attitude from that he showed at the first meeting . . . It appeared that he had been driven by the extremists to reverse his earlier policy of conciliation’ (*Co. Cork Eagle*, 11 February 1922). Craig had assumed that had only meant adjustments of the border were at stake. Michael Collins, for his part, declared: ‘Our attitude has been made perfectly clear and that we will not coerce any part of Ulster, which is desirous of remaining in the area controlled by the Northern parliament but neither will we allow coercion of any part of Ulster which votes itself into the Irish Free State’. As Collins privately told his cabinet, he then wished to wage a tariff war against a smaller Northern Ireland.<sup>8</sup> Hardly surprisingly, this time the Craig/Collins discussions broke down completely.

Worse still, the Free State government appeared to switch immediately into war-like mode. The *Irish Times* reported grimly:

We deplore the unofficial but authoritative reports which suggest that the provisional government is dallying with the fatal notion of war upon Ulster. It says that an attempt may be made to smash the machinery of the Northern administration by reducing such services as the Post Office and the Land Commission to a state of chaos. (3 February 1922)

Yet, it is worth noting that the official public line of the new Free State government remained unchanged. In an ironic comment on de Valera’s republican propaganda on partition, the *Free State* observed on 25 February: ‘We have agreed with de Valera that we should not coerce Ulster, still agree not to coerce Ulster but have the power to make it worth while for Ulster to join with the rest of Ireland’. But such public language was increasingly compatible with rather more devious forms of private action. On the night of 7/8 February, Collins secretly approved a series of IRA raids across the border into Fermanagh and Tyrone which led to the kidnapping of 42 prominent loyalists, including the High Sheriff of Fermanagh: these were intended to be used as bargaining counters to

<sup>7</sup> SPO (Dublin), Provisional Government, cabinet conclusions, 30 January 1922.

<sup>8</sup> SPO (Dublin), Provisional Government, cabinet conclusions, 6 March 1922.



secure the release of IRA prisoners. Three days later 5 died (four B-Specials) in a clash between B-Specials and IRA in Clones: the rest of the Specials were arrested. This, in turn, provoked violent loyalist reprisals in Belfast, including a bomb attack which killed 6 children. Matters continued to deteriorate along these lines in March—in that month 35 Catholics and 18 Protestants were killed in Northern Ireland.

Blithely disregarding his own role in the deterioration, Collins sent an angry telegram to the British government on 6 March 1922:

Belfast parliament apparently powerless or unwilling to prevent bloodshed or to bring criminals to justice. Invariably your troops are called against our people and feeling running very high against this course of action. Suggest you send an independent investigator and my statements can be shown to be correct. Cannot over-emphasise the seriousness of the situation. Absolutely imperative that some action be taken.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the month, responding to such pressures, the British government sponsored an attempt to renew the Craig/Collins pacts. On the eve of this meeting, Sir James Craig claimed that his government did not blame the provisional government for IRA outrages in the North—though he noted language explicitly supporting Northern IRA violence had been used by senior figures closely associated with the regime such as Sean MacEoin, Eoin O’Duffy and P. McGrath. This rather tactful (if ambiguous) message clearly indicated that he was prepared to make a second serious effort to reach a settlement (*Irish Times*, 29 March 1922). After rather difficult discussions in which Collins apparently ‘boasted’<sup>10</sup> of responsibility for outrages in the North, the terms of a new pact were dramatically announced:

1 Peace is hereby declared.

2 From today the two governments to cooperate in every way with a view to the restoration of peaceful conditions in the unsettled areas.

Its most important clause was the third one:

3 The police in Belfast to be organised in general accordance with the following conditions:

a The police in mixed districts to be composed of one half Catholics and of one half Protestants . . . All Specials not required for this force to be withdrawn to their homes and their arms handed in.

<sup>9</sup> PRONI, HA 31/1/28. Telegram from Collins to Churchill, 6 March 1922.

<sup>10</sup> Lady Spender’s diary (6 April, 1922) records her husband Wilfrid Spender’s view of these negotiations: ‘Collins, who he says is like the hero of an American film drama, was very truculent . . . did not attempt to deny responsibility for outrages in Ulster . . . indeed he boasted of them’. Diary of Lady Spender in PRONI, D1633/2/24.

