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DE VALERA AND THE ULSTER QUESTION: 1917-1973

John Bowman

Ph.D. Thesis

University of Dublin

Department of Political Science

April 1980

THESIS
420

DE VILHENA AND THE ULSTER QUESTION 1870-1900

John Doherty

B.A. Thesis

University of Dublin

Department of Political Science

1981

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted by me for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the University of Dublin, is entirely my own work. It has not been presented as an exercise at this or any other university. All sources are duly acknowledged in the text.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John Bowman", written in a cursive style.

John Bowman.

Date:

ABSTRACT

John Bowman, 'De Valera and the Ulster Question: 1917-1973' Ph.D thesis submitted to Trinity College, University of Dublin, April 1980.

The dominant political leader of his generation, Eamon de Valera first entered politics because of the threat of Partition and spent his entire political career attempting to undo it. Initially, he shared the naive views of southern nationalists concerning the Ulster unionists: in turn, he suggested their expulsion, coercion or assimilation into an Irish-Ireland. By 1921, however, he had recognised the intractability of the Ulster issue and advocated an accommodation with them, thereby accepting the postponement of what remained his avowed ideal: a unitary, separatist, autarkical, neutral, Irish-Ireland, predominantly Catholic in its ethos. He justified his proposal that Ireland be 'externally associated' with the British Commonwealth as a concession to the Ulster unionists to whom he was also prepared to devolve local autonomy from Dublin. He managed to maintain tolerance if not enthusiasm for these concessions throughout the rest of his career despite the fact that he was leading the more extreme section of nationalists who had opposed the Treaty.

Although himself often typecast as a doctrinaire extremist, he was, essentially, a pragmatic moderate, attempting - and, through the formation of the Fianna Fail party, with considerable success - to persuade those Republicans who had been militarily defeated in the Civil War to pursue the Republic through political means. A Fianna Fail programme designed to achieve this end could not also appeal to Ulster unionists who reserved a special antipathy for the Catholic, Gaelic, Republican ethos preferred by de Valera. Their political culture - Protestant, British, monarchist - could not have been more different: they remained unlikely citizens in de Valera's proposed Ireland and were only included in his scheme because of the nationalist belief that natural boundaries should delimit the state,

In power from 1932, he failed to interest either Belfast or London in any of his proposals and with growing scepticism among republicans and northern nationalists concerning his policy, he was obliged to pursue a more agitational approach in order to maintain control over anti-Partitionist politics. His concern throughout was to avert an outbreak of violence on the border issue. This was particularly true during the War when he declined all offers of help towards Irish unity in return for the abandonment of the south's neutrality. Neutrality further widened the gulf between north and south and Partition was never again a salient issue between Dublin and London during de Valera's years in power.

Although he won the reputation of being obsessively preoccupied by Partition and a 'hawk' on the question, he was, in fact, content to relegate it to an indefinitely postponable aspiration because of his conviction that this was the most likely policy to lead to unity: he constantly lectured his own party on the futility of force and on the fact that he, like other nationalists, had no 'blueprint' for unity. If uniting Ireland was his priority, his own policy was a failure but judged in terms of creating a political vehicle for Republicans after their defeat in the Civil War, his achievement was considerable, stabilising southern politics and strengthening democracy.

SUMMARY

The dominant political leader of his generation, Eamon de Valera entered politics because of Partition and spent half a century attempting to undo it. Initially he shared the naive views of southern nationalists concerning the Ulster unionists: in turn, he suggested that expulsion, coercion, or assimilation into an Irish-Ireland should be their fate; by 1921, however, he had recognised the intractability of the Ulster issue and advocated an accommodation with Ulster, thereby accepting the postponement of what remained his avowed ideal: a unitary, separatist, autarkical, neutral, Irish-Ireland, predominantly Catholic in its ethos. A scrutiny of the record of his speeches in these early years reveals de Valera, not as a doctrinaire on Ulster but as, perhaps, the first of the revisionists among nationalists on the issue. His own solution of the difficulty - for which he won acceptance before the Treaty - was a formula of external association with the British Commonwealth and local autonomy for the north east, devolved from Dublin. His opposition to the Treaty and the largely successful attempts by the Free State government to characterise him as responsible for the Civil War which followed, typecast de Valera as a doctrinaire extremist. In fact he was a pragmatic moderate, attempting - and through the formation of Fianna Fail, with considerable success - to persuade the defeated Republicans of the Civil War period to pursue the Republic through political rather than military methods. A political programme designed to achieve this end could not also woo the Ulster unionists and, in fact, all of de Valera's 'republican' successes further alienated the north. His approach towards unity was essentially aspirational, epitomised in his 1937 Constitution which undid to his satisfaction the south's acceptance of the 1925 Agreement just as it finally destroyed the basis of the Treaty settlement which he had opposed since 1921. But with no success to show on Partition - particularly glaring after the 1938 Anglo-Irish Agreement - de Valera resorted to a more agitational phase, probably to avoid being outflanked by his republican critics. His concern throughout his career was to abjure force. With diplomacy and propaganda unavailing and with Partition further entrenched by Irish neutrality in the War, de Valera failed thereafter to interest any British government in the issue. He was obliged to relegate it to an indefinitely postponable aspiration and he constantly lectured his own party on the futility of force and on the fact that he could point to no policy likely to lead to Irish unity. His own policy proved a failure - if uniting Ireland was his goal - but judged in terms of creating a political vehicle for Republicans after their defeat in the Civil War, his achievement was considerable, stabilising Irish politics and strengthening democracy.

ABBREVIATIONS

BUL	Manuscripts Department, Birmingham University Library.
CUL	Department of Western Manuscripts, University Library, Cambridge.
DE	<u>Dail Eireann, Official Debates.</u> ¹
DGFP	<u>Documents on German Foreign Policy.</u>
FRUS	<u>Foreign Relations of the United States.</u>
HC	<u>House of Commons (Westminster), Official Debates.</u>
NIHC	<u>Northern Ireland House of Commons, Official Debates.</u>
NLI	National Library of Ireland.
NUM	New Ulster Movement.
PRO	Public Record Office, London.
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.
SE	<u>Seanad Eireann, Official Debates.</u>
SPO	State Paper Office, Dublin.
TCD	Manuscripts Department, Trinity College Library, Dublin.
UCD	University College Dublin Archives Department.

1. Where parliamentary debates are quoted, the initials (i.e. DE, NIHC etc) are followed by the Volume no., then by the column no. and then the date.

INTRODUCTION

An enigma or an 'open book'? A revolutionary nationalist who defined his goal in the 1916 Rising and spent the rest of his long career working for the achievement of a united, sovereign, Irish Republic, or the first of the revisionists, a complex, secretive, essentially conservative, politician who often concealed his political strategy from his colleagues and, consciously, from history? Which of these views best encompasses the career of Eamon de Valera?

The former view is the most widely held. It is the popular legend among Irish nationalists - and, one might add, the unpopular legend among Ulster unionists. Abroad, it is widely believed:¹ and it is reflected in the Longford and O'Neill 'authoritative' biography, based on de Valera's papers and written with his co-operation.² The present writer believes that this de Valera legend needs revision; that it fails to do justice to the truth, or, indeed, to de Valera himself; and that, far from being an 'open book', de Valera's career presents the historian with many formidable questions, some of which - given the lacunae in documentary sources - may remain incapable of being authoritatively answered.

Nor has de Valera, although himself preoccupied by the verdict of history,³ facilitated the historian's task: his own papers still remain closed to researchers; and in conducting his own political work - whether in cabinet, ministerial department or political party - he was shy of committing a full record to paper. Often, the most cursory mention of the topic under discussion is all that is recorded in the official minutes of de Valera's cabinet:⁴ in one specific episode of the highest importance - the British suggestion of Irish unity in return for participation in the War in June 1940 - the Irish cabinet record barely mentions the offer, whereas the British archives reveal considerable detail. De Valera informed Fine Gael front-bencher Richard Mulcahy during the War that on security grounds the government's policy was to 'minimise written records' and do their work 'orally as far as possible'.⁵

This instinct not to commit the most sensitive material to paper, the rumoured destruction of some very sensitive files,⁶ the occasional removal of files by some ministers,⁷ the failure to employ professional archivists within government departments, and the generally tardy attitude to access - all of these factors result in serious problems for the historian of Irish

1. Obituaries, The Times, Sydney Morning Herald, both 30 Aug. 1975.

2. Longford and O'Neill, (1970:xv-xvi).

3. Irish Times, 15 Oct. 1962; DE:151:552, 12 July 1955.

4. They can, however, be useful as an index to departmental papers.

5. De Valera to Mulcahy, 12 Feb. 1941, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/215.

6. Confidential source.

7. Lemass interview re 1932 change of government; also see note 25, p.26 below.

politics since Independence. Moreover, as a leader, de Valera did not easily delegate responsibility. He always remained, to his supporters, 'The Chief': and in power, he sometimes took initiatives which, in any 'open' system of government, would have been the result of collective cabinet decisions. Reinforcing a natural instinct for privacy and secrecy was a personal sense of self-justification which dated from the Treaty and Civil War period. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this latter factor: not only did his opponent's propaganda simplify the issues involved and attempt to attribute culpability entirely to him but on the anti-Treaty side of that division, de Valera was sometimes suspected of moderation, or, worse, opportunism. Deflecting such criticism was important to him, not only for party political purposes but also in terms of his own self-esteem and self-justification for his stance in 1921.

The rest of his long career was devoted to reconciling, on the one hand, the aspiration to an independent, sovereign Republic for the thirtytwo counties, with on the other, his appreciation that, strategically, Irish defence was inseparable from that of Britain, and that in the north east of Ireland, a local majority was determined to resist Irish unity on the nationalists' terms. Aware of the formidable difficulties in reconciling the aspirations of Irish nationalism with British interests and Ulster's antipathy, de Valera clearly felt the need to explore potential solutions without being scrutinised by the fundamentalist Republican school. As a former member - indeed a founder member - of this school in his own generation, he knew only too well, how vulnerable any mooted compromise was to the criticism most tellingly expressed in Pearse's admonition that

The man who, in the name of Ireland, accepts as final settlement anything less, by one portion of one iota, than separation from England will be reputed guilty of so immense an infidelity, so immense a crime against the Irish nation that it were better for that man that he had not been born.⁸

For many nationalists after 1916 Pearse's admonition was their guiding principle; and for those for whom it was not, few spoke out against this example of what Tom Paine has categorised as 'the most ridiculous and insolent of tyrannies' - 'the vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave...'.⁹ Although de Valera was adept at using the imprimatur of the 'dead generations' when it suited his purpose, he was also capable - and on the most important occasions - of siding with Paine rather than Pearse.¹⁰

Nor is the task of the student of de Valera's politics made easier - although it may be rendered more interesting - by his cast of mind. Those who politically disagreed with him often thought him pedantic and vacillating, incapable of decisive action. Hugh Kennedy, Attorney General

8. quoted in Nicholas Mansergh, Britain and Commonwealth relations, (London:1948) p.167.

9. Thomas Paine, Rights of man, quoted, Ronald Segal, The struggle against history, (London:1974) frontispiece.

10. Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(6).

in the first Free State Government, characterised de Valera's mind as adept in futile ingenuity and metaphysics, loving to examine problems of concrete life in a vacuum exhausted of the atmosphere of fact...¹¹

A more sympathetic witness, Kevin Boland, confirms, from his own and his father, Gerald's experience, this capacity for scrupulous indecision on de Valera's part;¹² and, most significantly, de Valera's own 'Republican' nominee on the Treaty Delegation, Robert Barton, accused him, at the crucial meeting when his cabinet divided on the Treaty, of vacillation throughout the period of the Negotiations.¹³ Lloyd George considered him a man of narrow views and limited vocabulary.¹⁴ Smuts, Craig, C.P.Scott, Tim Healy, Lord Cranborne and Ramsay MacDonald - all from their widely differing perspectives - do not contradict this impression.¹⁵ Baldwin considered him 'impossible to deal with...' - only one of three such men in his experience.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the researcher, in attempting to trace the formulation of de Valera's policy on a particular issue - particularly an issue as central, sensitive and intractable as Partition - may be forgiven if he sometimes shares Lloyd George's view that grappling with de Valera's thought is akin to trying to pick up mercury with a fork.

The threat of Partition was the issue which prompted de Valera's first involvement in politics: having failed to avert it, it is no exaggeration to say that he spent the rest of his long public life attempting to undo it. From 1917 until his retirement from active party politics in 1959, he made some thousands of speeches on Ulster; later as President, until his retirement from that office in 1973, he took further opportunities to speak on the issue; moreover, these were years during which his successors as leader of Fianna Fail, Sean Lemass from 1959 to 1966 and Jack Lynch thereafter, faced formidable challenges on the Partition issue. The belief that de Valera was the only Irish leader who could end Partition - a consistent claim by his followers down the years - encouraged his successors to maintain the appearance, at least, that their policies were consistent with his. Not only were they leading a party whose raison d'etre was the abolition of Partition, but if they took an initiative on Northern Ireland which could be represented as inconsistent with what was presumed to have been de Valera's traditional approach, they were vulnerable within the party to a charge of being heretics. This was true despite the fact that those who saw themselves as the custodians of de Valera's version of Republicanism, often knew little of the complexity of his approach.

11. Hugh Kennedy to W.T.Cosgrave, Hugh Kennedy papers, UCD P4/B/30.

12. Interview, Kevin Boland.

13. Erskine Childers' diary entry, 8 Dec. 1921, Childers papers, TCD, ms. 7814.

14. Thomas Jones, Whitehall diary:iii:Ireland, 1918-1925, (London:1971) p.90.

15. For Smuts see n.29,p.38 below; Craig, n.17,p.37; Scott, diary, 28 July 1921, see n.29,p.38; Healy, n.29,p.77; Cranborne, note 1 Feb 1941, PRO DO 35/1109/WX 11/24; MacDonald, n.7 and 11,p.94.

16. See note 5, p.94 below.

What was de Valera's policy towards Ulster? How consistent was it; how pragmatic; how revisionist? To what extent did he reveal his full mind in public; or, privately, to colleagues or to British negotiators? To what extent did he accept the myths about Ulster which were popularly believed by Irish nationalists? To what extent did changing circumstances encourage him to modify his policy towards the north? In Part 2 of this thesis, we consider de Valera's record on the Ulster question throughout his public career from 1917 to 1959 and in Part 3 consider his impact on the issue and the legacy he left to his successors. As an introduction, Part 1 examines the geography of Partition. The argument here presented is that images of Ireland were profoundly important in determining approaches to politics - and of particular significance were map images.

Indeed, de Valera himself had a very specific map-image of Ireland. He always kept a map of the partitioned island close at hand to impress his views on visitors. Sir John Maffey, the first British diplomat accredited to Ireland, noted how one of his first meetings with de Valera, in September 1939, concluded:

As I left the room he led me to his black map of Eire with its white blemish on the North East corner and said: "There's the real source of all our trouble". He could not let me go without that.¹⁷

Many years earlier, in the course of his American tour in 1919-20, de Valera outlined what he saw as the spurious map-image of 'Ulster' then prevalent in the United States.

When the word "Ulster" occurs to the average American there springs immediately to his mind the concept of an Irish province with fixed, well-defined historical boundaries, within which there is a solid, homogeneous, political or religious block such as this "Ulster" which British propaganda has suggested to Americans. There is no such racial block. This Ulster is a thing of the mind only, **non-existent** in the world of reality.¹⁸

17. Maffey report to DO after his meeting with de Valera 20 Sept. 1939, PRO DO 35/1107/WX1/5.

18. Gaelic American, 24 Jan. 1920.

PART ONE

THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF PARTITION: THE CASE OF IRELAND

If we could frame the world to our own desire, we would place the small States in their ancestral territories - and I know all the difficulties there are about that.

Eamon de Valera, November 1944.¹

...the so-called "nations" or "peoples" of which the nationalists dream do not exist.

Karl Popper.²

Ulster will be a...geographical fact.

Edward Carson, 1914.³

1. Speech at the College Historical Society, Trinity College, Dublin, Irish Press, 2 Nov. 1944.

2. Karl Popper, 'The history of our time: an optimist's view', in Popper, Conjectures and refutations, (London:1963) p.368.

3. Quoted, Richard Rose, Northern Ireland: a time of choice, (London: 1976) p.7. Hereafter cited as Rose:1976.

CHAPTER ONE: A LINE ON THE MAP

(i) Irish Nationalism's National Image

(a) The geographical dimension

It is argued here that the partition of the island of Ireland in 1921 exercised a profound, complex and largely misunderstood, effect on the course of Irish nationalism: profound, because it has since remained the central issue in Irish politics; complex, because of its continuing reverberations within nationalist ranks and its impact on both north-south and Anglo-Irish relations; and misunderstood because so few of the nationalists whose constitutional and physical force agitations led to political independence for the twenty-six counties appreciated that part of the price of independence was Partition itself. This latter point has been obscured, not only because it was uncomfortable to accept, but also because of the prevailing consensus among nationalists in their opposition to Partition - an opposition which remained unquestioned because of the plausibility of the case against the border as drawn. Bitterly resenting an unfair border - itself the result of Ulster Unionist leverage - nationalists could easily ignore any merits in an Ulster unionist case for some border.

Essentially then, Irish nationalism, concerned with territorial tidiness or completeness, has done little to develop a political culture capable of uniting the population of the entire island. Unlike landlocked nationalist movements elsewhere, Irish nationalism can admit of no compromise on where any new boundary line might be drawn. In the words of Arthur Griffith: 'Ireland cannot shift her frontiers. The Almighty traced them beyond the cunning of man to modify.'⁴

The special importance to Irish nationalists of the territorial bond, may be due to the fact that - unlike, say, the Poles - they have always thought of the 'homeland' in terms of a discrete geographical entity. Hertz emphasises the significance to every nation of the 'national territory' which is considered 'an inalienable sacred heritage...'; moreover,

...its independence, integrity, and homogeneity appear bound up with national security, independence and honour. This territory is often described as the body of the national organism and the language as its soul. In the ideology of almost every nation, therefore, its historical territory is looked upon almost as a living personality which cannot be partitioned without destroying it altogether.

Further, he suggests that in the case of smaller countries the integrity of what

4. Arthur Griffith, holograph draft, 'On nationality', S.T.O'Kelly papers, NLI ms. 8496(2).

is perceived as the national territory is of especial importance.⁵

Every state, argued Febvre, has 'its germinal, its geographical starting-point.'⁶ Political geographers have since distinguished two broad categories: states which 'have been created arbitrarily to fill some preconceived geographical frame' which Pounds and Ball term arbitrary states; and 'those which have grown slowly and over a long period of time from some nuclear, germinal, or core-area' which they categorize as organic states.⁷ It is the argument of this thesis that the twentysix county state which has resulted from the efforts of Irish nationalists is essentially an organic state but with the arbitrary aspiration to encompass the entire island.

The Irish preoccupation with a 'preconceived geographical frame' may be attributed to the fact that the Irish map-image is so sharply delineated. Political geographers have come increasingly to acknowledge the importance of map-images. Hartshorne describes the state as 'a geographic feature which we visualise on the political map, the most common map in educational and general daily use': the tendency is for citizens to identify the state in their minds, 'primarily in its external morphology, notably its size and shape.' Hartshorne, a prolific and influential political geographer, retrospectively regretted that he had given 'but scanty attention' to map-shape in his earlier work.⁸ Boulding agrees that the map-image of a country is of central importance:

...the shape of the map that symbolizes the nation is constantly drilled into the minds of both young and old, both through formal teaching in schools and through constant repetition in newspapers, advertisements, cartoons, and so on.⁹

This constant exposure to the map-shape is particularly prevalent in Ireland, whose external morphology, being an island, is sharply delineated:¹⁰ moreover, along with its constant repetition in all the ways mentioned by Boulding, the Irish map is also recognised as a symbol of the nation being commonly incorporated into the mastheads of nationalist newspapers, and, notably being used as the design for the most common postage stamps in the first half-century following independence.¹¹ Given that the state occupies such a large part

5. Frederick Hertz, Nationality in history and politics, (London: 1944), pp.150-1. and ch.5 passim; hereafter, Hertz:1944.

6. N.J.G.Pounds and S.S.Ball, 'Core areas in the development of the European States system', Annals of the Association of American Geographers, vol.54, Mar.1964, pp.24-40; reprinted in H.J.de Blij, Systematic political geography, (London:1973 ed). Hereafter, Pounds and Ball:1964.

7. Pounds and Ball (1964:87).

8. Richard Hartshorne, 'Morphology of the state area: significance for the state', in C.A.Fisher, ed., Essays in political geography, (London:1968), pp.27-32. Hereafter, Hartshorne:1968.

9. K.E.Boulding, 'National images and international systems', The Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol.3, 1959, pp.120-31; reprinted in J.N.Rosenau, International politics and foreign policy, (New York:1969 ed), pp.422-31. Hereafter, Boulding:1959.

10. De Valera speech, SE:22:980, 7 Feb. 1939.

11. For newspapers, see the Fianna Fail weekly, The Nation, 1927-31, and the Irish Press, at least throughout the 1930s. A map of Ireland was the feature on one of four designs which comprised the definitive series of Irish postage stamps from 1922 to 1968, Liam Miller, Postage stamps of Ireland: a checklist: 1922-76, (Dublin:1976). Maps were also used

of the island, it is scarcely exceptional that the map used is that of Ireland: what may have significance - especially in the context of the south's irredentist claim to 'reintegrate the national territory' - is the constant omission of the boundary line, especially in a map being used to symbolize the state. Indeed, few citizens of the twenty-six county state can have a clear map-image of their state. The Irish case then is complicated by the fact that the state is not coterminous with what is popularly, and - since the enactment of the 1937 Constitution - formally, regarded as the national territory.

Resentment of such discontinuity is not peculiar to Irish nationalism: Jones writes of a general and 'almost mystical' dislike of discontinuity;¹² Smith argues '"Incompleteness" is not merely an insult, it is a negation of the nation';¹³ Boulding notes an uneasiness with map-shapes which show 'strong irregularities, enclaves, detached portions, and protuberances or hollows';¹⁴ Pounds concludes that the

bond between people and place, between nation and state, is a close one and is sometimes exaggerated and exalted into a kind of spiritual union. The land itself comes to be thought of as divinely shaped, and any proposal to partition or truncate it becomes sacrilege.¹⁵

Such nationalist instincts must be all the more strongly felt in a case where the 'geographical frame' is as clearly perceived as is the map-shape of Ireland. Indeed Haslinga suggests that to many Irishmen 'it is almost a dogma that the Creator has predestined Ireland to be a national and political unit, because it is a perfect geographical entity...'.¹⁶ From the time when it was first mooted, Irish nationalists have condemned Partition as essentially unnatural, John Redmond believing the very idea 'an abomination and a blasphemy'.¹⁷ Once enacted, the exclusion of the six counties was deeply resented: 'That portion of Ireland was the very head of the island in more senses than one, but it is beheaded now...'.¹⁸

The partition of Ireland has been particularly controversial because of the political greed of the Ulster Unionists when the boundary line was decided. Originally based on the historic nine counties of Ulster, the Ulster Unionist

by cartoonists: see Dublin Opinion, Feb. 1969, p.19, Aug. 1970, p.13, Sept. 1970, p.26, Irish Independent, 5 Oct. 1977, Irish World, 5 and 12 Dec. 1925, cartoon, 'De Valera's Home Again!' in Golden papers, NLI ms. 13,141(1)a. Maps were also widely used in advertisements, see Irish Independent, 7 May 1921. The map was also used as a symbol of Ireland, as in a presentation medal to de Valera, Irish Press, 14 Apr. 1941.

12. S.B.Jones, 'Boundary concepts in the setting of place and time', Annals of the Association of American Geographers, vol.49, 1959, pp.241-55; reprinted in H.J.de Blij, Systematic political geography, (London:1973, 2nd ed.), p.168. Hereafter cited as S.B.Jones:1959.

13. A.D.Smith, Theories of nationalism, (London:1971). Hereafter cited as Smith:1971.

14. Boulding (1959:426).

15. N.J.G.Pounds, 'History and geography: a perspective on partition', Journal of International Affairs, vol.18, 1964, pp.161-72. This quotation, p.163. Hereafter cited as Pounds:1964.

16. M.W.Heslinga, The Irish border as a cultural divide, (Assen:1962) p.41. Hereafter cited as Heslinga:1962.

17. Quoted in Nicholas Mansergh, The Irish question: 1840-1921, (London: 1965; 2nd ed.), p.206. Hereafter cited as Mansergh:1965.

18. Tom Hales TD, DE:67:123, 11 May 1937.

Council, fearing that any devolution of power to such a province would leave their majority vulnerable to nationalist erosion, opted instead for a 'clean cut' of six counties. In these counties they enjoyed a two-to-one majority but the territory chosen also included significant areas with nationalist majorities which were contiguous to the proposed border. Beckett charges the Unionists with artificially carving out the 'largest possible area within which the Protestants could expect to maintain a safe and permanent majority.' Nevertheless he reminds us that an entirely new boundary, ignoring the politically convenient county borders, 'would have been almost impossible to establish on any logical basis.'¹⁹

Political geographers who have studied the partition of Ireland would not disagree with such a verdict: Busteed has characterised the 1920 settlement as '...a less than perfect partition',²⁰ Muller-Ross acknowledging that the two communities are 'not clearly spatially separated' suggests that the boundary has been delimited 'to maintain an absolute majority of Protestants in the Belfast parliament';²¹ Emrys Jones faults the acceptance of county boundaries 'which bore no relevance to the issue and brought with them serious difficulties in detail';²² Mitchel believes that Northern Ireland may 'have been given an almost impossible task because of the size of its minority' and he concludes that its boundaries 'should have been drawn better in accordance with local wishes';²³ Evans writes of a 'tortuous border';²⁴ and Orme, noting that in a cultural sense, Northern Ireland 'may be quite distinct', insists that 'the boundaries of this individuality are not.'²⁵

However, political geographers while sharing conventional nationalist criticism of the absurdity of the 'unnatural' boundary line, dissented from what nationalists believed was a corollary: that the only admissible political boundary was the 'natural' boundary of the sea. Indeed, political geographers seem unanimous in their rejection of what they see as a doctrine of geographical predestination: Febvre,²⁶ Sieger, Maull, Solch,²⁷ Broek,²⁸ Minghi²⁹ and

19. J.C.Beckett, 'Northern Ireland', Journal of Contemporary History, vol.6, 1971, pp.121-34; quotations from pp.125-7. Hereafter, Beckett:1971.

20. M.A.Busteed, 'Northern Ireland', (Oxford:1974), p.23, hereafter, Busteed:1974.

21. Quoted in Heslinga, (1962:22)

22. Ibid.

23. N.C.Mitchel, 'Ireland: divided island', Geoforum, vol.8, 1971. Hereafter cited as Mitchel:1971.

24. Estyn E.Evans, 'The personality of Ulster', Transactions, The Institute of British Geographers, no.51, Nov. 1970, pp.1-20; quotation p.2. Hereafter, Evans:1970.

25. A.R.Orme, The world's landscapes: 4: Ireland, (London:1970), p.249. Hereafter, Orme:1970.

26. Lucien Febvre, A geographical introduction to history, (London: 1925), pp.308-9. Hereafter, Febvre:1925.

27. Sieger, Maull and Solch, all in Richard Hartshorne, 'Geographic and political boundaries in Upper Silesia', Annals of the Association of American Geographers, vol.23, 1933, p.196. Hereafter, Hartshorne:1933.

28. Broek, quoted in J.V.Minghi, 'Boundary studies in political geography', Annals of the Association of American Geographers, vol.53, 1963, reprinted in R.E.Kasperson and J.V.Minghi, The structure of political geography, (London:1970), pp.140-160, quotation p.144. Hereafter Minghi:1963.

29. Minghi (1963:160)

Jones³⁰ all reject the theory of natural boundaries, a term which should, in Hartshorne's view, be '...banned from scientific literature'.³¹ Prescott, reviewing the arguments, concludes that natural boundaries have now 'no academic currency. Their worthlessness has been demonstrated by a generation of political geographers since Fawcett' in 1918.³²

Gilfillan, reviewing the political boundaries of Europe in 1924, also dismissed the theory of natural boundaries, faulting, in particular, the 'propagandist historian' who invariably found

an unlimited quantity of heroic actions, great patriots, picturesque incidents and all the other matter that, whether false or true, makes up what is essentially each nation's mythology. How much talk there is of "when Ireland was a nation", though she never was...³³

Encouraging this trend in Ireland is the fact that throughout its recorded history, Ireland has been a discrete geographical space,³⁴ the 'map-image' or 'geographical frame' facilitating an unhistorical belief in a continuous 'Irish nation'.

(b) The historical dimension

Although the geographical realities and myths contribute substantially to the national image, it remains essentially in Boulding's words

a historical image - that is, an image which extends through time, backward into a supposedly recorded or perhaps mythological past and forward into an imagined future. The more conscious a people is of its history, the stronger the national image is likely to be. It is no exaggeration to say that the function of the historian is to pervert the truth in directions favourable to the images of his readers or hearers.³⁵

The political geographer, Kristof has called for a distinction between the national culture and the national idea; the latter 'essentially, an idealized self-image of the nation, the acceptable part of the national culture; the heritage, true or imaginary, of which the nation is proud, which is to be emulated.'³⁶ Kristof argues that 'the iconography of the fatherland' is constantly adjusted to harmonize

...with evolving aspirations, with the anticipated future... According

30. S.B.Jones (1959:167).

31. Hartshorne (1933:193).

32. J.R.V.Prescott, Political geography, (London:1971) pp.69-70. See also Prescott, The geography of state policies, (London:1968) pp.34-5; N.J.G. Pounds, Political geography, (New York:1972), pp.83-4, hereafter cited as Pounds:1972; S.B.Cohen, Geography and politics in a divided world, (London:1964), pp.190-1, hereafter cited as Cohen:1964; Bernard Crick, In defence of politics, (London:1964 2nd ed.), hereafter cited as Crick:1964. Pounds (1964:169-70) does cite Ireland as one example of a discrete territorial entity, '...so distinctive and so separate from their neighbours that they almost demand to be administered as units', but does not himself support this view. For a rare expression of support for natural boundaries from a political geographer, see Roderick Peattie, Look to the frontiers: a geography for the peace table, (Port Washington, N.Y.:1970 re-issue; first published in 1944), p.19.

33. S.Column Gilfillan, 'European political boundaries', Political Science Quarterly, vol. 39, 1924, pp.458-84. Quotation pp.477-8. Hereafter cited as Gilfillan:1924.

34. A.T.Q.Stewart, The narrow ground, (London:1977), pp.34-5. Hereafter cited as Stewart:1977.

35. Boulding (1959:424).

36. L.K.D.Kristof, 'The Russian image of Russia', an applied study in geo-

to which idea and what image of the fatherland is cherished, appeal is made to different cultural and geohistorical heritages, and different ideals and geopolitical identities are seen in the future.³⁷

Once established, these images have considerable resistance to rational criticism; Deutsch and Merritt emphasise the influence of early socialization as a guide to subsequent behaviour, men being willing to 'distort many of their perceptions and deny much of reality, in order to call their prejudiced souls their own.'³⁸ Nor are political leaders immune; indeed, they must broadly share the national image to survive. Boulding concludes that like the ordinary citizen, the powerful statesman holds 'naive, self-centered, and unsophisticated images of the world' in which his own nation moves.³⁹

Irish politicians have not proved exceptions to these trends, and in particular to the propensity of nationalists to hold a selective view of their nation's past. Arnold Toynbee found in the history of Ireland a 'hypnotization of a living self by a dead self...';⁴⁰ James Joyce complained of the nationalists' emphasis 'on the old pap of racial hatred...';⁴¹ George Russell railed against the exclusion from membership of the nation of those not preoccupied by the 'dreams of worn-out yesterday.'⁴² Sean O Faolain argued that the dominating problem facing Irish politicians post-independence was '...what to do with their lovely Past.'⁴³ The historian, Mansergh, reckoned that the minds of the living were overshadowed by the 'rigid, inflexible doctrines of the "martyred" dead.'⁴⁴ In particular, Pearse's warning of the immense infidelity of accepting anything less than full separatism were words which served to undermine the possibility of constitutional compromise and his

irreconcilable spirit still haunted, or inspired, the minds of the Sinn Fein leaders. That was their tragedy... The 1916 rising was above all a challenge to those Irishmen who believed in compromise. It was a challenge which they could not meet. History was against them.⁴⁵

Nor is the exaggeration of the role which violence may have played in the formation of the state, unique to Irish nationalism. Boulding asserting that 'there is hardly a nation which has not been cradled in violence and nourished by further violence', emphasises that war is an experience which is dramatic, important and shared by everybody. In the formation of the national image

the consciousness of great shared events and experiences is of the utmost importance. A nation is a body of people who are conscious of having 'gone through something' together. Without the shared experience, the national image itself would not be shared, and it is of vital importance that the national image be highly similar.⁴⁶

political methodology', in Charles A. Fisher, ed., Essays in political geography, (London:1968), ch.19. This quotation p.347. Hereafter cited as Kristof:1968.

37. Ibid., p.356.

38. K.W.Deutsch and R.L.Merritt, 'Effects of events on national and international images', in Herbert C.Kelman, ed., International behavior: a social-psychological analysis, (New York:1965) pp.130-87, quotation, pp.182-3.

39. Boulding (1959:423-4;430).

40. Arnold Toynbee, A study of history:IV, (London:1939) p.291. Hereafter cited as Toynbee:IV:1939.

41. His specific target was Arthur Griffith in September 1906: quoted in Richard Ellmann, James Joyce, (London:1959) p.246.

42. Poem, 'On behalf of some Irishmen not followers of tradition'.

43. Sean O Faolain, The Irish, (London:1969 ed) p.145. Hereafter, O Faolain:1969.

44. Nicholas Mansergh, The Commonwealth and the nations: studies in British Commonwealth relations, (London:1948) pp.167-8; hereafter, Mansergh:1948.

45. Ibid., p.167.

46. Boulding (1959:424-5).

The admixture which incrementally formed the Irish national idea also included notions about race, language and religion. With concepts of racial distinctiveness fashionable in the early decades of this century, the notion of a separate 'Irish Race' was, for some, an important strand. Racial theories are now generally dismissed as pseudo-scientific, a 'parasite of nationalism';⁴⁷ nevertheless, in Ireland, as Stewart argues, '...the theory of a racial distinction between planter and "Gael"' is still dominant. Given the various population movements recorded throughout Irish history and the scientific evidence now available, '...the idea of an unmixed racial group ought to have been laughed out of court at the outset.' However, it has proved 'unshakeable' given the peculiar nationalist approach to historical evidence.⁴⁸ On language, the widely-held theory that it determined nationality had its advocates in Ireland - any dilemma posed by the fact that Gaelic was no longer the spoken language of those to be included in the nation, being solved by the espousal of a restoration policy. De Valera, in particular, constantly recorded his own conviction that Irish nationality would wither if the language revival failed.⁴⁹

Perhaps the most misunderstood factor in the Irish national idea is religion - so often 'the shibboleth of the contending parties' within Ireland,⁵⁰ although the substance of their disagreement concerns ethnic identity and national allegiance. Nevertheless among Irish Catholics a justified pride in their Church's survival of the religious persecution of earlier centuries, combined with the need to resist discrimination in their own generation, have helped to make Catholicism what Pounds regards as 'a significant part of the cement' of the Irish nation.⁵¹ Other observers confirm this picture: Demangeon argued that the Irish nationalist 'may discard his language, but he holds to his religion';⁵² Heslinga claims that Irish nationalism 'has become very much associated with Roman Catholicism.'⁵³

Catholicism clearly became part of the national idea for many nationalists⁵⁴ - just as Protestantism helped to shape the identity of Ulster unionism. As O'Farrell suggests, religious differences in Ireland,

also entailed difference in values and world view and historical experience, and it was also a polarity which coincided with other differences - political, social, and economic - and indeed a focus around which these other differences grouped. In both of these opposed amalgams, religion was an inextricable element.⁵⁵

Even the most self-conscious followers of Tone's republicanism, such as the Fianna Fail party, were capable of equating Catholicism with Irish nationalism. O'Kelly, deputy leader of the party in the formative years, claimed that it represented '...the big element of Catholicity.'⁵⁶ De Valera himself went on

47. Crick (1964:83).

48. Stewart (1977:26-7).

49. SE:22:988-9, 7 Feb. 1939.

50. Stewart (1977:180).

51. Pounds (1972:78).

52. A. Demangeon, The British Isles, (London:1952, 3rd ed.) p.113. Hereafter cited as Demangeon:1952. See also E.Jones (1964:409-10).

53. Heslinga (1962:58).

54. Noted by Rose (1976:11) and Jones (1964:415-6).

55. Patrick O'Farrell, England and Ireland since 1800, (Oxford:1975) pp. 151-2, italics added. Hereafter cited as O'Farrell:1975.

56. DE:30:821, 5 June 1929.

record:

Since the coming of St. Patrick 1,500 years ago, Ireland has been a Christian and a Catholic nation. All the ruthless attempts made down through the centuries to force us from this allegiance have not shaken her faith. She remains a Catholic nation.⁵⁷

(c) The state-idea

Along with all of these factors which went to form the national idea - what Kristof terms 'the carrier of the heritage of the past' - can be added 'the dynamic, forward-looking and future-oriented element', what he terms, after Ratzel, the state-idea. In evolving its own image, argues Kristof, the nation is helped by the state-idea:

...looking through its prism the nation draws strength from a sense of being pushed by history and pulled by an ideal - from a sense of past fulfilment and a duty to fulfil the future destiny. By linking that which was with that which is to be, the nation develops an image of what it itself is and what it should become.⁵⁸

Van Gennep suggests that '...nationality is never in other than an unstable equilibrium. It is always becoming.'⁵⁹ Francis in his consideration of the ethnic factor in nation-building, also places emphasis on the future, writing in terms of a common solidarity, destiny, purpose, mission, - all future-oriented terms.⁶⁰

The post-independence rhetoric of Irish nationalism reflects similar preoccupations. There is a constant emphasis on what the nation ought to be: and along with the customary exhortations and expectations found in all nationalist movements, there is the additional obsession of 're-uniting the national territory.' Indeed, Heslinga suggests that the distinguishing characteristic of an Irish nationalist is a belief in the 'necessity of the abolition of Partition' - a definition rooted in a future contingency.⁶¹ Specifically referring to the alienation felt by nationalists when nation and state are not coterminous, Kristof suggests that if this alienation is not overcome by idealizing the past, then nationalists may instead imagine 'an idealized future - the paradise, the Utopia that is to come...'.⁶²

57. Quoted in Richard Rose, Governing without consensus, (London:1971), p.247. Hereafter cited as Rose:1971.

58. Kristof (1968:345).

59. Quoted in Alfred Cobban, The nation state and national self-determination, (London:1969, revised ed.) pp.126-7. Hereafter cited as Cobban:1969.

60. E.K.Francis, 'The ethnic factor in nation-building', Social Forces, vol.46, no.3, Mar. 1968, pp.338-346. This quotation, p.342.

61. Heslinga (1962:53).

62. Kristof (1968:354).

(ii) A Separate Ulster Image

(a) A second nation?

To attempt to arbitrate on whether the Ulster unionists comprise a separate nation is beyond the scope of the present study: what can be more easily shown is that they comprise no part of the Irish nation. Not only do they exclude themselves from membership but they have also persistently been excluded by anti-Partitionists, one of whom admitted that

We have had a habit, when it suited a particular case, of saying they were Irish, and when it did not suit a particular case, of saying they were British or planters or the seed of planters.¹

Such ambivalence prompts Miller to write of Irish nationalists as being capable of reaffirming their own group 'not only as it was - a sectarian nationality - but also as it "ought" to be - an Irish nation transcending the sectarian division of Irish society...'.²

Disinterested scholarship supports the minimum contention: that the Ulster unionists form no part of the Irish nation. Political geographers refute any nationalist assumption of one nation: Semple,³ Holdich,⁴ Mackinder,⁵ Unstead,⁶ Johnson,⁷ and Prescott⁸ all recognised the distinctiveness of the north, Orme concluding that the province became '...the powerful bastion of people whose speech, habits, traditions, unwavering loyalties and resolute Protestantism differed totally from native ways...'.⁹ Bowman wrote of two 'totally unlike nations'.¹⁰ Estyn Evans suggested that in 'anthropological terms, there are two endogamous communities, nursing different historical myths.'¹¹ Political geographers concerned with theories have also added their evidence: Pounds and Ball identify two core-areas in Ireland;¹² Jefferson notes the existence of two primate cities, Dublin and Belfast, each the focus for the crystalization of a nationalism;¹³ and Pounds argues that if the ethnic distance between

1. Michael Hayes, SE:22:882, 26 Jan. 1939.

2. David Miller, Queen's rebels, (Dublin:1978).

3. E.C.Semple, Influences of geographic environment on the basis of Ratzel's system of anthropo-geography, (London:1911), p.435.

4. Thomas Holdich, replying to a paper on 'Race and nationality', read to the Royal Geographical Society, 7 May 1917, Geographical Journal, vol.50, p.329.

5. H.J.Mackinder, Britain and the British seas, (Oxford:1930, 2nd.ed.) pp. 301-2. Hereafter cited as Mackinder:1930.

6. J.F.Unstead, A world survey from the human aspect:III, (London:1957; 5th ed.), pp.263-5.

7. James H. Johnson, 'The political distinctiveness of Northern Ireland', The Geographical Review, vol.52, no.1, pp.78-91, this quotation, p.91.

8. Prescott (1970:379).

9. Orme (1970:123).

10. Isaiah Bowman, The new world, (New York:1928; 4th ed.) p.60.

11. Evans (1970:4)

12. Pounds and Ball (1964:97).

13. Mark Jefferson, 'The law of the primate city', Geographical Review, vol.29, no.2, 1939, pp.226-32; reprinted in W.A.Douglas Jackson, Politics and geographic relationships, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:1964) pp.172-5. This quotation, pp.174-5.

Protestant and Catholic were to be measured in Northern Ireland, it would result in 'a yawning gulf'.¹⁴

Theorists of nationalism also refute the Irish claim to one Irish nation:¹⁵ Hertz notes '...the alienation of Ulster from the Irish cause';¹⁶ Schmitt suggests that '...the core issues involve ethnic and national identities...';¹⁷ Toynbee wrote of the two communities behaving towards one another 'like oil and vinegar in a salad...';¹⁸ and Crick clearly has the Ulster unionists in mind when, in questioning irredentist enthusiasms, he asks:

What if...there are fellows who pass a nationalist examination on race, fail on religion, are passed on geography, but fail on wanting to join in?¹⁹

Cobban, in his historical survey, 'The Nation State and National Self-Determination', concludes that the 'essential price' paid by Irish nationalism for its success was the partitioning of the island.

In Ireland, the fatal logic of the nation state...had triumphed. Except where a community is culturally homogeneous, the principle of the nation state means that the success of a majority in achieving self-determination will involve the assimilation, extinction, or exclusion of the minority. The Ulster Orangemen, with Great Britain behind them, were able to insist on the third of these possibilities.²⁰

Heslinga, from his study of the Irish border, goes so far as to conclude that 'Ulstermen do form a separate nation' even though they rarely make the claim for themselves. Leaving this controversy aside, it can more confidently be presumed, with Heslinga, that 'At any rate', Ulster unionists 'cannot be considered to belong to the Irish nation.'²¹

Occasionally, a nationalist lapsed into a realistic assessment of the political geography of the island: indeed it seems difficult to improve on the 1910 assessment of Fr. Michael Flanagan - in time to become vice-President of Sinn Fein - when he argued that geography had

...worked hard to make one nation out of Ireland; history has worked against it. The island of Ireland and the national unit of Ireland simply do not coincide. In the last analysis the test of nationality is the will of the people....

Emphasising what might be summarised as two 'patriotisms of place', Flanagan wrote that whereas London was the centre of Ulster's 'patriotic enthusiasm', the Irish nationalist centered his on Dublin:

We claim the right to decide what is to be our nation. We refuse them the same right... After 300 years England has begun to despair of compelling us to love her by force. And so we are anxious to start where England left off, and we are going to compel Antrim and Down to love us by force.²²

14. Pounds (1972:21).

15. Hertz (1944:243); Royal Institute of International Affairs, Nationalism, (London:1939) p.111. Hereafter cited as R.I.I.A.:1939.

16. Hertz (1944:175).

17. David E.Schmitt, The irony of Irish democracy, (Lexington:1973), p.71. Hereafter cited as Schmitt:1973.

18. Toynbee (1939:IV:293).

19. Crick (1964:80).

20. Cobban (1969:163-5).

21. Heslinga (1962:62).

22. Freeman's Journal, 20 June 1910, quoted by John Biggs Davison, The Spectator, 24 Apr. 1976, p.13. Lloyd George and others exploited the propaganda value of these remarks: HC:123:1171-3, Round Table, vol.10, no.38, Mar. 1920, p.372.

(b) Ulster's map image

The rhetoric and metaphors of Ulster unionists confirm the self-image of a besieged garrison, defending, as their ancestors did, the Ulster Plantation.²³ This was facilitated not only by their own reading of their community's past, but also by the circumstances prevailing when organised Ulster Unionism gathered its resources to fight Home Rule. The geographical base of the Ulster Unionists - whether it encompassed the whole of Ulster or only a part - would be a 'last redoubt' for all Irish unionists.²⁴ Whenever Home Rule for Ireland looked probable, Ulster's veto came into play, the self-confidence of loyalists being expressed by their leader, Carson, in 1914: 'The difficulty will remain, and Ulster will be a physical and geographical fact.'²⁵

That it was eventually a six-county rather than a nine-county fact, left some Unionists within the new state with a sense of guilt and grievance over the boundary line: its arbitrary nature, with even its most glaring anomalies unrectified, resulted in some dissatisfaction on the part of six county unionists with the map-shape of Northern Ireland. J.R.Fisher, for instance, eventually to be the north's representative on the Boundary Commission, expressed his conviction, when Partition was first enacted, that 'Ulster can never be complete without Donegal.' In a letter to Craig, he advised him to lobby for the inclusion of Donegal and a safer boundary with the south: 'With North Monaghan in Ulster and South Armagh out, we should have a solid ethnographic and strategic frontier to the South, and a hostile "Afghanistan" on our north-west frontier would be placed in safe keeping,'²⁶ Once the six-county state was established and particularly after the threat posed by the Boundary Commission had receded, Ulster unionists developed a map-image of their state, which, to an increasing extent, as the years passed, was depicted in the press and, later, on television as a six-county map. This map-image of 'Ulster' was combined with a keen local sense of territoriality, based on the most detailed topographical knowledge concerning 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' territory; 'The Ulsterman carries the map of this religious geography in his mind almost from birth.'²⁷ One study of the religious ghettos of West Belfast, has concluded that 'ethnic enclosure' is a fair term to describe these Protestant and Catholic communities.'²⁸

On another scale, as it were, the Ulster map-image was that of the British Isles, 'the hub of Empire', with a self-conscious awareness of the strategic importance of Northern Ireland to imperial interests. Loyalists quoted Admiral Mahan's warning that it was impossible 'to look at a map and not perceive' the

23. Carson, The Times, 14 July 1919; Craigavon, ibid., 20 Jan and 3 July 1934; N.J.G.Pounds, An historical and political geography of Europe, (London: 1947) p.462; Mitchel (1971:60); Rose (1976:11).

24. Miller (1978:88).

25. Quoted, Rose (1976:7).

26. Quoted, D.R.Gwynn, The history of Partition:1912-1925, (Dublin:1950), pp.215-6.

27. Stewart (1977:181).

28. F.W.Boal, 'Territoriality on the Shankill-Falls divide, Belfast', Irish Geography, vol.6, 1969, pp.30-50. quotation, p.49.

threat posed by any concessions to the Irish separatists.²⁹ When Partition was being enacted, one loyalist characterised a solidly Protestant Northern Ireland as a 'prop in Ireland to the empire without which the whole naval strength of England would be jeopardised'. Along with this role - which was eventually to prove significant - was another geographical image which, in the event, proved irrelevant, but was thought important in 1920: the view of the north as a British bridgehead, '...an invaluable jumping-off point for the British navy and army if it were found necessary to use them in case of serious trouble in Ireland or elsewhere.'³⁰

Another dimension to the Ulster unionist's map-image, was the hostility and fear felt for what was popularly described by Ulster unionists as 'the south and west'. Along with a 'frontier mentality' which pervaded the remoter border regions, went a dismissal of what Unionists saw as the pretentious aspirations of the south to statehood, Carson describing as 'very ridiculous' the Irish nationalist ambition to have their own 'dot on the map which might be represented by a pinprick.'³¹

(c) The historical dimension

Ulster loyalists feared Irish nationalism as '...an insatiable beast which could never be satisfied short of total independence...'.³² It was, apparently, believed by some Unionists in 1920 that the Sinn Fein oath administered to Volunteers included the promise to '...wade in the blood of Orangemen and heretics who do not join and become one of ourselves.'³³

Although complicated by the fact that their union with Britain made the development of a local nationalism irrelevant, it would be a mistake to believe, as so many southern nationalists tended to do, that the Ulster unionists were, therefore, assimilable into the Irish nation. Taking Boulding's model, two distinct national images on the island of Ireland can be identified: Ulster unionists will simply not fit in to the Irish national image; they have not, with Irish nationalists, a 'consciousness of great shared events... of having "gone through something" together.' Indeed few communities - not even the nationalists to the south - have as keen a sense of their own history as those of Ulster Protestant stock - a factor which places them firmly within Boulding's theoretical framework for a community with a distinctive national image: 'it may be an experience shared long ago but constantly renewed by the ritual

29. Ronald McNeill, Ulster's stand for union, (London:1922) p.130.

30. F.H.Crawford, quoted in Patrick Buckland, Irish Unionism: Two: Ulster Unionism and the origins of Northern Ireland: 1886-1922, (Dublin: 1973) p.121. Also Toynbee (1939:iv:293,n.2).

31. The Times, 14 July 1919.

32. Miller (1978:99-100).

33. The provenance of this bogus oath is difficult to determine. It is quoted here from an RUC Intelligence file of documents which the RUC captured from a Sinn Fein source. This file was in turn stolen and forwarded to Richard Mulcahy in Dublin, Mulcahy papers, University College Dublin Archives Department, (hereafter UCD), P7/B/281.

observances and historical memory of the people.' Violence, he adds, is a particularly potent factor, war being 'the one experience which is dramatic, obviously important, and shared by everybody.'³⁴

Not only were Ulster unionists non-participants in the Irish struggle for independence - 'the great shared event' of contemporary Irish nationalism - but their very resistance to that phenomenon forms their own, most recent, 'great shared event'. If, in Renan's celebrated aphorism, a nation lives 'by a daily plebiscite',³⁵ then the Ulster unionists have consistently renewed at least their minimum allegiance: not to be assimilated into the Irish nation. Although not themselves claiming the status of a separate nation, eventual, albeit reluctant, acceptance of Partition, was, in a real sense, a claim to what was then the accepted political destiny of 'small nations', self-determination. Consciously, their leaders made exactly this claim³⁶ and in his study of Ulster loyalism, Miller suggests that although thinking of themselves, in the decades immediately preceding Partition, as the loyal Irish, they were also being driven to think of themselves as Ulstermen, a designation which they were reluctantly prepared to put forward as a "nationality" if that was a necessary ploy in the game of self-determination they were perforce playing.³⁷

(d) Northern Ireland's state-idea

What moved Ulster Protestants 'was not nationalism...but anti-nationalism', concludes Beckett:

There can have been few occasions on which a political group has shown itself so unwilling to accept even partial responsibility for managing its own affairs.³⁸

Once Partition had been enacted, the Unionists slogan, 'What we have, we hold', neatly encapsulated the state-idea of Northern Ireland as perceived by the majority community. But a one-third minority within its borders opposed the very existence of the state and the consequent, permanent, polarization of politics on such a fundamental issue precluded the development of a unified state-idea in Northern Ireland.³⁹ Unionism however, had its own exclusive state-idea, confirmed by all the slogans of its leaders: 'A Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people', 'Not an Inch', 'No surrender!'. Indeed the Northern Ireland state-idea was nothing less than the antithesis of the state-idea espoused by the south: the south wanted Partition abolished; the north insisted on its retention. Furthermore, taking the other two concepts discussed above, it seems clear that as a community, Ulster unionists at least excluded themselves - and

34. Boulding (1959:424-5).

35. Quoted in D.A.Rustow, A world of nations: problems of political modernization, (Washington, D.C.:1967) pp.20-21.

36. Craig, The Times, 19 July 1921, quoted, W.K.Hancock, Survey of British Commonwealth affairs: i: Problems of nationality: 1918-1936, (London:1937) p.132. Hereafter cited as Hancock:1937.

37. Miller (1978:119).

38. Beckett (1971:124).

39. Mitchel (1976:60).

are, in practice, excluded by Irish nationalists - from the Irish national image and national idea as outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

(iii) Britain's map-image of Ireland

Naturally, there we are, twin sisters. Geography has placed us there. No amount of ranting or flag-waving or anything else can destroy that geographical fact.

Daniel McMenamin TD¹

The sea forbids union but the ocean forbids separation.
Henry Grattan²

One other map-image is relevant to any understanding of Partition: the British map-image of her western flank. It would be impossible to exaggerate the strategic importance of Ireland in this context. For some centuries the strategic unity of the British Isles had become 'a fundamental principle...';³ Ireland was thought of as 'a back-door to England through which more than one great power had endeavoured to pass.'⁴ If anything, the strategic issue was even more acute when the British government came to consider the Irish settlement in 1920 - a bargaining point not forgotten by the Ulster Unionists. Having recently, successfully, withstood the U Boat menace of the Great War, Britain was apprehensive that Ireland was, in Churchill's words, '...intriguing with foreign enemies against her.'⁵ Churchill's image of Ireland as an island 'lapped about by British sea-power' was widely shared:⁶ Mackinder, the leading strategic theorist of the period, emphasising the critical importance for Britain of the use of the Irish ports, describes the Atlantic to the west of Ireland as the 'exercise ground' of the British navy and the area south of Ireland and west of Cornwall and Brittany as '...the marine antechamber of Britain.'⁷ The French political geographer, Demangeon, states frankly that the 'sea which encircles Ireland is not Irish, but British.'⁸

Although offensive to nationalists, such statements can be taken as expressions of strategic realities: not only would geography render Britain and Ireland - whatever their respective naval strengths - strategically interdependent, but in the period under review, Irish nationalists, in government, accepted that they could not undertake the naval defence of the Irish coasts.⁹ This, however, was emphasised privately. In public, a more orthodox, separatist, rhetoric was heard. As George Orwell remarked in just this context, the

1. DE:71:324, 29 Apr. 1938.

2. De Valera and Churchill were both familiar with Grattan's aphorism.

3. C.Barnett, The collapse of British power, (London:1972) pp.184-5.

4. Ibid., p.184.

5. Quoted in Martin Gilbert, Churchill:iv:1916-1922, (London:1975) pp.668-9, hereafter, Gilbert:iv:1975.

6. Ibid., p.680.

7. Mackinder (1930:20).

8. Demangeon (1952:147).

9. For de Valera, see PRO CAB 27/642 IN(38)6, 23 Feb. 1938. Also, Minister for Defence to Executive Council, 22 July 1925, Blythe papers, UCD P24/107.

'intellectual decencies' could 'vanish' and the 'plainest facts' could be 'denied' when an Irish nationalist refused 'even in his secret thoughts' to admit that 'Eire can only remain independent because of British protection.'¹⁰ A central British consideration when the Government of Ireland Act was being prepared in 1920, this strategic dimension remained important, as least throughout the period of de Valera's leadership of Fianna Fail, and formed part of the context in which the Partition question was considered in Dublin and Belfast, as well as London.

¹⁰ George Orwell, Collected Essays, (London:1961), pp.234-5.
Original Essay, 'Notes on nationalism', 1945.

PART TWO

DE VALERA'S ULSTER POLICY: 1917-1959

In almost every exchange, formal or informal, between (de Valera) and his British counterparts, there recurs, like the clanging of a bell, one theme; Partition, Partition, Partition! Every argument came back to it, every decision was affected by it.

Sean MacEntee, obituary note on de Valera, 1975.¹

1. Sean MacEntee, 'De Valera: the man I knew', Iris, Fianna Fail party journal, Winter, 1975. Hereafter cited as MacEntee:1975.

(i) Nationalist myths on Partition

'No man has the right to set bounds to the onward march of the nation.' Probably no political slogan was more often incanted from Fianna Fail platforms than these words of Charles Stewart Parnell. Throughout de Valera's years as leader of the party, they constantly recur, underlining Fianna Fail's belief that they were, in their generation, in the vanguard of Irish nationalism, the inheritors, not of Parnell's policies, but of Parnell's promise.² Ironically, it was this generation of politicians who, at the 1918 election, effectively eclipsed the party which Parnell had first made effective. As the victorious Sinn Feiners well knew, part of the reason for the old Irish Party's defeat was electoral disenchantment with what was seen as their appeasement of Ulster Unionism. But by voting republican rather than nationalist in 1918,³ the electorate was supporting a policy even more extreme than that which had proved unacceptable to Ulster: in this, the southern voters were at one with their politicians, who - preoccupied by the relationship with Britain - seriously underestimated the Ulster dimension to the Irish Question.

When they did refer to Ulster, it was often in terms which betrayed the grossest ignorance of the political realities in the north east. This was partly due to the genuinely egalitarian instincts of many in Sinn Fein who believed that by reminding the Ulster Protestants of Wolfe Tone and the United Irelanders that this would somehow split the Unionist monolith and convert some to the true faith of Irish Republicanism.

The new generation of nationalists perceived the Ulster question in a highly subjective manner. The present writer has identified six key ideas which were common currency in nationalist speeches and propaganda. Self-evident truths to some, to others they were myths. They were:

1. That the people of Ireland comprised one nation.
2. That Britain had partitioned Ireland solely from self-interest.
3. That an independent, politically 're-united' Ireland was inevitable.
4. That even if Britain had to coerce the Ulster unionists into unity, as she was, if necessary, in honour bound to do, the resulting united Ireland would, nevertheless, be economically prosperous and politically stable.
5. That if Britain unilaterally broke the link with Northern Ireland, the Ulster unionists would then accept a united Ireland.
6. That Britain had the necessary resources - military and/or economic and/or political - to coerce the unionists into accepting a united Ireland.

2. See, for instance, Irish Press reports of de Valera's last general election campaign in 1957: speeches at Clonmel, reported 18 Feb., at Ennis, 25 Feb., at Bandon, 4 Mar. and at the final rally, GPO, Dublin, 5 Mar. 1959.

3. Not all of those, of course, who voted Sinn Fein in 1918 were voting for a Republic, but the terms nationalist and republican reflect a general tendency.

De Valera, as will be seen presently, is on public record in the early part of his career, as espousing all six of the above. In the concluding Part 3 of this thesis, we shall examine whether, and to what extent, he modified or discarded any of these myths. In the chapters which follow, we shall analyse de Valera's record on Partition from 1917 to 1959. From the 'twenties to the 'fifties, he was pre-eminent on the Irish political stage; even his political opponents acknowledged that he embodied Irish nationalism to the majority of the people. What does the record tell us of his Ulster policy during the first forty years of Partition?

(ii) Coercion or Expulsion? De Valera's policy towards the Ulster unionists: 1917-18

Although we have de Valera's own testimony that his interest in politics was due to Ulster's resistance to the 1914 Home Rule Bill,¹ the earliest evidence of his views on the Ulster question dates from his imprisonment following the 1916 Rising. His fellow-prisoner, Sean MacEntee - a man destined to be his life-long colleague in politics² - had lived in Belfast until 1916 and could claim that he

knew something of Northern politics and Northern politicians. De Valera, on the other hand, knew them only by repute and what he had heard of them had not impressed him. He was surprised indeed, that I had so much that was good to say about "wee" Joe Devlin. Though his views mellowed later, he was then firm in the conviction that the trouble there was due to British guile and nothing else.³

This simplistic perspective on Ulster is reflected in the speeches which de Valera made during the eleven months between his release from jail in June 1917 and his re-arrest in May 1918, an eventful period during which he became abstentionist MP for East Clare, campaigned in other by-elections, was elected President of Sinn Fein, opposed Conscription and conducted a Sinn Fein organizing drive in the north west. Longford and O'Neill in their chapter covering this period quote his constantly repeated theme that 'Ulster was entitled to justice and she should have it, but she should not be petted and the interests of the majority sacrificed to please her.'⁴ They also complain that de Valera's views on Ulster were distorted by the press, a viewpoint which he shared: having been 'emasculated and distorted' by the censor, one speech had then, he complained, been 'doctored by another hand' to suit the policy of the Freeman's Journal.⁵

It is not always clear whether specific grievances against the newspapers

1. The Earl of Longford and T.P.O'Neill, Eamon de Valera, (Dublin:1970), p.470; hereafter cited as Longford and O'Neill:1970.

2. MacEntee was a founder member of Fianna Fail and served in all of de Valera's governments.

3. MacEntee (1975:1).

4. Longford and O'Neill (1970:ch.6 passim., quotation, p.63.

5. Irish Independent, 23 Jan. 1918; Longford and O'Neill (1975:75).

concern omission, distortion or editorial hostility.⁶ The latter may be discounted here, as our concern is to trace de Valera's thinking on Ulster. Undoubtedly some of his views were omitted, either by timid or hostile editors or by the censor, but from a reading of the newspaper files of the period, there is no evidence to suggest that even with the journalists' and censors' interventions between de Valera's speeches and the following morning's press that the words which were published had not been spoken. Nor given the consistency with which key ideas recur, could the charge be sustained that de Valera's words were quoted out of their context. So repetitious are the newspaper reports that one must presume that they represent more accurately de Valera's view of the Ulster question at this period than can be found in any other source.

These speeches invite the question: did de Valera envisage any future for the Ulster unionists within Sinn Fein's Irish Republic? And, if they were to have a future, on whose terms could they remain?

De Valera variously described the Ulster unionists as a 'foreign garrison' and 'not Irish people';⁷ he had 'never used any argument with unionists except this - are you Irishmen first or Englishmen first?';⁸ He threatened them that if they rejected Sinn Fein's solution 'they would have to go under';⁹ that if they stood 'in our way to freedom we will clear you out of it';¹⁰ they they must decide to 'either be in Ireland or out of it.'¹¹ He also went on record as saying that the Irish question would be settled quickly if England 'cleared out her troops';¹² that he was not a pacifist, although the Freeman's Journal's censor had made him appear one;¹³ that 'ten foot pikes' in the hands of Irish volunteers 'were a far greater guarantee that they would not be conscripted' than eighty MPs in London;¹⁴ and that they

would struggle...as chances and opportunities presented themselves by every means in their power, restricting themselves only by the law of commonsense and prudence and the fundamental law of morality.¹⁵

In other speeches he promised that the 'methods of their striving were to be bound by no constitution but that of the Ten Commandments',¹⁶ and he repeatedly asserted his belief that no theological argument could be sustained against the use of force.¹⁷ He challenged any theologian to deny Ireland's right to prepare for a just revolt and he defended the priest's right 'as a citizen' to take part in politics:

...and I go further, and say that as political questions sometimes involve moral questions, the Church has a right on this question of morality to interfere, and I acknowledge, as a Catholic, its right to interfere - (cheers) - but it must be a moral question....¹⁸

6. See, for instance, editorials in Freeman's Journal, 1 Feb. 1918 and Irish News, 23, 25 and 28 Jan. 1918.

7. Freeman's Journal, 12 Nov. 1917.

8. At an election meeting in Newry during the South Armagh by-election, reported in Irish Independent, Freeman's Journal, Irish Times, 1 Feb. 1918.

9. Irish Independent, 6 July 1917.

10. Freeman's Journal, 20 July 1917.

11. Ibid., 19 Jan. 1918.

12. Irish Times, 13 Feb. 1918.

13. Kilkenny Moderator, 11 Aug. 1917.

14. Irish Independent, 29 Jan. 1918.

15. Freeman's Journal, 19 Feb. 1918.

16. Irish News, 9 Apr. 1918.

17. Freeman's Journal, 3 Nov. 1917.

18. Ibid., 5 Nov. 1917.

There was nothing in any of this to reassure the Ulster unionists that de Valera was offering them what he was shortly to call 'their share in Ireland's glorious traditions',¹⁹ which, to de Valera, included Ireland as 'an Irish-speaking nation'.²⁰ Sinn Fein, said de Valera, after his Clare election victory, were 'the vast majority' and stood for separation:

If he felt that the best thing for Ireland was not separation he would fall in with the Unionists. But if the Union were maintained it would mean the destruction of the Irish language.²¹

However, as the Ulster by-elections were to show, both Ulster communities proved difficult missionary terrain for de Valera. Confident from earlier by-election successes that there was a major national swing to Sinn Fein, de Valera approached the South Armagh by-election in January 1918 with mistaken confidence.²² Later he ascribed the reversal suffered by Sinn Fein to the combination of the 'Carsonite Partitionists and the Devlinite Partitionists',²³ the latter having been used by the Unionists to block Sinn Fein's advance: it was 'a disaster and a defeat for Ireland...'.²⁴

De Valera was determined to campaign against this trend.²⁵ With Sean MacEntee he undertook a ten day tour of the north west, speaking in Donegal, Derry and Tyrone: 'Ulster cut from Ireland would leave her without her head - without her heart.'²⁶ His strategy was to fight sectarianism, win Ulster's nationalists to Sinn Fein 'because their nationality was the same...'²⁷ and then unite

under the same banner of equality...a large number of the deluded followers of the capitalist class of Belfast. He believed the people of Ulster aspired for freedom as much as the people of Munster, Leinster or Connaught. Ulster's hard-headedness was like the cat that would like to get the fish, but would not wet her paws to get it. Whilst they were struggling for their freedom they meant to concentrate the minds of the Irish people on their own nation. If they did that - even if their struggle went on for forty years - they would have advanced materially.

In contrast, MacEntee, from the same platform, implied that the Republic would be won within twelve months.²⁸ To attempt this, thought John Dillon, would result in 'horrible bloodshed and disaster' - a fear which he thought was now 'dawning' on de Valera's mind, hence his reference to a possible forty years wait.²⁹ De Valera's moderation in comparison to his colleagues was already a matter for comment although Dillon feared that de Valera's fate 'would be like that of Mr. Kerensky in Russia.'³⁰

Politicians, priests and editors hostile to Sinn Fein constantly drew a parallel with the Russian Revolution. It was a scare which de Valera seems to have been particularly keen to defuse:

19. Ibid., 30 Jan. 1918.

20. Ibid., 5 Nov. 1917.

21. Irish Times, 13 July 1917.

22. Irish Independent, 19 Jan. 1918.

23. Ibid., 11 Feb 1918.

24. Freeman's Journal, 19 Feb. 1918.

25. Irish Independent, 11 Feb. 1918.

26. Anglo-Celt, 16 Feb. 1918.

27. Freeman's Journal, 15 Feb. 1918.

28. Irish Independent, 11 Feb. 1918.

29. Letter to Freeman's Journal, 14 Feb. 1918.

30. Dublin Daily Express, 22 Feb. 1918.

They were called by certain people the Revolutionary Party. Were they called the Conservative Party they would be more correctly named. They would conserve the spirit of true Irish nationality to keep the people true to ideals sanctified by the blood and the sacrifices of twenty-five generations....³¹

Often during this period, Sinn Fein's opponents depict de Valera as a comparative moderate. The propaganda 'Notes From Ireland' circulated by the Irish Unionist Alliance, noted, in November 1917, what they saw as conflicting views on Ulster by Sinn Fein's leaders. They quote Griffith as saying in Belfast that the Ulster unionists

must make up their minds either to throw in their lot with the Irish nation or stand out as the English garrison. If they did the latter the Irish nation must deal with them.

They contrast this with de Valera, whom they quote as arguing that he would ask the Ulster unionists to be

loyal to Ireland and to be true and honest to their flag. He would not like to see any man who was loyal as an Irishman, be he Unionist or Separatist, coerced.³²

De Valera often struck such a note³³ but he had also spoken in the coercive, threatening way attributed here to Griffith. 'Ulster must be coerced if she stood in the way...',³⁴ her case for self-determination was merely that 'of the robber coming into another man's house, and claiming a room as his';³⁵ again, he said

As far as the Unionists were concerned he had nothing more to say to them than that they represented only English interests, and as they were in the minority they had nothing to do but give way to the majority. (cheers).³⁶

The circumstances in which all of these speeches were made varied: audiences might be Sinn Fein supporters, or indifferent, or hostile or mixed; some speeches seem to have been scripted, most probably not;³⁷ allowances ought to be made for the partisan approach by all parties in election campaigns and perhaps for the temptation to reply in kind to the often contemptuous propaganda of the Ulster Unionists; finally, standards of reporting may have varied. Taking all of these factors into consideration, it would be surprising if there were not some inconsistencies in his references to Ulster. But from the speeches quoted, it would be fairer to ascribe any contradictions to de Valera's ambivalence towards Ulster at this juncture. Along with promises to the Ulster unionists that a Sinn Fein Ireland would not create a new ascendancy at their expense, he also persistently threatened them with coercion or expulsion. At an election meeting in the predominantly Protestant town of Bessbrook, Co Armagh he

31. Anglo-Celt, 4 May 1918.

32. 'Sinn Fein and Ulster - conflicting views of leaders', Notes from Ireland, vol.26, no.4, p.74, 1 Nov. 1917, Irish Unionist Alliance, Dublin.

33. Irish Independent, 19 Jan., 1 and 15 Feb. 1918.

34. Sligo Champion, 28 July 1917.

35. Irish Times, 9 Feb. 1918.

36. Sligo Champion, 28 July 1917.

37. Longford and O'Neill who based their biography on de Valera's papers, often quote from speech drafts, but the impression left by newspaper reports is that de Valera was, in the main, speaking without notes. This was his practice in later years. One informant, who worked as part of de Valera's 'local machine' in Clare from 1917 until de Valera's retirement from Fianna Fail in 1959, did not recall him speaking from a script, even once, during those years, interview Sean MacNamara. For details of de Valera's approach to public speeches during his visit to America in 1919-20, see John Bowman, 'De Valera on Ulster: what he told America', Irish Studies in International Affairs, vol.1, no.1, 1979, pp.3-18. See discussion in note 30, p.6. Hereafter cited as Bowman:1979.

likened Ulster to a 'rock in the road' which must be 'blasted' from Sinn Fein's path. Again with this speech, as will be seen, de Valera was to criticise the reporting. He was speaking without notes and to one of his audience - a local Volunteer and later to be a colleague in government, Frank Aiken - he reacted adversely to Orange hecklers.³⁸ Held on the last week-end before the poll in South Armagh, the meeting was well attended by press correspondents from the Belfast and Dublin papers. They report him as saying that the

Unionists of the North must make up their minds whether they were going to be a British garrison or Irishmen. If they are content to be a British garrison we have only one thing to do and that is not to try to conciliate them. They had seen the effect of conciliation in Ulster's attitude towards the Convention.

Such an approach has only made 'the Unionists sit tight and contribute not a single suggestion to a settlement of the Irish Question'. De Valera 'recognised the Unionists as a rock in the road.' He recognised the position they took up and said that

that position must be stormed from at home, and they must make up their minds not to be peddling with this rock. They must if necessary blast it out of their path. They must face³⁹ this problem, and if the choice offered to them was the choice of Solomon they would reject it. They would not accept that choice. The child was theirs: this was their land, and there was no parity of reasoning in those who said that Ulster's secession from Ireland was the same as Ireland's secession from the Empire.⁴⁰

John Dillon, a persistent critic of Sinn Fein's threats to Ulster, publicly rebuked de Valera for threatening force against Ulster within six months unless she accepted the Republic. De Valera replied in an open letter to Dillon published in the Irish Independent two days after the reports of his Bessbrook speech. Specifically, de Valera denied that he had prophesied 'in terms of months' as it was 'unwise':

That you should make me give six months to Ulster is for you, seemingly very natural. I never was guilty of such stupidity. If your other "quotations" are as genuine as those attributed to me they are three-fourths fabrications. What is the good of all this filthy lying?⁴¹

It will be noted that this strongly-worded refutation of Dillon's speech limits its specific denial to the stupidity of prophesying 'in terms of months'; although it also has the clear effect of calling into question the veracity of his critics and the accuracy of all press accounts, it does not specifically deny or withdraw the threat of force; it may well have been written to shield de Valera from those of his critics who believed what they read of his speeches in the press.

At the close of the campaign in South Armagh, de Valera expressed general dissatisfaction with press reports that his policy amounted to no conciliation of the Ulster unionists. On 30 January the Freeman's Journal announced that it had received a letter from de Valera too lengthy to publish in full - it would have taken up three full columns. However the paper did publish de Valera's

38. Interview with Frank Aiken.

39. Freeman's Journal, 28 Jan. 1918 reports de Valera as saying that Sinn Fein 'must force this problem...'.
40. Based on reports in Freeman's Journal, Irish Times, Dublin Daily Express, Irish News, Northern Whig, Belfast Newsletter, all 28 Jan. 1918.

41. Open letter to John Dillon, Irish Independent, 30 Jan. 1918.

'corrected' views on Ulster. His position was that no 'compromise' rather than no 'conciliation' was possible with the Unionists. One tradition in Ireland must prevail.

Any half-way position is bound to be unstable. That the Unionists should come over to us is both reasonable and just, sanctioned by nature, justified by precedent... We offer them, too, their share in Ireland's glorious traditions. If they refuse, they're an "alien garrison". With such there can be no peace.

Moreover, de Valera suggested that Ulster would appreciate his 'straight dealing'; his was a 'plain, blunt, manly, honest statement and fair.'⁴² It was also, it may be added, ambivalent and confused. Having chided the Freeman's Journal for suggesting that his policy rejected 'conciliation' with Ulster, de Valera explicitly contradicts this within days both in a letter to Patrick McCartan and in a public speech in Derry where he defended the use of physical force. The local unionist paper reports him as saying that 'when the opportunity presented itself they could secure their demands by force of arms. (cheers)' From the same platform, Sean MacEntee predicted that Belfast and Ulster nationalists would emulate the 1916 Dublin Rising

rather than permit a settlement by the (Irish) Convention which involved even the acknowledgement of the right of any Irish county to set itself up as an English pale....⁴³

Even if one relies on de Valera's letter of correction and clarification to the Freeman's Journal, his policy can be fairly summarised as one of indefinite coercion against an 'alien garrison' unless and until they accepted Ireland's 'glorious traditions' as defined by Sinn Fein. Taking all of his speeches into consideration, and also bearing in mind how they were received by the Ulster unionist community, it can be argued that during this period de Valera repeatedly insisted that coercion or expulsion was the just fate for the Ulster unionists.

(iii) Assimilation of the Ulster Unionists: De Valera on Ulster, 1919-20: What He Told America

Arrested in May 1918, during the course of the East Cavan by-election, de Valera was effectively silenced until the general amnesty for Sinn Fein prisoners ten months later.¹ On his own initiative and, initially, with only the reluctant approval of his cabinet colleagues, he decided to seek recognition for the Republic in America. His particular appreciation of the Irish-American vote as a lever in Anglo-American relations was not shared by all Irish nationalists.² But, it seems de Valera was correct in believing the British

42. Freeman's Journal, 30 Jan. 1918.

43. Derry Standard, 11 Feb. 1918.

1. Although he escaped from Lincoln Prison in February 1919, de Valera could not engage in open political activity until the amnesty for Sinn Fein prisoners the following month, Longford and O'Neill (1970:ch.7).

2. See, for instance, P.S.O'Hegarty, A history of Ireland under the union: 1801-1922, (London:1952) pp.731-2. The index entry reads 'vain and foolish visit to America', p.793. Hereafter cited as O'Hegarty:1952.

apprehensive in this regard. Lloyd George, for instance, appealed to Ulster's champion Bonar Law to ensure that - for the sake of the Empire - Ulster would bear in mind the danger posed by the Irish in America: 'If America goes wrong we are lost. I wish Ulster would fully realise what that means. I am afraid they don't.'³ Moreover, in the view of The Times correspondent in New York, political circles in America, when considering the Irish question, had 'scant sympathy with Ulster.'⁴

Although, initially, he was reluctant to use the political platform in America - 'How I hate having to go "talking" to public meetings...'⁵ - de Valera quickly established himself as a national figure, travelling many thousands of miles and becoming a popular and prolific speech-maker. Indeed it seems probable that this eighteen month period played a decisive role in his formation as a politician. Although thirtysix years old when he arrived in America, he had led a relatively sheltered political life up to this point, much of the shelter resulting from two lengthy terms in British jails; by the time he landed in New York in June 1919 he had been free to organize politically in Ireland for less than one third of the period which had elapsed since the Rising of 1916 had first made him a national figure.⁶

From an analysis of what he told his American audiences in the eighteen months from June 1919, it is clear that de Valera's views on Ulster were now more moderate: in these speeches he foresees the assimilation of the Ulster unionists into an Irish-Ireland. He had sometimes spoken in this sense during the 1917-18 period analysed above, but taking into consideration all of his reported speeches for each period, a definite shift of emphasis is discernible in the future he foresaw for the Ulster unionists.

What follows is based on a content analysis of all reports of de Valera's speeches, during these eighteen months, as printed in one weekly political paper, specially published for the Irish-American community, the Gaelic American.⁷ His addresses included both scripted and impromptu speeches which probably makes them more revealing of de Valera's mind than would be the case if they were exclusively in one or other category.⁸ In these newspaper columns are recorded de Valera's considered views and his 'thinking aloud' on Ulster at this critical period in the formulation of the Partition settlement. Consistently impressing his audiences with what the Boston Herald terms his 'passionate sincerity',⁹ it seems probable that he is here speaking his full

3. Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 12 Jan. 1918, quoted, Patrick Buckland, Irish Unionism: One: the Anglo-Irish and the new Ireland; 1885-1922, (Dublin: 1972) pp.121-2. Hereafter cited as Buckland:1972.

4. The Times, 28 and 30 June 1919.

5. De Valera to McGarrity, 19 Dec. 1919, McGarrity papers, NLI ms. 17,439(2).

6. Of the seventyfive meetings of the Sinn Fein Standing Committee held between February 1918 and May 1919, de Valera had been available to take the chair at only six: computed from a list compiled by Richard Mulcahy, 6 Apr. 1963, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/D/1.

7. See Bowman (1979:5, incl.n.28) for reliability of this source.

8. Ibid., n.30, p.6.

9. Quoted, Gaelic American, 12 July 1919.

mind on Ulster. Indeed given the great complexity, intractability and sensitivity of the issue throughout the rest of de Valera's career, his sojourn in America may well be the last period during which he expressed himself without any inhibition on the Ulster question. Although he emphasised in one letter to his cabinet colleagues in Dublin that '...I do not weigh every word and every sentence of a speech and of an interview as if it were a treaty I was actually signing', he also assured them that, in his American speeches, he said nothing which he 'would not say at home. I do not believe in the old parliamentary policy of one sort of speech for America and another for Ireland.'¹⁰

Many of the themes which dominated his speeches in America had relevance to Ulster. His view of Irish history was simple: he entertained no doubts but that Ireland was, and always had been, one nation. In almost every speech, he revealed his reading of Irish history. He had two main themes: 'the tale of a nation crucified' during 750 years of occupation;¹¹ and, preceding that, a golden age. He variously described Ireland as 'a nation before Augustine set foot on English soil';¹² a country which was feared by the Romans, who, having conquered Britain, 'never dared to cross into Ireland';¹³ and a country which had 'enjoyed sovereign independence for over a thousand years' before the invasion of the Danes.¹⁴ 'The Irish Nation is one Nation, not two', he claimed; it was 'as homogeneous as any nation upon the earth...'.¹⁵ He liked to emphasise that it was not possible to point to Ulster on a map of Ireland: 'homogeneous Ulster doesn't exist.'¹⁶ That the island was too small to be partitioned was another of his claims.¹⁷

Britain's responsibility for Ireland's difficulties was another central theme in de Valera's speeches: he likened the Union between Britain and Ireland to 'the union of the shark with its prey',¹⁸ described Britain as the 'greatest tyrant of all the ages',¹⁹ again, as 'a tyrant far greater than Germany.'²⁰

This is a contest between Imperialism which is an artificial system, and nationalism, which is a natural and permanent system. History shows you that the latter has always triumphed.²¹

He also showed himself to be aware of the central preoccupation of the British with regard to Ireland: naval defence. Ireland, he said, 'with its strategic position at the gate of the Atlantic Ocean, overlooking 60 per cent of the world's commerce' was seen by Britain as her 'key' to be 'mistress of the world'.²² There is also evidence which suggests that, in advance of his more insular colleagues in Dublin, de Valera at this early stage appreciated the

10. De Valera to the cabinet, n.d., circa 27 Feb. 1920, received in Dublin, 10 Mar. 1920, SPO DE 2/245.

11. Gaelic American, 12 July 1919.

12. Ibid., 6 Sept. 1919.

13. Ibid., 2 Aug. 1919.

14. Ibid., 3 Jan. 1920.

15. Eamon de Valera, 'Some points from recent speeches by President de Valera', *ibid.*, 24 Jan. 1920.

16. Ibid., 10 Jan. 1920.

17. Ibid., 9 Aug. 1919.

18. Ibid., 17 Jan. 1920.

19. Ibid., 31 Jan. 1920.

20. Ibid., 12 July 1919.

21. Ibid., 28 Feb. 1920.

22. Ibid., 1 Nov. 1919.

potential common interest between Britain and Ireland of an independent Ireland whose neutrality would, in fact but not in law, be guaranteed by British naval supremacy in the Atlantic.²³

More specifically, on Ulster, de Valera consistently denied that religion was a factor in the Irish Question; it was merely a 'rack on the peg of which England exhibits Ireland's political differences before the world'. Its introduction was 'nonsense',²⁴ 'an insult',²⁵ 'unworthy'.²⁶ In none of these reports is there any attempt to weigh religion as a factor of any significance in the political differences between Ulster unionists and Irish nationalists.²⁷ Allowing that the 'internal political divisions amongst Irishmen themselves ...roughly correspond' to the two lines of division of religious belief, he argued that this was 'merely accidental',²⁸ and was exploited by English statesmen 'with consummate skill to deceive'.²⁹

He constantly discounted the intransigence of Ulster unionists towards Sinn Fein and their imminent conversion to his point of view is forecast on a number of occasions.

Irishmen are coming more and more to realize that they are a race with a common country to love, and a Parliament to guarantee equality of rights to every one of the Irish nation.³⁰

At a meeting in New York, he assured the Protestant Friends of Ireland - a pro-Sinn Fein lobby in North America - that 'Carson's followers have lost the old political faith of the North of Ireland'; adding that he was certain that some time ago many thought 'it would be impossible to get a Presbyterian minister from Belfast to support the Irish Republic'.³¹

In some speeches de Valera instanced the presence of Protestant supporters on the same platform as sufficient evidence for his argument that religion was an irrelevant factor in settling the Irish question.³² On ten occasions during this eighteen months, the Gaelic American reports him as claiming Ulster Protestant support for Sinn Fein.³³ He constantly emphasised the high proportion of nationalist leaders who had been Protestant, noted Robert Barton and Ernest Blythe as contemporaries of his own,³⁴ and added that the 'movement had its origin in Protestant Ulster'.³⁵

23. Ibid., and Westminster Gazette, 6 Feb. 1920.

24. Gaelic American, 24 Jan 1920.

25. Ibid., 12 July 1919.

26. Ibid., 29 Nov. 1919; also ibid., 18 Oct. 1919 and 15 May 1920.

27. Ibid., 12 July 1919.

28. Ibid., 23 Aug. 1919.

29. Ibid., 11 Oct 1919.

30. ibid., 12 July 1919.

