For eight hundred years England felt a compulsive need to hold Ireland. Now that need has gone for good

Thirteen crosses mark the dead of Bloody Sunday in January, 1972—a watershed in British thinking about Ireland

The brave new coalition of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland is already under strain. The truth is, JOHN WHALE argues, this is inevitable; in the last two years British policy in Ireland has undergone a profound change of heart which is not yet understood.

THE PIVOTAL POINT in the whole long course of British dealings with Ireland can be seen in retrospect to have been the last ten days in January, two years ago. In Brussels, on January 22, 1972, Edward Heath and Jack Lynch—Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and of Ireland—signed their two countries into membership of the European Community. In Derry, on January 30, 1972, during disturbances which followed a banned civil-rights march, paratroopers of a British regiment shot 13 Northern Irish civilians dead.

could only cause more and more deaths, more and more resistance. Bloody Sunday itself came just after the Brussels signing had shown that the basically military considerations which had governed the British presence in Ireland from the beginning were now anyway out of date: Britain, Ireland and the ancient European enemies who might have used Irish soil against Britain were now certified to be all on the same side.

If you re-read Anglo-Irish history by the light of recent events, one fact leaps to eye. For eight centuries, England's view of Ireland was a coldly strategic one. The English were in Ireland to keep it from falling to the enemies of the English state—enemies sometimes inside England, but mostly outside. It was not until the middle 1960s that the nature of war had changed enough to make that preoccupation look as old-fashioned as it was unprincipled.

HENRY II, the man who had Archbishop Becket murdered, was the first English ruler to take troops to Ireland; and the potential enemy he had in mind, in 1171, was his own Norman barons. He wanted to make sure that they did not use Ireland to establish rival principalities in. The sheer size of his army was enough to win a titular lordship of Ireland for the English crown.

Henry VIII, reasserting English influence after more than three centuries during which its area had shrunk to a Pale round Dublin, got himself proclaimed (in 1541) king of Ireland. "The Tudor monarchy," writes Professor J. C. Beckett, "could not for ever tolerate the existence of a half-subdued dependency which, if not controlled by England, might soon be controlled by England's continental enemies."

Mary, Henry's elder daughter, continued his policy through the first (and unsuccessful) plantations of English colonists. Elizabeth I, her half-sister, fought a nine-year war against Hugh O'Neill—The O'Neill, a great Ulster noble—during which he had the help of a Spanish fleet. James I was on the throne before the Irish commanders lost the war and (in 1607) left the country: he put English and Scottish settlers on their land to secure Ireland against Spain in particular, and several hundred were well established before he was engaged in a new Spanish war.

Cromwell, the Englishman best remembered in Ireland, went there

Elizabeth I. 1603. Completed the Tudor conquest of Ireland begun by her father, Henry VIII (in a tradition established by Henry II). The chief aim was to bolt England's back door against sea-borne foreign enemies—France, the Netherlands, and especially Spain

James I. 1607. Put English and Scottish settlers in Ulster as a garrison: Spain was still an intermittent enemy of England

Cromwell. 1649. Went to Ireland after Charles I's execution to root out Royalist rebels against the Commonwealth

William III. 1690. Defeated James II, who was using French help in Ireland to try to recover the English throne he had lost

Pitt the Younger. 1800. Brought a rebellious Ireland formally under the British Parliament to secure it during a French papal war

Asquith. 1916. Had Dublin's Easter Rising during the First World War sternly put down: it had received help from Germany

Lloyd George. 1921. Under the Treaty which freed the South, kept naval rights for Britain in the Republic's two Atlantic ports

Churchill. 1943. Used bases in Northern Ireland against German U-boats in the Second World War, and bitterly lamented the fact that Chamberlain—as an act of generosity—had lately given up Britain's rights to the two ports in the South

in 1649 partly on an anti-Catholic crusade: the island had been little touched by the Reformation. But his chief motive was to deny beaten Royalists a mustering-point. Charles I had just been executed: a week before that, the future Charles II had been invited to Ireland to gather together his considerable support there. It may have been because Cromwell lost his temper, as Lady Antonia Fraser suggests in her new book about him, that he allowed his troops to kill between 2,000 and 4,000 people in Drogheda. But Drogheda was a Royalist-held fortress which commanded the approaches to the troublesome North; and to make a prize and an example of the town at the outset of the campaign made brutal strategic sense.