**b** An advisory committee composed of Catholics to be set up to assist in the selection of Catholic recruits for the Special Police. (*Irish Times*, 31 March 1922)

In addition the British government was to make available at least £500,000 for relief works—at least one-third of which was to go to Catholic workers. The essence of the new pact is clear: a reformed, non-sectarian Northern Ireland as far as security and employment policy was concerned, in exchange for an end to IRA violence (clause 6) and Dublin recognition. Many senior unionists felt that Craig had conceded too much ground—but the Prime Minister himself seems to have been determined to work the new arrangement.

Even so, this new pact was to fail as did its predecessor. In his explanation of that failure, Michael Farrell lays great emphasis on the failure of the Northern government to fulfil its part by investigating four particularly brutal reprisal murders of innocent Catholics in the Arnon Street/Stanhope Street area in retaliation for the earlier IRA murder of a policeman on the day after the pact was signed: ‘Eye-witnesses in the area and a number of Catholic policemen claimed that they could identify the police involved and that they were led by the district inspector of the area, J. W. Nixon’ (Farrell, 1983: 114, 330). In Michael Farrell’s view, ‘D.I. Nixon was a powerful and influential figure in loyalist, Orange and Ulster Special Constabulary circles’; but he adds, more controversially, ‘it seems that Craig had to choose between confronting his own forces and undermining the pact. He chose the latter’. The difficulty with this interpretation is that it appears to overestimate the significance, undoubted though it was, of D.I. Nixon. It also underestimates the scale of mainstream unionist condemnation of the Arnon Street/Stanhope Street murders.<sup>11</sup> Farrell argues reasonably that the ‘withholding of the file on Nixon even sixty years after the event inevitably sharpens suspicion about Nixon’s role’. But one important file on Nixon has now been opened and it does not confirm his analysis.

The file actually opens with a complaint from Nixon that he, a district inspector, has been passed over for promotion to the rank of county inspector; worse still, in Nixon’s view, he has been passed over in favour of Southern Catholic candidates. Nixon wrote:

Some of the officers brought from southern Ireland have longer service than I have, and others have shorter service. I can not see why they should be brought from southern Ireland and appointed county inspectors over Ulster officers, Ulster sympathies, Ulster associations, and at least with as good police records . . .

<sup>11</sup> ‘Mob Law at its Worst’, *Weekly Northern Whig*, 8 April 1922.

It is a common saying here that loyalty to Britain does not pay but I hope the same will not be said about Ulster, but it is very hurtful to be rejected by those whom you considered your friends.

Personally, I attach little importance to the promotion itself, except that I feel that as if Sinn Feiners and their friends were laughing at me for getting left after all my exertions against them. In short, I can hardly conceive how the Home Secretary could bring District Inspector Regan and promote him over me.<sup>12</sup>

The Minister of Home Affairs, R. Dawson Bates, himself a rather shrewish Orangeman, was singularly unimpressed by this complaint. He wrote to a cabinet colleague, J. M. Andrews:

Much stress is placed on appointments not having been given to Ulstermen; but the analysis will show that more than half of the officers are in fact Ulstermen. Mr Nixon is not included in this category, but comes in under the heading of 'Irish' as, although the inference in his letter is that he is an Ulsterman, the fact remains that he comes from Co. Cavan.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, the RUC senior command had 58 officers; 12 of whom were Irish Catholics and the rest were English, Southern Protestant, or by far the largest category, Ulster Protestants (*Irish Times*, 17 October 1996). This is nevertheless a wry touch—consciously or unconsciously indicating—that Ulster had come to mean the 'six counties' as opposed to the 'historic' nine (including Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal) very early indeed in the life of the government of Northern Ireland. One sees here that birth of the 'little Ulsterist' mentality—so often to be rightly associated with a narrow bigotry, but here being comically turned against one of the great exponents of sectarian extremism. Anyway, as Bates told a Tyrone loyalist delegation who had wrongly assumed that a security 'leak' was due to the activities of a Catholic policeman: 'And do they think a police force could be carried on without Roman Catholics?'<sup>14</sup>