31. Ibid., 17 Apr. 1920.

32. Ibid., 10 Jan 1920.

33. Speeches to Massachusetts Legislature, reported ibid. 12 July 1919; Chicago City Council, ibid., 2 Aug. 1919; New Rochelle, ibid., 23 Aug. 1919; Brooklyn, ibid., 27 Sept. 1919; Philadelphia, ibid., 11 Oct. 1919; Cleveland, ibid., 18 Oct. 1919; Butte, ibid., 29 Nov 1919; Bridgeport, ibid., 10 Jan 1920; Chicago, ibid., 3 Apr. 1920; speech to Protestant Friends of Ireland, New York, Easter Monday, 1920.

34. Ibid., 18 Oct 1919.

35. Ibid., 23 Aug. 1919.

The main argument adduced by de Valera to his American audiences was that in accordance with the principle of self-determination, Ireland was entitled to unity and independence. He did not admit that Ulster's objections in any way weakened Ireland's case. He went so far as to claim that if the American parties made the recognition of the Irish Republic an issue in the 1920 Presidential election, it would be 'the most momentous thing that ever happened in the history of the world; because if that is done... that is the principle of government by the consent of the governed.'³⁶

A historical parallel whose validity de Valera denied was the claim that Ireland's secession from the United Kingdom was equivalent to the South's attempted secession at the time of the American Civil War.

In the case of the South, there was a voluntary contract, so the analogy breaks down. If you want that analogy, you must look to the north-east corner of Ireland. Therefore there is no barrier to Ireland's being given the right to Self-Determination.³⁷

Self-determination was, of course, the prevailing slogan of the political leaders who had been victorious in the 1914-18 war. The rights of small nationalities, the demarcation of their boundaries and an international system to secure their independence from aggression were all being currently debated in the context of the mooted League of Nations. Fundamental to de Valera's argument was the assumption that the island of Ireland would be the unit chosen for the application of the self-determination principle. Along with his belief in natural boundaries and the indisputable fact that there was no obvious line which would separate the north east from the rest of the country, he based his case largely on the result of the 1918 election which Sinn Fein had, after all, fought on the issue of self-determination. In terms of seats won, 1918 was a Sinn Fein 'landslide' but in terms of votes won, it was not so impressive. Contemporary commentators and those writing the history of that period have drawn from the same election returns remarkably different conclusions.³⁸ To the politicians of the day the impact was clear: one generation's political careers were broken and a younger generation's launched that December. Sinn Fein had won 73 seats to the Unionists 26 with the old Irish Party reduced to a rump of six. What was significant and was ignored was that within the six counties, the Ulster Unionists had won 22 seats to the Irish Party's four and Sinn Fein's three.

Our concern here is with how de Valera read these election results. It is clear that if the geographical pattern to the distribution of votes could be ignored, the all-Ireland figures could be exploited as a plausible justification for Irish self-determination. Throughout his time in America, this is what de Valera did, citing the election figures in speech after speech and never admitting that within the six counties, Sinn Fein had suffered a defeat on

36. Ibid., 15 May 1920.

37. Ibid., 28 Feb. 1920.

38. Dorothy Macardle, The Irish Republic, (London:1968 ed) pp.243-8, hereafter cited as Macardle:1968; Mary Bromage, De Valera and the march of a nation, (London:1956) pp.81-2, hereafter, Bromage:1956; O'Hegarty (1952: 720-30); W.A.Phillips, The revolution in Ireland:1906-1923, (London:1923) pp. 152-3

a scale comparable to the scale of their victory in the rest of the country. In most of his references to the 1918 election, de Valera simply does not mention the Ulster voting figures. He places the election in a national context, emphasising the margin of Sinn Fein's triumph. On at least one occasion he claimed a four-fifths³⁹ majority for the Republic, but more often he claimed a two-to-one majority for the Republic and three-to-one support for self-determination.⁴⁰ He claimed that 'no people on earth ever agreed so overwhelmingly on a great issue...'.⁴¹

Clearly de Valera considered the topical issue of self-determination one of the most persuasive arguments for his American public. At Washington in January 1920 he claimed that although he had kept his 'ears and eyes open' since coming to the country, for a good argument against Irish self-determination he had heard none.⁴² In April he rejected Lloyd George's suggestion that north east Ulster might also be entitled to self-determination.⁴³ De Valera had already gone on record that the principle

if it is not going to be reduced to an absurdity, has to be restricted to some unit, and the unit that was chosen was the Nation, and, therefore, it is not right to say that we are denying self-determination to the people of the North of Ireland. We give them the right to vote as citizens of the Irish Nation as to how they are to be governed, but we cannot recognize as a nation a portion which has not even a hypothetical existence, which changes from election to election, a block in the north east which is not a homogeneous block.⁴⁴

Later, in the wake of Lloyd George's Government of Ireland Act which envisaged two subordinate parliaments for Northern and Southern Ireland, de Valera offered a more detailed rebuttal of Ulster's case. His argument gives some indication of the cast of his mind at this time and displays an ingenious capacity for special pleading which doubtless bore greater fruit among his immediate audience - at Bridgeport, Connecticut - than would have been the case had his argument been heard by the group whose support or, at minimum, whose acquiescence he most needed: the Ulster unionists. De Valera began with Ulster's nine counties - a better starting point for his argument than the six counties then under consideration in the British proposals. Having stated that the other three provinces were 'solidly Republican', he changed categories and said of Ulster's nine counties that Self-Determinationists had a majority in five. By using this latter term he could more plausibly include - to his own satisfaction if not to their's - the Irish Party MPs among his supporters. Only four of the nine counties 'went to the Unionists.' Omitting Antrim, the county with strongest unionist representation, de Valera tabulated the figures for the other eight Ulster counties, arguing that

there are 14 Self-Determinationists to 10 Unionists - that is outside the one county of Antrim. In only one county, and that the county of Antrim, do we find any trace of a homogeneous Ulster. So you see there are no boundaries for the Ulster you have been talking about(:) Lloyd George

39. Gaelic American, 6 Sept. 1919.

40. Irish World, 6 Sept. 1919.

41. Gaelic American, 8 Nov., 1919.

42. Ibid., 17 Jan. 1920.

43. Ibid., 15 May 1920.

44. Ibid., 10 Jan. 1920.

can't find them. Lloyd George with all his talk about two States in Ireland can't find one of them, therefore, he cannot find the other (laughter and applause). He has failed because, as a matter of fact, that solid homogeneous Ulster which he is trying to palm off on the world does not exist. He can't take six counties, no, nor four. Why, he can't even take Antrim, because it hasn't a complete Ulster representation. He can't take Belfast, because in Belfast there are more Nationalists than in the City of Cork. Therefore, Lloyd George can't himself find the boundary of his Ulster. His homogeneous Ulster does not exist.⁴⁵

In July 1920 the New York Sun and Herald carried reports from London and Dublin suggesting that de Valera was willing to accept Dominion Home Rule 'together with county option for Ulster'. The Gaelic American commenting on these news reports noted that 'The explanation was added that his acceptance of county option was due to the fact that his friends had assured him that probably only two Ulster counties would vote themselves out.' De Valera published a denial of these rumours in the New York Times but without specifically mentioning the county option proposals. He contented himself with the claim that he stood as he 'stood in Tulla three years ago by the proclamation of Easter Week and by nothing else.'⁴⁶

In one speech in America he is reported as favouring four provincial parliaments in an independent Ireland: '...it is certainly a project I would be ready to support - we would divide the island into four little States(sic) so that we might have greater decentralization of government.'⁴⁷

De Valera's conviction that peace and political stability would follow in a united, independent Ireland was another theme in his American speeches. In June 1919 he said that if British troops withdrew 'there is hardly a man or woman in Ireland who will not warmly embrace the Republic.'⁴⁸ The following March he said that once the British forces were withdrawn 'we'll put a South of Ireland Catholic on a platform in Ulster and an Ulsterman on a platform in the South, and in ten words they will have dispelled the boggy-illusion of religious differences.'⁴⁹ In an article in the Irish World he expressed his belief that the unionists would accept majority rule; '...the moment that the (electoral) contests were definitely and irrevocably decided Irish unionists would accept the result with as much sportsmanlike good will' as Republicans accepted defeat by Democrats in the United States.⁵⁰

Unionists, he claimed, were 'in their hearts opposed to partition of the island.' Politics, which was not as 'pure' as it should be, he blamed 'in large measure' for Ulster's fears: '...the bugaboo of Ulster opposing self-determination for Ireland is a political bugaboo. But I know that the Ulsterman would fight for Ireland as quick as anybody else if invaded by any country.'⁵¹

45. Ibid., 10 Jan. 1920.

46. All quoted, ibid., 7 Aug. 1920; see also, ibid., 14 Aug. 1920.

47. Ibid., 10 Jan. 1920.

48. Ibid., 12 July 1919.

49. Ibid., 3 Apr. 1920.

50. Irish World, 25 Oct. 1919.

51. Gaelic American, 9 Aug. 1919.

That Ireland's ultimate freedom and unity was inevitable, predetermined by the forces of history and geography, is another constant theme in de Valera's thinking. 'We are absolutely certain of success;... we are not vain dreamers. We are to-day the one white race inhabiting Europe that has not yet won its freedom.'⁵² Nor could Britain's superior force prevail: 'with all England's aeroplanes, poison gas and the rest of it, we shall win, because we have justice on our side.'⁵³ Besides, nationalism had 'always triumphed over imperialism.'⁵⁴ If necessary, future generations would carry on 'the same holy task that will one day be completed.'⁵⁵ Irish freedom, he argued was not necessarily imminent but it was inevitable:

It may be that Ireland will not yet gain freedom. It may be that there is to be another Calvary and another agony. Whether we are to be spared that depends on free America. Three mighty empires had to crumble before Poland was given her liberty.⁵⁶

And at the end of August 1920 he predicted that the world will see 'Britain crumbling into ruins and her tyrant arm finally paralysed.'⁵⁷ In Washington in November 1919 he states 'Ireland has never been partitioned and never will.'⁵⁸ At Chicago the following April he argued that there could be no peace unless Ireland's full claims were met: an unsatisfied Ireland would be a 'centre from which wars will necessarily emanate.' Indeed, the peace of the world hinged on the Irish case as 'a test of statesmanship.'⁵⁹ Irish aspirations included the re-creation of an Irish golden age: '...all Ireland wants is that the remnant of the Irish race left at home should be permitted to develop and build up the great nation which God intended Ireland to be.'⁶⁰ He also claimed that a great majority of the Irish people read 'the history of the past when Ireland was the light of Europe in the Middle Ages and they want Ireland to be something like that again.'⁶¹

As for Ulster, de Valera claimed that 'racially', the province 'remains Irish', with the 'great majority of its people' having 'a perspective of Irish history that extends back 2,400 years.' On the Ulster plantation, he added that after 'more than 300 years of intermarriage' there were 'few native born Ulstermen or Ulsterwomen today in whom Gaelic blood does not predominate.'⁶²

Clearly many of these arguments bore little relationship to the reality of Irish politics as it was then being enacted in Ulster. But if it is accepted that politicians, to a greater or lesser extent, deal not with the world as it is but with their image of reality,⁶³ then it is important to ascertain de Valera's image of Ulster on the eve of what was to be the critical year of

52. Ibid., 15 Nov. 1919.

53. Ibid., 10 Apr. 1920.

54. Ibid., 28 Feb. 1920.

55. Ibid., 28 Feb. 1920.

56. Ibid., 2 Aug. 1919.

57. Ibid., 11 Sept. 1920.

58. Ibid., 29 Nov. 1919.

59. Ibid., 15 May 1920.

60. Ibid., 20 Sept. 1919.

61. Ibid., 9 Aug. 1919.

62. Eamon de Valera, Ireland's claim to the Government of the United States of America for recognition as a sovereign independent State, Washington, 1920, pp.67-8.

63. Robert Jervis, Perception and misperception in international politics, (Princeton, New Jersey:1976).

settlement, if not solution, of the Irish question: 1921. His American period - with so many opportunities and demands to put his views on the record - provides important evidence on how he perceived the Ulster issue.

It should also be remembered that de Valera's expression of the nationalist position on Ulster was, by now, comparatively moderate. For instance, the Irish-American newspapers rarely missed an opportunity to heap contempt and ridicule on Ulster's claims: when a party of Ulster unionists arrived in America to counter de Valera's propaganda, they were described by the Gaelic American as 'intellectual pygmies' and 'narrow-minded bigots', later, as 'a wooden headed lot' who were 'working against the freedom of the country in which they make their home'.⁶⁴ De Valera challenged them to a public debate which they declined on the grounds that they would not debate with rebels; de Valera saw this as 'an indication that they have little confidence in their case'.⁶⁵

Typical of the Ulster unionist response to de Valera's American tour was the humorous dismissal of his aspirations as expressed by Sir Edward Carson at the 12th of July celebrations in 1919. There were, he said, only two choices before Ireland: the Union or

...an Irish Republic with your hats off to the President, Mr. de Valera - (laughter) - who is now working against you in America... and who imagines in his vanity that one day he is going to march through Belfast and Ulster - (cries of "never") - and you will all willingly take off your hats - ("no") - and bow the knee to the head of the organization which in the darkest hour in the war for the world's freedom shot His Majesty's soldiers in the streets of Dublin. I invite Mr. de Valera to come to Ulster and I undertake that he will get a proper Ulster welcome. (laughter and cheers).⁶⁶

Sinn Fein had no monopoly of propaganda and this must be borne in mind when assessing de Valera's Ulster policy as outlined above. The political context in which he was working was not conducive to conciliation: he was struggling for international credibility in the form of recognition for the Republic; in Ireland the War of Independence was being prosecuted; some distinguished disinterested commentators supported his arguments - and specifically agreed with him that Ulster should not exercise a veto on Irish self-determination;⁶⁷ and, of course, the Ulster Unionists themselves were vehemently and influentially opposed to any concessions being made to Sinn Fein. Nor were these the only arguments against conciliation. Mansergh has noted that 'in dependent societies as the time for a transfer, or possible transfer, of power approaches' that 'there is an element of political determinism in the working out of majority-minority relations...'. Dealing specifically with the dilemma facing all Irish nationalist leaders from Parnell to de Valera on the Ulster question, he suggests that a policy of conciliation had the 'grave liability' of admitting the separateness of the Ulster unionist community and thus encouraging 'a heightening of its claims'. Furthermore, conciliation was unlikely to be

64. Gaelic American, 3, 31 Jan. and 28 Feb. 1920.

65. See ibid., 31 Dec 1919 and 3 Jan. 1920.

66. The Times, 14 July 1919.

67. See report from the New York correspondent, The Times, 30 June 1919; also, 'The case for Irish freedom', The Nation (New York), 5 Apr and 'The temper of Ireland', ibid., 22 Mar. 1919, pp.427-8.

effective. 'That being so, was not the wiser course to pursue a policy, not of conciliation, but of undermining the Ulster minority's will to resist and, as a corollary, its means of support?'⁶⁸ De Valera had put forward exactly this argument following the collapse of the Irish Convention. 'It was evident to us that with the "coercion-of-Ulster-is-unthinkable" guarantee, the Unionists would solidly maintain their original position.'⁶⁹

But even allowing for the inevitable overstatement of his position in the context of a propaganda war, it would seem from his American speeches that de Valera had yet to realise how antipathetic the Ulster unionists were to his policies. He does not seem to have appreciated the relevance to Ulster of one of his first speeches made in America. It was on the nature of war and its causes; he predicted that foremost amongst wars in the future would be 'national wars where plain men and women willingly sacrifice themselves to the sentiment of patriotism'. And this sentiment of patriotism, he saw as 'a fundamental fact in human life'. What he did not acknowledge was that there were two 'sentiments of patriotism' in Ireland; further, that they were, not only mutually exclusive, but mutually hostile. He concluded this speech with a claim which he intended to be applied to Irish nationalism but which, with equal force, could be cited as an explanation of Ulster unionism. 'To maintain their nationality', he said, 'men and women will endure as much as to maintain their religion.' As fiercely as the individual would be prepared to fight 'to prevent the assimilation or absorption of his personal individuality' so a 'Nation will fight to prevent the assimilation into another Nation...'.⁷⁰

(iv) 1921: Postponing the Ulster Question: de Valera's Search for an Accommodation with the Ulster Unionists

(a) pre-Truce: de Valera moots 'local autonomy' for Ulster

After eighteen months of open political campaigning in America, de Valera returned to Ireland at Christmas 1920. Historians have failed to agree on whether his return was facilitated by the British government: Wheeler-Bennett's suggestion that he returned 'with the connivance of the British authorities' has been disputed by Longford and O'Neill; and the evidence adduced by Younger does not justify his attempt to arbitrate in this disagreement in favour of Wheeler-Bennett. The British cabinet records merely show that the British were aware of the arrival time of de Valera's ship from America and decided against

68. Mansergh (1965:188-9).

69. De Valera to Patrick MacCartan, 7 Feb. 1918, Devoy papers, NLI ms. 18,003(4)B.

70. Gaelic American, 23 Aug. 1920.

an arrest unless fresh criminal charges could be brought against him.¹ The evidence points to British appreciation, at this juncture, that de Valera was in Hamar Greenwood's phrase of a few months later '...the one man who can deliver the goods.'² This impression must have been confirmed to the British as they carefully scrutinised his press interviews during these months.

With no open political forum available, de Valera used interviews with the foreign press as a means of publicising Sinn Fein's viewpoint, and, in effect, communicating it in detail to the British government. With Ireland a posting for war correspondents, and a clandestine interview with de Valera being considered a scoop, it was possible for Sinn Fein to 'manage' at least this aspect of the press coverage of Ireland. Interviews were granted when the journalists were trusted, submitted questions in advance and when it suited Sinn Fein politically to have the interview published.³ Invariably in these interviews the question of Ulster was raised. The emphasis which de Valera now placed on the future he envisaged for the unionists shows further moderating compared to the policy of assimilation expressed in America. In 1921 de Valera's policy can be summarised as that of working towards an accommodation with Ulster.

In reply to a questionnaire submitted by American correspondents in January, de Valera said:

The so-called Ulster difficulty is purely artificial as far as Ireland itself is concerned. It is an accident arising out of the British connection, and will disappear with it. If it arose from a genuine desire of the people of the North-east Corner for autonomy the solution proposed would be the obvious one. But it is not due to such a desire - it has arisen purely as a product of British party manoeuvring.

With this paragraph alone de Valera would have reassured his followers that their most cherished views on Partition - one nation, artificially sundered by Britain, but to be united if the British withdrew - were the cornerstone of his policy. He continues with further criticism of the Ulster unionist minority and the Partition act - 'an exquisite essay in contrariety'; he then addresses himself to the question as posed originally in the submitted questionnaire: 'How do you view Professor O'Rahilly's plan for the federation of Ireland as a solution to the Ulster difficulty?' And de Valera's reply is that 'as regards the Professor's general idea of decentralisation of administration and devolution of authority, I am wholly in agreement with it, and I am sure our people would be.'⁴

These interviews presented de Valera with an ideal opportunity to test

1. Longford and O'Neill (1970:115-6); Calton Younger, A state of disunion, (London:1972) p.243; PRO CAB 23/23 74(20)1, 20 Dec. 1920. John Dillon believed de Valera 'came home with a view to making peace - if that should prove to be possible...'. Dillon to C.P.Scott, 18 Jan. 1921, Dillon papers, TCD, ms. 6843/83.

2. Hamar Greenwood to James Craig, 3 May 1921, quoted, Lady Craigavon's diary, 3 May 1921, Craigavon papers, PRONI D1415/B/38

3. For de Valera's refusal of interview without advance list of questions, see SPO DE 2/2; also, de Valera to G.S.(?) 29 Mar. 1921, SPO DE 2/14.

4. Weekly Freeman, 5 Feb. 1921.

Sinn Fein's tolerance for a compromise settlement - a strategy which was clear to John Dillon.⁵ But specifically on the north, how would rank and file republicans react to the suggestion of a federal solution? And how much local autonomy should be granted to what geographical area of Ulster? As will be seen, throughout 1921, de Valera continues to keep these questions to the forefront, thereby, presumably, making some federal settlement with Ulster more tolerable to fundamental republican opinion.

To the French journal L'Oeuvre he claimed that neither the Ulster unionists nor republicans wanted Dominion Home Rule. He denied there was any division within Ireland: and 'pretended division was only a British story. There is no division. We all want Ireland free and independent.' On Ulster, he said that if England conceded Ireland's claim to self-determination, 'there would be no further difficulties, either with her or with the Ulster minority. If Ulster should claim autonomy, we would be willing to grant it.'⁶ The Paris correspondent of The Times read the interview 'with the feeling faint but yet definite, that de Valera is ready to retreat a little from his extreme attitude.'⁷

On 2 May he was interviewed by the Zurich paper Neue Zeitung. Asked how an independent Ireland would settle the Ulster question, he repeated his assurances that an independent Ireland would guarantee 'civil and religious equality'; and provided

the unity and independence of Ireland is preserved, we are ready to give such local autonomy to Ulster, or to any other part of Ireland, as would be practicable, if it would make for the contentment and satisfaction of the citizens resident there.

In what reads like a scripted interview, de Valera adds this paragraph:

I feel certain that the Republic would be ready to give to the Six Counties, for instance, far more substantial powers than those they are to possess under the British Partition Act, which was designed less to give local autonomy to Ulster than to foster political and religious rancour amongst us, and by dividing Ireland into two antagonistic parts to make both subservient to British interests and purposes.⁸

Later in May to the New York Herald, de Valera expresses a willingness to meet Ulster unionist representatives to 'see if it is possible by negotiation to give such guarantees for the security of their interests as (would) make them loyal and contented citizens.'⁹ In July to the same newspaper and to the Chicago Tribune he answers a specific question on the 'measure of autonomy' he envisages for the north east with the reply: 'such autonomy as they themselves desire and is just.'¹⁰

5. Diary note, 2 June 1921, Dillon papers, TCD 6582.

6. L'Oeuvre, (Paris), reported in New York Evening World, 28 Jan. 1921.

7. The Times, 28 Jan. 1921.

8. Neue Zeitung, 3 May 1921, reproduced as appendix 12 in Macardle (1968:854-6).

9. New York Herald, 17 May quoted in Gaelic American, 28 May 1921.

10. Transcript of interview circulated by Publicity Department of Dail Eireann, quoted Irish Times, 8 July 1921.

(b) De Valera meets Craig

Meanwhile, 'local autonomy' for the six counties, devolved from Westminster under the 1920 Act, came into effect with elections in May and the official opening of the Northern Ireland parliament in June: this strengthened Ulster's bargaining position, even if it did not, as Churchill suggested, make it 'unassailable.'¹¹ It certainly changed the context in which any settlement was possible - a point clearly appreciated by de Valera. His understanding, as he wrote to Art O'Brien, was that Britain insisted that the Belfast parliament should retain 'its present powers unless by mutual agreement with the rest of Ireland.'¹²

While pressing ahead with the establishment of a Belfast parliament, the British also sought a rapprochement between north and south. With Cope at Dublin Castle the main intermediary, strenuous efforts were made to persuade Craig and de Valera to meet. On 15 April, Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe, wrote to de Valera informing him that a high official in Dublin Castle had suggested that Craig 'would welcome a talk with you' concerning a north-south agreement. 'I think the idea is fiscal autonomy for all Ireland with Partition.' Dr. Fogarty urged de Valera to consider it.¹³

On 5 May in a suburban house in Clontarf, to which the blindfolded Craig had been taken by 'three of the worst looking toughs I have ever seen',¹⁴ the two men who were largely to shape nationalist and unionist politics in the decades ahead, met for the first and only time. It was not a successful meeting.

Most of the ninety minutes seems to have been spent on an historical discourse by de Valera - a point for which he has often been criticised. Twenty years later he gave an account of how the meeting went:

Craigavon had been told...that I had asked to see him and I was told that Craigavon had asked to see me. So we met rather under false pretences. We sat on opposite sides of a table and I said after the first few moments silence "Well?" He looked at me and he said "Well?". I then said "I'm too old at this political business to have nonsense of this kind: each waiting on the other to begin" and I started putting our case to him. He spoke of the Union as if it were a sacred thing. "But" said I, "do you not know how the Union was brought about" and I started telling him about it. After a while he tore a piece from the Freeman's Journal which was lying beside him. "I think" he said, after writing for a few minutes "we ought to issue this statement." He had drafted it to the effect that we had exchanged our respective views on the situation. That ended the talks but I must say I liked him.¹⁵

The meeting clearly derived its significance, not from what was discussed, but from the fact that it had happened at all; Hamar Greenwood described it as

11. Quoted Macardle (1968:418).

12. De Valera to Art O'Brien, 14 June 1921, quoted, ibid., pp.425-6.

13. Fogarty to de Valera, 15 Apr. 1921, SPO DE 2/528.

14. Craig's description, quoted St.J.Ervine, Craigavon: Ulsterman, (London: 1949) p.410. Hereafter cited as Ervine:1949. Cope met Craig on 30 March to attempt to interest him in 'trying to get a settlement with De Valera', Lady Craigavon's diary, 30 Mar. 1921, PRONI D1415/B/38.

15. De Valera's retrospective account of his meeting with Craig, as 'told to Mr. Pyper of the Toronto Telegram, 6 Mar. 1940: Frank Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(11).

'the most hopeful thing in 750 years',¹⁶ a verdict with which Craig was scarcely in sympathy since his complaint was that de Valera had spent the time 'harping on the grievances of...the last 700 years...'. It is interesting to compare Craig's retrospective account with de Valera's:

After half an hour he had reached the era of Brian Boru. After another half hour he had advanced to the period of some king a century or two later. By this time I was getting tired, for de Valera hadn't begun to reach the point at issue. Fortunately, a fine Kerry Blue entered the room and enabled me to change the conversation, and I asked Mr. De Valera what announcement he was going to make to the Press about our meeting. Finally, I tore off a piece of paper and wrote something down.¹⁷

The British cabinet on 24 and 25 May discussed the 'probability' of further meetings between the two Irish leaders on an agenda proposed by Craig: indeed they even expressed concern lest Britain be left in an 'invidious position' if Craig and de Valera were to come to some agreement unacceptable to London.¹⁸ Although both Craig and de Valera were willing to meet, their respective pre-conditions ruled this out.

On de Valera's side, his conviction that any satisfactory settlement must come through negotiations with London not Belfast, dates at least from this period. After his meeting with Craig he wrote that he saw no hope of ending the Anglo-Irish quarrel 'through a prior agreement with a Unionist minority.' Essentially the question was 'an Irish-English one' and the solution, he thought, 'must be sought in the larger play of English interest.'¹⁹

Whatever political repercussions the meeting may have engendered, there was clearly no business done between the two principals, who in the decades which followed, were to do so much to reflect and shape the different political cultures of north and south. Although Partition, in time, was further to emphasise the mutual antipathy of these political cultures, evidence that they were already deeply rooted when Partition was introduced came in the first elections for the Northern Ireland parliament held some weeks after the Craig-de Valera meeting. In this election, de Valera's appeal to 'you plain people' of 'North-East Ulster' to vote Sinn Fein and thereby solve the Irish problem 'in a few hours...in the quiet and privacy of the polling booth' was emphatically rejected.²⁰

When the suggestion of a truce and an invitation to negotiate eventually came from London, it was for tripartite talks with Craig included. De Valera believing this would give equal status to the leader of a minority, instead invited Craig to join with Southern Unionists at a Dublin meeting where de Valera 'would like to confer with you and to learn from you at first hand the views of a certain section of our people of whom you are representative.'²¹

16. Greenwood, quoted *Gaelic American*, 14 May 1921. Ulster Unionists took a more sceptical view, Adam Duffin believing London's optimism to be 'rubbish', Duffin to his wife, 10 May 1921, *Duffin papers*, PRONI, Mic.127.

17. Craig's description 'several years later' in Ervine (1949:411).

18. PRO CAB 23/25 41(21)1 and 42(21)1.

19. De Valera to Judge O'Connor, May 1921, quoted, Longford and O'Neill (1970:123).

20. *The Times*, 24 May 1921.

21. De Valera to Craig, quoted Longford and O'Neill (1970:129).

For 'sheer impertinence it could hardly be beaten...', thought Lady Craig;²² not surprisingly, Craig, who had already accepted Lloyd George's invitation to London, declined de Valera's blatant offer of demotion.

(c) Smuts' advice to de Valera on Ulster

The South African leader, General Smuts was an important catalyst at this juncture.²³ The most influential of Dominion statesmen, he was acceptable as an intermediary to both sides,²⁴ and he was willing, even anxious, to play this role: 'I have brought both mules to the water; I have pushed their heads into the trough; but the drinking is their own affair.'²⁵ Smuts combined a moral commitment to help solve the Irish deadlock - which he considered damaging to Imperial interests²⁶ - with a belief that South Africa's experience placed him in a position to understand the particular difficulties posed by Ulster; and it was on this aspect of the question, above all, that he lectured de Valera.

What de Valera thought of him is not altogether clear: he told the Dail in private session that Smuts had approached the question '...purely as a thinking machine...as a professor would approach a problem.'²⁷ His biographers - perhaps reflecting de Valera's retrospective verdict - record that de Valera 'was genuinely impressed by Smuts', considering him 'the cleverest of all the leaders he met in that period, not excluding Lloyd George.'²⁸ Such admiration was not reciprocated by Smuts: he did not consider de Valera the 'big man' then needed by Ireland²⁹ and in his report of his meeting with him to the British cabinet he characterised de Valera as a 'visionary' who 'spoke continually of generations of oppression and seemed to live in a world of dreams, visions and shadows.'³⁰

Smuts told the British cabinet that de Valera at the Dublin meeting 'continuously harped on the crime of partition.' Smuts had advised him to accept Lloyd George's invitation to a conference with Craig; but this de Valera was unwilling to do because he feared that

if both of them appeared before the British Government they would be like two bad boys and would start fighting themselves at once and the Government would exploit their differences.³¹

22. Lady Craigavon's diary, 29 June 1921, *op.cit.*

23. W.K.Hancock, *Smuts: the fields of force: 1919-1950* (Cambridge:1968), pp.49-61, hereafter cited as *Hancock:1968*; Longford and O'Neill (1970:130-1); Tom Jones, *Whitehall diary, vol.3: Ireland: 1918-1925*, ed. Keith Middlemas, (London:1971) pp.74-85, hereafter cited as *Jones:1971*.

24. Lloyd George to The King, 23 June 1921, quoted Hancock (1968:55); Tom Casement, diary extracts, NLI ms. 10,723(4); Longford and O'Neill (1970:130-1).

25. Smuts to A.B. and M.C.Gillett, 8 Aug. 1921, quoted, Hancock (1968:60).

26. Smuts to Lloyd George, 14 June 1921, reprinted in Jean dan der Poel, ed., *Selections from the Smuts papers:vol.v: September 1919-November 1934*, (Cambridge:1973) pp.90-91. Hereafter cited as *Smuts:V:1973*.

27. DE:private session: 22 Aug. 1921, p.28.

28. Longford and O'Neill (1970:130).

29. Smuts to M.C.Gillett, 23 Feb. 1922, in Smuts (1973:V:113). See also Jones (1971:83) and C.P.Scott's diary entry for 13 July 1921, reprinted, T. Wilson, ed., *The political diaries of C.P.Scott: 1911-1928*, (London:1970) p.391. Hereafter cited as *Scott:1970*.

30. Jones (1971:83).

31. Smuts' account to the cabinet is recorded by Jones, 6 July 1921, Jones (1971:83).

Smuts jotted down his impressions after his meeting with de Valera. The document headed 'De Valera's position - Dublin meeting' has survived in his papers:

Ulster having been satisfied, dispute now is (as it has really always been) between British Government and majority in Ireland, and conference should be confined to two. Ulster may be dealt with separately where her interests are concerned.³²

It was Smuts' belief that he had shaken Sinn Fein's self-confidence in their own analysis;³³ specifically he told the King that de Valera had been impressed by his arguments on the Partition question. Lord Stamfordham's memorandum of Smuts' briefing to the King is the most comprehensive available evidence of the Smuts-de Valera meeting. It should be remembered that the King, largely at Smuts' prompting, was playing a central role during these weeks in seeking peace in Ireland.³⁴ Smuts had 'strongly urged' de Valera to go to the conference with Lloyd George

but to avoid doing or saying anything which would hurt public feeling in Ulster; accept the settlement of Ulster - it has got its own government; but tell the Prime minister that he came as the representative of south Ireland!

Smuts suggested that the south should remember that Ulster which traditionally

did not want home rule, has got home rule and the rest of Ireland is quit of Ulster but is left without the home rule she wants; therefore, obviously, the right thing for de Valera to do is to cease talking or troubling about the Ulster partition, accept what has been done, and talk to the British government about south Ireland.³⁵

It was Smuts' conviction that if a united Ireland were ever to come it would only be with Ulster's consent; hence his advice to Sinn Fein to tolerate Partition as a temporary necessity and to accept that Ulster had a veto on Irish unity.

32. Smuts: handwritten note, 'De Valera's position - Dublin meeting', reprinted in Smuts (1973:V;94).

33. Jones (1971:82).

34. Stamfordham, 'memorandum of a conversation between The King and General Smuts at Buckingham Palace, Thursday, 7 July 1921', in Smuts (1973:v:95-98). No author is cited but Hancock (1968:533) attributes this account to Stamfordham whose duty it would have been to write such a memorandum. A.J.P. Taylor considers the King's role on this occasion the most significant intervention by a British monarch this century. A.J.P. Taylor, English history, 1914-1945, (Oxford:1965) p.157.

35. As note 33 above.

a) De Valera meets Lloyd George

During the third week in July, both Craig and de Valera were in London for talks with Lloyd George: there was no tripartite meeting nor was any consensus reached, but the truce was maintained and the door to further negotiations was kept open. After the first round of talks, Craigavon informed his cabinet colleagues that de Valera had talked to Lloyd George 'in vague generalities about "self-determination", "right to a Republic", "freedom of a nation".' Craig advised Lloyd George that the only realistic policy was to put the British proposals in writing to enable the Dail to debate them.

These proposals were to be embodied in a document full of high-sounding phraseology, which would appeal to the imagination of the Southern Irish, and very highly-coloured lights should be thrown upon the concessions which it was proposed to offer.

Craig assured his colleagues that 'no coercion of Ulster' was among Lloyd George's non-negotiable commitments.¹ But two days later, on 18 July, at talks in Downing Street, Lloyd George put forward 'five suggestions' to Craig and his ministers as to how they might accommodate de Valera's requirement of Irish unity with local autonomy for the north devolved from Dublin. None was acceptable and the Ulstermen withdrew from London, winning Lloyd George's concurrence for a public statement by Craig insisting on the north's right to self-determination.² This 'wholly inadmissible claim'³ angered de Valera⁴ and in a protest to Lloyd George he wrote:

I have made it clear in public statements which reflect the views of the Irish people that Ireland, so far from disregarding the special position of the minority in north-east Ulster, would be willing to sanction any measure of local autonomy which they might desire, provided that it were just and were consistent with the unity and integrity of our island.⁵

That the Ulster ministers were immovable in their decision not to even discuss such proposals was clear to Lloyd George from his meeting with them on the previous day. On 20 July, Lloyd George gave de Valera written proposals for a settlement which Jones thought 'one of the most generous acts' in British history: 'Briefly it is Dominion status with all sorts of important powers, but no Navy, no hostile tariffs, and no coercion of Ulster.'⁶ De Valera reluctantly agreed to place the offer before the cabinet and Dail in Dublin. It was rejected. On Ulster, de Valera replied to Lloyd George, 'We cannot admit the right of the British Government to mutilate our country, either in its own

1. PRONI CAB 4/2/3, 16 July 1921; these 'Rough Notes' of the London cabinet meeting of Northern Ireland ministers are incorrectly dated 16 June, They were probably typed up some months later from Spender's notes.

2. PRONI CAB 4/3/1, 18 July 1921, 'Rough Notes' of meeting between Northern Ireland ministers and Lloyd George, 18 July 1921. Again, these are incorrectly dated June, see note 1 above.

3. De Valera to Lloyd George, 19 July 1921, quoted in Longford and O'Neill (1970:135).

4. Childers, diary, 19 July 1921, Erskine Childers papers, TCD ms. 7814.

5. As note 3 above.

6. Tom Jones to Bonar Law, 22 July 1922, in Jones (1971:90-1); also F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland since the famine, (London:1971) p.426. Hereafter cited as Lyons:1971.

interest, or at the call of any section of our population.'⁷ Eight words followed which were to be, for de Valera, among the most important he ever wrote concerning the north: 'We do not contemplate the use of force.'⁸ He concluded by reiterating his claim that if Britain stood aside from the Ulster issue, 'we can effect a complete reconciliation'⁹ - a claim which Lloyd George found unconvincing.¹⁰ Still anxious to cajole Craig into talks with de Valera, Lloyd George advised the Ulster leader to accept any proffered invitation from Dublin as it might help de Valera to

realise that Ulster is a fact which he must recognise, not a figment bolstered up by the British government as a counter to Sinn Fein. He does not understand this. Till he understands it, I fear that a settlement will always be unattainable.¹¹

Craig remained wary: whereas he was always open to receive proposals in writing provided they contained 'no suggestion' of any interference with Northern Ireland's constitutional position, a draft reply to de Valera's expected invitation, reads: 'I repeat, we have nothing left to give away.'¹²

(b) More advice from Smuts

Smuts tried again to interest both Irish leaders in talks but to no avail. Before leaving for South Africa, he summarised in a private letter to de Valera the convictions he had come to about Sinn Fein's Ulster policy. In the short term, he thought 'no solution based on Ulster coming into the Irish state will succeed.' However he believed that 'over a period of years' the community of interests between north and south would prove 'so great and compelling that Ulster will herself decide to join the Irish state.' For the present

an Irish settlement is only possible if the hard facts are calmly faced and Ulster is left alone. Not only will she not consent to come in, but even if she does, the Irish state will, I fear, start under such a handicap of internal friction and discordance that the result may well be failure once more.

My strong advice to you is to leave Ulster alone for the present, as the only line along which a solution is practicable; to concentrate on a free constitution for the remaining twenty-six counties, and, through a successful running of the Irish state and the pull of economic and other peaceful forces, eventually to bring Ulster into that state.

Smuts acknowledged that such a solution would be 'repugnant' to 'all Irish patriots, who look upon Irish unity as a sine qua non of any Irish settlement': but, he added 'the wise man, while fighting for his ideal to the uttermost, learns also to bow to the inevitable.' To overcome the facts, there must first

7. De Valera to Lloyd George, 10 Aug. 1921, in Jones (1971:90-1).

8. Throughout his political career de Valera used this disavowal of force against the north by his pre-Treaty cabinet as a powerful endorsement to his own appeal against force. Its inclusion in this reply to Lloyd George may have been prompted by Childers, see Childers papers, TCD 7786/8/1-5.

9. As note 7 above.

10. C.P.Scott, diary entry for 28 July 1921 after breakfast with Lloyd George, Scott (1970:394-5).

11. Lloyd George to Craig, 21 July 1921, PRONI CAB 4/10/5.

12. Draft letter prepared for Craig in anticipation of a request for a further meeting from de Valera, August 1921, PRONI CAB 4/12/5-6.

be 'a humble acceptance' of them.

It was a letter which analysed all of the difficulties which had to be overcome if there was to be peace with, and within, Ireland; written with the knowledge of the British government and broadly sympathetic to their policy, it betrayed none of Smuts' impatience with what he saw as de Valera's political naivete on Ulster. An eloquent appeal for pragmatism, it excused its absence: 'A history such as yours must breed a temper, an outlook, passions, suspicions, which it is most difficult to deal with.' On Ulster he concluded:

As I said to you before, I do not consider one single clean-cut solution of the Irish question possible at present. You will have to pass through several stages, of which a free constitution for southern Ireland is the first, and the inclusion of Ulster and the full recognition of Irish unity will be the last. Only the first stage will render the last possible, as cause generates effect. To reverse the process and begin with Irish unity as the first step is to imperil the whole settlement. Irish unity should be the ideal to which the whole process should be directed.

Psychologically, it must be said, this letter was brilliantly pitched; at a moment when the pragmatic impulse was presumably battling with other more fundamental nationalist emotions, it offered a plausible escape from the dilemma posed by Ulster's intractability. Reassuringly, it advised de Valera not to give up his ideal, but rather

to realize it in the only way which seems to me at present practicable. Freedom will lead inevitably to unity; therefore begin with freedom - with a free constitution for the twenty-six counties - as the first the most important step in the whole settlement.¹³

De Valera may have thought Smuts too detached - a 'thinking machine' as he told the Dail - but, perhaps alone of all his cabinet, he was impressed by this advice from the South African¹⁴ and later that month outlined the most conciliatory policy towards Ulster which he was ever to put on record.

(c) County option for Ulster? De Valera's speech in private session, Dail Eireann

For two days in mid-August, the Dail met in public session to hear de Valera's account of his talks with Lloyd George. Concerning the Ulster question he said that the negotiations had been

an attempt to get in touch with the people of the North of Ireland and to tell them that for them we had not enmity, and that we would make sacrifices for them we would never think of making for Britain, because they are Irishmen living in Ireland.¹⁵

13. Smuts to de Valera, 4 Aug. 1921, Smuts:V:100-105.

14. Not only did de Valera think Smuts the most impressive of all the leaders he had met during that period. Longford and O'Neill (1970:130) but a year later, after the outbreak of the Civil War, he admitted that 'if anything could have converted me to acceptance of the Treaty, that letter would. Without hesitation, a united cabinet, however, rejected his (Smuts) recommendations.' Interview with de Valera, 10 Sept. 1922, Manchester Evening News, copy forwarded to McGarrity, McGarrity papers, NLI ms. 17,440.

15. Quoted in Macardle (1968:455).

Later when the Dail went into private session he invited TDs to raise 'any questions they had in their minds.' The first question, from J.J. Walsh, asked for a 'full and clear definition of his policy with regard to Ulster.' De Valera once again ruled out force: they lacked the power, 'some of them had not the inclination...' and, anyway, the policy would not succeed. Then in a speech which must have been disappointing if not alarming to the TDs present, he gave his pessimistic evaluation of the difficulties posed by Ulster - an evaluation which seems at variance with his statement of perhaps twenty minutes earlier when he had instanced Partition as the reason why the earlier British proposals for settlement had been rejected. Ulster's present position, he said was that

she claimed the Six Counties as a constitutional right...and did not want to be under the domination of the rest of Ireland whose sentiments, ideals and religion were different. They said that they would not give away their established rights and that they were prepared to die for them. The question was how they were to deal with Ulster - peace or war conditions. At the present the Ministry proposed to act as they had done before under war conditions. He could not definitely say further than that their object at present was to get in contact to see what exactly Ulster wanted.

De Valera knew only too well what Ulster wanted: his persistent suggestions for talks had been publicly spurned by Craig a week before unless Sinn Fein recognised Northern Ireland. He continued, in his speech to the Dail, that if talks were agreed with the Ulster Unionists, Sinn Fein would be up against

a big difficulty. Ulster would say she was as devotedly attached to the Empire as they were to their independence and that she would fight for one as much as they would do for the other. In case of coercion she would get sympathy and help from her friends all over the world... For his part if the Republic were recognised, he would be in favour of giving each county power to vote itself out of the Republic if it so wished. Otherwise they would be compelled to use force.

At this point three voices were raised in protest: J.J. Walsh who had originally asked for a 'full and clear definition' of de Valera's policy, expressed disagreement with the policy as outlined and promised to move a motion later on to challenge it; Deputy Whelahan asked 'in the event of war being renewed, should not the Ulster Cabinet be regarded as traitors in league with the enemy?'; and Eoin O'Duffy put forward an analysis and policy completely contrary to that just outlined by de Valera. O'Duffy was an advocate and practitioner of 'using the lead' against Ulster. They could not

meet them by concession. He had dealt with them(sic) by force in Monaghan, Fermanagh and Tyrone, and those people were now silent. There was no Ulster question so far as Ulster was concerned. They realised they could not exist without the rest of Ireland.¹⁶

Other deputies seemed apprehensive or confused, some cautioned delay; but none spoke in support of de Valera's proposal for county option.¹⁷ Later in the debate, he explained that he was anxious to persuade the British to accept the principle of 'government by the consent of the governed' because it would be applicable to Ulster and would certainly 'commend itself to the world at large.'

16. DE:private session, 22 Aug. 1921, pp.28-29.

17. McGoldrick and Collivet were apprehensive; MacCabe seems confused; Gavan Duffy cautioned delay; MacEntee thought the debate was 'taking an unsatisfactory course'; ibid., pp.30-35.

De Valera lectured the Dail on the dangers of losing world sympathy if Britain were to argue that one third of the Irish people wanted the British connection and that if Britain left, Sinn Fein would 'smash the sentiments of the minority.' Lloyd George's propaganda would take the line that the Ulster Unionists

had been put into N.E.Ulster and those Sinn Feiners want to stamp upon these people and deprive them of their rights. These arguments he was putting before them were rather fallacious, but the fallacy was not recognised by those to whom they would be addressed. Hence he would like them to realise if they were determined that they would only make peace on the basis of the recognition of the Republic, they were going to face war and therefore he wanted to know..would the Dail be ready to take war.

The overall impression left by this debate is that de Valera is attempting to educate the Dail to the realities then facing the cabinet: some compromise was inevitable. The alternative was war and he expressed no optimism about Irish success if hostilities were resumed: the new war, if it came, would be a 'definite attempt at reconquest'; world opinion he thought would be on Britain's side; and in any event, 'she would face the world's odium to crush Ireland to the earth.'

Further, he echoed Smuts' advice when he told the Dail that 'the building up of Irish unity was a slow process.' They must get the feeling of the people and win as much support 'so as to try and secure for the nation what is best for the nation at the moment.'¹⁸

On the following day, J.J.Walsh who had initially raised the issue, was granted time to further question de Valera on 'one matter which was agitating the minds of some of the members': whether de Valera and his cabinet were 'prepared to consider such a proposal as would amount to a voting out of any county or part of a province of this country from the Free State.'

De Valera refused to be 'fettered'; he had kept his mind 'in a fluid state'; 'I have not my mind made up as to anything'. He deflected the criticism by playing the strongest card in any party leader's hand:

I cannot accept office except on the understanding that no road is barred, that we shall be free to consider every method. For example, the question of voting out of counties or provinces. That would be a way, if that came up, a way in which a certain result could be obtained. I would be ready to consider that. We should be able to give our reasons. If we are not able to stand on these proposals by the reasons we give, then turn us out. But we must be free to consider and above suspicion to deal with every situation that arises.¹⁹

There is one surprising element in this episode: the fact that it remained obscure until the private sessions of the Dail were published over half a century later. This is particularly inexplicable given the controversial nature of the proposal, and the fact that so many of the witnesses within a matter of months had every reason to pillory de Valera for his lack of flexibility over the Treaty terms. No doubt its impact was diminished by the fact that it was said in private session with no transcript in circulation thereafter: or, could it be that for many TDs de Valera had only spoken the uncomfortable truth which they internally recognised but left unsaid? Given what followed, both in

18. Ibid., pp.33-4.

19. Ibid., 23 Aug. 1921, pp.58-9.

the immediate short term and for the rest of de Valera's career, this debate must be considered a remarkable revelation of his perception of the Ulster question at this period. And given the heretical nature of the views he then expressed, the fact that they met with scepticism and not a backbench revolt, gives some indication of his ascendancy in Sinn Fein in the autumn of 1921.

(vi) The Treaty Negotiations: the Ulster Dimension

(a) Sinn Fein's intelligence on Ulster

By late September Lloyd George and de Valera had agreed that 'conference, not correspondence' was the 'most practical and hopeful way to an understanding'.¹ While still at the 'talks about talks' stage, a specialist Sinn Fein committee was established 'to collect, compile and arrange...statements of fact and argument bearing on the position of Ulster...'. Along with collecting evidence to demonstrate the 'impracticability' of Partition, it was also enjoined to prepare 'the contrary case so far as ascertainable.' This may have been merely to understand the opposition's arguments, but it would also have the beneficial effect of reminding republican purists that any Sinn Fein leaders at the negotiating table had to reckon with the fact that Northern Ireland - with its own parliament, government, civil service and local security forces - was now a fait accompli.

That the leadership was determined to prepare its supporters for something less than a unitary separatist republic is clear from de Valera's statements throughout this year and from the most important of the Ulster Committee's terms of reference: these were to consider the

effects of alternative future adjustments i) in case of the majority in a limited area making option to be excluded from the national government; ii) in case of a majority making option to come under the National Government but to have some local legislative and administrative powers.²

Sinn Fein could be encouraged by the evidence they were receiving that the Belfast business community was apprehensive lest the south was granted powers enabling them to adopt a hostile tariff policy towards the north: there was even one report by a Sinn Fein researcher sent to Belfast that 'some of the most representative businessmen' would tolerate a version of Sinn Fein's local autonomy solution

but only on condition that the connection with England is maintained. That is they would accept Dominion Home Rule with local autonomy, but we find no indication anywhere among them that they would subscribe to the Republic on any terms.³

1. De Valera to Lloyd George, Sept. 1921, quoted in Longford and O'Neill, (1970:143).

2. Erskine Childers papers, TCD 7784/66/8.

3. Seosamh de Cuipear, 'Financial and economic position of North East Ulster', n.d. but autumn 1921, Childers papers, TCD 7784/73/1-17.

That nationalists must abandon separatism, their hope of 'a clean cut in one shape or other...' was a unionist precondition for some north-south relationship.⁴ Covetous 'to get all the powers they could' Ulster Unionists were, at this juncture, more open-minded about some north-south relationship than was to be the case hereafter.⁵

Whatever optimism there may have been in Sinn Fein's ranks of the possibility of economic coercion of the north, there cannot have been much hope of military coercion: of the 72,000 men under arms, little more than four thousand were based in the six counties.⁶ The challenge which Ulster posed to the Sinn Fein cabinet was to devise a policy tolerable both to their own supporters and to the British government and which could also be imposed on the Ulster unionists. Given the entrenchment of the Unionist administration in Belfast, this would have to be some variant of federalism. Not only had de Valera prepared the ground on this since his return from America, but he had also been influenced by both Smuts and Childers to seek some such solution. While Childers acknowledged that there was some support in Sinn Fein for the 'logically perfect' system of local autonomy to the north devolved from an all-Ireland parliament, he thought 'the advocates for centralization' were 'in the ascendant'. He advised de Valera that they should regard 'the quasi-federal policy as a temporary expedient and trust that before long the arguments for complete unity would triumph on their merits.'⁷

'Painstaking, methodical and brilliant...' in de Valera's words,⁸ Childers was a particular confidant of the Irish leader, who had brought him into the political elite of Sinn Fein, included him at cabinet meetings, relied on him as an analyst of Lloyd George's first proposals in July, appointed him as Secretary to the Plenipotentiaries, and - most significantly for the purposes of this research - retrospectively credited him with greater perception on Ulster than he had himself.⁹ The most revealing of Childers' writings on Ulster are the previously unpublished and incomplete drafts of a paper entitled 'Ulster powers' which he was preparing in London during the course of the Treaty negotiations.

The memorandum first analyses the powers devolved to the Northern Ireland Government under the 1920 Act. It then hypothetically considers the consequences for Ulster if the full Irish claim to independence were met by Britain. Childers envisages a subordinate Northern Ireland parliament with no provision for Ulster MPs at Westminster. 'But the question at once arises: Are there to be two or three Parliaments in Ireland?' Childers emphatically prefers

4. Adam Duffin, N.I. civil servant to his wife, 10 May 1921, Duffin papers, PRONI, mic.127

5. George Russell, 'Memorandum on Ulster and Irish Trade policy', being record of three hours talk with H.M. Pollock, J.M. Barbour and Duffin, Oct. 1921, Childers papers, TCD 7784/82/2-6.

6. Tabulated from Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/A/32/10.

7. Childers holograph draft rejecting British proposals of 20 July, Childers papers, TCD 7786/4/1.

8. De Valera to Lord Longford, 25 and 27 Feb. 1963, (copy to Molly Childers), Childers papers, TCD 7848/302/2-10. See also de Valera in Dail, DE, private session, 27 Aug. 1921, p.86.

9. De Valera, in later years, often alluded to his indebtedness to Childers on Ulster: three of those interviewed by the author mentioned this point, political correspondent, Michael McInerney, Secretary to the Department of the Taoiseach, Maurice Moynihan and de Valera's biographer, T.P.O'Neill.

two: 'This has been advocated as being the less likely to be permanent and as less complicated and costly.' The framework of the 1920 Act 'which is based on the three-Parliament idea, must be scrapped...'. This would preclude Ulster representation at Westminster and also the notion of 'equal representation in any national body taking the place of the Council of Ireland.' Repeating his hypothesis of an independent Ireland with the three-parliament model rejected, he traces the main consequences of the two parliament system. 'The most important result...would be that the "Ulster" Province would not have "security of tenure."' At this point in the manuscript Childers mentions some 'difficult legal questions' which should not be discussed in this memorandum, adding, 'but it is certain that a simple and literal transference of the reserved powers from Great Britain to a national Irish authority would make a "Ulster" Province a creature of the national authority.' This is crossed out in the manuscript and is not included in the typescript version which concludes that "Ulster's" powers 'could be amended and the province itself be abolished by a simple Act of the All-Ireland Parliament.'

However Childers does not expect "Ulster" to accept such a fate.

"Ulster" would stand out with reason for a secure status as well as the residuary powers (of government as envisaged in the 1920 Act.) Under the two-Parliament system this would probably have to be given her by express provision making her powers and status unalterable except with the consent of her own legislature.

This draft memorandum apparently remained unfinished, being overtaken by events. It was presumably written with de Valera's known tolerances on the question firmly in mind and it may provide a clue to the latter's insistence in the difficult years immediately ahead that some interim, federal solution was the only practical policy on Ulster. Indeed, although popularly associated - and especially by his own followers - as the champion of what undoubtedly was his preferred solution, a united Ireland, de Valera was, throughout his career, to mull over some 'second-choice' policy similar to that discussed in Childers' memorandum: a federal solution, short of a unitary state and vague on whether it was a final or interim settlement.¹⁰

(b) De Valera remains in Dublin

That de Valera envisaged an outcome from the Treaty negotiations which would fall short of his political ideal was well understood: his goal was to render any outcome compatible with minimum republican claims and to allow future generations to complete the work. In one of the many mooted drafts of a possible treaty which the delegates took with them to London, one clause in a draft by de Valera reads

At any time after the first day of January, 1950, the Parliament of Ireland

10. Memo by Childers, '"Ulster powers" (not complete))', holograph and typescript versions, Childers papers, TCD 7786/19/i+1-18.

or the Parliament of Great Britain may demand that negotiations be initiated for a revision of this Treaty; and, if, within two years of the date of the first such demand, a new Treaty shall not have been concluded, either the Parliament of Ireland or the Parliament of Great Britain may declare this Treaty to be annulled.¹¹

Those republicans who were to reject the Treaty on the grounds that it envisaged less than a unitary, separatist republic often forgot that de Valera's cabinet in preparing their minimum claim for these negotiations had realistically accepted that such an outcome was politically impossible. In particular, de Valera had been responsible for much of the small print in Sinn Fein's attempts to meet the conflicting requirements of their own supporters, the British government and the Ulster Unionists. That de Valera had offended some Ulster nationalists in the process is clear from the complaint of one Donegal TD who objected to de Valera's willingness to cede local autonomy to the Unionists. From them no 'tolerable modern government, or, indeed, any civilised' government at all could be expected: if the Unionists were to be given control of

police, judiciary and things affecting life, liberty and civil rights (and Mr de Valera has declared he will give more) then we cannot submit and our grievance will be against Ireland generally for her desertion of her Highlanders.

J.E.O'Doherty was, presumably, not alone in taking this view and his suggestions were circulated to the Ulster Committee and included in the working papers brought to London by Childers.¹²

Nevertheless, support from the Sinn Fein cabinet was obtained for an Ulster policy based on federalism. That de Valera had considerable difficulties in convincing Brugha and Stack to accept this and external association is well known. In fact, de Valera's plausible justification for his controversial decision not to lead the delegation in London was that he would need to maintain cabinet support in Dublin for what he, presumably, realised would be controversial proposals.

The complex story of the negotiations themselves has already been documented in Longford's Peace by ordeal. What is of relevance here is the role played by de Valera on the Ulster issue during the course of the negotiations. In general, there has been criticism of the lack of a clear-cut policy on the Irish side, Longford suggesting that de Valera must share the responsibility for the inception of a vulnerable strategy, a policy of 'circumspection' which obliged the Irish Delegation to present their demands 'with caution and prevision, gradually and inoffensively.'¹³

A central goal for Sinn Fein in their approach to this conference was to re-open the Ulster question. In this, they were successful: matters which the Unionists insisted had been settled, became once more matters for negotiation. The Irish tactics were that if the negotiations were to fail,

11. De Valera draft treaty, 7 Oct. 1921, Childers papers, TCD 7785/4/8-13.

12. J.E.O'Doherty, 'Memo on Partition as it affects the rights and interests of Ulster nationalists', copy in Childers papers, TCD 7784/88/1-7.

13. Lord Longford (Frank Pakenham), Peace by ordeal, (London:1972 ed.), quotation, p.172. Hereafter cited as Longford:1972.

the break should come on Ulster. This was a shrewd tactical ploy and showed an appreciation of what British ministers were saying privately: that as the six counties was 'illogical and indefensible', it would be the 'worst ground' on which to attempt to win a battle for public opinion.¹⁴ It was left to Griffith to prepare the Ulster clause in Sinn Fein's draft treaty which they took with them to London. The clause was, however, retained by de Valera for possible revision. Needed urgently in London shortly after the negotiations opened, de Valera forwarded it to Griffith with the comment that it had not 'been submitted to the Cabinet, but I do not anticipate any objection as to the principle - the phrasing is of course open to alteration. I have scarcely changed it at all as you notice.'¹⁵

As forwarded to London, the Ulster clause provided that all of the constituencies in the six counties or a 'smaller number contiguous and forming a territorially continuous group' could opt out of an All-Ireland Parliament and 'be entitled to maintain a legislature' with powers identical to those already exercised by the Northern Ireland parliament. Further, it was envisaged that the MPs who currently went to Westminster would instead be members of an All-Ireland parliament. If, on the other hand, the constituencies opted to forego their option of local autonomy, Sinn Fein promised a Commission 'to safeguard any lawful interests.'¹⁶

De Valera watched developments from Dublin but, as the correspondence between himself and Griffith reveals, he did not criticise any of the significant developments on Ulster - including the first meeting of the Boundary Commission.¹⁷ Nor, when Childers told him of his misgivings that after two weeks of negotiations, the British had abandoned the plenary sessions in favour of more informal sub-conferences, with only Griffith and Collins present, does he seem to have protested.¹⁸ It should be remembered here that Sinn Fein had good reason to believe in the early weeks of negotiation that what they thought their generous offer to Ulster would form the basis of British policy in any settlement. Ulster was not the principal difficulty between both sides. The information available to de Valera from Griffith, Collins and Childers can fairly be interpreted as broadly reassuring on Sinn Fein's Ulster strategy. And this seems to have been de Valera's reading of it. When Griffith told him of Lloyd George's strategy of coercing Craig, de Valera replied that if a break had to come, it should be on Ulster 'provided we could so manage it that "Ulster could not go out with the cry of "attachment to the Empire and loyalty to the Throne."' De Valera added that he was aware that the difficulty for the Irish negotiators was

14. Austen Chamberlain to Ivy Chamberlain, 31 Oct. 1921, Austen Chamberlain papers, Birmingham University Library (hereafter BUL) AC6/1/441. Lloyd George made the same point to Craig and his ministers at their meeting on 18 July 1921, PRONI CAB 4/3/1.

15. De Valera to Griffith, 14 Oct. 1921, SPO DE 2/304/1.

16. Enclosed with *ibid.* The clause is reproduced in Appendix I.

17. The de Valera-Griffith correspondence is in SPO DE 2/304/1.

18. Childers' dissatisfaction with the abandonment of the Plenary Sessions is manifest in his diary, 25 Oct., 5 and 18 Nov. 1921; also note of his meeting with de Valera, 14 Nov. 1921, Childers papers, TCD 7814.

to secure this without jeopardising our own fundamental position.

There can be no doubt whatever that the Delegation has managed to do this admirably, and if a break occurs at this stage, "Ulster" will be crushed between the public opinion of both countries, as well as the public opinion of the world - if it counts for anything.

De Valera noted that all of this 'is shared by everyone here, so that we shall be quite unanimous on it.' Griffith would understand this to mean that the republican doctrinaires in the cabinet, Stack and Brugha, were acquiescing in the compromises already mooted by the Irish Delegation in London. De Valera concluded his letter to Griffith with a warning to resist the temptation of making 'any further advances on our side' even though this would have the advantage of putting the Ulster Unionists 'more hopelessly in the wrong...'.¹⁹

This letter crossed with another from Griffith outlining what Tom Jones had called Lloyd George's 'second card against Craig if Craig refused to accept a subordinate Parliament.' This was to be a Boundary Commission to 'delimit the six-county area... so as to give us the districts in which we are a majority.' And Lloyd George 'would give no further powers than what they possessed under the Partition Act to the area that remained obdurate after the Boundary Commission had completed its work...'. However the area would have to 'bear itself its proportion of British Taxation.' Griffith agreed with Tom Jones, his informant for all of this, that the Ulster cabinet would not accept such an offer.

The move was a tactical one to deprive "Ulster" of support in England by showing it was utterly unreasonable in insisting to coerce areas that wished to get out.

He asked us would we stand behind such a proposal. We said that it would be their proposal - not ours, and we would not, therefore, be bound by it but we realised its value as a tactical manoeuvre and if Lloyd George made it we would not queer his position. He was satisfied with this.²⁰

It is not within the scope of the present work to evaluate culpability on Griffith's part for any naivete he may have shown regarding this proposal which, at the eleventh hour, Lloyd George was, so decisively, to exploit. What can be said of de Valera's approach is that his absence from the centre of the negotiations allowed misunderstandings to develop and while his presence in Dublin may have enabled him to get what he termed his 'left wing to come up', his 'right', he thought, 'deserted' him.²¹ At the last full cabinet meeting held in Dublin on the Saturday before the fateful signing, de Valera objected to the British proposals on the grounds of the Oath and Partition. The official cabinet minute records: 'He personally could not subscribe to the Oath of Allegiance nor could he sign any document which would give N.E. Ulster power to vote itself out of the Irish State.'²² Longford adds: 'He might understand Griffith giving up independence for National unity, but "you have got neither this nor that."'²³ This seems to suggest a measure of flexibility greater than he was to show when the Treaty was signed. Childers' brief diary entry records

19. De Valera to Griffith, 9 Nov. 1921, SPO DE 2/304/1.

20. Griffith to de Valera, 9 Nov. 1921, ibid.

21. Childers' note of de Valera's phrase, Rough notes of Dail meetings, 16 Dec. 1921, Childers papers, TCD 7804.

22. SPO DE 1/3.

23. Longford (1972:209).

that de Valerá rejected the document because it was 'very like' that of 20 July: in addition to fact that it gave up conditional character of the settlement (i.e. on Ulster's coming in) and contemplated partition at Ulster's choice. Dispute about this but there was no real doubt that it does so.

Childers records that there was further discussion of the Ulster clauses later in the day: amendments were suggested but no definite record was made of them. The business was, as Childers recorded, 'too hurried',²⁴ as the delegates hastened to catch the night boat to return to London where in the early hours of the following Tuesday morning, they signed the Treaty which was to determine the subsequent course of Irish history, re-shaping Anglo-Irish relations, north-south relations, and creating a split in Sinn Féin which precipitated the Civil War and has since determined party cleavage in Irish politics.

(vii) The Treaty Debate: the Ulster Dimension

On what grounds did de Valera reject the Treaty? Was it solely a question of principle or did tactical considerations complicate the issue? These are questions on which historians have disagreed. That de Valera disliked the Treaty's provisions on partition and allegiance is clear: so did all the signatories. What is at issue is whether either or both of these provisions was tolerable, as the price to be paid for the establishment of the Irish Free State, which, after all, its defenders argued, could then be used as the first 'stepping-stone' to undo these very aspects of the Treaty. To establish de Valera's own exact position on these questions, concentration on his Ulster policy during these critical weeks is revealing. It seems clear that the proposition that de Valera would reject any agreement which contained either the Treaty's Ulster clauses or the Oath of Allegiance is no longer sustainable. However, once he had cast his cabinet vote against the London agreement, it was thereafter, perhaps inevitable, that he himself, his followers and apologists would suggest that he was implacably opposed to the Treaty on both of these grounds.

New evidence from Childers' papers emphatically confirm what de Valera's speeches throughout 1921 already suggest: that on the issue of allegiance and Partition, which were at the root of the Treaty divide, de Valera should be included among the pragmatists and not the doctrinaires. Childers who was present at the decisive cabinet meeting on 8 December, which was to determine the future course of Irish politics, noted in his diary - his italics:

President talked at great length. Vehemently pressed to come into line he refused... Someone said (:) "Supposing Ulster came in on the treaty basis, would you agree to it?" he replied that that was the one consideration that might affect his judgement.

Childers added the comment: 'This surprised me.'¹ The clear implication here is

24. Childers diary, 3 Dec.. 1921, Childers papers, TCD 7814.

1. Childers diary, 8 Dec. 1921, Childers papers, TCD 7814. See also exchange between Collins and Brugha, DE:private session, 16 Dec. 1921, pp.188-9.

that if Ulster were included de Valera would have considered accepting the oath as worded in the Treaty.

De Valera's pragmatic approach is also evident in his celebrated alternative to the Treaty - Document Number 2. In its first draft, circulated to the Dail in private session before Christmas,² de Valera included all the Ulster clauses of the Treaty prefaced by a declaratory clause asserting the essential unity of Ireland. At the end of four days of private debate de Valera defended Document Number 2 as 'a Republican document...as true to the Republic, every line of it, as any document that I wrote to Lloyd George...'. It was, he allowed, 'a gamble' but if the deputies 'had imagination to see it' they would reject the Treaty and accept it. Originally put forward for possible amendment, this point, he said, had not been understood by the Dail and he had now amended it himself. To a house which he regretted was 'not more complete' - it was after 11 o'clock on Saturday night - he rather disarmingly said:

I have cut out the last clauses myself because I think that it is very much better that we should make (sic) this question and that we should simply say as regards Ulster that we offer to meet them and so on.³

This change entailed no less than the deletion of all of the treaty's Ulster clauses from 'Document Number 3' as it was termed by de Valera's critics when it was eventually circulated in January. The changes so enraged Griffith that he leaked both versions to the press who did not share de Valera's verdict that it was merely 'a slight change of form.'⁴ In substitution for all the Ulster clauses de Valera had expanded the extra 'essential unity' declaration which had originally been included as a preface to the Ulster clauses and which was now in the form of a resolution to be proposed to the Dail. While refusing to admit Britain's right to interfere, or the north's right to 'be excluded from the supreme authority of the Parliament of Ireland', this resolution, to ensure internal peace and to demonstrate that force was excluded, was prepared to grant to Northern Ireland 'privileges and safeguards' not less substantial than those in the Treaty.⁵

The Times considered that it allowed 'Ulster to decide her own destiny';⁶ the Freeman's Journal concluded that it 'agrees to Partition, but, unlike the Treaty, it abandons Tyrone and Fermanagh to Orange domination.'⁷ This latter criticism was based on the fact that in omitting the Ulster clauses from his revised Document No.2., de Valera had abandoned the Boundary Commission from which southern opinion confidently, if naively, expected much, and certainly Tyrone and Fermanagh.

2. Circulated to Dail in private session, 14 Dec. 1921; de Valera said: 'It is my last effort and it is a poor one. It is only a bad best.' DE:private session, 14 Dec. 1921, p.139. This volume, covering the private sessions of the second Dail, 1921-22, conveniently includes in Appendix 15 (pp.311-5) the Treaty itself; in Appendix 17 (pp.317-20) de Valera's proposed Treaty presented to the Dail on 14 Dec., i.e. Document No.2; and in Appendix 18 (pp.321-4), 'The President's alternative proposals', i.e. the revise of Document No.2.

3. DE:private session, 17 Dec. 1921, p.272.

4. DE:5 Jan. 1922, p.267; see also ibid., 4 Jan. 1922, pp.258-9. For Griffith's views, see ibid., 5 Jan. pp.267-8 and 7 Jan. 1922, pp.339-40.

5. Addendum: North East Ulster, in de Valera's revise of Document No. 2 see note 2 above.

6. Editorial, The Times, 6 Jan. 1922.

7. Editorial Freeman's Journal, 5 Jan. 1922

There can be little doubt, both at the time and retrospectively, that de Valera felt vulnerable about his handling of Ulster in the Treaty debates and in these documents. Longford and O'Neill in their biography fail to explain the genesis of these changes; they strike a somewhat apologetic note:

De Valera explained in his speech that his proposals were tentative and designed to form the basis for a document on which they could all agree. They were far from perfect. He was not happy, for example, with the Ulster clauses as they stood

His biographers add that when he came to explain the Ulster clauses to the Dail, 'he said they were engaged, not in a fight with Ulster, but in a fight with Britain.' He was prepared to grant the north all the rights she received in the Treaty, so long as there was 'a declaratory clause which safeguarded the supreme authority of the Dail over the whole national territory...later he amended the Ulster proposals; the basic ideas remained, however, the same.'⁸

This does not explain why de Valera handled Ulster as he did during the Treaty debate. How did he come to leave the Ulster clauses intact in his original draft? Could it be that he believed Ulster to be the wrong issue on which to fight the treaty because of the vulnerability of his own compromises on 'county option' to this very assembly only four months before? It is one of the surprises of the exhaustive Treaty debates that in both public and private sessions nobody reminded de Valera of how far he had been willing to go in accommodating Ulster in his speeches of August 22 and 23.⁹ The point was made by Blythe that 'the possibility of getting an absolutely united Ireland' immediately, had been abandoned with de Valera's rejection of force and promise of arbitration earlier in August;¹⁰ and MacCartan thought the northern nationalists 'betrayed' when the entire cabinet had promised devolved powers to a local Belfast parliament.¹¹

Blythe, incidentally, thought coercion justifiable as an option but, for the moment, supported de Valera's promise not to use force: '...you cannot coerce them and comfort them at the one time.'¹² There was a wide range of opinion on Ulster among the delegates who alluded to the question: some thought the Treaty would make partition permanent;¹³ but more were complacent that the economic weapon would be sufficient to bring Ulster to her senses;¹⁴ most speakers did not refer to Partition at all - perhaps an indication of the impasse which any policy-maker on the Sinn Fein side would encounter once alternatives to the Treaty policy had to be formulated. Perhaps it was this factor which explains de Valera's initial acceptance of the Ulster clauses: he was as well aware as any of the Plenipotentiaries of the stubborn facts of Ulster's intransigence and of the British government's policy on the question.

8. Longford and O'Neill (1970:172-80). See also de Valera's explanations to Dail, private session, 15 Dec., pp.149-54 and public sessions, 19 Dec. p.19 and 20 Dec. 1921, p.68.

9. See above, 2:v:c.

10. DE: 3 Jan. 1922, p.194.

11. Ibid., 20 Dec. 1921, p.80.

12. As note 10 above.

13. Ibid., Ferran, 6 Jan., p.287; Derrig, 6 Jan., p.294; Dee, 3 Jan., pp. 207-8; and, notably, MacEntee, 22 Dec., pp.152-8.

14. Ibid., MacCabe, 4 Jan. pp.219-20; O'Duffy, 4 Jan., pp.224-6.

But once the first draft of Document No.2 was circulated, de Valera must have been made aware that his critics were not confined to Treaty supporters: the inclusion of the Ulster clauses must have astonished MacEntee if one is to judge by the powerful - and in many important respects, prophetic - denunciation he was shortly to make of the very clauses to the Dail.¹⁵ De Valera's solution, the omission of the clauses from his second version, was probably the only possible way out of this dilemma: whether this was on his own initiative, or at Childers' prompting,¹⁶ or for another reason, is not clear. In the event, Document Number 2 was never formally put to the Dail: the Treaty was passed, de Valera resigned the Presidency and became the figure around which 'an opposition' party formed.

De Valera at one point in the Dail had described Document No.2 - the first draft - as 'a sort of document we would have tried to get and would not have agreed if we did not get':¹⁷ the implication was that if it did not prove useful in re-uniting the Dail, he did not feel bound by its compromises. Initially, he resented its publication; it was intolerable that 'the working of one's mind...is shown to those with whom we are dealing...'.¹⁸ Once public, it became the stuff of pamphlets - by both sides: Treaty supporters used it to remind de Valera that he had once been realistic on the Ulster question; and he himself, as will be seen, may have subsequently found it useful when attempting to maintain some moderation amongst his followers in their policy towards Ulster unionism.

There is one further consideration which should be borne in mind; it is a factor which may even be unique to Irish parliamentary democracy and its importance would be difficult to exaggerate: because the party system in Dail Eireann has its roots in the Treaty division, positions publicly espoused during these critical weeks have become a touchstone for each side. For de Valera, in particular, this was true. Indeed the rest of his career can be seen as an attempt to achieve what he failed to accomplish in the Treaty debates: unite Irish nationalists behind Document No. 2 and, that achieved, attempt to win Ulster.

With hindsight, he could be analytical of what had happened the Ulster issue during the Treaty period. In 1963, writing to Lord Longford, he justified in some detail his decisions during this period, his choice of delegates for the London talks, his decision to stay at home. He wanted all documents 'carefully examined' in Dublin 'by legal experts who would themselves not have taken any part in the discussions out of which the documents arose.' This was to avoid the danger

15. Ibid., 22 Dec., pp.152-8; see also his contribution in private session 16 Dec. 1921, pp.200-1. Retrospectively, MacEntee approves of Document No.2, (interview, Sean MacEntee). Also Irish Times, 19 May 1976.

16. The Freeman's Journal suggested that Document No.3 - as they termed it - was 'largely the work' of Childers: editorial, 5 Jan. 1922.

17. DE, 19 Dec. 1921, p.25.

18. Ibid., 5 Jan. 1920, p.267.

that those involved in the discussions would give to the words and phrases used in any document arising out of them, such special and limited meaning as might have occurred or been attached to these words and phrases in the discussions themselves...

Had, for example, this precaution for which I was providing been taken with the Treaty Articles, and were they submitted to lawyers unprejudiced by the discussions, the trap in Article 12 would, I am sure, have been noticed - the trap by which the qualifying phrase "so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions" was used ultimately to nullify, as a whole, the provision "in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants."¹⁹

This letter to his friend, biographer-to-be and author of the definitive work on the Treaty itself, is typical of de Valera's sense of self-justification. But it sits unhappily with the record of his own handling of the Ulster issue during the Treaty period. De Valera, himself aloof from the discussions, failed throughout the controversy on the Treaty, to mention 'the trap' in the Boundary Commission clause; indeed, he included it verbatim in his first draft of Document No.2. It might be argued in de Valera's defence that his point to Longford concerns the scrutiny of the clause before it was signed in London, but this scarcely explains de Valera's subsequent silence on it. Instead evidence points to a general lack of authority on de Valera's part during this crisis. Against the calm appraisal of his letter to Longford, one must place his confused handling of the Ulster dimension to the Treaty inquest and his indecision at the crucial cabinet meetings of December 3 and 8. Indeed at this latter meeting when the split became irrevocable, his own 'Republican' representative on the Treaty delegation, Robert Barton, criticised de Valera for not himself going to London. Childers' diary records that Barton 'strongly reproached President. Said it (presumably the split) was due to his "vacillations" from beginning.'²⁰

(viii): Peace? January -June 1922

De Valera's individual influence on the south's Ulster strategy becomes more obscure at this juncture: once he loses power, it is Collins' name, not de Valera's, which can be traced in the official files; and to his biographers, the Ulster dimension does not obtrude in their evaluation of his impact on the events of this period. Although his opponents branded him as a fomentor of civil war - and some of his more bellicose speeches left him vulnerable to such a charge - de Valera's explanation was that his words represented prophecy rather than incitement.¹ It should also be borne in mind that where others had rejected the Treaty simpliciter, he had agonised over his stance and its implications. A vacillator to Barton during the negotiations, his subsequent

19. De Valera to Lord Longford, 25 and 27 Feb. 1963, Childers papers, TCD 7848/302/2-10.

20. Diary entry, 8 Dec. 1921, Childers papers, TCD 7814.

1. Longford and O'Neill (1970:185) for de Valera's reading of his controversial 'wading through blood' speech at Thurles on 16 Mar. 1922.

attempts to reconcile the Treaty with the Republic had damaged his credibility with the doctrinaires. It was clearly the nadir of his political career. He was without executive power, and his authority as 'opposition leader' was ebbing away to the military wing of the republicans, who according to his biographers, felt 'complete indifference' to his views; he was 'in a nightmarish position, with little influence on events...'.²

To the British, the ferments in Irish politics at this juncture had to be read in an all-Ireland context; political stability, if it were to be attained, could only come, they believed, through an understanding, not between Collins and de Valera, but between Collins and Craig. Although, in cabinet, the British correctly identified de Valera as among the more moderate of those opposed to the Treaty,³ Churchill publicly blamed him in the Commons for fomenting sectarian violence in the north⁴ and told a delegation of Belfast Catholics that they were 'being tortured' by de Valera.⁵ He described him to Collins as a man who might gradually come 'to personify not a cuase but a catastrophe.'⁶ At the end of April, Churchill warned Collins that his

opponents in the South hope to use antagonism against Ulster as a means of enabling them to snatch the power from the hands of the Provisional Government or else involve them in a series of events so tragic that they will break up under the strain.

He added that Collins' opponents in the north hoped to see a Republic because it would lead to civil war 'in which they know they will have the whole force of the British Empire behind them.' Both of these sets of 'wreckers', added Churchill dreaded any approach to the idea of a united Ireland as the one fatal, final blow at their destructive schemes.⁷

Whatever the merits of this analysis, it shows little perception of de Valera's concerns and in particular of his anxiety regarding the vulnerability of northern Catholics. Both factions in Sinn Fein were being advised by groups of nationalists and both had been represented at a special meeting in Belfast in early March, de Valera himself attending.⁸ Doubtless in these contacts, de Valera was told of the deep misgivings in these circles in the north concerning southern divisions over the Treaty.

Collins emphasised another benefit if the south could speak with 'one voice'; on 2 April, he appealed to 'de Valera and his friends' for southern unity which might give his pact with Craig some chance of replacing suspicion with tolerance and understanding.

...it opens up a new era of hope in the North East and adds immensely to the prospect of union. The hopes of fulfilment of such a union would be made almost certain if some understanding could be arrived at among ourselves, if something could be done to end the threats of civil war and the tendency towards discord and anarchy shown by our opponents' present tactics.

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2. Longford and O'Neill (1970:187).
 3. Churchill's view, PRO CAB 43/1/22/N/148/1-5, 23 May 1922.
 4. On 26 June 1922, quoted Gilbert (1975:735-6).
 5. Ibid., p.726.
 6. Ibid., p.708.
 7. Ibid., pp.711-12.
 8. Provisional government minutes, 8 Mar. 1922, SPO G1/1.

However, on the same day at Dundalk, de Valera was dismissing the Craig-Collins pact: it was 'already a scrap of paper so far as certain sections in the North were concerned' because of further murders on the previous weekend. De Valera rejected what he saw as a policy of appeasement by Collins in the face of Orange violence:

But what was it? The same thing again. It simply told men in the North, "Go murder our people, and then, in order to prevent murder, they will give up what they are striving for."⁹

Another fear entertained by de Valera and one which was to remain with him for many years to follow was the possibility of the north being used as a bridgehead by the British to re-establish their control of the entire island. Sinn Fein's intelligence network had uncovered some interest in such a scenario among some of the die-hards on the British side. The previous autumn, for instance, they had come upon a memorandum from General Tudor to the Representative Body of the RIC: if the London talks, then in progress, produced a settlement leading to a British withdrawal - presumably from the whole island - then, argued Tudor, 'North and South will be left to fight it out.' Tudor believed that

blood-letting was essential between North and South before there could be any such thing as peace. The South is gushing for war with somebody. They did not know what war was and they were not war weary like England. But though the Crown forces will be withdrawn help would come to Ulster from England and Scotland.¹⁰

Since then the bellicose Sir Henry Wilson, had, on his retirement from the British army, been appointed security adviser to the northern government. Given de Valera's preconceptions and his Dundalk speech already quoted, he clearly had no faith in the Craig government to defend the lives, still less the interests, of northern Catholics. There were even more alarming rumours from Sinn Fein's representative in London, Art O'Brien. On 6 April, O'Brien, whose sympathies were anti-Treaty but who had yet to be dismissed by the pro-Treaty faction, sent on to de Valera - 'to you privately' - details of a British political plot about which he had heard from 'a very reliable informant... in the English Government service.' What one might call the 'Irish dimension' to this plot, as summarised by O'Brien, did not apparently come as a surprise to the already distrustful de Valera.

Sir Henry Wilson is to act in Ulster with Sir James Craig. The Conservative element of the Coalition is to get rid of Lloyd George as Premier at any cost. They anticipate being able to get Cabinet control. When they have gained this object, civil war will break out in Ulster, (preparations for same being now well in hand,) and to re-establish what is considered English prestige the reconquest of Ireland will be effected, troops being kept largely in Ulster, and will later find it necessary to go over the border. The conversation ended with a laugh from one member of the group, who stated that they would exterminate the swine this time for good.¹¹ Further details can be given to you, personally, at some future time.

9. The Times, 3 Apr. 1922.

10. Statement attributed to Tudor, addressing a meeting of Representative Body, RIC; quoted by de Valera to Childers, c.15 Oct. 1921, Childers papers, TCD 7791/5.

11. Art O'Brien to de Valera, 6 Apr. 1922, Art O'Brien papers, NLI ms. 8424(6)

De Valera replied by return: "As regards the "political plot" memo, the danger which it foreshadows has already been noticed by us, but it is extremely difficult to find a suitable counter."¹² De Valera was grateful to have received the information, asked to be kept informed of 'anything of this sort that comes to your notice', and was told by him on 19 May that on information from British informants, this particular danger had receded.¹³

The Ulster unionists meanwhile feared that a British withdrawal from the south would inevitably encourage the IRA to use the 26 counties as a base for a guerrilla campaign against Northern Ireland.¹⁴ Although there were some Volunteers who supported such a strategy this was a minority view both because the IRA within the north was poorly armed and seriously outnumbered and because the military context so differed from the recent experience in the south.¹⁵

It would seem that it was the desperation felt by Sinn Fein supporters in the north which proved to be the catalyst for the temporary rapprochement between de Valera and Collins during the spring of 1922. One of the IRA's northern leaders, Frank Aiken was one of those who were instrumental in impressing on de Valera and Collins what the consequences of a division in the south might be for 'the nation and for Ulster':¹⁶ it would lead they warned, to the entrenchment of the northern government, 'permanent partition' and the exposure of 'the Catholic and nationalist population' to an element 'only thirsting to proceed with (their) extermination...'.¹⁷ Emphasising these dangers, the northern delegation helped to close Sinn Fein's ranks through the Collins-de Valera pact which so angered Belfast and London: on 30 May Churchill told the cabinet that Craig 'blamed the supporters of de Valera' for upsetting his agreement with Collins, and that Collins had 'admitted this.'¹⁸

Attempts by the pro and anti-Treaty factions to avoid an irrevocable split continued into May: a Committee of Ten, drawn from each side held a series of meetings; among the points of disagreement - Collins believed it was a deliberate ploy to wreck the Treaty - was de Valera's insistence that members for northern constituencies should be free to take their seats in the Dail.¹⁹ There was not necessarily a conflict between this proposal and de Valera's public affirmation the following week of his basic idea of a local parliament for the northeast. The two ideas were compatible if the northern representatives he envisaged as attending the Dail were to be elected for nationalist areas contiguous to the 26 counties while his proposal for 'the largest measure of autonomy' for Ulster would be confined to the unionists' core-area. Interviewed by the international press, he does not specify what area of Ulster

12. De Valera to O'Brien, 8 Apr. 1922, ibid.

13. O'Brien to de Valera, 19 May 1922, ibid.

14. Patrick Buckland, The factory of grievances, (Dublin:1979) ch.8.

15. Woods' reports on IRA strength in Belfast, especially in July 1922, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/B/77/1-24, passim.