Cromwell's method of holding territory thus subdued was to clear out all those landlords who were not provenly pro-Commonwealth ("Let them go to hell—or to Connaught," he is supposed to have said) and to replace them with new ones. Many of these settlers had been officers in the Commonwealth armies: all were Protestants.

From then on, Protestants of English and Scottish origin were a permanent force in Ireland. They made up the bulk of the landowning and ruling class; and it was successive administrations in London which had put them there, out of straightforward military self-interest. As guarantors of safety to the régime in England, they had a special title to its protection in return. The essential difference between Catholic and Protestant was therefore not one of doctrine (though in the atmosphere of the early seventeenth century that could not be unimportant, and it has kept some importance to this day): it was the difference between native dispossessed and alien possessors.

William of Orange confirmed the Protestant supremacy when he defeated his Catholic father-in-law James II at the Battle of the Boyne, near Drogheda, in 1690; and he has his picture on gable-ends in the Protestant slums of Belfast still, to prove it. That campaign also neatly demonstrated the hostile purposes to which Ireland might be put if it were not thus garrisoned. James, with the help of Louis XIV of France, was seeking to use Ireland as a base for the recovery of the crown which he had already lost to William in England. The Boyne put paid to the attempt.

France was the enemy which stimulated the next major change in Ireland. By the 1800 Act of Union the whole country was absorbed into the United Kingdom and the subordinate Irish parliament abolished. A brief rebellion in 1798, against the disabilities which Irish Catholics suffered under penal legislation, had been inspired by the French Revolution; and now that the Revolution had turned militarily expansionist, Ireland could not be left unsecured. Britain and France were at war: a Franco-Spanish fleet was stationed off Brest.

Union was a failure in both countries. In Ireland it produced administration which was remote and (especially at the time of the famine in the 1840s) cruel: in England it clogged government by bringing able and obstructive Irish parliamentarians to Westminster. The Liberals under Gladstone ("My mission is to pacify Ireland," he said in 1868) proposed Irish home rule: the Conservatives fought it by fair means and foul for half a century, confident in their own imperial mission and making full use of the strategic argument.

Germany, this time, proved their point. During the First World War the Irish Republican Brotherhood, flag-carriers of nationalism, maintained that the cause of Irish liberty would be best served by a German victory; and the Germans were just sufficiently interested at the time of the Dublin rising of Easter 1916, to send a small ship-load of arms and a submarine carrying Roger Casement and a

To such tyranny had they come

rubber dinghy. The arms vessel, intercepted by the Royal Navy, blew itself up in Cobh harbour. Casement (Ulsterman, former British consular official and the IRB's envoy in Germany) fell out of the dinghy and stumbled ashore to be picked up by two Irish policemen. The rising itself lasted a week. The whole tragic farce, even set against the thousands of Catholic Irishmen who fought with the British army, was nevertheless enough to re-emphasise luridly the dangers of a disloyal Ireland.

The effect was two-fold. Caught at a nervous stage of the war against Germany, the Asquith Government felt obliged to have 15 of the Dublin insurgents shot. They were picked out unsystematically over several days; and their martyrdom turned the IRB into an army, a national movement capable of sustaining a fight against the British forces of order (chiefly the irregular Black-and-Tans) for two-and-a-half years after the war was over. By contrast, the loyal Protestants in the North looked even more precious than before; and the British Government grew prepared to see Ireland divided rather than lose them altogether.