In 1924 Bates finally succeeded in easing Nixon out of the force—this despite a spectacular campaign of intimidation of even the high and mighty of the unionist hierarchy by Nixon's supporters—Bates commented: 'I never thought that the time would come when any group of persons who are loud in their protestation of loyalty would take their cue from Sinn Féin'. Bates argued that the public expression of private political opinions by the police—as Nixon had done on a number of occasions—would

<sup>12</sup> PRONI HA 31/1/254. Nixon's protest to R. Dawson Bates is dated 11 July 1922.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> PRONI HA 31/1/467. Minutes of meeting of delegation led by Captain Hamilton Fyffe, solicitor, Co. Omagh. Though as Kevin Myers points out in *Irish Times* (17 October 1996) Collins used co-religionists to steal security files in the North and South; as Stephen Gwynn admitted in his *Observer* articles (see below) this was bound to affect unionist policy.

destroy the 'utility of our force'. The burden of this Nixon file is clear enough; a government which felt strong enough to refuse Nixon promotion at the expense of a Catholic policeman was hardly going to allow Nixon to determine the fate of the Craig/Collins pact. There is no question that Nixon—later a unionist MP at Stormont—was powerful enough to be a thorn in the flesh of the government; no doubt also that he was suspected of involvement in reprisals, reprisals which had been a common feature of the police response to the IRA's campaign of murder of policemen all over Ireland since 1919 and for which few policemen had been made accountable because the 'authorities' regarded the practice as inevitable. But it is, none the less, clear that the government felt no overwhelming need to placate Nixon where his interests clashed with those of wider policy; Craig undoubtedly did not want an enquiry into the working of his state 'security' forces but this was a context in which he and his officials clearly believed that the peace proposals of the pact were not being worked honourably by the Collins government: to accept an inquiry would imply a possible major culpability for continuing disorder—a notion which mainstream unionism bitterly rejected. David Lloyd George, the British Premier, anxious to secure his accommodation with Michael Collins, was sympathetic to Dublin calls for a full-scale judicial inquiry, but this eventually transmuted to a private inquiry by a senior official, S. G. Tallents, which concluded at the end of June: 'I have no doubt that the failure to give effect to clause 6 of the Agreement which provided for the cessation of IRA activity in the six counties was the major cause of its failure'.<sup>15</sup>

The alternative view was expressed in the *Free State*, the organ of the Irish government, which described government in the North as 'government by animals'. In this view, a reign of terror had been unleashed on the Catholic minority which required Southern support—if only to maintain its morale. These morale-boosting actions included the shooting of a unionist MP, the destruction of the houses of others and even, at the end of May, an 'invasion' of Fermanagh (at Belleek) by Free State forces. The Northern government, in turn, believed that these were the real acts of aggression. One captured document (13 May) from the north-east advisory committee of nationalists—Collins' Northern representatives—in effect spoke of a 'definite plan of campaign to be adopted by the nationalists of the north-east whereby they can render impotent the so-called government of Northern Ireland'.<sup>16</sup> On 24 May 1922, Major General A. Solly-Flood, the Northern Irish government's military advisor, prepared a 'Guide for City and County Authorities in Connection with the Defence

<sup>15</sup> PRO CO 906/30.

<sup>16</sup> PRONI, HA 32/1/206.

of Ulster'. Some of its proposals were draconian—in the event of 'war' disaffected areas were to be proclaimed; there was to be widespread use of censorship and black-lists of suspect officials were to be drawn up. The document concluded:

The real difference between the precautionary period and the war period is that at this latter period the main duty of the Constabulary is to kill or capture the enemy, for it is by overcoming and evicting him from the six counties that peace can be restored. There must be no half measures when enemy forces are met.<sup>17</sup>

On 27 June 1922 S. Watt, a senior official of the Ministry of Home Affairs, summarised the position as he saw it:

A very large number of outrages attributed to the IRA have been committed and documents and other evidence in the hands of the Intelligence Branch prove that the provisional government is fully cognisant of the activities of the IRA. These outrages include many cases of murder and wounding of members of the police forces, government officials and loyal subjects, ambushes, laying of mines, sniping across the frontiers, seizure of motor cars, arson etc., fifteen police and one civilian kidnapped prior to 30 March 1922 and seven police and seventeen civilians kidnapped since that date are still detained in southern Ireland. Some of these men were kidnapped in the Free State.