16. Interview with Frank Aiken; also Irish World, 16 Jan. 1926.

17. Aiken and others to Griffith, de Valera, Collins, Brugha, Mulcahy, O'Connor, Lynch and O'Duffy, on 'six county position in the present national crisis', Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/A/145.

18. Gilbert (1975:718-9).

19. Committee of 10, 19 May 1922, Mulcahy papers, UCD, P7/A/145.

should receive devolved powers, but he clearly excluded those border areas with nationalist majorities, when emphasising that he was against what he termed 'his own people' being coerced.²⁰ This interview followed the specially convened Sinn Fein Ard Fheis at which Collins and de Valera spoke 'in favour of a policy of concentration on the affairs of North-East Ulster.'²¹ The Collins-de Valera pact was greeted with profound disquiet in Belfast. The Times correspondent there, concluded: 'In the mind of the Ulster loyalist the whole affair is as plain as a pikestaff.' It was 'an abject surrender' by Collins.²²

However, the subsequent attempts by both factions in Sinn Fein to draft a constitution somehow compatible, both with the Treaty and with external association, proved abortive. In their joint draft they excluded the oath, went beyond the already agreed Dominion status, and failed to recognise the north's special position under the Treaty.²³ London, having conceded - as they read it - so much, the previous December, had no intention of thus accommodating de Valera. The pact, in time, failed to halt the slide into civil war in which both sides were irrevocably engaged by the end of June. The outbreak of hostilities brought to an end whatever influence on the Provisional Government's northern policy may have been due to sensitivity to republican criticism. That that policy had been 'really, though not ostensibly, dictated by Irregulars' was claimed by Kevin O'Higgins in an analytical, revealing, and probably influential, memorandum to his colleagues on 9 August. He advocated a new policy to take account of the changed circumstances of the Civil War: in 'scrapping' the Republican's Northern policy, 'we shall be taking the wise course of attacking them all along the line.' Implicit in O'Higgins' detailed advice is the assumption that before the Civil War had commenced in the south, the Provisional Government would have felt unable to fully espouse the northern policies he was now advocating: the 'full acceptance of the Treaty' and the abandonment of all coercive measures against the north, whether of a military or economic character, as well as 'all kinds of minor nagging...'.

The only prospect for unity, he argued, was for the south to show a 'friendly and pacific disposition towards the Northern government and people while letting them come up against the full economic logic of Partition.' He also expected through the proposed Boundary Commission that the Free State would gain two and a half counties; he believed, as he wrote, in getting 'the last tittle' out of the Treaty. O'Higgins also held that what he termed 'the outrage propaganda' concerning the six counties, no matter how justified, should be abandoned, as it served only to 'make certain of our people see red which will never do us any good.' He concluded by admitting that his proposed peaceful policy would be vulnerable to the criticism that it allowed 'the Pogromists to have their own way unhindered.' The government's reply should be that the belligerent policy had proved 'useless for protecting the Catholics...'; this

20. The Times, 26 May 1922.

21. Ibid., 25 May 1922.

22. Ibid., 26 May 1922.

23. Jones to Hankey, 28 Apr. 1922, quoted Jones (1971:198); see also Collins to Duggan, memo. 4 May 1922, Hugh Kennedy papers, UCD P4/E/1.

peaceful policy might, of course, fail; but, at least, 'it has a chance, where the other has no chance.'²⁴

What distinguished this memorandum - and it was a distinction rarely found in southern approaches to the Ulster issue - was a sense of realism: the policy being advocated considered seriously the obstacles to its attainment. As was clear from the policy he had advocated since his return from America, de Valera was also a comparative realist on the north. But he was also capable of lapsing into a more traditional, sentimental, rhetoric which managed to ignore Ulster's very existence, her obduracy in the face of the republic, her inconvenient insistence on her own sense of identity, and her capacity and will to resist absorption by the south. His Easter message in 1922 - the sixth anniversary of the Rising - exhorted the young men and women of the country to

hold steadily on. Those who with cries of woe and lamentation would involve you in a disastrous rout you will soon see rally behind you, and vie with you for first place in the vanguard. Beyond all telling is the destiny God has in mind for Ireland, the fair, the peerless one. You are the artificers of that destiny. Yours is the faith that moves mountains - the faith that confounds cowardly reason and its thousand misgivings. Yours is the faith and the love that begot the enterprise of Easter, 1916. Young men and young women of Ireland, the goal is at last in sight. Steady, all together, forward, Ireland is yours for the taking. Take it.

The Dublin correspondent of The Times noted dryly that 'the rhetorical character' of de Valera's style did not conceal 'the vagueness of his policy. He advises the young men to take Ireland but does not suggest how the six north eastern counties are to be brought into his scheme of things.'²⁵ Although this rebuke was deserved, it ignored the other side of de Valera's character, the pragmatic realist who alone among opponents of the Treaty had expounded and defended a policy of compromise on Ulster - and this in the midst of his colleagues' passionate espousal of the separatist, united Republic. But having determined his concessions and felt the brunt of his colleagues misgivings, de Valera was then, it seems, impervious to further change. Tim Healy, presently to be the Free State's first Governor General, met him secretly in March 1922 and found him 'inexorable and infallible' in refusing to adopt a more conciliatory line on Ulster: ''Twas like whistling jigs to milestones....'²⁶

(ix) Civil War

De Valera himself and his apologists have always exonerated him from responsibility for the Civil War: in contrast, his political opponents have exaggerated whatever measure of responsibility may be rightly his.¹ Decades

24., Kevin O'Higgins, memo., 'Policy in regard to the North East', 9 Aug. 1922, Blythe papers, UCD P24/70.

25. The Times, 17 Apr. 1922.

26. Tim Healy to William O'Brien(MP), 3 May 1922 and 2 Mar. 1926, both letters referring to a meeting with de Valera in March 1922, William O'Brien papers, NLI ms 8,556(29) and (31).

1. Conscious attempts to exaggerate de Valera's culpability are manifest in the file covering his arrest, SP0 S 1369/15; see also O'Duffy to Executive Council, 5 July 1924, Blythe papers, UCD P24/233; W.T.Cosgrave, DE:56:2195, 4 June 1935. In defence of de Valera, see Longford and O'Neill, (1970:chs.16-18 passim).

of claim and counter-claim, across the floor of the Dail and at chapel-gate meetings throughout the country, have not helped to sort fact from myth. The antipathy of the national press to the anti-Treaty side, combined with the tendency of foreign observers to oversimplify the issue into one of the government versus de Valera, has further distorted his role. In particular, those who were optimistic about the Treaty's prospects for ending Partition, insisted on what they saw as his special culpability, for fomenting a civil war whose effects on Ulster unionist opinion they reckoned as incalculably damaging. Ulster unionists, for their part, with little concern for the complex details of the war, but a vital interest in the result, easily accepted any anti-de Valera propaganda to which they were exposed.

Evidence from his colleagues on the anti-Treaty side, suggests that once his efforts to avert it had failed, de Valera was an extremely reluctant participant in the war. On 12 July, two weeks after the Republicans' Four Courts garrison had been routed, Erskine Childers confided his misgivings about de Valera's leadership in a letter to his wife.

Dev, I think, has collapsed... Frank (? Gallagher) and I furious and fear general cave in. Trying to get them to form a normal government. At least act strongly. No one leader alas! There is a truce in one district already but details very vague. Dev. says we "should surrender while we are strong," I believe. Have not seen him.²

Three months later Free State Army Intelligence received information that de Valera's status with the Irregulars had been eroded by further unsuccessful peace initiatives.³ De Valera himself in a letter to Joseph McGarrity confided that he was 'almost wishing (he) were deposed' because he was obliged to take responsibility for a programme which was not his own.

The programme "Revise the Treaty" would be mine and I could throw myself into it heart and soul. I am convinced it is the only way for the present to keep the Republican idea alive.

Yet again he defended the terms of Document No.2: it represented 'the farthest possible that Republicans could go to meet the claims of England and the North without sacrificing the Republic.' He hypothesised about possible victory for the Free State and the political course which he would then follow: it is a remarkable prophecy of what was to be the course of Fianna Fail's subsequent policy under his leadership. De Valera saw

no programme by which we can secure independence but a revival of the Sinn Fein idea in a new form. Ignoring England. Acting in Ireland as if there was no such person as the English King, no Governor-General, no Treaty, no oath of Allegiance. In fact, acting as if Document No.2 were the Treaty.

He then adds: 'Later we could act more independently still.' From this letter

2. Erskine to Molly Childers, 12 July 1922, Childers papers, TCD 7855/1269. In contrast, Longford and O'Neill, while emphasising de Valera's despair on the outbreak of the Civil War, write that he 'plunged wholeheartedly into the war.' p.197.

3. Wireless message from Intelligence Officer, 2nd Southern Command to GHQ, 9 Oct. 1922, (stolen and now in) O'Malley papers, UCD P17/F/38; also, copy, extract, Maurice Healy to Tim Healy, sent 19 Oct. 1922 to Director of Intelligence, suggesting that when de Valera proposed that arms be laid down, he was outvoted on Lynch's motion and told that 'henceforth E(rskine) C(hilders) as their leader', ibid.

his strategy is clear: to win broad nationalist support under his leadership, within the existing Dominion context, and then await an opportunity to pursue the full separatist goal. His letter to McGarrity concludes:

Whilst the Free State were in supposed existence (sic) would be the best time to secure the unity of the country. That is my one hope out of the situation. If we can get a single state for the whole of the country, then the future is safe.⁴

But for McGarrity, Document No.2 was an unacceptable 'starting point.' He replied to de Valera that

As a united Ireland is essential, your minimum must include that - a united Ireland. By that I mean all of Ulster in(,) with the same rights and privileges as any other part - nothing more, nothing less.⁵

Such intractability was echoed by many other Republican purists and illustrates de Valera's considerable difficulties in arguing for a realistic political programme: his emphasis throughout his career on the distinction between tolerating de facto Partition but denying it de jure consent, dates from this period.

Although by now a figure of some controversy with the Republican military leaders, de Valera continued to argue that force was proving futile as a means of opposing the Treaty.⁶ With a propaganda campaign launched by the Free State based on the compromises of Document No.2, de Valera risked embarrassing his colleagues by once again publicly defending its terms. In a personal rebuke, the IRA's leader, Liam Lynch, complained that de Valera's move had had 'a very bad effect' on the morale of his men because generally 'they do not understand such documents.' De Valera, in his reply to Lynch, refused to apologise for what he considered a realistic political programme and threatened to resign rather than be expected to account for what he had to say 'to people who have not given a moment's thought to the whole question.'⁷

As the Republican's military position became weaker, de Valera's criticisms of the efficacy of military opposition to the Free State, finally made some impression on Lynch. After a clandestine conference with the IRA generals, Lynch asked de Valera how he thought the 1916 signatory, Tom Clarke, would regard the understanding they had reached. De Valera suggested that the question was irrelevant; they were the living Irish generation and had to make their own decisions.⁸

Fragmentarily but consistently such evidence accumulates, attesting to de Valera's essentially pragmatic instincts. Above all, although no pacifist, he had shown himself pacific when confronted with the formidable odds which he could now see were arraigned against the Republic: the war-weariness of the general population, the military superiority of the Free State, and the persistent intransigence of the north; nor could British re-intervention be ruled out in the event of a Republican victory over Free State forces.

4. De Valera to McGarrity, 10 Sept. 1922, McGarrity papers, NLI ms. 17,440.

5. McGarrity to de Valera, 27 Sept. 1922, ibid., 27 Sept. 1922

6. Longford and O'Neill (1970:207-8).

7. Lynch to de Valera, 28 Feb. and de Valera to Lynch, 7 Mar. 1923, quoted ibid., pp. 215-6.

8. Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(6).

Notwithstanding Cumann na nGaedheal's portrayal of him as a war-lord, the historical evidence attesting to de Valera's pacific role within Republican circles is overwhelming. In addition to the evidence, already cited, of his efforts to avert, deflect and then to end the Civil War, his correspondence with the Clan na Gael organiser in Philadelphia, Joseph McGarrity also suggests that consistently de Valera's strategy was to subvert the militarists and focus Republican attention on a realistic discussion of the best means to undo the hated Treaty settlement.⁹ But, perhaps inevitably, in all the circumstances, Cumann na nGaedheal's propaganda concentrated culpability for the Civil War on de Valera's shoulders: and because of the war's damage to the south's economy, he was also thereby held to be responsible for alienating moderates in Ulster and postponing the introduction of the Boundary Commission.

(x): Politics: War by Other Means: 1923-25

The Civil War may have ended with the military defeat of the Republicans: but, at its close, they had been persuaded to accept, not a surrender, but a ceasefire.¹ De Valera's efforts to convince the defeated republicans that they should become political, rather than military, opportunists was not helped by his internment for twelve months by the Free State authorities following his arrest in August 1923. In the absence of his moderating presence, considerable attention was paid - if Free State Army Intelligence reports are any guide - to the possibility of attacking the north. By May 1924, Eoin O'Duffy in collating this intelligence material for the cabinet, reported that there was 'no doubt that Aiken was strongly in favour of such a move'; it had been brought before the Republican 'cabinet' with Aiken present:

The whole question was gone into very minutely and after a lengthy and heated discussion, Aiken was turned down on the grounds that his scheme was impracticable and impossible.²

That there was still a lobby for a campaign of force against the north was understood by the Cosgrave government.³ Another concern was that any error in their policy towards the boundary controversy might result in political gains for de Valera. On this point, though, they were willing to use the prospect of their replacement by a 'strong Die-hard Government', as leverage to win a sympathetic hearing in London.⁴

Such was the political context in which de Valera found himself when he was released from jail in July 1924. Within republican circles, he found that less conciliatory voices than his own had prevailed in his absence.⁵ His comparative

9. See Ch.3:vi below.

1. Lyons (1971:462); Longford and O'Neill (1970:222-3); see also Aiken's statement in Sinn Fein's Daily Sheet, 24 May 1923 in Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/B/229/159.

2. O'Duffy to Executive Council, 29 May 1924, O'Malley papers, UCD P17/F/49.

3. Ibid., 30 Sept. 1924.

4. Kevin O'Shiel to cabinet, n.d. but c. Nov. 1922, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/B/288.

5. Longford and O'Neill (1970:235).

moderation was again clear when, attending the first clandestine meeting of Republican deputies since his release, he was questioned about policy towards Ulster. If deputies were hoping that he had abandoned his pre-Civil War stance, they were to be disappointed. He defended his earlier policy that the Treaty's Ulster provisions should be fulfilled; although the record does not make his meaning explicitly clear, he seems to be suggesting that as the boundary clauses were 'ridiculous', their inherent contradictions would be manifest if they were acted upon. It is clear that he believed time favoured the Republicans; and among the issues which would, eventually, justify their opposition to the Treaty would be the boundary question.

The object of the Free State was to make it appear that we by our opposition had smashed the possibility of the North coming in. We will have to be very careful as to that. The Ulster problem will remain for us and it will be a very difficult problem.

Yet again he invoked the 1921 Republican cabinet's imprimatur for the notion of local autonomy for the north east 'to cover all those areas where the people would vote definitely for such a parliament...'; such a parliament to have 'the fullest powers consistent with the unity of the country.' It would be 'subordinate, and secondly, it was not to cover any area in which the people were unwilling.' Emphasising that the sole motivation in their policy of external association was 'for the express purpose of offering an inducement to the North', he stated that if rejected, then Sinn Fein reserved the right to act as they pleased. He also emphasised that in making this offer, they were not admitting to the Ulster unionists, their right to a separate parliament 'but conceding it to them.'

Although de Valera also spoke of the need to safeguard the 'sovereignty and essential unity of the country', this speech immediately came under criticism from MacEntee who bluntly expressed the hope that 'we were not going to commit ourselves to a settlement of the Northern question as outlined in Document No.2. The people in the North could not see how it was going to be settled on that basis.' Indeed they considered Document No.2 as 'being no better' than the Treaty. 'Heart and confidence would have to be restored to these people. There ought to be issued a strong unequivocal declaration that Republicans would not accept any solution based on Partition.' Obviously stung by MacEntee's characterisation of his policy as partitionist, de Valera denied that there was anything in Document No.2 'which was contrary in any sense to our position as the established government of the Republic. The two fundamentals were the unity and sovereignty of the nation and these he would always endeavour to get.'⁶

This exchange revealed the embarrassment and controversy which still rankled among Republicans over Document No.2. MacEntee's argument on this occasion, for instance, implicitly denies the claim of the Sinn Fein election leaflet in 1923, which had insisted that Document No.2 made '...no recognition

6. Minutes of Comhairle na dTeachtaí, 7 Aug. 1924, reprinted in J.A. Gaughan, Austin Stack, (Tralee:1977), pp.335-6. Hereafter cited as Gaughan: 1977.

of the Partition of Ireland...'.⁷

Free State publicists were well aware of these differences within Sinn Fein. They had been manifest since the initial publication of Document No. 2 with its inclusion of all the Treaty's Ulster clauses, and de Valera's revised version in which he deleted them and substituted an addendum covering the Ulster question. In October 1924, when de Valera had already made the boundary issue a theme in his political speeches throughout the country, 10,000 copies of a pamphlet were published comparing in detail both versions of Document No.2 with the Treaty. The pamphlet was prefaced with the suggestion that

When Mr. de Valera states on a public platform what he will do if the Ulster Unionists will accept the national authority, ask what he will do if they won't. That is the question Ireland has had to face, and that was the question Mr. de Valera faced when he put forward his alternative to the Treaty - Document No.2

Claiming that de Valera's original solution to the Ulster question was 'precisely the same as that of the Treaty', this leaflet accused him of endeavouring 'to make political capital out of the Boundary problem.' Moreover, the fact that his altered version of Document No.2, had been re-adopted by him in February 1923, threw 'into still bolder relief' the inconsistency of his 1924 attacks on the Treaty's Ulster clauses. In support of this claim, the author of the pamphlet reminded de Valera that in his revised version of Document No.2, he had included a promise that the Dail would be willing to grant to the six counties 'privileges and safeguards not less substantial than those provided in the Treaty, such a policy being justified 'in order to make manifest our desire not to bring force or coercion to bear upon any substantial part of the Province of Ulster, whose inhabitants may now be unwilling to accept the national authority...'; in contrast, by 1924, de Valera was insisting that Ulster must accept the national authority, Sinn Fein's preparedness to grant local autonomy to the northeast being now "on condition that that minority will give loyal allegiance to this nation as a single State". The pamphlet concluded that de Valera's efforts 'to convince his own adherents and the Nationalists of the North East, that he never accepted the Ulster Clauses of the Treaty are absurd in face of his own printed proposals.'⁸

While concentrating on what they saw as the contradictions in de Valera's own policy, another theme in Free State propaganda was the moderation of de Valera's Ulster policy compared to the extremist rhetoric of some Sinn Fein speakers, notably Mary MacSwiney.⁹ In contrast, the unionist press in Belfast still saw him as an extremist, emphasising his 'truculent' opposition to Partition and his promise that republicans would 'use every available means by which determined men would win their freedom.'¹⁰ De Valera's speeches were

7. 'The Document No.2 lie', Sinn Fein election leaflet, 1923, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/B/227/14.

8. 'The Treaty and Document No.2', Dublin, 1924; see also 'Document No.2: clauses expunged by Mr. de Valera when it became necessary to submit the Document to public inspection', n.d. NLI LOP 117/41/1.

9. See draft of speech by ?Mulcahy entitled 'Miss MacSwiney v. Mr. de Valera', Mulcahy papers, UCD, P7/C/96.

10. See emphasis in report of de Valera's Ennis speech of August 1924 in Belfast Weekly News, 21 Aug. 1924.

scrutinized on all sides; O'Duffy in his Intelligence Reports to Free State ministers, thought that de Valera's references to a

...military defeat, and his secondary statement that, while he proclaimed himself a moderate man, he still refused to exclude the utilization of any and every means to secure this object, seems a pretty fair indication of the pains he is at to try and discover a middle course.

O'Duffy questioned whether de Valera had the qualities necessary to unite the two extreme Republican factions, Stack's constitutionalists and Aiken's 'Ultra-Militarist Section', the latter 'by no means keen to throw their politicians into the limelight.'¹¹

If de Valera had already shown greater awareness than his colleagues concerning the difficulties which the north posed to any party aspiring to unite Ireland, there was nothing in his experience of the north in the months ahead which could have given him any reason for optimism. In the October 1924 Westminster election, Sinn Fein nominated abstentionist anti-partitionist candidates in eight constituencies, all of them safe Unionist seats with the exception of Fermanagh-Tyrone, then a two-seat constituency with a comfortable, if narrow, nationalist majority. One of the Unionist candidates here, J.A.Pringle thought the withdrawal of other nationalist candidates left the position 'worthy of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera.' A great party in the constituency 'which claimed that it had not only a majority, but that it had the men and the money' had withdrawn by dictation from Dublin.¹² With most anti-partitionists voters abstaining, the election resulted in Unionist candidates winning the seats for the first time, and by a margin of almost 38,000 votes.¹³

Nor were de Valera's personal interventions in six county politics very fruitful. In September 1924, he announced that he would be visiting the north: he wrote to Joe Devlin hoping to meet him 'for a short talk'; he thought it 'a pity that the full anti-partition strength cannot be registered at this time.'¹⁴ His visit when it transpired was only successful on the level of personal publicity following his arrest by the RUC. He was first deported on the instructions of the northern government. Then amidst considerable public speculation, he re-entered Northern Ireland to speak at Derry where he was arrested, and brought before a Belfast court which he refused to recognize; it may safely be presumed that he also failed to make himself understood, his non-recognition, like all his interjections in court, being in Gaelic. He was jailed for one month and found the conditions worse than he had experienced, in either Free State or British custody.¹⁵

11. O'Duffy to Executive Council, 8 Sept.1924, Blythe papers, UCD P24/223

12. Irish Times, 20 Oct. 1924.

13. The Irish correspondent of the New Statesman, anticipating the loss of safe nationalist seats, suggested that de Valera would be 'safer in an internment camp than he would be among the Nationalists of Tyrone and Fermanagh.', New Statesman, 25 Oct. 1924.

14. De Valera to Joseph Devlin, n.d.(1924), H.J.Moloney papers, PRONI T2257/1. (Quotation taken from calendar entry as original not in file, May 1979).

15. Longford and O'Neill (1970:238-9).

Although there may have been propaganda gains from this visit, there were limited opportunities to make contacts with local anti-partitionists, still less to attempt any ambitious plan to unite them. Not only were they fragmented; they were ambivalent about southern interference. Eoin O'Duffy reporting to the Cosgrave cabinet on advance preparations for de Valera's visit suggested that

Irregular sympathisers... have not been as eager as was expected to make the necessary arrangements, excusing themselves on the grounds that any such meeting would be proclaimed... and would result in having many more of their supporters arrested, a risk which they are not prepared to take unless the matter is forced upon them.¹⁶

Although his followers may have appreciated the publicity which accrued from his jailing in Belfast, the incident did little to expedite de Valera's main objective: the reunification of nationalist ranks. He came under increasing attack from the Cumann na nGaedheal government. Kevin O'Higgins specifically pilloried his Ulster policy.

Mr de Valera hates facts like a cat hates water, and we have got to rub these facts into him in the next few weeks. It is time we grew up and recognized that we cannot just live in a world of make-believe. If we denounce the Treaty and tear up the Constitution... it is certain to mean the loss of the North-east...¹⁷

Already, or so it was believed by pro-Treaty supporters, the Civil War had meant the postponement of the opportunity enshrined in the Treaty of a quick decision by a Boundary Commission to grant large stretches of Northern Ireland to the Free State. Further, there was the cost of reconstruction following the civil war which delayed what O'Higgins saw as 'the building up (of) a worthy state that would attract and, in time, absorb and assimilate' the Ulster unionists. Instead 'we preferred the patriotic way' of practising

upon ourselves worse indignities than the British had practised on us since Cromwell and Mountjoy and now we wonder why the Orangemen are not hopping like so many fleas across the Border in their anxiety to come within our fold and jurisdiction.¹⁸

Where possible government propaganda pinned responsibility for all of this on de Valera. Meanwhile the Boundary Commissioners had begun their work: whatever their arbitration it was likely to have a profound impact on politics throughout Ireland.

(xi) Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, 1925

De Valera was absent from the 1923 Sinn Fein Ard Fheis because he was in Free State custody, and from the 1924 conference because it fell during his month in jail in Belfast. The 1925 Ard Fheis was, then, the first which he had

16. O'Duffy to Executive Council, 30 Sept. 1924, Blythe papers, UCD P24/223.

17. Irish Independent, 9 Feb. 1925, quoted in Donal O'Sullivan, The Irish Free State and its Senate, (London:1940) p.142. Hereafter cited as O'Sullivan: 1940.

18. O'Higgins to MacCartan, May 1924, quoted in Terence de Vere White, Kevin O'Higgins, (Tralee:1967 ed.) pp.206-7.

attended since the Civil War: it was also to be his last, since the launching of his new party, Fianna Fail, was, presently, to split Sinn Fein in the months ahead. Two persistent rumours of considerable significance to Sinn Fein were in circulation at this time: one was that some of the more restless abstentionists among the party's TDs were about to enter Leinster House;¹ the other was that the Boundary Commission, far from delimiting Northern Ireland to the point of unviability, might instead, merely rectify anomalies in the boundary and even cede some areas of the Free State to the north.²

Addressing a reception on the eve of the Ard Fheis,³ de Valera attacked the latter possibility and once again put on record that republicans were willing to cede a local parliament 'to all those areas in the north' which could 'prove they had a majority...'; but they 'never contemplated giving their sanction to the cutting off of any portion from Ireland' and claimed that 'in justice' the Ulster unionists 'could not ask for anything more.' Also, although 'they did not like it', Sinn Fein were prepared to tolerate external association with the British Empire as a further gesture to the north. All of this, concluded de Valera, 'was a great concession for national Ireland.'⁴ Some of his audience obviously thought the concessions too great. When the Ard Fheis itself was convened, delegates from Stranorlar tabled a resolution 'respectfully' suggesting that Document No.2 be withdrawn as it 'would not now be an equitable settlement...'. De Valera in reply emphasised that external association and local autonomy for Ulster were 'the kernels of the policy'; they would also, he believed, meet with the approval of the electorate as the basis of a 'fair' settlement. The circumstances might have changed since Document No.2 had been put forward but 'the fundamental problem had not changed' and any future republican government would face the same dilemma as faced the 1921 cabinet. His policy as enunciated in Document No.2

was an attempt to give expression in a final form to that policy of external association with England (sic) Canada and Australia and with autonomy for the North-East corner.

There was no use in their denying the fact that there were people in the country who had certain sentimental regard for the nations called the British Empire.

The view of the Republican Cabinet at that time - and it still remained his view - was that the views of that section were entitled to full consideration.

In the action they took at that time they thought they would secure a united Ireland. The same problem would have to be faced again, and he, for one, could not agree to have the idea of possible External Association for a United Ireland completely ruled out of court.

Care should be taken, he added, 'before they did anything which would limit any honourable settlement of the question', adding, characteristically, that 'the rights of Ireland were complete and absolute independence.' And, perhaps

1. Discussed in private session, Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, Irish Independent, 19 Nov. 1925; see also Intelligence report to Executive Council, 15 June 1925, Blythe papers, UCD P24/223.

2. The inspired forecast of the Commission's decision had been published in the Morning Post, 7 Nov. 1925; see also Irish Independent, 19 Nov. 1925.

3. One thousand attended this meeting, while Ard Fheis delegates numbered two hundred, Irish Independent, 18 Nov. 1925.

4. Ibid.

with Cumann na nGaedheal's propaganda in mind, he reminded the delegates that the Document had originally been put forward during the Treaty debate as 'a rough draft', and added that 'it probably contained some things against which he himself would vote.' But he did not specify what these might be and to those delegates who had formally initiated this debate, the objectionable parts of Document No.2 were clearly its 'kernels' of external association and local autonomy for Ulster which de Valera had just defended. Thus did de Valera manage to nurse his Ulster policy past the sniping of its critics, including MacEntee, who followed him to the rostrum to argue that he did not agree that the Ulster unionists 'were entitled to the consideration which the President was prepared to give them...'. However, he asked the delegates to give the strategy conditional support: '...they should give the policy a chance'.⁵

On the following day, de Valera was again among the moderates when the Ard Fheis passed a resolution demanding the release of political prisoners in the north, failing which, Sinn Fein would call for a boycott of 'British and Belfast goods'; and if the prisoners were still in jail by Christmas, the boycott was to be extended to the American marketing campaign for Ulster linen. De Valera's interventions all counselled caution: he warned that 'it was a very serious thing to start a boycott of goods manufactured in this country'; that the matter, might be referred to a committee; that no ultimatums or threats should be issued as they would leave the northern government with no option but to ignore them - if he got a threat, 'he would not send a reply...'.⁶ But ignoring his misgivings, the delegates voted for sanctions, including attempts to obstruct the marketing of linen in America. The Belfast Newsletter reports him as asking the delegates if they wanted the American boycott to be imposed after Christmas. 'In response there were cries of "Yes"'.⁷

Still, de Valera could feel satisfied with this Ard Fheis, the last to be held by the party before the hiving off of Fianna Fail, in March 1926. Indeed, to facilitate the very strategy which was to lead to Fianna Fail's formation, he had persuaded the Ard Fheis that although the party's stance on the Oath and Partition remained non-negotiable, all other issues could be debated within Sinn Fein. On Ulster his advice may have been ignored on the boycott issue, but on fundamental policy, he had the distinct gain that his Document No.2 concessions, in possible danger of lapsing through lack of attention, had been challenged and then endorsed by the Ard Fheis. Nevertheless, the debate showed, once again to de Valera, that there was little enthusiasm among republicans for Document No.2. In the four years since he had first advocated these concessions to Ulster, he had persuaded his followers to tolerate rather than champion this policy; other republicans who spoke on the subject either ignored de Valera's concessions, or, if moved to comment, expressed misgivings or open hostility. Obviously his own persistent repetition of the policy, along with his

5. Ibid., 19 Nov. 1925.

6. Ibid., 20 Nov. 1925.

7. Belfast Newsletter, 20 Nov. 1925.

description of it as 'the Republican position'⁸ and his constant emphasis on the approval it had won from the pre-Treaty Sinn Fein cabinet, can be taken as further evidence of an early awareness on his part of the endemic intractability of the Ulster question and his expectation that he would need the flexibility embodied in this policy if he were ever to hope to deliver a political settlement. Where other Republican speakers indulged in simplistic anti-Partition rhetoric, de Valera at this stage of his career was obviously attempting to curb, to some extent, republican expectations on Ulster. Such an emphasis was particularly significant at this juncture, on the eve of the Boundary Commission crisis, which was shortly to change the entire context in which Partition was considered.

On the day following the Ard Fheis, the boundary crisis deepened with the shock announcement of the resignation of the Free State's Commissioner Eoin Mac Neill. In the weeks which followed, as it became clearer throughout nationalist Ireland that the hopes vested in the boundary clauses of the Treaty had been misplaced, it must have seemed to the republicans that their hour had come. Perhaps the political ground lost in the Civil War might be regained: might it even be that retrospectively their stand against the Treaty itself would be vindicated?

8. Irish Independent, 18 Nov. 1925.

CHAPTER THREE: THE 'SLIGHTLY CONSTITUTIONAL' OPPOSITION

Could anybody find the effective way of ending Partition? The man who could and who succeeded in it would be the saviour of the country.¹

Eamon de Valera to Fianna Fail Ard Fheis, 1931.

(i) Boundary Commission result: Sinn Fein split: formation of Fianna Fail

The debacle over the Boundary Commission provided de Valera with the context in which he finally broke with the doctrinaire abstentionists in Sinn Fein and sought to regather the political resources - votes, funds, activists, and, not least, propaganda arguments - within a new political party dedicated to reviving the old Sinn Fein of 1917-18. The shock of November-December, 1925 breached Cumann na nGaedheal's solidarity which had owed much to their confidence that the Boundary Commission would prove to be what Collins had promised, a 'stepping-stone' to unity. Now there were defections by some deputies, doubts on the part of others - a general loss of confidence. It might even be that legislation necessary to approve the government's policy would lack the necessary Dail support; but this would only become a possibility if the abstentionist Sinn Fein TDs make a token visit to the House to vote against the government. The abstentionist policy, already weakening, came under further pressure during these weeks. It was the occasion if not the cause of the founding of Fianna Fail.²

In 1923 de Valera claimed privately that he had 'always told Griffith he would be euchred'³ on the Boundary Commission Clause of the Treaty, a clause on which de Valera himself would not have placed 'a particle of dependence...'.⁴ Yet he had not voiced such scepticism in the Treaty debates. During the Boundary Commission crisis of November-December, he claimed that he had never trusted Lloyd George's promise:

From the very beginning I have been convinced that the English meant to play foul on this question of the Boundary. The Mr Lloyd George who could promise Damascus to the Arabs and to the French at the same time would not be above promising East and South Down, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Derry City to Arthur Griffith whilst at the same time he winked at Sir James Craig and promised them all to him and something more as well.

Yet, de Valera told a hastily convened public meeting in Ennis, he had not come 'to shout "I told you so"' but rather to insist on the importance of national

1. Irish Press, 28 Oct. 1931.

2. Longford and O'Neill (1970:241-3); interview with Joseph Groome.

3. Derived from an American card game, 'to euchre' means to gain advantage over an opponent.

4. De Valera to prominent cleric, 23 June 1923, in Dermot Keogh, 'Ireland, the Vatican and Catholic Europe: 1919-1939, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, European University Institute, Florence, 1979, p.224.

unity at such a time of crisis.⁵ He emphasised this theme repeatedly during the critical two week period between MacNeill's resignation and the eventual acceptance by the Free State of the existing border.

The political unrest - particularly in the border areas - at this juncture would be difficult to exaggerate. Once published, the Commission's decisions would be immediately binding; contingency plans had been drawn up by the security forces north and south to take over any of the territories to be transferred. Politicians representing the disputed areas became agitated; delegations lobbied their respective governments; B Specials were reported to be marching towards Donegal.⁶ The possibility of armed resistance to any change of territory was feared by both Dublin and Belfast governments. And to add to the confusion and uncertainty, whilst MacNeill's resignation raised some hopes in the south that it would preclude any arbitration being enacted, constitutional experts seemed agreed that the remaining two commissioners could, and indeed fully intended, to proceed with their business.⁷ De Valera's appeal was to public opinion:

They might not be able to go and rescue the people, but there was one thing they could do - not be a party to the Partition of their country.

The only redeeming feature of the whole business was Eoin MacNeill's resignation...no Irishman could be allowed to put his signature to an instrument which meant the Partition of his country.⁸

De Valera's compliment to MacNeill was typically constructive, striking a positive note when others on the same platform as himself poured scorn on MacNeill's performance.⁹ Whereas de Valera read his resignation as a gesture against Partition, other Republicans more logically took the view that any participation in the boundary commission had been partitionist per se. But de Valera was hoping for a broad national consensus against Partition and even had hopes that Cosgrave himself might support such a stand.¹⁰ It may have been a moment of intense national disappointment; but it was also one of opportunity. De Valera's aim was to achieve what had been possible in 1918: to bury party differences on an issue as fundamental as Conscription had been then.

Nor was it unreasonable to hope for a broad national front against Partition. Had not many TDs decided their support for the Treaty precisely because of their expectations that the Boundary Commission would abolish the Border? If, instead, it was to entrench Partition, was it not reasonable to expect a backbench revolt, if not a cabinet split, in Cumann na nGaedheal? O'Higgins and McGilligan warned Baldwin on 28 November that the Cosgrave government faced 'certain defeat' if they attempted to implement the Commission's

5. Clare Champion, 5 Dec. 1925.

6. Irish Independent, 18 and 27 Nov. 1925. That violence might follow any changes in the boundary was believed both north and south: 'L.M.' to Director of Intelligence, 8 May 1924, now in O'Malley papers, UCD P17/F/48; Minister for Defence to Executive Council, 22 July 1925, Blythe papers, UCD P24/107; NI cabinet meeting, 16 Sept. 1924, PRONI CAB 4/121/16.

7. Baldwin, Cosgrave and Craig all express their concern in PRO CAB 61/16 CP 503(25).

8. As note 5 above.

9. Brian O'Higgins, speech, ibid.

10. Army Intelligence, Eastern Command, Sinn Fein policy, 2 Dec. 1925, quoted Reynolds (1976:34-5).

award.¹¹

Looking back over the entire Treaty conflict, and from a vantage point 'better than most', de Valera assured his Ennis audience that he 'had come to realise more profoundly every day that division in our ranks is the way to national ruin...'; furthermore, that unity was the only way 'to national freedom and greatness.' Although implacably against Partition, believing any boundary 'indefensible and ruinous to all concerned' he argued for a fairer boundary than that of 1920.

But if the Treaty, which as Republicans we have resisted and will continue to resist, no matter what happens, gives us Partition, then in the interests of the nation and of justice to the people(sic) of the North-East whose lives and fortunes are immediately affected, I want to see that that Partition will not be a worse Partition than the Partition contemplated by the Treaty.¹²

It is worth noting that some anti-Partitionists thought such arguments inadmissible, since, despite being prefaced by disclaimers denouncing Partition in principle, they seemed then to invite debate on which boundary line would be tolerable.¹³ There was also the consideration, for some, that an 'improved' boundary line, with contiguous nationalist areas incorporated in the Free State, would result in a more homogeneous and, therefore, more entrenched Northern Ireland. De Valera however did not take this view: he could never resist the argument - and it was a formidable one - that the original 'clean cut' of six Ulster counties was unfair. He often expressed it in terms which he now used: that whatever right Sir James Craig had to self-determination, he had no right to nationalist areas.¹⁴ De Valera was even prepared to offer Cosgrave advice on how to handle the crisis, though he prefaced it with the necessary disclaimer: '...I am not a Free Stater and the Treaty policy is not my policy...'. His advice was to abandon those elements in the Treaty - the Oath and the Crown - which Griffith had been persuaded to tolerate because of British promises regarding the outcome of the Boundary Commission. Indeed, de Valera pressed Cosgrave - as he had been doing since his release from jail in mid-1924 - to examine the de Valera-Griffith correspondence during the course of the Treaty negotiations which would reveal what promises had been made on the British side regarding a Boundary Commission; such a study he added, 'will reveal it clearly to history.' And if the government's files did not have copies of the letters, de Valera offered his own copies to Cosgrave.¹⁵

De Valera was far from being a disinterested party. The course he outlined, if pursued by Cosgrave, would have done much to resolve Sinn Fein's internal problems; without the Oath, the abstentionist TDs could have entered a Leinster House where party alignment would no longer be predictably pro and anti-Treaty. But aside from these potential gains, de Valera was also showing in these

11. Notes of meeting between O'Higgins, McGilligan and O'Byrne and Baldwin, at Chequers, 28 Nov. 1925, Baldwin papers, CUL, vol.99.

12. As note 5 above.

13. See Lemass speech at the 1928 Ard Fheis, Irish Independent, 26 Oct., 1928.

14. Clare Champion, 5 Dec. and Irish Independent, 1 Dec. 1925.

15. As note 5 above.

speeches what the rest of his political career underlined: that although often the leader of the intransigent, doctrinaire wing of Irish nationalism, his own instinct was to be spokesman for the wider nation. Even after his advice had been ignored, with Cosgrave's acceptance of the existing boundary on 3 December, de Valera still sought a role wider than that of leader of an irreconcilable, irreproachable and - many would have said - a, by now, largely irrelevant faction. A public meeting was advertised for the following Sunday in Dublin; significantly the advertisements carried no party label, in fact the organizers were not named.

Advertisement: No Partition; Demonstration to voice the NATION'S PROTEST against the DISMEMBERMENT of our Country and the BETRAYAL OF THE NORTH. EAMON DE VALERA and representatives from the provinces.¹⁶

Sharing the platform with de Valera were members of Clann Eireann - who had splintered from Cumann na nGaedheal on the Partition issue - and representatives of northern nationalists.¹⁷ The press coverage reflected what the advertisement had conveyed: that de Valera was spokesman for the wide and growing band of nationalist opinion shocked by the Boundary debacle and determined to oppose the London Agreement accepted by the Free State government.¹⁸ De Valera bemoaned the futility of verbal protest at this 'meditated crime'; he argued that force would be justified in opposing the Agreement, that the case was better than Lincoln's in prosecuting the American Civil War, which had enjoyed the support of world opinion. He repeated again his concessions of 1921 to the Ulster Unionists. He had been willing to go very far - 'I hardly like to think how far' - but 'against any proposal for cutting Ireland in two we would have held out to the death.' In this he seems to be morally justifying force rather than advocating it; a fine distinction, probably lost on the crowd, and scarcely appreciated in Belfast, but, nevertheless, real enough. He added that there were 'resources other than arms' to make Partition 'unprofitable' for Ulster - presumably a reference to his belief in the efficacy of economic coercion of the north.¹⁹

Despite the rather bellicose note he struck at this meeting, de Valera must still be considered a 'dove' on Ulster among Sinn Feiners. In addition to the constructive approach he had shown at the recent Ard Fheis and at his Ennis and Limerick meetings, there is evidence from another source of his pacific inclinations. Apparently a guerrilla campaign against Northern Ireland was mooted at the private meetings of TDs held in Dublin on 6 and 8 December to discuss an opposition strategy to the Boundary Agreement. The idea was not new - it had been considered by Collins before the Civil War broke out - and was now

16. Display advertisement, Irish Independent, 5 Dec. 1925.

17. Clann Eireann was a potential threat to de Valera as they were seeking financial support from America for a constitutional republican party with a programme not dissimilar to Fianna Fail's of a few months later; Devoy to Maurice Moore, 14 Apr. and Moore to Devoy, 21 June 1927, Maurice Moore papers, NLI, ms. 5,500. Also Reynolds (1976:71).

18. Irish Independent and Irish Times, 7 Dec. 1925.

19. Irish Independent, 7 Dec. 1925.

being advocated by Frank Carty, leader of a group of indeterminate size, the Ulster Federal Army. Carty's group 'had some sort of shadowy support from sections of the Free State army' ; had propositioned Cosgrave's Minister for Defence, Richard Mulcahy, in February 1924 with a plan to operate Southern-based 'flying columns' to attack the north; and was a group known to Free State Army Intelligence who considered them 'dangerous lunatics.' Carty attended the meetings of December 6 and 8 in Dublin, and approached many of the Sinn Fein leaders with another plan envisaging 'a united Fighting Force on the present Boundary Area to operate against the Six Counties.' An informant working for Army Intelligence also attended these meetings and reported to the Cosgrave cabinet that Carty's suggested attacks on the north were thought by de Valera to be 'the worst thing that could happen' adding that Austin Stack 'is the person in the Republican Party who is interested in this.'²⁰

As has been noted, these were days of increasing pressure on the abstentionist policy of Sinn Fein TDs. Not only had there been doubters in their own ranks for some time past; there was now the catastrophe of the Boundary Agreement, at once a spur to protest in some fashion and perhaps an excuse to make that protest within Dail Eireann.²¹ But although the debacle, in time, helped to impress on some waverers the futility of abstentionism, it was at a public meeting in the Rotunda in Dublin - not in Leinster House - that the Sinn Fein TDs solemnly registered their protest against the 1925 Agreement which had 'sown the seeds of turmoil, trouble, misery and revolution...'.²² For many however, this was an unsatisfactory compromise; they were impatient to enter the Dail and among them were some of the most doctrinaire Republicans. De Valera, for his part, was anxious to time any initiative to enable him to bring the largest possible number with him. It seemed now a question of 'when' not 'whether' this faction in the party would come to terms with the political realities of the Free State. The embryonic Clann Eireann - which had broken with Cumann na nGaedheal on the Partition issue - was a potential rival for electoral support and American dollars; a rival moreover working as a Republican party within the Free State system. If it was de Valera's belief that he had to somehow bring Sinn Fein along that same path or else break with the party and found a new organization, he must have appreciated that the Boundary Commission crisis was loosening political allegiances; perhaps it might even replace the Treaty as the issue which would henceforth determine party allegiance in Irish politics. Yet he moved cautiously. His hesitations, compared to some of his colleagues in jettisoning the abstentionist plank during these critical weeks, may well have been due to conscientious difficulties in working through the Free State system; they would also be consistent with a prudently slow strategy to prepare public opinion and particularly his own more doctrinaire followers for what seemed to many his volte face of March 1926 when he took his first tentative steps towards Leinster House.²³

20. Director of Intelligence to Minister for Defence, 11 Dec. 1925, quoted Reynolds (1976:37).

21. Reynolds (1976:37-41).

22. Phrase of Fr. Coyle, *Irish Times*, 11 Dec. 1925.

23. Longford and O'Neill (1970:245); Reynolds (1976:37-41).

The early weeks of 1926 were unpredictable; the initiative, some feared, might again pass out of the hands of the politicians; the possibility of an IRA border campaign, in the wake of the disappointment over the Boundary Commission, seems to have been feared by de Valera. Others, soon to be among his senior colleagues in Fianna Fail, were less circumspect. At a meeting in New York, Sean T.O'Kelly stressing that Partition was 'no more permanent than last week's snow', added that 'it may be that Ireland will have to resort again to the use of force.' He hoped it would not come to that, but, if necessary, the IRA 'that wonderful military machine...must be kept intact...'. Frank Aiken, whose reputation then rested on his IRA exploits rather than his political career, argued from the same platform that he could not 'tell exactly' what means would be justified in fighting Partition.

But as far as we can we wish to prepare at once for all eventualities. We do not desire war. Especially do we wish to avoid war with men claiming to be Irish. Neither do we desire a long political campaign. We wish to be ready always to advance our cause by whatever honourable means its custodians think most advisable.

This claim to custody of the national aspiration was necessary if Irish-American funds were to be channelled to de Valera; Aiken stressing the need for dollars added that the donors should 'leave the choosing of the steps to the faithful Republicans of Ireland...'.²⁴

It will be noted that no outright commitment to force has been made by either speaker; and it could be that such rhetoric came easily to Irish Republicans when competing for Irish-American dollars. The militant language could also indicate frustration at what must be seen as the nadir of both men's careers; so many disappointments since November 1921, and, apparently, no constructive way forward. Their impotence in the face of the Boundary Commission collapse is ironically caught in a private letter to Art O'Brien written by O'Kelly on his official notepaper as Poblacht na hEireann's 'ambassador' to the United States. Most of his attention is directed to the 'mess' Cosgrave and MacNeill 'have got themselves into.' But he concludes:

I wonder what way our people as a whole will react to this new situation? Perhaps they will take it lying down as they have done so completely in the last four years.²⁵

By the time O'Brien replies, Sinn Fein has been split and Fianna Fail launched. On the Boundary Commission, he writes: '...as you anticipated, the people took the matter lying down...'. And he confided his personal lack of confidence in the new departure just undertaken by de Valera:

I told you a long time back, the view which I had taken with regard to Dev. He is quite hopeless as a leader. His apparent success, before, was due to his lieutenants not to himself. Since he has...exercised personal sway he has ruined everything.²⁶

Such scepticism about the new party was widespread; even those engaged in the enterprise seem to have entertained doubts about its prospects. De Valera's

24. Irish World, 23 Jan. 1926.

25. O'Kelly to Art O'Brien, 24 Nov. 1925, Art O'Brien papers, NLI ms. 8461.

26. O'Brien to O'Kelly, 17 May 1926, ibid.

aim was to seek the broadest possible front on one issue: the abolition of the Oath. If it were abolished, the way would be clear for, at least, 'slightly constitutional' opposition to the Treaty. To this end he held secret meetings with Clann Eireann, the Neutral IRA, and the army 'Mutineers'; Lemass and Boland, later to be the dynamic secretaries of Fianna Fail, lobbied within Sinn Fein for a change; and when the split came at a specially convened Ard Fheis in March, de Valera placed the emphasis on continuity, not division. A joint sub-committee of Sinn Fein and Fianna Fail was inaugurated to prevent a full scale split and when de Valera was cabled from America by a news agency 'as to whether he had left the Republican party...' he replied: 'Have not left party. Intend continue to assert sovereign right of Irish people...', adding that to this end he would 'use every means rightfully available...'.²⁷ His Irish-American readers scarcely guessed that the 'rightful means' would be the Free State Dail; but this was to be, henceforth, de Valera's main forum and the instrument through which he pursued the sovereign, united Republic.

Launched in May 1926, de Valera outlined the fundamental aims of Fianna Fail, foremost among which were the re-unification of the country and the restoration of the Irish language. In support of the new party he had a formidable group of Republicans who, having been defeated in the Civil War, were prepared to face the realities of Free State politics and attempt to subvert the system from within. Further, there was the accretion of important support from many northern nationalists who after the disastrous collapse of Cumann na nGaedheal's partition policy switched their allegiance and hopes to Fianna Fail.²⁸ The significance of such support in helping to establish Fianna Fail as the custodian of Irish nationalist aspirations need not be exaggerated; further, it helped to offset the frequently voiced criticism that because of the Civil War, de Valera had been, as Tim Healy put it,

more responsible for the sufferings of Northern Catholics than any man alive. Ingredients of blame belong it is true, elsewhere, but on him the guilt is blackest.

Healy writing to his former Home Rule colleague, William O'Brien, complained of the political capital which de Valera had made out of the Boundary Commission disappointment. Anyway, as 'Feetham's line' was worse than the 1920 line, de Valera's criticism of Cosgrave was unjustified, particularly when a debt which de Valera himself reckoned at £19m had been written off. Yet writes Healy, he considers such a settlement 'a crime' and 'now makes a stock topic of the desertion of the Northern nationalist. However his influence for evil here and in USA is at an end.'²⁹ O'Brien, to his death a vehement opponent of Partition and an admirer of de Valera's stand on the question, sent his reply by return post: both men, after lifetimes devoted to Home Rule had seen that goal by-passed by de Valera's generation; looking on now from the sidelines they

27. Similarly ambiguous replies were cabled to the Boston Post and the Associated Press; see collection in J.J.Hearn papers, NLI ms. 15,987.

28. Eamonn Phoenix, Introduction and Calendar of the Cahir Healy papers, papers', unpublished MA thesis, Queen's University, Belfast, 1978. Hereafter cited as Phoenix:1978.

29. Tim Healy to William O'Brien, private letter, 2 Mar 1926; O'Brien (MP) papers, NLI ms. 8,556(31)

could agree on one point: de Valera's political eclipse. O'Brien wrote: 'You and I see de Valera in very different perspective. He has largely failed, as which of us has not?'³⁰

Within a week of these letters being exchanged, de Valera had split Sinn Fein and begun preparations for the launching of Fianna Fail. Not since Parnell's ascendancy in the 1880s were Irish aspirations to be so coherently pursued by a national leader dominating a great political machine - at once, a party and a movement. There were sceptical voices in the press³¹ and Tim Healy believed that the 'de Valera split' had 'practically finished the Republicans.' De Valera, however, was seeking a new vehicle for republicanism. He wrote to McGarrity:

What will be the fate of this new venture, I do not know. I have at any rate done my duty and launched the ship on the sea of fate. If favourable winds blow, I may bring her safely to harbour. If not, well I am prepared to go down trying.³²

(ii) Fianna Fail in Opposition

(a) The partition issue as seen by the party rank and file

While de Valera, attempted to project a relatively moderate, reforming image, many of the party activists to judge by resolutions tabled to the annual Ard Fheis, seemed reluctant to accommodate to the realities of the political context in which Fianna Fail was now operating. When the parliamentary party eventually accepted the hated Oath as 'an empty formula' and entered the Free State Dail, the Ard Fheis which followed passed a resolution 'that the furthestmost limits in compromise had been reached.'¹ De Valera was anxious to wean republicans from Sinn Fein and from the IRA into the new party² and his speeches on the use of force during this period must be judged in terms of the audience he was attempting to influence. He warned the party's first Ard Fheis that 'If the road of peaceful progress and natural evolution be barred, then the road of revolution would beckon and would be taken.' But the problem would remain, he argued and it would be found 'that force was not the solution.' It was 'to rescue people from that fate' that Fianna Fail had been established. He would not say that force was not a legitimate weapon: it had been necessary in history but it was now the wrong weapon as it would serve only to divide the Irish people.'³

Also at this first Ard Fheis with many speakers calling for a national

30. O'Brien to Healy, 3 Mar. 1926, *ibid.*

31. *The Times*, 10, 11 and 12 Mar., *Irish Times*, 11 Mar. 1926.

32. De Valera to McGarrity, 13 Mar. 1926, McGarrity papers, NLI ms 17,441.

1. Clar, 1927 Ard Fheis.

2. *Irish Press*, 28 and 29 Oct. 1931; copy of Austin Stack to ?, 6 Nov. 1928, re Stack-de Valera meeting, Aug. 1927, Austin Stack papers, NLI ms. 17,092. Interview with Sean MacBride.

3. *Irish Independent*, 25 Nov. 1926.

front of all those groups opposed to Partition and standing for the Republic, de Valera spoke of the 'heart-wrench' of breaking with Sinn Fein. It had, however, been necessary. Sinn Feiners now

were like comrades of an army who feared the operations Fianna Fail were performing were too dangerous for them to risk. He regarded them as a redoubt on the left wing of the Republican forces, and asked them to do nothing further than not to fire on them as they were advancing from their trenches into the open.⁴

Initiatives from the delegates at Ard Fheiseanna during this period included a call - unanimously carried - that 'at the earliest practicable opportunity' the Boundary Agreement of 1925 be repudiated;⁵ that a 'more fighting and militant' policy on Partition be adopted in the Dail; and that Fianna Fail should 'make a boycott of goods and travellers coming from the area under the Belfast Parliament part of its policy.'⁶ De Valera's emphasis was invariably one of realism:

It is long ago since I first said that I was not a Republican doctrinaire, and it was clear that I meant that I was a realist. And I hold that I have always been a realist in politics.

The delegates must not forget that the party 'could not perform miracles...'.⁷

(b) With a thirtytwo county policy, why not a thirtytwo county party?

Regarding the party's strategy on the Partition question, Fianna Fail seemed divided between those who considered that while in opposition, propaganda against its injustice was all that could usefully be accomplished and others who thought this too inactive and sought every opportunity to intervene on the question. That unilateral initiatives could achieve very little was de Valera's answer to the interventionists. However, one initiative, strenuously advocated by the latter, did lie completely within the party's discretion: to organize Fianna Fail in the six counties and contest elections there. Given that the 'parent' party, Sinn Fein, was so organized and given that Fianna Fail's first aim was to unite the country, the apparent hesitation, indeed reluctance, of the leadership on this question clearly came as a surprise and disappointment to many.

In the very first Secretaries' Report, Lemass - who, with Boland, had spent the previous six months establishing party branches throughout the south - admitted that the general organizing Committee 'had not attempted actively' to organize the party in the north. They had however 'established contact' with Republicans in many centres 'but being anxious to avoid the unnecessary division in the ranks of Republicans there(,) the existing organisation had not been interfered with.' Such a policy, it was clearly hoped, would meet with the Ard Fheis's approval: the delegates would be asked to instruct the executive to endeavour to arrive at 'an arrangement' with other Republican organizations.⁸ De Valera himself supported this pragmatic approach: he compared the position

4. Ibid.

5. Proposed by the ubiquitous Fr. Coyle, The Nation, 3 Dec. 1927.

6. Respectively, resolutions 7 and 51, Clar, 1928 Ard Fheis.

7. The Nation, 10 Dec. 1927.

8. Irish Independent, 25 Nov. 1926

north and south. In the twentysix counties, the nationalists, 'Republicans at heart', were in a majority and it would be 'their own fault' if they did not 'take over the Government...'; in the north the position was 'entirely different...'.⁹ Fianna Fail, said de Valera, was 'intended to be an All-Ireland organization.' But it should 'take cognisance' of these differences which necessitated different approaches; 'The time to start organizing in the six counties would depend on the conditions there.'¹⁰ The delegates however thought all of this too cautious and rejecting the Lemass-Boland resolution which gave the party organizers considerable discretion, opted instead for a resolution which seemed to presume that Fianna Fail would spread its organization across the border. As a preliminary to this, a representative conference of six county Republicans should be called; in vain de Valera intervened to say that he did not see how Fianna Fail 'could give a direction to anybody' to convene such a meeting: but the delegates did not heed these misgivings and voted not only in favour of a convention, but in the event of 'no arrangement for united action' being agreed, committed the party to 'go ahead at once' in organizing Fianna Fail within Northern Ireland.¹¹

Although the Ard Fheis was theoretically the final arbiter of party policy, an early indication of how the actual power rested elsewhere was soon demonstrated. The Ard Fheis resolution was noted at the National Executive's inaugural meeting, postponed a week later pending de Valera's availability and within five weeks was dropped, the Executive, on a division, supporting an amendment by Boland and Little that 'the present time' was unsuitable for the holding of a conference in the north to discuss a united front there.¹² This was despite the efforts of Eamonn Donnelly, himself a native of Newry, who remained the leading advocate within the party for the extension of Fianna Fail to the north.¹³ This closed the issue until the following year's Ard Fheis¹⁴ when the Clar included a resolution calling on the National Executive 'to call an All-Ireland conference of Anti-Imperialist forces, not later than the last day of February 1928...'.¹⁵ Whether the private meeting of prominent anti-Partitionists in Belfast in that month owed anything to this resolution is not clear: but at such a meeting of 'anti-Imperialist forces' in Belfast, the Nationalist Party was initiated, Fianna Fail being represented by O'Kelly and Lemass.¹⁶

9. Irish Independent, 25 Nov. 1926.

10. Irish Times, 26 Nov. 1926.

11. Irish Times, 26 Nov. 1926 and Irish Independent, 25 Nov. 1926.

12. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes for inaugural, 2nd and 5th meetings, on 25 Nov., and 2 and 30 Dec. 1926.

13. Although Donnelly was not a member of the National Executive until 14 July 1927, he was clearly the leader of the interventionist faction; ibid., minutes for 30 Dec. 1926, 24 Mar., 21 Apr. and 14 July 1927.

14. 6 Jan. to 21 Nov. 1927 in the Executives minutes, ibid.

15. Clar, 1927 Ard Fheis.

16. Healy to Devlin, 8 Feb. 1928, Cahir Healy papers, PRONI D2991/A/6. The Healy papers were still closed at the Public Record Office, Northern Ireland, while this research was being undertaken: however, lengthy quotations of the politically significant letters and documents are included in Phoenix's calendar of the papers, Phoenix:1978. I am grateful to Mr. Phoenix for permission to quote from this work. Throughout, I have used the PRONI reference numbers for each document in anticipation of their availability.

The attendance of such party leaders on such an occasion suggests that from the beginning, Fianna Fail preferred to liase with established anti-Partitionist politicians rather than attempt either to recruit them to Fianna Fail or to challenge their authority by seriously organizing the party within Northern Ireland.

Again in 1928, the Secretaries' Report records that the National Executive had been urged by many northern nationalists to extend Fianna Fail across the border and to contest the elections for the Northern Ireland Parliament. But after investigation...the general view of most Republicans was that an essential step to the realization of national unity would be a political victory by Republicans in the South.

Even Donnelly, accepted this point during the Ard Fheis debate. Moreover, following a report prepared by Boland, the Executive decided that it would not be in the best national interest to contest the elections for the northern parliament, although the party was willing 'to give all possible support to any effort made by Republicans within the Six Counties.' Tentatively the Secretaries also noted that local efforts to set up Fianna Fail Cumainn 'have met with a measure of success in Derry, and will possibly be followed up in other districts.'¹⁷ Obviously highly vulnerable if a serious organizational drive did not establish the party as leaders of the northern nationalists, Fianna Fail was still willing to accept the affiliation of local branches provided the initiative came from within the six county area.

As will be seen this issue was to remain a live one for a minority within the party who argued - very plausibly, it must have seemed - that it was paradoxical for a movement whose raison d'etre was the winning of the north not to be organizing there.

(c) What de Valera told the British press

Despite its own antipathy to the Irish Free State, its intention to undo the Treaty settlement and its aspiration to a united Ireland, Fianna Fail was, from the beginning, essentially a twentysix county organization. South of the Border they quickly established themselves as an electoral force and the preferred party for republican voters.¹⁸ Before the crisis of August 1927 which precipitated their entry to the Dail, de Valera gave a series of interviews to British newspapers which provide useful insights into his Ulster strategy at this stage. The correspondents from the Daily Express, Daily Mail and Manchester Guardian all questioned him on ULster. He assured the Daily Mail that:

If we in the twenty-six counties built up a sound national economy, raised standards of living and generally made the country a place to be proud of, I believe that the people of the six counties would be anxious to join us.

17. Irish Times, 26 Oct. 1928.

18. Longford and O'Neill (1970:253-8); Cornelius O'Leary, Irish Elections: 1918-1977, (Dublin:1979) pp.22-26, hereafter cited as O'Leary:1979; J.L.McCracken, Representative government in Ireland, (Oxford:1958) pp.105-6.

'Even though you were a Gaelic state?' asked the questioner: 'Yes, I believe they would,' replied de Valera. He had prefaced his remarks on attracting the north, by insisting that 'Irish unity can be achieved only on the basis of complete freedom from English interference in our affairs.'¹⁹

The Daily Express questioned this analysis, pointing to the 'fact that cleavage in ideas and ideals' already existed between north and south. De Valera, however, was adamant that the responsibility for Partition rested with Britain: there were 'acute political differences' in 'every country and in every State. Is secession and partition suggested as the remedy?' Partition had 'introduced two minority problems where there was only one.'²⁰ His interview in the Manchester Guardian was more detailed: he claimed that northern nationalists were 'virtually disfranchised' being 'without political freedom'; that the unionist 'ascendancy' was

digging itself in deeper every day. It does not even trouble to pretend that it desires or aims at an ultimate reunion. It distrusts and despises the rulers of the Free State as men who say one thing and mean another.

He added that 'Ulster has more respect for the honest Republican and is more likely to come to terms with a Republican Government than with the Free State. But the prospect is bad.' When asked if a Fianna Fail government would 'recognise the accomplished fact and have friendly relations with the Northern Government?', he replied: 'No; I cannot exactly say that. We must of course recognise existing facts, but it does not follow that we must acquiesce in them.' Partition was a 'hideous act of mutilation': at present they might be 'powerless to undo what has been done, but Ireland must reserve her right to act as and when opportunity presents itself.'

Nor was de Valera's next point reassuring to Ulster. The unionists there who 'have wilfully assisted in mutilating their motherland can justly be made to suffer for their crime.' This was a threat which was to become controversial. De Valera then explained what his economic policy would be towards the north, were he in government: the north, he said, would not continue to get favoured treatment in trading with the Free State.

They have chosen separation, let them feel what separation means. Public opinion in Ireland will insist on high protection. If Ulster chooses to remain outside our political system she can have no special right of access to our markets. But we do not rely only or chiefly on pressure. When Ireland flourishes as a Republican Ireland would flourish, Ulster will be attracted and will seek reunion.

The interviewer - clearly Irish, from the south and with broad nationalist sympathies - put a final point: 'I wish you could accept the Northern Ireland settlement, bad as it is, and take the position we find ourselves in for a basis on which to rear your spiritual edifice.' De Valera replied: 'There is no wisdom in building on unsound foundations.'²¹

19. Daily Mail, 22 June 1927, reprinted in The Nation, 2 July 1927.

20. Daily Express, 15 June 1927, The Nation, 25 June 1927.

21. Manchester Guardian interview, reprinted in The Nation, 9 July 1927.

All of these interviews were reprinted in the Fianna Fail newspaper, The Nation, a certain indication that de Valera was here communicating with his own supporters as well as with international opinion. The party paper also reprinted his answers to 'a questionnaire submitted to him by Mr.P.J.Barry, New York.' Again he emphasised that 'efficient and economic government' in the twentiesix counties would attract the north.

The people of that area are suffering by Partition just as we are. If they persisted in keeping themselves detached we should have to tighten the Border and treat them as aliens. They cannot be allowed to have it both ways.

Barry put another question which has a bearing on Ulster: if Gaelic were to become the 'first and spoken language of Ireland' will it set up a 'barrier against the Irish race abroad...particularly in the coming generation?' De Valera thought not.

For some generations it is certain that English will be understood and spoken as a second language. Instead of being a barrier, my view is that the restoration of the national language here will establish a further spiritual bond between the people at home and our exiles.²²

Although his questioner instances Irish exiles as the group likely to see de Valera's language policy as a barrier, the question could equally have been asked on behalf of Ulster unionists: indeed, it may have been implied in the Daily Mail's question when de Valera reassured his interviewer that even a 'Gaelic state' would attract Ulster. One pattern in de Valera's politics is already clear: whether on the language question, or the Oath, or economic protectionism, de Valera believes in expediting his cultural, constitutional or economic policies irrespective of the preferences of Ulster unionists.

One point on Ulster in these newspaper interviews became a matter for controversy. De Valera's threat that the Ulster unionists who had 'wilfully assisted in mutilating their motherland' could 'justly be made to suffer for their crime' was condensed to the phrase: 'we must punish Ulster.' Although this does not seem to be a direct quotation from the original interview,²³ it was a fair summary and it was the phrase which was used by opposition critics. The verb 'punish' is used four times in one Cumann na nGaedheal advertisement in the September 1927 election, a campaign in which the governing party was anxious to make the link between Fianna Fail and the IRA.²⁴ The advertisement ridiculed de Valera who

proposes to establish this perfect peace by enlisting its gunmen in the people's army, by smashing the Treaty, by destroying the Constitution, by having "another round" with England, by "punishing Ulster".

Elaborating on the last point, the advertisement explained what 'punishing Ulster' entailed:

by sending Mr. Frank Aiken northwards with his "army" to bring in by force the six counties, to "punish Ulster" with all the²⁵ consequences the "punishment" would bring to Ulster Nationalists.

22. Reported in The Nation, 2 July 1927.

23. Manchester Guardian not consulted but The Nation seems to have reprinted verbatim.

24. For Cumann na nGaedheal's advertisements, Irish Independent, 3 and 12 Sept. 1927; Fianna Fail's response, ibid., 10 and 12 Sept. 1927.

25. Boxed alongside this quotation was the sentence: '"We must punish Ulster" - Mr de Valera in the Manchester Guardian interview', Irish Independent, 5 Sept. 1927.

In this, the Cumann na nGaedheal government was probably exploiting the confidential information received from their own Intelligence branch which had constantly portrayed Aiken as lobbying within the Sinn Fein movement of 1924-25 for a policy of force against the six counties.²⁶ These same reports show de Valera as deflecting or rejecting all such proposals but this would scarcely make appropriate copy in election advertisements. With such 'scare campaigns', Cumann na nGaedheal may have hoped not only to win electoral support but also to unsettle the Fianna Fail party by emphasising what they knew were sensitive issues.

By this stage, de Valera may have regretted his indiscretion in the Manchester Guardian interview: the threat to 'punish Ulster' had become one of the issues in the election. He was attacked for it in the press;²⁷ and a series of questions was posed by Professor E.P.Culverwell of Trinity College Dublin:

1. Does your intention of punishing the six counties include only an economic war with them?
2. If the economic war does not succeed in getting the six counties to join the Free State will your policy be to allow them to stay out, i.e. to remain as they are?
3. or will it be to declare war on them as a last resource(sic)?²⁸

De Valera used these questions to good effect: he may even have welcomed Culverwell's intervention - it was certainly de Valera who publicised this querying of Fianna Fail's intentions towards Northern Ireland. He read the questions in detail at a widely reported election meeting in Sligo - Culverwell's challenge to his Ulster policy being the lead news story in The Times.²⁹ In reply, de Valera argued that the south lacked the power to force Ulster into unity.

They were not in a position to declare war on the six counties with England behind them, and they were more concerned with the safety of their own country than with the safety of English interests.

He also chided Culverwell for attributing to him the view that he 'would punish the six counties.' If the professor had read his interview in the Manchester Guardian, 'he ought to have quoted it, because, he said, in that, which was an oral interview, that if the north area wanted to cut themselves off, they in the twenty-six counties would have to look after their own interests.'³⁰ It is even possible that de Valera prompted Culverwell to raise these questions.³¹ He certainly took the opportunity offered, to remind the voters - and, indeed, his own 'wild men' - that the party eschewed force. An election advertisement proclaimed:

What Fianna Fail Does Not Stand For: .Attacking the North East: Fianna Fail does not stand for attacking "Ulster". It will accept EXISTING REALITIES, but will work resolutely to bring Partition to an end.³²

It is impossible to evaluate the effect, if any, of the Ulster issue in the election itself: the result was encouraging for Fianna Fail which despite the

26. Intelligence reports to Executive Council in Blythe papers, UCD P24/233, passim, but especially 29 May 1924.

27. Editorial, Irish Independent, 15 Sept. 1927

28. Irish Independent, 13 Sept. 1927.

29. The Times, 14 Sept. 1927.

30. Irish Independent, 13 Sept. 1927.

31. Culverwell had attempted mediation in September 1922 during the Civil War, being then '...able to communicate with Mr de Valera'. Hugh Kennedy papers, UCD P4/F/15.

32. Fianna Fail advertisement, Irish Independent, 14 Sept. 1927.

jibes from right and left that they were 'oath-swallowers', increased their support, significantly, at the expense of the abstentionist Sinn Fein candidates. Given its fundamental importance, the Partition question becomes a relatively dormant one between the parties in the course of the sixth Dail: within Fianna Fail, as we have seen, it is a central issue at each Ard Fheis, but it fades from its earlier prominence in the nation's politics, with Cumann na nGaedheal anxious to forget the Boundary Commission episode and Fianna Fail increasingly recognising the logic of de Valera's strategy in concentrating on short-term, realistic goals, the abolition of the Oath and the retention of the land annuities.³³

(d) De Valera, Partition and International Opinion

International opinion was not forgotten by de Valera. He took every opportunity to propogate his belief in the inherent injustice of Partition. As a delegate to the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in Berlin in August 1928 he told the Telegrafen Union that there would be an 'overwhelming majority' throughout Ireland for independence; moreover Britain could 'still do whatever she wanted' in Ireland. British troops could reach Dublin from the 'strongly occupied' Northern Ireland within a few hours.³⁴ Invariably Partition was discussed in foreign press interviews and when de Valera was speaking abroad. In Ireland there may have been little need to restate known positions: abroad - particularly to the volatile Irish-American community - it was the issue on which Irish politicians were assessed. During Fianna Fail's opposition years de Valera made three visits to America; in all, he spent some nine months in the country and undertook two public-speaking tours.³⁵ He was obliged to summarise and defend his Ulster policy to audiences which were potentially sceptical - they might favour the Free State government or the Sinn Fein position in preference to his.

On the first of these American tours in 1927 de Valera attacked the Partition of Ireland by citing American comparisons: his favourite parallel was with Lincoln's fight against the partition of the United States in the American Civil War.³⁶ The Irish situation would be 'best understood' by an American who asked what would have happened the United States had Lincoln lost. There would, surmised de Valera, have been 'two states who at the very best would be rivals.' Because of the status of the states they probably would be enemies 'incurring unnecessary expenditure on armed forces, separate fiscal and tariff policies,

33. For the party's emphasis on 'normal' political issues, minutes National Executive, 6 Jan. 1927; de Valera to Patrick Brennan, circular letter, 9 Nov. 1926, reprinted in Patrick Brennan, 'Founding of Fianna Fail: the full story', Sunday Independent, 14 Mar. 1976.

34. Interview to Telegrafen Union, Berlin, reported The Times, 23 Aug. 1928.

35. What follows is based on all speeches, statements and interviews by de Valera, as reported in the Irish World, during his American visits. Sympathetic to Fianna Fail, the Irish World claimed to publish 'exclusive statements and reports' of de Valera's tour, 26 Mar. 1927.

36. See for instance, Irish World, 26 Mar., 16 and 30 Apr., 7 May 1927.

and - an argument likely to appeal to American audiences at the time - suffering from too much government.

Many of the points he made during this tour were familiar to his Irish audiences: that Partition was not essentially a religious question;³⁷ that it resulted wholly from British policy which through Clause 12 of the Treaty had been designed 'to make it permanent'; that Irish public opinion had accepted the Boundary Commission agreement of 1925 because of their mistaken belief that 'there would be a complete wiping off of all further payments to England.'³⁸ Further, he suggested that an all-Ireland plebiscite would give 'an overwhelming majority' for unity,³⁹ their being, at most, only two counties which would favour Craig's government.⁴⁰

His utopian streak also found expression in America: on his 1927 tour he stated:

We can support in Ireland not merely the four and a quarter millions we have, but we can support the sixteen millions we should have. Economists have calculated that Ireland can support a population of from sixteen to twenty millions of people.⁴¹

He believed Ireland potentially self-sufficient and insisted that a Fianna Fail government would pursue a rigorous protectionist policy.⁴² Ireland could feed, clothe and house her population, he said, adding in a revealing phrase, that this could be achieved 'even if a wall a thousand feet high were put around our island and I believe there is hardly another country that could do it.'⁴³

(e) A more 'hawkish' line to his American audiences?

Among the Irish-Americans there was a strong lobby for the use of force against Northern Ireland: and at a first reading, de Valera's contribution to this debate in America seems to classify him as a 'hawk'. But a more careful examination usually shows him insisting on a distinction between the moral justification for force - an argument he largely approved - and the rejection of force on the grounds that it would be counterproductive. Remembering this context, what did de Valera say on force to his Irish-American audiences? In 1927 he asked a Boston audience

Do you think that the Irish people are so mean that after all this fighting for seven and a half centuries they are now going to be content to have six counties of their ancient territory cut off?⁴⁴

The press reported 'No' and 'Never' coming from thousands of throats.' A New York audience heard his familiar metaphor:

We have a point in front of us that the enemy cannot strengthen. We are strong enough in Ireland to break it down (applause) and when we have broken

37. Ibid., 23 Apr. 1927.

38. Ibid., 16 Apr. 1927.

39. Ibid., 7 May 1927.

40. Ibid., 16 Apr. 1927.

41. Ibid., 6 May 1927.

42. Ibid., 30 Apr. 1927.

43. Ibid., 6 May 1927.

44. Ibid., 26 Mar. 1927.

it down are you going to tell me that the conquering army is going to stop at that point? It is not!⁴⁵

In seven speeches of his 1927 tour he stated or implied that peace could not be established so long as Partition lasted.⁴⁶ Yet these quotations, while bellicose, did not advocate force. The unstoppable 'conquering army' after all was composed of the 'Soldiers of Destiny' - the Fianna Fail party. A Chicago audience on the same tour was told that British troops garrisoned in Northern Ireland, were 'within an hour's march of our capital.' If foreign troops were within an hour's march of Washington, he asked

an hour's march with their armoured cars and their tanks, would you permit a foreign power to maintain their troops there? You would not as long as you were able at all to drive them out! So it is with Ireland to-day.⁴⁷

Three years later on his next extended American tour, de Valera's speeches on Ulster have changed little: but if anything he is even more explicit about the threat to the Free State posed by the British troops in Northern Ireland. Partition - Britain's 'greatest crime' - had as its 'only object' the securing in Ireland of 'a safe base - a bridgehead across the Irish sea - from which her troops could pour over the whole island at will.'⁴⁸ And it was on this tour that, of all his American speeches during these years, he came closest to approving a policy of force to end Partition. At Brooklyn on the eve of St. Patrick's Day, 1930 he said:

As long as a British soldier remains in Ireland...as long as our country is partitioned, no Irishman can say that this is the final settlement of Ireland's claim to nationhood... Every Irishman worthy of the name, no matter where he may be, lives in the hope that there will be a battle of Clontarf for the British as there was for the Danes.

Earlier in the speech he had claimed that the Irish victory at Clontarf had 'smashed the Danish Empire...'. Later he added that British troops were still in the north 'because at the present time we are not able to put them out.'⁴⁹

It must be remembered that these speeches were being made to audiences whose support for de Valera's particular approach to establishing the Republic was conditional and relatively fickle. Furthermore, de Valera knew that if the dollars collected by this community for the Republican cause did not come to him, they would, in all probability, be diverted to the IRA. As McGarrity's letters to him reveal, there was already some resentment against de Valera's use of such funds for political propaganda, for fighting elections, even for language lessons. The subscribers whilst accepting that Republicans in Ireland must decide how best to spend the dollars, clearly preferred what was popularly termed 'one more round with John Bull'.⁵⁰ No matter how 'hawkish' his American speeches might appear - and they would have been enough for an Ulster Unionist to classify him

45. Ibid., 26 May 1927.

46. Speeches at Boston, reported ibid., 26 Mar.; Rochester, Minneapolis, and Butte, ibid., 16 Apr; Oakland, ibid., 23 Apr.; Chicago, ibid., 30 Apr.; and New York, ibid., 7 May 1927.

47. Ibid., 30 Apr. 1927.

48. Ibid., 3 May 1930; see also ibid., 22 Mar. and 5 Apr. 1930.

49. Ibid., 22 Mar. 1930.

50. Based on McGarrity to de Valera of 23 June 1923, McGarrity papers, NLI ms. 17,440, and letters of 5 June 1925, 23 Dec. 1927, 10 Jan. and 25 Sept. 1928, 2 Oct. 1933, ibid., ms. 17,441; also de Valera to McGarrity, 30 Apr., 28 June and 20 Dec. 1927, ibid.

as, at least, a 'fellow-traveller' - his true position was represented in a letter of April 1927 to McGarrity:

I know what I am doing and I know what the Clan exists for. Take this as an axiom: in the present circumstances, unless those who stand for the Republican cause can get a majority of the elected representatives of the people on their side, there can be no success for force. A successful Civil War, with England on the side of those opposed to the Republic, cannot be waged. Those who think it can had better be brought down to the hard facts of the situation.⁵¹

(f) The eve of power: the 1931 Ard Fheis.

The sixth Ard Fheis of the party held in October 1931 was known to be the last before Cumann na nGaedheal would be obliged to call an election. In fact, Fianna Fail were to be in government within three months. Consequently, the Partition debate at this Ard Fheis is a useful indication of the range of opinion within the party on Ulster at this time. The general note struck by de Valera - not surprisingly given the context - seems geared to curb the expectations of the more naive faction in the party while further reassuring the voters that Fianna Fail was not the revolutionary party of gunmen portrayed in Cumann na nGaedheal publicity. Any incoming government, de Valera informed the Ard Fheis, needed plans when facing serious problems:

The first step is to get a clear understanding of the data in each case, and to face all the facts without blinking. To ignore the data, to adopt an ostrich policy in regard to any of them, to be content with phrases applicable to past conditions only, is to court failure.

Given his ascendancy in the party, it cannot have been easy to criticise de Valera on the Partition issue at an Ard Fheis: yet, in 1931, perhaps tentatively, but consistently, speakers did voice their doubts. One TD, Dr. Conor Ward, said he was 'not quite satisfied' with de Valera's Partition policy. He did not think it would succeed. Besides, he added, and this was the unkindest cut of all, de Valera's policy 'sounded too much like the policy enunciated by the members of the Free State executive.' He agreed that force 'would never solve the problem...'. Still Fianna Fail needed 'a more determined programme.' Revd. James Kelly, a delegate from Co. Galway, suggested that 'mild persuasion' should be used against the Ulster unionists. 'The resources of civilization were not exhausted, and various measures had been used before with very salutary effect!' Seven speakers - including two TDs and three members of the National Executive - are reported in the Irish Press as expressing broad sympathy with the IRA, then the target of Emergency legislation by the Cosgrave government. Dr. Con Murphy of the National Executive said the IRA

had a moral right to resist foreign domination, and in that they were one with Fianna Fail, but it should be pointed out to them that the means they were adopting would never bring about success in their object.⁵² Their only hope was to put in power a Dail representing the Irish people.

51. De Valera to McGarrity, 30 Apr. 1927, McGarrity papers, NLI ms 17,441.

52. Irish Press, 28 Oct. 1931

De Valera, in his reply to this debate, spent considerable time explaining on what grounds he denied the IRA the right to take life. The arms dumped after the Civil War were never, he said, intended for

class warfare or for civil war - they were for the one purpose of supporting a Republican State if the people decided to establish that state (applause). If the Republican State is again established it will be done by Dail Eireann and the majority will be behind it and in that event he did not think they would lack the necessary weapons.

De Valera was speaking here at a time of apprehension by the bishops and others that the IRA's links with communism were a new threat to the status quo. He may well have shared some of these same fears himself: he was certainly aware of the damage to his own political prospects of being linked with the extreme left: he might convince the electorate that he was not a communist; but could he deny that his advent to power would be aided by the extreme Republican left who perhaps hoped that he would play the role of a Kerensky? De Valera specifically rejected such a role, denying the suggestion that if Fianna Fail achieved power they 'would be a mere stalking horse for some other people': nor would a Fianna Fail government fail in its duty to maintain order - though he added a specific promise that, in office, his government would repeal the 'recent Coercion Act'.⁵³ His strategy encompassed winning power, abolishing the Oath and then calling a further election at which those republicans with scruples about the Oath would have an 'opportunity for securing representation.'

His tone - didactic and persistent - at this Ard Fheis emphasised the need for realism: 'We must be very careful or we will let our sympathies run away with us on matters of right and wrong'; 'It is just as well that there should be no loose thinking...We are not play-acting in this organization'; specifically on Partition, he could 'see no immediate solution of that problem'; and, replying to the criticism of his Ulster policy, he said he was trying to get the party 'to face the situation as it was...'. If he could point to no effective way to end Partition, he wanted to point to 'ways which most certainly would not end it.' Force was 'out of the question. Were it feasible, it would not be desirable.' De Valera contented himself with a vague aspiration:

The only hope that I can see now for the re-union of our people is good government in the twenty-six counties and such social and economic conditions here as will attract the majority in the Six Counties to throw in their lot with us.⁵⁴

This point, so often quoted, has not been placed in the generally pessimistic context in which it was offered: that of 'no immediate solution' being available to the party.⁵⁵ Nor can it be considered as benign a scenario as might be construed from its usual citation: in response to calls - from, among others, Dr. Ward, TD and Senator Connolly - that the party should use the 'economic weapon to bring about the unity of the country',⁵⁶ de Valera suggested a course of action which would appeal even less to Ulster unionists than his hope that, in time, they might - through self-interest - 'throw in their lot' with the south.

53. Ibid., 29 Oct. 1931.

54. Ibid., 28 Oct. 1931.

55. Conor Cruise O'Brien, States of Ireland, (London:1972) p.187.

56. Ward's phrase, Irish Press, 28 Oct. 1931.

He explained that Fianna Fail's tariff policy

was intended to make certain that no outsider would live upon them as long as their own people were not able to get a living for themselves (loud applause). Clearly, if the people of the Six Counties continued to separate themselves, that policy would have to operate against them as it would against the British and other peoples.⁵⁷

There was nothing in any of this to reassure the Ulster unionists - already wary of the possibility that Fianna Fail might win power at the forthcoming Free State election.⁵⁸ At this Ard Fheis the party revealed antipathy, even hostility towards Ulster: de Valera might see himself as the realist attempting to educate an ill-informed party on the complexities of the Ulster question; but his own Ulster policy was seen by the unionists as naive, hostile, and, above all, irrelevant. Nor would they have been impressed by his repetition at one controversial point in the proceedings that his fundamental touchstone remained what it had been in 1917: '...I declared that, if all came to all, I was a Catholic first. (applause).'⁵⁹

(g) Fianna Fail's anti-Partitionism as aspirational politics.