That idea, partition, was the one finally adopted by the Lloyd George Coalition in the Government of Ireland Act in December 1920, and ratified in the Treaty talks with the Republican leaders a year later. The United Kingdom was to keep the north-eastern corner of the island, where the Protestants predominated: the rest of it was to go free.

The limitations on that freedom, although the new Republic fought a civil war about them, were all peacefully removed within 30 years. The abiding problem about partition proved to be the actual line of the border. The Act drew it, temporarily, where it runs still. The Treaty proposed a boundary commission to fix it definitely; and the South's negotiators were confident that the commission would give them two whole Ulster counties—Fermanagh and Tyrone—and parts of three more. But first the new administration in the North refused to make an appointment to the commission, and then the views of the British-appointed chairman (a South African judge) proved so conservative that the South's man withdrew too. The border stayed unchanged.

So the Protestants were left not with a four-county area where Catholics would be so few as to be unthreatening, nor yet with a nine-county area (the old province of Ulster) where Catholics would be numerous enough to provide a normal opposition and perhaps even a government, but with a six-county stake-out which was the largest the Protestants felt they could hold. It was what their leaders in the Unionist Party wanted; but their majority overall was not impregnable, and in places it was non-existent.

To maintain control, in consequence, they found it necessary to gerrymander electoral boundaries within the new province, and to counteract the slightly higher Catholic birthrate by showing Catholics good reason to emigrate. This took the form of police bullying, backed by special legislative powers, and of making it more than ordinarily difficult for Catholics to get jobs or public housing. It was the eighteenth-century system of penal laws against Catholics even less pardonably renewed.

Successive British Governments looked the other way; and it was not long before the underlying reasons for their tolerance were sharply reinforced. The 1921 Treaty had kept rights for British forces in certain Southern ports—Berehaven and Cobh. In 1938 the Chamberlain Government renounced those rights; and throughout the Second World War de Valera's studied neutrality made sure that the renunciation was effective. Many British merchant ships were lost in the western approaches to Britain because the Royal Navy lacked bases from which to fight the U-boat war.

The virtue of the North stood out the more strikingly. Convoys of shipping were marshalled in Belfast Lough. The Royal Air Force gave them cover over the Atlantic from Northern Ireland airfields. In 1943 Churchill wrote to J. M. Andrews, then giving way as Prime Minister of Ulster to Basil Brooke: "But for the loyalty of Northern Ireland and its devotion to what has now become the cause of 30 governments or nations, we should have been confronted with slavery and death, and the light which now shines so strongly throughout the world would have been quenched."

Brooke—later the first Lord Brookeborough—had for fifteen years been chairman of Fermanagh County Council, a body which was the admiration of Protestant Ulster for the way it ran its affairs. Its cunningly-drawn electoral boundaries converted a slender Catholic majority in the county as a whole into a steady two-to-one Protestant majority in the council chamber; and that majority was used to give Protestants an advantage of more than two to one in public housing, and more than eight to one in public jobs. The arrangement persisted well into the 1960s. According to a calculation made in 1969, out of 370 posts with Fermanagh County Council no fewer than 332, including all the top ones, were filled at that time by Protestants. To such mean tyranny had these upholders of the light of freedom come.

HISTORICALLY, the problems created by oppressive settler régimes have for the most part been resolved either by the total victory of the settlers, as in the United States, or (more often) by their departure, as in the former Belgian Congo. By 1962 even the Algerian *pieds noirs*, the most limpet-like colonists of modern times, were on the boats home. But in Northern Ireland nothing changed. The need to defend Britain remained paramount. 1962 was also the year when a Russian missile threat to the United States was held to be infinitely more dangerous from Cuba than if it had come from mainland Russia. Offshore islands were still a high security risk. Then again, there was no pressure for change from Northern Ireland Catholics. In 1962 the IRA abandoned a sporadic border campaign for lack, confessedly, of popular support.