On 20 May a wholesale series of raids and attacks on various police barracks and incidences in Counties Antrim and Down occurred which could only have been carried out in pursuit of an organised plan, while the forces which invaded Northern Ireland at Belleek and Pettigo would appear from the statement issued by GHQ at Beggars' Bush [see *Belfast Telegraph*, 6 June 1922] to have been troops who owed allegiance to the Free State.

It is clear from documents found that the IRA are determined to make Ulster part of a free Irish Republic [see *Northern Whig*, 7 June] and to make the task of the northern government impossible.

The boycott of Ulster has been reinforced more vigorously than ever [see Arthur Griffith's speech in *Newsletter* of 27 April where he admits this, though of course repudiating responsibility] and attacks have been made on Ulster firms in Dublin—the headquarters of the provisional government, looting of towns and seizure of northern goods still continue.

No attempt has been made to restore to their homes the refugees driven from southern to Northern Ireland.<sup>18</sup>

Tallents regarded Watt as a 'partisan' figure but he seems to have accepted the validity of much of this analysis. It is clear, however, that Craig's earlier apparently genuine attempts to reach a compromise with Collins stood in good stead with London. In particular, Winston Churchill

<sup>17</sup> PRONI, HA 32/1/466.

<sup>18</sup> PRONI HA 5/139/6.

insisted that Craig's moderation implied that Britain had a duty to defend the North, thus, for example rebuff the Belleek/Pettigo invasion. But it does not follow that Craig had always intended only this outcome or that he was principally to blame for the failure of the two pacts.

The next major effort to achieve a measure of *rapprochement* on a North/South basis came with the O'Neill/Lemass meetings of the 1960s. Both Terence O'Neill, Northern Premier, and Seán Lemass, Irish Taoiseach, were self-proclaimed modernisers. Their meetings initially generated great optimism about the future of Ireland. However, the documents recently released in Dublin, Belfast and London serve to highlight the ambiguities of this process. Lemass was not perhaps as iconoclastic (with respect to nationalist pieties) as many have assumed. Professor Henry Patterson, the scholar who has worked most with this material, insists that there were contradictions in Lemass's policies on the North: in particular, he continued, whilst calling for greater North/South functional cooperation, to employ a relatively unreconstructed rhetoric on the national question. O'Neill—whose antennae were very sensitive to any signs of disapproval in London—picked up the notion that the London governments of Macmillan and Alec Douglas-Hume (that is to say, even before Harold Wilson) felt that the Northern government should respond to Lemass on themes of cooperation. O'Neill was responding to this external pressure: he was fully aware that Brookeborough's obstructive attitude towards a Lemass proposal for a North/South Free Trade Agreement—something which had support both from within the unionist cabinet (Lord Glentoran) and local businessmen—had annoyed London. London's view was that Lemass was such an improvement as compared with de Valera that the North should seize the new opportunity and not complain so much about the irridentist Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution of 1937. The principal difficulty for O'Neill arose out of Lemass's tendency to present economic cooperation as leading to a relatively quick end to partition. Also, Lemass seems to have misunderstood the British position as being part of the broad sweep of 'wind of change' and 'decolonisation' policies. Because of these confusing signals from Dublin, O'Neill was never able to keep a dialogue on a pragmatic economic level and was always open to internal revolt, exacerbated by the rise of Paisleyism (Bew *et al.*, 1997: Chapter 1). Similar difficulties befell Brian Faulkner in 1974.

More recently, these difficulties have again been reprised in the controversy over the Anglo-Irish Joint Framework Document, published by both governments in February 1995. This text outlines the imaginary line of compromise between unionist and nationalist aspirations. On the British side, a significant influence on the Framework Document was an article by the late Dr John Whyte, Professor of Politics at The Queen's

University, Belfast. Dr Whyte drew attention to the large number of voluntary associations which had an all-Ireland identity and in which unionists participated freely. He noted that the secretary of his local Unionist Association was also the secretary of one of these all-Ireland bodies. The implication is clear: North-South bodies are already a significant part of Northern Irish life, and they might have a role to play in any compromise. Fresh bodies worked, in effect, on the basis of the principle of consent.