Although the Partition question had become relatively quiescent since the Boundary Commission debacle, Fianna Fail had, by now, established themselves as the leading advocates of Irish unification. Although anxious to place the electoral emphasis on more immediate, attainable goals, the party consistently argued that they alone could undo Partition; de Valera tended to be less certain about when this might be accomplished and spent a considerable proportion of his energy attempting to quieten the party rank and file on the question. Essentially, Fianna Fail's anti-Partitionism was now aspirational in character. Frankel has usefully divided the policies of political parties - especially in the foreign policy context - as expressing essentially aspirational or operational interests. His characterisation of aspirational interests provides a succinct and, it seems, accurate summary of Fianna Fail's unification policy at this important juncture, the eve of the party's accession to power. Indeed Frankel generalises that aspirational interests 'command more attention from an opposition free of the restraints of, and the preoccupation with, the tasks of governing than from the actual government'. Although the incoming Fianna Fail government in 1932 was to open the Partition question with Britain, shortly after assuming office, it can retrospectively be seen - and in particular, it was true of de Valera's own emphasis - that the experience of office made the party more quiescent and realistic on the issue. While in opposition, Fianna Fail's goal of Irish unity seems to 'fit' Frankel's typology of aspirational interests. For Fianna Fail, Irish unity was a 'long-term interest', 'rooted in history...', of particular concern to that extremist faction within the party 'concerned with ideological purity': moreover, the aspiration provided 'purpose or direction, or at the

57. Irish Press, 28 Oct. 1931.

58. David Harkness, 'Unionist reaction: bitterness and hostility', Irish Times, 19 May 1976, supplement.

59. Irish Press, 29 Oct. 1931.

least, a sense of hope...'; it was not 'fully articulated and co-ordinated...' and it contained contradictions; it could be believed in without being costed or being the subject of a 'feasibility study'; and it meets Frankel's concluding point: that aspirational interests are determined

by political will rather than by capabilities - ideology is a strong determinant. The influence of power is ambivalent: while an ambition may be due to the people's awareness of the power of their state, it can be likewise due to their awareness of their powerlessness and their escape into day-dreams....⁶⁰

60. Joseph Frankel, National interest, (London:1970) pp.32-3.

(i) Aspirational or Operational Politics: De Valera's Choice in Office

Only once during his long public career did Eamon de Valera ever discuss the Irish Question with the leader of Ulster Unionism: that was at his ninety minute meeting with James Craig in May 1921. After it he wrote

I do not see any hope of ending the struggle with England through a prior agreement with a Unionist minority. At bottom the question is an Irish-English one and the solution must be sought in the larger general play of English interest.¹

It was de Valera's constant assertion that Britain had originally fomented religious tensions in Ulster in order to divide Irishmen; that the culmination of this policy was Partition; and that the motive throughout, was to secure her strategic interests in the Atlantic. His own conviction was that this policy was counter-productive and that Partition, in fact, led to instability within Ireland which could be exploited by Britain's enemies. Once in power, in 1932, he set out to convince the British government that their strategic interests would be best served by a stable, peaceful, independent and united Ireland.

In power, consistent with Frankel's thesis,² Fianna Fail experienced the pull of operational interests, although in their particular case there was a continuing and considerable emphasis on the fundamental aspirations of the party: these were central to its self-esteem and indeed to its credibility with its own supporters, many of whom, according to Sean T.O'Kelly, were suffering from a Republican inferiority complex.³ De Valera also had the acquiescence or conditional support of some republicans still outside Fianna Fail. The IRA had helped the Fianna Fail election machine to victory and de Valera had hopes of uniting all republicans behind - if not necessarily within - Fianna Fail. His hopes of weaning some of the more extreme republicans from their belief that physical force might prove the best means to undo Partition turned on the credibility of his constitutional methods to dismantle the Treaty and pursue the Republic.⁴

As has already been shown, de Valera had defined, in 1921, the maximum concessions which might be made to Ulster: and this was before the Treaty had been signed. Often suspected by republicans of being too moderate, he had managed in the intervening decade to retain the essentials of his Ulster policy - local autonomy devolved from Dublin and external association for the whole island. More aware than his followers of the difficulties of achieving this goal, he was content to postpone the Ulster question to the last item on the agenda. While assuaging the activists within Fianna Fail, comforting the northern nationalists, and virtually ignoring the Ulster unionists, he retained

1. De Valera to O'Connor, May 1921, Longford and O'Neill (1970:123).

2. See Ch.3:xi above.

3. O'Kelly at Ard Fheis, Irish Press, 9 Nov. 1933.

4. At one of Fianna Fail's earliest cabinet meetings, it was decided that a proposed parade and meeting of released Republican prisoners should not be interfered with, 'observation being sufficient'. SPO CAB 1/4, 12 Mar. 1932

personal control of Fianna Fail's Partition policy, clearly believing that the most appropriate forum for tackling Partition was through secret diplomacy between himself and the British government. Moreover, there were many other aspects of Anglo-Irish relations which needed revision and many of them - unlike Partition - permitted initiatives which could be taken unilaterally. For two such changes - abolition of the Oath and non-payment of the land annuities - he could claim a mandate at the polls: further, he had made a specific electoral promise not to introduce any other constitutional changes without again consulting the electorate.

This incremental, gradualist approach to the Republic held many advantages for de Valera: it enabled him to test the temper of the British government; it was more congenial to an essentially conservative electorate; and it kept some desirable goals within that electorate's reach, always provided that they kept de Valera in power. Moreover, for as long as Fianna Fail kept the nation 'on the march', the scepticism of the party's republican critics could be discounted. Above all, given his own conviction that there was no immediate solution to Partition, an agenda full of other business where successes were possible had obvious political advantages.

In conflict with the British government within weeks of his election victory and in negotiation with them by July, de Valera was anxious to debate 'fundamentals' including Partition; but if this proved, at least for the moment, non-negotiable, he was willing to pursue a policy of 'nibbling' at an agenda which he, after all, had unilaterally defined.⁵

(ii) Anglo-Irish Relations

(a) British perception of de Valera

Whatever the British cabinet's reaction to Smuts' advice that de Valera was 'a lunatic', they most certainly hoped that the South African statesman was correct in his prediction that de Valera would prove to be 'merely a transient apparition.'¹ The British government was alarmed at de Valera's election: they saw him as the bogeyman of Irish nationalism who had militarily failed to wreck the 1921 Treaty and who was now determined to achieve this goal by re-writing Anglo-Irish relations according to his alternative to that Treaty - Document No.2. Whereas de Valera needed to stir up Anglo-Irish relations, the British instinct was to hope that the Treaty settlement had mellowed by default into a solution. Ireland had settled down and no longer obtruded in British politics. Indeed Irish affairs had merited only six mentions in the British cabinet minutes in 1930 and

5. PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)26 and 58; also CAB 27/526 ISC(32)87 annex III.

1. Smuts on 20 May 1932 to the British High Commissioner in South Africa, suggesting he relay the verdict to the British government, PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)23.

again in 1931:² in 1932, with de Valera at the helm, the cabinet index lists forty three cabinet conclusions concerning Ireland.³ Ill-prepared for the electoral success of what the cabinet secretariat termed Count de Valera's party, the British lacked political intelligence on the situation in the Irish Free State.⁴

As a political adversary, and, in particular, as a negotiator, British ministers found de Valera incomprehensible: Baldwin thought him 'impossible';⁵ Thomas and Hailsham considered him 'a complete dreamer, and with no grasp of realities...';⁶ Ramsay MacDonald wrote of his 'mentality which simply baffles one in its lack of reason...'.⁷ This picture of de Valera was confirmed for British ministers by their informants in the Irish Free State: Lord Granard, for instance, acting as an intermediary,⁸ found de Valera '...a most curious personality' and 'certainly not normal'. He reported to London that he found de Valera

on the border line between genius and insanity. I have met men of many countries and have been Governor of a Lunatic Asylum, but I have never met anybody like the President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State before. I hope that the Almighty does not create any more of the same pattern and that he will remain content with this one example.⁸

This dismissal of de Valera as an impractical eccentric permeated the British political elite; for as long as there was any prospect of his electoral defeat, the British remained reluctant to become embroiled in negotiations with him.¹⁰ The Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, confided to a friend that with de Valera in power, the Free State represented '...a tragedy in the impractical.' He also identified what so often annoyed British negotiators - de Valera's preoccupation with historical grievances.

He begins somewhere about the birth of Christ and wants a commission of four picked solely to give individual opinions to explore the past centuries and all he demands is a document, a manifesto, a judgment as from God himself as to how the world, and more particularly Ireland, should have been ruled when they were all cutting each others throats and writing beautiful missives at the same time. It makes one sick. Behind it is the romance of force and of arms - shooting, murdering and being murdered. It is a gay adventure of the fool put into a china shop in hobnail boots with liberty to smash.¹¹

Such intense frustration on the British side is explicable given their realisation that de Valera was intent not only to change the rules in the game of Anglo-Irish relations but then to insist on a replay of the 1921 negotiations.

It was not, then, on the merits of his arguments that de Valera was taken seriously in London; but rather in the keen awareness by Whitehall of the

2. For 1930, PRO CAB 23/63ff; for 1931, CAB 23/66ff.

3. PRO CAB 23/70ff.

4. Meanwhile King George V thought it 'a pity' that Fianna Fail was led by a man who was 'not an Irishman at all.' Dulanty to Walshe, 18 Jan. 1932, quoted in Deirdre MacMahon, 'Anglo-Irish relations: 1932-38', Ph.D thesis, Cambridge University, 1979, p.11, hereafter, MacMahon:1979.

5. W.P.Crozier, 'Off the record: political interviews: 1933-43, ed. A.J.P.Taylor (London:1973) p.27, hereafter Crozier:1973.

6. PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)26.

7. MacDonald to the Archbishop of York, 13 Sept. 1932, Ramsay MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/2/35. References to MacDonald papers refers to Ramsay's not Malcolm's.

8. Who invariably wanted the return of a Cosgrave government.

9. PRO CAB 27/526 ISC(32)86 Annex II.

10. PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)36.

11. MacDonald to Sir Abe Bailey, 22 July 1932, MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/6/35.

interdependence of the two countries and of the potential damage which an unstable Free State could do to Britain's trade, to her strategic interests, to the nature of dominion status, and, not least, to Ulster.¹² Indeed in some quarters, there seems to have been a fear that the incoming Dublin government might sanction force against Northern Ireland - a possibility which de Valera was careful to deny in two press interviews.¹³ Nevertheless, 'Defence of the Border' was soon tabled for discussion by the Northern Ireland cabinet;¹⁴ and British ministers discussing the change of government in Dublin noted that 'An armed attack on Ulster was not, however, anticipated' - a comment which suggests that it was considered, at least, in the realm of the possible.¹⁵ Although the Northern Ireland cabinet also thought an attack from the south unlikely, the tone of their discussion emphasises the considerable apprehension then felt on all sides concerning the maintenance of peace in Ireland.¹⁶ From de Valera's viewpoint, he had to consider not only the tensions within the south, but also the possibility of an IRA campaign against the north and the fact that the British government refused to rule out war with the Free State when he had asked what their response would be if his government were unilaterally to secede from the Commonwealth.¹⁷ More often thought of as a 'fellow-traveller' of the IRA than their implacable opponent, as he undoubtedly was by this stage, it took de Valera some years to convince the British that his policy was to stabilise the Free State and then to seek the elements of his controversial alternative to the Treaty, Document No.2.

b) The Irish Situation Committee

Reluctantly, but inexorably, the British were obliged by de Valera to reconsider questions which they had supposed closed with the agreements of 1921 and 1925. Shortly after his accession to power they established a specialist cabinet committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, to be known as the Irish Situation Committee, which had the responsibility of 'coming to terms with Mr. de Valera's Government on the various outstanding issues - constitutional, financial, defence and economic.'¹⁸ After exactly six years in existence, this committee was declared defunct with the signing of the 1938 Anglo-Irish agreement. Irish historians can be grateful that the formulation of policy on the British side was delegated to such a specialist committee: without question the 'best evidence' for this critical and formative period in Anglo-Irish relations can be found in the minutes of the Irish Situation Committee's forty-four meetings,¹⁹

12. 'Situation arising from Mr de Valera's pronouncements'. Memo. by the Prime Minister, 30 Mar. 1932, PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)4; also CAB 64/34 CP 15(37). For Smuts' fears, Smuts papers, vol.49, reel 252, no.769, July 1932.

13. News Chronicle, 17 Feb. 1932; Irish Press, 17 Mar. 1932.

14. PRONI CAB 4/303/31, 22 June 1932.

15. PRO CAB 23/70 14(32)10.

16. N.I. cabinet, 22 June 1932, PRONI CAB 4/303/31.

17. PRO CAB 27/523 ISC(32)18th meeting, 30 Nov. 1933.

18. Explanatory note, Irish Situation Committee (hereafter ISC) PRO CAB 27/522.

19. Minutes in PRO CAB 27/523-4.

its 141 internal memoranda,²⁰ the various position papers on Ireland circulated to the cabinet,²¹ the minutes and other papers covering the 1938 negotiations,²² and the voluminous Irish files in the Dominions Office.²³ Nothing comparable was committed to paper on the Irish side:²⁴ and much of what remains closed, since only those departmental papers circulated to the Irish cabinet have, thus far, been opened for research and it was not de Valera's habit to discuss all details of his policy with cabinet colleagues.

Obviously caution must be observed in attempting to delineate de Valera's policy on Ulster from the papers, no matter how comprehensive, which have survived on the British side. It would clearly be more satisfactory if the Department of External Affairs files and those for the Department of the Taoiseach were open for research, irrespective of how much, or, of how little, they reveal. Another disappointment is that de Valera's own papers are still not available: this is especially true since it would seem from the sources quoted in the Longford, O'Neill biography, that the de Valera archive contains some material which more properly should be in the State's custody.²⁵ Of course the British files do contain what formal documents and letters were submitted by de Valera; further, some of the minutes of formal meetings were circulated to the Irish side and, although drafted by British civil servants, may be considered agreed minutes, since no objection to them seems to have subsequently come from Dublin.²⁶

Another factor which must be considered in this context is that many of the most significant exchanges during this period took place at private off-the-record meetings between de Valera and his opposite number in Britain, whether the Prime Minister, or, more often, the Dominions Secretary. His biographers publish some of de Valera's accounts of these meetings, but, again, the British official papers provide the most comprehensive evidence. One further point should be made: a comparison between British and Irish cabinet minutes reveals very clearly how 'open' the British government system was in the formulation of policy and how secretive, by comparison, was the Irish approach. Contributory factors must have included the much smaller numbers involved in the Irish civil service, the tendency towards secrecy which derived from the 1919-21 period of 'catacomb' government and the fact that de Valera was both head of the government and minister in charge of foreign policy - he did not have to exchange memoranda with himself! But the most significant explanation seems to be caution on de Valera's part in handling what were extremely sensitive issues as secretly as possible. Much of the detail may have been known, on the Irish side, only to J.P.Walshe,

20. PRO CAB 27/525-7.

21. See PRO CAB 27/522.

22. Ch.5:ii, below; minutes are in PRO CAB 27/642.

23. These are in the D.O. series in the PRO.

24. Interview with Maurice Moynihan.

25. See comments by Deirdre MacMahon, 'Malcolm MacDonald and Anglo-Irish relations: 1935-38', MA thesis, UCD, 1975, p.284. Hereafter, MacMahon:1975.

26. R.B.Howarth, secretary to the ISC, PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)70 IN(32) 3rd meeting.

27. Interview with Maurice Moynihan.

Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, and to J.W.Dulanty, the Irish High Commissioner in London: and even they, on occasions, were not privy to direct talks between de Valera and British ministers. It should be remembered that the diplomatic and political skills which de Valera's policy called for were considerable. Indeed, many might argue that he was attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable: the Republic with Irish unity; independence with the benefits of external association.

c) The Partition question: agreeing to disagree

Partition, although the most intractable problem in Anglo-Irish relations, was not the main preoccupation on the British side. De Valera consistently argued that any settlement which ignored it, could not result in the 'friendly neighbour' policy which he sought with Britain: then, having recorded his fundamental objection he acquiesced in its postponement to the realms of 'future business'. Although he would, anyway, have been obliged by British pressure to accept such a course, it seems clear that, for his own part, de Valera was content to bide his time on Partition.

With some deliberation he had placed little emphasis on Irish unity during the 1932 election campaign:²⁸ at its close, when asked by the News Chronicle if a Fianna Fail government would 'take immediate steps to a(b)olish the Boundary', he reiterated his abhorrence of Partition but added that 'we can only protest', admitting that there were 'no effective steps that we can take to abolish the Boundary. Force is out of the question.'²⁹ And at his first press conference after his election victory, his Ulster policy was again scrutinised. Asked specifically if he intended making any representations to Ulster he replied that he did not

see any way in which we can make them effectively. There are no steps so far as I can see, which we can take to change a situation which I regard as disastrous.

Asked how his protectionist economic policies might affect Ulster he expressed regret that the north's existing industry and expertise could not form part of Fianna Fail's proposed programme of native industrialization: 'In order to protect those industries against the Six Counties' he warned, 'we will have to set up a rigid barrier to trade...'.³⁰

It should be remembered that the electorate which finally returned de Valera to the helm of nationalist agitation had been asked for their support on the basis that an incoming Fianna Fail government would limit its unilateral initiatives to the removal of the Oath and the non-payment of the Land Annuities.

28. But at New Ross, de Valera suggested that an incoming Fianna Fail government 'would not be satisfied with the Partition of the country', Irish Times, 25 Jan. 1932. At Kanturk, he criticised the extravagance of having two governments in Ireland and promised a tariff barrier against the north, ibid., 18 Jan. 1932. In the main, his emphasis was on the Oath and Land annuities issues.

29. News Chronicle, 17 Feb. 1932.

30. Irish Press, 17 Mar. 1932.

Both had obvious popular appeal; and along with a programme of 'robust economic nationalism',³¹ they were pitched to succeed with an electorate which was ready for 'more emotion and more drama.'³² For Dublin these two initiatives had the added advantage that they could be introduced unilaterally and, although posing a considerable challenge to Britain, de Valera felt righteously confident that both Irish public opinion - and international opinion, if it came to that - would take his side in any dispute. Once challenged, the British began 'to warn and to lecture.'³³ De Valera, in reply, revealed his full mind: this may have alarmed the British, but it can scarcely have surprised them. De Valera was insisting on nothing less than a renegotiation of the 1921 Treaty. An original draft in his own hand of one communication to London confirms what all other evidence supports: that de Valera was author of his own policy. For Ireland, he argued, the Treaty

has meant the (sic) consummation of the outrage of Partition(;) the cutting off of six of our counties from the motherland (;) the alienation of the most sacred part of the national territory with all the cultural and material loss that this unnatural separation entails.³⁴

The Dominions Secretary, J.H. Thomas in a note to his colleagues on this despatch, commented that 'to anyone with a knowledge of feeling in Northern Ireland' there was 'no conceivable hope' for Irish unity except 'on the basis that its allegiance to the Crown and its relationship with the United Kingdom and the rest of the British Commonwealth will continue unimpaired.'³⁵

Negotiation by ultimatum gave way to direct talks in June when Thomas and Hailsham went to Dublin where they heard de Valera expound on the need for agreement on 'fundamentals' if true friendship between Britain and Ireland was to be established. 'We asked him if he would tell us what he meant by the "fundamentals"' reported Thomas and Hailsham to their colleagues.

He said - "Certainly." They were two - first the reunion of the six counties as to which, he said, Mr. Lloyd George seemed to him in 1921 to have been anxious only to secure the partition of Ireland, and secondly the recognition of the position of Ireland as a Republic.

De Valera went on to detail his theory of external association; both British Ministers had to resist the temptation to interrupt and enter a protest. Instead they asked de Valera to expound on his alternative to a tackling of 'fundamentals': this was what he termed a 'modus vivendi' by which he meant 'the acceptance by the United Kingdom of the abolition of the unjustified payments.' Further, any such agreement 'would only last until a fresh mandate had been secured at another election.'

Thomas and Hailsham considered de Valera sincere but 'a complete dreamer'. However their mission to Dublin, they considered a success: the 'main object' - with which, incidentally, Dulanty was in agreement - was to ensure that any full-scale negotiations should take place in London where Dulanty hoped de Valera

31. Hancock (1937:329).

32. *Ibid.*, b.324.

33. *Ibid.*, p.334.

34: De Valera's holograph draft reply to British government's despatch no. 69 of 23 Mar., Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(12). With the exception of the reference to six counties being cut off from the motherland, this draft forms the basis of the official reply, PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)7.

35. PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)8.

would be free of the influence of the extreme section of his party.³⁶ In the event, the London talks proved abortive; although they confirmed for the British - if they needed confirmation - what de Valera's central preoccupations were. Having indicated that he presumed 'that no useful purpose could be served by his discussing the two "fundamentals"', de Valera

nevertheless...proceeded, for about a quarter of an hour, to develop his ideas as to these, on the same lines as in Dublin.

After he had finished, the Prime Minister said that, in his view, no useful purpose could be served by discussing these "fundamentals" since the British Government could not possibly entertain either.³⁷

Although cordial, the negotiations failed, as did a further attempt to reach some understanding in reopened discussions in October.³⁸ The British were told - whether at de Valera's instigation or not, one cannot say - by Dulanty in June,³⁹ and by Walshe in October,⁴⁰ that the experience of office had greatly altered de Valera.⁴¹ Sir John Simon, noted de Valera's insistence that he 'was a realist and not a theorist' and would always have men on his left;⁴² Hailsham, whose views on de Valera were 'rabid',⁴³ remained sceptical, believing that de Valera, having failed to get a slogan from the London talks, was now looking for an election issue.⁴⁴ Partition was not on the agenda during the four sessions of negotiations in October. As they concluded in failure, de Valera reminded the British that the issue would be central to any overall settlement. For as long as partition lasted 'the majority of Irishmen would take advantage of any opportunity to re-open that question.'⁴⁵

(d) Dominions Office intelligence on de Valera's Partition policy

That Irish unity was a distant prospect - and distinctly less likely, given the trend of de Valera's policies - was unquestioned in London. Although their files included cuttings of de Valera's main speeches,⁴⁶ there was other evidence which enabled the Dominions Office 'to read between the lines' of his public condemnations of Partition. In two instances they were literally enabled to read between the lines when transcripts, corrected by de Valera, of two comprehensive interviews were passed to them for their information.⁴⁷ The Dominions Office clearly welcomed details of the 'not uninteresting' interview which Mr Lias, the European Correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor, brought to Whitehall

36. Ibid., ISC(32)26.

37. PRO CAB 27/522 CP 206(32).

38. PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)70.

39. Ibid., ISC(32)25.

40. PRO CAB 27/523 ISC(32)15th meeting.

41. Dulanty and Walshe may well have been prompted by de Valera to reassure London. Similar points were made by de Valera himself to Peters, PRO DO 35/397/11111/36; and to a visitor from the Conservative Party's research department, unsigned note of an interview with de Valera, 30 Mar. 1932, Baldwin papers, CUL vol.101.

42. PRO CAB 27/523 ISC(32)15th meeting.

43. Interview with Malcolm MacDonald.

44. As note 40 above.

45. PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)70, IN(32)4th meeting, 15 Oct. 1932.

46. Usually taken from the Irish Press.

47. Lias' interview with de Valera, Feb. 1933, PRO DO 35/398/11111/399; interview between de Valera and A.E.Jones, 18 Oct. 1934, DO 35/890/X1/15.

on his return from Dublin; but the 'most interesting part' was de Valera's amendments in which he had 'considerably toned down' some statements, which, however, Lias had 'no doubt' had been made at the original interview.⁴⁸ De Valera, claiming that he had not changed his views on Ulster 'at all', since his interview for the same newspaper in 1918⁴⁹ emphasised that the boundary was 'entirely artificial, fostered by British money and British influence in the alleged interest of "minorities".' Having emphasised the importance and indeed the inevitability of unity, de Valera was asked whether the Ulster question might not be better

settled by degrees - the North (being) gradually brought back into the southern fold, as it were?

"Sometimes it is better to do these things all at once," riposted the President without committing himself to saying that this was one such time.

"Are you going to take this question up with the British Government(?"

"I think it would be unwise for me to say what I am going to do about that."

Despite the emphasis on the non-committal nature of de Valera's responses, he suggested no amendments to this section; elsewhere, however, he seems to have been keen to emphasise that Partition was subsidised by Britain - a charge which, incidentally, the governments in both Belfast and London were always at pains to deny in the 1930s, but which, particularly with the completion of the new parliament buildings at Stormont, became an issue among nationalists. Claiming that without the southern market, the north would eventually find itself economically 'strangled', de Valera added the qualification that this would be so 'in the absence of foreign (sic) aid...'; and in a later addition to the text, he revealed the same preoccupation by suggesting that if 'British influence and British financial contributions' were withdrawn,

the force of common interest, the natural interdependence of the two parts of the country and the sentiment of nationality would work irresistibly for the restoration of the unity destroyed by British policy in 1920.⁵⁰

There was no suggestion here, that Britain could, unilaterally, end Partition forthwith: likewise, there was nothing to offend a Fianna Fail supporter, confident that such a solution was available to Britain. In October 1934, when questioned about the 'the very serious difficulty of Ulster' by the Welsh mine-owner, A.E. Jones, de Valera replied in terms of north and south protecting their respective minorities; and, making special criticism of Stormont's abolition of proportional representation, he added the comment that 'he had no room for dictatorships.' His only two amendments to the typescript on this occasion both emphasised his willingness to grant local autonomy to the north.⁵¹

Despite the nadir then reached in Anglo-Irish relations, indirect contacts were not discouraged by either side. As early as the summer of 1933, P.J. Fleming 'a friend and intimate' of de Valera's and acting with his knowledge but without any 'express authority...', paid two visits to the Dominions Office in Whitehall.

48. PRO DO 35/398/11111/399.

49. Christian Science Monitor, 15 May 1918.

50. PRO DO 35/398/11111/399.

51. PRO DO 35/890/X1/15.

Assuring Harding that it would '"not be a waste of time"' for Britain to consider his proposals, Fleming sought a settlement of the economic war, repeatedly pressed for the replacement of the Treaty by Document No.2, and suggested that it should be publicly declared that, if the north consented, Britain would not veto a united Ireland. In response, Harding argued that there could be no useful discussion of Irish unity 'except on the basis of a satisfactory settlement of the constitutional position in the Irish Free State.'⁵² Invariably, Dublin's response to such arguments was also to insist on linking Partition with the wider questions in Anglo-Irish relations; constantly, London was reminded in these years that, for as long as British policy rested on the Treaty and included Partition, there would remain in Ireland, as Walshe put it privately to Batterbee, a 'slumbering revolt.'⁵³

Against this, it must also have become clear to the British government that de Valera himself - for all his rhetoric - was willing to proceed cautiously on the Partition question. While his aspirations for a united Ireland 'baffled' some of the informants of the Dominions Office,⁵⁴ there was also on their files sufficient reliable evidence to allow the British to appreciate the difficulties inherent in de Valera's position as the leader of a party pledged to remove the Border. Justice Wylie, on official business in London, representing the Free State's Customs authorities, was confidentially asked by Batterbee, if de Valera 'really believed that he could win over Ulster to the idea of an all-Ireland republic.' Wylie felt certain that

in his own heart Mr. De Valera must know that the idea was absurd. In view, however, of the promises he had held out to his followers. It was impossible for him to make any such admission.⁵⁵

Nor was there anything in Dulanty's communication with the Dominions Office to seriously contradict this impression: but this is not to suggest that de Valera's High Commissioner in London, was not constantly seeking some 'movement' on Partition. However the modesty of Dublin's short-term expectations is revealed in Harding's note of a conversation with Dulanty in February 1934. Dulanty urged the British to prevent a 'drift' to the Republic, by publicly ruling out a veto on a united Ireland within the Commonwealth provided that this 'were Northern Ireland's own wish...'. At another stage in the conversation, as Harding notes, Dulanty 'went rather further' hinting at the possibility of a flat statement of approval by Britain for a united Ireland within the Commonwealth but without mentioning a veto for Ulster; however he then realized that 'any statement of this kind was not within the realms of practical politics.'⁵⁶

Some months later, after another conversation with Dulanty - who had just returned from Dublin - Harding noted that, to the Irish High Commissioner, de Valera now seemed to have

what might be described as a dual outlook. The first was that which he had always had - belief in a Republic of Ireland as his ultimate political aim.

52. PRO DO 35/398/11111/463 and -/473.

53. Walshe to Batterbee, 11 Nov. 1933, PRO DO 35/398/11111A/93.

54. Report from Hall, an Australian history student, PRO DO 35/398/11111/454.

55. Batterbee's note of conversation with Justice Wylie, 3 Aug. 1933, PRO DO 35/398/11111/466.

56. Harding's note of talk with Dulanty, 19 Feb. 1934, PRO DO 35/398/11111A/55.

The second was that of a man who believed that a Republic of 26 counties was not a satisfactory solution, who felt that a Republic of 32 counties was unlikely during his lifetime, and who, as a responsible political leader, was determined to do his utmost to avoid a civil war.⁵⁷

It was some time before this pragmatic and pacific side to de Valera was appreciated in London, although for his own part, he seems to have been anxious to bring it to their earliest attention. Within days of winning the 1932 election he had called in the most senior British official in Dublin, the United Kingdom Trade Commissioner, William Peters, who had duly reported to the Dominions Office that he well understood de Valera's 'real object' in talking to him: '...to disabuse H.M.G. of the idea that he was a firebrand looking for a second round with England...'. Furthermore, on Partition, Peters had then reported that de Valera had told him that there was 'no question of an immediate settlement' and although the question 'stood at the back of everything it had to be left out of account so far as immediate relations with Great Britain were concerned.'⁵⁸

(e) A 'Two Dominions' solution?

One detailed proposal for a settlement of Partition, was mooted towards the close of Thomas's tenancy of the Dominions Office. It was forwarded to Thomas in March 1935 by Lord Granard, an ubiquitous figure, who combined being an Anglo-Irish landlord and Free State Senator, with being Deputy Leader of the House of Lords and Master of the King's Horse.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, given his class and background, Granard's sympathies were pro-British, his estimate of de Valera being that he was abnormal, somewhere '...between genius and insanity'.⁶⁰ Granard's own merits, according to Lord Sankey,⁶¹ were not that he was 'endowed with celestial wisdom' but that he has 'means of seeing people on both sides'; Sankey did not suspect him of having 'a foot in both camps...'.⁶² Granard in forwarding the proposed scheme for Irish unity to Thomas, informed him that the two delegates, one of whom was 'in touch with Mr de Valera and is a personal friend of his', had asked him 'to put it into the hands of a (British) Cabinet Minister' and had also hoped that the King would see it. The delegates had claimed to Granard that their scheme 'would have the approval of the Irish Government... and would settle the Irish deadlock provided that the British and the Northern Governments would assent to it.'⁶³

The proposals advocated the establishment of a sovereign, federal, Irish Commonwealth, composed of two Dominions, north and south, both externally associated with the British Commonwealth. Such a 'new arrangement' was

57. PRO DO 35/398/11111A/94.

58. Peters to Batterbee, 14 Mar. 1932, PRO DO 35/397/11111/36.

59. W.J.Flynn, Free State Parliamentary companion for 1932, pp.104-5.

60. PRO CAB 27/526 ISC(32)86 Annex II.

61. Acting Dominions Secretary during Thomas' absence in Ottawa.

62. Sankey to MacDonald, 10 Aug. 1932, MacDonald papers, PRO 30/69/2/35.

63. Sankey to Thomas, 11 Mar. 1935, PRO DO 35/399/11111A/163.

imperative because the 1921 Treaty had 'failed to establish Anglo-Irish peace and friendship; and the timing of such an initiative was opportune, it was argued, because of Britain's desire for a settlement, the worsening 'commercial dispute', the drift in the Free State 'towards a Republican form of Government', and Ulster's 'constitutional difficulties and loss of Free State trade.' Urging 'sacrifice by all sides', the authors advocated 'a settlement by goodwill' trusting that time would 'soften some features which arise from the tragic past.' They contended that their solution would meet the fundamental requirements of all three parties, the British, the Ulster Unionists and the Irish nationalists: Britain would secure her strategic and commercial interests; Ulster would secure 'political peace', 'the trade of the whole of Ireland', and would also 'give England a present of an Irish settlement...'; and for Irish nationalists, such a solution would meet 'the unquenchable Irish desire for nationhood'.

The requirements of these three parties would be 'brought into one frame' by the proposed settlement which the authors then detailed:

- (a) The establishment of an Irish Commonwealth, acknowledged by Great Britain to possess Sovereign authority,
- (b) The Commonwealth to be federal, so that the Northern Irish Parliament and the Free State respectively will continue to exercise their present powers in their own territories.
- (c) A Treaty of Association between the Irish Commonwealth and Great Britain designed to meet British interests and yield benefits to all Ireland.

Reciprocal citizenship between Ireland and Britain would follow as would preferential trade agreements and a defensive and military alliance 'recognising the strategic unity of these islands' but with Irish forces occupying all ports.

While the 'State Parliaments' in Dublin and Belfast would retain their present powers, their members would also elect an Irish Commonwealth parliament which would 'control the transferred powers of North and South and also such other common services as the North and South may decide to surrender to it, e.g. agriculture(.)' This Commonwealth Parliament would also elect a President, who would be an Irish citizen, preferably a non-political personage, who would be elected for a term equal to the normal term of three parliaments: assent to Bills of the Commonwealth and State Parliaments would be delegated to the President. The authors urged the British government to 'approach and endeavour to persuade the North': claiming that Dublin was 'willing', they added, 'it happens that London is willing too. Is Belfast?' If agreement was reached, the proposals would then be submitted for ratification to a Constituent Assembly with representatives of north and south 'elected at an ad hoc general election...'. Such ratification was deemed

necessary to secure the concurrence of the Irish nation; and so eliminate the objections which have been taken by extremists in the past.

We are satisfied that the Government of the Free State will accept these proposals if the assent of the Northern Government is obtained.

For the first time in history, all the parties would appear to have a common interest, and a settlement should therefore be possible.⁶⁴

This initiative appears to have been, initially, at least, of some interest to the Dominions Office: a note was prepared on the financial relations between Northern Ireland and Great Britain; the Home Office was alerted; then through an

64. 'Protocol of an Irish Settlement', in ibid.

intermediary, Granard sent the proposals back to Dublin, to de Valera. Some gamesmanship can be presumed in this move, as it reads like London asking de Valera for an opinion on what they must have presumed was his own kite! De Valera, in his response, was not tempted to make a firm proposal: what went back to London was still a kite.⁶⁵ His intermediary informed Granard that the scheme would form a satisfactory basis for settlement for the great majority of the Irish people if initially advocated by the British government; in such circumstances, the intermediary assured Granard, de Valera 'would talk business.'⁶⁶ As the Irish Situation Committee seems to have been dormant at this juncture - it did not meet at all during 1935⁶⁷ - it is difficult to assess the seriousness with which the proposal was considered in London. Although expressing disbelief that Northern Ireland would give her assent, and noting that the scheme envisaged Irish forces holding the Treaty ports, the main misgivings noted in the Dominions Office file concern the role envisaged for the Crown and unease about the proposed functions of the President; apart from these issues, however, Harding's note continues, '...the principles set out...as the basis of the scheme would seem generally to afford a basis for negotiations...' This, however, may merely have been Harding's 'first sight' response to the proposal: that these words are scored through on the file suggests that he had second thoughts on them; his basic view is more probably expressed in the less optimistic covering memorandum to Thomas:

It is, I fear, clear that the proposals...do not really carry us any further. They are only a rather elaborate variant on Mr. de Valera's original idea of "external association".⁶⁸

It was this view which, in time prevailed; and no bilateral, still less trilateral talks, with Belfast included, took place on the proposal. Belfast's antipathy to an earlier comparable, proposal, publicly advocated in the Irish Times, was already on record.⁶⁹ This proposal, written by a life-long Republican, is markedly similar, if somewhat more elaborate, than the scheme proposed in the Granard initiative. Arguing that while Ireland remained partitioned, Anglo-American peace was unattainable, the writer praised de Valera's recent 'magnificent conception' of the Commonwealth as 'a smaller League of Nations' and even mooted the possibility of the United States becoming a member of a wider Anglo-Celtic Commonwealth. Although widely publicised⁷⁰ and appealing to pluralists in Ireland at that time,⁷¹ the scheme was faulted for being academic, utopian and romantic.

The importance of these proposals lies not in any success they achieved, but rather that, taken together, they may be presumed broadly to reveal the form which de Valera would then have thought tolerable for his fundamental ideas of external association and local autonomy for the north. Document No. 2 was by

65. Harding minute, 28 Mar. 1935, ibid.

66. PRO DO 35/399/11111A/163.

67. PRO CAB 27/523.

68. Harding minute, 14 Mar. 1935, PRO DO 35/399/11111A/163..

69. Irish Times, 1 Jan. 1935.

70. The Times, and Belfast papers, 2 Jan. 1935.

71. Including John J. Horgan, then Irish correspondent for Round Table, who may well have arranged for a similar kite to be flown in that journal, vol. 25 pp. 36ff., the previous December.

now required reading in the Dominions Office and in the British cabinet.⁷²

Had an initiative, such as that just outlined, become a matter for serious negotiations, it would, no doubt, have helped to act as a brake on Fianna Fail's republican programme: but without any success to report on Partition, the republican instincts of the party came to the fore. Not until Thomas's successor as Dominions Secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, established a creative diplomatic relationship with de Valera with a series of private talks in the spring of 1936, was the deadlock broken in Anglo-Irish relations. Before considering how MacDonald and de Valera handled the Partition question,⁷³ some consideration must be given to Fianna Fail's continuing consolidation of its power base, often, it must be said, with policies which could only further alienate the Ulster unionists, if that were possible. Along with the abolition of the Oath, and the non-payment of Land Annuities - Craigavon was concerned that this might spread to the north⁷⁴ - there was the virtual eclipse and then the abolition of the Governor-General's office, the abolition of the right to appeal to the Privy Council, the unilateral repudiation of British citizenship,⁷⁵ the abolition of the Free State Senate - one of whose explicit objects had been to represent the interests of southern unionists - and the economic war itself which, whatever the damage to both countries, had the advantage for de Valera that it created 'the atmosphere of emotional fervour which he needed for launching a drastic experiment in economic nationalism.'⁷⁶ A bonus - as de Valera saw it - if this experiment succeeded, would be the economic persuasion, if not coercion, of Ulster into a new relationship with the south. But the entertainment of such hopes was to ignore the syndrome which Gellner has identified as the capacity of ethnic groups to ignore rational self-interest if the 'call of blood or group loyalty or territoriality' is awakened.⁷⁷ That such might be the north's response to economic pressure should have been clear to de Valera: his own followers' response to the consequence of the economic war was itself an example of Gellner's theory.

Even if Fianna Fail could offer economic inducements to Ulster, there was the rest of de Valera's political programme to take into consideration. All aspects of it had implications for Ulster. Not only his handling of Anglo-Irish relations and his economic policies, but also other constitutional issues, Church-State relations, his cultural and linguistic policies, must all be considered in the context of his declared overall strategy of fashioning a society capable of attracting the north to, at least, a federal embrace. Another critical area - where the Belfast government had, perhaps, its most direct interest - was de Valera's handling of internal security, his relationship with extremist groups, and particularly with the IRA.

72. Interview, Malcolm MacDonald.

73. See below, ch.4:iv-v.

74. PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)9, 7 Apr. 1932; he repeated his concern the following January, CAB 27/526 ISC(32)77.

75. MacMahon (1979:220-6; 254-60).

76. Hancock (1937:350).

77. Ernest Gellner, 'Scale and nation', in Gellner, Contemporary thought and politics, ed. I.C. Jarvie, J. Agassi, (London:1974) p.150.

(iii) De Valera's Partition Strategy: the Irish Context

(a) Handling the extremists

Although himself committed to very far-reaching changes in Irish society, de Valera was by temperament, no revolutionary. Rather, he was a cautious gradualist, albeit one who was determined to 'march the nation' a long distance; he justified his preference for incremental change by arguing that Fianna Fail had 'started by knowing that the country was not prepared to move forward in a revolutionary way.'¹ His immediate goal was to unite, or rather re-unite Irish nationalists and achieve political stability. His own willingness to tolerate a solution compatible with Document No. 2 was dismissed as partitionist by both the Blueshirts to his right² and Republicans to his left:³ de Valera for his part, believed both of these groups to be potentially dangerous meddlers in seeking to redress the grievances of northern nationalists. The most significant and persistent threat came from republican attempts to force the pace on Partition and change the context in which he wished to work on the question. While some lobbied for the boycott of both 'partitionist parliaments' and the convening of elected representatives north and south in an all-Ireland parliament, the greatest threat came from the potential resort to the use of force.

Initially there was optimism in IRA ranks at Fianna Fail's win in the 1932 election. Some entertained the hope that in considering any terrorist or guerrilla campaign against Northern Ireland, they could at least count on using the south as a safe haven.⁴ Indeed de Valera was under pressure to come to an understanding with the IRA: McGarrity believed this to be a 'national necessity' and wrote to de Valera from America

They can do the things you will not care to do or cannot do in the face of public criticism...You both profess to desire the same goal, why in God's name do you hesitate to sit down and try to find a working agreement. It is the extreme, the fanatical thing as the English call it, that frightens them and causes them to seek for peace. We denounced Collins and his friends for stopping the boycott on Ulster, and why now stop it by those who have the courage to carry it on.⁵

De Valera agreed that some understanding was necessary with the IRA, though his version of what an acceptable understanding would be differed from McGarrity's.

You talk as if we were fools and didn't realise all this. My God! Do you not know that ever since 1921 the main purpose of everything I have done has been to try to secure a basis for national unity.

But the 'need and desire' for unity should not lead Fianna Fail into an alliance with a group 'too stupid or too pigheaded' not to see that a disaster would follow if Fianna Fail's policy of seeking the Republic on the basis of winning majority support through the Irish Free State institutions, were to be replaced by a policy of force. De Valera did not believe 'the wit of man' would discover any alternative to his strategy. If the country was to avoid becoming 'a Mexico or a Cuba' there was no alternative to order being imposed by the elected

1. Irish Press, 4 Dec. 1935.

2. O'Duffy's speech, PRO CAB 27/526 ISC(32)84.

3. Irish Freedom, Feb. 1936, Jan. 1937.

4. McGarrity to de Valera, 22 Oct. 1933, McGarrity papers, NLI ms. 17,441.

5. Ibid.

majority.

We have undertaken a responsibility to the people at present living, to the future, and to the dead. We will not allow any group or any individuals to prevent us from carrying it out.⁶

De Valera repeated these arguments to the IRA leader, Sean MacBride, in five lengthy clandestine meetings held in the first eighteen months of Fianna Fail rule.⁷ MacBride reported to McGarrity that at the last meeting de Valera had 'got excited and said that he would maintain law and order even if it cost him his life'. MacBride challenged his right - given de Valera's previous record - to invoke majority rule; further, he reminded him that the majority he cited was 'in a country which was not free and was not even a single unit...'.⁸

Partition was the outstanding difficulty, de Valera told MacBride: but it is significant that in the course of a lengthy letter outlining many hours of talks, no strategy on Partition was discussed. The understanding between Fianna Fail and the IRA which MacBride clearly thought probable because of 'great pressure' from within Fianna Fail, was for 'a united front in the economic war crisis...'.⁸ Within two years of being returned to power with the active campaign support of the IRA, de Valera had 'with great caution and very considerable skill' succeeded in 'broadening his base, chipping away at his enemies, securing his first round aims, and edging the IRA further off the stage.'⁹

De Valera combined persistent warnings that the government would not tolerate private armies with a propaganda campaign pitched to appeal both to the Republicans still outside Fianna Fail and, broadly, to all who considered themselves in the nationalist tradition.¹⁰ Characterising Fianna Fail as 'the resurrection of the Irish nation...',¹¹ he posed the choice to the 1933 Ard Fheis in these terms:

We either march forward as a disciplined people with a recognised and accepted headship, or we are going to be a rabble and get nowhere. Which is it to be? Voices: "Forward".

It would be easy but irrelevant to generate what he termed a 'war atmosphere'; instead they had before them a 'hard long struggle'. Persistently he likened Fianna Fail to a nation on the march; and he carried his metaphor further, to the comfort of his immediate audience though scarcely to that of Ulster unionists.

There was a point in the enemy position to be taken and they were on the march to take it, having made their dispositions. Was it for somebody else to say: "We will not help you but we will hinder you unless you turn to take another point?"¹²

De Valera repeated this metaphor at the next Ard Fheis in a speech counselling patience:

Each step in advance henceforth ought to be a step taken when they had

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6. De Valera to McGarrity, 31 Jan. 1934, *ibid*.
 7. De Valera also met other IRA leaders at this time, Bell (1970:100).
 8. MacBride to McGarrity, 19 Oct. 1933, *McGarrity papers*, NLI ms. 17,456.
 9. Bell (1970:102-3).
 10. Speeches, *Irish Press*, 9 Nov. 1932, 9 Nov. 1933.
 11. Quoted in *Irish Press* editorial, 9 Nov. 1932.
 12. *Irish Press*, 9 Nov. 1933.

brought up all the necessary reinforcements from the rear to enable them to take it and hold it....¹³

On the same theme in 1935 he told delegates 'to wait and not to seize something before it was ripe.'¹⁴ In 1936 he asked them to ensure that there would be 'no retreat' remembering that 'when you have a position like this, your opponents will do their utmost to storm the position.'¹⁵

The assumption was general at these Ard Fheiseanna that the party was the custodian of the nation's destiny,¹⁶ which it defined as 'a free, self-contained, united Gaelic Ireland.'¹⁷ Whether this could be reconciled with de Valera's offer of a federal solution on Partition does not seem to have been debated in the party; the ambiguity between the two positions can perhaps be explained by the fact that de Valera never promised that his proposed concessions to Ulster would amount to a final settlement. The instincts of the party - from a reading of the resolutions to the Ard Fheis - show that there was little enthusiasm, or even interest, in these concessions; perhaps, too, there was little awareness of the details of de Valera's declared policy.¹⁸

The party was certain of its role as midwife to the Republic and de Valera himself reassured successive Ard Fheiseanna about the ultimate goal of the party. In these addresses he seems to contradict his concessions to the Ulster Unionists; certainly to that community, obsessively suspicious of all Irish nationalists and especially of de Valera, his Ard Fheis speeches can have brought no reassurance. In 1933 he emphasised the difficulties of 'restoring' the North to the nation:¹⁹ in 1934 he talked of a 'completely united...independent republic';²⁰ in 1935 he foresaw a 'unified State' where a majority would inevitably opt for 'complete independence' taking 'the republican form.'²¹ As to how this was to be achieved, de Valera was certain that neither words nor force would succeed:

The way to solve it was by having a life for our people here which would be the envy of the people in the North. It was true that there were the old prejudices and enmities which died hard. They are dying very hard. But they are dying; and the people of this nation which resisted oppression for seven hundred years are yet going to continue.²²

(b) A Catholic, Gaelic and united Ireland?

Emphatically de Valera was in the mould of those nationalist leaders who wish to refashion society; his specific ideal for Ireland was extraordinarily detailed and amounted to nothing less than the remoulding of the entire society. On education,²³ morality,²⁴ materialism,²⁵ agriculture,²⁶ industrialization,²⁷ even on women's fashions,²⁸ and especially on the language issue, de Valera

13. Ibid., 14 Nov. 1934.

14. Ibid., 4 Dec. 1935.

15. Ibid., 4 Nov. 1936.

16. Secretaries' Report to Ard Fheis, ibid., 13 Nov. 1934.

17. Secretaries' Report to Ard Fheis, ibid., 9 Nov. 1932.

18. Resolutions 78 (1933), 1 (1934), and 6,10 (1935) Clar, Ard Fheis.

19. Irish Press, 9 Nov. 1933.

20. Ibid., 14 Nov. 1934.

21. Ibid., 4 Dec. 1935.

22. Ibid., 9 Nov. 1933.

23. Speech to INTO, Easter 1940, in The Capuchin Annual, 1941.

24. 'The hundred best sayings of de Valera' (Dublin:nd) p.10.

25. 'The Ireland that I dream of', recording, 17 Mar. 1943.

26. Longford and O'Neill (1970:282) for emphasis on tillage.

27. As note 25 above.

28. Irish Press, 9 Nov. 1933.

believed in change. Of course, this might be said of many comprehensive political programmes. But the direction and scale of the changes envisaged by de Valera imply a confidence on his part that human behaviour could be significantly altered; and, that if leadership proved inadequate, then state intervention would be justified and effective. For instance he suggested that to save the Irish language it would be necessary to give jobs - he instanced technical jobs - to less qualified applicants who had the 'essential national qualification of the language.'²⁹ Indeed he often suggested that the restoration of the language was a more urgent national aim even than partition - arguing that while Irish unity was inevitable, the language had to be saved in his generation. Once restored, he foresaw it spreading across the border.³⁰

Characteristically he argued that the economic war with Britain would lead to 'the foundation here of the sort of economic life that every Irishman who thought nationally in the past hoped for...'.³¹ Not only would de Valera's ideal Ireland mean a radical transformation of society but, as he had advocated since he had first entered public life, the new order would be modelled on an idealised Gaelic past.³² Acknowledging as a 'central difficulty' the affection of Irish unionists for the Crown,³³ he allowed for no plurality of views on this question, insisting that in the name of democracy majorities should decide - and the majority for which he spoke was 'the historic Irish nation.' As narrowly defined by de Valera, this nation could only include unionists through absorption which he predicted was inevitable: 'I have no doubt as to the direction you will have to go in the end.'³⁴

In all of this, de Valera - as opposition deputies constantly pointed out in the Dail - was entrenching Partition. The 1937 Constitution was the most formal expression of the contradiction at the core of Fianna Fail's strategy on unification: their attempt at nation-building on a specifically republican, Catholic, Gaelic model in an island where political, cultural and religious diversity clearly precluded any such outcome. De Valera at the 1936 Fianna Fail Ard Fheis had promised that the forthcoming constitution would be 'in accordance with their traditions, their aspirations, and their philosophy of life.'³⁵ Scholars and politicians might argue about whether there were, or were not, two nations in Ireland: but who could deny that there were two traditions, two aspirations, two philosophies of life? The concept of political culture best demonstrates the cleavage: were there not two 'intelligible webs of relations' on the island of Ireland? Further, was not de Valera's Constitution as finally passed emphatically the expression of one of these political cultures; and far from being suited to a united country was it not antipathetic to the traditions of Ulster unionist society, 'the spirit of its public institutions, the passions and the collective reasoning of its citizenry, and the style and operating codes of its leaders...'?³⁶

29. Ibid.

30. In particular in his addresses to annual Ard Fheiseanna, see Irish Press, 10 Nov. 1933, 14 Nov. 1934; 4 Nov. 1936. Longford and O'Neill (1970:459-60).

31. Quoted in Longford and O'Neill (1970:281).

32. Gaelic American, 17 Jan. 1920; SE:22:988-9, 7 Feb. 1939.

33. Irish Press 8 Nov., and The Times, 10 Nov. 1934.

34. Irish Press, 8 Nov. 1934.

35. Quoted in PRO CAB 27/527 ISC(32)118.

36. L.W.Pye and S.Verba, Political culture and political development, (Princeton:1965) p.7.

The most persistent contemporary critic of the contradictions in de Valera's policy was one of the most independent-minded members of the Dail in the 1930s, Frank MacDermot. He characterised Fianna Fail's initial 'onslaught on Commonwealth symbols' as a policy which 'might have been specially designed to consolidate Partition.' His constant harassment of de Valera on his Ulster policy proved futile but the researcher can be grateful for the occasional explanations he elicited from the Fianna Fail leader. In April 1935, de Valera rejected MacDermot's arguments that the south should shape its policies bearing Ulster's interests and sensitivities in mind. If they were to do this, the unity of Ireland would not follow: consequently when the southern public heard 'talk about the unity of Ireland' being dependent on 'our attitude', they had 'sufficient sense...not to bother their heads about it.'³⁷ MacDermot railed against what he termed 'the stale claptrap and the weary fallacies of Fianna Fail propaganda...'; argued that a 'purely Gaelic Ireland, even if attainable, would be a non-Irish Ireland'; and - unkindest cut of all - likened de Valera's 'character and mental equipment' to that of Carson: while de Valera

may succeed in retaining his halo intact by persevering in the path he now follows, he may also be ensuring that his career, like that of Lord Carson, will be one that will have brought almost unrelieved disaster to Ireland.

MacDermot also put on record that 'some very prominent politicians on both sides of the House' had suggested to him that 'the North would be an embarrassment to us...and that we were better off without them.'³⁸

If the trend of southern politics was inimical to northern interests, this seems to have been a matter of indifference to de Valera. Under another assault on his policy from MacDermot, he admitted that no member of the Dail could point 'to any plan which will inevitably bring about union. We do not pretend to be able to do it.' Partition may have been

a disaster and a shame but we cannot by any action of ours remedy that. All we can do is to try our best to bring about union but no one can say how it can be inevitably done. The question for us is how far we should deny ourselves in order to bring it about.

Emphasising yet again how a united Republican cabinet in 1921 had accepted external association 'expressly' as a concession to Ulster, he reminded the Dail of Ulster's lack of interest in the proposal. But Fianna Fail would always leave 'the door open...'; and claiming that developments in the south's constitutional status vis-a-vis Great Britain, would eventually prove a 'help' rather than a 'block or a barrier' to the north, he concluded: 'We cannot get them in: Deputies yonder cannot get them in and our policy is to go ahead in our own way.'³⁹

37. DE:55:2284, 3 Apr. 1935.

38. DE:59:196-210, 30 Oct. 1935.

39. DE:56:2112-6, 29 May 1935.

(c) The Ulster context: the northern unionists

De Valera presumed that the all-Ireland majority of which he, plausibly, saw himself as the elected leader, had no moral obligation to appease the Irish minority - the Ulster unionists: nor, as we have seen, did he consider it worthwhile, on pragmatic grounds, to pursue a policy of conciliation. He believed that external association was as much as the majority could cede, and repeatedly rejected opposition suggestions that staying within the Commonwealth was an important consideration to woo Ulster. Repeatedly, in the Dail, he called on opposition deputies to refrain from advocating an all-Ireland Dominion as a possible settlement, unless they first won approval for it from the Ulster Unionists. Such approval, he believed, would not be forthcoming.⁴⁰ But what he did not emphasise was that Ulster was even less interested in his own attempts to devise structures for a united Ireland compatible with the republic.

His defence of Fianna Fail's strategy on unity, when challenged in the Dail, reveals clearly that de Valera's first instinct was to defend his party's republican flank, irrespective of the consequences on Ulster opinion. It could, of course, be argued that no policy to weaken the border short of an application by the Free State to rejoin the United Kingdom, would have won a hearing from the Ulster unionists.⁴¹ Traditionally suspicious of the south, they reserved a particular antipathy for de Valera and his policies and when, in 1932, Fianna Fail came to power, their reaction was one of apprehension, if not foreboding particularly among loyalists along the border. At a cabinet meeting to discuss the changed security situation in June, the northern government noted that in view of 'the excitement, amounting almost to frenzy', which had been caused by the Eucharistic Congress then being held in Dublin, 'it was generally felt that certain incidents might occur on the Border which would lead to bloodshed...'. Although the cabinet heard reports that drilling was taking place along the southern side of the border, Home Affairs minister, Dawson Bates, did not anticipate 'anything in the nature of a major operation...' but thought some 'tip and run' attacks a possibility.⁴² The emphasis at this cabinet meeting on the Eucharistic Congress is revealing: Craigavon's government - itself subjected to nationalist attack for its espousal of the epithet 'Protestant' - clearly thought of Partition as an expression of religious divisions in Ireland. At Stormont, in reply to his critics, Craigavon claimed that 'in the South they boasted of a Catholic State... All I boast of is that we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State.'⁴³

Fianna Fail's security and tariff policies may have been matters for intense suspicion in the north, but when it came to eliciting the siege reflex, on which after all, organised Unionism thrived, de Valera's programme was exactly suited to Craigavon's book. All nationalists were unreliable, but here, at least, was

40. Repeatedly in the Dail, see DE:63:125, 23 June 1936.

41. There was some Ulster Unionist interest in a customs union of the British Isles, Buckland:(1979:71).

42. PRONI CAB 4/303/31, 22 June 1932; also Lady Craigavon's diary, 12 and 14 Apr. 1932, PRONI D1415/B/38.

43. Quoted Buckland (1979:72); see also cabinet discussion on whether a religious question should be included in the Northern Ireland census to obtain information 'pertinent to the State as a whole.' PRONI CAB 4/331/24, 30 Oct. 1934.

an acknowledged enemy of Ulster in power in Dublin: some comfort from this development seems to have been drawn by the former Northern Ireland minister, by now a member of the British government, Lord Londonderry, when he confided to Craig that, in Britain, they were 'now faced by the more or less open opposition of a De Valera government instead of the somewhat doubtful friendship' of a government led by Cosgrave whose goodwill would probably have depended 'entirely upon the concession they could get from us.'⁴⁴

One concession, not forthcoming from Fianna Fail, and coveted by the northern government, as their lobbying of London clearly reveals, was some amelioration of the south's tariff policy. Recognised as inimical to northern interests under Cumann na nGaedheal, it was now, as amended by the new government, significantly harsher and was thought, in Belfast, to be coercive in intent. Envious of the south's fiscal powers, frustrated by their own impotence in such matters, and constantly harassed by northern industrialists who were losing markets and profits in the south, this remained an abiding grievance with the Stormont government.⁴⁵ They were particularly vigilant in monitoring London's financial and trade policy towards the Free State; every concession wrung from London by de Valera, every attempt to settle the economic war was marked by what the British Treasury thought selfish and myopic sniping from the Stormont administration.⁴⁶ As early as June 1932, Andrews expressed his concern to Craigavon that the withholding of the Land annuities by de Valera's government, if successful, would result in the continuation of the lower income tax rate, and the establishment of better social services in the Free State, a trend which, he considered, was already apparent. If this were to continue, he warned,

...it will ultimately have a very unsettling effect upon some of our people. We can absolutely trust, as you know, the older members of our community, but among the younger ones is where the danger lies.⁴⁷

Consistently, throughout this period, Unionists were immune to any hints from Britain - and, as has been shown, London was constantly prompted by Dublin to play this card - that concessions to Irish unity should be coaxed from Belfast to prevent the drift in the south to a Republic. Northern Ireland's answer to such pressures, said Craigavon, 'would always be the same - "Nothing doing."⁴⁸

In general, Craigavon successfully exploited the opportunities for propaganda presented to him by de Valera's political programme. If J.L.Garvin is correct in suggesting that every party needs a dream and a bogey,⁴⁹ then Craigavon had his dream - a British Ulster with its own administration 'manned by Ulster stalwarts'; and his bogey - the threat from the south. De Valera's followers may well have thought in terms of politically capturing Ulster when they heard his call to join the nation on its march to capture the next

44. Quoted Buckland (1979:71).

45. Buckland (1979:73-7).

46. Buckland (1979:77); also ch.5:ii, below, passim.

47. Quoted Buckland (1979:76).

48. The Times, 27 Aug. 1934; see also Sir Kingsley Wood, ibid., 20 Jan. 1934; J.Davison and Craig, ibid., 13 July 1934. Unionists were also concerned that southerners would 'infiltrate' the north, see PRONI CAB 4/320/5, -/4/321/6, -/4/331/24, all for 1934.

49. J.L.Garvin, quoted in R.J.Scally, The origins of the Lloyd George coalition, (Princeton:1975) p.373.

stronghold. Craigavon's audience had no doubts as to his meaning when he reminded them to be 'ever on their guard against the persistent efforts of their opponents to capture that stronghold.' They must be particularly vigilant against the possibility that a British government with 'antipathy' towards Ulster might be open to persuasion by Dublin's lobbying: attempts, he predicted to have Ulster brought under an All-Ireland parliament would persist 'for all time.'⁵⁰

(d) The Ulster context: the nationalist response to de Valera

Virtually powerless in Northern Ireland, and suffering the gross and petty discriminations of Ulster Unionist rule, the northern nationalists tended to look southwards for their salvation. Notoriously fragmented,⁵¹ they had, in the main, supported Collins's most optimistic reading of the outcome of the Boundary clauses of the Treaty;⁵² it was only when their expectations had been disappointed with Cosgrave's 'damn good bargain' in signing the 1925 Boundary agreement, that they switched their support and their hopes to de Valera. Fianna Fail's accession to power in 1932, brought with it a quickening of expectations.⁵³ De Valera, however, while sympathetic to their plight, and invariably a publicist for their grievances, was reluctant to share an anti-Partition strategy with their leaders; consistently, to the chagrin of one faction within Fianna Fail, he kept the party aloof from political alliances which might erode his strict personal control of Fianna Fail's Partition strategy. He informed Cahir Healy that whereas Fianna Fail was 'ready to co-operate in any movement which is likely to bring Partition to an end', it would not intervene 'in differences of opinion, among Six County anti-Partitionists...'.⁵⁴ Although his successful candidature as abstentionist MP for South Down in 1933 gave, to some, the contrary impression, most of the evidence, public and private, suggests great inhibition on de Valera's part in his relations with northern nationalists.⁵⁵

Any republican organization, and particularly a political party whose raison d'être was to unite Ireland, yet which confined its base to the south, left itself vulnerable to criticism. The orthodox policy for such a party, would be to organize throughout the 32 counties and adopt an abstentionist policy in

50. The Times, 13 July 1934.

51. M.Coyle to Healy, 10 Nov. 1937, Healy papers, D2991/A/50.

52. See Kevin O'Shiel to Executive Council, 17 Nov. 1923, Mulcahy papers UCD P7/B/287.

53. Buckland (1979:72-3).

54. Sean Moynihan (on de Valera's behalf) to Healy, Jan 1934, Healy papers, D2991/A/17B.

55. De Valera was first chosen as Sinn Fein candidate in South Down in the 1918 general election; he then withdrew from the campaign in favour of the nationalist candidate under an agreement whereby 'safe' nationalist seats were divided between Sinn Fein and the Nationalists to avoid splitting the vote. Because this arrangement was agreed after nominations had closed, de Valera's name was on the ballot paper and Walker records him as receiving 33 votes. In elections for the NI parliament, he stood successfully as an abstentionist candidate in 1921 and 1925. He did not stand in 1929. In 1933, he was again asked to stand and won the seat. He did not contest, nor did any anti-Partitionist, this seat in the election called by Craigavon in February 1938 during the course of the Anglo-Irish negotiations. Longford and O'Neill (1970:79,121, 238), Brian M.Walker, Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922, (Dublin:1978), p.387; Northern Ireland parliamentary election results:1921-1972, (Chichester:1973) pp.14-15, 72; Irish Press, 18 Nov. 1933.

six county elections. Within Fianna Fail, one faction continued to demand such an approach, arguing that Fianna Fail should 'throw its mantle over Ulster'.⁵⁶ A formal resolution to this effect was on the agenda, but not, apparently, debated, at the 1934 Ard Fheis;⁵⁷ it was debated and defeated the following year, the main speeches against being made by northerners, including the Minister for Lands, Joseph Connelly, who argued that the party 'must grow in the Six Counties. Tactics, great wisdom and patience were required.'⁵⁸ Such caution infuriated the interventionist wing of the party, led by Eamonn Donnelly. A northerner himself and a former Sinn Fein director of elections, Donnelly was now a Fianna Fail backbencher and a member of the party's National Executive.⁵⁹ He considered himself the main broker between northern nationalists and Fianna Fail. He was fertile with ideas on Partition, thought the south quiescent, even polite, on the subject, and remained 'incensed'⁶⁰ at de Valera's refusal to extend Fianna Fail across the border.

Donnelly, in fact, heckled de Valera on Partition at the 1933 Ard Fheis,⁶¹ which prompted the party leader to defend his northern record, a speech which met with such 'extraordinary enthusiasm' in the north, that the Irish Press shortly published a 'sensational report' detailing an invitation to the entire Fianna Fail cabinet to stand as abstentionists throughout the north.⁶² Although de Valera accepted a nomination for South Down, no other minister stood, Fianna Fail's aim being 'to consolidate... not to divide' the northern nationalists.⁶³ Nothing of what emerged from a week of rumour and consultation contradicts what must remain speculation: that the original Irish Press scoop was in fact a kite being flown by Donnelly.⁶⁴

Lobbying for Fianna Fail to 'throw its mantle over Ulster' was not the only tactic approved by the interventionist faction in the party; a more significant initiative which they favoured was to open Leinster House to elected representatives from the six counties. The powerful appeal of this strategy would be difficult to exaggerate; if implemented, it would undo the compromises inherent in the Treaty settlement, and subvert the hated 1925 Boundary Agreement. At a stroke, it would 'legitimize' Dail Eireann for Republicans, by putting it on the same basis on which it had been founded after the 1918 election: the All-Ireland parliament established by a majority of elected representatives from south and north. The subsequent exclusion of six county representatives, after the Treaty, had rankled with northern nationalists; and de Valera who had then protested at their exclusion,⁶⁵ now had the power to admit them to the Dail.

56. Eamonn Donnelly's phrase, Irish Press, 4 Nov. 1936.

57. Note the Secretaries report, 1934 Ard Fheis, ibid., 13 Nov. 1934.

58. Ibid., 5 Dec 1935.

59. His preoccupation with Partition was legendary. In 1980, a Fianna Fail minister recalled him as 'the (Neil) Blaney of his day', confidential source.

60. E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn, Nationalism and socialism in twentieth century Ireland, (Liverpool:1977), n.1, p.185. Hereafter, Rumpf and Hepburn:1977.

61. Irish Press, 9 Nov. 1933.

62. Ibid., 11 Nov. 1933.

63. Ibid., 18 Nov. 1933.

64. Ibid., 11-18 Nov. 1933, passim.

65. Minutes, Comhairle na dTeachtaí, 7 Aug. 1924, in Gaughan (1977:335).

In February 1933, the two major political figures among northern nationalists, Joe Devlin and Cahir Healy approached de Valera privately, seeking seats in the Dail as the duly elected representatives of northern constituencies. He refused; he even declined to offer them any advice on whether they should return to Stormont.⁶⁶ To de Valera's discomfort, this particular tactic continued to have its advocates. Some republican fundamentalists went further, threatening to call for a boycott of both Stormont and Leinster House and the convening instead of an all-Ireland parliament. George Gilmore, introducing himself as 'one of the joint secretaries of the United Republican Labour Committee' attempted to persuade Healy in October 1935, to adopt such a strategy: '...the effect would be tremendous. Fianna Fail could not refuse to co-operate with you to form the all-Ireland Parliament you seek.'⁶⁷

Yet two more northern-based organizations prepared strategies to force the Partition question: the National Unity Organizing Committee was pledged not to 'take part in the proceedings of any partition Parliament, or any Parliament other than the sovereign independent legislature of all Ireland...';⁶⁸ and a rival 'Irish Union Association', inspired by Healy, which pledged its members to fight Partition but, to Fianna Fail's comfort did not prohibit membership of 'partitionist parliaments'.⁶⁹ But even this latter organization, although obviously the most moderate of those groupings, was preparing to put further pressure on de Valera - the orchestrator being, again, the indefatigable Donnelly. In October 1936, Healy confided to a fellow MP that he received 'a letter from a well-known Fianna Fail TD, from which I gather that they think we are likely to let the national spirit die here...'.⁷⁰ Donnelly had written: 'Partition is now in operation fifteen years and we are worse to-day than when it began. If the present position lasts for another ten years we may chuck in.' This generation would only be remembered 'as a lot of weaklings who saw what to do and who didn't do it.' Donnelly's advice to northern MPs was to act independently, 'No more delegations and resolutions.' They should leave Stormont and demand admission to the Dail: 'We'll carry all Ireland on this...'. Donnelly outlined his talks with politicians north and south and felt certain that the policy advocated would 'pull together all the various elements', would generally 'force the pace' and make the re-unification question 'practical politics again.'⁷¹

In reply, Healy argued that abstentionism had proved futile at Westminster and was now made difficult by new legislation at Stormont whereby elected abstentionists forfeited their seats. However, he mooted the possibility that MPs might 'take their seats formally, make a considered protest and then leave'; adding that such a course 'might work in with your plan for recognition under the new Free State Constitution' - a reference to Donnelly's campaign that de Valera's forthcoming constitution should provide seats in Leinster House for northern

66. Healy to de Valera, 19 June 1956, Phoenix (1978); not calendared, but cited in his chapter on 'The Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland, 1921-55', p.6.

67. George Gilmore to Healy, 25 Oct. 1935, Healy papers, D2991/A/31A.

68. Press cutting, Healy papers, ibid., -/37D.

69. Copy of draft constitution, 16 Sept. 1936, ibid. -/39E.

70. Healy to J.J. McCarroll, MP, 23 Oct 1936, ibid., -/41E.

71. Donnelly to Healy, 25 Sept. 1936, ibid., -/42A.

representatives. Healy remained diffident; he reminded Donnelly that a Northern Ireland minister had stated

that if the Dail make provision for Northern members or senators in their new House, they would be interned... or given the option of going back to the Free State permanently.⁷²

Donnelly dismissed this reasoning as partitionist;

If men are to suffer for going to an all-Ireland parliament, so be it... You as an Ulster leader should demand your seat in the Dail and so should the others. Forget the obstacles and be the Cahir Healy you used to be when I knew you.

Donnelly's letter strikes an optimistic, even exuberant, note concerning the forthcoming Fianna Fail Ard Fheis. 'Note resolutions... re Ulster. They are grand and contain in my opinion, the solution.'⁷³ The resolution which, in particular, elated Donnelly, read:

This Ard Fheis demands that a clause be inserted in the new Constitution enabling the elected representatives of North East Ulster to sit, act and vote in Dail Eireann.⁷⁴

Despite the imprimatur of Healy's anti-partition grouping,⁷⁵ the resolution seems to have presented little difficulty to de Valera at the Ard Fheis. After some debate it was withdrawn, at his suggestion, on the grounds that it would be premature to pass any resolutions concerning the new constitution.⁷⁶

Despite de Valera's consistent adoption of a more cautious policy than that preferred by the northern nationalists, Fianna Fail retained a broad measure of support among the minority:⁷⁷ in 1935, Healy assured de Valera that the 'vast majority of the Nationalists here would be supporters of Fianna Fail.'⁷⁸ From de Valera's own viewpoint, Partition represented a continuing threat to the political stability he was building in the south - a new equilibrium through which he hoped to assimilate extreme republicans to constitutional methods. His particular fear was that IRA violence might erupt in the north.⁷⁹ He would have agreed with what Frank MacDermot had told Westminster MPs at a private meeting in 1936:

Whatever assurances Mr. de Valera or anybody else may give you about our attitude in time of war, there is nothing to guarantee you against violent outbreaks by the Nation(al)ist minority in the north, which would produce overwhelming reactions in the Irish Free State.⁸⁰

72. Healy to Donnelly, 25 Oct. 1936, *ibid.*, -/42B.

73. Donnelly to Healy, 30 Oct. 1936, *ibid.*, -/42C.

74. Resolution 4, Clar, 1936 Ard Fheis.

75. Irish Union Association, *Irish Press*, 2 Nov. 1936

76. *Irish Press*, 4 Nov. 1936.

77. Interview, Patrick McGill; Fr.Coyle's speech, *Irish Press*, 5 Dec. 1935

78. Healy to de Valera, 23 Oct. 1935, *Healy papers*, DD2991/A/29A.

79. De Valera to Healy, 20 July 1935, *ibid.*, -/25A.

80. Frank MacDermot to the 1922 Committee at House of Commons, 20 July 1936, noted in PRO DO 35/399/11111A/257,

(e) The international context

On the international stage too, consistent with the cautious policy already revealed, de Valera was not placing any great emphasis on Partition during these early years of office. Mischievously he was questioned by McGilligan in the Dail, as to whether he had raised the disabilities of the northern minority at the League of Nations, '...without waiting to be asked'. Fianna Fail, when in opposition, had raised just this question with Cumann na nGaedheal. De Valera replied that the issue had not arisen,

but if any opportunity for undoing some of the work which was done by the previous administration should arise... he would be very glad to avail of it.

Mr. McGilligan: But, again, only if it arises?

The President: And if we make it arise we will do it too.⁸¹

This exchange scarcely suggests that de Valera intended to concentrate on Partition at Geneva. More than the Dail opposition were monitoring his handling of the issue there. Again the interventionists in his own party were vigilant; they saw Irish participation at Geneva as an opportunity to make progress on Partition. In time they were disillusioned both with de Valera's performance and with that of Joseph Connolly deputed by the government to various League committees. By 1936, Donnelly had abandoned any hopes of progress on this front.

Rule out Geneva. This is dead or dying. The chance was lost and apparently "statesmen" like Joe Connolly knew more about Bolivia, Paraguay, China... than about Ballinamallard or Tempo.⁸²

Occasionally de Valera did remind the League about Partition, usually emphasising the importance of evolving methods for the solution of such international problems. Participating in a debate on possible methods of guaranteeing minority rights, he raised central questions which belied his own dogmatic analysis of Partition in Ireland. His suggestion was that

the greatest common measure of the rights of minorities might be distilled by a conference and given universal application. But he admitted that the greatest difficulty was to agree upon the problem, "What is a minority?"⁸³

Arguably it was off-stage at Geneva, during informal talks with British ministers, that de Valera made whatever progress was possible on Partition:⁸⁴ his aim was to make it a negotiable issue between himself and the British government; his strategy was to link it to a defence agreement; his argument was that without such a comprehensive settlement, Partition brought endemic instability to Ireland leaving both islands vulnerable in a Europe drifting towards war. His pessimism about the prospects for international peace clearly gave an impetus to these diplomatic dealings with London. Although it was in the interest of both countries to end the mutually damaging 'economic war', the threat of another major war also formed part of the context in which the Anglo-Irish negotiations of 1938 took place. These negotiations represented de Valera's long awaited opportunity to question the basis of the 1921 Treaty, a document which

81. DE:44:1164-7, 4 Nov. 1932.

82. Donnelly to Healy, 25 Sept. 1936, Healy papers, D2991/A/42A.

83. The Times, 22 Sept. 1934.

84. Interview with Malcolm MacDonald.

unilaterally he had already rewritten in his first six years in power. As has been seen, he spent these years virtually ignoring the Ulster unionists, deflecting any unwelcome liason with the northern nationalists and curbing the excesses of southern extremists of all hues. His ascendancy in the Free State was established; but republican support on which it depended was conditional on de Valera's making progress on the national aim: restoring Irish unity.

(iv): Anglo-Irish Relations: the thaw; Malcolm MacDonald as Dominions Secretary

In November 1935, in a British cabinet re-shuffle, Malcolm MacDonald succeeded J.H.Thomas as Secretary of State for the Dominions. During the three following years his impact on Irish policy was immense. A young, gifted politician, son of the former Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, he had two advantages over his more senior colleagues: he believed in the Commonwealth rather than the Empire and, on Ireland, he was young enough not to have 'typecast' de Valera in 1922 as the 'wrecker' of the Treaty settlement. His dealings with de Valera were to be characterised by 'tact, goodwill and above all by an almost sublime patience.'¹ There was an empathy between both men which de Valera had never managed to establish in his earlier relationships with British politicians. MacDonald found de Valera 'a transparently honest and sincere man who never concealed, or even half-hid, his beliefs and aims.'²

MacDonald was a diligent negotiator, a prolific writer of memoranda to his colleagues, and a persistent advocate of appeasement towards Ireland, disarming, with considerable skill, his opponents within the government. His first comprehensive cabinet paper in May 1936, marked a turning point in Anglo-Irish relations, demonstrating an astute analysis of the impasse already reached, his own preference for a conciliatory policy, and an acceptance on his part of de Valera's claims that he had to bear his republican critics constantly in mind: '...these advanced Republicans might become formidable if he lightly made them a present of the Republican cause.'³

To those in Whitehall whose duty it was to monitor developments in the Free State, there was now increasing evidence that de Valera was a gradualist, adopting as one writer to the Dominions Office put it, 'Fabian tactics' on Partition.⁴ Another correspondent, after an interview with the Irish leader, assured London that de Valera himself claimed he was '...disarming the gunmen by a peaceful process.'⁵ But de Valera's gradualism was more apparent to the Dominions Office than to Baldwin's cabinet, who, content that their retaliatory

1. MacMahon (1975:11)p.65

2. Malcolm MacDonald, Titans and others, (London:1972)

33. PRO CAB 64/34 CP 124(36).

4. Charles Spring Rice to Batterbee, 3 June 1936, PRO DO 35/399/11111A/229.

5. Major General Sir George McK Franks, memo on interview with de Valera, 12 Mar. 1936, forwarded to Dominions Office, PRO DO 35/399/11111A/213.

levies on imports from Ireland compensated for the unpaid land annuities, had settled for a policy of drift: they seemed, if anything, bored with de Valera. Indeed Irish policy was scarcely under active consideration when MacDonald became Dominions Secretary - the Irish Situation Committee, for instance, not having met for the previous ten months.⁶

That de Valera was now electorally secure was becoming widely accepted in London;⁷ and MacDonald, for one, actually saw some advantages in this. A settlement concluded with him would prevent the Free State slipping into even more republican hands: and the other alternative, for which London had been hoping - and working, where possible - since 1932, the return of a Cosgrave government,⁸ would hardly bring political quiet. It would leave an unappeased Fianna Fail in the wings, awaiting their turn, and, doubtless, becoming even more republican in opposition. MacDonald, the first British minister to recognise that the 1921 Treaty was outdated,⁹ argued in just this sense to his colleagues: because of de Valera's 'unique position and influence in Irish politics', he wrote, any settlement with him had '...much more prospect of being permanent than one concluded with any other possible southern Irish leader.'¹⁰

Once awakened by MacDonald's initiatives to the importance of Irish policy, British ministers came to appreciate that de Valera's goal remained the essentials of Document No. 2: external association for a united, independent Ireland with local autonomy for Ulster.¹¹ For the British government, this policy had some limited appeal; after all, de Valera's espousal of external association, tolerable to him only because of Ulster, had, for London, the merit of curbing his separatist instincts.

For de Valera too, Fianna Fail's need to make some concessions to Ulster opinion, could be invoked to justify a closer relationship with Britain than the party would otherwise have supported. Convinced as he was about the injustice and the intractability of Partition, a policy of propaganda, economic coercion,¹² and secret diplomacy seemed best, with an appreciation that if the context changed any opportunity to weaken Partition should be exploited. What seems certain is that given the nature of Fianna Fail's political support, de Valera could scarcely have formulated a more conciliatory northern policy: Document No.2's concessions to Ulster were already anathema to many republicans,¹³ it was incumbent on Fianna Fail, at minimum, to champion the aspiration to Irish unity.

Although MacDonald's tenure of the Dominions Office brought a more sympathetic approach to Dublin, there was little change on Partition. The

6. PRO CAB 27/523, *passim*.

7. In the summer of 1936, Dulanty told MacDonald that there was 'now no chance' of Cosgrave returning to power and that Patrick McGilligan agreed with this view, MacDonald, 26 Aug. 1936, PRO CAB 27/527 ISC(32)117.

8. PRO CAB 27/525 ISC(32)36.

9. As note 3 above; see also MacMahon (1975:45).

10. As note 3 above.

11. As note 3 above; see also Sir Warren Fisher's views in PRO CAB 27/527 ISC(32)118, 7 Nov. 1936.

12. That the Ulster Unionists were apprehensive about this policy is clear, Pollock to Baldwin, 20 July 1932, Baldwin papers, CUL, vol.98.

13. MacBride at Sligo, Sligo Champion, 18 Apr. 1936.

British were still extremely reluctant to become embroiled in the issue and must have been confident that it could be safely kept in the background. Anthony Eden in October 1935 - a month before MacDonald was appointed - informed his cabinet colleagues that the Irish External Affairs Secretary, J.P.Walshe, at Geneva, had informed him that de Valera 'fully appreciated' that a united Ireland

could not come about all at once. The most therefore that could probably be hoped for at this stage would be some declaration by both Governments in Ireland expressing a hope that at some future date when both parties desired it a united Ireland might come about.¹⁴

Whereas the British believed that office had mellowed de Valera,¹⁵ they still considered that on fundamentals, including Partition, he was contrary and probably immovable.¹⁶ One significant element in the British cabinet, led by Hailsham, thought it obvious that de Valera was pursuing his 'obsession',¹⁷ of an all-Ireland republic and that it would be 'a pity to revive a dormant issue by encouraging any renewal of even exploratory talks'.¹⁸ Inskip supported this line because he believed that de Valera 'would not listen to arguments of any kind'.¹⁹ But MacDonald's enthusiasm for 'a careful effort to reconcile differences',²⁰ prevailed against both the sceptics and Baldwin's indifference, and he eventually won cabinet approval for a continuation of his bilateral talks with de Valera, begun in the spring of 1936.

Constantly, MacDonald deflected any efforts on de Valera's part to make Partition an issue between Dublin and London. A fundamental assumption agreed from the beginning on the British side was that, as MacDonald put it to his colleagues in his initial lengthy position paper,

...we still take the line that we could not contemplate any action towards the establishment of a united Ireland without the consent of Northern as well as Southern Ireland.²¹

Furthermore, MacDonald concluded that any political agreement would need the 'acquiescence' of the Free State government in the principle of the north's consent being necessary for unity. Although he could find no reason to suggest to his colleagues that de Valera might yield on external association, MacDonald added that

on the other hand, he is at least as anxious to attain his other ideal, that of a United Ireland, and appears lately to have shown more realisation that a Republic is incompatible with this.

Again, on de Valera's interpretation of the implications of his nationality legislation which the British had disputed, MacDonald counselled caution

in the hope that time, and possibly the desire on the Irish Free State's part to facilitate reunion with Northern Ireland, may produce a solution.

It was MacDonald's view that acceptance of the Crown's role in the internal

14. Eden's note of talks with Walshe, 15 Oct. 1935, PRO CAB 64/34 CP 124(36) appendix III.

15. PRO CAB 27/523 ISC(32)23rd meeting, 12 May 1936. *Ibid.*, ISC(32) 24th meeting, 25 May 1936.

16. PRO CAB 27/523 ISC(32)23rd meeting, 12 May 1936.

17. *Ibid.*, ISC(32)25th meeting, 17 June 1936.

18. As note 16 above; for Hailsham's confidential views of de Valera's 'bigoted' outlook on Anglo-Irish relations, see Hailsham to Granard, 5 Mar. 1934, in R.F.V.Heuston, Lives of the Lord Chancellors: 1885-1940, (Oxford: 1964) p.478.

19. As note 17 above.

20. PRO CAB 64/34 CP 124(36).

21. *Ibid.*, see also MacDonald's and Baldwin's contributions to ISC(32) 24th meeting, 25 May 1936 in PRO CAB 27/523.

affairs of the Irish Free State and Ulster's right to veto Irish unity, were the 'main points on which Mr. de Valera's views have presented difficulties in the past, and any prospect of settlement must depend largely on his present attitude towards them.'²²

The best evidence for de Valera's views at this juncture comes from MacDonald's detailed memorandum of a lengthy conversation which he had with the Irish leader in London on 7 July. MacDonald found de Valera in a 'practical mood', this being indicated by the fact that in four hours talk he had 'never mentioned Oliver Cromwell or any character or event which troubled Ireland prior to 1921.'²³ De Valera did mention 1921, confirming that it was during the course of that year that he had settled to his own satisfaction the tolerable compromise which could be offered to Ulster. MacDonald's memorandum puts on record his impressions of de Valera's arguments:

His personal preference was for an independent Republic, but above all else he wished for a united Ireland, and therefore in 1921 he had given careful thought to the possibility of finding some compromise which would ultimately bring the majority and the minority in Ireland together. He had considered what was the furthest that he and those who agreed with him could go to meet the feelings of the Northern majority and those who agreed with them.