Yet change came, within a decade. The world changed. The gradual advance towards Western European unity meant that France and Germany (let alone Spain) became each year less believable as countries that might attack Britain again. The further development of the ballistic missile meant that even if they did—even if Russia or China did—they would scarcely need to go round by way of Ireland. (The Russian intercontinental system was largely in place by the end of 1965.)

The world changed in another way, too. The whole notion of equality of opportunity, of the right of every human being to certain minimum benefits, had a new airing. In Northern Ireland, the fierce reaction to that idea produced in time a counter-reaction: the IRA Provisionals.

Influenced by the ferment of the Kennedy presidency in the United States, the movement for Catholic civil rights began in Northern Ireland in 1963. A Dungannon doctor's wife pressed the local council on Catholic housing. She had some success. At the same time Terence O'Neill, the new Prime Minister, set out on a path of guarded acknowledgment that Catholics in the North and the Catholic state in the South did at any rate exist.

To both trends the reaction of many stern-minded Protestants was disproportionately and self-destroyingly violent. They foresaw the loss of the separate and unequal status fostered by Britain for 350 years. Egged on by the men who lead them still, Ian Paisley and William Craig, they identified the Civil Rights Association with the IRA. They were wrong at the time (the authority is the 1969 Cameron Report); but they made their identification come true.

Catholic civil rights marches in the winter of 1968-69 were met with physical assault by Protestants, not least those in the ranks of the regular and auxiliary police forces. The worst incidents were at Derry and Burntollet. Angrier protests brought fiercer suppression. By August 1969, after a Northern Ireland general election and a change of prime minister had settled nothing, fighting between the two communities had passed well beyond police control. British troops stationed outside Derry and Belfast moved in to keep them from each other's throats.

A parcel of reforms purporting to free Catholics from discrimination, and competently imposed on a bewildered Ulster Cabinet by James Callaghan as the Wilson Government's Home Secretary, left the central problem untouched: that in a state designed—but clumsily designed—as an enclave garrisoned by Protestants for the British, Irish Catholics could have no sense of valued participation, no object for their pride or loyalty as citizens. Now they had a further burden: the presence of a large and growing army in their streets. British soldiers were bound to be more in Catholic areas than Protestant; the Protestants were their friends, and needed little watching. But an army is not a police force. For as long as Labour stayed in power, natural military zeal in searching houses and controlling rioters was checked and held back. The Conservative tradition, back in force after June 1970, was to let the Army get on with the job in its own way. The hood came off the falcon.

Other persuasions had their weight in the resurgence of armed republicanism (including money paid by the governing party in the South as an inducement to activists to confine their activities to the North); but it was at bottom as a response to the Army's altered methods—"an animal reaction," one Belfast Catholic MP called it—that the old IRA spawned its militant offspring, the Provisionals.

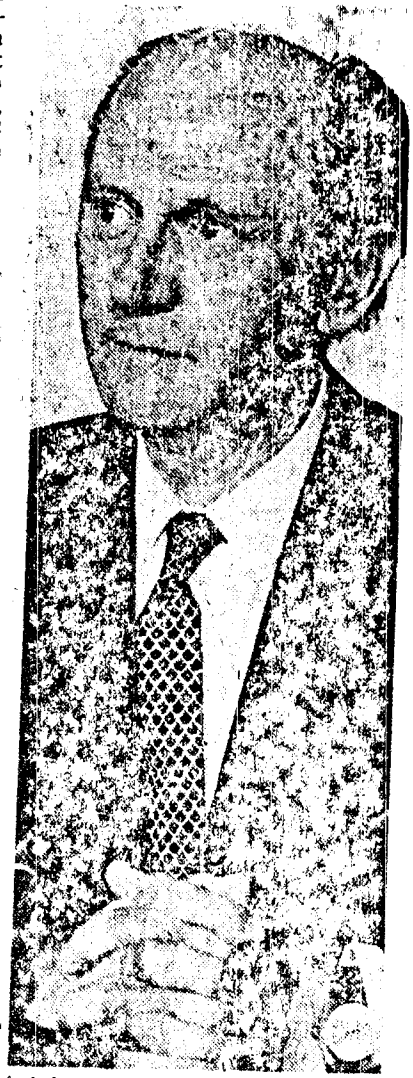
The fact was that policy could at last be governed by considerations of ordinary fairness. The Protestants were the problem, and it was in origin Britain's fault that they were there. But the present generation of Protestants could not help being there, and to pretend that they were not there—although it had been the myopic treatment which they had themselves meted out to Catholics—would only shift the burden of unfairness to a different set of shoulders.