On the Irish side, a key concept was a rather unrefined concept of an 'island economy' perceived in a European context. The growing integration of the two economies, North and South, was intended to provide the basis of all-Ireland harmonisation. In fact, the greater integration between the two economies, a key intellectual prop of the Framework Document, now looks to be a rather more uncertain project. The decision by Ireland to join the single European currency while the UK stays out has seen to that. As the Lancaster House paper 'North-South Co-operation' reveals, it is difficult to talk, say, of harmonisation of financial services when the two countries will be inside different currency systems.

All of the current controversy and debate which surrounds the Framework Document and the current talks process cannot hide the fact that the underlying themes are those of Craig-Collins: the need to produce equality of treatment for Northern Catholics; the need to produce a system whereby the two governments, North and South, will work together on an all-Ireland basis—the same notion here reappearing in both the Craig-Collins agreement and the 'Heads of Agreement' promulgated at Stormont early in 1998—and the need for the Irish government to recognise the North. On this last point, the failure of the Dublin government to promise (in the event of an otherwise satisfactory negotiated settlement) that the words 'the territory of Ireland is the island of Ireland'—and thus the territorial claim—be removed from its constitution constituted a difficulty (Bew and Gillespie, 1996: 90). What is clear, however, is that we are not served by a history—unsupported by serious acquaintance with the latest available material archives—which exaggerates unionist intransigence on the matter of cross-border cooperation. It deprives those unionist leaders who wish to reach an understanding with Dublin of the necessary cultural and ideological resources. It is also a more hopeful sign that in a recent interview for *Parliamentary Brief* with the present author, the Taoiseach, Mr Ahern said: 'We have to make constitutional changes and we have to make them as clear and as acceptable as we can. I would be anxious that we do not create ambiguities and further difficulties'.

When the Craig-Collins pact was signed in April 1922, Stephen Gwynn, a former Protestant nationalist MP who had lost his seat to the new Sinn

Féin movement in 1918, offered an analysis in *The Observer* on 2 April 1922; he was confident that Craig was genuine in his policy of peace, even though he had earlier condemned Craig's failures to alleviate the condition of Belfast Catholics since the first pact—by contrast Gwynn felt that unionist restraint in rural border areas had been impressive—he now felt sure that Craig was sincere. He pointed out: 'If Ulster wanted war, Ulster only had to wait. With an IRA divided, raids across the border were certain and every raid was worth a British battalion to Ulster, if Ulster bided its time. Enough of such raids, borne without retaliation in the end, the war must have had full British support. It looks as if the strategists have decided that Ulster's interest was peace' (*Observer*, 19 February 1922). He noted that even while the negotiations leading to the new pact were ongoing, new policemen were killed by the IRA close to Monaghan on 29 March (*Observer*, 2 April 1922). Stephen Gwynn—and possibly here he was speculating over-much—saw as factors making for the pact the benign influence of Sir Henry Wilson, former Chief of the Imperial General staff and unionist MP, but also Joe Devlin, moderate Belfast nationalist MP, and prominent Southern Orangemen. This is perhaps less important than his analysis of the underlying principles involved: 'Generous recognition for differing interests without regard to their numerical strength is the saving formula for Ireland'. He might have added: the need to cooperate on an all-Ireland basis. As the *Weekly Northern Whig*, a staunch unionist supporter of the regime, put it in an important editorial on the pact:

Friendly co-operation between north and south is not only perfectly practicable but necessary in the interests of the populations on both sides of the border. Ulster's refusal to submit to the authority of a Dublin parliament does not involve refusal to recognise the palpable fact that the six counties and the twenty-six have much in common and that it is their duty to help each other to the extent of their capacity. (*Weekly Northern Whig*, 1 April 1922)

But the leader added 'Ulster' would never accept 'forceful incorporation in the Free State'—indeed, 'Every effort to bring it about is bound to result in further alienation of the people'. Seventy-five years later little has changed; though the large reduction in the size of the Southern Protestant population has made it more difficult for unionists to think in 32 county terms, on the other hand, the Ahern government is far more solid in its commitment to the principle of consent than the Collins one ever was.<sup>19</sup> This has to be a source of hope that this time a viable North-South arrangement will be achieved.

<sup>19</sup> For the most recent analysis of the 'devious northern policy' of Collins, see Fitzpatrick, 1998.



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