Hence the compromise of external association with the British Commonwealth; de Valera's motive for this link was his fear of an even 'wider' division between north and south. External association was the furthest he could possibly go in the direction of compromise. Were he to go further, 'he himself would be overthrown by his followers.' Despite the 'intense dislike' of the Crown in the Irish Free State he thought he could successfully advocate its retention for external functions; but that was the limit to which he could go.

Even if he were willing to advocate more than that, and if he were to carry the day immediately, the success would be temporary. What he wished was for some settlement which would have some prospect of being permanent.

The aim which 'lies closest to his heart', MacDonald noted, is that of a united Ireland; he thought Britain responsible for creating Partition - her 'greatest crime against Ireland' - and for maintaining it through subsidies,²⁴ her motive being self-interest. Further, he insisted that if only Britain had the will, she 'could persuade the North to join in a United Ireland.' MacDonald attempted to disabuse him on this point but de Valera insisted that at least if Britain used her influence with the north, she 'could do much to make them favour a United Ireland.' The issue, in de Valera's view, was of 'supreme importance' since good relations between Ireland and Britain depended on a solution. He laid great emphasis, as was customary in all his talks with British officials on the difficulties of curbing Republican extremists.

He was opposed to those in the South who asked him to use force to bring in the North. He would not use force; but²⁵ he would employ reason, and was willing to wait for reason to prevail.

It may be that de Valera consciously exaggerated the threat from extreme

22. As note 21 above.

23. PRO CAB 27/527 ISC(32)108.

24. There is clearly a misprint in MacDonald's paper on this topic: 'He (de Valera) said that the financial agreements which he (?we) had made favoured Northern Ireland and were an inducement to the North to remain separate.'

25. PRO CAB 27/527 ISC(32)108.

republicans to encourage a more tolerant response from the British to his own political programme; the need to assuage republican opinion is certainly a persistent theme in his diplomatic communications with London;²⁶ on this occasion, for instance, he suggested that

the tendency in the Irish Free State was for voters to move to the Left.²⁷ He was having great trouble with the extreme Republicans and was doing everything he could to break their influence.²⁸ But the movement of opinion seemed to be in their direction, and he himself was being spoken of now as belonging to the Right!²⁹

(v):De Valera, the 'ratchet effect' and Irish nationalism

This is an appropriate point at which to consider whether Irish nationalist politics was not a demonstration of a ratchet effect at work - a ratchet effect being where policy is amenable to change in one direction only.¹ In the case here considered - Ireland's relationship with Britain - was it not the case that changes tolerable to Irish nationalist opinion had to be towards the separatist end of a unionist-separatist continuum? The course of Irish nationalism in the twentieth century seems to show such a ratchet effect: agitation for Home Rule gave way to a Dominion settlement, itself, only justified because it could be used as a 'stepping-stone' to further freedom; later, under de Valera's leadership, the 'restless Dominion' which he inherited was incrementally nudged towards a relationship of external association with the Commonwealth; and once his External Relations Act was repealed in 1948, it was thereafter inadmissible for the twenty-six county Republic of Ireland to contemplate rejoining the Commonwealth, even to facilitate a pan-Irish rapprochement in the interests of re-unification.

This syndrome - even if not identified and labelled - was felt to be at work by all political factions in the south.² The key to both London's and Belfast's understanding of Irish nationalist politics,³ it was particularly evident

26. See for instance PRO CAB 64/34 CP 167(36).

27. The British described in left-right terms what was, in fact, a republican-'dominion' continuum in Irish politics.

28. Dulanty also said as much on 10 June 1936 to MacDonald, PRO CAB 64/34 CP 167(36).

29. As note 26, italics added.

1. The ratchet metaphor is derived from: 'ratchet: set of teeth on edge of bar or wheel in which a pawl engages to ensure motion in one direction only.' Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, (London: 1964, 5th ed.) An example of the ratchet effect would be the British Conservative party's opposition to the British National Health Service but failure to dismantle it when returned to power.

2. De Valera's speech at Easter 1935 on the consequences of the 1916 Rising, Irish Press, 22 Apr. 1935; also, DE:55:2270-86 passim., 10 Apr. 1935; Senator Joseph Connolly expected Fianna Fail's 'ultimate successors in government' to come from 'the extreme Republican viewpoint...', Fianna Fail Bulletin, Apr. 1936.

3. 'Irishmen got more extreme as time went on', Sir John Simon, 3 Mar. 1938, PRO CAB 27/642 INC(38)3; Craigavon, interview, Sunday Dispatch, 23 Oct. 1938.

once Fianna Fail were in power, since their programme was based on moving gradually towards external association, which was in the direction of separatism. Against this background, it is interesting to consider some of de Valera's ideas as he revealed them in his private talks with the Dominions Secretary.

MacDonald elucidated the nuances of de Valera's position for circulation to his colleagues, sometimes finding it prudent to cast the Irish leader in as moderate a light as possible consistent with the opinions exchanged by both men at their meetings. This was to shelter MacDonald's essentially conciliatory policy from its formidable opponents in the British government.⁴ Making some allowances for this factor, MacDonald's accounts offer remarkable evidence on the evolution of de Valera's thinking on Anglo-Irish relations. The de Valera - MacDonald talks were often exploratory in character, both men 'thinking aloud' in order to exchange views frankly and without committing their respective governments. Nothing in the picture of the pragmatic, almost Anglophile de Valera portrayed by MacDonald, contradicts the picture of the cautious, pacific, gradualist suggested above. It should be remembered, too, that de Valera was a secretive politician, leading an anglophobic party, and had every reason not to trumpet his personal appreciation of the considerable strategic and economic interdependence between Ireland and Britain.⁵

From the beginning, it was clear to MacDonald that de Valera appreciated the strategic vulnerability of the Free State and that he coveted a common defence agreement with London.⁶ Although, subsequently, de Valera was to insist on Dublin's right to opt for neutrality, in January 1937, MacDonald's understanding was that the Irish Free State would be at war if the United Kingdom were at war; that the ports, if they had been returned to the south, would be available to Britain in such an eventuality, but that as a matter of politics, de Valera could not give any guarantee to this effect as this might ruin the possibility of co-operation.⁷

On the controversial question of the Crown - which had split Irish politics since the Treaty - MacDonald reports de Valera's views in considerable detail after two long conversations in January 1937.⁸ As these immediately followed the Abdication crisis, which de Valera had met by rushed legislation to limit the Crown to external functions, MacDonald was, manifestly on this occasion, obliged to record de Valera's views with some precision. It would seem from these conversations, that de Valera was hoping to keep the ratchet locked at external association. Commenting on his recent External Relations Act, he emphasised not

4. MacDonald describes his own role as 'a sort of diplomatic liason officer' between de Valera and 'the group of very pro-Ulster, anti-de Valera, right-wing Conservative ministers', in the National Government. Note to author, 15 May 1979.

5. De Valera constantly emphasised the importance of secrecy during his initial talks with MacDonald, PRO CAB 27/527 ISC(32)117; also CAB 27/523 ISC(32)23rd meeting, 12 May 1936.

6. PRO CAB 64/34 CP 124(36); also Eden's note of talks with Walshe, Geneva, Oct. 1935, *ibid.*, appendix III; CAB 27/522 ISC(32) 108 Appendix I, being CP 204(36).

7. PRO CAB 27/524 ISC(32)31st meeting, 20 Jan. 1937.

8. The conversations took place on 14 Jan. 1937. See MacDonald's memorandum to the cabinet, PRO CAB 64/34 CP 14(37) 16 Jan. 1937.

his exclusion of the Crown from internal affairs but, rather, the 'big thing' which Fianna Fail had done in voluntarily recognising the King's role in external relations. Emphasising the fact that Irish public opinion was unaware of the Crown's limited functions, de Valera argued that, slowly, 'Irishmen would become reconciled to the King. But if he forced the pace now, that process would be checked and destroyed.' MacDonald put it to de Valera that it seemed to him that for reasons which the British 'perfectly understood' de Valera was

reluctant...to use in his actual legislative documents precise language to describe the facts as they were. The facts, as he described them, regarding Irish Free State Membership of the Commonwealth and the recognition of the King were one thing, the language in the Acts seemed a somewhat different thing. To put it plainly, he dared not in the document "call a spade a spade."

MacDonald informed his cabinet colleagues that de Valera had admitted 'that this really was so,' claiming that his 'domestic political difficulties were very real.' MacDonald recorded that he had assured de Valera that the British government 'would be ready to recognise his difficulties',⁹ a point scarcely appreciated by British ministers many of whom were, by now, exasperated by de Valera's politics: Ramsay MacDonald felt trapped in a 'metaphysical discussion' over external association,¹⁰ a concept which Simon characterised as the 'shadow of a shade'.¹¹ Presently, MacDonald sent a further paper to the cabinet outlining London's options. Without denying the unsatisfactory nature of Dublin's initiative, he stressed as always, the positive dimensions; he argued that 'it must be a very serious blow' to the republicans in the Free State

that their unrivalled leader has recognised the position of the Crown and actually passed legislation to maintain it in some form. It is true that Mr. de Valera himself still hankers after a united Irish Republic within the Commonwealth. He told me so frankly, but at the same time he kept saying that in five or ten years time the Irish, who could only accept the King reluctantly now, may have learned to accept him more readily.¹²

The vital importance for the British to establish de Valera's exact position - they were particularly concerned at the potential repercussions in the Commonwealth - combined with the exhaustive detail of MacDonald's two memoranda ensures that what is delineated above is, at least, an accurate representation of what de Valera thought the British government should believe was his position.

Against all of this evidence suggesting that de Valera would be content to settle for external association - to be justified on the grounds of its appeal to Ulster - must be placed other public statements which suggest a different emphasis. Whereas in his talks with MacDonald he seems to expect and want Irish nationalism's ratchet to lock at external association, in some public statements - especially to the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis¹³ - he implies that the ratchet will inevitably turn to the position espoused by the party: an independent united Republic. At the 1936 Ard Fheis, counselling patience and realism on Partition,

9. Ibid.

10. PRO CAB 27/524 ISC(32)30th meeting, 15 Dec. 1936, Ramsay MacDonald's comment.

11. Ibid., ISC(32)29th meeting, 17 Nov. 1936.

12. PRO CAB 64/34 CP 15(37), 18 Jan. 1937.

13. See de Valera's statements to successive Ard Fheiseanna of 1933, 1934 and 1935, Irish Press reports for 9 Nov. 1933, 14 Nov. 1934 and 4 Dec. 1935.

de Valera had assured delegates that the party was 'going the right road and that we will get there to the end in good time.' He also told them that the new constitution would be so drafted that 'it can continue to be an Irish Nation's constitution, when that cruel wrong of Partition is undone.'¹⁴ Promising separate legislation to cover the state's external relations - soon enacted during the Abdication crisis - he said of this bill that it would

make it possible to continue these relations until such time as the Irish people will clearly make up their mind that they do not want these relations to continue.¹⁵

Such sentiments, combined with de Valera's decision to provide for external association, not in the constitution but through an act which could be repealed by a simple Dail majority, seems to envisage a very different future for external association from that outlined to MacDonald. Although difficult to reconcile, some sympathy is due to de Valera who was, after all, engaged in the awesome task of trying to find a modus vivendi between Irish republicanism and the British Commonwealth.

It was MacDonald's own belief that de Valera's legislation 'really represents the beginning of Mr. de Valera's own permanent acceptance of the King as King of Ireland and head of the Commonwealth.' MacDonald does not preclude the possibility that 'this theory...is wrong' and that de Valera's recent moves represent 'only one step in the direction of abolishing the King altogether' - the ratchet effect itself. His own impression, however was that he had correctly assessed de Valera's motives.

Mr. de Valera wants a united Ireland, and he also wants to remain a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, and I believe he is at least convinced that he cannot attain either of these objects unless he is ready to accept the King.¹⁶

There is one other possible explanation of the difference in emphasis between what de Valera told MacDonald and what he said to the party. It is possible that he was only too confident of the ratchet effect and was relying on it, in time, to deliver the Republic; while, in the interim, he kept his 'bridge' open to Ulster, and could honourably defend those Irish interests in trade, finance and defence which derived from Dominion status.

Although de Valera persistently reminded the British during these years of his fundamental objections to Partition, they remained merely listeners to his grievances: at most, there was an exchange of views on Partition; there was little change of mind on either side. The British successfully resisted attempts to make the question one for negotiation rather than debate. Nevertheless, MacDonald and de Valera both appreciated that eventually there would have to be comprehensive formal negotiations and that Partition would, inevitably, obtrude. Meanwhile the British government managed to remain disengaged on the issue; and although de Valera was obliged to acquiesce in this course, it had, too, some advantages for him. In particular, he was anxious to expediate external association. Furthermore, since early in 1935 he had been contemplating a new

14. Irish Press, 4 Nov. 1936.

15. De Valera speech reprinted in PRO CAB 27/527 ISC(32)118; date of speech, 3 Nov. 1936 to Ard Fheis.

16. PRO CAB 64/34 CP 15(37), 18 Jan. 1937.

constitution and given the impossibility of drafting a document tolerable to Ulster and to his own party, there were advantages in finalising it before any possibility arose of negotiations involving, even indirectly, the Ulster Unionists. This latter may have been an unlikely contingency but one which could have posed serious and uncomfortable challenges to him; with external association and a new constitution both necessary if Fianna Fail's republican support was to be maintained, the de Valera government was anxious that each should be a fait accompli before Ulster's representatives got to any conference table.

In July 1936, in a speech emphasising the need to attract Ulster into unity, MacEntee stressed the need to work

towards the national objectives so that when we have a republican constitution, if these people want to come in with us they will have to accept the Republic as well as every other thing.¹⁷

In time, external association and a republican constitution were achieved by Fianna Fail, but no progress could be reported in getting 'these people...to come in with us...'.

Just as the British reminded him that he ought to heed Ulster's views, thereby hoping to curb his republican instincts, so he, in turn, informed them that as no progress had been made on abolishing Partition, he felt free to proceed with his new constitution.¹⁸ The publication of this, in draft form, in May 1937 with its formal expression of his irredentist claim on the north, brought the Partition question to the forefront in Anglo-Irish relations. The period which followed, including as it did the comprehensive intergovernmental negotiations of January-April 1938, is critical in any consideration of de Valera's record on Partition. Not since 1921, when he had controversially left the detailed negotiations to others, was there such an opportunity to make some progress. Always an issue of great intractability and one where opportunism on the Irish side was understood to be important, de Valera sensed that the Chamberlain government's appeasement policy might be extended to meet his grievance on Partition. Arguably it was during this period that his policy on Ulster was most seriously considered by any British government: whatever frustration he may have felt about his own party's naively optimistic expectations on the question, de Valera believed he had some formidable cards to play against the Ulster Unionists. During this period he had occasion to play them all: in the new constitution he formalised his party's aspirational claim to the thirtytwo counties; in Anglo-Irish diplomacy, he attempted to hinge a coveted defence agreement with concessions on Partition; his policy of economic discrimination against Northern Ireland was seen to be a matter of grave concern to the Ulster Unionists; his allegation that they discriminated against nationalists was heeded by the British; briefly, functional co-operation between north and south was tried; de Valera detailed again his offer of a federal solution; and, finally, there was the resort to an intensive anti-Partition propaganda campaign. All of these initiatives failed before the advent of the Second World War marked the close of this period of de Valera's attempts to unite Ireland.

17. Irish Press, 27 July 1936.

18. Longford and O'Neill (1970:307).

(i) The 1937 Constitution: 'As few fictions as possible',¹

(a) Articles 2 and 3

It may not be given to us in our time to see the end.

- De Valera to Ard Fheis, 1932.

I can truthfully say that I am more confident now that I have a good chance of seeing the attainment of our objectives than I was when we started twenty years ago.

- De Valera to Ard Fheis, 1937²

Since the end of the Civil War, de Valera's aim had been to persuade all Irish nationalists to work together through constitutional means, to achieve the kernels of Document No.2. Since he saw his proposed new constitution as an essential step towards this goal, he sought all-party support for it in the referendum campaign,³ claiming that its rejection by the electorate would prove a 'national disaster'.⁴ But despite persistent appeals, the proposed constitution was not recommended to the voters by opposition parties. Although some of its Dail critics considered the Constitution paradoxical on Irish unity,⁵ the opposition based their rejection of it on grounds other than its particular expression of anti-Partitionism: Articles 2 and 3.⁶

Article 2 claimed for the nation, jurisdiction over the entire island: article 3 accepted that de facto the laws of the state could only be exercised in the 26 counties 'pending the reintegration of the national territory'.⁷ A matter for concern in Belfast and London, as will be seen,⁸ and broadly dismissed as naive and counterproductive in the press,⁹ Articles 2 and 3 provoked scepticism rather than opposition from Fine Gael. Their genesis is obscure:¹⁰ while de Valera undoubtedly took final responsibility for the constitution, it is possible that, as Dillon claimed in the Dail, Articles 2 and 3 were MacEntee's 'contribution...to the solution of the problem of partition.'¹¹ In the absence of the relevant evidence however, it is not possible to establish with certainty

1. De Valera told the Dail in 1948 that 'our Constitution was intended to be as explicit as it possibly could be, with as few fictions as possible...', DE:113:421, 24 Nov. 1948.

2. Irish Press, 9 Nov. 1932 and 13 Oct. 1937.

3. Longford and O'Neill (1970:299); Aiken, DE:67:336-7, 13 May 1937.

4. Irish Press, 18 June 1937.

5. See exchanges between de Valera and McGilligan, DE:67:448, 13 May 1937.

6. Controversy centered on the status of women and the role of President.

7. Article 2, Bunreacht na hEireann.

8. See ch.5:i:c below.

9. Irish Times, 1,3,10 May; Irish Independent, 21 June. 1937.

10. Longford and O'Neill offer no clue (1970:295-300).

11. DE:67:249, 12 May 1937.

the influences which shaped what have since become the most controversial articles in the State's constitution. When the initial draft was first circulated within the civil service, there was, at least, one dissenting voice, and a formidable one: the Secretary of the Department of Finance, J.J. McElligott. Offering the department's commentary in a critical spirit, McElligott objected to the irredentist claim on the north, whose validity in international law he doubted. Articles 2 and 3 seemed 'rather to vitiate the Constitution, by stating at the outset what will be described, and with some justice, as a fiction...': further, he argued they 'will not contribute anything to effecting the unity of Ireland, but rather the reverse.'¹² In a later comment, McElligott repeated his view that the claim to territory 'which does not belong to Saorstát Éireann' gave a 'permanent place in the Constitution to a claim to "Hibernia Irredenta." The parallel with Italy's historical attitude to the Adriatic seaboard beyond its recognised territory is striking and in that case it is likely to have lasting ill-effects on our political relations with our nearest neighbours.'¹³ McElligott's broadsides proved futile, no trace of their thinking being incorporated in the constitution when published.

A more likely source of influence, whose lobbying seems to have been taken into account was the interventionist faction within Fianna Fáil; they had suggested that an all-Ireland Republic should be unilaterally declared in the new constitution.¹⁴ The unilateral initiative, it must be remembered, had successful precedents: indeed the induction of most Fianna Fáil TDs into political activity dated from the 1916-1925 period during which their classic pose was based on a unilateral assumption of authority by their group, whether as Sinn Féin abstentionist MPs setting up Dáil Éireann, IRA volunteers prosecuting a war on behalf of the nation, or workers in the 'underground' government departments, pre-Treaty.¹⁵ Later, a similar strategy was attempted in opposition to the Free State, Republicans unilaterally maintaining a rival 'Dáil', 'cabinet' and 'army'. Moreover, since 1932, de Valera's successes in Anglo-Irish relations had largely been a result of unilateral initiatives.

Given this background, it is scarcely surprising that one faction in the party believed that through the formal declaration of a united country in the constitution, de Valera could precipitate a crisis and, perhaps, force London's hand to abolish Partition.¹⁶ Certainly Article 2, without Article 3's de facto acceptance of interim Partition, and with seats in the Dáil for northern MPs, was the most radical initiative available to the Fianna Fáil government, and was probably what the interventionists had in mind when they called for the abolition of Partition through the new constitution: also it would have been consistent with the tradition of unilateral initiatives just outlined. But having failed to

12. McElligott's memo. is dated 22 Mar. 1937, quoted in J.R. Fanning, The Irish Department of Finance: 1922-1958, Dublin, 1978, p.267, hereafter, Fanning:1978.

13. Department of Finance submission on 'Second Revise' of draft Constitution, early April 1937, by J.J. McElligott, quoted by Dermot Keogh, 'Ireland, the Vatican and Catholic Europe: 1919-1939', Ph.D thesis, European University Institute, Florence, 1979.

14. Irish Press, 4 Nov. 1936, Clár 1936 Ard Fheis.

15. De Valera told the 1936 Ard Fheis that 'unilateral action is not going to end Partition.' Irish Press, 4 Nov. 1936.

16. Ibid., for reports of 1936 Ard Fheis; also Fianna Fáil Bulletin, Nov. 1936.

persuade the 1936 Ard Fheis to demand that the new constitution provided Dail seats for Northern MPs, Donnelly's group had to settle for an assurance 'that there would be no words in the new Constitution that could possibly place bounds to the march of a nation', sentiments which de Valera found no difficulty in supporting.¹⁷ Thwarted at the Ard Fheis, Donnelly persisted in his attempts to get his strategy on Partition adopted by de Valera. Indeed his lobbying was, presumably, all the more embarrassing since his preferred strategy was what de Valera himself had espoused in 1923. A member of the party's National Executive, he had a special meeting called to discuss his resolution that

an all-Ireland convention be called before the Constitution is introduced and that steps be taken to approach again the question of the re-unification of Ireland on the basis as adumbrated in President de Valera's letter of the 19th July 1923.¹⁸

This referred to a specific version of de Valera's federal solution which was less conciliatory towards the Ulster unionists than de Valera's position in the late 1930s: in 1929 de Valera had proposed a six-county plebiscite with the expectation that 'Derry City and the greater parts of the Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh as well as South Armagh and South Down would be represented directly in the National Parliament.' 'On no plea,' he had then argued, 'could the "Ulster" minority demand anything more.'¹⁹ But by 1937 he clearly preferred a different emphasis. Unfortunately the minutes of the National Executive meeting merely record that 'after a long discussion the motion by Mr Donnelly was put and defeated by 21 votes to 4.'²⁰ De Valera - an infrequent attendee at such meetings in these busy years - took the chair on this occasion.

(b) The national debate

Article 3 which accepted de facto Partition, 'pending the reintegration of of the national territory' was considered by many to render nugatory Article 2's claim that the entire island comprised the 'national territory'. Taken together, these articles seemed, to a wide spectrum of political opinion, to be paradoxical and contradictory: 'make-believe' was the verdict of both W.T.Cosgrave²¹ and of the most stubbornly orthodox of all republicans, the 2nd Dail;²² Ulster unionists agreed: Craigavon thought the articles made 'not a pin of difference...',²³ and the Belfast Newsletter wrote of the 'pretentious claims' of a Constitution which had 'no reality'.²⁴ There was nothing in this remarkable unanimity to contradict McElligott's original verdict that the articles were 'a fiction'.

For their part, Fianna Fail speakers while emphasising, as always, the

17. Irish Press, 4 Nov. 1936.

18. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 1 Feb. 1937.

19. Quoted by Donnelly, DE:67:110, 11 May 1937; see also minutes of Comhairle na dTeachtaí, 7 Aug. 1924, reprinted in Gaughan (1977:335).

20. As note 17 above.

21. Irish Times, 3 May 1937.

22. Statement by '2nd Dail', Irish Freedom, June 1937, see also ibid., July 1937.

23. Irish News, 6 May 1937.

24. Editorials, Belfast Newsletter, 1 and 7 May 1937.

desirability, necessity and inevitability of unity,²⁵ argued that the Constitution would bring closer, as O'Kelly put it, this 'promised land of the 32 county republic.'²⁶ Vivion de Valera claimed that, through it, 'we can blot out the ignominious border';²⁷ a party advertisement claimed that it 'forms a secure basis' for national unity.²⁸ Persistently, the boast was made from Fianna Fail platforms that the Constitution would not need to be changed in any detail in a united Ireland.²⁹ Along with the obvious appeal which such a claim had for a party firmly convinced that unity was inevitable, it may also be taken as an indication of a hope on de Valera's part that if unification were achieved, there would be no renegotiation of the constitution by Ulster interests; nor would there be the need for a further referendum, which, necessarily embracing all 32 counties, would inevitably be used by those unionists opposed to unity as a plebiscite to demonstrate the areal extent of their resistance. No matter how optimistic de Valera might be of converting some loyalists to Irish unity, any such future plebiscitary endorsement of his Constitution was better avoided, if possible. Indeed, under attack, in the Dail, for claiming his Constitution would suit a united country when it was only being voted on south of the border,³⁰ de Valera explicitly claimed that 'the majority of the people' would be acting 'on behalf of the whole.'³¹

When the Dail came to consider the document, two of de Valera's most persistent critics on Ulster, MacDermot and Donnelly, tabled the first two resolutions: both men were preoccupied by Partition, both wanted to involve the north in the shaping of any Constitution but their attacks came from diametrically opposed positions. Donnelly, in order to give the people of Ulster 'a voice and a vote' in the Constitution, called on the Dail to defer a second reading, at least until 1938, to enable 'a special Governmental Department' to be set up which would concentrate on the Partition question: its role would be the 'uniting and co-ordinating' of all the anti-Partitionist forces throughout Ireland, organizing the Irish lobby abroad,

focussing through the home and foreign Press world opinion on this grave national issue, and pressing the English government to reopen negotiations on the reunification of Ireland, so that, if and when a solution of the problem is found, Bunreacht na hEireann can be submitted to the whole people of Ireland for ratification or otherwise.

Partition, he insisted, was 'the predominant national issue. Nothing else counts; nothing else matters... We cannot call this a nation until we get back that territory.'³²

No Fianna Fail backbencher spoke in support of Donnelly's resolution;³³ it was dealt with in detail by Sean MacEntee. He emphasised the antipathy which some Republican factions reserved for Leinster House when he rejected Donnelly's

25. Aiken, Irish Press, 10 May; O'Kelly, ibid., 23 June; de Valera at Dundalk, ibid., 28 June; and at Trim, ibid., 1 July 1937.

26. Ibid., 24 June 1937.

27. Ibid., 26 June 1937.

28. Irish Independent, 26 June 1937.

29. See Derrig, DE:67:392, 13 May 1937.

30. See for instance, FitzGerald, DE:67:1912-23, 4 June 1937.

31. DE:67:1912-23, 4 June 1937.

32. DE:67:104-118, 12 May 1937.

33. It was seconded by an independent deputy, Tom Hales, ibid., cols. 118-23,

idea of a government department to coordinate all anti-Partition forces north and south: it was 'an ambitious idea but had not 'the slightest chance' of proving of practical value. Nor, in propaganda terms, or in persuading the British to negotiate on Partition, could such a department achieve more than would be achieved by the enactment of the Constitution.³⁴

MacDermot, a strong advocate of a pluralist, united Ireland moved a resolution calling on the Dail to decline to give a second reading to the Constitution 'since, while purporting to establish a Constitution for the whole of Ireland, it offers no basis for union with the North and contains various provisions tending to prolong partition.' Although the concept was not then current, MacDermot's essential objection is on the grounds that the Constitution was an expression of the political culture of a republican, Gaelic, Catholic Ireland: it was 'at heart' partitionist, a 'wrong turning'. 'It is we who seek unity and it is on us the burden lies for showing vision, kindness and courage.' The south should offer the north 'an Ireland in which a place can be found for their traditions and aspirations as well as for ours.'³⁵ Having failed with his original resolution, MacDermot scrutinised the rest of the Constitution clause by clause and was the author of several amendments, most of them inspired by his desire that the north should not be alienated. To this end, he recommended that the preamble should include some acknowledgement of the sentiments of Ulster unionists and of the need to conciliate 'our various traditions and aspirations so as to fuse them into one national consciousness...'. But peremptorily dismissed by de Valera, and finding no support in the house, this amendment was negatived.³⁶

MacDermot also attacked Article 44's reference to the 'special position' of the Catholic church; whereas he believed that it 'really means nothing', he was certain it would be misunderstood in Ulster.³⁷ De Valera refused MacDermot's call for its deletion claiming that all the religious articles were 'the result of serious deliberation and careful thought'³⁸ - the entire Constitution had, in fact, been shown to the Pope.³⁹ As for the specific criticism that the 'special position' clause would hinder Irish unity, de Valera merely remarked: '...we can only take these things as they come.'⁴⁰ Moreover in the course of the exchanges with MacDermot on this amendment, he gave further evidence that in terms of political culture, he preferred a society based on majority - in this case, Catholic - norms:

If we are going to have a democratic State, if we are going to be ruled by the representatives of the people, it is clear their whole philosophy of life is going to affect that, and that has to be borne in mind and the recognition of it is important in that sense.⁴¹

De Valera's Minister for Education, Tomas Derrig, spoke even more explicitly on this theme. Insisting that 'every endeavour' had been made by the

34. Ibid., cols. 205-210.

35. Ibid., cols. 76-89, 11 May 1937.

36. Ibid., cols. 1923-5, 4 June 1937.

37. Ibid. cols. 1888-1911, 4 June 1937.

38. Ibid. cols. 1890-4,

39. Mentioned in the Irish language version of de Valera's biography, Tomas O'Neill and Padraig O Fiannachta, De Valera, (Dublin:1970) Vol.2,p.337.

40. DE:67:1892, 4 June 1937.

41. Ibid., col. 1890.

framers of the Constitution 'to see that it would suit and be appropriate to any development that might take place towards a united Ireland', Derrig, defended the government against the criticism that the document made little appeal to Ulster. If the alternative, he admitted, was to wait until 'we are appreciably nearer to a united Ireland, we will have to wait a very long time.' Claiming that the government had 'given a great deal of attention to the matter', Derrig continued,

we have been listening for a number of years to this thing - that in everything from the Irish language generally to the provisions about divorce, we are holding up the ultimate reunion of this country. Are we then to assume, or can it be claimed to be the logical outcome of these arguments, that we are simply to refuse to put our own ideas into law and refuse to put before the Irish people the instrument which we, as responsible for the government of the country, regard as being suitable to the country's requirements?⁴²

Although Fine Gael critics - notably FitzGerald, McGilligan and Dillon - supported MacDermot's claim that the Constitution would hinder unity, this seems to have been a minority view.⁴³ The Constitution's provisions on Partition were as often criticised, inside and outside the Dail, on the grounds that they were not sufficiently republican.⁴⁴ Only a minority seem to have appreciated the pervasive antipathy to such a Constitution on the part of Ulster unionists. Indeed the New York Irish World was not alone in making the claim that although 'recognising Ireland as a Catholic nation' the Constitution appealed to all 32 counties.⁴⁵ One independent deputy claimed that the guarantee of religious freedom should appeal 'to these objectionable religious bigots' in Ulster who were 'the barrier to unity...'.⁴⁶

The Constitution's debt to the social teaching of the papal encyclicals was widely commented upon: approval came from the Catholic Standard,⁴⁷ the Irish Catholic⁴⁸ and from the Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. Gilmartin.⁴⁹ Further, the outgoing Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, Dr. F.W. O'Neill - who had been consulted by de Valera on the religious clauses - broadly approved of the document. He was 'impressed by the unbiassed fairness' with which the small Protestant minority in the south had been treated and he welcomed the Christian tone of the document.⁵⁰ Coming as it did from the leader of Presbyterians throughout the thirtytwo counties, this was a valuable endorsement. It was 'a joy', said MacEntee, 'to read the utterance' as it disposed of the Rome Rule myth. In the same speech MacEntee argued that it was to the credit of Fianna Fail that they had the 'moral courage almost unique in the world today to adopt as part of the Constitution the fundamental teachings of the Holy Father in regard to the Family.'⁵¹ Another Fianna Fail candidate in the general election, Bernard Butler claimed that Fine Gael in opposing the Constitution 'sinned against' the country's 'dearest beliefs',⁵² and Sean T O'Kelly in one speech made

42. DE:68:392-3, 14 June 1937.

43. FitzGerald, DE:67:373, 13 May; McGilligan, ibid., col. 413; Dillon ibid., col. 249, 12 May 1937.

44. Sinn Fein statement, Irish Press, 16 June; Brian O'Higgins, letter, ibid., 30 June; Tom Barry at Bodenstown, Irish Independent, 21 June 1937.

45. Irish World, quoted in Irish Press, 25 May; see also Tuam Herald, quoted ibid., 8 May; Seamus Moore, TD, ibid., 4 May 1937.

46. Deputy Kent, DE:67:237, 12 May 1937.

47. Irish Press, 7 May 1937.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., 10 May 1937.

50. Ibid., 8 June 1937.

51. Ibid., 18 June 1937.

52. Ibid., 17 June 1937.

two claims for the Constitution, that it was 'worthy of a Catholic country...', and brought nearer 'the promised land' of a united Irish republic.⁵³

During the election and referendum campaign, a considerable diversity of viewpoints was expressed on how unity might come. Two weeks before polling day, a prominent Fianna Fail backbencher, the 1916 veteran Richard Walsh, claimed at an election meeting in Mayo that 'Fianna Fail had no objection to the use of force to achieve Irish independence provided peaceful methods failed.'⁵⁴ Although Walsh's speech was not specifically disowned by de Valera, he immediately rejected the use of force, arguing throughout the rest of the campaign that force was 'impracticable':

Some have mentioned force. There has been no question of force in regard to the Six Counties. We recognise it would be a distasteful task, and one which probably would not succeed, and which ultimately if it did would not make for the kind of re-union we want.⁵⁵

De Valera again, was the leading moderate on this issue.⁵⁶ O'Kelly who, in reply to a heckler, had characterized force as being 'no longer a necessity...',⁵⁷ in general, struck a more bellicose note than his leader.⁵⁸ Another argument heard was that Partition rendered a resort to force inevitable. Dr. Conor Ward, from a platform which he was sharing with de Valera, argued in this sense: for as long as Partition lasted

so long will there be men found, call them wild or tame or mad, and I say it is a glorious madness - who will be prepared to risk their lives again so that the country will be free. (Cheers). That is not a threat although it has been misrepresented as a threat.⁵⁹

De Valera, in contrast, emphasised the need to achieve such economic progress that the Ulster unionists would be attracted into a united country. He repeatedly exhorted election meetings to work for the abolition of Partition by exploiting the fact that the twentysix counties was 'wonderfully situated to make our state one of the most prosperous in the world...'.⁶⁰ He even expressed optimism: increasingly he claimed, the Ulster unionists saw their fears of unfair treatment in a united Ireland as 'hallucinations';⁶¹ some conversations were already taking place;⁶² but unity, de Valera insisted, must be based on a common pride in Irish citizenship,⁶³ and in making a 'stirring appeal for the Irish language', he argued that 'there was no use in being an imitation country.'⁶⁴ Despite the consistency of Ulster Unionist support in northern elections, there seems to have been optimism within the Fianna Fail elite on the prospects of winning majority support against Partition within the six counties;

53. Ibid., 24 June 1937.

54. Ibid., 15 June 1937.

55. At Carrickmacross, ibid., 28 June 1937.

56. See his speeches at Sligo, ibid., 18 June; Kilkenny, ibid., 23 June; Bray, Sunday Independent, 27 June 1937.

57. Irish Press, 24 June 1937.

58. See also ibid., 21 and 23 June 1937.

59. Ibid., 28 June 1937.

60. At Sligo, ibid., 18 June 1937.

61. At Kilkenny, ibid., 23 June 1937.

62. All nationalists tended to exaggerate the importance of any contact with unionists.

63. Irish Press, 28 June 1937.

64. At Kilkenny, ibid., 23 June 1937.

some of this optimism - Aiken⁶⁵ and Donnelly⁶⁶ are examples - was claimed to be based on local knowledge.

Indeed, Donnelly, confident that 'South Down, South Armagh, Derry City, Tyrone, Fermanagh and East Down' would prefer Dublin rule, called again during the campaign for the plebiscite of the six counties which had been de Valera's 1923 policy and for which Donnelly had already failed to win endorsements from both the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis and the party's National Executive.⁶⁷ De Valera, who was confident that throughout Ireland, three votes in four and 'probably higher' would vote for 'unity and one state'⁶⁸ revealed his attitude most clearly when responding to a heckler at a meeting in Monaghan:

Somebody has asked me about the Six Counties, continued Mr de Valera, "My reply is get a copy of the new Constitution. There is in it an assertion that the national territory is the whole of Ireland, not part of it."

Asserting that the Constitution was 'the only basis that I can see' for unity, de Valera claimed that one third of the six county population was already anxious to join the south

and if you can get another one sixth of the whole population of the six counties to support the idea of unity of Ireland, then you will have a majority for the unity of Ireland. When we have got that majority the problem of the unity of the country will be solved.⁶⁹

Those voters whose support for de Valera was based on their belief that only he could solve 'the national question',⁷⁰ might have noticed the range of opinion within Fianna Fail, not only on how Partition might end, but also on when. Two weeks before polling day, de Valera admitted that unity might not come within 'a short time...',⁷¹ a prediction which may have caused misgivings in the party because during the rest of the campaign, de Valera gradually changed his emphasis: he first predicted unity '...long before twenty years',⁷² then 'before a very short time',⁷³ then within a 'relatively short time',⁷⁴ and, finally, on polling day, 'soon'.⁷⁵ Moreover, he promised that an incoming Fianna Fail government would give precedence to the Partition issue:

no matter what form it may take and how it is to be effected - the main political purpose must be to try to bring back the complete independent unity of this country and I believe that this Constitution which you are asked to enact may form the basis of the re-union.⁷⁶

65. DE:68:386, 14 June 1937.

66. Ibid., cols., 466-7; also Irish Press, 15 June 1937.

67. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 1 Feb. 1937; Clar, 1936 Ard Fheis.

68. At Bray, Sunday Independent, 27 June 1937.

69. At Monaghan, Irish Press, 28 June 1937.

70. Margaret Pearse, ibid., 17 June; T.J.Keane, ibid., 18 June; and resolution of Buncrana UDC, ibid., 13 June 1937.

71. At Sligo, ibid., 18 June 1937.

72. At Gort, ibid., 21 June 1937.

73. At Kilkenny, ibid., 23 June 1937.

74. Ibid., 29-30 June 1937.

75. At Ballybofey, ibid., 1 July 1937.

76. Ibid., 17 June 1937.

De Valera although privately sceptical about the prospects for unity, lapsed into such rhetoric from public platforms. He was emphatic on one point: the Constitution's 'big concessions' to Ulster were, in his book, the best offer he could make to appease unionist opinion. Emphasising this to the Dail, he then devalued these 'concessions' by implicitly acknowledging the ratchet effect when talking of the greater hopes and expectations of the younger generation: perhaps 'we are reaching the old fogey stage by now...', adding, to reassure his republican wing, that 'this is not the last.' ⁷⁷

(c) London's response

London had no inkling that de Valera intended to be so provocative on Partition in his constitution. MacDonald's attention had been focussed on the clause which would cover the south's relationship with the Commonwealth and had, repeatedly and unsuccessfully, pressed Dulanty for a preview. In fact, MacDonald first saw the draft constitution on the day of its press publication: it was a considerable disappointment to him. He had been hoping that the ratchet was locked at the point to which de Valera had brought it with his External Relations Act. Indeed, with the threat of a European war making good, certainly better, Anglo-Irish relations a primary British interest, MacDonald, early in April, made one of Britain's rare appeals to the Northern Ireland government for some gesture on Partition. ⁷⁸

Unaware that Articles 2 and 3 were already at the printers in Dublin, MacDonald sounded Craigavon on the possibility of some co-operation with the south in order to get the Free State 'more firmly' in the Empire. Their exchanges, as chronicled by MacDonald, reveal again not only the gulf which existed between Belfast and Dublin, but also London's difficulty in securing Northern Ireland's assent to even the most perfunctory crossborder co-operation. MacDonald stressed to Craigavon that de Valera's External Relations Act although unsatisfactory, had, at least, recognised the King. Moreover, de Valera's motive had been to appease Ulster, hoping that 'he had left the door open to a possible united Ireland'. If, however, de Valera were to find

that Northern Ireland would take no step whatever in that direction, then he might well, in a fit of impatience, or as a result of Republican political pressure, abolish the King altogether so far as Southern Ireland was concerned.

77. DE:68:430-1, 14 June 1937.

78. See MacDonald's note of talks with Dulanty in April and May 1937, PRO DO 35/890/X1/56 passim; also Dulanty to MacDonald, 1 May 1937, ibid., -/57.

One can imagine Craigavon's feeling of deja vu at this stage: having reluctantly accepted devolved Home Rule in 1920, to appease Irish nationalism, the Ulster Unionists had, thereafter, developed a deep suspicion of London's suggestibility when under pressure from Dublin.

MacDonald now tentatively brought forward his proposition: while assuring Craigavon that no coercion would be applied, he, along with some of his colleagues,

in thinking carefully over the problem, had wondered whether there was any chance, at any time in the near future, of the Northern Ireland Government making a response, however slight, to de Valera's policy.

MacDonald added the assurance that he had never discussed any such proposal with de Valera; indeed he had always stressed to de Valera that Partition was a matter for the Dublin and Belfast governments: 'If they wished to take any step towards greater co-operation, we certainly would not intervene to prevent them.' At this point Craigavon interjected to insist that 'Northern Ireland would never think of amalgamation with Southern Ireland.' Ulster unionists would have 'no confidence whatever' in any 'assurances and guarantees of fair treatment'. If Ireland were to be united, added Craigavon, 'the situation would soon become similar to the present situation in Spain.' MacDonald hastened to reassure Craigavon that his proposition was merely

some sort of a Council - of a purely advisory character - on which representatives of the North and South met round the same table to discuss certain matters of common interest. They might be merely questions concerning postal services or wireless services.

There would be no infringement of the power of either Irish government, but the establishment of such a Council would be 'a concession to Mr. de Valera' and might well 'for a long time to come' confirm the King's position in the Irish Free State.

Indeed, it seemed to some of us in London that at this moment Northern Ireland might be able, even by a slight gesture, to perform a very valuable service to The King and the Empire. They could help to anchor the Irish Free State inside the Empire.

Craigavon remained unmoved: in any event, he told MacDonald that he personally felt bound by his own public promises never to co-operate with Dublin; 'fundamental distrust' was how MacDonald summarised Craigavon's view of the south, and this was before the publication of de Valera's constitution.⁷⁹

Once published, MacDonald noted Craigavon's view that whereas Articles 2 and 3 were 'very objectionable, it would be a mistake to take too much notice of them',⁸⁰ a response similar to that of the British cabinet. Halifax reflected the impotence and exasperation of his

79. MacDonald note of talk with Craigavon, 7 Apr. 1937, PRO DO 35/890/X1/54.

80. Holograph draft by MacDonald, PRO DO 35/892/X1/111.

colleagues when he noted that it was 'hopeless and a waste of time to attempt to discuss these constitutional niceties' with de Valera, much of whose behaviour was 'really play-acting' which it would be a great mistake to treat... too seriously.'⁸¹ The British Attorney General's view on the offending articles was that they were 'without legal result',⁸² a verdict with which Northern Ireland's adviser Professor A.L. Queckett concurred, adding, however, that they were

framed in words which may well create an impression that the position of Northern Ireland is something different from that for which provision has been made by the enactments of the Imperial Parliament.⁸³

It was also feared that there would be confusion over Article 4, which provided for a change of title from the 'Irish Free State' to 'Eire, or in the English language, Ireland'. MacDonald noted that to accept the new title without comment would be open to the 'gravest objection' and would be 'violently' opposed by Northern Ireland as it would be 'tantamount to a recognition of the claim to the whole of the island...'.⁸⁴ Having agonised over this article for many months - the Stormont cabinet even discussed the possibility of changing their own title by substituting 'Ulster' for 'Northern Ireland'⁸⁵ - the British government decided on a formal statement explaining their position.⁸⁶ In time, they established - much to Dublin's annoyance - 'Eire' as a synonym for the twentysix county state.

Initially, London delayed any official communication to Dublin concerning the Constitution: busy with the Imperial Conference, then being held in London - with de Valera, incidentally, a prominent absentee⁸⁷ - they were anxious to sound the Dominion leaders on the document. MacDonald asked Dulanty to inform de Valera that silence did not mean they were 'indifferent or had decided to be acquiescent...'.⁸⁸ At a comprehensive, informal discussion on Ireland, the Dominion Prime Ministers were agreed on the intractability of Partition, which MacDonald feared might 'prove the Achilles heel' in Anglo-Irish relations. MacDonald alluded to de Valera's consistency since 1921 when he had first espoused external association

Having said this for so many years I think that he will continue to say it all his days. My own view is that he hopes that North and

81. PRO CAB 27/524 ISC(32)34th meeting, 9 June 1937.

82. Somervell to MacDonald, 8 July 1937, PRO DO 35/891/x1/98.

83. Note on Articles 2 and 3, by Prof. A.L. Queckett, Parliamentary Counsel, Northern Ireland, *ibid.*, -/77.

84. PRO DO 35/891/x1/98.

85. Craigavon told his cabinet that MacDonald was 'very much perturbed' by Articles 2 and 3; whether Northern Ireland should change its name to 'Ulster' as a 'counter-stroke' was discussed on 7 Dec. 1937, PRONI CAB 4/389/2.

86. Draft, MacDonald, PRO DO 35/892/X1/111.

87. MacDonald's first intimation that de Valera would not attend, was gleaned from *The Times* report of de Valera's statement to the Dail; MacDonald note of talk with Dulanty, 30 Apr. 1937, PRO DO 35/890/x1/56.

88. MacDonald note of talk with Dulanty, 20 May 1937, PRO DO 35/891/X1/67.

South will come together in the end on this very basis. He knows that it would be impossible for the North to come in if the King's position were to be further reduced.⁸⁹

(d) The Referendum

Whatever about its reception in London or Belfast, an earlier priority for Fianna Fail was to win the greatest possible measure of support for the Constitution in the referendum. Within Fianna Fail, it was considered to be the most significant achievement, thus far, in rendering the hated Treaty agreement and the 1922 Free State Constitution obsolete. De Valera had claimed during the referendum campaign that Fianna Fail had 'torn up a document which was made disgraceful to the Irish nation and it is a battered, a torn document at present.'⁹⁰ Given this political background, it was too much to expect all party support for de Valera's Constitution although he constantly appealed for this. The party's efforts to win endorsements from northern nationalists proved more fruitful⁹¹ and helped to offset the criticism that it was illogical to presume that a southern electorate could endorse a constitution including a claim to the thirtytwo counties.⁹² When the results were announced, it could be seen that some supporters of other parties in the Dail election had voted for the Constitution which was passed by 685,105 votes to 526,945.⁹³

(ii) The Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1938

(a) Talks about talks

De Valera confided to a British intermediary that since he had 'delivered the goods' to his own supporters, the way was now 'clear for a closer rapprochement' both with Britain and Northern Ireland. Pleading innocence to the charge that his politics had alienated the north, he allowed that some 'wooing and winning' of Ulster would be helpful and he

89. Relations with the Irish Free State were discussed at an informal meeting of principal delegates to the Imperial Conference, 14 June 1937, PRO DO 35/891/X1/82.

90. Irish Press, 23 June 1937.

91. But the more radical of them were already calling for the repeal of Article 3.

92. DE:67:1913, 4 June 1937.

93. Longford and O'Neill (1970:300).

expressed an intention to examine the possibility of functional co-operation with the north.¹ He discussed his strategy and Britain's policy on Partition at two lengthy meetings with MacDonald at Geneva in September. De Valera insisted that his remaining 'great objective' was the ending of Partition, which he would like to see realised 'in his lifetime.' Apart from sentiment, the security of both countries necessitated a settlement: '...if partition were still in being when the next war came', MacDonald informed his colleagues, de Valera

was afraid that it would be a powerful element influencing people in Southern Ireland to oppose us. He feared that there would be serious trouble on the border, which would be extremely embarrassing to him and an additional centre of trouble for us.

MacDonald who had failed to interest Craigavon even in co-operation on wireless and postal services held out no hope of progress to de Valera; his recent constitution would make northern hostility 'even stiffer, if that were possible'. In MacDonald's view 'there was no possibility whatever of any alteration in the present situation in the near or even the more distant future.' Reluctantly, de Valera acquiesced: he was, MacDonald noted, 'very sorry...but he must accept the fact.'² De Valera's own note of these talks confirms the impression that at this meeting, both men agreed that whatever the possibilities of a settlement on the other outstanding differences, the Partition issue would have to be postponed. De Valera's note does place considerable emphasis on Partition: before MacDonald left, 'he had quite definitely my views' on a number of matters among them 'That the ending of partition was absolutely necessary for the good relations we both desired.' But this was scarcely news to MacDonald; it had prefaced every discussion between de Valera and London since 1932. The significant point here is that de Valera, who then lists the preconditions for an Anglo-Irish agreement on defence, finance and trade, and who was presently to conclude just such an agreement, excludes any preconditions on Partition, and explicitly acquiesces in its postponement. De Valera wrote that settlement on the other matters 'would help to make the solution of partition itself easier...'; later, he notes that MacDonald's 'steadfast view was that the partition solution would have to wait. I said we would therefore have to consider a campaign to inform British and world opinion as to the iniquity of the whole position.'³

This evidence shows that de Valera - unlike so many of his followers - appreciated that no solution of Partition was possible at the intergovernmental negotiations which, to London's surprise, he soon suggested. Indeed it was only when prompted by detailed press questioning,

1. Batterbee's memo to MacDonald of talk with Edith Ellis, reporting her interview of June 1937 with de Valera, PRO DO 35/891/X1/75.

2. MacDonald at cabinet, PRO CAB 24/271 CP 228(37).

3. Memo by de Valera, 17 Sept. 1937, quoted in Longford and O'Neill, (1970:309-10).

that de Valera claimed that Partition would be included in the discussions,⁴ a comment which precipitated the Northern Ireland election which Craigavon decided on, in bed, the following morning, when he read the accounts of de Valera's press conference.⁵ Some British ministers, too, may have been surprised: de Valera had made no mention of Partition in his letter suggesting talks;⁶ the British had ignored the issue in their exhaustive preparatory documentation;⁷ and when, only some hours before the negotiations opened, MacDonald told his colleagues to expect a lengthy elaboration by de Valera of his case against Partition, Chamberlain records the view that he had 'never contemplated...any lengthy discussion on Partition.'⁸

At a private preliminary meeting MacDonald had found de Valera's general attitude to be 'stiffer' than it had been some months before. MacDonald 'had made it clear to Mr. de Valera that he could look for no settlement of the partition question at the forthcoming discussion.' De Valera had mooted the possibility of meetings between Belfast and Dublin ministers and had even referred to the possibility of the setting up of a Council of Ireland. MacDonald had emphasised the impracticability of these suggestions 'at present or in the near future.' However MacDonald did suggest to his colleagues that in order to disabuse de Valera of his belief that Britain positively desired a partitioned Ireland, a statement, 'at a later stage', confirming that Britain would accept a voluntary union between north and south might be possible. Morrison, believed that any such statement would require to be 'most carefully drafted' in order to avoid the suggestion that the British government 'were putting Northern Ireland in the dock, and placing upon them the sole responsibility' for Partition. Chamberlain agreed; his own belief was that a united Ireland was inevitable 'but this aim would have to be realised by a very different road to that by which Mr. de Valera and his colleagues were approaching it.'

There followed some discussion of de Valera's style as a negotiator: MacDonald who, of course, had more experience than his colleagues in dealing with the Irish leader thought his characteristics, as a hard bargainer, might be summed up in the words "friendliness", 'frankness', and "obstinacy". Chamberlain for his part

'was afraid that Mr. de Valera's mentality was in some ways like Herr Hitler's. It was no use employing with them the arguments which appealed to the ordinary reasonable man.'

4. Note the tone of de Valera's replies to press questions when announcing the talks, Irish Press, 13 Jan. 1938.

5. Lady Craigavon diary, 12 Jan. 1938 (presumably an error for 13 Jan.) PRONI Craigavon papers, D1415/B/38.

6. De Valera to MacDonald, 24 Nov. 1937, PRO CAB 27/527 ISC(32)126 appendix A.

7. See PRO CAB 64/34 CP 300(37).

8. PRO CAB 27/642 INC(38)1st meeting, 17 Jan. 1938.

This judgement was offered in the context of a general agreement by the British ministers that Fianna Fail's tariff policy since it discriminated particularly against Northern Ireland was 'bad politics' as far as re-unification was concerned. Adjustment of this policy to take heed of Northern Ireland's interest was seriously debated on the British side in their preparation for the talks.⁹ Under considerable pressure from the Northern Ireland government, and with Hoare lobbying within the cabinet for some concessions by Dublin on this score, this was the 'Ulster dimension' to the negotiations which most concerned the British and which was, as will be seen, to play a vital role in the later stages of the negotiations.

(b) The negotiations

Invited by Chamberlain to open the discussions at the first meeting, de Valera's choice of subject must have come as no surprise to the British ministers: Partition. He repeatedly couched his argument in the context of the common defence interests of both countries: in the event of a European war, his government would be in 'great difficulties' if Partition were still unsolved; he might find himself in a situation similar to John Redmond's during the Great War when he was 'faced with difficulties which proved beyond his control'; 'agitation and grave unrest' would be inevitable; 'incidents might occur which would be misunderstood by the Government and people of the United Kingdom.' Later, the British record of the conference notes de Valera's warning that 'he and his colleagues would hold themselves completely free to take such action, in support of their point of view, as they might think fit to do.'¹⁰

At almost every opportunity, even after the discussion has moved on to the question of defence, de Valera brought the argument back to the Partition theme;¹¹ a 'mistake' made by the Irish negotiators on this question might throw the country 'into turmoil', he warned, adding that he hoped that British ministers realised that

there were many people of the Left Wing in Eire who welcomed the adage that "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity" and who would be only too ready to prepare accordingly.

Rejecting Chamberlain's attempt to disclaim any British responsibility, de Valera emphasised London's duty to redress the grievances of northern nationalists. Further, to encourage Irish unity, he suggested that

9. Ibid.

10. PRO CAB 27/642 IN(38)1.

11. Although accompanied at the talks by Lemass, MacEntee and Ryan, de Valera did almost all the talking on the Irish side.

Chamberlain should bring 'pressure...of a moral character' to bear on Northern Ireland. When challenged by Hoare that if the 'ultimate solution' of Irish unity were to be reached, it would be necessary to persuade rather than coerce Ulster, de Valera replied that while he believed that 'the coercion of Northern Ireland would, in all the circumstances, be justifiable', he would not himself favour such a policy as it 'would merely create greater difficulties than it would solve.' Later, he emphatically rejected any advocacy of coercive force being used against Ulster going so far as to say that 'he himself would be disposed to join with Northern Ireland if the United Kingdom attempted to coerce her by force.'

The Partition issue having dominated the opening skirmishes, it was now hoped by Britain that it would be nursed into the background whilst the 'bargainable' issues of defence, finance and trade were tackled. For his part, de Valera clearly appreciated that there was no prospect, on this occasion, of serious negotiations on the abolition of Partition: what was imperative was to ensure that he did not leave himself or his government vulnerable to his republican critics both outside and inside Fianna Fail. His strategy was to emphasise his fundamental objection to Partition in principle and to seek some amelioration of it in practice. As the negotiators, in effect, agreed to disagree on Partition, de Valera expressed his regret that

...one very important part of the mission of himself and his colleagues to London must be left undone. Some patching in regard to other questions might be possible but it must be realised that the conference had failed to get down to bedrock.¹²

Such exchanges can scarcely be regarded as political negotiations on Partition: this was merely the reiteration of what were, by now, the very well known views of each side.

Chamberlain, as he confided to his sister, was now optimistic that the negotiations could resolve all outstanding issues except Partition. Even that, in time, might be settled, but not, he thought, before Ulster had confidence in the southern government;

and that cannot be attained except slowly, and step by step. But if Dev(sic) will heed the good advice I gave him(,) I should not despair of ultimate agreement on unity...¹³

De Valera seems to have been encouraged by Chamberlain's advice that he should concentrate on persuading Ulster - and indeed, British - opinion to his viewpoint.¹⁴ Given his personal pessimism about the prospects of any breakthrough on Partition during these negotiations, it seems probable that, as he left for Dublin to confer with the rest of his cabinet, he was prepared to acquiesce in the further postponement of the question. The

12. As note 10 above.

13. Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 16 Jan. 1938, Chamberlain papers, BUL NC18/1/1035.

14. Sean MacEntee, interview, Irish Times, 25 July 1974.

note struck by Chamberlain conveys this impression as do three private memoranda cabled from the London talks by the Irish Independent's political correspondent, Paddy Quinn.

On the night of 18 January after three sessions of the negotiations, Quinn cabled his editor:

Joe Walshe conveyed impression to me tonight t(ha)t he does not expect conf(eren)ce failure Partition issue. He s(ai)d de Valera wanted Brit(ish) to do something to show t(ha)t unity o(f) Ireland was something wh(ich) had to come and wh(ich) Brit(ish) sh(ould)d assist bringing about. I cannot quote him but it looks like shelving Partition in favour settlem(e)nt other issues.¹⁵

Later that same night, Quinn added a second cable: 'Have just had word Dulanty... Partition he believes has b(ee)n shelved.'¹⁶ The following morning, Quinn added: 'Have just had fifteen minutes talk with de Valera. His attitude clearly shows he is accepting settlement with Partition shelved.'¹⁷ And later that day, before the Irish politicians and press left for Dublin, Quinn cabled that Irish ministers were 'in hopeful mood', de Valera being 'all smiles', Lemass and MacEntee 'like school boys.'¹⁸

The exchange of views on Partition during this first round of talks was not entirely barren: gains included greater mutual understanding of the difficulties experienced by each side; the clarification, welcome to Chamberlain - although Hoare remained sceptical¹⁹ - that Dublin did not intend their tariff policy as a punitive measure against Northern Ireland; and the formal, if private, confirmation by British ministers that their government would support a united Ireland if based on voluntary agreement between north and south.

Indeed London came close to publicly disclaiming any interest in Partition during the course of these negotiations. From the record of his personal interventions, it would seem that MacDonald may have favoured such a concession on the British side. If he did, he seems to have been anxious not to appear too eager to win his colleagues approval. In discussing the press communique which should follow the first day's talks, MacDonald advocated a statement that the British government 'had once again made it clear that the issue was primarily one for discussion between Eire and Northern Ireland.' MacDonald added that it might be difficult to win de Valera's approval for such a statement as it 'would indicate that he had been "turned down flat".' This remark, however, may have been made to mask MacDonald's personal hope that his colleagues might approve a public declaration that Partition was indeed a problem to be solved within Ireland and that Britain would not veto any settlement

15. Quinn to Geary, telegram, 18 Jan. 1938. I am grateful to Mr. Brian Quinn for permission to quote his father's telegrams and memos to the editor, Irish Independent, Jan-Apr. 1938.

16. Ibid., later, same date.

17. Ibid., 19 Jan. 1938.

18. Ibid., later same date.

19. PRO CAB 27/642 INC(38)2nd meeting, 18 Jan. 1938.

which had Ulster's approval. Earlier, at this same meeting, he had suggested such an initiative, but without any support.²⁰ Yet, within twenty-four hours, he again suggested such a public statement which he characterised as 'entirely innocuous'.²¹ But the other interested parties - his cabinet colleagues, de Valera, and the Ulster Unionists - all considered it far from innocuous, believing it would represent a significant coup for Dublin in the diplomatic and propaganda war with Belfast.

That de Valera was pressing MacDonald on the point, is clear from a note of their last conversation before de Valera returned to Dublin. MacDonald informed his colleagues of an appeal made by the Irish leader:

I gathered that what he had in mind was a declaration that if the North wished to join the South we would not oppose union, and that indeed we thought a united Ireland was ultimately desirable.

MacDonald reassured his colleagues that he had told de Valera that he 'did not hold out any hope' that any such statement could be made; but, then, as an aside, he added that such a declaration was '...the one really good card' still in Britain's hand and that perhaps it would be

worth considering whether we should play it later on. For instance if the Irish Ministers prove very difficult about making some concession to the North regarding customs duties, we might try to do a deal on this.²²

MacDonald went so far as to formulate a draft declaration which was shown to de Valera: emphasising that Northern Ireland's consent was a necessary precondition, the statement added that if 'closer relations' between north and south or a united Ireland were acceptable in the future to Northern Ireland, the British government 'far from raising any difficulties, would, on the contrary, be ready to take any practicable steps to facilitate any arrangement desired by the two parties.'²³

The Irish cabinet minutes perfunctorily record that on 21 January, 'The Taoiseach gave a general report on the matters discussed at the Conference with the representatives of the British Government.'²⁴ Yet again, the researcher must rely on the indirect evidence of the British official papers for some gleanings of what was said in Dublin. That de Valera brought disappointing news back to his cabinet seems clear. Soon MacDonald was being told by Dulanty that it was de Valera's fear that some of his colleagues might lose their seats in the next election if no concessions were made on the Partition question; alternatively, there might be a split in Fianna Fail with a fundamental republican faction forming a new splinter party.²⁵ None of this could have surprised

20. Ibid., INC(38)1st meeting, 17 Jan. 1938.

21. Ibid., INC(38)2nd meeting, 18 Jan. 1938.

22. Note by MacDonald of talk with de Valera, 19 Jan. 1938, ibid., INC(38)1.

23. PRO DO 35/893/X11/287, reproduced in Appendix II below.

24. SPO CAB 2/1, 21 Jan. 1938.

25. As note 22 above.

MacDonald: he was familiar with de Valera's emphasis on his 'wild men' and, while aware of the gains which de Valera might hope to win from posing as the most moderate available leader in Dublin, MacDonald accepted that de Valera also had genuine domestic difficulties. Dulanty suggested that perhaps 'something positive' should be done about Partition: '...would it not be possible to create some kind of body for the whole of Ireland on which matters of common concern to North and South, such as railway questions, could be discussed...'? MacDonald said it was impossible: Dulanty interjected that he did not envisage any announcement before the Ulster elections, but afterwards. MacDonald however was not thinking of the northern elections, believing that de Valera's idea was 'quite impracticable': moreover Ulster opinion would be even further alienated from the south if de Valera refused 'in two or three weeks time the agreements on Defence and other matters which seemed to be in sight.'²⁶ The British cabinet discussed the news from Dublin on 26 January. Chamberlain was disturbed but suggested to his colleagues that if de Valera were to hinge a resumption of negotiations on condition that a cross-border Joint Council be established, then 'the negotiations would break down.' De Valera 'must therefore get out of his head any idea that anything could be done at present.'²⁷ Although willing to shelter de Valera from his extremists as far as was possible,²⁸ the only Ulster dimension which was, henceforth, seriously considered by the British, concerned trade concessions by the south to Northern Ireland.

Meanwhile, de Valera, never shy of playing the Irish-American card, secretly appealed to President Roosevelt to help with this 'wonderful chance' to end Partition which was a primary cause of mistrust of Britain in America. Frank Gallagher - the emissary chosen by de Valera to go to Washington - suggests that de Valera had decided on this course before negotiations opened in London; he also credits Roosevelt as being responsible for 'a resumption of negotiations when they had broken down...' and suggests that his intervention 'made the British more anxious for as wide a settlement as possible.'²⁹ Roosevelt himself boasted to his intimates in government that he had been 'largely responsible' for the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1938; his Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, noted that the President had claimed that it was probable that 'history would never know what part he had played' because his letters to Chamberlain and de Valera were 'written in long-hand...'.³⁰

26. MacDonald note of talk with Dulanty, 24 June 1938, PRO CAB 27/642 INC(38)3.

27. PRO CAB 23/92 2(38)4, 26 Jan. 1938.

28. See for instance the particular care in handling a parliamentary question, PRO DO 35/890/X1/PQ10.

29. Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375.

'It is clear', concludes Ickes, 'that the President thinks that he was a determining factor in bringing about an adjustment of the difficulties between the two countries.'³⁰ Such a claim may be attributed to ignorance or conceit: nothing in the detailed British records nor in the published extracts of Roosevelt's letter to de Valera, contradicts MacDonald's retrospective verdict that Roosevelt's intervention was of little consequence.³¹ On Partition, Roosevelt confined himself to the harmless reassurances, always forthcoming from third parties, that any Irish rapprochement³² would be welcome.

There was however no possibility of rapprochement: all the evidence pointed to a further widening of the gulf which separated north and south - the most telling evidence being the increased support for Ulster Unionists in the Northern Ireland elections held between the first and second rounds of the London negotiations. MacDonald reported de Valera as 'somewhat embarrassed' by the calling of this election.³³ The available evidence on the Irish side suggests that de Valera, discomfited by Craigavon's initiative, favoured a boycott of the election by anti-Partitionists: one indication of this was that he himself did not defend his seat in South Down; also the Irish Press called for a boycott, which northern nationalists found confusing, particularly when Fianna Fail headquarters declined to say whether this reflected party policy. Healy's view was that without approval from Dublin, 'we are not willing to take the responsibility of handing over the seats to Partitionists.' Privately, northern nationalists expressed indignation or disappointment at de Valera's handling of electoral strategy. This evidence, however, is only suggestive.³⁴ Motive may also be considered. Here, de Valera had many reasons to prefer a boycott: it would excuse his own controversial decision not to contest South Down; it would distort the voting figures, thereby robbing Craigavon of the inevitable propaganda coup which would follow a hard-fought 'border poll' election; above all, de Valera may have feared the strategy which his own interventionist faction might adopt in liason with successful nationalist MPs. Some of the latter, after all, thought the major election issue was 'a vote for implementing the Constitution of Eire and against Partition.' Implementation of the Constitution must have sounded to de Valera ominously like yet another request for admission to the Dail.³⁵

30. Harold Ickes, The secret diaries of Harold Ickes:II, (London: 1955) p.416.

31. Interview with Malcolm MacDonald.

32. Extracts in Longford and O'Neill (1970:318-9).

33. PRO CAB 27/642 INC(38)1st meeting, 17 Jan. 1938.

34. Cahir Healy to Secretary, Fianna Fail, 17 Jan., Healy papers, D2991/A/62B; Healy to Irish Press, 14 Jan. 1938, ibid., -/62A; Senator T. McLaughlin (convenor of nationalist convention, South Down constituency) to Healy, 21 Jan., ibid., -/63A; Maguire to Healy, 15 Jan. 1938, ibid., -/B/14/1B.

35. Maguire to Healy, 15 Jan. 1938, cited in previous note; also Joseph Stewart, MP, to Healy, 13 Feb. 1938, ibid., D2991/A/68.

Meanwhile, some indication of how Fianna Fail's interventionists were thinking can be gleaned from Donnelly's motion to the incoming National Executive elected by the 1937 Ard Fheis. Emphasising that a new departure would be appropriate once the new Constitution became law in December, Donnelly called for nothing less than that Fianna Fail should be

remodelled and made applicable to all Ireland under its present title, or, if necessary, under another name, with a view to recommending:-

- a) contesting all parliamentary seats in Northern Ireland at coming General Election
- b) holding a General Election in Southern Ireland (sic) on same date,
- c) the formation of an all-Ireland national Party under the leadership of Mr. De Valera with headquarters in Dublin³⁶

First tabled before de Valera suggested talks in London, it is possible that Donnelly's subsequent agreement to defer the resolution was at de Valera's request. Donnelly, having asked for a postponement was then absent through illness for a number of meetings and the resolution was, in fact, never considered by the National Executive, being overtaken by events.³⁷

Meanwhile, Craigavon achieved a propaganda coup through his party's predictable success in the Stormont election. Having called the election as a plebiscitary protest against the London talks, he did not hesitate in forwarding to Hoare his 'brief appreciation' of the voting figures. His central concern was to emphasise the substantial endorsement of the British link: 'there cannot now be any possible doubt in De Valera's mind on that issue.' What Craigavon thought 'most significant' were the internal divisions between nationalist and republican factions; his claim was that

the elements in Ulster which are tugging Southward are only a small body of the Republican-Communist type and that the Nationalists as a whole are quite content with, and indeed happy in their association with Great Britain.

De Valera, he thought, had 'lost caste among thinking Nationalists...'. Exhorting Hoare to work for a 'satisfactory trade agreement', he concluded on a typical note: 'See, however, that it is fair; compromise can be stood over, not surrender!'³⁸ Hoare reassured Craigavon that he would do his best 'to see that Ulster's strong views are not ignored.'³⁹

Indeed, assiduously, from their earliest preparations for the talks,

36. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 8 Nov. 1937.

37. *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. and 6 and 20 Dec. 1937.

38. Craigavon to Hoare, 15 Feb. 1938, Templewood papers, CUL, X/3. 'Everybody' in London - at least everybody in Lady Abercorn's circle - was 'pleased for the snub' which de Valera had suffered because of Craigavon's success in the election: 'We are so bucked!', she wrote to Lady Craigavon, transcribed by Lady Craigavon into her diary, 11 Feb. 1938, PRONI D1415/B/38.

39. Hoare to Craigavon, 17 Feb. 1938, Templewood papers, CUL X/3.

the British had been seeking some trade concessions for Northern Ireland, not only to meet pressure from Belfast, but also because the British Treasury, as their chief negotiator on this occasion, S.D. Walley, put it, had 'a very lively interest in the prosperity of Northern Ireland - which comes to us when bankrupt.'⁴⁰ The Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, Warren Fisher, approved this minute, adding his own revealing comment - he was the leading civil servant in Whitehall - that the Treasury would 'gain greatly from the termination of the present wholly uneconomic partition.'⁴¹ If Ulster seems to have been without many friends in the Treasury, she had them in an even more important centre, the Irish Situation Committee. At their meeting on 17 February, Hoare said he was 'much disturbed' by what he had heard of the negotiations between civil servants from London and Dublin; Morrison objected to the appeasement of the south '...even to the extent of putting pressure on Ulster to abandon Partition'; Hailsham feared that an unsatisfactory trade agreement would present de Valera

with a lever...to force the termination of Partition. Ulster manufacturers might in fact get into such desperate straits they would either vote for inclusion in Eire or move their factories into Eire.

MacDonald, as usual, attempted to calm his colleagues: they should remember that they were dealing with a 'strange people who were more influenced by sentimental than by logical and economic considerations.'⁴²

With a briefing from Andrews in the meantime, Ulster's supporters on this committee were even more sceptical of the draft trade agreement at their next meeting held on the eve of the resumption of talks with Irish ministers. Hoare believed that the Northern Ireland government would come out 'root and branch' against such an agreement. All were further agreed that de Valera should be told that '...he would never win Northern Ireland over to his point of view if he persisted in inflicting his injury on its trade.' MacDonald warned his colleagues that they 'would again have to listen' to de Valera's line on Partition and he also repeated his suggestion of a possible British declaration that they reserved no veto on Irish unity in the event of Northern Ireland's consent. Morrison stated that he was 'by no means' satisfied with the draft declaration suggested by MacDonald.

If it meant something Ulster would be upset, and if it meant nothing it would serve no useful purpose. He objected to the declaration because in effect it placed Ulster in the dock...'

If published it would 'cause great astonishment and deep resentment...'. MacDonald rejoined that it would not now be used since de Valera on some vital defence matters was only prepared to give a unilateral statement in

40. Waley minute, 14 Jan. 1938, PRO T 160/747/F14026/04.

41. Ibid.

42. PRO CAB 27/524 ISC(32)36th meeting, 17 Feb. 1938.

the Dail rather than incorporate them in the proposed agreement.⁴³

De Valera, who insisted on the second round of negotiations being prefaced by a private meeting between himself and Chamberlain, again raised the Partition issue: no defence agreement would be tolerable to his own extremists, he told Chamberlain, without 'some arrangement for the termination of Partition.'⁴⁴ Quinn cabled to his editor: 'Deadlock on Partition...Dev (sic) has just seen us but we cannot quote him. He told Chamberlain unity o(f) Ireland was fundamental.'⁴⁵ Later, at the formal negotiations, de Valera doggedly insisted that the Partition and defence issues should be linked. Admitting an impasse, Chamberlain asked de Valera if he had any other suggestions. De Valera then proposed that the negotiations be confined to finance and trade and that without any defence agreement, the British should surrender the Treaty ports to his government. If, subsequently, the Partition question was satisfactorily settled, then 'he would be able to go a long way...' towards the defence agreement then being contemplated.

If, however, it was not found possible to solve the partition difficulty, he would have to say that in the unhappy event of Eire being involved in some conflict she would naturally have to see⁴⁶ where, in her own interests, she could best obtain assistance.

Explicitly, de Valera told the British negotiators that one section of his public opinion, which he could not afford to ignore, would urge that defence 'should be made a lever' in order to bring effective pressure on Britain over Partition. Chamberlain exhorted de Valera to make some 'gesture of good-will' towards Northern Ireland, instancing some concession in the proposed trade agreement. De Valera believed it was impossible to make concessions to the north which would not, in effect, also be enjoyed by Britain.

He was certainly animated by no ill-will against Northern Ireland; he wished it every prosperity, if only for the reason that one day, sooner or later, it would be part of a reunited Ireland.

Pressed by Chamberlain, on this point, Irish ministers promised to consider making 'some concessions on the particular duties which bore hardly on Northern Ireland.' De Valera also expressed his intention of using a successful Anglo-Irish agreement '...as a jumping-off ground for entering into better relations with Northern Ireland.' First, though, '...he would have to do something to steady and to educate his own people.'

43. Ibid., ISC(32)37th meeting, 22 Feb. 1938.

44. Ibid., ISC(32)38th meeting, 24 Feb. 1938.

45. Quinn to Geary, telegram, 22 Feb. 1938.

46. PRO CAB 27/642 IN(38)6, 23 Feb. 1938.

By this stage Dulanty could foresee a settlement on all questions except Ulster. Quinn, having spoken with him, cabled Dublin that all could be regarded as settled 'except Partition... De Valera and Chamberlain talked on it for an hour today wi(th)out making any progress.' Quinn believed that de Valera was 'seeking some kind o(f) face saving formula f(ro)m Chamberlain on Partition.'⁴⁷ De Valera's problem was that nationalist opinion in Ireland expected too much from the London negotiations. Pessimism and intransigence may have been the response of cabinet colleagues in Dublin to the reports he brought back from the first round of talks, but alarm was the reaction among northern nationalists - some of whom simply refused to believe that Partition would not be solved at these talks.⁴⁸

To complicate de Valera's problems, he seems to have been embarrassed by the arrival in London of a delegation of northern nationalists MPs. On 23 February, Quinn cabled his editor:

De Valera asks as personal favour that movements Nationalist MPs be published without linking up Irish delegation with them for he has not asked them to come and knows nothing of their plans.⁴⁹

Their plans evidently included talks with de Valera and - reluctant, or not - he spent 'practically (the) entire day' with them on 24 February.⁵⁰ After the meeting Healy suggested that northern nationalists 'would regard it as a betrayal of all our interests' if de Valera 'ignored the problem of partition by getting Trade and Defence Agreements only.'⁵¹

However it was to be the Unionists rather than the Nationalists of Ulster whose demands were to influence the remaining weeks of the negotiations: and trade policy between north and south was the principal issue. On 25 February, Hoare sounded Andrews on the possibility of a differential tariff, by which the south would favour Northern Ireland over Britain. Andrews welcomed the idea, but suspiciously. It would have to result from British pressure on the south; otherwise the Stormont government would be accused of trying to end Partition by the back door. Andrews insisted on no involvement of the Northern Ireland government in the negotiations.⁵²

At the resumed negotiations on 3 March, de Valera flatly rejected the proposal that the south should allow free entry for manufactures of Northern Ireland origin. Irish public opinion 'would be very strongly opposed' to any such concession as it would be seen as 'an important step towards stabilising' Partition and allowing the north 'the best of both

47. Quinn to Geary, telegram, 23 Feb. 1938.

48. See Maguire to Healy, 20 Jan. 1938, Healy papers, D2991/B/4/1C.

49. Quinn to Geary, telegram, 23 Feb. 1938.

50. Ibid., 24 Feb. 1938.

51. Longford and O'Neill (1970:321); for northern nationalists' strategy at this juncture, see Belfast Newsletter, 22-28 Feb. 1938, passim.

52. PRO CAB 27/524 ISC(32)39th meeting, 25 Feb. 1938.

worlds'. Whereas the south appreciated that in a united Ireland, the 'industrial supremacy of Northern Ireland would have to be faced and acquiesced in', if partition were to remain, any 'open door' policy would not be tolerable as it would be 'highly prejudicial, and in some cases, disastrous to Eire's industries.' MacDonald, however, thought that if the proposal were rejected, then the British government could do little to help de Valera with his goal of removing that 'cloud of ill-will and suspicion which went to the very root' of Partition. De Valera was adamant: public opinion, south of the border 'would certainly have nothing to do with it' and he believed that if he accepted the proposition, that Northern Ireland 'would laugh' at what they would see as 'an act of almost incredible stupidity and weakness.' He would, however, consider 'some plan for an exchange of preferences.' Chamberlain was 'bitterly disappointed', more particularly, because, - as he now felt obliged to disclose to the Irish negotiators - following what the British considered to be de Valera's 'not altogether unfavourable' response when the idea was first mooted, Northern Ireland had been informed of the proposal. Although, it had seemed possible to British ministers that the Ulster Unionists might consider it 'the thin end of the wedge so far as partition was concerned', they had, in fact welcomed the proposal. Now, if it were to be rejected by Dublin, the position would be 'very much worse than if the proposal had never been formulated at all.'⁵³ De Valera was unmoved. The political gulf between north and south proved to be too great and economic interests too divergent for much success to attend this attempt by the British to create what would clearly have been a greater measure of economic unity throughout Ireland. No further progress was made at what was to be the last formal session of the negotiations on the following day: British ministers, determined not to abandon Ulster's interests, said 'how very disappointed' they were at the Irish attitude. In further discussion, the probable effects of free entry for Northern Irish goods into the south were detailed by Lemass who suggested that the autarkical policies of the south would have to be abandoned if the proposal was put into effect.⁵⁴

The north had dismissed the original draft trade agreement as inequitable and indefensible: now the south was returning an identical verdict on the free trade proposal. There was a distinct possibility that the entire negotiations would founder. The nature of the triangular relationship between Belfast, London and Dublin was being clarified for all participants: all had die-hard elements among their supporters - including their parliamentary supporters - whose extreme views had to be

53. PRO CAB 27/642 IN(38)7th meeting, 3 Mar. 1938.

54. Ibid., IN(38)8th meeting, 4 Mar. 1938.

taken into account.⁵⁵ This factor rendered what would have been an unlikely consensus between the three parties even more remote. Moreover, the discussions themselves were never trilateral in form: London was dealing with both sets of Irish negotiators in turn. There were to be no further formal sessions between the British and Irish ministers: the significant meetings hereafter were held at prime ministerial level and behind very closed doors. Chamberlain seems to have had full cabinet support for the proposals he put forward, but both de Valera and Craigavon seem to have had less sympathy from some of their colleagues.

De Valera was clearly under considerable pressure. Quinn, from his own observations and reporting what Dulanty thought, suggests that throughout this period in London de Valera was unhappy with how the negotiations were proceeding: he was in 'agressive mood', he 'looked worried', MacDonald's butler found that, during a week-end he spent with the Dominions Secretary, he 'never smiled' and 'looked as if he meant to attack somebody'. He was under pressure from his own civil servants to settle; he was anxious not to return to Dublin 'empty-handed';⁵⁶ and the lobbying of Northern Ireland ministers and officials was clearly having its effect.

If anything, the Stormont government was becoming more intransigent as they came to appreciate that London needed at least their acquiescence for any Irish settlement. At a meeting with Hoare on 5 March, Andrews, who had been handling the discussions for the Northern Ireland government, warned Hoare that the proposed agreement was so unsatisfactory that he and Craigavon would have no alternative but 'to launch an attack' on the British government 'for their surrender of Northern Ireland's vital interests' or both resign from the government. Hoare believed the position of Northern Ireland, already intransigent, 'had considerably hardened.'⁵⁷

British ministers now feared a breakdown in the negotiations which would have 'Northern Ireland and Eire scowling at one another across the border.'⁵⁸ While de Valera had suggested that free trade might have 'most devastating' effects in the south, Andrews had pleaded that without it, the north's industries would 'face disaster and collapse.' The British did not accept these arguments at face value because Stormont civil servants had admitted to the Board of Trade that their government's objections were 'really political and not economic'; and British ministers, from talking to civil servants from Dublin, had come to the

55. Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 13 Mar. 1938, Chamberlain papers, BUL NC18/1/1041.

56. Based on Quinn to Geary, telegrams, 2-8 Mar. 1938.

57. PRO CAB 27/524 ISC(32)41st meeting, 8 Mar. 1938.

58. Simon, ibid., ISC(32)42nd meeting, 10 Mar. 1938.

conclusion that de Valera, too, was hindered by political rather than economic impediments.⁵⁹

Against this background, the British prepared a 'final offer' which Chamberlain would put privately to de Valera. On 8 March, Chamberlain suggested that with some agreed exceptions, the south should permit free entry to the north's exports but that the abolition of tariffs should be gradual over a period of five years; at the end of this period, the trading relationship between north and south would, suggested Chamberlain, be 'exactly the same as it would have been almost at once had the negotiations resulted in the immediate termination of Partition.' Moreover Chamberlain impressed on de Valera 'the very powerful appeal' which he could make to his public opinion along these lines.⁶⁰

This meeting seems not to have been a success: Quinn cabled to his editor in Dublin, that he believed the Irish leader had made 'no progress today' with Chamberlain. 'He w(oul)d simply say nothing about it but he looks very ill at ease and so to t(he) officials.'⁶¹ On the following day, de Valera told Quinn that 'nothing has b(ee)n settled yet and t(ha)t it is all in t(he) lap o(f) t(he) gods...';⁶² and on 10 March Lemass's list of proposed tariffs did not satisfy the British, 'They want v(er)y much more.'⁶³ Chamberlain believed the negotiations had reached a 'deadlock' but on the following day he interested de Valera in 'a new and final offer.' De Valera was 'surprised and anxious to accept' although he admitted to being 'very doubtful about his colleagues.' Later, Chamberlain heard that the reaction from Lemass, MacEntee and Ryan to the offer was '"appalling"'. Chamberlain confided to his sister that he now believed that a settlement was in sight if the cabinet in Dublin approved the terms. If the agreement went through he expected the extreme right in Britain to suggest that he had 'weakly given way when Eire was in the hollow of my hand'; in fact, he believed he had only conceded 'small things' and, among the gains, he listed the prospect of better north-south relations in Ireland.⁶⁴

At this meeting, Chamberlain had brought forward the card which MacDonald had been mooting since the previous December: the possibility of a public declaration by Britain that she would not veto a united Ireland which had the consent of the north. In Dublin, de Valera's cabinet was unimpressed with the latest offer: the draft declaration on Partition, 'containing as it did; nothing of a positive character', was 'altogether inadequate': as for concessions to Northern Ireland, in

59. Waley to Fisher, 29 Feb. 1938, PRO T 160/747/F14026/04; also CAB 27/524 ISC(32)41st meeting, 8 Mar. 1938.

60. As note 57 above.

61. Quinn to Geary, telegram, 8 Mar. 1938.

62. Ibid., 9 Mar. 1938.

63. Ibid., 10 Mar. 1938.

64. As note 55 above.

present circumstances, Dulanty reported to MacDonald, these were 'a sheer impossibility.'⁶⁵ MacDonald believed that de Valera and 'at least two' of his negotiating team, although they themselves 'intensely disliked the concessions to Northern Ireland' had reluctantly, and without success, recommended the agreement to their colleagues. However, with some modifications, the Irish ministers were prepared to accept the whole of the agreement except for the provisions which give 'concessions to Northern Ireland by name.' Some of their concessions on imports would, in effect, be of benefit solely to Northern Ireland since this was the only part of the United Kingdom with an interest in exporting the goods in question to the twenty-six counties.