The same truth began, to be perceived in Dublin. Eamon de Valera, survivor of 1916 and first President, knew that Ireland had had Protestant patriots, from Tone to Parnell and Yeats. He nevertheless established the Republic as "a Catholic nation" He used that very phrase: he wrote the idea into his Constitution. Stripped down, the Dublin judgment until 1972 had always been the same as the Provisional judgment: that Protestants should be prepared to submerge themselves in the Catholic community—and that they would, if once British patronage were withdrawn.

But after the ball was over for Northern Protestants—once they had no remaining institutional privileges, and could therefore no longer be said to stay separate only because of them—it became easier for the South to concede that Protestants too had civil rights. Of these the most immediate was the right to freedom from terrorist attack. Strengthened politically by a big win in a referendum on taking Ireland into Europe, Lynch took the first effective step towards denying the Provisionals their Southern sanctuary. He set up a special juryless court in Dublin. It could only try them, when caught, for the comparatively minor offences — possession of firearms, membership of an illegal organisation—which they might commit in the South; but it did at least remove them from the too-tender mercies of timid provincial justices.

At the end of 1972 Lynch went further. He held and won another referendum, which removed from the de Valera Constitution that article which gave the Roman Church a special position in the State. It was a first recognition that among Northern Protestant objections to unity there might be a few legitimate ones. Helped by a couple of stray bombs in Dublin, Lynch also changed the law to make Provisionals a little easier to convict. He knew, because he observed it in himself, that Irish people were cooling towards unification by violence. Indeed, they were cooling towards unity in general. They feared the extra tax demands which might follow, the Northern reputation for hard work, the possible damage to the tourist industry, the contagion of violence.

Unfortunately for Lynch, that anti-ideological drift had gone further than he realised. In February, 1973, he called a General Election. He hoped to win it on his trouble-free handling of the Northern problem. Instead he lost it, to a hastily lashed-up coalition, on the price of butter and lamb chops.



Jack Lynch. 1972. In return for Britain's changed line, began a slow and halting process of assuring Northern Protestants that the South no longer meant to swallow them

It had been a winter of political exploration. In the North, Whitelaw had been busy seeing whether the new equipoise between the communities would produce a common political thrust. He had held a conference at Darlington to draw it forth. But the thrust was not there. The irreconcilables on both sides held it back. Protestant extremists burnt Catholic churches: Provisionals attacked the Army

Too profound and too bloody

with Russian rockets. Protestants in general voted solidly, in a March 1973 referendum, to stay with Britain: Provisionals planted bombs the same day in London. In that atmosphere, Northern politicians could hardly be expected to kiss their opponents on both cheeks and remain representative.

So the British Government's final prescription, announced in a historic White Paper late in March 1973, took account of those unplumbed estrangements. The medicine was to be a variant of partition. It was called power-sharing. Yet power was not to be shared: it was to be divided. Each side was to have its spheres of government, its due tally of Cabinet jobs: finance for one side, housing for the other, and so on.

The Cabinet was to be the Executive of a scaled-down Assembly. Elections to the Assembly in June 1973 showed that this recognition of division might work. Catholic politicians in particular, grouped in the Social Democratic and Labour Party, found their guarded support for the plan confirmed. But they knew that, at any rate in the tormented North, the politics of aspiration remained more important than the politics of self-interest. The plan gave Catholics status. Unless it also offered them—more specifically than the White Paper did—a refuge for their feelings as Irishmen, there would be a residual hunger which the Provisionals or their successors would claim to feed.