MacDonald's appreciation of the position was forwarded to Chamberlain to brief him for the talks he had now proposed with Craigavon. MacDonald was concerned lest the negotiations break down over Ulster, since this would exacerbate what he already considered the very unsatisfactory obtrusion of the Partition issue in all his work for a better and more stable Anglo-Irish relationship. 'Unless we can make a beginning', he advised Chamberlain,

this difficulty is going to upset all our efforts to settle the old quarrel at any time in the reasonably near future. We have got to try to break through the suspicions and distrust which at present exist....

MacDonald was convinced that de Valera could not yield any further concessions to the north: 'The issue then is - this agreement or nothing.'⁶⁶

Chamberlain wrote to Craigavon emphasising those aspects of the proposed agreement which would benefit the north; some of de Valera's concessions although they 'would not appear to be made directly to Northern Ireland' would, in effect, be that.⁶⁷ As in his private meetings with de Valera, Chamberlain succeeded in persuading the Unionist leader to agree to terms which were disliked by his colleagues. Indeed, two of the latter, Andrews and Brooke - the two men who would, in due course, succeed to the leadership of Ulster Unionism - had been prepared to resign rather than accept the draft agreement which had been forwarded to Belfast. Craigavon, having left the detailed negotiations to them through ill-health, had now resumed control, ignored their misgivings and settled privately with Chamberlain. Worse, he failed to inform them of the line he had taken - even supporting Brooke's view at a subsequent meeting that the northern government could not survive if it accepted the terms; but, then having excluded his civil service experts, he astounded Andrews and

65. Dulanty to Walshe, 14 Mar. 1938, Longford and O'Neill (1970:323).

66. Memo by MacDonald for Chamberlain, prior to latter's talk with Craigavon, 16 Mar. 1938, PRO DO 35/893/X11/139.

67. Chamberlain to Craigavon, 17 Mar. 1938, *ibid.*

Brooke by accepting the terms at a formal session with Chamberlain and British ministers!⁶⁸

Some Ulster Unionists by this stage believed that Craigavon was 'ga-ga':⁶⁹ perhaps this was the explanation; perhaps Chamberlain's diplomatic skills worked, as with de Valera; or, perhaps, both de Valera and Craigavon were the most constructive, pragmatic members of their respective cabinets. Whatever the reason, in these private talks, Chamberlain achieved a breakthrough. He believed both north and south, 'so unreasonable', and shared the Treasury's view that Craigavon had blackmailed him.⁷⁰ Some measure of the dissension within the Northern Ireland cabinet on the terms now broadly agreed, can be gleaned from the correspondence on the Treasury files in the weeks which followed. Just as de Valera's returns to his colleagues had been followed by pessimistic reports to London, so now, reports came from Belfast that the northern ministers were not inclined to agree to the terms. Walley, who had been the Treasury's chief negotiator with Stormont, noted:

In a word Lord Craigavon promised the Prime Minister to acquiesce in return for a bribe, but afterwards went back on this promise.'⁷¹

Further concessions - or, as Chamberlain put it 'sufficient sops to keep Northern Ireland quiet'⁷² - were eventually, forthcoming, Fisher advising that, if yielding to Craigavon would facilitate an enduring settlement with the south, then 'I advocate our being blackmailed.'⁷³ Chamberlain wrote once again to Craigavon: not for the first - or, indeed, the last time - the Ulster Unionists were invited to support what they perceived as the appeasement of the south; and again, London's appeal was being made in the name of wider imperial interests. In his letter, Chamberlain emphasised the importance of demonstrating 'that the policy of peace by negotiation can be successful.' He was hoping for success with both Anglo-Italian and Anglo-Irish agreements because it was 'very necessary that an impression of solidarity here should be made, and not least in Berlin.'⁷⁴ Craigavon again crossed to London - and again insisted on leaving his civil servants out of the formal session with British ministers. The business was despatched, London agreeing 'to pay most, but not all, of the price demanded for Northern Ireland's acquiescence.'⁷⁵ Included in the further concessions to the north was the withdrawal of any British statement concerning her future approval of a

68. Spender's holograph notes, prefacing his diary, vol.10, Spender papers, PRONI D715/10.

69. Lady Londonderry to Hoare, 3 May 1938, Templewood papers, CUL X/4.

70. Neville to Ida Chamberlain, Chamberlain papers, BUL NC18/1/1042; Fisher minute, 26 Mar. 1938, PRO T 160/747/F14026/04/2.

71. Waley memo to Philips, 21 Mar. 1938, PRO T 160/F14026/04.

72. Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 9 Apr. 1938, Chamberlain papers, BUL NC18/1/1046.

73. Fisher minute, 26 Mar. 1938, PRO T 160/747/F14026/04/2.

74. Quoted, Buckland (1979:115).

75. Buckland (1979:115).

united Ireland if this had Ulster's support.⁷⁶

Agreement was signed in London on 25 April. Retrospectively, de Valera thought it his greatest political achievement.⁷⁷ This was because of its importance in the context of neutrality. His biographers suggest that he was 'heartily disappointed' that no progress had been made on Partition.⁷⁸ Quinn's verdict was less sympathetic; he concluded that de Valera had 'been beaten into a hopeless position...'; there was 'nothing doing re Partition - there never was and de Valera knew there never could be.'⁷⁹ De Valera, had, in fact, sheltered himself from too much disappointment on this issue by announcing at the end of February, after his return from the second round of talks, that he despaired of reaching any agreement on Partition.⁸⁰ What is beyond question is that de Valera's primary concern was not Partition - which he believed intractable in the short term - but the return of the Treaty ports, thus facilitating southern neutrality in a European war which he believed imminent.

In the Dail debate on the Agreement, de Valera theorised about the economic consequences of the re-unification of the country. It would entail 'big and heavy problems', not least the absorption of the north's 100,000 unemployed. Presuming that the south would not 'grumble' at taking on such a 'burden', de Valera, in an aside, tilted at one faction in the south which had, by now, a vested interest in Partition: 'I understand', he said, 'that a number of industrialists down here would be shivering if we had the whole country in now.'⁸¹ That the Irish negotiating position had been inhibited by what Quinn called 'that section of racketeers wh(ich) is making money on tariffs '⁸² seems to have caused some misgivings in the Irish cabinet.⁸³

In general, de Valera was pleased at the degree of consensus being shown in the Dail: he emphasised the merits of isolating the Partition issue and reminded deputies that all parties in the south were now 'consecrated to try to end that wrong.'⁸⁴ While admitting that the British might 'have to proceed slowly' about convincing the Ulster Unionists of the need for Irish unity, he hoped that he had 'gone some

76. Dulanty to Walshe, 14 Mar. 1938, quoted, Longford and O'Neill, (1970:323).

77. In reply to question from historian, T.D. Williams: I am grateful to Professor Williams for this information.

78. Longford and O'Neill (1970:325).

79. Quinn, memo to Geary, 14 Mar. 1938.

80. Belfast Newsletter, 28 Feb. 1938; Round Table, vol.29, no.111, pp.523-4.

81. DE:71:424; 29 Apr. 1938.

82. As note 79 above.

83. See de Valera, DE:71:450, 29 Apr. 1938; also MacEntee, ibid., col.389. Spender believed that the south's new protected industries feared competition from the north and that this should be exploited to hinder de Valera's campaign for unity, Spender's note of conversation with Maffey, 11 Dec. 1940, Spender papers, PRONI D715/15.

84. DE:71:431, 29 Apr. 1938.

distance' in persuading London to his viewpoint.⁸⁵ There was some criticism that he had failed to win a guarantee from London that they would prevent the Stormont 'puppet Parliament' from discriminating against the northern minority.⁸⁶

This was an unfair criticism: one of the consequences of the exchange of views on Partition during the course of the negotiations was a growing scepticism among some sections of Whitehall - notably the Dominions Office - concerning the Unionists treatment of the minority in Northern Ireland. The documented grievances of northern nationalists had been passed on by de Valera to the British government. These posed a challenge to Whitehall - notably to the Home Office whose duty it was, presumably, to ensure that no malpractices on the scale suggested should be allowed to continue.

The document listing the nationalist grievances - its author was, probably, Cahir Healy⁸⁷ - made a formidable case against Ulster unionism. Although propagandist in tone, it was well documented and can scarcely have been read by British ministers and officials without some misgivings. It included expressions of bigotry by Ulster Unionist MPs: one backbencher was quoted,

Every time he approached the steps of Stormont his heart glowed, and as he came nearer to it - he dare not say it in the Parliament but he could say it there that day - to hell with the Pope.

Backbench bigots might be explained away but the document also detailed the widespread gerrymandering of constituencies to favour local Unionist minorities: it also included a lengthy list of statements from Unionist ministers - including Northern Ireland's first three prime ministers, Craigavon, Andrews and Brookborough - advocating discrimination against Catholics in private and public employment.⁸⁸

Although the Home Office staunchly defended Northern Ireland from the charges in the document,⁸⁹ the Dominions Office seems to have been impressed by the arguments presented: its Permanent Secretary, Harding, minuted that although he did not believe in pressing the Home Office further on the matter, it was his impression that they were 'beginning to wake up to the fact that the situation wants careful watching!'⁹⁰ MacDonald, too, seems to have been impressed by the charges against the Stormont administration. While sending a non-committal reply to an Irish correspondent who had also outlined the grievances of northern Catholics,

85. *Ibid.*, col.433. Longford and O'Neill (1970:317-8) write that between the first and second round of talks, MacDonald 'worked without success on Lord Craigavon in the direction of Irish unity', but adduce no evidence for their inherently implausible claim that Craigavon 'appears to have been privately impressed, though publicly his attitude remained unaltered.' MacDonald recalls no meeting with Craigavon at this juncture, interview Malcolm MacDonald.

86. DE:71:340-1, 29 Apr. 1938.

87. Healy to L.J.Walsh, 18 Mar. 1938, Healy papers, D2991/A/78.

88. Document is in PRO DO 35/893/X11/123.

89. See four Home Office memoranda sent to the Dominions Office, Nov. 1938, *ibid.* -/251.

90. Harding minute, 9 Mar. 1938, PRO DO 35/893/X11/123.

he minuted on the office file:

I am convinced that as soon as the present Irish talks are over we must go quietly and carefully into the position of the minority in the north.

(iii) '...all the sadly familiar arguments.'

(a) Endorsement: the 1938 election

Characteristically, given the comparative popularity of the Agreement and his unsatisfactory voting strength in the Dail, de Valera called a general election for June. During the campaign, considerable emphasis was placed on the fact that Partition had now been isolated as the sole remaining grievance in Anglo-Irish relations.¹ A strong Fianna Fail government would be the obvious choice, the electorate was assured,² to work towards 'the final realization of the dream of seven centuries'.³ Ministers did not conceal that ending Partition would be 'most difficult',⁴ but it would be achieved 'before this generation is all in its grave':⁵ and the obvious man to accomplish the task was de Valera,⁶ leading what O'Kelly was already describing as 'a national government'.⁷ There were, too, some valuable endorsements from northern nationalists - including the Northern Council for Unity which, because it had been formed to pursue unity on the basis of the 1937 Constitution, believed it would be 'disastrous' if Fianna Fail were not returned as the north, 'groaning' with unemployment, 'forlorn and ill-administered', was awaiting deliverance.⁸ Vivion de Valera emphasising the return of the Treaty ports told an election meeting in County Donegal: 'We are rallying on the Swilly, and the enemy is going out. The Irishmen of Donegal will have their own Lough Swilly. Derry is the next.'⁹ His father, in his message to the electorate also drew on historical parallels, renewing, on behalf of Fianna Fail, the resolve of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic in 1916:

To pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally and

91. MacDonald minute, 5 Mar. 1938, *ibid.*, -/118.

1. *Irish Press*, 1 June 1938.

2. *Ibid.*, 28 May 1938.

3. Election message, *ibid.*, 30 May 1938.

4. James Ryan, *ibid.*, 11 June 1938.

5. Frank Aiken, *ibid.*, 31 May 1938.

6. Lemass, Aiken, O'Kelly, *ibid.*, 6 June; Neal Blaney, *ibid.*, 9

June 1938.

7. O'Kelly, *ibid.*, 11 June 1938.

8. *Ibid.*, 30 May, 1 June 1938.

9. *Ibid.*, 6 June 1938.

oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

However idealistic the sentiments of the 1916 Proclamation, they were unlikely to rally the Ulster unionists. Yet, de Valera here invoked them for just this purpose.

We in this generation are blessed with an opportunity which a short while ago seemed beyond hope. There is the clearest evidence that within a few years we shall have in this part of Ireland a homogeneous people, with past divisions and differences forgotten, and all animated by the single purpose of enhancing the glory and advancing the prestige of our nation. That spirit will reach across the border, dispelling ancient prejudices, until the whole of the land of Patrick responds to it and the dream of the dead generations is completely realised.¹⁰

Sean T.O'Kelly added a characteristic flourish with his famous 'whip John Bull' remark. In the Agreement, Fianna Fail had 'whipped him right, left and centre. And with God's help we'll do the same again when the opportunity arises.'¹¹

None of this helped to nurture the frail plant of north-south co-operation which had been sown during the London talks. Spender, Secretary of Finance at Stormont Castle and a leading interpreter of the Stormont mind to Whitehall, added a caustic postscript to yet another letter of complaint to the Treasury about the unfairness of the Anglo-Irish Agreement: 'The speeches made during the Eire election hardly indicate the arrival at that millenium which the Chancellor apparently envisages.'¹²

(b) Co-operation?

Clearly there were bruised feelings within the Northern Ireland cabinet about the outcome of the London discussions. Nor can relations have been improved by the south's accusations of discrimination and gerrymandering - and the fact that Whitehall had now begun to ask for explanations. In short, a climate of ill-will prevailed between north and south and whereas there were some politicians and civil servants in Dublin, Belfast and London who seem to have been anxious to expedite north-south co-operation where mutual benefits would accrue,¹³ there were others who seemed distinctly less sympathetic. Stormont's Home Affairs Department's handling of two episodes - an invitation to de Valera to

10. Message to electors, *ibid.*, 14 June 1938.

11. *Ibid.*, 9 June 1938.

12. Spender to Waley, 11 June 1938, PRO T 160/747/F1406/K4/2.

13. Leydon's views, reported by Jenkins, 1 July 1938, PRO DO 35/893/X11/227.

unveil a statue of Saint Patrick in Northern Ireland¹⁴ and the imprisonment of Eamonn Donnelly in July¹⁵ - demonstrated no anxiety to establish better cross-border relations. Indeed the approach of both Donnelly and Dawson Bates,¹⁶ prompts the suspicion that both die-hards for their very different motives may even have been pleased that these incidents further discouraged cross-border co-operation between the two governments.¹⁷ The Dominions Office, while believing Donnelly may have been 'unnecessarily provocative', concluded that in Northern Ireland to suggest that 'partition should be ended is a crime!'¹⁸

On his release, Donnelly remained in the north to further defy the Exclusion Order¹⁹ and to orchestrate the lobbying of Fianna Fail by various factions in the north. As Healy saw it, Donnelly's role was nothing less than the nationalist 'representative' on the party's National Executive.²⁰ As the minutes of their meetings reveal, the Partition issue had become increasingly prominent throughout 1938. The Executive's approach seemed, generally, cautious: this certainly seems to have been Donnelly's view. On 5 October he wrote to Healy describing his attempts to force an all-Ireland anti-Partition convention on the Executive; he exhorted northern MPs to 'force the pace' on the basis of their recent '"evacuation by the British" resolution.' When this had been passed a week earlier, Donnelly had approved: 'Let them get out of Ulster and we'll settle the matter quite nicely.'²¹

(c) De Valera's Sudetenland

Opinion in Ireland tended to see the return of the Treaty Ports as an Irish gain from Chamberlain's overall policy of appeasement; this encouraged the hope that the remaining grievance of Partition might also be settled on Dublin's terms. Such expectations quickened during what Donnelly termed the 'three psychological weeks'²² in September when Hitler's irredentist claims in the Sudetenland were, with British acquiescence, appeased. Britain's defence minister, Sir Thomas Inskip, after

14. PRO DO 35/893/X11/217.

15. *Ibid.*, -/236. The Manchester Guardian's headline read, 'Arrested for going home'; The RUC listed Donnelly as still a member of the IRA and 'a dangerous and troublesome person'.

16. Northern Ireland Minister of Home Affairs since 1921.

17. Bates was a die-hard Unionist, deeply suspicious of all nationalists, Buckland (1979:part 3 *passim*).

18. Stephenson minute, 29 Sept. 1938, *ibid.*, -/243.

19. Dulanty made representations on 10 Sept. that Donnelly was being harrassed by the RUC, Machtig note of 17 Sept. 1938, *ibid.*, -/236.

20. Healy to Donnelly, 6 Oct. 1935, Healy papers, D2991/A/95B.

21. Donnelly to Healy, 29 Sept. and 5 Oct. 1938, *ibid.*, -/88, -/94.

22. Irish Press, 23 Nov. 1938.

a meeting with de Valera on 8 September noted de Valera's claim that he had his

own Sudeten in Northern Ireland and he had even thought sometimes of the possibility of going over the boundary and pegging out the territory which was occupied by a population predominantly in sympathy with Eire and leaving Northern Ireland to deal with the situation.²³

De Valera was an enthusiast for Chamberlain's appeasement policy and one of his keenest supporters of the Munich agreement with Hitler - '...the greatest thing that has ever been done':²⁴ along with his personal regard for Chamberlain and his anxiety that war should be avoided, de Valera saw in the Sudeten issue a parallel with 'his own minority' in Northern Ireland.

Passing through London on 4 October, de Valera had separate meetings with Devonshire, MacDonald and Chamberlain. Well used to his lectures on Partition, they now found him 'in a state of considerable excitement' on the issue.²⁵ He suggested to Chamberlain that 'if a crisis arose such as might have arisen over recent European troubles', then the northern minority problem might 'become a positive danger.'²⁶ To Devonshire, he made the point that the Poles and the Hungarians, 'were getting their just rights and asked: 'what about his minority...'? He said that

...there was a time when if he felt strong enough he would have moved his troops up to the line to which he thought he was justly entitled, just as Hitler was doing... .

But he would not now adopt that solution because it would not solve the problem. Pleading British inability to improve north-south relations, Devonshire exhorted de Valera to establish closer relations with the north 'over such matters as railway management, control of animal diseases, possibly even defence...', but de Valera insisted that this would not be enough,

That in the course of time his party would be superseded by something to the left of them who would not be as patient and law-abiding as he had been... .²⁷

23. Inskip note of talk with de Valera, 8 Sept. 1938, Halifax papers, PRO FO 800/310.

24. Diana Cooper noted de Valera's comment at 'a British Empire dinner' in Geneva on 14 September 1938 when the proposed summit was announced. Quoted in Duff Cooper, Old men forget, (London:1953) p.229. De Valera had been elected President of the League Of Nations Assembly on 12 September. After the signing of the Munich Agreement, de Valera described Chamberlain to the League Assembly as '...this hero of peace, who...has attained the highest peak of human greatness, a glory greater than that of all conquerors.' See also, Deirdre MacMahon, 'Ireland, the Dominions and the Munich crisis', Irish Studies in International Affairs, vol.1, no.1., 1979, pp.30-37.

25. Devonshire's note of talk with de Valera, 4 Oct. 1938, PRO DO 35/893/X11/247.

26. Chamberlain's note of talk with de Valera, ibid.

27. As note 25 above.

(d) The federal offer to Northern Ireland: October 1938

On 17 October in an interview in the Evening Standard, de Valera detailed proposals for a federal solution which henceforth was to form his basic policy on the north. He appealed to the Northern Ireland government to accept the same devolved powers from Dublin as they were then accepting from London. De Valera excluded a plebiscite or boundary commission which although it 'would give us territory', would only perpetuate Partition. Speaking with care and emphasis, he added that although the Stormont government was not entitled to local autonomy over the entire six counties, 'we make the concession' provided minority rights were safeguarded. He wanted to make it 'as easy as possible' for the north to 'join us' because it was his 'fixed belief' that once they were working together on such a basis, the border would eventually disappear.²⁸

Although heralded in the south as a major initiative, this interview contained little that was new. An almost identical offer had been mooted in an interview in the New York Times the previous January and had been widely publicised in the Irish newspapers, including the unionist press in Belfast.²⁹ There were, however, some - probably deliberate - differences of emphasis. In January de Valera had said that a local parliament in the north-east 'could not justify any claim to its present boundaries', but added that with guarantees of fair treatment for the nationalists, the boundary 'might be tolerated under an All-Ireland Parliament.'

In the Evening Standard interview he had used the phrase, 'we make the concession' of tolerating the existing boundary. Given de Valera's habit of using press interviews in a deliberate manner to test support for a particular line of policy,³⁰ and knowing the strict terms under which many interviews were agreed, often including de Valera's right to correct attributed quotations before publication,³¹ it seems possible that what had flown as a kite in January was now the basis of what was to be his final policy on Partition. Adding weight to this interpretation is the fact that he prefaced the latter interview with the declaration that he had abandoned any idea of a plebiscite as this would only further

28. Irish Press, 18 Oct. 1938; Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 16-17 Oct. 1938, p.3282; Longford and O'Neill (1970:340-1).

29. De Valera interview with Harold Callender, New York Times, reported, Belfast Newsletter, 27 Jan. 1938.

30. There are many examples of this: parts of the original draft defence agreement put forward by the British in the 1938 talks were not acceptable to de Valera as part of a signed agreement whilst he was prepared to arrange a press interview and incorporate them in his policy in this way, see MacDonald at ISC meeting, 22 Feb. 1938, PRO CAB 27/524 ISC(32)37th meeting. In September 1922, de Valera asked for some 'leading questions' in order to promulgate a particular line during the Civil War, 'Correspondence of Mr. Eamon de Valera and others', Dublin, 1922.

31. 'He is very particular about newspaper interviews', John Gunther, 'The truth about de Valera', Strand Magazine, July 1936.; cuttings dated 17 and 21 Aug 1923 in Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/B/364; see also 6pp typescript interview with de Valera by Joseph F.O'Connell, Jr., corrected in de Valera's hand, Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(11).

perpetuate Partition.

Longford and O'Neill, noting that he was no longer appealing 'for a rectification of the boundaries', justify the change on the grounds that such a re-partition 'would still be no more than a half measure or palliative.'³² This, however, ignores the significant change from his 1921-23 policy which had been willing to grant local autonomy only to those areas of the north-east with a unionist majority;³³ in fact, as has been noted above, Donnelly had tried, unsuccessfully, to hold de Valera to this in the Dail debate on the Constitution.³⁴

Nor did Craigavon in his contemptuous dismissal of the offer, miss the significance of what was, in fact, something of a bonus for the Ulster unionists: the fact, as Craigavon put it, that de Valera had been 'converted, and no longer desires plebiscites after suggesting them for so long.' Craigavon ridiculed de Valera's offer: 'If the imagination could picture anything as fantastic happening' then, in a short time, Northern Ireland's representatives 'would be completely swamped...and thus reduced to complete impotence in resisting the establishment of a republic - Mr de Valera's aim.'

Dismissing de Valera's 'dishonest propaganda' as an 'insult' and emphasising his belief that public opinion in Britain 'would rise in indignation' if any British government showed 'the slightest signs' of its intention to betray Ulster, Craigavon concluded his broadside with a message which was clearly intended for London as much as Dublin:

Therefore, as someone must make a decision, we are here now to say that, in no circumstances whatever, will we listen to the rattling of the sabre or, for that matter,³⁵ the cooing of the dove, where the integrity of Ulster is concerned.

Batterbee sent on the clipping of this interview to Devonshire with a note regretting Craigavon's stated lack of trust in de Valera's word.³⁶ Devonshire shared this regret, but thought that, read in its context, Craigavon's interview was 'no more than a bare statement of fact'; nor was he sure that it was 'altogether a bad thing that Mr. de Valera should be, brought sharply up against the realities of the situation', because he was 'certainly not aware of them when I saw him last.'³⁷

By now the Dominions Office was impatient with Dublin's handling of the Partition issue. MacDonald believed that since the April agreement, de Valera had 'taken no steps...to woo the North', but rather, had 'done the very opposite.' Devonshire agreed and resented, in particular, de Valera's expectation that London would be his 'cat paw' in coercing the

32. Longford and O'Neill (1970:341).

33. See note 19 in ch.5:i.

34. See above, ch.5:i:a.

35. Craigavon interview, Sunday Dispatch, 23 Oct. 1938.

36. Batterbee to Devonshire, 25 Oct. 1938, PRO DO 35/893/X11/250.

37. Devonshire minute, 25 Oct. 1938, *ibid*.

north.³⁸ British frustration with de Valera's public speeches was not lessened by their amazement at the naivete of what he was suggesting in private. The abolition of the Oath of Allegiance in Northern Ireland was one idea he favoured, and the unfortunate Dulaney had had to argue at the Dominions office that Dublin would consider it 'an excellent gesture' if Republican prisoners were released in the north to mark the inauguration of de Valera's new Constitution!³⁹ MacDonald did not hide his frustration: Britain was willing to help 'our friends in Eire', he minuted, 'but it is up to them to assist occasionally; the two barriers to a united Ireland at the moment are Eire and Northern Ireland; the United Kingdom is no bar.'⁴⁰

(e) Party pressures

A 'hawkish' line on Partition was now demanded by de Valera's supporters and, he may well have thought, by the circumstances. If he did not champion anti-Partitionism, perhaps the IRA might win back some of the people whom he had persuaded to support his constitutional approach. Furthermore, he was deeply pessimistic about the dangers of a European war believing that the opportunist instinct in Irish nationalism would come to the fore in any situation which could be construed as 'England's difficulty'. For his own part, he was convinced of the importance of making enough progress on Partition to maintain his credibility as an opponent of force. And given his difficult relationships with previous British politicians, he must now have sensed the importance of pressing Chamberlain and MacDonald for some concessions on Partition since they were, comparatively, so sympathetic. There was the point, too, that on the Continent, the British government had supported or acquiesced in the rectification of frontiers in pursuit of their policy of appeasement. De Valera clearly hoped that his government's grievances would also be appeased.

That the Fianna Fail party was agitated about Partition is clear from the party's Bulletin, from the proceedings of the National Executive and from the resolutions arriving at Headquarters for the Ard Fheis to be held in late November. Replying to a lengthy debate on Partition, de Valera again played what might be termed his '1921 card'. Before the Treaty had been signed, he reminded delegates, his united Republican cabinet had

38. MacDonald's and Devonshire's comments, both dated 21 Aug. 1938 in ibid., -/234.

39. Harding to Batterbee, 1 June 1938, ibid., -/210; see also ibid., -/234.

40. MacDonald minute, 21 Aug. 1938, ibid., -/234.

ruled out force against Ulster and had been willing to settle for external association. He now threatened to resign rather than 'shift an inch' from this policy which had been designed to encourage Ulster unionists 'to form part of the Nation.' Perhaps patience would be needed, but it would be far better 'to wait a long time to get them that way than to get them any other way.'⁴¹

That 'other' methods had some supporters at the Ard Fheis was clear from some suggestions made during the debate on how unity might be achieved: one speaker thought compulsory military service should be introduced in the south; another regretted that force had been excluded as an option, since this 'tied their hands'. The delegate who made this point was one of a number who had, earlier, unsuccessfully, attempted to have the discussion on Partition held in private session. Some delegates complained that the presence of the press 'shackled' those who might want to have a 'heart to heart' talk; those with 'hard things to say' did not want to be 'fettered and muzzled'.⁴² De Valera insisting that the rumours which would follow an 'in camera' session would result in 'the worst form of publicity', persuaded the Ard Fheis with the support of other delegates, to vote for an open debate.⁴³ Replying to the discussion, de Valera found little new in the issues raised; admitting that he had no blueprint for Irish unity, he pointed out that neither had his opponents.⁴⁴

At the Ard Fheis and at a university debate a week later, de Valera discussed the international status of the south: he claimed that Article 1 was in effect, a Declaration of Independence, that the existing status was not that of a Dominion and that it would 'be better for the nation if we were an independent Republic.'⁴⁵ Harding in the Dominions Office was exasperated by these speeches which frustrated any British action 'to better' north-south relations, 'still less to bring about a situation in which the end of Partition would be, even remotely, conceivable.'⁴⁶ The chagrin of the officials in the Dominions Office was all the greater because - much to the discomfort of the Home Office and of Stormont - they had been investigating de Valera's allegation that Britain was subsidising a discriminatory administration in the north. Harding thought de Valera's assertion of a British subsidy, 'not wholly unreasonable', and believed there was 'a good deal of foundation' in the charge of 'differential treatment' of the minority.⁴⁷ Such views were, by no means unanimous in

41. Fianna Fail Bulletin, Dec. 1938; Irish Press, 23 Nov. 1938; Clar, 1938 Ard Fheis.

42. H. McDevitt, a Donegal delegate, who had favoured an 'in camera' session to discuss Partition, suggested in public session that force should not be excluded, Irish Press, 23 Nov. 1938.

43. Irish Press, 23 Nov. 1938.

44. Ibid., 24 Nov. 1938.

45. John O'Hara Harte to McGarrity, 15 Dec. 1938, McGarrity papers, NLI ms. 17,544(2).

46. PRO DO 35/893/X11/257, quoting Irish Press reports of 24 Nov. and 3 Dec. 1938.

47. PRO DO 35/893/X11/257.

Whitehall, but clearly they were some indication that his criticisms of Stormont were being taken seriously.

His public speeches, however, were causing dismay and consternation in the Dominions Office. Just before Christmas, Dulanty, on a visit to Dublin, again reported to de Valera, MacDonald's 'strong view' that the anti-Partition campaign would 'do no good to his cause...', as it would only alienate Ulster. Dulanty reported that de Valera 'understood this point of view, but said that no man sitting in his chair could stand out of the partition campaign.' Unless he kept 'some sort of control over it' by entering into it, 'it would get into unconstitutional channels.' MacEntee agreed with de Valera's assessment; 'the extremists would have got control' of the campaign had de Valera not intervened; 'the rank and file in the party were feeling extremely bitter about partition' and it was MacEntee's opinion that de Valera 'could not help himself.'⁴⁸

Chamberlain, for one, should not have been too surprised by de Valera's emphasis on Partition: at one of their private meetings during the 1938 talks, he had assured him that without a shift in British public opinion, concessions on Partition could not be made to Dublin's viewpoint. He had also assured the Irish leader that he would raise no objections if de Valera were to organize an anti-Partition movement within Britain.⁴⁹ In due course, the Fianna Fail National Executive established a sub-committee 'to consider the most effective means to organize public opinion in England on the subject of Partition.' Chaired by Oscar Traynor, it included two 'hawks', Aodh de Blacam and Donnelly, and two moderates, Senator Margaret Pearse and Liam Pedler.⁵⁰ The preparation of an anti-Partition campaign in Britain had received considerable attention from the National Executive throughout 1938, money, speakers and advisers being sent to British cities to liaise with local Irish groups.⁵¹

De Valera also had plans for an American tour. Invited by Roosevelt to the New York World's Fair, he had decided to take the opportunity of touring the country. MacDonald, informed of these plans, supposed that de Valera 'would make some frightful speeches.' Dulanty attempted to reassure him by emphasising that de Valera's adviser in America - presumably Sean Nunan - had warned him that he could not 'raise the fiery cross' as he had on his tour of 1919-20.⁵² By now, de Valera must have realised that support for his approach was waning among Irish Americans.

48. MacDonald note of talk with Dulanty, 23 Dec. 1938, *ibid.*, -/265.

49. MacEntee later recalled that Chamberlain was 'tacitly accepting' Irish involvement 'in the evangelising of the great British public'. Interview, *Irish Times*, 25 July 1974.

50. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 10 Oct. 1938; de Blacam, who later joined Clann na Poblachta was considered doctrinaire on Partition, L.J. Walsh to Healy, 22 Feb. 1938, *Healy papers*, D2991/A/76.

51. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 1938, *passim*.

52. As note 48 above.

Indeed an apathetic and implicitly partitionist attitude towards Ulster was reported to Gallagher by Charles E. Russell, president of the organization which had remained loyal to de Valera since he had founded it in 1920 - The American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic. Russell had written in May of his concern that among members the 'general feeling' was that the south 'had won all she wanted...and why bother about Ulster, anyway? If Ulster wished to deprive herself of these advantages, let her go her way and find out her blunder.'⁵³ Meanwhile the McGarrity faction had long since tired of de Valera's coaxings and cajolements to rely on political progress towards the republic and was now, to de Valera's knowledge, plotting with the IRA leadership to finance a campaign of force.⁵⁴ One of McGarrity's circle, John O'Hara Harte now detected in de Valera's recent speeches a return to the 'Republican ideal.' He thought it 'very significant' that de Valera had never criticised 'recent activities' by Republicans in the north. 'It indicates, once again, that he may be using the Republican forces as a club over England to force them to deliver the North.'⁵⁵

This view was shared by many extremists and attempts had been made in November under the auspices of the Old IRA to persuade Fianna Fail to participate in a conference with other national organizations 'with a view to considering plans to deal with the Partition problem.' This may well have had Donnelly's support - it was consistent with a proposal he had often favoured - but the National Executive refused the bait: referring the invitation to de Valera, they recommended sending not a delegation but 'a suitable reply'.⁵⁶ Sean Russell, then Chief of Staff of the IRA, 'believed that even if de Valera would not or could not openly support the campaign, he would at least tolerate the IRA's activities in order to reap the benefits - the end of partition.' But Russell misunderstood that Fianna Fail 'had forsaken force as a solution to a not too pressing problem.'⁵⁷

(f) The IRA changes the context

On 12 January, Britain's Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax received an ultimatum from the IRA demanding a British withdrawal from the north

53. C.E. Russell to Gallagher, 17 May 1938, Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,351; but see ibid., 17 May 1938 for a more optimistic reading of Irish-American opinion.

54. Gallagher to McGarrity, 25 June 1938, McGarrity papers, NLI, ms. 17,544(1); Coogan (1970:118-130).

55. O'Hara Harte to McGarrity, 15 Dec. 1938, McGarrity papers, NLI ms. 17,544(2). In 1936 O'Hara Harte had failed to interest de Valera in a secret pact with the IRA which McGarrity favoured, Coogan (1970:119).

56. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 14 Nov. 1938.

57. Bell (1971:147-51).

within four days, failing which the IRA would declare war on the United Kingdom. Four days later a series of bomb explosions caused material damage but no loss of life in major British cities. The attacks caused alarm in government circles in London, Belfast and Dublin: in Berlin, they were noted with satisfaction.⁵⁸ The IRA leadership may have believed that they had sufficient recruits 'to Blow or Burn England from her Moorings',⁵⁹ but, in reality, the strategy had no possibility of success. Dulanty believed the IRA to be 'madmen' anxious to prevent any permanent reconciliation between Ireland and Britain. He told the Dominions Office that he himself doubted the wisdom of some of de Valera's recent anti-Partition speeches but that de Valera felt the need 'to convince his countrymen that he really was getting a move on upon constitutional lines.' Devonshire appreciated that this was de Valera's motive but thought that the public in Britain and America

would find it difficult to dissociate Mr de Valera's remarks and the still more inflammatory utterances of some of his followers, from the acts of violence which have followed them.

Further, Devonshire hoped that de Valera appreciated that his recent interventions and the IRA violence 'made any prospect of ultimate re-union ...infinitely more remote.' According to Devonshire's minute, Dulanty

emphasised the fact that Mr de Valera would be horrified by these acts of lawless violence and that his speeches had been mainly directed towards preventing these and I replied that the man who shouted "Don't nail his ears to the pump"⁶⁰ might have claimed the same motive, but with equally little success.

There is some evidence to suggest that, at this juncture, de Valera had to heed the republican 'fellow-travellers' in his party. The Dominions Office had suggested to Dulanty that de Valera should dissociate his government from the outrages: Dulanty said he had thought of this himself and 'had been in touch with certain people in Dublin by telephone' but that he gathered that 'in view of the "political position in Eire", it would be difficult for Mr. de Valera to do this at the moment'.⁶¹ Some indication of de Valera's difficulties can be gleaned from the recommendations of the anti-Partition Sub-Committee to the National Executive on 13 February: emphasising the 'urgent need' for 'a firm direction in the present crisis' and, 'in order that our supporters in newspapers and on platforms shall speak with one voice', the committee 'asks the National Executive to obtain a reiteration of our claim to the whole of Ireland from the Government and an official demand for the evacuation of the North...'. Moreover, the Committee believed the state should take over the anti-Partition movement 'as the only way to avert

58. Longford and O'Neill (1970:341-2); T.D.Williams, 'Neutrality!', Irish Press, 6 July 1953; Lord Templewood (Samuel Hoare), Nine troubled years, (London:1954), pp.243-4.

59. Hayes to Russell, 10 June 1939, quoted, Sean Cronin, The McGarrity papers, (Tralee:1972), p.171, hereafter cited as Cronin:1972.

60. Devonshire minute, 18 Jan. 1939, PRO DO 35/893/X11/271.

disaster'. A lengthy discussion but no decisions followed the tabling of this resolution.⁶² In a Senate debate on Fianna Fail's anti-Partition strategy, de Valera insisted that his was not a pacifist position: he would, if he 'could see a way of doing it effectively, rescue the Border nationalists 'from the coercion which they are suffering at the present time... If we had behind us the strength of some of the continental Powers - I can say publicly what I have said privately - I would feel perfectly justified in using force to prevent the coercion' of the Border nationalists. But implicit in de Valera's argument - and the clear purpose of his speech - was the lesson that such a use of force could shift the border, not abolish it.⁶³ This speech was noted at Stormont and the opportunity for further widening the breach between north and south was not missed by the Unionist Party. In an official statement they characterized de Valera as 'justifying the use of force if there were any chance of force succeeding.' He would also, the Unionists claimed, impose the Irish language on a united Ireland and declare an independent, neutral republic if the north ever accepted any of his offers of unity under the 1937 Constitution.⁶⁴

Privately the Stormont government attempted to press home their advantage. On the outbreak of the IRA campaign in Britain, Andrews informed Chamberlain that he could

not help feeling that many of the statements and claims which Mr. de Valera and his colleagues have recently made have encouraged the members of the IRA to believe that now that they have got rid of Britain in Eire all they have to do is to fight on and they will get Ulster.⁶⁵

If Andrews was hinting here at collusion between de Valera and the IRA, Whitehall did not agree. The Prime Minister was advised to take the line in reply that the violence was 'all very unpleasant, but that it is not thought that it should be regarded as an attack by Mr. de Valera...'.⁶⁶ The Northern Ireland government pressed for a specific commitment from London: they believed that in the new circumstances it would be 'most helpful', if the British government publicly reaffirmed Northern Ireland's constitutional right to remain within the United Kingdom and that any 'necessary assistance' would be forthcoming should the need arise.⁶⁷ Even the Home Office, usually sympathetic, advised against attempting to satisfy the Unionists who would want a declaration which would preclude 'any change in the present position'. Whitehall had no intention of going that far, Chamberlain replying to Andrews that to suggest 'that Great Britain should say that, if the people of Northern Ireland desire to join the south, that they are not to do so for imperial reasons, is to put the British government in a position to which they have never aspired and do

62. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 13 Feb. 1939; National Anti-Partition Council to de Valera, 27 Apr. 1939, SPO S 12432.

63. SE:22:980-1, 7 Feb. 1939.

64. The Times, 10 Feb. 1939.

65. Andrews to Chamberlain, 18 Jan. 1939, PRO DO 35/893/X11/273.

66. W.C.Hankinson to J.E.Stephenson, 24 Jan. 1939, ibid.

67. As note 65 above.

not aspire.'⁶⁸ Lord Londonderry thought such 'anaemic statements' were 'really amazing' and complained to Hoare of the government's 'pusillanimous' Irish policy: nor had he any long term faith in future British government's resisting Dublin's pressure over Partition. 'The British Government can always put on a squeeze, as you know, without appearing to coerce, and a Socialist Government would certainly do this.' Londonderry wrote that 'the British Government should state quite categorically that they have no idea of Ulster joining up with the Free State.'⁶⁹ Hoare, in reply, sided with Chamberlain: any possible united Ireland to which Ulster would be attracted 'would be in such conditions as to make it perfectly safe' for Britain and in present conditions, unity was 'inconceivable' so rendering the whole question 'academic'.⁷⁰ The issue seemed anything but academic to Ulster Unionists. In March, Hoare was still attempting to reassure Londonderry: the 'very suggestion that these despicable terrorist attempts should in any way deflect British opinion is so ridiculous that it is not worthy even of a repudiation'; further, Hoare denied that the cabinet displayed 'antagonism...towards Ulster'.⁷¹ Londonderry's son, Robin, himself a Conservative backbencher, thought MacDonald's 'pitiful cringe to de Valera' merely encouraged 'a creature like Goring (sic) to ask for more.'⁷² Craigavon, in mid-cruise when the IRA campaign was launched, stated in Ceylon that Ulster was 'prepared to fight to the end rather than yield. There can never be a compromise.'⁷³

The continuing IRA campaign in Britain posed a challenge to de Valera's cabinet. Repression was one possible response; but given the climate of opinion in the country, there was always the danger that it might prove counterproductive. De Valera seems to have favoured an emphasis on the merits of his own political approach: the government, he insisted, needed 'no spurring on this question. It is always alert and active and never misses an opportunity of trying to end Partition...'.⁷⁴ MacDermot, now a de Valera appointee in the Senate but as ascerbic as before in his denunciations of Fianna Fail's approach to Partition, sensed, after six months of the IRA campaign, 'a widespread suspicion' that Fianna Fail 'if they do not actually approve what is going on, at any rate regard it with a considerable degree of complacency.'⁷⁵

The files of the Department of Justice give some indication of the concern of the civil servants at what they saw as an alarming and deteriorating situation: the absence of extradition for terrorist offences created a 'hiatus' in Irish law; arguments against its inclusion were 'mainly of a political character'; amending the law might always be

68. Draft prepared for Chamberlain *ibid.* -/278; also extract from letter, Chamberlain to Londonderry, 31 Jan. appended to Londonderry to Hoare, 6 Mar. 1939, *Templewood papers*, CUL X/4.

69. Londonderry to Hoare, 6 Mar. 1939, *op.cit.*

70. Hoare to Londonderry, 11 Mar. 1939, *op.cit.*

71. *Ibid.*, 1 Mar. 1939, X/3.

72. Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill: v: 1922-1939*, (London: 1976) p.1027.

73. Craigavon interview, *Sunday Express*, 22 Jan. 1939.

74. Notes on Treason Bill, 16 Feb. 1939, *Gallagher papers*, NLI ms. 18,375(11).

75. SE:23:957, 26 July 1959.

'misunderstood' as being done only at the behest of Britain.⁷⁶ Arguments were put forward for 'strong police powers' as a preventative measure; if illegal republican activities 'appear not to be regarded seriously by the Government', argued one departmental paper, 'this facilitates recruitment to the IRA particularly by the young in search of adventure...'.⁷⁷ That public opinion was ambivalent about suppression of the IRA is clear from the civil servants' comments and from the government's approach.⁷⁸ Perhaps it was this factor which encouraged Russel to write to McGarrity that 'at its worst', the Offences Against the State Act 'will prove but a small obstacle, and is of little concern to us.'⁷⁹

(g) Politics or commonsense?

Meanwhile throughout these months of deteriorating north-south relations, officials from London, Belfast and Dublin were struggling to implement the new trade relationship between north and south. T.G.Jenkins from the Board of Trade in London thought Dublin generally unhelpful in the early months: moreover, noting the 'uneasiness and ill-feeling' in Unionist circles following de Valera's Evening Standard interview, he believed civil servants could do nothing more than 'shed a silent tear about it.'⁸⁰ At a meeting with de Valera in February, he took his opportunity of putting his complaint directly: de Valera was 'cordial and friendly'- and unapologetic: 'sentiment in Eire compelled him to speak'. While assuring de Valera that the matter was all 'outside my province altogether', Jenkins ventured to suggest that if de Valera's goal was to unite the thirtytwo counties, then surely he had to convince the unionists that 'they would be at least as well off politically and economically under a Dublin Government as they were at present.' To achieve this, Jenkins recommended 'a generous gesture' in some 'small matters' which he had been trying to persuade Lemass were 'at any rate worth a trial.' De Valera declined to make promises: whereas Jenkins had found Lemass 'genuinely anxious' to improve north-south relations, in de Valera's case he had 'no doubt that whenever it comes to a choice between politics and common sense, politics will win.'⁸¹ Whitehall believed that here were 'all the sadly familiar arguments'.⁸²

They were to become even more familiar in the weeks which followed. Inskip spent almost four hours with de Valera on 24 March and his detailed note of their conversation, gives some indication of de Valera's scenario on how Irish unity might be brought about. Ruling out force as

76. Secret memo. re Offences Against the State Bill, 6 Apr. 1939, SPO S 10454D.

77. General observations on the Draft Bills, Office of the Minister for Justice, SPO S 10454B.

78. S.A.Roche, to Minister for Justice, 8 Mar. 1939, ibid.

79. 3 Mar. 1939, quoted, Cronin (1972:170).

80. T.G.Jenkins to John Leydon, 22 Nov. 1938, PRO DO 35/893/X11/258.

81. Jenkins note of talk with de Valera, 1 Feb. 1939, ibid. -/276.

82. Inskip, minute, 23 Feb., 1939, ibid.

impractical, de Valera reckoned that the four counties which were 'predominantly with him' would, in a plebiscite, vote themselves out of Northern Ireland.

So far as the "Ascendency Party", mainly in Down and Antrim, were concerned, they would do what the Unionists would do in Southern Ireland, namely, make a way of living in peace and harmony with their neighbours, notwithstanding differences of political outlook. This process would be hastened if we withdrew our army from Northern Ireland. The Ascendency Party, as he called them, would be faced with the possibility of a "revolt" and they would, before long reconcile themselves to the position and make terms.

Inskip suggested to de Valera that such an outline, sounded to him 'very like the use of force': that presumably when de Valera spoke of 'a revolt...he meant not a political revolt but something like a military or forcible revolution.' Inskip's own reading of what he termed 'Protestant and political feeling' differed from de Valera's; he did not think de Valera was right in thinking that they 'would not fight.' De Valera 'agreed that this was a possibility, but he still thought that the maintenance of British forces in Northern Ireland perpetuated an unnatural state of affairs.'⁸³

Chamberlain listened to some of these same arguments when de Valera visited him at Chequers the following morning. In particular, de Valera complained about the coercion of the predominantly nationalist border areas 'and added that England was being blamed because she stood in the way and covered Northern Ireland with her protection, without which Eire would make short work of her.' De Valera then tried to coax some concessions from Chamberlain, arguing that unless some change was forthcoming on Partition, his speeches on his American tour might have to be provocative. Chamberlain was not perturbed by this prospect; instead, he chided de Valera for neglecting the 'great opportunity' during the 1938 negotiations of making some tariff concessions to Northern Ireland. Had he done this, 'he would at least have had a nucleus there who might have moderated the more extreme views of the majority'; instead, during the intervening twelve months, he had 'embittered feeling in Northern Ireland' where he now 'had not got a single friend...'. Chamberlain concluded this lecture by asking whether de Valera could not now offer some tariff concession to the north, to which de Valera 'offered a somewhat lengthy explanation' of why he found this difficult. Asked whether he could reassure Ulster on the question of a Republic, Chamberlain records de Valera as being satisfied with the then Commonwealth link, although if 'some move' could be made on Partition, it would be a position 'much easier to maintain...'. Asked to confide 'honestly whether he thought the majority of people in Ireland wanted her to cut loose from the Empire', de Valera accepted that they did, because, in his view, 'mistakenly, they believed they would never have complete independence unless they were a separate Republic.' Chamberlain's rebuttal of this argument, with which de Valera is recorded as having 'entirely agreed', was that a Republic

83. Inskip note of talk with de Valera, 24 Mar. 1939, PRO DO 35/893/X11/296.

outside the Empire because of its strategic vulnerability, would have to submit to 'much closer restrictions' than would be necessary within the Commonwealth.

Thus, yet again, Chamberlain and de Valera found themselves discussing Partition in the context of what both men appreciated was a common external threat to the peace of both countries. Indeed Chamberlain believed that it was only by approaching the Ulster Unionists on the basis of 'national safety' that he could possibly induce them to 'make some contribution to (Irish) unity'.⁸⁴ De Valera gratefully accepted Chamberlain's promise to make some such approach and thus closed what was to be the last meeting between de Valera and the only British Prime Minister whom he admired, trusted and whose outlook on the Partition issue, he believed was broadly sympathetic.⁸⁵

While the principals were thus engaged, J.P. Walshe, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, put a proposition to Devonshire which the latter circulated to his colleagues. Walshe is recorded as believing that 'substantial advantages' would follow from a 'frank conversation' between de Valera and a Northern Ireland minister. Walshe claimed that, to de Valera, the Ulster unionist viewpoint was 'wholly incomprehensible', it meant 'nothing at all to him'; further, that 'his Chief was becoming more and more obsessed' about Partition and showed 'angry resentment' at Britain's failure to make progress towards ending it. Devonshire, for his part, was against any such meeting. Because Northern Ireland viewed the idea of closer association with the south 'with the utmost repugnance...., there was no chance of a deal anyhow'; Northern Ireland's terms would be 'far higher than Eire could possibly agree to.' Walshe's argument was that 'it did not matter how high' Northern Ireland pitched its claims 'or how little result was achieved'; this goal in pressing for the meeting was to 'disabuse Mr. de Valera of his present fixed conviction' that Britain was solely responsible for Partition.⁸⁶

The Dominions Office communicated all of this information to Hoare at the Home Office and to Chamberlain, but at Harding's suggestion they omitted a concluding paragraph from Devonshire:

It should not be forgotten that Mr. Walshe is a Jesuit and that his object in pressing for this conversation to take place may be quite different from what he told me: but what he said seems to me to make sense and I think that no harm and possibly considerable good, might come from such a conversation.

Inskip minuted that he was 'a little suspicious' of the proposal coming from Dublin for a de Valera-Craigavon meeting; he justified this by pointing out to his colleagues that de Valera 'wants to put partition right in front of the window' and a meeting with Craigavon would be 'the

84. Chamberlain, note of talk with de Valera, 25 Mar. 1939, PRO FO 800/310.

85. De Valera told a press conference in London in 1951 that he once convinced a British prime minister that Partition was an 'anachronism and an anomaly', Irish Press, 17 Mar. 1951. He made no secret of his respect for Chamberlain; interviews with Sean MacEntee, Frank MacDermot, James Dillon.

86. Devonshire note of talk with Walshe, 13 Apr. 1939, PRO DO 35/893/X11/303.

very thing from his point of view'. But this suspicion seems to have been only tentatively held since Inskip added that he also appreciated 'the force of Mr. Walshe's point' and in a letter to Chamberlain on the same day he cites Walshe's argument at face value. In this letter, Inskip bemoans de Valera's recent reference to the Crown and to neutrality which had, 'to put it mildly, not improved the atmosphere.' Inskip, who had recently been warned by Dulanty that de Valera was in danger of suffering Cosgrave's fate unless the British got 'something begun concerning partition', now warned Chamberlain that he felt de Valera vulnerable to being 'displaced by people more extreme than himself'. This was 'not a new experience for Irish leaders' but the syndrome whereby Irish negotiators had to be appeased to defend them against such extreme domestic opponents, was, argued Inskip, familiar to Ulster which would consider 'as both futile and mischievous' any approaches by London to 'meet or to help Mr. de Valera...'. However, Inskip still favoured some approach to Craigavon, although Hoare's 'very strong opinion' was that to invite the Ulster leader 'to discuss better relations with Eire at this juncture' would be 'useless'.⁸⁷

Whether this was a personal initiative on Walshe's part or whether it was mooted with de Valera's support, and, if the latter, whether de Valera knew the grounds on which Walshe sought the meeting, it is impossible to say. What is clear is that Craigavon would have rejected any initiative from Dublin as was his habit: as one journalist noted after such a rebuff to de Valera, he had 'never heard one man tell another so politely and charmingly to go to blazes and mind his own business.'⁸⁸

No matter how, why, or by whom, the Partition question was raised during this period, one factor seemed constant: each episode demonstrated the gulf between the two Irish governments. Their respective positions on whether the London government's conscription bill should be applied to Northern Ireland illustrates the cleavage. To have the north excluded from the Bill, would clearly be a boost to de Valera's flagging reputation with northern nationalists: he also believed it would be immoral and foolhardy in the extreme to attempt to conscript northern nationalists into the British Army. So serious was the issue to de Valera that he postponed his American tour to handle the crisis.

Donnelly, for his part, was anticipating political gains if the British attempted to impose the measure on the north. 'Conscription! Damn the bit of harm a fight over this will do', he wrote, confiding to Healy his enthusiasm about de Valera's 'bold' decision to cancel his American tour.

But what a fight! That awful "dud" party of his would be better worth £10 a week to keep them at their homes. Let us hope that this is the first step in the final drive forward.⁸⁹

Craigavon travelled to London 'hoping, expecting and believing' that there

87. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

88. Lady Craigavon, diary, 9 May 1939, *op.cit.*

89. Donnelly to Healy, 28 Apr. 1939, *Healy papers*, D2991/A/135B.

would be no differentiation between the mainland and Northern Ireland. Lady Craigavon's diary records that the Ulster leader used 'all his powers of pressing and persuasion but to no purpose' because the British government 'were frightened of the issue being complicated by De Valera kicking up a dust...'. Chamberlain spoke bluntly: '"If you really want to help(,) don't press for conscription(:) it will only be an embarrassment." What else could J(ames) do than say very well I wont...?'⁹⁰

Lady Londonderry felt 'very very strongly' that the British government was guilty of yet another foolish appeasement. 'It is the old old story. If you want the British government to do anything - you must make yourself a real nuisance - in fact like de Valera...'. She found particularly galling that it was now 'openly being said' in the north that the British government 'would never dare' to introduce conscription there. Frustrated at the poor representations made to London of Ulster's real interests, she expressed little faith in the British government's future policy on Partition: with sarcasm, she argued to Hoare that 'the same arguments will hold just as good when the six counties are demanded - i.e. that de Valera will make trouble - and that the Americans are behind him.' Hoare in a restrained reply insisted that the conscription question was 'extremely difficult' and that the decision taken was in the Empire's best interests.⁹¹

Whereas Robert Brennan, the Irish Ambassador at Washington, believed that 'the time had definitely passed when it was worth while to talk anti-British stuff in America',⁹² and although the American Ambassador in Dublin told de Valera 'very emphatically' that anti-British speeches would be resented and counterproductive,⁹³ it would seem, from the preparatory research which Gallagher assembled for the American tour, that de Valera intended laying considerable emphasis on Partition.⁹⁴ The British meanwhile believed de Valera was past arguing with: apprehensive that he was 'getting more and more worked up about partition', Inskip believed that 'by the time he reaches the U.S.A., he will be thinking of little else.'⁹⁵ De Valera had confided to a San Francisco judge passing through Dublin that his purpose in America would be 'to mobilise the Irish vote' in order to bring pressure on London 'to agree to the union of all Ireland.' He had added that if war broke out, Eire would be neutral 'but "would want her price".'⁹⁶ Indirectly, these comments had been passed on to the Foreign Office, who circularised the Dominions Office. Harding suggested to Devonshire that the 'remark about neutrality is interesting but cryptic!'⁹⁷

90. Lady Craigavon diary, 2 May 1929, *op.cit.*; PRONI CAB 4/416/16.

91. Lady Londonderry to Hoare, 3 May and Hoare to Lady Londonderry, 4 May 1939, *Templewood papers*, CUL X/4.

92. Sir Robert Lindsay to Sir Alexander Hardinge after Lindsay's talk with Brennan, 1 Mar. 1939, PRO DO 35/899/X161/4.

93. Cudahy to Roosevelt, 6 Apr. 1939, quoted T.Ryle Dwyer, *Irish neutrality and the USA: 1939-47*, (Dublin:1977) pp.14-15. Hereafter Dwyer:1977.

94. *Gallagher papers*, NLI ms. 18,375(11).

95. Inskip minute, 4 Apr. 1939, PRO DO 35/899/X161/4.

96. John Balfour to P.Liesching, 8 Aug. 1939, *ibid.*

97. Harding to Devonshire, 15 Aug. 1939, *ibid.*

Meanwhile, the pressures from within his own party, were, if anything, increasing. On 28 August the National Executive of Fianna Fail decided that speakers from the Executive and from the Dail should participate in a series of public anti-Partition meetings in the north, 'all speakers to be prepared for arrest and imprisonment in the event of active opposition to such meetings by the Northern Government.'⁹⁸ Donnelly had also been active on another front: he wrote to Healy of his proposal to press for the elimination of Article 3 from the constitution which limited its jurisdiction to twenty-six counties pending the 'reintegration of the national territory.' Its elimination would, in effect, be a unilateral declaration of a united Ireland and, by implication, an invitation to the north's citizens, elected representatives, and local authorities to switch their allegiance to Dublin. The deletion of Article 3 had its advocates among the interventionists: what Donnelly called the 'best types' in Dublin were 'all delighted' with the proposal. Northern nationalists

should demand the application of (the) constitution to us and keep at it. Now is the time. Only Dev(sic) can battle with any hope of victory or negotiate with any hope of success, and we must make him do it.⁹⁹

The outbreak of the Second World War changed the context in which these initiatives were considered. Nevertheless, the interventionist faction in the party seem, if anything, to have escalated their demands for anti-Partitionist pressure as war became more and more inevitable. For de Valera, however Partition was to take second place to the securing of a policy of neutrality for the twenty-six counties. Both policies, of course, were linked - Partition at once determined and excused Irish neutrality: and, in time, neutrality was to have its effects on Partition. But as the war began, de Valera must have recognized that all his repeated attempts with British ministers to win concessions on Partition in return for defence co-operation had failed. After almost eight years in power, he could claim to have achieved much of the rest of his programme. But every gain had further alienated the Ulster Unionists. And as the north became a belligerent in the War and the south faced 'The Emergency', the line on the map became something more than a customs frontier and an international border: it separated the south which valued neutrality, independence, and 'frugal comfort' from the north which had self-consciously joined what Unionist leaders emphasised was one of the most fateful struggles in history, a fight for freedom, democracy and civilization.

98. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 28 Aug. 1939.

99. Donnelly to Healy, 28 Apr. 1939, Healy papers, D2991/A/135B.

(i) The Phoney Emergency?

(a) Neutrality declared

In November 1940, the novelist Elizabeth Bowen suggested to the Ministry of Information in London that although Irish neutrality must appear 'an affair of blindness, egotism, escapism or sheer funk', it ought to be understood as a positive 'free self-assertion' of her independence.¹ De Valera, for his part, insisted that neutrality was based on prudence, not cowardice: properly, he did fear that Ireland might become a war theatre, a 'cockpit',² or 'a side-show'³ to a German invasion of Britain. He knew that no policy other than neutrality was politically possible: politicians,⁴ the press,⁵ the churches,⁶ ex-unionists,⁷ Irish writers⁸ - and the voters, when asked⁹ - all approved. What began as 'a gambler's throw', in time, hardened into a 'habit of mind.'¹⁰ It was supported by factions as far apart as republican extremists and those southern Irishmen who were in the war as volunteers in the British armed services!¹¹

De Valera believed it would have been 'suicide' to abandon it;¹² his ambassador in Washington thought 'revolution' might have followed;¹³ and Britain's ambassador in Dublin thought the consequences 'beyond computation'.¹⁴ Although scarcely popular in London or Washington, there were some who appreciated that Irish neutrality might even be the best

1. Elizabeth Cameron's report, 9 Nov. 1940, PRO FO 800/310.

2. The Times, 4 Feb. 1942.

3. Mulcahy recording de Valera's view, 'The X summary', 5 July 1940, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/210.

4. Interview, James Dillon; exchange of letters between Cosgrave and de Valera, July 1940, quoted, Longford and O'Neill (1970:371).

5. Summary of editorials, Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,334.

6. Ibid., for Church of Ireland Gazette support; see also T.D. Williams, 'Neutrality!', Irish Press, 1 July 1953.

7. Percy Lorraine, confidential report, Dec. 1940, PRO FO 800/310.

8. See Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,341.

9. O'Leary (1979:34-7); Longford and O'Neill (1970:401-2;409-10).

10. The Times, 28 Apr. 1942, 19 Oct. 1944.

11. The left-wing Republican leader, Frank Ryan, then in Berlin, was anxious to return to Ireland to help in unifying his 'friends' behind de Valera's 'foreign policy', Ryan to Leopold Kerney (Irish Minister in Madrid) 14 Jan. 1942. I am grateful to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Brian Lenihan, for permission to consult a series of letters from Ryan to Kerney, June 1940- Aug. 1942, now in the archives of the Department. For Irishmen in British Army supporting neutrality, The Times, 28 Apr. 1942.

12. Longford and O'Neill (1970:395).

13. Welles memo, 9 Nov. 1940, FRUS, 1940, p.167.

14. Maffey to Eden, 26 Oct. 1939, PRO CAB 66/2 WP(39)97.

possible policy from an Allied viewpoint: the south was virtually defenceless and participation would have entailed spreading even more thinly the Allies' already overstretched defensive capacity.¹⁵ What was true was that given Ireland's recent history and the continuing grievance of Partition, wholehearted support for the Allies was not within any politician's gift.

Allied to this negative factor supporting neutrality was a positive dimension of particular importance to de Valera. The theme of national unity had been a recurring one in his speeches since the Civil War: occasionally, he used it to refer to the abolition of Partition; but, more often, he was emphasising the need for pan-nationalist unity throughout Ireland as a pre-condition for an effective campaign of conversion of the Ulster unionists. Deeply disappointed that his 1937 Constitution had failed to win all-party support in the south, he could claim greater unanimity among nationalists in their opposition to Partition - although, here again, he had had to steer Fianna Fail clear of some organizations whose methods might have entailed a loss of personal control over anti-Partitionist activities.¹⁶ Now, the virtually unanimous support for neutrality represented a positive breakthrough for de Valera: this was the first healing of the Civil War split, his first success in achieving pan-nationalist unity.

If domestic political pressures insisted on a neutral policy, this was not true of international pressures. As a leader who had always tended to shelter the more controversial aspects of his foreign policy from the scrutiny of cabinet colleagues,¹⁷ he must now have appreciated that a pragmatic approach to neutrality might be more easily pursued if he effected some changes in the government. In the first week of the war, he re-shuffled his cabinet: at least two of the changes can scarcely have pleased the republican wing of the party. Replacing Patrick Rutledge as Minister for Justice with Gerald Boland portended a tougher line against Republican extremists;¹⁸ more significantly, Frank Aiken - reputedly the most Anglophobe member of the cabinet and a 'hawk' on Ulster - was moved from the very sensitive Ministry of Defence to become Minister for the Co-ordination of Defensive Measures with responsibilities for wartime censorship.¹⁹ General Richard Mulcahy, himself a former defence minister and Chief of Staff, may have been expressing a widespread view in Fine

15. Sean Lemass, interview with Michael Mills, Irish Press, 25 Jan. 1969; W.L.Langer and S.E.Gleason, The world crisis: American foreign policy: vol.1: the challenge to isolation, 1937-1940, (London:1952) p.717.

16. Note in particular the bitterness of northern nationalist leaders at what they saw as the neglect of Partition by Fianna Fail, open letters from Healy, Fr. Coyle and others, Irish News, 26 June 1940. See also Patrick Maxwell to Healy, 24 June 1939, Healy papers, D2991/A/142A.

17. Many of those who had dealings with de Valera formed this impression: see MacDonald's report of his talk with de Valera, Lemass and Aiken, 27 June 1940, PRO CAB 66/9 WP(40)233, annex II; also Gray to Roosevelt, 28 May 1941.

18. By temperament, Rutledge was not a 'law and order' minister, interview with Peadar O'Donnell. In contrast, Boland believed in abdicating or governing, interview with Kevin Boland.

19. Rumours of cabinet dissension were denied by de Valera, The Times, 29 Sept. 1939. Carroll comments, 'With all due respect to Mr. Aiken, one wonders what his main preoccupations were.' Joseph Carroll, 'Few revelations in the "Emergency" papers', Irish Independent, 12 Mar. 1976.

Gael circles when he suggested to a Fianna Fail informant, 'R' - possibly James Ryan, Minister for Agriculture and his brother-in-law - that Aiken had been moved because he believed '"...that the Army should be ready to March into Ulster at any time."' 'R' rejected this explanation: 'speaking in lodge', he said that it was because Aiken was 'obstinate and ignorant.... ..intolerant and dictatorial': moreover, coming from the north, 'he was necessarily a bigot.'²⁰ De Valera was considerably more pragmatic on defence questions than Aiken, although he hid this trait from his minister;²¹ could it be that to continue such an approach, de Valera now needed a less Anglophobic and more amenable minister for wartime conditions?²²

The outbreak of war heightened expectations in some quarters of the Fianna Fail party that Partition could be abolished. Although party headquarters attempted to channel this pressure into propaganda efforts,²³ the approval for an opportunist resort to force won some support at the Ard Fheis in December. Donnelly argued that if they did not re-unite the country while the War was on, 'they could whistle for it afterwards.' Partition, he complained, had been neglected during Fianna Fail's years in power:²⁴ another northerner, the ubiquitous Canon Tom Maguire who had naively misread de Valera's strategy in the 1938 negotiations,²⁵ now complained to the Ard Fheis that many northern nationalists likened the 1938 agreement to the Treaty - 'many believed that they had been sold again'. Some other speakers directly advocated the use of force against Northern Ireland. De Valera, in reply, did not rule it out in principle: if force 'promised success' they would not 'shirk the sacrifice of energy, wealth, or even life that would be entailed.' Again, the purpose of de Valera's speech was to emphasise the 'irrationality' of force as a method of uniting the country. Fianna Fail's aim was not merely to 'get these people momentarily or temporarily united to us' but rather to arrive at a situation where unity could be stabilised: implicit in de Valera's approach was that some measure of acquiescence if not consent, on the part of the Ulster unionists would be forthcoming.²⁶ On the second day of the Ard Fheis however, de Valera suggested that a transfer of populations between Irish emigrants in Britain and those in Northern Ireland who refused to consider themselves Irish might provide a solution to the Partition question.²⁷

20. Mulcahy's memo of conversation with 'R', 20 or 26(?) Oct. 1939, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/219. Internal evidence suggests, almost certainly, that 'R' is a member of the Fianna Fail cabinet: James Ryan was Mulcahy's brother-in-law and they did meet socially in these years (Confidential source).

21. Aiken, for instance, was not included among Irish ministers at the 1938 talks although the minister responsible for defence.

22. Oscar Traynor who was appointed Minister for Defence, was described as 'kind and courteous' by 'R' (see note 22 above).

23. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 18 and 25 Sept., 20 Nov. 1939, 8 Jan. and 1 Apr. 1940.

24. Belfast Newsletter, 13 Dec. 1940.

25. Maguire to Healy, 20 Jan. 1938, Healy papers, D2991/B/4/1C.

26. As note 24 above.

27. Irish Times, 14 Dec. 1939; also, SE:23:1002-3, 26 July 1939.

To defend his Partition strategy against extreme party opinion, de Valera had yet again offered offence to the Ulster unionists: in contrast, he was much more sensitive when it came to defending his ascendancy as nationalist leader from any erosion on his republican flank. Maffey's reports of his September talks with de Valera reveal his obsession on this point: de Valera complained that his every action was 'studied by men bitterly opposed to any sort of rapprochement with the United Kingdom...'; it was he said, 'beyond belief' how easily suspicions could be aroused.²⁸ De Valera was particularly alarmed at the possibility of an outbreak of violence within Northern Ireland, whether fomented by the Stormont authorities, or by a German invasion, or by IRA activity from south or north of the border.²⁹ He appreciated that the IRA was now, largely, northern based and that there was greater sympathy there for Germany than was the case in the rest of the country.³⁰ Moreover throughout 1939, the northern nationalists had become increasingly sceptical concerning his record on Partition;³¹ and at the height of the conscription crisis in April, they had twice suggested to him that he should launch an all-Ireland 'scheme for Irish National Service.'³² A month later, one of the proposers complained to Healy that he had been 'agitating for a considerable time to have young men from the North enrolled as volunteers in the Twenty Six Counties; but so far without success.' Aiken, when refusing one request, had been told that 'we would have to make local arrangements ourselves.'³³

To de Valera, all of this evidence pointed to one conclusion: that the failure of the British to end Partition had left him - as he himself had constantly warned - with an unstable and unpredictable security problem. 'The Nation is on the March...' intoned the IRA propaganda machine,³⁴ exhorting the people to 'rise now' and help in 'the destruction of the British Empire.'³⁵ Although poorly led and with negligible support in the south, the IRA remained potentially exploitable by the Germans and clearly posed serious security problems for the government:³⁶ as de Valera admitted to Gray, they 'appealed to something very deep in the Irish heart.'³⁷

What particularly terrified de Valera was the prospect of a German invasion of nationalist areas north of the border. If he were in charge of German strategy, he told Gray, he would land in these areas and

28. Maffey's reports of his talks with de Valera, 14, 20, 22 Sept. 1939, PRO DO 35/1107/WX1/5.

29. Confidential source; also Gray to Roosevelt, 6 June 1940.

30. Interview Patrick McGill. Cardinal MacRory's anti-Partitionism led him to sympathise with a German victory.

31. See note 16 above.

32. Patrick Maxwell to de Valera, 28 Apr. 1939; also Sean Dowling and Roger McCorley, National Anti-Partition Council, to de Valera, 27 Apr. 1939, SPO S 12432.

33. Maxwell to Healy, 24 June 1939, Healy papers, D2991/A/142A; ibid., 30 June 1939, -/152B.

34. IRA circular, James O'Donovan papers, NLI ms. 21,155(4).

35. 'Irishmen, stop and think', duplicated typescript, NLI ms. 18,945.

36. Sean Lemass, interview, Irish Press, Jan. 1969.

37. Gray to Roosevelt, 15 Apr. 1940.

proclaim himself 'a liberator. If they should do that(,) what I could do I do not know.'³⁸ This contingency was also feared by Mulcahy³⁹ and was formally raised by another Fine Gael member at the all-party advisory Defence Conference. O'Higgins asked whether southern troops should be willing to help the north to fight the Germans if they landed there: few other questions would have elicited such revealing answers from the Dail parties. Labour thought any such aid would amount to collaboration with the British enabling them '"to continue their occupation and exploitation of the Six Counties"'': Fine Gael believed that not to assist 'would be disgraceful and absurd'; while Fianna Fail ministers, Aiken and Boland, were non-committal, believing that any decision would have to be referred to the Dail. What the meeting demonstrated was that parties who shared a tripartisan policy on neutrality, could be deeply divided on any deviation from that policy.⁴⁰

It was also clear to the IRA that a German attack on the six counties could shatter the equilibrium of Irish politics, an equilibrium which had Fianna Fail in the ascendant as the custodian of the nation's destiny. The IRA, in fact, tried to interest Berlin in a joint invasion plan for Northern Ireland - 'Plan Kathleen'. It was 'so amateurish' that some Germans suspected a British plot. Hermann Goertz, the only German agent to enjoy any success in Ireland, believed the proposed plan to be 'childish' and 'completely useless'.⁴¹ Six months before the War had started, the German High Command had expressed an interest in Goertz 'kindling some sort of rebellion in Ulster...'.⁴² Once war started, those in Berlin interested in fomenting trouble for Britain in Ireland appreciated the strategic vulnerability of the border and hoped for an IRA concentration on the six counties. Goertz urged on the IRA leadership - by which he was very unimpressed - the need to avoid all friction with the southern government. Later he wrote that if the IRA had confined its activities to the north and had fought 'arms in hand, bleeding heavily,' in pursuance of its goal of Irish unity 'undoubtedly, there would have been a large measure of support from most of the people in Eire.'⁴³ Naively, it was German policy to attempt 'to effect an alliance between the IRA, the Irish Army and subsequently the government.'⁴⁴ The Germans were ill-informed about the nuances of Irish politics and believed that, as the IRA shared with Fianna Fail the goal of uniting Ireland, Goertz could assist in establishing some modus operandi between them: this demonstrated a naive view of both parties.⁴⁵

38. Ibid., 6 June 1940; also Gray to Hull, 18 May 1940, FRUS:1940: 3:p.160.

39. Mulcahy memo., 22 May 1940, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/211.

40. Mulcahy's notes of Defence Conference meeting, 25 July 1940, 'German attack on six counties', ibid., -/212.

41. Enno Stephan, Spies in Ireland, (London:1963 ed) pp.96,163.

42. Ibid., p.82.

43. Hermann Goertz, 'Mission to Ireland', Irish Times, 25 Aug. 1947.

44. T.D.Williams, 'Neutrality!', Irish Press, 10 July 1953.

Professor Williams was among those historians who catalogued the German archives captured by the Allies.

45. Frank Ryan to Leopold Kerney, 14 Jan. 1942, Ryan letters, see note 11 above.

As Maffey, Gray and Hempel all reported to their respective governments, Irish sympathies were largely pro-British.⁴⁶ The Germans were disliked for their military excesses, their religious persecution and their anti-democratic ideology.⁴⁷ Still, as de Valera told Maffey as early as September 1939, there were 'a good many waverers' who had been impressed with Germany's early successes: 'That was the way of the world.'⁴⁸ In considering German-Irish relations during this first year of the war, a distinction must be made between Irish sympathies and Irish interests: whereas majority sympathy was overwhelmingly pro-British from the beginning of hostilities, it seemed prudent to ensure that in the event of a German victory, Irish interests would not be neglected. Among these interests was control over the nationalist campaign against Partition. Even though the Fianna Fail government was deeply apprehensive about a German victory, they could not afford to ignore the danger that their own leadership of Irish nationalism could be usurped if they allowed others to make progress in undoing Partition. Moreover, in the first year of the war, Germany seemed, to many observers, to be invincible: American diplomats and journalists, even members of the British war cabinet were deeply pessimistic about Britain's prospects.⁴⁹ Dublin's policy seems to have been based on the expectation that the United States would not enter the war⁵⁰ and that 'a speedy conclusion of peace' on terms which would be 'reasonably tolerable' to Britain was the most likely outcome.⁵¹ It is against this background that Irish diplomatic relations with Berlin must be judged.

As the official archives in Berlin⁵² make clear, from the very eve of the war - late August 1939 - Irish foreign policy was vigilant in protecting Irish interests in the event of a German war victory. Walshe was reported by Hempel as suggesting on 26 August that Berlin should make a 'formal declaration...that Germany has no aggressive aims in Ireland, but on the contrary has sympathy for Ireland and Irish national aims - mentioning, if necessary Northern Ireland...'.⁵³ Ribbentrop thought it would be a mistake to expressly mention Northern Ireland but suggested to Hempel that he should reassure the Irish government of 'the wide sympathy⁵⁴ felt in Germany for...the national aspirations of the Irish people.' By November, Hempel was advising Berlin against precipitate interference which might destroy 'the possibility of a future utilization of the Irish cause for our interests...'. He foresaw circumstances where the Partition

46. Maffey, report, 24 Sept. 1939, PRO DO 35/1107/WX1/5; Gray to Roosevelt, 14-15 Apr and 15-16 May 1940; Hempel to Foreign ministry 23 May 1940, DGFP:D:9:doc.310.

47. Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 8 Oct. 1939, DGFP:D:8:doc.216; interview with Kevin Boland reporting his father, Gerald's strongly held views; Sean MacEntee interview.

48. As note 46.

49. Hempel reported that the Department of External Affairs in Dublin believed that Chamberlain, Halifax, Simon and Hoare were interested in a negotiated peace, Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 22 July 1940, DGFP:D:10:doc.201.

50. Gray to Roosevelt, 6 June 1940.

51. Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 22 July 1940, DGFP:D:10:doc.201.

52. The papers of the German legation in Dublin were weeded before Irish, and later, British officials had access, Carolle J. Carter, The Shamrock and the Swastika, (Palo Alto:1977) p.82. Hereafter, Carter:1977.

53. Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 26 Aug. 1939, DGFP:D:7:doc.303.

54. Ribbentrop to Hempel, 29 Aug. 1939, ibid., -/doc.428.

grievance might become a factor in Germany's favour: if Britain were to invade the south, or, if she were to become considerably weakened, then there might be some attempt to regain the north.

Then we might expect the rise of an active nationalist movement on a broad basis, perhaps, inclusive of the Government and supported by the Irish in the USA and the Dominions, which might force us to make decisions.

Hempel reported that he had 'occasionally heard the hope expressed' that Germany, at an opportune moment, might 'promise Ireland our support for the return of Northern Ireland, to be made good at the conclusion of peace...'. Hempel added that 'the proper moment' had not yet arrived for such an announcement. He believed such a hope of German aid in ending Partition, was 'probably entertained...in some Government circles, although hardly by de Valera so far...'.⁵⁵

Although willing to regard Irish grievances as potentially exploitable in German's interest, the political elite in Berlin were ill-informed and prejudiced about Ireland.⁵⁶ They considered the country to be largely within Britain's sphere of influence: for instance, the most detailed plans drawn up in Berlin for the administration of a defeated Britain had six military-economic commands with headquarters in London, Birmingham, Newcastle, Liverpool, Glasgow and Dublin.⁵⁷ Hitler's own perspective when commenting on an anti-Partition speech by de Valera, in April 1939, had emphasised, not that Britain's presence in Northern Ireland was culpable, but that as he had kept silent about it, so Britain should not criticise his excursions into the Sudetenland. While welcoming such international attention on the Partition issue, the Irish Press saw the incident as confirming that London and Berlin were both essentially imperial in their outlooks.⁵⁸

(b) Britain's perspective

As in Berlin, the generals' map rooms in London emphasised the strategic indivisibility of the British Isles. It was clear that the partitioned island of Ireland could, in certain circumstances, become a coveted prize for either belligerent. Not only might it prove decisive in control of the Atlantic but Lloyd George's words were recalled to emphasise its importance for Britain's security which, he had said, depended on 'what happens on this breakwater, this advance post, this

55. Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 14 Nov. 1939, ibid., -/doc. 355.

56. Ribbentrop's views, quoted Stephan (1963:147); interview, David Kahn, author of Hitler's spies: German military intelligence in World War II, (London:1978), Irish Press, 15 Sept. 1978.

57. Norman Rich, Hitler's war aims: the establishment of the New Order: vol.2, (London:1974) p.397.

58. De Valera's lecture, Irish Press, 24 Apr.; Hitler's comments and editorial comment, ibid., 29 Apr. 1939.

front trench of England.'⁵⁹

In his conversations with de Valera, Sir John Maffey, appointed as Britain's first ambassador in Dublin on the outbreak of the War, had consistently emphasised the strategic interdependence of the two islands: de Valera, for his part, concentrated on the Irish map, the subject of Partition recurring 'again and again'. Maffey reported to London that

...we always performed a circle, the President saying that Eire could not consider any policy to-day except in the light of the crime of partition, while I said that the prospects of readjusting partition must be affected by the policy of Eire to-day.⁶⁰

This 'circle' was to remain the basis of Anglo-Irish relations throughout the rest of the war: it underlined the interdependence of neutrality and Partition and also demonstrated the respective priorities of the British and Irish governments and publics.

Despite de Valera's outbursts, anti-Partitionism was no longer the paramount issue in Irish politics: it was now most often mentioned to offset criticism of neutrality. Indeed, when a new trade agreement was being negotiated in May 1940, British ministers were 'willing to give Eire a good mark' for not having once mentioned 'Northern Ireland(,) Partition or the Boundary' during the course of the negotiations.⁶¹ Neutrality had replaced anti-Partitionism as the goal which took precedence in Irish politics.

(c) David Gray's 'hundred to one chance'

That the continuance of Partition prevented any deviation from neutrality was clear: what was not, was whether some move towards a united Ireland might be traded for concessions on neutrality. And if Ireland were to be united, would she join Britain at war? De Valera had invited conjecture on this topic by his constant pre-war emphasis on the limitations which Partition placed on possible defence co-operation with Britain. The incoming American ambassador to Ireland, David Gray, was anxious to explore this issue in Belfast and Dublin. His motivation was clear: to shelter Roosevelt from the pressures of those whom Gray characterized as 'the professional anti-Lion boys' among Irish-Americans. He did not underestimate the difficulties of attempting to interest Craigavon and de Valera in some compromise settlement: it was like '...walking on the sulphur crust over a crater full of melted lava'; it was 'a hundred to one chance but it ought to be taken.' Before offering his services as honest broker, Gray spoke to four Irish ambassadors, to the Pope and to many of the political elite in Britain. He was not, he insisted, 'conducting a negotiation or proposing a mediation.' While not

59. Lloyd George's speech of Dec. 1921 recalled in H.Duncan Hall, 'Fighting Ulster and neutral Eire', in W.Y.Elliott and H.D.Hall, The British Commonwealth at war, (Harvard:1943) p.478.

60. PRO DO 35/1107/WX1/5.

61. PRONI CAB 9R/60/5.

discouraging his efforts, the Irish diplomats were scarcely optimistic: Dulanty, Gray found,

was very doubtful of any success with Ulster. His idea is that it will take years, that the most that can be hoped for in a reasonable future is a joint commission on roads or a joint art exhibition or even an all-Irish football team. But he said: "For heaven's sake explore away and if you turn up any chance tell us."

In London Gray also 'talked Ireland' with Stanley, Eden, Harold Nicholson, Devonshire, Sir Horace Wilson - Chamberlain's secretary - and with the American Ambassador, Joseph Kennedy. All were agreed that Ulster could not be coerced, as was an irascible Churchill, who 'roared for a time' about the Irish. Informally, and 'off the record' Churchill was prepared to arrange that Gray meet Craigavon to sound him on concessions on Partition if the south reconsidered its policy of neutrality; but Churchill insisted that it was 'all up to Ulster.'⁶² Gray's understanding of Churchill's position was that he would 'under no circumstances... tolerate any coercion of Ulster(,) direct or indirect' by the London or any other government: but that any settlement agreeable to Belfast and Dublin, provided it was 'not inimical to the vital interests' of the British, would have Churchill's approval.⁶³ In his early meetings with de Valera, Gray was lectured on Partition and given the 'map treatment'; de Valera, he reported to Roosevelt, 'keeps coming back to the Ulster question insisting that the British are making a terrible mistake in not settling it.' Gray suggested to him that 'he might be making a bad mistake' not to take advantage of the current crisis by making a 'bold and original' defence concession to the north; it was 'obviously the time to convince Ulster of the South(')s friendliness...'. It was Gray's opinion that de Valera appreciated that such a course would win concessions but that it was 'a hard pill to swallow in his present state of mind.'⁶⁴

(d) Chamberlain's demise: Churchill's succession

Asked if he intended 'to prepare (the) public mind for the realities' de Valera had replied to Gray 'yes(,) but slowly.'⁶⁵ The realities in Gray's and Maffey's book were that Ireland, south or north, or both - could be the object of the Nazi's next expeditionary force. The British failure to prevent the fall of Norway in April, caused alarm in Dublin - as did its direct sequel in British politics, the fall of the Chamberlain government. His successor, Winston Churchill, had been a persistent critic of de Valera's politics since the latter's opposition to the Treaty in 1921. As a backbencher, he had stood out against the return of the Treaty ports in the 1938 Agreement, calling the decision 'incredible' and

62. Gray to Roosevelt, 8 Apr. 1940.

63. Transcript of aide-memoire, Gray to Churchill, shown to de Valera, *ibid.*,

64. *Ibid.*, 15 Apr. 1940.