For months, that crux kept the Executive from being formed. The answer was in the South: Dublin would have to be part of any web woven to meet the case. Heath went to Dublin to see the new Prime Minister there, Liam Cosgrave. Astonishingly, it was the first visit by a British Prime Minister in office.

The first British soldiers lost their lives in February 1971. The cycle of violence was gathering pace. The Westminster Government allowed one Ulster Prime Minister (James Chichester-Clark) to fall because he wanted too much Army intervention: he was replaced by a man who wanted more and got it. Brian Faulkner's panacea was to have republicans interned. Once internment was introduced in August 1971, and the affront to Catholics compounded by the cruel questioning of certain prisoners, recruitment to the Provisionals climbed dizzily.

It is still too early to make a judgment of internment. Indefinite imprisonment without trial was not much of an addition to the quality of life in the United Kingdom; but the British had long been used to behaving by different standards in Ireland. Internment put more Provisionals on the streets than it took off; but at least the men lately released may conceivably have cooled towards militancy during their long wait in the muddy compounds of Long Kesh.

At the time, internment was simply one more episode in the interminable alternation of violence and counter-violence. It provoked the Provisionals to a new ferocity. In the four months before it began, four soldiers were killed and four civilians. In the four months which followed, the dead numbered 41 members of the forces of order and 73 civilians.

As one result, working-class Protestants began to band together in conscious imitation of the IRA. They had no educated leadership, contrary to widespread belief, no intelligence and no strategy. As another result, the mailed hand of the British Army fell with ever-increasing weight on Catholics in general.

The end was the carnage which followed a banned anti-internment march in Derry on Bloody Sunday. In a battalion operation not clearly authorised at brigade level, disapproved by the police, and begun

Violence needs a nerve of guilt

when other methods of keeping order seemed to be succeeding, British troops used rifles and used them carelessly. At least five of the 13 dead were killed without justification. That much was later established in a report on the incident by the Lord Chief Justice of England, Lord Widgery.

Within two months, and without waiting for Widgery, the British Government had cancelled the Lloyd George settlement. On March 30, 1972, Northern Ireland's separate parliament was suspended. Not just 50 but 350 years of British policy in Ireland were reversed. Released by Europe from the strategic preoccupation, repelled by the endless squalid killings which the old policy was at last seen to entail, the British were no longer backing the Protestants. Heath spelt it out in terms which have been made good: Catholics, too, were to have an "active, permanent and guaranteed role in the life and public affairs of the Province."

BUT THE PROVISIONALS wanted more; and in demanding it, they too destroyed themselves. They wanted the British not just to come away from the Protestant side, but to swing right over to the Catholic side. They wanted to see the Protestants publicly and signally humiliated by the British.

That was the demand which tore apart the 1972 midsummer truce. The Provisionals had at first decided to continue the fight, on the obtuse reasoning that nothing had changed. Multifarious peace movements throughout the early summer had then drawn them into contact with Willie Whitelaw, Britain's new Northern Ireland Secretary, first through Catholic politicians and then through his own officials. The truce, a non-harassment pact between the Provisionals and the Army, came into effect in late June. Early in July 1972 Whitelaw went further still. He met Provisional leaders in careful secrecy at a house in London.

There the Provisionals made certain political and military demands, notably that Britain should allow an all-Ireland decision on Ulster's future. The British promised an answer at a second meeting in a week's time, with the truce to continue at least till then. But Protestant street organisations, stimulated partly by Provisional intransigence, were now active in Belfast. The casual murder of Catholic civilians was increasing. When the Protestant Ulster Defence Association got into an argument with the Provisionals about the rehousing of Catholic families in formerly Protestant houses in west Belfast, the Provisionals looked to the British Army to engage the UDA on their behalf.

Out of ordinary tactical prudence, the Army refused. The Provisionals tried forcible rehousing. The Army stopped them forcibly. The truce broke. The Provisionals never had their second meeting with Whitelaw.

They then compounded their self-exclusion by two things. They told the Press that the first meeting had taken place, a piece of news sufficiently scandalous to ensure that there could never be a second meeting; and on a sunny July day in Belfast which became known as Bloody Friday they proclaimed their readdiction to violence by letting off 22 bombs which killed 11 people and wounded 130. From then on, the British knew they were morally justified in moving into the Provisionals' urban redoubts and hunting down their leaders.

Yet if the Provisionals had recognised that Protestant extremists too are a fact of life, had held off from confrontation with them and had continued to talk, they would by now be a great deal nearer achieving their historic aim. The British Government had not ruled out a declaration in favour of a pan-Irish decision, which was held to mean Irish unity. Whitelaw's officials had been pushing appropriate forms of words round their blotters. Certainly, Provisional leaders would have had their place at the table where the future of Ireland was discussed. They would have been at Sunningdale; and Sunningdale would have been earlier.

But they believed that it was solely their military action which had changed British minds thus far, and they believed that more of the same would change them farther, and in the end Protestant minds too. They ignored the shift in Britain's strategic need. They forgot that violence only has a chance of succeeding when it touches a nerve of guilt (and not always then): it dislodged President Batista in Cuba, but it could do nothing for Quebec separatism. They made the mistake which General Tanganyika of Mau Mau made in Kenya, and General Grivas of Eoka in Cyprus, in the 1950s. By persisting beyond the point where there were political dividends to be won, they missed their chance to cash their cheque.

AS THE GREEN FLAG drooped, the Orange flag revived. While the Provisionals were throwing away their political and military authority, violent Protestant groups were re-establishing their presence. By the autumn of 1972, twice as many Catholics as Protestants were falling victim to sly, sectarian assassination. Yet that was not the main reason why British ministers, who had been briefly tempted by the idea of dumping the Protestants, now turned to the aim of reconciling them to a new status instead.

THE END OF A LONG STORY IN IRELAND

The SDLP wanted a Council of Ireland, a pan-Irish Parliament. So did the South; but in its changed and unideological mood it was not disposed to make the demand too difficult. It would give its blessing to a Council so purely cosmetic as to leave all but the most insecure Protestants untroubled. That was enough for the SDLP. Assembly politicians from the two sides struck a bargain in Belfast. Dublin ministers pronounced the benediction in December 1973 at Sunningdale.

For them the new satisfaction was that they were at last recognised as having a legitimate interest in the North. In return, they would lean a little harder yet on Catholic terrorists. That is the promise which Northern Protestants, insecure in greater numbers than had been foreseen, are still waiting to see fulfilled.

SO NORTHERN IRELAND exists again as a separate state with a separate administration. There is no longer any point in saying that it ought not to. True, its origins are in injustice: plantation was unjustly done, partition was unjustly done. But states once made are hard to unmake: witness the map of Africa, largely divided by rapacious European Governments in the nineteenth century without any reference to natural boundaries, yet unchanged in the post-imperial era. The purging of injustice from Northern Ireland's present body politic makes its dismemberment now more difficult still.

For Protestants, that ought to be a comfort; but the upheaval of the past two years has been too profound and too bloody for the consolation to be trusted just yet. For the British it is less of a comfort: there is still a part of Ireland which by its own majority choice remains legally and economically linked to Britain, and British troops are therefore committed to keeping order there until a local police force can do the job. But it was not to be expected that a connection first entered into with so little regard for the native inhabitants, and renewed over eight centuries at will, could be abandoned with the same brisk and cynical ease.

Albert Schweitzer, practising medicine in the jungles of what had been French Africa, said that former imperial powers should stay with their old charges in a spirit not of beneficence but reparation. In Ireland the British are at last in a position to take that advice—if their former protégés let them

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