65. Gray to Hull, 18 May 1940, *FRUS*:1940:3:p.160.

'feckless'.⁶⁶

His recall to his old desk at the Admiralty on the outbreak of the War had offered Churchill every opportunity to criticise Irish neutrality and his colleagues can have been in no doubt concerning his antipathy to de Valera. He recommended to the cabinet that Britain should 'take stock of the weapons of coercion';⁶⁷ he complained of the 'odious' approach by Dublin to Anglo-Irish relations;⁶⁸ he was 'sick' of the Irish;⁶⁹ he queried whether their neutrality had any validity: 'Nothing had been defined. Legally I believe they are "At war but skulking".'⁷⁰ To de Valera, this change of leadership was drastic:⁷¹ the most sympathetic leader with whom he had ever dealt was being replaced by one of Ulster unionism's stoutest defenders. Craigavon, for his part, was 'very delighted' that his 'old friend' was now Britain's war leader and Spender, too, noted the implications for Ulster.⁷² As Williams claims, the psychological tension between Churchill and de Valera now introduced 'an incalculable element' into Anglo-Irish relations.⁷³

(e) May 1940: de Valera's leadership questioned?

On the very day, 10 May, on which Churchill was moving into Downing Street, Belgium and Holland fell to the Germans: without waiting for instructions, Maffey called on de Valera to question once again what he clearly saw as de Valera's complacency in the face of the 'maniacal force let loose in the world.' In what was an uncomfortable encounter, Maffey failed to budge de Valera from his set course: Maffey concluded that he was 'not a strong man' and had a 'tendency to surrender always to the extremist view...'.⁷⁴ Gray was also critical; he thought de Valera 'frightened' by the new situation 'but not prepared to cope with it...he is not the man for a war.'⁷⁵ Indeed, having spoken with James Dillon, Gray thought it 'not impossible' that a national government might be formed.⁷⁶ That the idea was under active consideration is clear from Mulcahy's papers for the third week in May. Some 'very alarmed' Fianna Fail ministers thought of an approach to Fine Gael to discuss the possibility; Mulcahy, however, believed it 'nonsense' to attempt its formation until 'something very serious arises.' By 20 May, Mulcahy believed that the 'physical collapse of de Valera' could be ruled out, as

66. W.S.Churchill, The second World War: the gathering storm, (London:1949 ed), pp.247-9.

67. PRO CAB 65/1 WM 58(39)8.

68. Nicholas Bethel, The war Hitler won, (London:1972) p.243.

69. Gray to Roosevelt, 8 Apr. 1940.

70. Churchill to Eden, 20 Oct 1939, PRO FO 800/310.

71. Longford and O'Neill (1970:361) describe it as 'a drastic change'; interview Malcolm MacDonald; Terry de Valera, letter, Irish Times, 7 Nov 1979.

72. Lady Craigavon, diary, 13 May 1940, PRONI D1415/B/38; W.B.Spender diary, 13-18 May 1940, PRONI D715/14.

73. T.D.Williams, 'Neutrality!', Irish Press, 27 June 1953.

74. PRO CAB 67/6 WP(G)(40)128, 16 May 1940.

75. Gray to Roosevelt, 16 May 1940.

76. Ibid., 31 May 1940.

could action by him which 'would suggest alternative leadership to his own, graciously and with his full co-operation.' Full Fianna Fail support would be necessary for the success of any national government, and if one were to be formed without de Valera's approval, Mulcahy feared that Fianna Fail would fragment and an 'irresponsible opposition' would result.⁷⁷ If there was a challenge from within the cabinet during this crisis, de Valera's biographers do not document it.⁷⁸ Further evidence suggesting some discord is to be found in the notebook of the editor of the Manchester Guardian. Presently, Dulanty complained to him of a British emissary, Sir Charles Tegart, who had visited Dublin 'trying to stimulate de Valera's own supporters, including his ministers, against him. How was that to be explained?'⁷⁹

(ii) June 1940: Partition - negotiable by London?

(a) Denouement

That Germany could not be defeated was now a fairly common belief throughout Western Europe. Assurances that Irish neutrality would be respected were of little value: it now seemed imperative at least to prepare for the contingency of a German invasion. What agitated the British was that, due to Partition, responsibility for the defence of Ireland was shared by three separate authorities, the governments in Dublin, Belfast and London. Partition now had another disadvantage: as a highly emotive issue within Ireland, it remained a critical factor in shaping Irish attitudes towards the War: to solve it might win Irish co-operation; to leave it unsolved, might result in it being exploited by the Germans. For the first time since its enactment twenty years before, Partition was seriously questioned by London. Was it, any longer, the least deadly alternative of Britain's policy options towards Ireland? Could de Valera, who had always pointed to just these dangers, now take advantage of London's willingness to consider alternatives to Partition?

De Valera, too, had his idea of a 'least deadly alternative': that the north should join a united Ireland, whose neutrality would be guaranteed by all sides, including the Germans.¹ Some opinion in Fianna Fail believed that the prospect of thus escaping the War's excesses would prove attractive to the Ulster unionists.² To Britain, however, the

77. Mulcahy notes, 15 May 1940, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/210.

78. Longford and O'Neill (1970:ch.28 passim).

79. W.P.Crozier, interview with Dulanty, 26 July, 1940, in Crozier, 'Off the record', ed. A.J.P.Taylor, (London:1973) pp.179-80.

1. Explained to MacDonald in June 1940, memo by Chamberlain, 'Eire: negotiations with Mr. de Valera', 25 June 1940, PRO CAB 66/9 WP(40)223.

2. Eoin O'Mahony at 1939 Ard Fheis, Irish Press, 13 Dec. 1939.

abandonment of the Northern Irish ports was strategically impractical, a consideration, which Gray noted, had not occurred to de Valera when the American minister discussed Dublin's choices with him. Gray favoured 'concerted action' with the north:

...a compromise now might produce results that would otherwise be impossible for years to come(,) assuming the allies won. If they did not win(,) Irish freedom was a vanished dream. He agreed in principle but could devise no line of compromise.³

(b) Berlin's view

That some bargain on Partition in return for defence co-operation was now a possibility was appreciated by Hempel. On 23 May, he cabled Berlin that any such agreement between Dublin and London

...could strongly, and perhaps decisively, influence conditions in England's favour and probably bring England political advantage in the U.S.A., which perhaps has a hand in the game.

He added his own assessment of de Valera's policy: that whereas he would invite British aid if Germany invaded Ireland, his democratic principles would preclude him '...seeking German aid in the event of a British attack'. He would instead 'offer resistance by a call for national unity' and 'attempt to localise the conflict and set all wheels in motion in the U.S.A.'. Even in these circumstances, Hempel did not expect de Valera to be vulnerable to the danger of internal disturbances fomented by the IRA. However, any German assistance, 'especially a simultaneous proclamation of the liberation of Northern Ireland as a German war aim', would probably give the IRA movement 'a powerful impetus.' Hempel added that, in his view, the liberation of Northern Ireland was a matter in which there was no German interest.⁴

(c) London's view

At their meeting on 10 May, Maffey apparently in the belief that the question was 'academic', had asked de Valera bluntly: '"If the Partition question were solved to-day would you automatically be our active Ally?"' He recorded de Valera as replying: '"I feel convinced that that would probably be the consequence".'⁵ This reply may have been in the nature of 'bait' from de Valera: it was not a flat promise and all other evidence suggests that any abandonment of neutrality was unlikely;⁶ the reply's significance lies in the fact that Maffey communicated it to London on

3. Gray to Roosevelt, 16-21 May 1940.

4. Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 23 May 1940, DGFP:D:9:doc.310.

5. PRO CAB 67/6 WP(G)128, 16 May 1940.

6. Gray to Roosevelt, 19 June 1940; PRO CAB 66/9 WP(40)223, 25 June 1940.

16 May where the question was, by then, not at all academic.⁷

In addition to the increasing alarm in London and Dublin as the Germans advanced westwards, on 22 May, Irish police discovered the equipment, money and plans of a German agent in a raid on a house in Dublin. The spy who had not himself been apprehended, was Hermann Goertz.⁸ De Valera took his opportunity to publicly emphasise the menace of an IRA-German link. A small group was clearly 'meditating treason'; it was, he said, '...no time for nonsense.'⁹

De Valera now sanctioned top level staff talks between the Irish and British armies - Walshe also attended - to prepare plans for British help after a German invasion. There was a full exchange of 'strengths and dispositions' north and south, General Huddleston, G.O.C. in Northern Ireland, believing that the 'small risks' involved were 'well worth while.'¹⁰ The British believed the staff talks useful, but very much 'second best' to an abandonment of neutrality and the adoption of a common defence policy for both Ireland and Britain. To encourage de Valera to make neutrality negotiable, the British were now prepared to reconsider their policy on Partition. The 'political aspect' of the proposed negotiations was entrusted to Chamberlain.

(d) Belfast's view

The mutual ignorance and lack of rapport between Dublin and Belfast could be blamed on both sides. In March 1940, de Valera had publicly called on the Ulster Unionists to become 'a proud part' of 'their own nation': in joining up with the south, they would be realizing '...the dream of centuries.'¹¹ Unionists could not be wooed on this basis; nor were they interested, at the end of April, in a kite which they believed was being flown with de Valera's approval 'to ascertain whether the North would join the South if certain concessions were made.'¹² Instead, the Unionists were anxious to extract all propaganda value from the south's neutrality which Craigavon constantly reminded London was '...in every way...a menace to the British flank.'¹³ London did not need Craigavon to point out this danger: what they needed were concessions from him to avert it. To awaken him to the realities, Craigavon was now subjected to a concerted campaign of cajolement, persuasion and political pressure. Baldwin begged him 'to be helpful... at this time of national danger. If

7. See reports by Chiefs of Staff, 27 May 1940, PRO CAB 65/7 WM 141(40)9; also sub-section e below.

8. Stephan (1965:115)

9. Irish Press, 27 May 1940.

10. PRO PREM 3/130.

11. Irish Press, 20 Mar 1940.

12. W.B.Spender diary, 15 Apr.- 4 May 1940,

13. Lady Craigavon's diary, 17 Apr. 1940, op.cit.

it is a question of meeting de V.(sic) well I know the difficulties in ordinary times. But the times are not ordinary...'.¹⁴

Endemically suspicious that a British government might betray them to the south, some members of the Ulster Unionist elite were now 'very uneasy' about possible developments. Even if de Valera were to get 'some eye-wash concession', Spender was 'very doubtful' if the south would join the war: as for the north's duty, Spender thought that the European situation was 'so serious that there is no knowing what sacrifices it would be right for Northern Ireland to make, and I do not wish to prejudge the issue...';¹⁵ a week later he thought the position of the Stormont government 'shaky' following the resignation of Warnock, the junior minister at Home Affairs.¹⁶

Nor had Spender much confidence in Craigavon as the best man to defend Ulster's interests - particularly in negotiations with Chamberlain. As Spender's diary reveals, the memory of Craigavon's volte face of March 1938 still rankled:¹⁷ Andrews and Brooke had been astounded then by what they considered his naive, weak and, indeed, deceitful behaviour. Moreover, it was now clear to his colleagues, that Craigavon was in poor health.¹⁸

Against a background of 'great scares' and 'panic',¹⁹ Craigavon met Chamberlain on 5 June. On his return to Belfast, he reassured the press that British ministers regarded Ulster 'as a rock of Gibraltar.'²⁰ Maffey's emphasis was different when briefing Gray who was due to meet Craigavon on 7 June: Downing Street had given the Ulster leader '...merry hell(,) all but ordering him to make up with de Valera and end Partition on the best terms he could.' Maffey said that they had found Craigavon 'very tough' and - like de Valera - keen to blame the other side for poor north-south relations: 'They told him to forget it(;) that Ireland had to defend itself as a unit and he must take his medicine.' The British had communicated none of this to de Valera, 'as he will be stubborn enough without knowledge of this advantage...'.²⁰

Thus briefed by Maffey, Gray was anticipating the possibility of making some progress with 'a crushed statesman' although he had been warned by Craigavon's colleagues, Andrews and Brooke that even if a settlement were agreeable to the prime minister, they were 'not interested'. But Gray found Craigavon's orthodoxy unimpaired by his London talks: the Ulster people, he insisted, 'were not interested in southern Ireland...'. When Gray sounded him on the contingency which most frightened de Valera - a German invasion of the north posing as liberators - he replied: 'Oh(,) we'll take care of them...'. He thought co-operation with the south on defence questions would be fine but was a

14. Baldwin to Craigavon, c.23 May 1940, quoted in Lady Craigavon's diary, 24 May 1940.

15. Spender's diary, 20-25 May 1940, op.cit.

16. Ibid., 27 May- 1 June. 1940.

17. Ibid., 16 Nov. 1940 and 20 May 1943.

18. J.M.Andrews to Sir John Anderson, 30 Apr. 1940, PRONI CAB 9R/60/5.

19. Lady Craigavon's diary, 4 June 1940, op.cit. and Spender's diary, 8 June 1940, op.cit.

20. Lady Craigavon's diary, 4-6 June 1940, op cit.

matter for London and he 'absolutely refused to take any step that would recognize the South in any way that differentiated Ulster from Britain.'²¹ Gray thought him 'so nice and so dumb'; he 'intended to do nothing or learn nothing. He was the perfect Bourbon...'.²²

Since consensus on defence throughout Britain and Ireland was now London's principal concern - the fact that Craigavon's extremists were loyalists ironically told against them: unlike the 'wild men' in the south, they were unlikely to contemplate collaboration with the Germans. Moreover, Craigavon had few other cards if the British cabinet decided that a deal on Partition was now necessary to secure the defences of the British Isles. Against Gray's impression that he did not appear to have been 'crushed by the Downing Street steam-roller', must be placed Maffey's account that he had been given 'merry hell' in London. Moreover Lady Craigavon records her husband as being 'very angry' with Chamberlain at this time, evidence which suggests that London was prepared to question its traditional support for the Unionists.²³

(e) The Curtis proposal

In reviewing their options on Partition the British cabinet now sought expert advice from Lionel Curtis who had been a central figure in the Treaty settlement of 1921. Curtis, then in All Souls, Oxford, met Bevin on 11 June and then consulted five academics - including the historian, Arnold Toynbee and a former Irish minister in Berlin, Daniel Binchy - all of whom were 'to be trusted absolutely.'²⁴ Curtis advised Bevin that all were agreed that to start 'this initiative' with a draft of a permanent, federal constitution for Ireland 'would court disaster from the outset.' Curtis had therefore 'drafted a proposal for a provisional arrangement which might lead on to an agreed federal solution after the war.'²⁵

Curtis's idea was that a private appeal should be made by Churchill to Craigavon

to invite Mr de Valera to form a joint executive authority for the defence of Ireland for the duration of the war, consisting of members of the Cabinets of Southern and Northern Ireland with de Valera as Chairman. This joint executive authority should be charged with the duty of organising an Irish army solely for the defence of all Ireland, but not for service beyond its shores.

21. Gray to Roosevelt, 6 June 1940.

22. 'So nice and so dumb', was Gray's verdict on Craigavon and Abercorn, Gray to Welles, 23 June; the 'perfect Bourbon' verdict, he reserved for Craigavon alone, Gray to Roosevelt, 19 June 1940.

23. Lady Craigavon's diary, 4 June 1940, op.cit. PRONI CAB 4/442/5. NI cabinet minutes.

24. Curtis had been secretary to the 1921 Treaty negotiations on the British side.

25. Curtis to Ernest Bevin, 12 June 1940, enclosing 'Memorandum on Ireland', Curtis papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, ms. Curtis 90. I have not consulted the Curtis papers and am grateful to Dr. Deirdre MacMahon for her transcription of the memorandum and the Curtis-Bevin letter on which the following is based.

This joint cabinet would be responsible to a legislature formed by merging the Dail and Stormont, the new arrangement having responsibility exclusively for defence and supplies: north and south, in all other respects, would be governed as before.²⁶ Although two of his advisers preferred a less ambitious all-Ireland body 'analogous to the Supreme Allied Council', Curtis believed that this would 'get nowhere, if it had to pass all its measures through two legislatures...'.²⁶

Curtis hoped that if Craigavon had 'the imagination to take this bold initiative', then American influence would be brought to bear on de Valera to point out

that this provisional arrangement for the duration of the war would accustom leaders for All Ireland to work together for their common security. Ere long it might be found possible to appoint Commissioners with expert advisers to work out a permanent scheme for the unification on federal principles, leaving the six counties their present provincial powers.

H.M.G. should also inform de Valera that it would do all in its power to encourage and bring about a movement to end partition after the war.

Should Craigavon decline to co-operate, Curtis suggested that London could make the proposal public and offer to legislate as necessary at Westminster. In that eventuality, Curtis believed it 'quite possible' that unionist opinion would accept the scheme because Craigavon's position is 'much weaker than it was before the war.'²⁷

(f) The 'old firm': MacDonald and Chamberlain

France fell to the Germans in the second week in June. Hitler now told his generals that Britain's situation was 'hopeless',²⁸ a verdict reflected in the abject pessimism of Chamberlain's diary.²⁹ That Ireland was in a state of 'hopeless unpreparedness' was Labour leader, William Norton's estimate: the government's response to the crisis, he complained to de Valera, had been 'weak, vacillating(,) uninspiring'.³⁰ Gray noted 'a before the battle atmosphere' in Dublin. Invasion, he reported to Roosevelt, was thought to be probable and imminent.³¹

The crisis did result in an all-party recruiting drive for the Irish Army. The campaign's success resulted in an army with more soldiers than guns - a situation not entirely unsatisfactory since there were some, at least, of the new recruits whom de Valera did not wish to arm: they were, apparently, safer in uniform than not, but safer still without weapons - a point which well indicates the peculiar subtleties of de Valera's dilemma at this critical time.³² It remained true that a severe shortage of arms

26. Ibid., 'Memorandum on Ireland'.

27. Ibid., Curtis to Bevin, 12 June 1940.

28. Hitler's directive no.16, 16 July 1940, H.R.Trevor-Roper, ed., Hitler's war directives: 1939-1945, (London:1966 ed) p.74.

29. Diary, 30 May, 17 June 1940, Chamberlain papers, BUL NC2/24A.

30. Norton to de Valera, 11 June 1940, SPO S 11896 A.

31. Gray to Roosevelt, 19 June 1940.

32. Gray reported de Valera as telling him that he 'dares not arm volunteer force.' Gray to Hall, 18 May 1940, FRUS:1940:3:p.160. It was Ryan's view that his former IRA colleagues should have joined the Irish Army during the War, Ryan to Kerney, 14 Jan. 1942, see note 11 above; the Chief of Staff of the IRA, Stephen Hayes, recalled that the 'recruiting

was a major problem for the Irish government. Mulcahy wondered why the British, who provided arms to 'every flea-bitten bunch' anywhere, were reluctant to supply them to Dublin.³³ Gray, too, appealed to Washington for some arms for de Valera who was 'frantic because he had practically nothing.'³⁴ Gray was anxious to put de Valera 'under all the obligation possible(,) immediately' because, as he told Roosevelt, 'the time may come soon when the most useful thing I can do for you is strongly to urge compromise with Ulster on Mr. De Valera...'; this was to prevent him from 'insisting on too much and muffing the situation completely' as was feared by 'the Opposition and some members of his own government...'.³⁵

On 16 June, Chamberlain informed the war cabinet of his progress - or, rather, lack of progress - with the proposed discussions on Ireland.³⁶ At his meeting with Craigavon eleven days before, he had agreed that the Stormont cabinet would 'endeavour to put forward some proposal which might be helpful' in winning the south's co-operation:³⁷ in the interim, with each day bringing more alarming news from the Continent, no proposals had been received from Craigavon. Chamberlain reproached him for this, emphasised the worsening situation and invited him to join de Valera and himself for tripartite talks in London.

De Valera declined to travel to London: it would only raise expectations on Partition and nothing but its 'complete disappearance' would satisfy Irish opinion. He did consent to talks in Dublin, the British deciding to appoint Malcolm MacDonald as their negotiator. MacDonald, it was agreed by the cabinet, would emphasise to de Valera that 'it would be too late to do anything after the invasion had started'; the 'whole thing might be over in a matter of hours' with de Valera himself 'probably shot.' Anticipating that de Valera would raise Partition, MacDonald would then suggest

that a Council for the defence of all Ireland should be set up, which would consider not only matters of defence, but would form a bridge for eventual discussions on partition.

If de Valera accepted this proposition, MacDonald would meet Craigavon and persuade him to accept it also.³⁸

London prepared the ground as best they could for MacDonald's visit: the south was 'crawling...with ex-colonels' and others, all warning of the consequences of a German invasion;³⁹ both de Valera and Craigavon heard

ground of the ordinary young fellows growing up in the country was closed to us because of the Local Defence Forces organized by the Government which took all the manpower', quoted Coogan:(1970:159). This evidence refers to the new recruits in the LDF. The professional full-time soldiers were, in the main, thought to be pro-Ally, Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 8 Oct. 1939, DGFP:D:8:doc.216; Lemass and Gray were both uncertain whether the Army would obey orders if asked to fire on United States troops if they were to invade the south from Northern Ireland, Gray to Hull, 23 Dec. 1941, FRUS:1941:3:252-3; Lemass, interview Irish Press, 25 Jan. 1969.

33. Mulcahy memo. 29 June 1940, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/220.

34. Gray to Welles, 23 June 1940.

35. Gray to Roosevelt, 19 June 1940.

36. PRO CAB 65/7 WM 168(40)5.

37. Chamberlain to Craigavon, 12 June 1940, in PRONI guide to documents on the War in Public Record Office, Northern Ireland.

38. As note 36 above.

39. Mulcahy memo., 29 June 1940, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/220; also PRO DO 35/1107/WX1/88; and DO 121/8 for meeting of High Commissioners in London, 14 June 1940, especially Te Waters comments.

the Canadian government's view that north-south co-operation was necessary to stop 'the totalitarian hordes' who were 'now crushing every people who stand in their path'.⁴⁰ MacDonald spent over three hours with de Valera on 17 June impressing on him that whereas a German invasion of Ireland would 'embarrass' the British, it would be 'disastrous' for Ireland. The 'wisest course' would be abandonment of neutrality and 'complete co-operation' with Britain to which de Valera gave 'an emphatic negative.' MacDonald then mooted the possibility that in defence of Irish neutrality, de Valera might invite British assistance; again, de Valera declined, adding that the 'position might have been different if there had been a United Ireland.' MacDonald then suggested that as a step towards this goal, de Valera should agree to 'a joint council for the defence of the whole island', but whereas MacDonald envisaged this as a 'step...towards' a united Ireland, de Valera rejected it as 'a blow to the national unity of Eire.'⁴¹ De Valera struck MacDonald as 'tired and frightened and without much grasp of the situation.'⁴²

Having heard MacDonald's account on 20 June, the British war cabinet approved Chamberlain's proposal for a second visit. Chamberlain reminded his colleagues that in the view of the Chiefs of Staff, access to Eire for the British Army, Air Force and Navy was essential; he suggested that in return for such access and the internment of potential fifth columnists, de Valera 'would be content to accept a declaration' stating that the British government 'were, in principle, in favour of the establishment of a United Ireland.' Later, Craigavon 'would have to be told that the interests of Northern Ireland could not be allowed to stand against the vital interests of the British Empire'. Anticipating Craigavon's question as to 'whether the United Ireland would form part of the British Empire', Chamberlain suggested that the answer to this 'was clearly in the affirmative, though of course full Dominion status carried with it the right to secede from the Commonwealth.'

Further, Chamberlain argued that if de Valera rejected this offer, MacDonald 'should insist' that the proposal be put to the Fianna Fail cabinet, some members of which, he understood, 'were likely to take a less rigid view.' As MacDonald's return to Dublin was approved, there was little optimism around the cabinet table: Churchill thought that Britain must 'avoid putting undue pressure on the loyal province of Ulster', a viewpoint which found support from Attlee, Halifax and Sir John Anderson, the latter arguing that 'any substantial advance' towards Irish unity was unlikely as it was impossible to coerce either the north or the south.⁴³ Even Chamberlain - the initiator and 'manager' of the initiative was less than optimistic: he wrote privately of de Valera's 'unshakeable obstinacy':

40. Mackenzie King to Craigavon, 16 June 1940, Documents on Canadian External Relations:8:doc.593; a similar telegram was sent to de Valera, ibid.

41. PRO CAB 65/7 WM 173(40)9, 20 June 1940.

42. Chamberlain's diary note after meeting MacDonald on his return from Dublin, Chamberlain papers, BUL NC2/24A.

43. As note 41 above.

'I am still at him, but fear he won't be moved till the Germans are in Dublin.'⁴⁴

At the second meeting, three proposals were discussed. MacDonald suggested:

That there should be a declaration of a united Ireland in principle, the constitutional and other practical details of the Union to be worked out in due course; Ulster to remain a belligerent, Eire to remain neutral, at any rate for the time being; if both parties desired it, a joint Defence Council to be set up at once; at the same time, British naval ships to be allowed into Eire ports, British troops and aeroplanes to be stationed at certain agreed points in the territory, the British Government to provide additional equipment for Eire's forces, and the Eire Government to take effective action against the Fifth Column.

De Valera emphatically rejected this as it would break the 'national unity' which had been established in response to the German threat.

Instead, de Valera mooted:

That Eire and Ulster should be merged in a United Ireland which would at once become neutral; its neutrality to be guaranteed by Great Britain and the United States of America; since Britain was a belligerent its military and naval forces should not take any active part in guaranteeing that neutrality, but American ships could come into the Irish ports, and perhaps American troops into Ireland, to effect this guarantee.

This, in turn, was 'rejected firmly' by MacDonald, for, as Chamberlain told the war cabinet, 'a number of reasons which are obvious.' Then MacDonald suggested another possibility:

That there should be a declaration of a United Ireland in principle, the constitutional and practical details of the Union to be worked out in due course; this United Ireland to become at once a belligerent on the side of the Allies.

De Valera expressed some interest in this third suggestion: if there were not only a declaration in principle but also agreement on the constitution of a united Ireland, then, the south 'might agree to enter the war at once. He could not be certain about this. Perhaps the existing Government would not agree to it, and would be replaced by another Government which did.'

MacDonald believed it impossible to agree a new constitution 'in the short time which might be at our disposal before invasion took place'; neither could the British government approach Ulster on the basis that the south might enter the war. De Valera replied that 'he could not go further than "might", with a big question mark after that "might".'⁴⁵

Given what seemed an unbridgeable gap between MacDonald and de Valera, it would scarcely have been surprising if the talks had been broken off at this juncture. Instead, the British made concessions to de Valera's position in what were the first written proposals of the negotiations. The memorandum was drafted by Chamberlain on 25 June: 'Showed the memo to Winston who approved it and brought it to Cabinet at

44. Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 21 June 1940, Chamberlain papers, BUL NC18/1/1162.

45. Memo by Chamberlain, 'Eire: negotiations with Mr. de Valera', 25 June 1940, PRO CAB 66/9 WP(40)223.

6 when it was unanimously approved. Malcolm to go to-morrow.⁴⁶

The document which MacDonald handed to de Valera on 26 June envisaged (i) a British declaration accepting the principle of a united Ireland; (ii) the immediate establishment of a joint north-south body 'to work out the constitutional and other practical details of the Union of Ireland'; (iii) the immediate establishment of a north-south Defence Council; (iv) the south to join the allies 'forthwith' and to invite British military, naval and air support to help defend the south against invasion; (v) the south to intern all German and Italian aliens and to suppress the IRA; (vi) the British to provide immediate arms supplies to the south.⁴⁷ In an introductory preface, the memorandum sought Dublin's opinion on such a plan: it was not described as a specific offer, but if acceptable to Dublin, then the British government would 'at once seek to obtain the assent thereto of the Government of Northern Ireland...'.⁴⁸ On the British side, there was considerable speculation on whether de Valera spoke for all of his cabinet in these talks. He had promised to put this written proposal to his colleagues and, having done so, Lemass, Aiken and himself had what MacDonald described as a 'most unsatisfactory' discussion, on 27 June.

MacDonald found Aiken, who did 'most of the talking' on the Irish side, to be even more persistent than de Valera in insisting on a united, neutral Ireland; in contrast, Lemass 'seemed to be prepared to discuss our plan in a more reasonable way, but his contributions to discussion were usually cut short by fresh uncompromising interventions from one or other of his colleagues.' MacDonald got the impression that de Valera 'had not passed on to his colleagues the assurance I gave him yesterday that declaration of a United Ireland should settle the issue once and for all, and that there would be no going back on that', for he said that one of the principal reasons why the cabinet 'regard the plan as unacceptable is that they believe that (a) United Ireland will not materialise from it.' MacDonald repeated his assurance 'categorically' to Lemass, Aiken and de Valera, telling them 'that if they rejected (the) plan on this ground(,) it was a false point. I think Lemass, and even Aiken, was impressed.' MacDonald suggested further amendments to the document to underline Britain's commitment to Irish unity. A revise would be sent to Dublin which de Valera proposed to discuss with his colleagues before sending a final answer. MacDonald remained 'definitely of opinion' that the Irish would reject the plan.⁴⁹ On receipt of his telegram, Chamberlain wrote in his diary: 'MacDonald's report of his visit is discouraging - the De Valera people are afraid we are going to lose, and don't want to be involved with us.'⁵⁰

46. Diary entry, 25 June 1940, Chamberlain papers, BUL NC2/24A.

47. Proposals taken by MacDonald to Dublin, 26 June 1940, PRO CAB CAB 66/9 WP(40)233, Annex I.

48. Ibid.

49. MacDonald's report to London(via Maffey), 27 June 1940 ibid. annex II.

50. Chamberlain's diary, 28 June 1940 BUL NC2/24A.

At this stage, the British invited American support for their proposal:⁵¹ having been briefed by Maffey, Gray's understanding of the plan was that

It guaranteed the whole lock(,) stock and barrel, providing for the immediate setting up of a commission to draft a new all Ireland Constitution but insisting on a declaration of War by Eire.⁵²

Moreover, this estimation of the offer predates the improved final revise which Maffey delivered to de Valera on 29 June. In addition to pledging British support for a united Ireland, the document was now willing to add that the 'declaration would take the form of a solemn undertaking that the Union is to become at an early date an accomplished fact from which there shall be no turning back'; and to the clause detailing the setting up of the joint north-south body to work out the constitutional details of unity, London was now prepared to state that their purpose in giving assistance to this body would be 'to establish at as early a date as possible the whole machinery of government of the Union.' All of this was subject to the north's approval but in a further concession to de Valera's objections, London deleted the requirement that the south enter the war: Britain would now be content with an invitation to British army, navy and air forces

to co-operate with Eire Forces and to be stationed in such positions in Eire as may be agreed between the two Governments, for the purpose of increasing the security of Eire against the fate which has overcome neutral Norway, Holland, Belgium, Denmark and Luxemburg.⁵³

(g) '...such treachery to loyal Ulster'

Three days before de Valera received this final revise, Chamberlain had sent on to Craigavon a copy of the first written proposals of 26 June. In reply he received a 'short but violent telegram':⁵⁴

Am profoundly shocked and disgusted by your communication, making suggestions so far reaching behind my back, and without any previous consultation. To such treachery to loyal Ulster I will never be a party.⁵⁵

Nor was Craigavon alone among Unionists in sensing treachery in the MacDonald-de Valera talks: Spender believed the political situation was 'drifting to a very delicate and dangerous condition... It is assumed that if Ulster makes some spectacular sacrifice, Eire would declare war on Germany but there is no clear evidence that De Valera would do so...'. Spender thought it 'just possible' that de Valera had promised to abandon neutrality in return for 'getting all he wants', but, 'as in the past', the south, having struck their bargain, would subsequently 'regret their inability to carry out their undertaking...'.⁵⁶ Nor was MacDonald an acceptable mediator to many Unionists who saw him as an advocate of

51. PRO CAB 65/7 WM 184(40)11, 27 June 1940.

52. Gray to Roosevelt, 28 June 1940.

53. 'Text of communication handed to Mr. de Valera on Saturday, 29 June 1940', PRO CAB 66/9 WP(40)233, annex III.

54. Chamberlain's diary, 27 June 1940, BUL NC2/24A.

55. Lady Craigavon's diary, 27 June 1940, op.cit.

56. Spender's diary, 4 July 1940, op.cit.

Dublin's interests.⁵⁷ Orthodox Unionists complained, at this period, of some colleagues who publicly advocated a new understanding with the south; Warnock 'and his little clique' were still annoying Lady Craigavon;⁵⁸ and Basil Brooke, one of the leading Stormont ministers admitted to Frank MacDermot that if the south were to join the war on Britain's side in return for unity after the war, Craigavon's cabinet would be split with his own vote favouring a new relationship with the south.⁵⁹ Moreover, it was Gray's estimate that Craigavon did not realise what the British were 'intending behind his back...'.⁶⁰ And was not Craigavon's 'furious'⁶¹ response to news of the Dublin talks, an indication that he, at least, suspected London's willingness to review Partition without Ulster's consent? Despite London's reassurances, there was clearly considerable suspicion among Unionists that in these new circumstances Britain would be willing, as Spender put it, 'to "sell the pass"'.⁶² It was, after all, a moment in history when Churchill believed that a British defeat would have allowed the 'whole world' to 'sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age'.⁶³ Unlike the circumstances of the Curragh mutiny, whose lesson was thought to be that Ulster could not be militarily coerced, the context was now entirely changed. The form which 'coercion' of Ulster would now have taken would have been a public appeal to their loyalism to approve a new relationship with the south in the interests of the Empire, democracy and civilization.

Nor can Craigavon's somewhat dilatory approach to the crisis have strengthened the north's position in London. On 29 June, the Saturday on which de Valera received the final British revise, Craigavon made a public speech insisting that he would be 'no party' to any change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. He was prepared to enter into the 'closest co-operation' with de Valera on defence questions provided he supported the British war effort, expelled the Axis diplomats and 'undertakes not to raise any issue of a constitutional nature'.⁶⁴

(h) German-Irish relations: June 1940

The last two weeks in June were also an active period for German-Irish relations. On 17 June, Hempel reported to Berlin Walshe's hope that Hitler's recent statement that he had no 'intention to destroy the British Empire, did not mean the abandonment of Ireland.' Hempel found Walshe

57. A pervasive theme in Spender's diary at this time,, see 15 Apr.-4 May, 6-11 May and 20-25 May 1940, ibid.

58. Lady Craigavon's diary, 18 June 1940, op.cit.

59. Interview with Frank MacDermot; Joseph Carroll, Ireland in the war years, 1939-1945, (Newton Abbot:1975), p.59 See also Brooke's comments on this period in a Stormont debate at the conclusion of the War, NIHC:29:80, 24 July 1945.

60. Gray to Roosevelt, 28 June 1940.

61. Lady Craigavon's diary, 27 June 1940, op.cit.

62. Spender's diary, 1-6 July 1940, op.cit.

63. Quoted in Longford and O'Neill (1970:364)

64. Speech of 30 June 1940, Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 1-8 July 1940, p.4127.

especially interested in what Hempel told him 'about the importance of the outcome of the war for the final realization of Irish national demands.'⁶⁵

Four days later, Hempel reported

a growing realization, at any rate on the part of Walshe and Boland, of the great and decisive importance even to Ireland of the changed situation in world affairs and of the obvious weakness of the democracies.

He added that Boland had told him 'in strict confidence' of British pressure for a bargain on neutrality and Partition which de Valera had rejected '"most vehemently"'.⁶⁶ On 1 July - while de Valera's cabinet was still debating the final British offer - Hempel cabled Berlin that de Valera was under 'increasingly powerful pressure' from the British, 'to bring about the end of Irish neutrality through a dangerous playing on the question of Northern Ireland...'. Hempel requested permission to reassure him that Germany would not collaborate with the IRA or use Ireland as a base from which to attack Britain. Such an unambiguous assurance, he believed, was necessary to strengthen de Valera's resolve to resist British pressure.⁶⁷ Nothing in Hempel's despatches to Berlin during this period would be inconsistent with a policy on Dublin's part to attempt to 'play off' London against Berlin. If neutrality was sacrosanct and Dublin had no interest in anything less than a united, neutral Ireland, then it is possible that those responsible for Irish policy during these days believed that the best exploitation of the British offer was to use it as a lever to exact promises from Berlin. Although Irish ministers may have expected a German victory, they did not share Hempel's view that this would be in Ireland's national interest. In recent talks with O'Kelly, MacEntee, Walshe and de Valera, Gray had stressed that 'if Germany crushes Britain and permits her resurgence as a third class power' Germany would keep Ireland as a Gibraltar to watch Britain.⁶⁸ Gray reported that this scenario had not been disputed by the Irish:

They naturally feel very timid these days and wishfully think that by not...plumping with England they are going to make their lot easier in the event of a German crushing victory.⁶⁹

(i) American-Irish relations: June 1940

Dublin's policy was based on the assumption that America did not intend to abandon her neutrality:⁷⁰ if she had entered the war, de Valera told Gray, '...it would alter our situation over-night...'.⁷¹ Gray believed that if the United States became a belligerent, the Irish government 'could take the chance they dare not now take.'⁷² Gray feared

65. Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 17 June 1940, DGFP:D:9:doc.473.

66. Ibid. 26 June 1940, doc. 506.

67. Ibid., 1 July 1940, ibid., 10:doc.79.

68. Gray to Roosevelt, 19 June 1940.

69. Ibid., 28 June 1940.

70. Ibid., 6-12, 19 and 28 June 1940.

71. Ibid., 19 June 1940.

72. Ibid., 6-12 June 1940.

that 'if Ulster doesn't offer to throw in with the south at once it will be too late. It may be too late anyway. These people unarmed can't make resistance and how rally them for a losing cause?' Gray's 'own belief' was 'that if Ulster would consent to the ending of partition under suitable guarantees' de Valera 'could capitalize it politically' and join Britain at war. 'But de Valera won't say he will do it. He told me a month ago when I was exploring the possibility(:) "The neutrality of Ireland is not for sale" and with some heat.'⁷³

(j) Dublin rejects initiative

Thus policies and attitudes in Washington, Berlin and Belfast had a bearing on the deliberations of the Irish cabinet as they considered the final British document. Delivered to them on Saturday, 29 June, the British government was expecting an early decision that same week-end. As the records already quoted reveal, the final British plan bore little resemblance to MacDonald's first suggestion of just ten days before. Having railed against Partition since its enactment twenty years earlier, Fianna Fail ministers were now invited to consider what was - whatever its limitations - the first substantial proposal from London to question that policy. But there were strong arguments against acceptance: any abandonment of neutrality in advance of a German invasion, would create a rift in the Fianna Fail party and cabinet; even if invited into the south to help defend Ireland against a German invasion, it seemed likely to the cabinet that some British troops would be attacked by republican extremists; in the event of a German invasion, a government which had invited prior British aid, would be open to the charge that it was the British presence which had precipitated the attack; further, there was a suspicion in de Valera's mind, at least, that if the British ever returned to the Treaty ports - even by invitation - they might never leave; there was the fact that Germany at this hour in the war seemed invincible; and, lastly, there was Ulster.⁷⁴ Was this not a repeat of the Home Rule controversy during the Great War? Was de Valera not being cast in the role of Redmond? Were not Fianna Fail being invited to repeat the mistakes of the Irish Party by accepting London's pledge of Irish unity in return for participation in 'a British war'? To a cabinet dominated by men who had helped to kill the Irish Party for just such a mistake, the parallel must have seemed ominously uncomfortable. Adding strength to these suspicions was the overt insistence in both the written documents submitted to Dublin that Ulster's approval would be necessary. For instance, the final revise, which solemnly undertook that Irish unity would 'become at an early date an accomplished fact from which there will

73. Gray to Welles, 23 June 1940.

74. Memoranda by Mulcahy, 15 May, 4 and 5 July 1940, P7A/210 and 29 May 1941, P7A/214, all in Mulcahy papers, UCD; Gray to Roosevelt, 19 June and 7 Aug. 1940. Longford and O'Neill (1970:364-8); interview with Sean MacEntee; and de Valera in the Dail, fifteen years later, DE:152:551, 12 July 1955.

be no turning back' was prefaced by an introduction which included the reminder that 'the whole plan depends upon our obtaining the assent of Northern Ireland'; Chamberlain promised that Britain 'should do our best' to secure this, but he could not, 'of course, give a guarantee that Northern Ireland will assent...'.⁷⁵ Was this not London's traditional insistence that Ulster had a veto on Irish unity? If the British document seemed somewhat contradictory in tone - if it seemed to speak with 'two voices' - was this because it had, effectively, been agreed by Chamberlain and Churchill?

On 4 July, de Valera wrote to Chamberlain informing him of his cabinet's rejection of the 'purely tentative' plan: this rejection was on the grounds that whilst it envisaged 'the immediate abandonment' of neutrality, it gave 'no guarantee' of unity. Again he informed London that the 1937 Constitution represented 'the limit to which we believe our (sic) people are prepared to go to meet the sentiments of the Northern Unionists', whereas, on the proposed plan, Craigavon and his colleagues 'could at any stage render the whole project nugatory...'.⁷⁶ De Valera's biographers report that the British proposals 'had a certain allure, but, from the moment he studied them de Valera was not impressed.' He thought the offer

largely illusory. Speaking of it years later he mentioned that when he was a child it was customary for two boys swapping treasures to insist on 'equal holds' - that each should have a firm grip on what he was to receive before he loosened his grip on that with which he was parting. The offer...did not give 'equal holds'."⁷⁷

Such concentration on the 'Ulster clauses' to justify rejection was not surprising. As they had done in the Treaty negotiations in 1921, Irish nationalists still appreciated the propaganda benefits of 'breaking on Ulster': to reject a partitioned Ireland would always seem more tolerable to international opinion, than to refuse Dominion status in 1921 or participating in the fight against Hitlerism in 1940. But it does not fully explain Irish motivations. Lack of public support was also mentioned by de Valera in his letter to Chamberlain: 'Our people would be quite unprepared for it, and Dail Eireann would certainly reject it'.⁷⁸ Aiken's retrospective verdict is that the offer was 'insulting':⁷⁹ Mulcahy's contemporary assessment was that any proposal by de Valera to join the Allies would have been opposed by 'perhaps more than half of his own party, one third of Fine Gael and perhaps the whole of Labour.' Moreover, the one third of the country which would be opposed to acceptance 'would be that part with the greatest possible capacity for nuisance and damage.'⁸⁰ A highly relevant factor for Irish policy makers but one which retrospective accounts tend to ignore, is the fact that the Irish political elite now believed that Britain was unlikely to win the

75. As note 54 above.

76. De Valera to Chamberlain, 4 July 1940, PRO CAB 66/9 WP(40)251.

77. Longford and O'Neill (1970:366).

78. As note 76 above.

79. Interview with Frank Aiken.

80. Mulcahy memo. 5 July 1940 Mulcahy papers UCD P7A/210.

War. At best she could hope for a negotiated peace:⁸¹ Consequently, Irish thoughts turned to defending Irish interests in what looked like being a peace dictated from Berlin.

The conclusion seems inescapable that no British offer other than a guaranteed united, neutral Ireland would have won support in the Fianna Fail cabinet. When MacDermot, back from Belfast, tried to interest de Valera and Aiken in what he thought were the promising results of a talk with Basil Brooke, he was cursorily dismissed: Aiken's words were; '"Get this into your head MacDermot, there are no conditions under which we would abandon neutrality'."⁸² At least one Ulster Unionist emissary met de Valera in Dublin at this time: Mulcahy noted that de Valera had told a Unionist senator that if the south went into 'the war in return for Unity', the country would be 'split from top to bottom...';⁸³ This Unionist industrialist, Senator Herdman,⁸⁴ may also have been Craigavon's 'friend' who met de Valera 'quite unofficially' in Dublin for an hour on 25 June. Craigavon wrote to Chamberlain:

My friend suggested that if he would declare himself as willing to come in with Britain I would be glad to meet him anywhere at any time over mutual civil defence provided no "constitutional" questions⁸⁵ were touched upon. Mr de Valera's answer was(:) "quite impossible".

Neither de Valera nor Craigavon deviated from their entrenched positions during this crisis: Craigavon's primary instinct was to offer de Valera unacceptable terms thus showing to London where their true interests lay; de Valera appreciated that the factors encouraging caution concerning the British offer were overwhelming. In addition to those already mentioned,⁸⁶ the expectations of extreme republicans,⁸⁶ northern nationalists,⁸⁷ and the evidence in mid-June of an embryonic, marginal pro-Nazi party⁸⁸ must all have encouraged rejection of the terms. Sharing as they did, what was, in June 1940, the widely held view, that Germany would win the War, or, at least, dictate the peace, the Irish political elite must have believed that it would have been reckless to risk Irish interests by joining what was thought to be the losing side.

Another factor weighed with de Valera: his particular suspicion of Churchill's bona fides towards Ireland. Chamberlain, he knew to be sympathetic towards Irish unity but Churchill's antipathy to the south was well known. In any cabinet disagreement on the coercion of Ulster, whose will would prevail? As the British records reveal, such suspicion was

81. See sub-section h above; also Gray to Roosevelt, 25 Aug. 1940 and 9 Nov. 1942; also Goertz's impressions recorded in Stephan, (1965:200-1).

82. Interview with Frank MacDermot.

83. Memo 4 and 5 July 1940, Mulcahy papers, P7A/210.

84. Sir Emerson C. Herdman, a linen merchant, served for 25 years as a Unionist Senator in the NI parliament.

85. Craigavon to Chamberlain, 26 June 1940, PRO PREM 3/131/2,

86. Stephan (1965:69).

87. Healy to Churchill, 3 July 1940, PRO DO 35/1107/Wx1/92. Coinciding with the de Valera-MacDonald talks there was a bitter public controversy between Tommy Mullins of Fianaa Fail headquarters and Cahir Healy, Irish News, 26 June 1940.

88. See affidavits from unnamed informant in Mulcahy papers, P7A/220, passim, but especially 31 May 1940.

well founded.⁸⁹ Not only had Chamberlain and Churchill very different outlooks on Ireland, they were also diametrically opposed in temperament: Chamberlain was morose, defeatist and extremely concerned about a German invasion of Ireland:⁹⁰ Churchill, on the other hand was enjoying the War⁹¹ and strategically even foresaw some advantages to Britain if a 'civil war' broke out in Ireland in the wake of a German invasion: "we shd(sic) have split the Sinn Feiners effectively and shd(sic) have the greater part of the pop(ulatio)n on our side for the first time in history."⁹²

(k) 'It is finished...'

Chamberlain did not believe that Ulster was the main ground on which de Valera had declined the initiative: on 7 July, he wrote to his sister:

...the real basic fact is that it is not Partition which stands in the way at this moment but the fear of Dev(sic) and his friends that we shall be beaten. They don't want to be on the losing side and if that is unheroic(,) one can only say that it is very much the attitude of the world from the U.S.A. to Roumania and from Japan to Ireland.⁹³

On 6 July Chamberlain told the cabinet that de Valera's reply was 'a flat refusal. He proposed to inform Lord Craigavon that the negotiations had come to an end.'⁹⁴

Meanwhile Craigavon, doubtless aware of how inoperable his scheme was, suggested in a memorandum on 6 July, a Military Governor for 'all Ireland, for the period of the war, without any consideration of the political border...'. He had a 'very satisfactory chat' with Churchill in London on 7 July, reported the details to his cabinet on the 10th, by which time he had publicised an unacceptable offer to de Valera who had duly rejected it.⁹⁵ Lady Craigavon noted her husband's words in her diary for 11 July: 'It is finished, it will not be raised by me again... We are closing the gates again as our ancestors did at Derry...'.⁹⁶

89. See for instance Churchill's margin note on his copy of MacDonald's telegram from Dublin on 27 June: 'But all contingent upon Ulster agreeing, and S.Ireland coming into the war.' PRO PREM 3/131/2.

90. Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 15 June 1940, BUL NC18/1/1161 and to Ida Chamberlain, 7 July 1940, ibid., - /1162. Also diary for 13 May, 17 June and 1 July 1940, NC2/24A.

91. Interview with Malcolm MacDonald.

92. Churchill to Ismay, 31 May 1940, PRO PREM 3/129/1.

93. Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 7 July 1940, op. cit.

94. PRO CAB 65/8 WM 195(40)11.

95. Craigavon, memo, 'All Ireland Defence Force', 6 July 1940, PRO PREM 3/131/2: Lady Craigavon's diary, op. cit., 7 July 1940: minutes of Northern Ireland cabinet PRONI CAB 4/447/6, 10 July 1940: NIHC:23:1694-5; Northern Whig, 9 July 1940.

96. Lady Craigavon's dairy, 1 July 1940, op. cit.

(a) A 'New Order'?

In 1956 David Gray suggested that the 'accumulating evidence' suggested that even before the fall of France, de Valera had 'believed that Hitler would win the war, and that in payment for keeping the allies out of the Eire ports he would obtain Northern Ireland on his own terms.'¹ De Valera cursorily replied that Gray's claims were 'unfounded and foolish'.² The exchange is typical of the postwar debate on Irish neutrality. Gray's claim may be contrasted with his disinclination in the autumn of 1940 to blame a 'very defeatist if not pro-German' Walshe for considering 'as a possibility if not a probability' an 'Irish regime based on a German control of Europe.'³ At that time, de Valera confirmed to Gray that he, too, foresaw as a probability 'a German-controlled Europe with England and Ireland alligned with the commonwealth of nations and the Americas.'⁴

British and German archives confirm this picture: on 29 November, Hempel reported that Irish political circles no longer believed that Britain was self-confident about the war, and would, in a negotiated peace, be particularly anxious to have 'possession of Ireland when the future new order is established, and they would attempt to make sure of that before the war ends...'.⁵ After the War, it was not in the south's interest to admit that, for most of 1940 and 1941 at least, a German victory was considered probable in Dublin. But to base policy on the expectation of a German victory was not the equivalent of sympathising or aiding such an outcome. In fact, Irish sympathies were decidedly pro-British as Maffey,⁶ Cranborne,⁷ Gray,⁸ Willkie,⁹ Menzies¹⁰ - and, even Hempel¹¹ - confirmed. As for 1940, Gray and Roosevelt later agreed that such a response by Dublin at this stage of the War had been dictated by self-interest and prudence.¹² Maffey too must have privately agreed: he also considered the possibility of a German victory and even presumed to advise the Ulster Unionists to prepare for such a contingency! In December 1940 he surprised Spender with the suggestion that 'if the British Empire were defeated' that 'it would be very greatly to the advantage of Northern

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1. David Gray, 'Introduction', to W.A. Carson, Ulster and the Irish Republic, (Belfast, n.d.(1956)), pp.i-ix; quotation, pp.iv-v.
 2. Irish Times clipping, circa May 1957, NLI MS.16,221.
 3. Gray to Hull, 18 Nov.1940, FRUS: 1940:3:pp.170 1
 4. Ibid., 24 Nov. 1940, ibid., -/pp.172 3.
 5. Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 29 Nov.1940, DGFP:D:11:doc.419.
 6. PRO PREM 3/131/4, Feb.1941; 'Lord Rugby Remembers', Irish Times, 3-5 July 1962.
 7. Cranborne, 'Note of conversation with Mr de Valera, December 17', 19 Dec. 1941, PRO CAB 67/9 WP(G)(41)158.
 8. Gray to Roosevelt, 6 June 1940.
 9. PRO DO 35/1109/WX13/4.
 10. Robert Menzies, Afternoon light, (London:1967), p.40. Hereafter, Menzies: 1967.
 11. Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 11 Mar.1941, DGFP:D:12:doc.150.
 12. Draft, Roosevelt to De Valera, 16 Aug 1943 FRUS, 1943:A:pp.618-2 pp.618-24; Gray to Roosevelt 7 Aug 1940.

Ireland to join up with Eire and that the British government would advise Ulster to do so.' Spender was shocked at Maffey's defeatism, replying that this was a contingency which he 'refused to visualise' or, indeed, to further discuss.¹³

Although Hitler himself claimed in December 1940 that 'possession of Ireland could have the effect of ending the war', he accepted the counsel of his military advisers that, strategically, German 'occupation of the island of Ireland' was 'impossible', if Ireland was not at war with Britain.¹⁴ The following year when Rudolph Hess was being questioned after his flight to Britain, his interrogator 'dropped a fly at him on Ireland' and received the reply that Hitler had 'no intention vis-a-vis that country. It had done nothing for Germany, and why should Germany do anything for her?'.¹⁵

While Irish Army Intelligence stymied the clumsy¹⁶ attempts by the German secret service to establish effective links with the IRA, Hempel attempted to introduce the anti-Partition card into German-Irish diplomacy. Insofar as Irish policy can be inferred from Hempel's despatches, the note struck is one of reticence and prudence. In December 1940, Hempel reported that neither de Valera nor any official of External Affairs had 'ever mentioned to me the possibility of recovering Northern Ireland with German help'.¹⁷

However, on five separate occasions between November 1941 and July 1943, the Irish minister in Madrid, Leopold Kerney, did engage in discussions with German emissaries concerning Irish unity. The foreign ministry in Berlin recorded Kerney as believing that de Valera

saw in a German victory the only possible chance of ending partition, but was unable to take any anti-British step in view of the defencelessness of Southern Ireland. If Germany could only provide Ireland with arms and organise successful assistance, Ireland might no longer, at a critical moment of the war, remain neutral.¹⁸

Williams, in revealing Kerney's role - and he was among the historians sorting the captured German records after the war - adds that Kerney was subsequently rebuked by de Valera for presuming to interpret his policy. Williams concludes that 'there was no evidence whatever that the Irish government was considering such a plan'.¹⁹ Along with this verdict, Hempel's assessment in the winter of 1941 must be considered: he believed the Irish 'preferred having friends on both sides in case of a negotiated peace'.²⁰

13. Spender, note of conversation with Maffey, 11 Dec. 1940, Spender diary, Spender papers, op.cit.

14. War diary of Wehrmacht operations Staff, for 3 Dec. 1940, DGFP: D:11:doc.416:note 2; Report of the C.in C., Navy to the Fuehrer, 3 Dec. 1940, reprinted in Brassey's Naval Annual, 1948, (London:1948) pp.156-8.

15. Ryan to Kerney, 6 Nov. 1941, Ryan letters, op. cit.,

16. H(ermann Goertz) to James O'Donovan, 30 Sept.(1940), James O'Donovan papers, NLI ms. 21,155(2); Ryan to Kerney, 14 Jan 1942, op.cit.

17. Hempel to Foreign Ministry, 7 Dec. 1940, DGFP:D:11:doc.466.

18. Quoted in Sean Cronin, 'Germany and Ireland in World War Two', Irish Times, 6 July 1978.

19. T.D.Williams, 'Neutrality!', Irish Press, 10 July 1953.

20. Carolle J.Carter's paraphrase of translation of Hempel to Berlin, Oct.-Nov., 1941, in Carolle J.Carter, The Shamrock and the Swastika: Germany espionage in Ireland in World War Two, (Palo Alto:1977) p.164. See also Carter's evidence that Major General Hugo MacNeill - second in command in the Irish Army - made regular contacts with the German Legation, ibid., pp.162-73, passim and p.261, note 19.

The rejection of the June 1940 offer by de Valera established a new consensus among the British political elite: those who once sympathised with Dublin's unity aspirations now supported the pro-Ulster politicians and civil servants.²¹ That de Valera was content 'to sit happy and see us strangled', was Churchill's complaint to Roosevelt²² and at Westminster in early November he disturbed Dublin with a bellicose speech complaining about the loss of the ports.²³ De Valera replied that there was 'no question...on any condition whatsoever' of handing over the ports: he warned the people that 'a grave crisis' might follow but 'if we have to die for it, we shall be dying in that good cause.'²⁴ This contretemps provided another opportunity for Craigavon to remind British opinion of the importance of the north, what he termed their 'pied a terre in Ireland'.²⁵ In a series of interviews he pointed to the 'solid English-speaking block from the East Coast of England to the West Coast of America. That is the greatest buffer against Hitler...and if you destroy the Ulster section of it you create a gap that all the goodwill of America cannot bridge...'.²⁶ Later in what may have been his last public statement - he died the following week - he suggested that de Valera's response to Churchill 'marks the culminating point in the process which we in the North have forseen for the past forty years.'²⁷

In direct response to the scare which followed Churchill's remarks, de Valera insisted that Irish troops prepare to resist a British invasion across the border - which Fine Gael believed to be posturing on his part. But by May 1941, de Valera had stated to the Fine Gael leaders 'very firmly and very emphatically', his belief that it was Britain's intention to take advantage of war conditions by 'reabsorbing, necessarily by force, this country back into the United Kingdom.'²⁸ Gerald Boland confirmed that this was de Valera's private view: if it was, Mulcahy believed it rendered their work on the Defence Conference irrelevant - 'fantastic fiddling'.²⁹

21. Interview Malcolm MacDonald.

22. Quoted in W.L.Langer and S.E.Gleason, The undeclared war, (New York:1953) pp.235-6.

23. HC:365:1243, 5 Nov. 1940.

24. Longford and O'Neill (1970:374).

25. Lady Craigavon's diary, 7 Nov. 1940, op.cit.

26. Daily Express interview, quoted ibid. 13 Nov. 1940.

27. Lady Craigavon's diary, 15 Nov. 1940, op.cit.

28. Mulcahy, notes on Defence Conference, 29 May 1941, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/214; Gray to Hull, 24 Feb. 1941, FRUS:1941:3:218-9.

29. Mulcahy memo., 24 Apr. 1941, Mulcahy papers, P7A/214.

(c) Fine Gael's perspective

Fine Gael provide useful insights into de Valera's policy at this period, and not least, the implications which his policy had for the Partition issue. The possibility of a German invasion of the north, ostensibly to unite Ireland, was still de Valera's worst fear. That such a development would have caused confusion within Fianna Fail's ranks is clear; only Fine Gael seem to have been confident that the correct response would be aid to the Unionists and British. Cosgrave wrote to Mulcahy: 'If we could help the north and don't, we are plumping for German occupation of a part of our country. Dermot (?MacMurrough) over again in a new shape.'³⁰ In general, Mulcahy was critical of de Valera's policy: he disliked the 'prevarications, contradictory statements and the extraordinary equating of the British with the Germans.'³¹ O'Higgins agreed: his paper, for a front bench meeting in March 1941, suggested that 'the most serious aspect' of Irish neutrality as practised was the 'indifference as to which side may become our enemy and therefore which side may become our ally': if Britain in desperation seized the ports we must make war on Britain and 'make a Nazi victory a certainty.' O'Higgins believed the most probable outcome of the war was a negotiated peace, in which case Ireland would learn that because of neutrality she had 'made an enemy of Britain for many years to come, and...Partition as permanent as British power can make it. Any future Commonwealth Conference will see our representatives begging for the scraps.' In the event of a German victory, O'Higgins believed that Ireland would become a German base. O'Higgins believed policy should be reviewed in the light of these probabilities and considered exclusively in terms of Ireland's rights, which could be 'summed up in one sentence, Ireland's territorial unity - the restoration of Ulster to Ireland.' O'Higgins' preferred solution to this dilemma was to lend or lease ports to the allies on the strength of an American guarantee of their evacuation at the end of the war.³²

(d) The American dimension

Throughout 1941, before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour precipitated their entry into the War, the Americans were thought of as possible guarantors of Irish neutrality and the vital Atlantic trade.³³ Ulster Unionists, too, appreciated that it was now vital for Britain to keep the Americans 'sweet'. Spender disapproved of a British MP's suggestion that 'we should go to America cap in hand to ask for their

30. Cosgrave to Mulcahy, c.25 July 1940, *ibid.*, -/212.

31. Mulcahy memo., 27 Dec. 1940, *ibid.*, -/210.

32. T.F.O'Higgins, copy of memo to be discussed at forthcoming Fine Gael front bench meeting, 3 Mar. 1941, *ibid.* -/215.

33. Joint Intelligence Staff, 'The invasion of Eire - a pocket appreciation', n.d., but June 1941, PRO PREM 3/130.

help in settling the Irish Question...'. Such an approach would give to de Valera 'just that handle which he requires to go on pressing impossible demands', foremost amongst them being the north's inclusion in a united, neutral Ireland to be declared a republic at the war's conclusion. To give any encouragement to such an impossible aspiration was 'merely to reopen in America a question which is very nearly dead and which certainly is much better left quiescent until peace comes.'³⁴

One course which seems to have been considered during the winter of 1940-41 was the possibility of inviting the United States - still a non-belligerent - to lease the Treaty ports, thereby guaranteeing Atlantic shipping and strengthening Irish neutrality. Walshe suggested that de Valera was considering such a possibility.³⁵ Washington, no less than London or Berlin, appreciated that some move towards Irish unity remained the obvious 'currency' for any negotiation with de Valera on neutrality. Among the detailed proposals put to Roosevelt in 1941 was one for a United States defence agreement with Ireland which, it was thought, would appeal to de Valera as in 'no other direction' was 'it politically possible for him to look for help.' Through such co-operation, the United States 'would be placed in a peculiarly effective position for a final and satisfactory solution of partition and of the whole Irish problem.' The State Department and the British had some misgivings about this plan but de Valera is reported to have been grateful that Roosevelt's 'benevolent eye was cast on Ireland's safety...'.³⁶

In the main, Roosevelt was unsympathetic towards Ireland. His emissary, Wendell Willkie, in Dublin in February 1941, paid no attention to de Valera's protests against Partition and 'did not conceal his contempt' when de Valera admitted his fear of German bombers. Willkie found nothing incongruous in a neutral American lecturing de Valera on Irish neutrality and failed to appreciate the defencelessness of Irish cities to aerial bombing.³⁷

(e) Belfast bombed

The public fear of such attacks was heightened in the spring of 1941 with the Luftwaffe raids on Belfast. At 2 a.m. on the morning of 2 May, de Valera learned that after a German raid, Belfast was ablaze. Longford and O'Neill report that his first reaction

was that the victims of this bombing were Irishmen and he must send aid. However, he weighed the consequences. Germany had decided to bomb the city. If he interfered to prevent it, or to counter the effect of the bombing he would be considered as interfering against Germany in the war.

34. Spender to Ian Hannah MP, 17 Dec. 1940, Spender papers, op.cit.

35. Gray to Hull, 10 Nov. 1940, FRUS:1940:3:pp.163-9.

36. Felix Frankfurter, memo for Roosevelt, June 1941, reprinted in Max Freedman, Roosevelt and Frankfurter: their-correspondence: 1928-1945, (London:1967) pp.608-9.

37. Bethel (1972:248).

Normally, as his biographers admit, 'He was not a man to take quick decisions', but on this occasion, 'he took what was possibly the fastest decision of his career - all the Dublin fire-engines, except one, were to go at once to Belfast.'³⁸ Surprise and gratitude was Belfast's response:³⁹ there were, apparently within Fianna Fail, some doubters; at the next meeting of the National Executive, the 'question of the despatch of the Dublin Fire Brigade to the Six Counties was raised. The government's attitude was explained by Mr. Little.'⁴⁰

This intensive bombing of Belfast may have destroyed one potential card in de Valera's hand: the previous December, Hempel had reported to Berlin that de Valera was presuming that the freedom from attack which the north had enjoyed was an expression of Germany's acceptance of Article 2's claim in the 1937 Constitution.⁴¹ The Unionists were not unaware of 'the great advantages' of neutrality but politically there was 'not the slightest indication' of interest in opting for such benefits.⁴²

(f) Conscription in Northern Ireland?

With support from the Stormont and British cabinets, the extension of conscription to Northern Ireland again became an issue in May 1941.⁴³ It was 'emphatically' welcomed by the Stormont cabinet which was even prepared 'as a last resort' to approve of the setting up of 'concentration camps for thousands of resisters'.⁴⁴ Unionists hoped that nationalist representatives would endorse their appeal.⁴⁵ But conscription was anathema to anti-Partitionists:⁴⁶ Fine Gael believed it would represent 'a major(,) irretrievable and probably fatal political blunder': it would amount to a 'scoop' for de Valera who would turn it to his political advantage.⁴⁷ Gray predicted that de Valera would 'raise anti-British feeling and call a Holy War': Maffey shared these apprehensions.⁴⁸

De Valera however was again as moderate as the circumstances permitted. He appealed to extreme republicans to cancel a Dublin protest meeting;⁴⁹ he lobbied Gray for American support, initially arguing that an 'escape clause for Catholics' on grounds of conscience would make the measure tolerable: however, he later contacted Gray to say that on reconsideration he must oppose the measure in principle.⁵⁰ Maffey was impressed by the moderation of the specially convened Dail debate in which

38. Longford and O'Neill (1970:373); Irish Press, 21 Apr. 1941.

39. Interview John Oliver.

40. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 12 May 1941.

41. Stephan (1965:173-4); Ryan told Kerney (13 Aug. 1942) that he never let an opportunity pass in Berlin of criticising the German bombing of Belfast, North Strand (Dublin) etc.; see also NIHC:29:1221-7, 13 Nov.1945.

42. Spender, note of talk with Maffey, 11 Dec. 1940, Spender papers.

43. PRO CAB 66/16 WP(41)107.

44. Home Secretary's summary of NI government's arguments, PRO CAB 66/16 WP(41)108.

45. Cahir Healy papers, D2991/A/152-3, 155.

46. Irish Press clipping, 23 May 1941, SPO S 12432

47. Gray to Hull, 22 May 1941, FRUS:1941:3:pp.234-5.

48. Maffey to DO, 25 May 1941, PRO CAB 66/16, WP(41)113.

49. Holograph note by Maurice Moynihan, 28 May 1941, SPO S 12432.

50. As note 48 above.

all parties agreed that conscription would be 'exceedingly dangerous'.⁵¹ Donnelly however was not satisfied with de Valera's response: he did not know why there should be 'any "shilly-shallying"'.⁵² Ottawa and Washington both advised against conscription, as did Maffey who agreed the case was in principle 'unanswerable', but believed the 'expediency of the measure' was 'most doubtful'.⁵³ Churchill realised his mistake: with the Ulster cabinet weakening,⁵⁴ he informed the Commons on 27 May that after 'a number of enquiries in various directions', the government had concluded that 'it would be more trouble than it is worth to enforce such a policy.'⁵⁵ Maffey was lunching with three of de Valera's ministers, O'Kelly, MacEntee and Rutledge, when the news came through: he reported to London that their 'joy was equally divided over the sinking of conscription and the sinking of the Bismarck.'⁵⁶ The Ulster Unionists were enraged, sharing with de Valera's apologists, the assumption that the Irish leader's representations had been decisive.⁵⁷ Two days later, Churchill argued to Spender that he believed the decision reached had in fact 'strengthened the position of Ulster' in Britain: Spender was 'sorry', he could not agree and feared that the fact that the decision had been cheered in the Commons proved that a large body of its members were prepared to 'play up to any demands made by de Valera.'⁵⁸

Whatever Unionist interest there might have been twelve months before for some bargain on Partition and defence, Unionist antipathy for Fianna Fail was now more intense than ever. In October 1941, the Canadian High Commissioner in Dublin, John D. Kearney was received at Stormont Castle, presumed to be flying a kite for de Valera. He argued that the 'moment was now favourable' to tackle Partition, 'to heal this wound', but, pressed by Spender, he could give no assurances that the resulting united Ireland would support the Allies. Spender took care to write to Hankey in London, hoping that British ministers would not '...get entangled in further political discussions'; experience had shown him that '...one cannot disregard proposals put forward by the Eire Government, no matter how wild they may appear at first sight...'.⁵⁹ The British thought Spender had 'read rather more' into Kearney's remark than the Canadian High Commissioner had intended.⁶⁰ Kearney however persisted in the belief that some deal on Partition and neutrality was possible. The following month he asked de Valera directly if the Ports would be available if the Americans were to enter the War and could guarantee an end to Partition.

51. Cosgrave's view, other party leaders taking a similar line, DE:83:969-78, 26 May 1941. Retrospectively, MacEntee believed this to be the most serious crisis of the War, interview with Michael McInerney, Irish Times, 25 July 1974.

52. Irish Press, 27 May 1941.

53. As note 48 above; also Gray to State Department, quoted by Maffey, ibid., Mackenzie King to Churchill, 25 May 1941, PRO DO 35/1109/WX37/6. De Valera to Churchill (via Dulanty) 26 May 1941, ibid., -/WX37/9; Winant 'A letter from Grosvenor Square', pp.186-7, excerpts in Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,334.

54. Winant to Hull, 26 May 1941, FRUS:1941:3:p.239.

55. HC:371:66, 27 May 1941.

56. Maffey to Machtig, PRO DO 35/1109/WX37/4.

57. Edmond Warnock, NIHC:24:2610, 20 Jan. 1942.

58. Spender diary, 26-31 May 1941, Spender papers, op.cit.

59. Spender to Hankey, 21 Oct. 1941, Hankey papers, PRO CAB 63/147.

60. Cranborne to Hankey, 29 Oct. 1941, ibid.

Kearney learned that 'even a promise of unity of Ireland would not alter his attitude.'⁶¹

(g) The U.S. joins the Allies

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour precipitated America's declaration of war on 7 December; at 2 a.m. on the following morning, Maffey delivered what he himself considered a 'Churchillian' telegram to de Valera. The message was brief:

Following from Mr Churchill for Mr de Valera. Personal. Private and Secret. Begins. Now is your chance. Now or never. A Nation once again." Am very ready to meet you at any time. Ends.

De Valera believed that this was Churchill's 'way of intimating "now is the chance for taking action which would ultimately lead to the unification of the country".'⁶² De Valera's own note of the conversation concludes:

I indicated to Sir John Maffey that I did not see the thing in that light. I saw no opportunity at the moment of securing unity, that our people were determined on their attitude of neutrality, etc.⁶³

Maffey seems to have shared de Valera's impression that Churchill was mooting another deal on Partition and neutrality: his report summarised de Valera's position as being that '...neither he nor anybody else would have a mandate for entering the war on a deal over partition.'⁶⁴ Cranborne was alarmed at de Valera's misinterpretation of Churchill's phrase. 'A nation once again.' Cranborne had taken this to mean that '...by coming into the War, Ireland would regain her soul.' He warned Churchill that de Valera's cabinet '...on consideration, might accept your invitation on this basis, and then feel that we had led them up the garden path'; and he sought permission from the Prime Minister to inform Maffey '...of the true interpretation of the phrase...'.⁶⁵ Churchill minuted on this letter: "I certainly contemplated no deal over partition. That could only come by consent arising out of war comradeship between North and South."⁶⁶ Maffey, briefed by Cranborne, took the opportunity at a further meeting with de Valera to make it clear that Churchill was suggesting no 'deal over partition.'⁶⁷

At de Valera's suggestion Cranborne visited Dublin where he had a 'long, friendly, but fruitless talk' on 17 December. De Valera accepted that some postponement of the solution of Partition might be inevitable although he did not 'rule out the possibility' that, after the War, his federal proposals might be acceptable if linked with 'a joint strategic

61. Kearney to Robertson, 20 Feb. 1942, quoted T.Ryle Dwyer, 'Canada and David Gray's attempts to discredit de Valera during World War Two', *The Capuchin Annual*, 1976, pp.285-95, quote p.287.

62. Churchill to de Valera, 8 Dec. 1941, PRO PREM 3/131/6.

63. Longford and O'Neill (1970:393).

64. Maffey's report, received 8 Dec. 1941, PRO PREM 3/131/6.

65. Cranborne to Churchill, 8 Dec. 1941, *ibid*.

66. Churchill minute on *ibid*.

67. Maffey to DO, 10 Dec. 1941, *ibid*.

plan for the defence of the British Isles.' Cranborne emphasised that to be discussing post-war contingencies was 'entirely academic'. The only chance of ending Partition, was through the community of interest which would follow Eire's participation in the war alongside Britain. 'For Eire to link her entry into the war with a solution of the Partition question, which was necessarily a long-term problem, was to ignore the urgency of the present position.' De Valera insisted that

...in existing circumstances, with the Partition problem as an open sore, any attempt to bring a United Ireland into the war at our side would be doomed to failure. From this position, I could not budge him.⁶⁸

Strategically, Northern Ireland was providing the Allies with a 'second best' bridgehead in Ireland: indeed, since the previous summer, American technicians had been helping to 'make a fortress of Ulster', a matter which de Valera had complained about as it seemed to imply American recognition of Partition.⁶⁹ Chagrin and resentment was apparently de Valera's response when informed of the American troops arrival in Northern Ireland in January. The move 'embarrassed him', reported Maffey, 'and he believed he would be expected to say something publicly...'.⁷⁰

De Valera reiterated the 'unabated' claim to Irish unity irrespective of which troops occupied the north.⁷¹ Although he clearly thought this as moderate as possible,⁷² it offended American opinion.⁷³ Pressed, the Americans denied that the move implied support for Partition; further, Roosevelt assured de Valera that there was no danger of an American invasion of the south.⁷⁴ Thereafter, Roosevelt gave de Valera the 'absent treatment'. Churchill did likewise: he discouraged visits by senior politicians to Dublin and persistently declined to reassure de Valera that Britain would respect Irish neutrality.⁷⁵ Churchill's support for Ulster persisted: he told Averill Harriman, '"No good making enemies of friends in order to try to make friends of enemies."' ⁷⁶ What reads like a concerted campaign in the American press, to undermine Ireland's 'irresponsible neutrality' gathered momentum in 1942: Ireland, it was suggested, could either help the democracies or 'play Hitler's game.'⁷⁷

Due mainly to de Valera's persistence, the status quo was maintained throughout the rest of the War. A plan by Dillon to involve the Americans in a bargain over Partition and neutrality was still-born;⁷⁸ another plan

68. Cranborne, note on conversation with de Valera on 17 Dec 1941, PRO CAB 67/9 WP(G)(41)158.

69. Gray to Hull, 21 July 1941, FRUS:1941:3:pp.243-5.

70. Gray to Hull, 27, 28 and 30 Jan. 1942, FRUS:1942:1:pp.751-4; also Winant to Hull, 30 Jan. 1942, *ibid.*, pp.754-5.

71. *The Times*, 28 Jan. 1942.

72. Longford and O'Neill (1970:397-8).

73. Note about Ireland, PRO DO 35/1228/WX101/1/69; Mulcahy memo. for 4 Feb. 1942, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/214.

74. Welles memo, 6 Feb. 1942, FRUS:1942:1:p.755; Cordell Hull, *The memoirs of Cordell Hull*, (New York:1948) vol.2, p.1355.

75. Churchill to Cranborne, 19 Feb. 1941, PRO PREM 3/131/4; Menzies, (1967:37).

76. Averell Harriman, personal notes, Dec. 1941, in W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-46*, (London:1976) p.115.

77. *The Nation* (New York), 31 Jan. 1942.

78. Gray to Hull, 27 Jan. 1942, FRUS:1942:1:p.752.

whereby the Stormont parliament would be 'superceded' by 'a joint American and British Commission' which would 'take over the running of Northern Ireland' also failed despite the efforts of two British MPs who argued in Dublin that Churchill 'would be anxious to settle the Northern question' and that 'faced with losing the War', the Americans were 'bloody-minded' and 'nothing would stop them.'⁷⁹ Another scheme which failed was that mooted by northern nationalists for a neutral, federal Ireland, to come into effect when 'a strong Irish army' could replace 'the present American-British army in occupation in Northern Ireland'; the new Irish army to be recruited from the six counties and from the Irish living in Britain or already enlisted in the British Army.⁸⁰

A definite casualty of the War was American goodwill towards the ending of Partition. Gray who had been so enthusiastic in 1940 for its solution, and who, even after the failure of the MacDonald talks, thought that 'this thing ought to be ended for everybody's sake',⁸¹ subsequently lost interest. By 1942, he was advising Dublin that the issue should be 'suppressed';⁸² by 1943, he believed de Valera had 'lost his chance to end Partition'.⁸³ The State Department by then had not 'the slightest desire' to become involved.⁸⁴

(h) The American Note

Gray with his belief in de Valera's capacity for 'skillful and mischievous intrigue',⁸⁵ feared that the United States would be embroiled in the Partition issue once the War concluded.⁸⁶ In September 1943, he warned Hull that de Valera was relying on the Partition grievance 'to gain sympathy in the United States at the peace table'; moreover, the subversive newspapers sympathetic to de Valera would be fed with 'formidable anti-partition anti-British propaganda as the war ends.' Moreover, since no solution to Partition was foreseeable unless neutrality were abandoned, 'only ceaseless agitation, disorder and growing bitterness' were in prospect.⁸⁷ Gray's stratagem was to prepare for Roosevelt a document to be presented to de Valera insisting on America's need for the Ports in advance of the Normandy landings.

Drafted on the assumption that de Valera would refuse, and with the intention of damaging his credibility in America, Gray's draft was discussed by Roosevelt and Churchill.⁸⁸ There were some misgivings,

79. Mulcahy note, 17 Aug. 1942, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7a/217.

80. Explained by Harry Diamond MP, NIHC:30:1951-2, 8 Oct. 1946.

81. Gray to Roosevelt, 25 Sept. 1940.

82. Gray to Hull, 21 Mar. 1942, FRUS:1942:1:pp.759-60.

83. Gray memo, 14 May 1943, FRUS:1943:3:pp.132-42.

84. Hull to Winant, 13 Nov. 1943, FRUS:1943:3:pp.161-2.

85. Gray memo, 14 May 1943, ibid., pp.132-42.

86. That the abolition of Partition should be the government's 'first plank in its postwar policy' was the demand of the 1943 Ard Fheis, Clar, 1943 Ard Fheis. This was repeated in 1944, Clar, 1944 Ard Fheis.

87. Gray to Hull, 28 Sept. 1943, FRUS:1943:3:pp.153-4.

88. See FRUS:1943:3:pp.132-71; ibid., 1943:A:pp.618-24; ibid. 1944:3:pp.216-21.

especially in London, that de Valera might somehow use a demand for the Ports as an opportunity to revive the, by now, quiescent Partition issue which the British would have found 'extremely embarrassing'.⁸⁹ For this reason, the demand for the Ports was dropped and a request for the removal of Axis diplomats from Dublin substituted. De Valera rejected the demand outright, suspected the motives of the Allies, was aware of the dangers of publication and sought - unsuccessfully - to have the Note withdrawn.⁹⁰ In considering his written reply to the Note, de Valera, at first, drafted what his press secretary Gallagher thought 'an over-apologetic note': de Valera, in his own defence, argued that Ireland was 'balanced on a razor's edge and in the circumstances a note of apology might not do us much harm.' The following weekend however he was impressed by children in a convent play on a seventeenth century bishop. Gallagher noted: 'He was greatly moved by the little play, and returning to the draft decided that no nation which had suffered as Ireland had done should be too meek. The note was carefully gone over and the accent of apology removed.'⁹¹

Gray reminded de Valera that if American lives were lost as a result of the intelligence activities of the German legation in Dublin, then 'American mothers and the American press' would conduct a propaganda campaign against Eire 'as you and I would least desire.'⁹² Yet Gray had prepared the American note precisely to damage de Valera with the American public. He claimed that the United States government was indifferent to whether the Note was published or not; he had no desire 'to embarrass you or to increase the tension' between the two countries. There would be no leak of the story from the U.S. Legation. Gray noted that de Valera was aware of 'the sinister implication' of having his refusal 'part of the record.'⁹³

Presently, the American Note was leaked to the press: motive alone would suggest a deliberate leak on the American side. Telephoned by the Irish Press for a comment, Gray protested that there was 'no reason to get excited about this thing...'.⁹⁴ But in fact, Gray must have been pleased: as American press reaction showed, the Note served its purpose. The American press proved virulently anti-Irish in the weeks which followed; an opinion poll the following month found that 71 per cent of adult Americans were aware of the issues which had been raised, and of these, 38 per cent approved trade sanctions against Ireland while a further 35 per cent thought a degree of force should be used against de Valera's government to ensure compliance with American wishes. James Reston in the New York Times believed that de Valera's refusal of the American request would weaken support for him in America after the war; Sumner Welles, recently resigned from the State Department, believed that

89. Hull to Winant, 13 Nov. 1943, FRUS:1943:3:pp.161-2; also Eden to Winant, 17 Dec 1943, PRO CAB 66/40 WP(43)589.

90. PRO CAB 66/48 WP(44)156; Gray to Hull, 24 Feb. 1944, FRUS:1944:3:pp.224-6; *ibid*, 8 Apr. 1944, -/pp.254-5; The Times, 18 Mar. 1944.

91. Gallagher, draft ms 'Dev', Gallagher papers, NLI, ms. 18,375(6).

92. Gray to de Valera, 2 Mar. 1944, PRO CAB 66/48 WP(44)151 annex III.

93. Gray to Hull, 8 Apr. 1944, FRUS:1944:3:pp.254-5.

94. Memo of Gray's reply to telephone query from ?Irish Press journalist, Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,334.

those who declined help to the Allies now, 'have no right to expect to be heard by the victors when the war is won.'⁹⁵ Cockram, monitoring press reaction for the Foreign Office, documented the Note's widespread success even in Irish-American circles: he believed

the wisest policy for Eire - and certainly one which her representatives in the United States constantly follow - is, like Brer Rabbit, to lie low and say nothing until the general atmosphere improves in the detente of the post war years.

But there was no room for complacency on the British side: 'instincts' were 'more long-lived than memories' and a mistake on the British side could always 'justify the American-Irish to themselves in beating their drums once more.'⁹⁶ The Gallup polls showed 'widespread ignorance or indifference', combined with 'irritation at Eire's attitude' and a 'surprising willingness on the part of even Irish Americans to disapprove of Irish policies.'⁹⁷ Gray was pleased with his work. On 15 March, he wrote to Hull: 'The general condemnation of De Valera by our press will have its effect without our taking further official measures.'⁹⁸ Three days later he reported Irish disquiet at the treatment of the issue in the American press 'as they never believed they would lose American sympathy.'⁹⁹

As can be seen from de Valera's handling of his wartime policy, he was, essentially, as moderate as circumstances allowed him to be. Because neutrality represented a conclusive expression of the sovereignty of the twentysix counties, his consistent refusal to trade it for a possible ending of Partition was defensible given Fianna Fail's basic strategy. Throughout every crisis and in all his political and diplomatic activity, he remained cautious in handling Partition. Within Fianna Fail, he deflected Donnelly's agitations to convene special conferences 'to discuss and take immediate steps' to secure its 'complete abolition' - this, in the summer of 1940!;¹⁰⁰ the party tolerated only a special meeting of the National Executive where de Valera explained his policy on 8 July 1940.¹⁰¹ Not only were the special conferences not approved but the opportunist faction - some of whom advocated force at the first wartime Ard Fheis in 1939 - did not have another Ard Fheis platform until 1943, when, incidentally they again advocated 'terrorist methods' which were duly censored from the press reports.¹⁰²

Along with containing the extremists within his party, de Valera also persuaded Cardinal MacRory to stop 'making cracks at the Ulster Government',¹⁰³ and he took every opportunity to tell Maffey, Hempel and Gray of the dangers inherent in any use of force against Partition. He himself advised against a prolonged debate on Partition at the 1943 Ard

95. Dwyer (1977:192-3).

96. B.Cockran, note, 14 Apr. 1945, PRO DO 35/1228/WX101/1/69.

97. Summary in *ibid.*

98. Gray to Hull, 15 Mar. 1944, *FRUS*:1944:3:pp.240-1.

99. *Ibid.*, 18 Mar. 1944, -/p.242.

100. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, May-June 1940, *passim*.

101. *Ibid.*, 8 July 1940.

102. *Belfast Newsletter*, 13 Dec. 1939; Gray to Hull, 1 Oct. 1943, *FRUS*:1943:3:pp.154-5.

103. Gray to Roosevelt, 25 Sept. 1940.

Fheis¹⁰⁴ and in April 1941, the Australian politician, Robert Menzies recorded de Valera as recognizing

that Great Britain could not possibly throw Ulster into Eire if that meant that Ulster was also to become neutral and that Great Britain was to be deprived of even those bases which she then had. In effect, the campaign for union could not usefully or sensibly be pursued during the war, assuming the neutrality of Eire.¹⁰⁵

Such caution was consistent with his policy throughout the 'twenties and 'thirties of insisting that each stage of 'the national advance' must be secure before risking any step - particularly one concerning the north - which might upset the consensus already reached in the south. Neutrality - it must also be said - was a very popular policy:

To let in the stranger is easy; to get him out again may mean centuries of blood and sacrifice. The Irish people want neither an old master nor a new one.¹⁰⁶

Consistently de Valera's regime in the 'thirties had seen itself as the custodian of the nation which it had a duty to 'restore': now it was claimed that 'Ireland's survival as a nation and the safety of the remnant of her long persecuted people depends on the maintenance of her neutrality.'¹⁰⁷

(iv) The Irish Question Reviewed: 1945-48

(a) The end of the Emergency

At the conclusion of the War, Bernard Shaw wrote that de Valera had been 'triumphantly saved...by the abhorred partition which gave the Allies a foothold in Ireland, and by the folly of the Fuhrer in making for Moscow instead of for Galway.'¹ Among others who shared this view were Spender, Eisenhower and The Economist.² For the Allies a central lesson of the war was that Ireland remained strategically important and that only by relying on the north's loyalty to Britain could the Atlantic be secure against a future enemy. Members of the British cabinet who pre-war had been well disposed to Irish unity were now converts to Partition because they believed that a united Ireland would have insisted on neutrality resulting in Britain being 'destroyed'.³ Where prewar, de Valera had seemed plausible in arguing that Irish unity would maximise Britain's security, wartime negotiations had obliged him to reveal that his ideal was a united Ireland which would then vote for neutrality.

104. Irish Press, 29 Sept. 1943.

105. Menzies (1967:41).

106. Irish Press, 6 Oct. 1941.

107. Irish Legation to the Dept. of State, 15 May 1941, FRUS:1941:3:p.232.

1. The Times, 18 May 1945.

2. Spender, diary, 18 May 1945, op.cit.; Eisenhower, quoted Gray, see note 1, ch.6:iii above; Economist, 18 July 1942.

3. Winant to Hull, 19 Sept. 1943, FRUS:1943:3:pp.152-3.

Were it not for Ulster's loyalty, claimed Churchill, 'slavery and death' would have been Britain's fate;⁴ indeed Britain's wartime indebtedness to Ulster gave to the Unionists a security which they had not known since Partition had first been enacted. Some measure of the shift in sympathies from 1938 was the Chancellor's admission, in 1942, that Northern Ireland had 'considerable leeway' to make up if she were to attain equality with mainland Britain: 'You can confidently rely on the Treasury always considering such a case sympathetically, as indeed the principle of parity requires us to do.'⁵ The extension to Northern Ireland of the British welfare state deepened the gulf between north and south. The differences were also psychological - due to what Lyons describes as the south's 'almost total isolation from the rest of mankind.' Sheltered by neutrality, the south missed 'the shared experience, the comradeship in suffering, the new thinking about the future...'.⁶

That this period continued to be known as 'the Emergency' was itself an indication of the south's isolation from the rest of Europe: de Valera was living in a 'Celtic twilight',⁷ his 'idea of paradise' being 'a Gaelic sanctuary'.⁸ Fine Gael's incoming leader, Mulcahy, thought de Valera's policy had resulted in a society 'confused, ignorant, and negative, almost too cowed in its ignorance and doubt to proclaim any positive policy.'⁹ The Irish Times editor, Smyllie, believed that as long as de Valera remained leader there would be 'a tendency to chase rainbows...'.¹⁰ Unionists too noted the deepening gulf between south and north: Spender believed de Valera's hope was to keep the south 'as remote from the world's affairs as Mars';¹¹ 'No one', claimed Andrews, had done 'so much to divide Ireland' as de Valera;¹² Brooke confessed to being sometimes in doubt as to whether the south really wanted 'a solution of this Border question or whether it is a happy battle flag to pull out at certain awkward moments';¹³ but, he added, notwithstanding 'cajolery, threats, arms and bullets' Northern Ireland would remain within the United Kingdom.¹⁴

With the news of Hitler's death on 30 April 1945 de Valera insisted - ignoring his closest advisers¹⁵ - on expressing his sympathy to Hempel. He believed Hempel's conduct throughout the war to have been 'irreproachable' and he believed it would have been 'an act of unpardonable discourtesy' not to have called.¹⁶ He was aware of the inevitable propaganda, telling

4. Churchill to Andrews, The Times, 10 May 1943.

5. R.J.Lawrence, The Government of Northern Ireland, (Oxford:1965) p.70.

6. Lyons (1971:549-51).

7. Howard (1956:256).

8. Maffey, 'The Irish Question in 1945', 21 Aug. 1945, PRO CAB 129/2 CP(45)152 annex I.

9. The Times, 22 Nov. 1944.

10. R.M.Smyllie, 'Unneutral neutral Eire', Foreign Affairs, vol.24, p.236.

11. Spender to Powell, 18 Jan 1941, Spender papers, op.cit.

12. NIHC:30:1985, 8 Oct. 1946.

13. NIHC:29:79, 24 July 1945.

14. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 4-11 Aug. 1945, p.7365.

15. Confidential source; the Canadian representative in Dublin, Kearney, found the Dept of External Affairs 'profoundly depressed' in the aftermath of the visit, Maffey to DO, 21 May 1945, PRO DO 35/1229/WX/110/3.

16. De Valera to Brennan, Whit Monday 1945, quoted Longford and O'Neill (1970:411).

Hempel: 'No matter. I do what I think is right.'¹⁷ Maffey, who believed 'the "absent treatment"' had resulted in an 'eclipse which had closed down on him and the Irish Question', believed that de Valera's condolences to Hempel, particularly as they had been followed by the revelations of Buchenwald, 'gradually took on a smear of turpitude'. Maffey was upset some days later when Churchill, in his victory broadcast at the conclusion of the War, focussed attention on de Valera with a bitter attack on Irish neutrality. De Valera made a politically brilliant reply: according to Maffey, he 'saw his advantage, found the authentic anti-British note and did not put a foot wrong.'¹⁸ Maffey sympathised 'very deeply' with the Dominions Office at what he presumed was their chagrin at Churchill's mistake: Ireland needed 'quiet treatment and a patient, consistent policy. But how are you to control Ministerial incursions into your china shop? Phrases make history here.'¹⁹ Canada's representative, Kearney, shared Maffey's disappointment: '"We had him on a plate. We had him where we wanted him. But look at the papers this morning!'"²⁰

Maffey summarised Britain's interest in a position paper which he appropriately entitled, 'The Irish question in 1945'. He argued that Irish influence in the United States had

been greatly reduced - permanently reduced if we play our hand patiently, remembering that for the outside world Dark Rosaleen has a sex appeal, whereas Brittania is regarded as a maiden aunt.

He recommended that Britain should act with forbearance, 'not talking too much and leaving others to judge the moral issue'; in that case Eire 'will come badly out of all this in the eyes of the world' and her power for anti-British 'mischief' would be greatly reduced. There was no assumption in Maffey's paper that Partition would provide a long-term solution to the Irish question: he believed the Catholic birth-rate would eventually create a nationalist majority and he predicted a resort to force:

It will cause guns to go off in Ireland once again. The Catholics of the North will call out to the Catholics of the South, saying: "We are only doing what you did in 1916. Are you going to leave us in the lurch?"

Nor did he believe that Britain's strategic interests, which he believed paramount, would be protected by a united Ireland solution:

The idea that Northerners forced into the South would leaven the South with British loyalties is childish. Mr. de Valera has thrown that fly over me in vain.²¹

Maffey was vigilant in monitoring United Kingdom policy to ensure that de Valera was not given a 'dangerous handle' with which to exploit the Partition issue. Consequently it was with some alarm that he reported to the Dominions Office in October 1945 a meeting with de Valera who was 'greatly agitated' about a Stormont threat to expel southern workers who had migrated to the north to work during the War. The issue, wrote Maffey

17. Quoted in Carolle J. Carter, 'Ireland: America's neutral Ally: 1939-1941', Eire-Ireland, vol.12, no.2, p.12.

18. Maffey to DO, 21 May 1945, PRO DO 35/1229/WX110/3.

19. Maffey to Machtig, 21 May 1945, *ibid*.

20. As note 18 above.

21. As note 8 above.

was 'full of politics' and was then 'the sole preoccupation' of de Valera's government.²²

Despite de Valera's anger and apprehension, at the prospect of any legislation which would limit 'the free movement of Irishmen in Ireland', his initial response was again moderate and pragmatic. He told Maffey that he had envisaged 'an orderly and measured process of return' to the south of those who had emigrated to Britain for wartime work and wondered why the southern workers in the north could not also 'be handled in that spirit?'²³ With de Valera's help, and despite blatantly insensitive speeches by the Unionists, the issue was by the following spring, 'quite quiet'.²⁴

(b) The 'psychological moment'

Although no juncture in European history could have been less propitious to seek sympathy for Irish grievances on Partition, Donnelly believed that the end of the war would be 'the psychological moment' at which 'to make partition the burning question it used to be years ago before it became submerged in matters not so important.' In making these points to what was to be the last wartime Ard Fheis of Fianna Fail, Donnelly announced that he had 'come with a message' from the northern representatives who were asking all southern parties to join with them in forming an anti-Partition body to prepare a political and propaganda campaign against Partition. Donnelly deprecated all the 'empty talk' about the abolition of Partition and insisted that only through a new nationwide organization embracing nationalists north and south could progress be made.²⁵ The following month, as Donnelly's correspondence with Healy reveals, more progress had been made in interesting Fine Gael and Labour in the new organization than was the case with Fianna Fail. Donnelly doubted if de Valera

will come as far as either. You must keep harping on unity in the South as well as the North, and insist on making and keeping partition a national issue instead of a party slogan. Always remember de Valera has no team, and whatever he says, the party will agree.²⁶

Twelve months later - optimistic because of the victory of the Labour party in the British election - two northern nationalists, McAteer and Conlon invited all 'nationally minded' groups and public representatives to a conference in Dungannon where the Irish Anti-Partition League was inaugurated.²⁷ This development can scarcely have met with de Valera's

22. Maffey to DO, 16 Oct. 1945, PRO DO 35/1229/Wx123/5; Spender had been sceptical of Unionist ministers' handling of this issue during the War, Spender diary, 23-28 Mar. 1942, op.cit. See also Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon, Henry Patterson, The state in Northern Ireland:1921-1972, (Manchester:1979) section, 'Populism and the "fifth column"', pp.110-14.

23. Maffey's report of talk with de Valera, 16 Oct. 1945, PRO DO 35/1229/WX123/5.

24. See R.Price, note, 20 May 1946, PRO DO 35/1228/WX101/146.

25. Irish Press, 11 Oct. 1944.

26. Donnelly to Healy, 24 Nov. 1944, Healy papers, D2991/A/164B.

27. Phoenix (1978:ch.3,pp.13-14).

approval: it was, after all, partly the fruit of Donnelly's interventionist tactics,²⁸ was an implied criticism of de Valera's own anti-Partition strategy and threatened to usurp his leadership on the issue. Disillusionment with Fianna Fail was now widespread among northern nationalist leaders²⁹ and this new development clearly rendered more difficult any attempt on de Valera's part to follow MacEntee's advice which was to remain silent on the north as 'the only way' to make progress.³⁰

Meanwhile a 'Friends of Ireland' group of Labour backbenchers at Westminster interested themselves in Partition and to Maffey's discomfort sought guidance from de Valera. One MP, Longden, had told Maffey he had been 'tremendously impressed' with what de Valera had told him. Maffey asked what that was.

He told me that Mr. de Valera had said that every concession, every chance, had been offered by him to the North and that his offers had been rejected. Now he could do no more. If the unity and independence of all Ireland were established he would give new consideration to his own policy towards England.

The MP had 'found this very impressive'; his colleague had 'more ballast, but was also under the spell.'³¹

Of more concern to the Labour government in London was the potential exploitation of the Irish ethnic vote in the United States. Maffey had warned that, at the opportune moment, the Irish propaganda machine in America was likely to be employed 'with vigour, ruthlessness and often covert rather than open methods...'.³² Moreover, Irish diplomats in November 1945 had been recalled to Dublin for a week-long briefing session. Under pressure from their Dublin embassy the Foreign Office prepared a list of the probable Irish arguments in the expected propaganda campaign and the British rebuttals commended to British embassy staffs abroad. The British believed that the Irish could be expected to make the claim that Partition was

A crime against the Irish people and against nature. Maintained (i) externally by subsidies and force from Britain, which thereby demonstrates the hypocrisy of her war aims and of her pretended solicitude for the rights of small nations, and (ii) internally by a Northern Ireland Government employing brutal methods, religious intolerance and political gerrymandering to keep in subjection a large and increasing Roman Catholic minority which desires union with Eire.

The British reply should be that there was 'no argument' in favour of the south's independence that was not also an argument for Partition because 'the great majority of the predominantly Anglo-Scottish, Protestant and industrial community of Northern Ireland' had no wish to be incorporated in the Irish, Roman Catholic and predominantly agricultural south. Partition in fact, enabled both parts of Ireland 'to choose their own form of government in accordance with the terms of the Atlantic Charter and of

28. As note 26 above.

29. Irish News, 26 June 1940; differences between Healy and MacEntee Apr. 1944, Healy papers, D2991/A/160A.

30. Sean MacEntee, interview, Irish Times, 13 Dec. 1979.

31. Maffey to Machtig, 16 Jan. 1946, PRO DO 35/1228/101/1/95.

32. Maffey to DO, May 1945, PRO DO 35/1230/WX132/1/140.

Meanwhile, the Ulster Unionists were also contemplating an incursion into American politics. Mooting a visit by Brooke himself, the Home Office believed it would be worthwhile, only to be rebuked by the Foreign Office who advised strongly against any official visit from Northern Ireland. British representatives in the United States believed the move would be 'disastrous'; the Irish issue had 'mercifully' been absent from the headlines for the previous twentyfive years: 'Emphasis on Ulster particularism would therefore awaken sleeping dogs, which we had every reason to hope were not merely somnolent but lethargic.'³⁴

One advantageous result of the War was the establishment of a British embassy in Dublin which allowed de Valera to make direct representations of his viewpoint to London without depending on Dulanty. In May 1946 he requested a meeting with Maffey to impress on him the "'tragic difficulty'" facing the government in dealing with those willing to use force against Partition. De Valera added that 'if he were to-day a young man in Northern Ireland, he felt that he would be giving his life to fight the existing order of things.'³⁵ Two months later, another member of the embassy staff, Norman Archer reported another conversation in which de Valera 'clearly intended to create the impression of a reasonably balanced approach to the partition question. As a tactician, he has perhaps decided that this is more likely to be effective than an obvious fanaticism.' Archer paraphrased de Valera's arguments:

One had to estimate the respective weights and positions of the two extreme views in the island and then to choose some middle course between them. If, from time to time, either extreme altered, one could move one's own course a little one way or the other. If one pursued this policy with care, the extremists on both sides might in time gradually become more tractable.³⁶

In September, de Valera tried to interest the visiting Labour minister, Herbert Morrison in his federal proposals but Morrison thought it would be a mistake 'to rush the issue...'. If, in time, there was a change of view in Northern Ireland, '...that would be another matter, but to expect us to coerce Ulster was expecting too much, especially in view of the troubled world in which we all lived.' De Valera, Morrison informed his colleagues, was 'not cross' with this line of argument. 'He rather shrugged his shoulders and indicated that in that case the difficulties in our relationships would have to continue.'³⁷ As this exchange demonstrated, both the Irish and British sides saw the strategic implications of Partition as the most salient. This had also emerged in Archer's talk with de Valera who had agreed with Archer's suggestion that those interested in Partition 'would benefit from a drive round the Antrim coast road whence the narrowness of the north-western channel is so strikingly evident.' De Valera had 'dangled the usual "carrot" as to the

33. PRO DO 35/1228/Wx101/1/69.

34. PRO DO 35/1231/WX168/4.

35. Maffey's note of conversation with de Valera, 18 May 1946, PRO CAB 129/10 CP(46)212.

36. Archer, note of talk with de Valera, 5 July 1946, PRO DO 35/1228/WX101/154.

37. Morrison's note of talk with de Valera, 12 Sept. 1946, PRO CAB 129/13, CP (46)381.

defence problem being solved by early agreement once Ireland's unity had been achieved...'. Queried on his definition of 'early', de Valera 'felt convinced that the period between one Irish General Election and the next would be sufficient.' He was however 'less confident in replying to the old question whether this proposed defence agreement would necessarily "involve Ireland in all England's wars".'³⁸

Archer's note of this July conversation seems to have created initial interest on the part of Labour's Commonwealth Relations Secretary, Viscount Addison,³⁹ who asked whether there was 'any useful action' which the British government could take with a view to 'furthering closer association between Eire and Northern Ireland.'⁴⁰ His civil servants seem to have thought this naive and gently reminded their minister of the strategic lessons to be learned from de Valera's wartime neutrality: it was 'unthinkable' to consider any policy which might result in the loss of all Irish ports.⁴¹ By the time Addison brought the issue to the cabinet in October, he was insisting that it must 'never be forgotten' that all de Valera could contemplate in June 1940 was 'a united Ireland on the basis of the whole being neutral in the war.' Britain's policy should be one of silence on Partition;

...any suggestion that we are prepared to give the matter consideration, is, in view of the strong feelings existing on both sides, certain to lead to serious trouble. We must be careful not to find ourselves on a slippery slope.⁴²

(c) The 1948 Election

As the reports of Dail questions reveal, any Irish government which had no progress to report on Partition was vulnerable to political opponents who espoused a more agitational approach. The founding of Clann na Poblactha and their by-election successes in 1947 prompted de Valera to call a general election in January 1948. The challenge posed to Fianna Fail by MacBride's new party was formidable: explicitly, it questioned Fianna Fail's claim to be the mainstream nationalist-republican movement and, in particular, accused Fianna Fail of talking about Partition but doing nothing.⁴³

The Anti-Partition League sent a questionnaire to all parties in the south - the most overt intervention by northern nationalists in any southern election - and asked voters

to 'support no party which does not pledge itself to give active and open support as a government to the work of the Anti-Partition League...., including the giving of reasonable financial support and publicity.'⁴⁴

38. As note 36 above.

39. The Dominions Office had by now been renamed the Commonwealth Relations Office.

40. Addison to Machtig, 23 July 1946, PRO DO 35/1228/WX101/154.

41. Stephenson to Machtig, 24 July, Machtig, minute, 25 July, Addison minute, 25 July 1946, *ibid*.

42. PRO CAB 129/13 CP(46)391.

43. *Irish Press*, 31 Jan. 1948; interview Sean MacBride.

44. *Ibid*, 14 Jan. 1948.

The League also sent circulars calling for a meeting between the incoming government and the League executive 'to discuss what approach' should be made to the British government on Partition.⁴⁵ De Valera in his reply assured the League of his government's preoccupation with the issue, of his sympathy with their efforts to inform the British public of the facts, and of the willingness of any Fianna Fail government 'to hear and consider the views of any group which has the removal of Partition at heart.' However regarding the League's request to 'discuss what approach' should be made by the incoming government to London, de Valera insisted that this must be the sole responsibility of the elected government.⁴⁶ MacBride's reply promised greater co-operation with the League especially on 'publicity and propaganda'.⁴⁷

One plank in Clann na Poblachta's platform which drew the particular ire of Fianna Fail was their promise to open the doors of Leinster House to the elected representatives of the six counties. The unkindest cut of all may well have come from Aodh de Blacam, long a de Valera supporter and serving on Fianna Fail's sub-committee on Partition ten years before, who now switched his allegiance to Clann na Poblachta.⁴⁸ De Blacam railed against Fianna Fail's failure on Partition: ministers who admitted that they had 'no plan to end Partition', were guilty of a 'a terrible desertion from the principles of 1932.' Moreover, de Blacam accused Fianna Fail ministers of attempting to destroy Clann na Poblachta's plan. This was to emulate the first Dail by inviting the representatives of the north into Dail Eireann and 'when they come, we would say to the world, are you going to permit a foreign power to occupy the territory from which these men come?'⁴⁹

Boland believed this a 'completely foolish policy',⁵⁰ MacEntee thought it 'absurd': if northern MPs had full voting rights in the Dail, 'it would follow that the government should undertake extending its authority over all Ireland, even by arms.'⁵¹ MacBride claimed that these attacks were based on a misreading of his party's policy which foresaw the nomination of northern MPs to the senate and their being granted a 'right of audience' in the Dail.⁵² MacBride was also critical of Fianna Fail's 'lip-service' on Partition: he believed a review of the Irish language policy might be necessary to attract the Unionists; and he acknowledged that for as long as the south's social welfare payments were below those of the north, it would be impossible to interest northerners in unity.⁵³ The Ulster Unionist Party was delighted: Warnock suggested that MacBride's election manifesto might have been written by themselves; as for Fine Gael, added Warnock, they 'never even mentioned' Partition in their manifesto; and de Valera

realised quite clearly the impossibility of uniting North and South

45. Ibid., 21 Jan. 1948.

46. Ibid., 2 Feb. 1948.

47. Statement by P.J.Scott-Maunsell, of the Anti-Partition League, ibid., 2 Feb. 1948.

48. Interview with Douglas Gageby.

49. Irish Press, 19 Jan. 1948.

50. Ibid., 28 Jan. 1948.

51. Ibid., 29 Jan. 1948.

52. Ibid., 21 Jan. 1948.

53. Ibid., 22 Jan. 1948.

and it was not unfair to say that, recognizing the fact, he had not made any real attempt to alter the position.⁵⁴

Fianna Fail pilloried MacBride for daring to suggest that even among northern nationalists, 'real enthusiasm' for unity could not be aroused unless 'economic conditions and social services' were as attractive in the south.⁵⁵ Clann na Poblachta, Lemass claimed, was 'Mr. Warnock's 26 Counties fifth column'.⁵⁶ Fianna Fail's persistent claim throughout the election was that their party was best placed to secure a 32 county, Gaelic-speaking republic: it should be left to de Valera to complete the struggle of the centuries.⁵⁷ Indeed, those attending the party's final rally were told that they had a patriotic duty to vote for Fianna Fail although 'they could, if they wished, be renegade Irishmen and knife Eamon de Valera in the back.'⁵⁸ Although no coalition strategy had been agreed before polling day, the combined opposition parties won sufficient seats to end Fianna Fail's sixteen year tenure of office: an unlikely coalition, their fundamental point of agreement was a belief in ousting de Valera from power.⁵⁹

De Valera's years in power had achieved much of his programme in the years since 1932. But all his gains had one inevitable side-effect, the further alienation of the Ulster unionists. On Partition, Fianna Fail reckoned that Articles 2 and 3 in the 1937 Constitution were a considerable advance, but again, these had served only to estrange the unionists. Moreover, the latter's political weight in London had been considerably enhanced by their war record, just as Dublin's had been weakened. There were lessons in all of this for anti-Partitionists - and, perhaps, some had learned them. But among the incoming Coalition government were some individuals keen to outbid Fianna Fail in opposing Partition. Clann na Poblachta's approach was reminiscent of the interventionism which Donnelly had, in vain, advocated. The Coalition years were to provide further lessons on Partition to the south's politicians.

54. *Ibid.*, 27 Jan. 1948.

55. MacEntee at Dublin, 28 Jan and 4 Feb., Derrig at Dublin, 30 Jan. and Aiken at Castleconnell, 30 Jan., are all reported on these dates in the *Irish Press* speaking in this sense.

56. *Ibid.*, 29 Jan. see also MacEntee *ibid.*, 4 Feb. 1948.

57. See speeches by de Valera at Kilmihil, 2 Jan., Milltown Malbay, 3 Jan., Dublin 4 Feb; Lemass, Carrick-on-Suir, 2 Feb.; and Traynor, 19 Jan. 1948, all dates being publication dates of speeches in *Irish Press*.

58. Matt Feehan at Fianna Fail's final rally, GPO Dublin *ibid.*, 4 Feb. 1948; see also Harry Colley, speech at same venue.

59. O'Leary (1979:38-40).

The Taoiseach (de Valera): If I am asked: "Have you a solution for it?" in the sense: "Is there a line of policy which you propose to pursue which you think can, within a reasonable time be effective?" I have to say that I have not and neither has anybody else. All I can do is choose the methods which seem most likely to produce the best results.

Mr. McQuillan: Hoping for a miracle.¹

(i) Out of power

(a) The end of 'external association'

The incoming Coalition government was prepared to give the Ulster Unionists 'any reasonable constitutional guarantees' if they were willing to espouse a unitary or federal Ireland.² Brooke, who had been over this ground before, thought the tone of the Coalition's anti-Partitionist speeches 'less aggressive and more ingratiating' than de Valera's, but the north's response was predictable, the south's 'fair promises and bland assurances' providing no temptation: 'Do they think our constitutional status is up for auction? They may bid as high as they please, but our answer remains the same - "Ulster is not for sale."' ³ Despite constant rebuffs, Dublin's enthusiasm never waned, the change of government in the south rekindling public interest in the Partition question. There were many reasons for this: first, the Coalition, and especially the Clann na Poblachta party, were determined to make progress on the issue; second, Fianna Fail, without the constraints of office, and with their leadership of the anti-Partition cause in question, responded with a less cautious approach; third, and most importantly, the Coalition's early decision to repeal de Valera's External Relations Act precipitated a crisis in Anglo-Irish relations which had profound consequences for the Partition question.

The External Relations Act, embodying de Valera's external association idea, had, for the previous decade, been the basis of the south's tenuous links with the Commonwealth and had been justified by de Valera on the ground that it was a concession to the Ulster unionists. Under pressure from his republican flank, he could argue - as early as 1939 - that were it not to result in unity 'after a certain time', that it might be repealed.⁴ The Act was controversial: it left de Valera

1. DE:126:2024, 19 July 1951.

2. Transcript of MacBride interview with Manchester Guardian, McGilligan papers, UCD P35/218.

3. Brooke, statement, 30 July 1948, Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 31 July- 7 Aug. 1948, p.9426.

4. De Valera, lecture, Irish Press, 24 Apr. 1939.

vulnerable to republican sneering,⁵ Unionist contempt,⁶ British bemusement,⁷ and constant harassment across the floor of the Dail that the formula which the Act embodied was a 'disgusting, fraudulent, dishonest attempt to blind our people'.⁸ Moreover, an element within Fianna Fail regularly called for its repeal.⁹ Disappointed that his concession had evoked no response from the Unionists and tired of the constant harassment in the Dail, de Valera had, whilst in power, considered repealing the Act.¹⁰ Once the Coalition mooted the idea, he promised no opposition from the Fianna Fail benches.¹¹

Controversially announced by Costello in Canada, the intention to repeal the Act provided a six month drama in Anglo-Irish relations. Rugby's verdict was that Costello had been 'slapdash and amateur' - the fact was that Fine Gael 'had a sudden brainwave that they would steal the "Long Man's" clothes.' Rugby believed that de Valera 'would himself certainly have annulled the Act' had he been returned to power.¹² He also reported to London, Lemass's claim that a 'new and complicating factor' had been introduced into the Partition issue by the Act's repeal. Rugby was apprehensive lest the new formula needed for the south's relationship with the Commonwealth, would leave 'the door...open for violent and ruthless attack backed by the full force of Fianna Fail.' The Commonwealth Relations Office would 'appreciate the force behind the cry(:) "No new adjustments whatever till Partition is done away with".'¹³

Rugby was anxious to dispel any complacency in Britain on the part of those who believed that the repeal of the External Relations Act had 'automatically put the partition question to sleep'. In his opinion, there could be 'no greater mistake'. Repeal of the Act had merely destroyed 'the best chance of a friendly solution.' Rugby predicted a stimulation of national sentiment on both sides of the border; although 'all the best Irish opinion' deprecated violence, Irish politicians were 'not free agents and they know it'; their oratory was, in Rugby's view, 'a summons to battle' which had the effect of 'poisoning young minds'.

Inexorably, inevitably, the Irish Republic now created will be pushed from behind to work out the destiny so long and so passionately preached. "Ireland shall be free from the centre to the sea." The Government need not move, will not move.

Rugby was particularly alarmed by the school of Unionists who believed

5. See for instance Sligo Champion, 18 Apr. 1936 for typical republican dismissal of de Valera's idea of external association on which his External Relations Act was based later that year.

6. Brooke, at Stormont, 30 Nov., 1 Dec. 1948.

7. Churchill, The Times, 15 March 1944 for comment that he was 'not prepared to attempt exact definitions which might be difficult even for eminent jurists'; A Special Correspondent in The Times, 20 Oct. 1944 wrote that the relationship between Eire and Britain was 'an exception to all rules.' The Economist, believed it had been reduced by de Valera to 'a solemn farce...'. 23 Oct. 1948.

8. Dillon in the Dail, DE:101:2179-2183, 19 June 1946; also interview James Dillon; also see McGilligan, DE:106:2306, 20 June 1947.

9. Clar, 1944 Ard Fheis; also see debate and de Valera's defence of his formula against its critics within the party at the 1945 Ard Fheis, Irish Press, 7 Nov. 1945.

10. Irish Press, 15 June 1949; Longford and O'Neill (1970:430).

11. DE:112:2441, 6 Aug. 1948.

12. Rugby to DO, 15 Oct. 1948, PRO CAB 21/1835; see also Lyons, (1971:556-60); David Thornley, interview with J.A. Costello, 24 June 1969, transmitted, 7 Days, RTE television, 6 Jan. 1976.

13. Rugby to Machtig, 21 Oct 1948, PRO CAB 21/1835.

that a show of force would be an ideal opportunity for the British Army to demonstrate its mastery: such a view had 'no element of wisdom in it. It will be a day of triumph for Eire if the forces of the Crown are actively employed against patriotic elements in Ireland. British bayonets are Ireland's secret weapon.'¹⁴

Rugby had no doubt about the 'significant consideration' for the United Kingdom: this was that 'each party must now outdo its rivals in a passionate crusade for Irish unity.' Whilst the firebrands in the Dail who advocated force were not representative, 'it is regrettably true that, in the atmosphere of a national drive against Partition, words like these may provoke irresponsible elements to act, and that once the spark of violence has been kindled it will not be possible for any Eire Government to put it out.' Rugby's view was that the 'Republican bandwagon' had come 'triumphantly home with practically every politician, on board' - yet again, the ratchet effect at work.

No leading politician dare to appear reluctant to join the anti-Partition bandwagon or to seem doubtful about the wisdom of giving it a shove. And yet it should be evident that there is a stiff ditch in front of them, dug deep by Eire's neutrality in the war, and now deeper still by the formal declaration of a Republic - a move away from Crown and Commonwealth which has still further outraged the feelings of the loyalists of the North.¹⁵

Although not surprised by the repeal of the External Relations Act - they had predicted its demise since its enactment - the Ulster Unionists expressed concern to London about the implications for them of the south's policy. They sensed both danger and opportunity. Brooke was vigilant in his public insistence that Northern Ireland's interests would be protected, assuring Stormont that 'if any further safeguards are needed', his government would insist that Ulster's position was 'secure and impregnable.'¹⁶ Churchill, too, hinted at the need for a recognition at Westminster that Dublin's initiative had 'simplified and consolidated' Northern Ireland's position:

It is evident that a gulf is being opened, a ditch is being dug, between Northern and Southern Ireland which invests partition with greater permanency and reality than ever before.¹⁷

In January, the British government heard of Brooke's serious misgivings about the political and psychological effects in the north if London were to acquiesce in the south's new title of 'Republic of Ireland': such an acceptance might be thought to weaken London's case if Partition were to be raised at the United Nations and, in general, it might be interpreted as an implicit recognition of the south's constitutional claim and would suggest that Partition was only temporary. Moreover, Brooke warned that his government would 'find it difficult' to persuade their parliament to ratify an agreement which made use of the new

14. Martin Cowley, 'Diplomatic silence considered safest response to anti-partition campaign', Irish Times, 1 and 2 Jan. 1980, reporting Rugby's memo of 29 Nov. 1948.

15. Rugby memo on Repeal of the External Relations Act, 3 Dec. 1948, PRO CAB 21/1837.

16. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 20-27 Nov. 1948, p.9647; The Times, 23 Oct. and 26 Nov. 1948.

17. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 20-27 Nov. 1948, p.9647.

title.¹⁸ Publicly and privately, Brooke also played the 'Ulster in danger' card: in a Belfast speech in October, he stated that if he saw that 'the forces' were gathering against Ulster 'and that we shall have to fight', then he would have no hesitation in going to the Ulster people, believing that he would 'get the answer that Ulster has always given.'¹⁹ He also detailed for London's attention the north's intelligence estimate of IRA training south of the border. Brooke added that there was, in republican circles,

a good deal of talk...about the creation of a "Sudeten" situation. The policy advocated is to foment disturbances in Northern Ireland, and to bring pressure on the Eire government to send troops into Northern Ireland to "protect the nationally-minded people".

The Unionists, however, believed that the Dublin government was 'not likely...to yield to such pressure' in which case the 'irregulars propose to undertake this task themselves.' In detailing these fears to London, Brooke was reminding Attlee that the Unionists 'naturally look to the British Government to defend our territory...'. Attlee assured Brooke that if questioned in the House of Commons he would make it clear that 'should the need arise' Northern Ireland would be defended against aggression in the same way as any other part of the United Kingdom.²⁰

It seems probable that Brooke overstated his claims to London. That his pressure helped to secure the considerable Unionist advance in the Ireland Act cannot be doubted: the Act in effect, switched the veto on Irish unity from Westminster to Stormont. Although Lord Pakenham - friend and biographer of de Valera - was one member of Attlee's government who expressed dissent, the cabinet approved this considerable gain for the Unionists, justifying it, in part, on the grounds that without reassurances there might be a revival of loyalist paramilitary groups in anticipation of a renewed IRA campaign for the south.²¹ That this was cited in justifying the cabinet's decision gives some indication of the success of Brooke's lobbying. But of greater importance was the wider security question of defending the North Atlantic, a dimension which, Sir Norman Brook, Secretary to the cabinet, argued was 'self-evident and fresh in everybody's mind as a result of...the last war.' He suggested to Attlee that because of these considerations, the proposals from the Ulster Unionists should be given 'a rather more sympathetic hearing than they might be thought to deserve on their strict merits.' Attlee was now being advised by Brook and lobbied by Brooke that Northern Ireland's position, in the wake of repeal of the External Relations Act in the south, needed strengthening.

However great the dislike of de Valera's formulation of external association, the breaking of this last link with the Commonwealth clearly prompted a significant shift in British policy on Partition. Norman Brook's memorandum for the cabinet, emphasised that with the north now the

18. Martin Cowley, 'British reassured Unionists when accepting Republic', Irish Times, 1 and 2 Jan. 1980.

19. The Times, 23 Oct. 1948.

20. Martin Cowley, 'Diplomatic silence considered safest response to anti-Partition campaign', Irish Times, 1 and 2 Jan. 1980.

21. Martin Cowley, 'Lord Longford warned against N.I. guarantee', ibid.

only part of Ireland with any British connection and bearing in mind the lessons of the War, that it would henceforth be impossible for any British party to retain their 'detached attitude' on Partition: Brook now believed that London would be 'compelled to take a positive line' in support of Northern Ireland.²² This advice seems to have been closely followed by Attlee's government, their clause in the Ireland Act giving a solemn guarantee that 'in no event will Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be a part of His Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom without the consent of the parliament of Northern Ireland.'²³

De Valera was in London when he heard the first rumour that Stormont might be promised such a veto:

If this thing is done to our country, I say for myself that then feelings will be back to what they were in 1919 to 1921. If these people are to tell us that our country can only be united by setting us an impossible task, we hope another way will be found that will not be impossible. We had hoped for something different than that.²⁴

On the night of publication of the Bill, de Valera was engaged in a public debate in London with the Ulster Unionist MP, Professor Savory. He accused the British government of cynically setting the south 'an impossible task'. For as long as Partition lasted, continued de Valera, Britain was giving the youth of Ireland 'an interest in your downfall. That is wrong and foolish for you and you may find yet that that is true.' When a heckler shouted 'Is that a threat?', de Valera replied, 'with heat', that he was merely speaking the truth; and that for as long as Britain adopted the attitude of 'the herrenvolk, so long will you compel me and others to have the sentiments towards you which we now possess.'²⁵ Some days later at a meeting in Ennis he said that if the British 'try to put new bars to the door we are going to add new pieces to the weight of the battering ram':²⁶ a week later, he said that the new British measure would have to be opposed 'by every means that is effective and just.'²⁷

In no speeches since the Sudeten crisis of ten years before had de Valera been so agitated about the Partition question: during these days, he variously described the new British guarantee to Stormont as calamitous, fantastic, outrageous, almost incredible, stupid, and mad:²⁸ 'it makes one desperate' to see the border nationalists being obliged to 'lie under the heel of the Ascendancy in the neighbourhood of Belfast...'.²⁹ Clearly, de Valera believed there had been a serious deterioration in the south's anti-Partition campaign. He told the Dail that he himself had tried in the past to secure from a British prime minister a declaration that the British desired and would use their influence to secure Irish unity. If the British

were sincere a declaration of that sort would not be too much to

22. Brook's views reported from recently released documents in the PRO, Irish Times, 4 Jan. 1980.

23. quoted in John A. Murphy, Ireland in the twentieth century, (Dublin:1975) p.127.

24. Irish Press, 2 May 1949.

25. Ibid., 4 May 1949.

26. Ibid., 7 May 1949.

27. Ibid., 14 May 1949.

28. Based on de Valera speeches reported ibid., 4,9,14 May; also DE:115:810, 10 May 1949.

29. Irish Press, 9 May 1949.

expect. We have never got that. Instead we have got the contrary assertion now.³⁰

Although he had every reason to feel embittered at what he must have seen as the subversion of so much of his own patiently constructed Partition strategy in the course of the previous six months, de Valera refrained from public criticism of the Coalition. The note he struck, while bellicose, was relatively moderate. Henry Harrison, for instance, in a leaflet calling for the deletion of the offending clause in the British Bill, characterised the northern nationalists as

...during quiet times effectively muzzled, shackled and oppressed and during times of public excitement...treated by the Orange mob and other government agencies in mufti with as abominable and as barbarous cruelty, involving arson, bloodshed and death, as ever were the Jews in Hitler's Germany.³¹

Others, - including at least one future front bench spokesman for Fianna Fail - advocated force in the wake of the Ireland Bill.³² Lemass, who now suggested that the ending of Partition would prove to be the most difficult of Fianna Fail's national aims, predicted that history might well record that what had been lacking during recent months was the 'wise leadership' of de Valera.³³ This assessment was probably fair. It seems improbable that de Valera - if he would have broken with the Commonwealth at all - would have mishandled the announcement of his decision in the manner in which Costello did, thereby excusing the subsequent lack of consultation with Dublin when the Partition clause in the Ireland Act was being drafted. Had de Valera been at the helm, it seems probable that he would have sounded the British government on their possible responses, thereby averting the entrenchment of Partition which was the net result of the Coalition's policy.

It certainly seems probable that if the British threatened a guarantee to Stormont such as that which they later passed in 1949, that de Valera would have maintained his tenuous link with the Commonwealth. It is true that de Valera mooted the repeal of the Act to Rugby in 1947³⁴ and that the latter believed that he would have proceeded with it if he had been returned at the 1948 election.³⁵ Moreover, the public record and his biography emphasise his indifference if not support for repeal, once the Coalition's decision had been taken,³⁶ but it should not be assumed from this that the decision met with his approval. There is some evidence which suggests a contrary interpretation to that in the official biography: de Valera was personally shaken when he first heard the news of the decision to repeal the Act,³⁷ his contribution to the Dail debate betrays some sense of loss,³⁸ and his own suggestion, in 1947, that he might repeal the Act, may merely have been a kite to test London's

30. DE:115:813, 10 May 1949.

31. Henry Harrison, leaflet, 'The Ireland Bill: one amendment obviously indispensable', Henry Harrison papers, NLI ms. 8,755(2).

32. Joseph Dowling (Fianna Fail spokesman on Labour 1973-77) reported as a delegate to the 1951 Ard Fheis, Irish Press, 7 Nov. 1951.

33. Irish Press, 7 May 1949.

34. Longford and O'Neill (1970:430).

35. Rugby to CRO, 15 Oct. 1948, PRO CAB 21/1835.

36. Longford and O'Neill (1970:431-5).

37. Interview with Liam MacGabhann.

38. DE:113:413-4, 24 Nov. 1948.

interest in a Council of Ireland.³⁹

Most tellingly, in contrast to Longford and O'Neill's version, the unpublished draft of an earlier attempt at an 'official' biography by Frank Gallagher - also written with de Valera's co-operation - suggests that the repeal of the Act resulted in de Valera being

troubled, for he believed harm would come to the cause of unity from the bridge to the North East being destroyed. The decision was taken and announced without consulting him and at that stage he would only weaken Ireland's position vis-a-vis Britain by opposing...⁴⁰

In another comment, Gallagher describes the repeal of the Act as the 'height of political folly'. In order 'to appear more republican than Fianna Fail, the Coalition had destroyed 'that bridge that had been so carefully left between the two parts of Ireland' with the result that Britain 'took the bitter action that should have been foreseen.'⁴¹

(b) The Mansion House Committee

By January 1949, the Coalition government had persuaded Fianna Fail to join an all-party anti-Partition group to be known as the Mansion House Committee.⁴² Given de Valera's general lack of enthusiasm for involvement in any anti-Partition strategy which he was not controlling and MacEntee's advice against participation,⁴³ it seems probable that Fianna Fail's involvement with the Mansion House Committee was less than enthusiastic. The leading activist in the Committee was MacBride whose approach to the Partition issue was somewhat reminiscent of Donnelly's⁴⁴ with the added difficulty for de Valera that MacBride was leading a rival political party whose claim to be the better republicans was scarcely damaged by its recruitment of some of Fianna Fail's staunchest anti-Partitionists.⁴⁵

The first initiative of the Mansion House Committee was to organize an anti-Partition campaign fund to be collected outside all church gates on the Sunday prior to the Stormont election of February 1949: that the funds thus collected went to finance anti-Partitionist candidates in the election, drew the wrath of the Unionists, although the net result of the intervention was very much to their advantage since it ensured yet another plebiscitary election.⁴⁶ The note struck by the Mansion House Committee was, anyway, unlikely to win converts from traditional unionist voters since it described them as the 'Quisling Irish.'⁴⁷

39. Longford and O'Neill (1970:430).

40. Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(6).

41. Ibid., 18,380(11).

42. The Times, 31 Jan. 1949.

43. MacEntee interview, Irish Times, 13 Dec. 1979.

44. It is indeed possible that Donnelly, had he lived, would have joined Clann na Poblachta.

45. Among whom was Aodh de Blacam who had been a member of Fianna Fail's National Executive and of their anti-Partition sub-committee a decade before.

46. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 19-26 Feb. 1949, pp.9813-4; Cornelius O'Leary, 'Northern Ireland:1945-1972', in J.J.Lee, Ireland: 1945-1970, (Dublin:1979) pp.156-7.

47. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 19-26 Feb. 1949, p.9814.

If the Mansion House Committee ever succeeded in establishing unity among anti-Partitionists, it was short-lived: carping internal criticism, inter-party competitiveness and signs of disenchantment with the Coalition on the part of some northern nationalists, combined with the lack of any obvious success, all helped to erode its credibility.⁴⁸ The regression in the anti-Partitionist case which followed the repeal of the External Relations Act must have reinforced Fianna Fail's instinct to manage their own policy in this area. As early as the 1950 Ard Fheis, three future members of the Oireachtas party, voiced doubts about Fianna Fail's continuing participation on the Committee and de Valera himself considered standing down in favour of another party nominee.⁴⁹

(c) 'Partition must go'

In contrast to his reticent participation in the Mansion House Committee, de Valera exploited his immense prestige in a major propaganda campaign against Partition during this first term in opposition.⁵⁰ Indeed it seems possible that the Coalition may have been hoping that a side-benefit of the Mansion House Committee would be to ensure that de Valera took his place in the chorus rather than continue with his rival touring company in which he was the star soloist. De Valera may well have sensed such a motive on the Coalition's part. His own anxiety 'to put an anti-partition girdle round the earth',⁵¹ was encouraged by his own party, had the effect of ensuring that others could not claim pre-eminence in such agitation and had the added advantage of silencing those who criticised what they saw as his quiescence on the issue in recent years. His immense prestige - exiles tended to identify him as the embodiment of Irish nationalism - ensured the success of his meetings. He toured Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Britain:⁵² most of the time he was speaking to the converted.⁵³ Along with public meetings, he held press conferences and attempted to influence political figures abroad to support his position.⁵⁴ He found that the misunderstandings concerning Irish neutrality placed him at a considerable disadvantage: the British and American governments could claim a measure of success for their efforts towards the end of the War which were directed precisely in anticipation of just such a campaign by de Valera.⁵⁵

De Valera's speeches drew parallels between the situation in Northern Ireland and the contemporary preoccupations of the American public. If a

48. Canon Thomas Maguire wrote to Healy of the 'snub' and the 'kickout' given to Healy's delegation in 1950, letter of 3 Nov. 1950, Healy papers, D2991/B/4/11A; Healy replied that the Dublin parties would 'heave a sigh of relief' if the northern nationalists ceased agitating in Dublin, 5 Nov. 1950, *ibid.*, -/11B; Maguire thought the Coalition 'a dangerous lot' who might destroy 'our chances of unity' quoted Phoenix: 1978, chapter on the Nationalist Party, p.14.

49. Callanan, Yeats and Brennan, *Irish Press*, 1 Nov. 1950.

50. Although Aiken travelled with him, it was de Valera's campaign.

51. *The Leader*, 24 July 1948.

52. *Irish Press* provides the best coverage; *ibid.*, 13 Oct. 1954.

53. Interview Liam MacGabhann who reported de Valera's tours.

54. With little success, T.D. Williams, 'Irish Foreign Policy, 1949-1969', in Lee (1979:141).

55. Interview, F.H. Boland; Dwyer (1977:passim).

minority in Eastern Europe shared the plight of the northern nationalists, he told a Boston radio audience, 'those on whom it was being done would be entitled to ask assistance...'.⁵⁶ Always a believer in the power of international opinion, he was now clearly willing to ignore any disadvantages in a policy of total propaganda:

The phrase "Partition must go" must henceforth be on every Irishman's lips, to be used on every appropriate or inappropriate occasion, that is, in season and out of season, until the continuing crime against our country shall have ceased.⁵⁷

Propaganda was not a success. O'Leary has queried the purpose of these campaigns, suggesting that the south's arguments, logically suggested either 'rectification of the border...or..the elimination of discriminatory legislation' within the north, but not the abolition of Partition.⁵⁸

Besides, the packed houses which attended his public meetings were - in the main - already convinced anti-Partitionists. Labour MP, Hugh Delarghy, then chairman of the Anti-Partition of Ireland League in Britain, shared platforms with de Valera at his major meetings in British cities. 'Enormous and enthusiastic meetings they were, in the biggest halls', recalled Delarghy, but, in retrospect, his verdict is that these meetings

...were all flops. They were not political meetings at all. They were tribal rallies: tribesmen met to greet the Old Chieftain. The melodies of 1916 were played. A few IRA veterans, with their Black and Tan medals, formed guards of honour. Sympathetic Englishmen who attended went away bewildered.⁵⁹

(d) Who governs?

Meanwhile the Coalition's anti-Partition initiatives were also ineffective, if not damaging to any prospect of Irish unity: their federal offers were spurned by the Unionists and distrusted by the nationalists;⁶⁰ and their intervention in the 1949 Stormont election had not been a success. It was a pattern reminiscent of what had happened during de Valera's publicly active period of anti-Partitionist initiatives in 1938-39: it seemed that such was the nature of Partition that 'frontal' pressure tended only to reinforce it. Also the passing years, the very different experience of the War and the extension of the British welfare state to the north had similar effects: and, as has been noted elsewhere, disputed boundaries, once thought to be temporary, have a tendency to strengthen existing differences once they become operable.⁶¹ During

56. Note in Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(3).

57. Speech to W.B. Yeats Cumann, Fianna Fail, Mansion House, Dublin 7 Feb. 1949, de Valera papers, quoted from typescript of Maurice Moynihan's forthcoming collection of de Valera's speeches.

58. O'Leary, pp.155-6 of chapter cited in note 46 above.

59. Hugh Delarghy, 'The man who outlived his memory', New Statesman, 5 Sept. 1975.

60. see note 48 above.

61. A point noted by Rose (1976:65) and by political geographers, Cohen (1964:190), Mitchel (1971:58); Orme (1970:249-50). See also Irish Times, 6 Nov. 1925.

thirty years of independence all Dail politicians were staunch anti-Partitionists with an ability to neglect, if not indeed to insult, the susceptibilities of northern unionists. Catholic norms were espoused, apparently without any embarrassment at their incongruity in the context of the anti-Partition campaign. Some did see the incongruity: two of the key figures of the 1920s, Blythe and Johnson - both with firsthand experience of Ulster and neither of them Roman Catholics - recognised a deterioration in the south's approach to unity. In 1949, Blythe's criticism of the anti-Partition drive was shared by Johnson who privately argued that the 'revival of militant Catholicism' now lent credence to the 'Rome Rule' doubts of the Unionists. 'At any time up to 15 or 20 years ago', Johnson would have refuted this charge: but now he was embarrassed by the pronouncements of his successors in the Labour movement. He wondered what the Northern Protestant Labour voters could think when, in the south,

a Labour leader states that the "Labour Party's policy is based on the papal encyclicals and they proudly acknowledge the authority of the Catholic Church on all matters which related to public policy and public welfare."

This was 'the essence of the Partition problem' and Johnson could see no solution at that time: if anything, he believed that, in the immediate future, there would be an intensification of 'the militant movement of the Catholic Church...'.⁶²

Corroborative testimony comes from a disinterested outsider, the historian J.D.Clarkson, writing about the same time, who concluded that to the

man in the street today, the distinctive fact about Ireland is simply that it is Catholic. His Catholicism sums up his nationalism. He cannot conceive of a true Irishman who is not a Catholic... It is the Church that rules Ireland today, and no politician, however anxious to differentiate himself from his followers would dream of challenging that basic fact.⁶³

The interest of these assessments is that they both pre-date the major Church-State clash in post-independence Ireland, the 'Mother and Child' crisis, which was to have a 'disastrous effect' on Partition, as it was 'resolved, apparently, by the abject capitulation of the secular to the spiritual power.'⁶⁴

In the second major crisis of the Coalition's tenure of office, decisions were again taken by the government which proved inimical to Irish unity: again, it seems probable - it was certainly believed by Fianna Fail - that under de Valera's leadership such problems would have been avoided.⁶⁵ The controversy concerned the provisions of proposed

62. Holograph draft letter, Johnson to Blythe, n.d.(1949) re. Blythe's memo on Partition, Thomas Johnson papers, NLI ms. 17,231.

63. J.D.Clarkson, "'Big Jim' Larkin: a footnote to nationalism", in E.M.Earle, ed., Nationalism and internationalism, (New York:1950).

64. Lyons (1971:569); Paul Blanchard, The Irish and Catholic power, (Boston:1953) pp. 55-71. John H.Whyte, Church and state in modern Ireland, 1923-1970, (Dublin:1971) chs. 7-8. Hereafter, Whyte:1971.

65. T.P.O'Neill in a brief resume of de Valera's career, published on his death, suggested that 'Perhaps his principal contribution' in the 1950s lay 'in his quiet and tactful withstanding of pressures of Church on State', 'Eamon de Valera:1882-1975', Ireland Today, no.872, 26 Sept. 1975, Bulletin of the Dept.of Foreign Affairs, Dublin. Hereafter O'Neill: 1975.

health legislation to which the Catholic hierarchy took exception and in which the Coalition government acceded to their pressure. That nationalist opinion largely ignored the central issues raised by this crisis, was, in itself, an indication of how partitionist the south had become. Who governs - Maynooth or Leinster House - was the critical question and it was largely ignored by the nationalist politicians and press.⁶⁶ The Irish Times - then, still considered a 'Protestant' newspaper - believed that the episode revealed that 'the Roman Catholic Church would seem to be the effective Government of this country';⁶⁷ the Ulster Unionists argued that 'in any matter' where the Church decided to intervene 'the Eire Government must accept the Church's policy and decision irrespective of all other considerations.'⁶⁸

No party which claimed to be in the Tone tradition and with aspirations to unite 'Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter in the common name of Irishman' should have remained aloof from this controversy. Here was an issue which was ripe for misunderstanding in the north and which was predictably and brilliantly exploited by the Ulster Unionists.⁶⁹ If it was the Fianna Fail view that the bishops had interfered improperly, there was an onus on them to say so: if, on the other hand, they believed that there was no evidence here of 'Rome Rule' they had an equal obligation to publicly speak in this sense. In fact, de Valera maintained an 'astute aloofness',⁷⁰ which may have maintained party unity and been electorally prudent but which compounded the considerable damage which the whole episode caused to the prospects for Irish unity.

The cursory two paragraphs which his biographers devote to the episode underlines how marginal was Fianna Fail's response: they reveal that de Valera 'kept a tight rein' on his Dail colleagues, many of whom would have 'willingly stirred up further trouble in the broken ranks of the Government parties.' De Valera himself 'took no part in the Dail debate apart from the disdainful comment: "I think we have heard enough...". Tactically it was the shrewdest way.'⁷¹

De Valera himself believed it had been an error to publish the exchanges of correspondence with the bishops:⁷² his own instinct was for private soundings with the hierarchy before deciding on his party's policy.⁷³ Although not precipitating an immediate election, the withdrawal of the proposed legislation and the resignation of the responsible minister, caused such dissension within the Clann na Poblactha party, that it can be presumed that it was largely responsible for the calling of a general election some weeks later. In this election

66. See Whyte (1971:ch.8 passim).

67. Irish Times, 12 Apr. 1951, quoted ibid., p.231.

68. Quoted, ibid., p.233.

69. Ibid., pp.231-2; W.A.Carson to G.C.Duggan, 16 June 1957, NLI ms. 16,221; NIHC:35:894, 9 May 1951.

70. John A.Murphy in De Valera issue of Ireland Today, see note 65.

71. Longford and O'Neill (1970:436-7).

72. Whyte (1971:288-9).

73. Ibid., chs. 7-9, passim; Noel Browne, letter, Irish Times, 29 Nov. 1979.

campaign, so little mention was made of the issue by Fianna Fail speakers that one can presume that the Dail directive for silence was extended to cover the campaign. Only two oblique comments are to be found in the Irish Press reports of the Fianna Fail election speeches: the outgoing government, it was suggested, had 'forged many weapons' for the Ulster Unionists⁷⁴ who could not be expected to join a parliament 'where ministers could rankle for hours to the disgrace and shame of the nation.'⁷⁵

In contrast, considerable attention was paid to the volte face of Fine Gael on the Commonwealth link: the repeal of the External Relations Act was 'unfair, unsporting and indecent.'⁷⁶ In general, the note struck was that the 'national advance' had been halted by Fianna Fail's loss of power in 1948.⁷⁷ MacEntee told the final election rally:

The one man who had been making real headway towards the ending of Partition was Mr de Valera. The people of the north looked upon him as a great Irishman, a world figure, a statesman who in the sphere of international politics was regarded as a man whose word was his bond. And if the Northerner was going to discuss the re-unity of our country, he would be more prepared to sit down and discuss it with Mr. de Valera than with any other man.⁷⁸

While de Valera's pre-eminence as the leader most likely to achieve Irish unity was stressed,⁷⁹ there was also considerable emphasis - especially in de Valera's own speeches - on the difficulties of ending Partition.⁸⁰ The Coalition ministers were berated for their unfulfilled promises: 'anyone who told the people that Partition could be solved in three months or six months, in five years or ten years, was speaking in a manner unworthy of a child...'.⁸¹

Another theme of Fianna Fail's campaign which had a bearing on Partition was their insistence that they had a better record on security than the outgoing administration.⁸² One Clann candidate, Michael Fitzpatrick TD - sharing a platform with MacBride - had, in reply to a heckler, claimed that the IRA had 'not been suppressed, is not suppressed, and is still active.'⁸³ This was the cue Fianna Fail speakers needed to make their claim - which their record since the mid-'thirties arguably justified - that they had the will, the experience and, perhaps, most important, the republican credentials, to effectively curb the IRA.⁸⁴ That Clann na Poblachta's claim to assume the republican mantle in constitutional politics had been demonstrated to be bogus was Fianna Fail's essential message to the electorate:⁸⁵ Fianna Fail was 'a strong

74. P. McGrath TD., Irish Press, 7 May 1951.

75. Erskine Childers TD, ibid., 5 May 1951.

76. ibid.,

77. De Valera Nenagh, ibid., 22 May 1951.

78. MacEntee, GPO, Dublin, final rally, ibid., 30 May 1951.

79. Robert Briscoe and James Ryan, ibid., 29 May; de Valera and MacEntee, ibid., 30 May 1951.

80. See points from speeches, ibid., 24 May 1951 and de Valera's speech at final rally, ibid., 30 May 1951.

81. Ibid., 24 May 1951.

82. Gerald Boland, ibid., 16 May 1951; a party advertisement cites the party's record on security, ibid., 17 May 1951.

83. Ibid., 16 May 1951.

84. Childers, ibid., 17 May; MacEntee, 18 and 23 May; Moylan, 27 May; Carroll O'Daly, 28 May; Aiken, 30 May 1951.

85. See de Valera's speeches on this theme, 7, 14, 15, 17 May, all publication dates in Irish Press.

single column'⁸⁶ whose 'policy and mission' was to save the country.⁸⁷ De Valera himself claimed that Fianna Fail was

striving to try and re-establish the nation that was held in subjection for seven and a half centuries. We are trying to restore that nation to what the men who died to restore it wanted it to be - not something less than that.⁸⁸

With neither Partition nor the 'Mother and Child' controversy as election issues, de Valera's emergence as 'a somewhat Pyrrhic victor' of this election,⁸⁹ offered no clue as to how the electorate evaluated - if they could differentiate at all - between the respective anti-Partition strategies of the competing parties. Although the Coalition's aspirations and declared policies did not differ markedly from those enunciated by de Valera, there must have seemed to the Fianna Fail leader to be a considerable difference in how the issue had been tactically handled.

On his return to power, de Valera inherited a weakened political base on which to pursue an anti-Partition strategy: both the repeal of the External Relations Act and the propaganda present of the clash with the bishops had significantly strengthened the Ulster Unionists. It was ironic that Fine Gael, who had traditionally made such telling criticisms of his own naivete on Partition, should now have further eroded the south's credibility. Nor had the heightened expectations of northern nationalists during the three years of Coalition government, rendered his task in 1951 any easier: his own call on them now to maintain a united front, annoyed one of his longtime supporters, Canon Thomas Maguire, who wrote to him insisting that leadership should emanate from the Taoiseach of the day, as 'the national leader'. Maguire advised that the whole position was 'breeding dangerous apathy' and force might be again resorted to unless a successful policy was forthcoming: 'None of us wants another bloody Easter Day, but it may have to come...it depends on you and Fianna Fail.'⁹⁰

As if to prove that the Coalition parties had no monopoly of Partitionist behaviour while adopting an anti-Partitionist stance, later in 1951 in his first year in office, de Valera joined the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. J.C. McQuaid at a ceremony at which 'Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary' was named as Patroness of the Irish Army. McQuaid sent a telegram to the Pope promising him the 'filial homage' of the Defence Forces,⁹¹ just as Costello had promised his government's 'filial loyalty' to the Pope three years before:⁹² 'respectful homage' was all de Valera had offered in 1932.⁹³

86. De Valera, *ibid.*, 7 May 1951.

87. Vivion de Valera, *ibid.*, 7 May 1951.

88. *Ibid.*, 21 May 1951.

89. Longford and O'Neill (1970:439).

90. Canon T. Maguire to de Valera, 27 May 1951, *Healy papers*, D2991/B/4/14G.

91. 'Army invokes Our Lady as Patron', *Irish Press*, 8 Oct. 1951.

92. Whyte (1971:158).

93. *Ibid.*, p.48.

(ii) 'Handing on the Inheritance: 1951-59'¹

(a) Despair?

The 1950's marked an inauspicious period in de Valera's career: retrospectively criticised for not resigning earlier,² his leadership remained unchallenged within the party.³ This was in spite of his advancing years, failing eyesight, and the fact that, his political priorities were increasingly irrelevant. De Valera may now have despaired of making any progress on the Partition question: his biographer, O'Neill, in an obituary note, excused his lack of success during this period on the grounds that Partition was, by now, 'outside the field of practical politics...':⁴ moreover, de Valera himself, in 1973, in his last public speech, admitted to one period when he had despaired of Irish unity.⁵ That this was probably in the 1950s is suggested both by O'Neill's comment and by de Valera's persistent pessimism on prospects for unity during these years.⁶ With the resort to propaganda a failure and his 'bridge' of external association destroyed, his options on Partiton, as he resumed power in 1951, were severely limited. The then Irish ambassador in London, F.H.Boland, recalls that, diplomatically, the issue was by now 'not active at all'. There was dissent, cynicism and disillusionment among those who had been in the forefront of the anti-Partition agitation in the previous two years.

Moreover de Valera may have believed that the recent emphasis on anti-Partition propaganda had had the effect of encouraging extremism and once he resumed office, he allowed the Mansion House Committee to become virtually defunct, but without formally disestablishing it.⁸ One result of the agitational phase was an inevitable rise in the expectations of northern nationalists. Canon Maguire, for instance, was outraged at MacBride's suggestion of a federal solution. He wrote to Healy that it was

as big a betrayal as that of 1925. Will we wait, as bartered, until it is done, and then whine?...I may...demand minister MacBride's showing why his Government sponsors this tinkering with our national rights.⁹

Such opposition to federal solutions was particularly forceful when it

1. The section title is borrowed from the Longford and O'Neill biography where it is the title of Chapter 34 which covers de Valera's role from 1951 to 1959 in less than eleven pages, pp.439-49.

2. The Times, obituary notice, 30 Aug. 1975.

3. Interview Sean Lemass (1970). Brian Farrell, Chairman or chief: the role of Taoiseach in Irish government, (Dublin:1971) pp.40-41. Longford and O'Neill (1970:446-7).

4. O'Neill (1975) see note 65 in ch.7:i.

5. De Valera's last public speech, Dublin, Irish Times, 25 June 1973.

6. Irish Press, 9 Mar. and 20 Nov. 1957; DE:170:1072, 17 July 1958.

7. Interview, F.H.Boland.

8. MacEntee, Irish Times, 13 Dec. 1979; Lynch, Sunday Press, 21 Feb. 1971; Coogan(1970:263).

9. Maguire to Healy, 8 Nov. 1950, Healy papers, D2991/B/4/12A.

came from northern nationalists - they, after all, were being invited by southern leaders to make major concessions to the Unionists. This was particularly true of border nationalists as their argument was that not only was Partition inadmissible but the border, as drawn, was indefensible. Maguire was implacably opposed to federalism: he had no interest in co-operation with the Unionist 'Quislings'.¹⁰ Healy suggested the possibility that neither de Valera nor MacBride believed the federal offer would be taken up and so could offer it in order to demonstrate British intransigence. Maguire replied:

...do you solemnly make that statement that "neither MacBride nor Dev(sic) believe that Federation would be accepted"? That means both are dishonest! We are well represented - aren't we?...I want..to "kick out" this proposal.¹¹

Another objection to the federal proposal came from Thomas Johnson: he believed that if federalism was effected against the will of the Ulster Unionists, the northern minority might be worse off than ever. His reasoning was that to devolve control over education, policing, the electoral franchise and civil service appointments to the local majority - the Unionists - would result in less favourable prospects for the northern nationalists since these were precisely the areas where the Unionists had discriminated.¹² With de Valera's return to power in 1951, Maguire expressed his views forcefully and privately to him:

You and...MacBride have done definite harm by your Swiss Federation idea. It is partition, and no political subtlety will disguise it.¹³

De Valera's relationship with the northern nationalists - as has been shown - was always complex and rarely satisfactory: they, for their part, thought him too much of 'an individualist' whose approach to Partition was too rigid.¹⁴ Whereas de Valera believed that nothing better than a policy of patience and opportunism was possible,¹⁵ the northern nationalists continued to set up new branches of the Anti-Partition League 'all over unoccupied Ireland' in order to oblige the Fianna Fail government 'to put Partition in the very forefront of its programme' at the next election.¹⁶ The hazards of pursuing a non-agitational policy are evident from MacBride's letter to Healy of February 1953: two years of Fianna Fail in office had left the Partition issue 'in the doldrums: neither Aiken nor de Valera even mentioned (it) in introducing their estimates', the usual occasion for reviewing policy; moreover, there had been only one meeting of the Mansion House Committee in the previous twelve months and it was de Valera's intention 'to wind it up soon.'¹⁷

Whether in government or opposition during this period, de Valera, while insisting on the credentials of Fianna Fail as the mainstream

10. Maguire to Healy, 10 Nov. 1950, Healy papers, D2991/B/4/13A.

11. Ibid., -/14F.

12. Thomas Johnson to Blythe, draft, (1949), NLI 17,231.

13. Maguire to de Valera, 27 May 1951, Healy papers, D2991/B/4/14G.

14. Healy to Maguire, 5 Nov. 1950, ibid., -/11B.

15. Irish Press, 13 Oct. 1954; DE:126:2022, 19 July 1951.

16. Healy to Fr. E.L.Curran, 21 Nov. 1952, Healy papers, D2991/A/256.

17. MacBride to Healy, 26 Feb. 1953, ibid., -/270.

nationalist party, pursued a more consistent and quiescent policy than opposition parties: he believed the Partition problem to be 'an extremely difficult one. It is a tantalising problem. It is an exasperating problem.'¹⁸

(b) Dail access for northern nationalists?

One initiative which was constantly advocated in the post-war period was the admission of northern elected representative to Leinster House. When it had first been mooted, pre-war, de Valera had 'for a moment... played around with the idea' but found it impractical:¹⁹ subsequently he had considered it 'time out of mind' but saw no merits in it.²⁰ It may be added that northern nationalists, including Healy, who was publicly obliged to advocate it, had considerable misgivings about the proposal. In 1950 he complained that some nationalists 'will believe anything a clever crank suggests - until they try it out and see the folly.'²¹ This was in reply to an even more outspoken comment from Maguire who had argued that for northern MPs to apply to the Dail for seats was '...a puerile and sterile policy. To leave the battlefield - cowardice!'²² Yet four years later - with Costello again as Taoiseach - Healy was spokesman for those northern nationalists seeking admission to the Dail.

The arguments he adduced in support of the northern claims were cleverly tailored to the Coalition governments' record on Partition, a record vulnerable to the charge that the establishment of a Republic for twenty-six counties, had reinforced Partition. Privately, indeed, this was Healy's own belief,²³ but in the case he put forward to Costello, he seems to have decided to call the bluff of the southern parties. He praised the 1949 Republic of Ireland Act which had, he claimed, been welcomed by northern nationalists 'as a special gesture of unity and friendship', ending the 'aloofness' which had been fostered by the border: and 'in order to give this gesture its national value', Healy pressed for the admission of northern MPs to the Dail.²⁴ In November, Healy again pressed the proposal: the northern MPs 'would form a direct, personal, official link between the Irish government and its foreign-occupied territory'; moreover, they could, 'at the discretion of the Irish Government, be used abroad'.²⁵

While other southern parties were willing to consider or even advocate the admission of northern MPs to Leinster House, de Valera remained implacably opposed. Healy who must have discussed the question

18. DE:147:196, 28 Oct. 1954.

19. DE:147:201, 28 Oct. 1954.

20. DE:126:2278-90, 19 July 1951.

21. Healy to Maguire, 5 Nov. 1950, Healy papers, D2991/B/4/11B.

22. Maguire to Healy, 3 Nov. 1950, ibid., -/11A.

23. Healy to J.Martin, (New York), 4 May 1954, ibid., -/A/382B.

24. Healy to Costello, July 1954, ibid., /390A.

25. Memo. Healy to Costello, Nov. 1954, ibid., -/408.

with him on many occasions, summarised de Valera's objections: the northern MPs would, on the Partition question, be 'talking to the converted' in the Dail, their participation in other business would amount to representation for the northern electorate without taxation and thirdly, there would be the possibility that northern MPs would take sides between the Dail parties which would not be in the national interest.²⁶

While other anti-Partitionists tended to approve any policy which created 'movement' on the issue, de Valera was more circumspect, looking ahead to the probable consequences of any initiative. He must have foreseen that the admission of northern representatives to the Dail would have increased support for the faction within Fianna Fail which advocated the extension of the Dail's sovereignty to include nationalist strongholds north of the border, and who, indeed, argued that the Dail should seek the allegiance of nationalist-controlled local authorities in border areas.²⁷ There was also the possibility that the irredentist claim in his own Constitution would be invoked to embarrass him into adopting policies whose possible consequences alarmed him. Clearly discomfited by the persistence of the proposals to admit northerners to the Dail, Fianna Fail remained the only southern party consistently opposed to the idea, a stance which was easily construed as partitionist and inconsistent with the tactics of the founders of Dail Eireann and with de Valera's own policy of 1923:²⁸ in his last term as Taoiseach, he was still being pilloried for the 'flimsy' arguments which he adduced in defence of his veto.²⁹

At every Ard Fheis during de Valera's remaining years as leader of the party, an anti-Partition resolution was tabled for debate: in the main, they were ritualistic pledges which promised to pursue by all constitutional means the unification of Ireland.³⁰ Occasionally, radical proposals were mooted, as in 1951, when one resolution suggested the breaking of diplomatic relations with Britain for as long as Partition lasted: after discussion this was amended to the more orthodox promise to take all practical steps to end Partition, in which form it was passed.³¹ The 1955 Ard Fheis passed a resolution which might have been drafted by MacDermot in the 'thirties or by Cruise O'Brien in the 'seventies: reminding the party that as the national effort 'must be to induce in all sections of the Irish people the desire to restore the political unity of the country', then the Ard Fheis should direct

that policies and actions are to be tested by their probable effect on this primary aim, are to be supported if they are likely to contribute to the achievement and opposed if they are likely to have the contrary result.³²

But when it came to specific implementation of such a policy, there were

26. Healy to Frieda Le Pla, 20 June 1953, *ibid.*, -/286E; also, de Valera to 1949 Ard Fheis, *Irish Press*, 15 June 1949.

27. J.J.Callanan at 1951 Ard Fheis, *ibid.*, 7 Nov. 1951.

28. See commentary on Donnelly's views on this point, ch.5:i, above.

29. McQuillan's charge, DE:163:781, 4 July 1957.

30. See for instance resolutions on Clar for 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1957 and 1958.

31. 1951 Clar; 1951 report of Ard Fheis published by Fianna Fail.

32. Clar, 1955 Ard Fheis.

always dissident voices at the Ard Fheis, willing to, for instance, criticise Lemass for fraternising with Northern Irish ministers in Dublin.³³

Such meetings were in connection with the only policy area where any success could be claimed: functional co-operation between north and south in matters of common interest.³⁴ Here, there were genuine advances made by both Fianna Fail and Coalition governments, and, it may be said, by the Unionists who had earlier had considerable misgivings.³⁵ Always anxious to pursue a 'good neighbour' policy towards the south, the Unionists believed the basis for such a relationship should be southern recognition of the north's constitutional position.³⁶ Lemass himself may have been the main advocate of functional co-operation within Fianna Fail: he believed that every such initiative 'would hasten the day' of unity.³⁷ But de Valera, too, approved: in 1955, he told the Ard Fheis, that if nuclear power were to be developed in Ireland 'it would probably be desirable that there would be cooperation in that also',³⁸ and in 1957 - the last Ard Fheis at which he was to discuss Partition - he reaffirmed his policy:

His conclusion grew stronger with the years - that the proper way to try to solve it was to endeavour to have as close relations as possible with the people of the Six Counties and get them to combine with us on matters of common concern.³⁹

(c) The use of force

There was one fundamental matter of common concern where northern and southern policies had a common purpose but could not - overtly, at any rate - be fully co-ordinated: the suppression of the IRA. Although both Belfast and Dublin governments were totally opposed to the use of force, there were considerable differences in their attitudes. To the first generation of constitutional nationalists in the south, the north looked like 'unfinished business' and while condemning any resort to force as misguided, they were reluctant to regard it as immoral and found it a painful duty to suppress its perpetrators.⁴⁰ Whilst a small and diminishing minority of southern politicians supported a resort to force, some others adopted a neutral stance and could be considered 'fellow-travellers': what was politically inadmissible for most of the first generation was concerted action with the northern security forces against the IRA.⁴¹ Indeed the IRA's decision in the 1950's to refrain from any

33. See Irish Press, 5 Nov. 1952.

34. Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 13-20 May 1950, p.10711; also ibid, 15-22 Aug. 1953, p.13090.

35. See for instance Spender's antipathy to co-operation for a possible joint hydro-electric scheme on the Erne in 1940, Spender diary, PRONI D715; also DE:103:1705, 13 Nov. 1946.

36. See Brooke's speech in Canada and de Valera's reply, Irish Press, 25 June 1951.

37. Lemass, Irish Press, 5 Nov. 1952; MacEntee agreed, ibid.

38. Ibid., 23 Nov. 1955.

39. Ibid., 20 Nov. 1957; see also DE:152:550, 12 July 1955; DE:103:705, 13 Nov. 1946, Irish Press, 25 June 1951.

40. Irish Press, 23 Nov. 1955; DE:112:964; 21 July 1948.

41. See Clann na Poblactha statement, The Times, 29 Jan. 1957, Costello, The Times, 1 Dec. 1955.

attacks on the southern security forces was clearly designed to invite a reciprocal response from the latter, thereby providing the IRA with a safe territorial base for their sporadic raids on Northern Ireland.⁴²

Occasional statements by maverick politicians in the Dail and by some judges, combined with condolences by county councils for IRA casualties, all illustrated the ambivalence of southern opinion.⁴³ The obvious military response to IRA border raids was cross-border security co-operation, but this left the southern government open to the charge of using the police and army to defend Partition: as late as December 1956, Costello retorted to such a criticism that he could not 'too strongly condemn this wicked misrepresentation.'⁴⁴ For many republicans, constitutionalism was merely a strategy which could legitimately be resorted to, but only for as long as it proved promising. Clearly, many of those originally recruited to Fianna Fail could be termed conditional constitutionalists. While some of them would have subsequently become convinced of the futility of force in any circumstances, at least a small minority of the party could still be classified as having an 'each way bet' on force.⁴⁵ It is this political sub-culture, peculiar to Fianna Fail, which should be remembered in judging de Valera's speeches on the Partition issue.

Many had warned that the constant propaganda campaigns of the late 'forties would inevitably set up expectations which, if not met, would lead to a recrudescence of violence. Maffey, in particular, as early as 1946, warned London of 'the dangerous incitement...for an indoctrinated and frustrated generation of Irishmen';⁴⁶ Ulster Unionists too believed that 'a monster' had been created by the anti-Partition propaganda;⁴⁷ nationalist critics such as Blythe, believed it 'one of the root causes' of the subsequent violence;⁴⁸ and, most significantly of all - since the understating of the case could be expected from such a quarter - some Fianna Fail ministers retrospectively implied a causal relationship between the emphasis on anti-Partitionism and the subsequent resort to force.⁴⁹

Another factor which must be borne in mind is that the lack of progress on the Partition issue was an implied criticism of Fianna Fail's record, since they had been the dominant party since their accession to power in 1932. Given this factor, de Valera's deliberate circumspection

42. Bell (1971:245-6).

43. DE:107:48-62, 24 June 1947; O'Leary (1979:44-5). See also Alexis FitzGerald, 'Irish democracy', University Review, vol.2, no.2, 1958, pp.31-46

44. The Times, 27 Dec. 1956.

45. Ch.4:iii;a, passim.; Irish Press, 7 Nov. 1951; de Valera's speech, ibid., 23 Nov. 1955. David Harkness, Irish Times, 19 May 1976.

46. Maffey's report of talk with de Valera, 18 May 1946, PRO CAB 129/10 CP(46)212.

47. W.A.Carson, Ulster and the Irish Republic, (Belfast:n.d.:(1956)), p.2.

48. Ernest Blythe, 'The significance of the Irish language for the future of the nation', University Review, vol.2, no.2, 1958, p.17.

49. See note 8 above; O'Leary (1979:44); John A.Murphy, 'The New IRA: 1925-62', in T.D.Williams, Secret societies in Ireland, (Dublin:1973) pp.150-165.

when asked if his party had a viable strategy to end Partition deserves credit for adopting a more realistic attitude than many other southern politicians. Aiken, for instance, in the course of the 1954 general election, boasted that Fianna Fail

had succeeded in getting rid of the British bag and baggage out of the 26 counties and he had no doubt that, with the help of God, the Irish people would get rid of them bag and baggage out of the remaining six counties.⁵⁰

Entering this election campaign, Fianna Fail could point to no achievements on the Partition question since inheriting power from the Coalition three years before. Their speeches differed little from 1951:⁵¹ again, they put themselves forward as the inheritors of the republican tradition of 1916-23, with a leader who was the most likely of all available politicians to keep the 'nation on the march'.⁵² Statesmanship, argued de Valera in an election broadcast,

should surely concern itself with the practicable and the possible. We might all agree that it would be worth while to get to the moon or Mars. It is how to get there is the problem.⁵³

De Valera, in this broadcast, was speaking on economic policy. On Partition, while emphasising that unity was inevitable, he made no promises:

I wish I could point out to you directly how this is going to be achieved. I do not want to pretend to have any certain plan which would definitely secure that end. Neither has anyone else.⁵⁴

Lemass asked his audience at the final rally at the G.P.O. to 'come along with us and although we might not reach the end of the road, we will build the bridges for the future generations to cross.'⁵⁵

For the third time in as many elections, power changed hands in this election, with Costello again forming a Coalition government: although it depended on MacBride's depleted Clann na Poblachta deputies for its majority, the latter did not on this occasion accept cabinet office. This second period of Coalition government was marked by a renewal of an IRA campaign against Partition which took the form of sporadic guerrilla-type attacks on military and economic targets in Northern Ireland by IRA units based in the south.⁵⁶ Bell, the historian of the IRA, suggests that 'Ireland seemed', at this period, 'to hover on the brink of a deep emotional commitment to a desperate crusade';⁵⁷ whilst his rather romanticised account of the period may be treated cautiously, there is little doubt - as the funerals of the IRA martyrs and the voting in the 1957 election both demonstrated - there was considerable public ambivalence and sympathy for the IRA campaign.⁵⁸

50. Aiken, Irish Press, 26 Apr. 1954.

51. Based on total Irish Press coverage of both election campaigns.

52. De Valera, 28 Apr., 11 May; Lemass, 12 May 1954, Irish Press.

53. Party political broadcast, sound recording, 14 May 1954.

54. Irish Press, 6 May 1954.

55. Ibid., 18 May 1954.

56. Bell (1971:chs.14-15 passim).

57. Ibid., p.300.

58. Ibid., 303-4; O'Leary (1979:44-5); Murphy(1975:138).

Such a campaign was anticipated by de Valera who clearly did his best to avert it. He displayed an almost missionary zeal in his lectures to the Dail and to the annual Ard Fheis concerning the impracticality of force.⁵⁹ He feared that 'the generous young people' who recognised the injustice, might 'be led away to try to pursue courses which in the end will be more harmful than helpful';⁶⁰ he feared that 'precious lives' might be lost in a violent campaign.⁶¹ Sympathising in particular with those northern nationalists in border areas, he told the 1954 Ard Fheis that there would always be 'sympathy for those who tried to assert their national rights against force. There would be a natural tendency to use force against force.' He himself was not a pacifist: he was not against force in principle, but because it could not succeed:

If you brought about the unity of this country by force, you are condemning the government and parliament of this country to govern that area by police methods.

The measures necessary for effective control of such an Ulster would be comparable to those which the Ulster Unionists had been 'practically compelled' to adopt following the tragedy of Partition.⁶²

For their part, the IRA - not for the first time - misunderstood de Valera, their leadership believing 'the illusion that their simple promise to remain quiescent in the South would be sufficient surety' for the southern authorities to ignore their presence.⁶³ In a clandestine meeting in 1956, an IRA group met de Valera - the intermediaries were Fianna Fail TDs⁶⁴ - and asked him

to assist in their attacks or at least connive at them. De Valera gave them not the slightest encouragement. He was indeed extremely forthright with them and impressed upon them his belief, often stated publicly, that partition could not be solved by force of arms. Their movement, he said, was bound to fail; it would cause great suffering without any visible weakening of partition.⁶⁵

While insisting that no task was 'more hateful' to an Irish government than 'having to deal severely with any section of the Irish people', de Valera was the leading advocate in the Dail of strong legal measures to suppress the campaign.⁶⁶ With Costello's government possibly reticent because of its electoral dependence on Clann na Poblachta, de Valera was the first to condemn this resort to force:⁶⁷ even the Ulster Unionists invoked his condemnation, in appealing to Costello to suppress the violence.⁶⁸ When the Costello government introduced tougher measures to deal with the continuing IRA campaign, Clann na Poblachta, under pressure from their own supporters, withdrew their parliamentary support

59. Among many speeches, see Irish Press, 13 Oct. 1954; ibid., 23 Nov. 1955; ibid., 20 Nov 1957; DE:152:549, 12 July 1955.

60. Irish Press, 13 Oct. 1954.

61. Ibid., 23 Nov. 1955.

62. Ibid., 13 Oct. 1954.

63. Bell (1971:305-7).

64. I am indebted to T.P.O'Neill for this information.

65. Longford and O'Neill (1970:444).

66. DE:112:964: 21 July 1948.

67. Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(3); DE:170:1073, 17 July 1958. Irish Press, 23 Nov. 1955.

68. The Times, 29 Nov. 1955.

thereby jeopardising the government's majority.⁶⁹

MacBride in his statement argued that support had been withdrawn because the government had 'failed to pursue any positive policy' on Irish unity; moreover, 'no amount of condemnation or coercion would make up for the absence of a positive and progressive policy designed to bring about the reunification of the country.' Further, the statement accused the government of 'unnecessary and provocative measures of a coercive nature which we must emphatically decry.' Clann na Poblachta objected to what they saw as the government's defence of the status quo and their undertaking of 'the role of Britain's policemen against a section of the Irish people.' The party - unconsciously revealing a partitionist, twentysix county view - added that such government policies resulted in a drift 'towards a tragic situation of internal strife.' De Valera's comment at this juncture - the election which MacBride's initiative precipitated, had yet to be called - was that MacBride's 'gyrations are amusing, but the situation in the creation of which he has played a full part, is not so amusing.'⁷⁰

The note struck by Fianna Fail speakers in the election was that the IRA's resort to force was understandable but counterproductive. Boland told a meeting in Roscommon that

If he thought that force could solve the border problem he would, old as he was, go and fight there himself and not be satisfied with encouraging gallant young boys to lose their lives and liberty in an action which would make it far more difficult to bring about eventual national unity.⁷¹

Fianna Fail's view was that the young men of the IRA needed 'friendly sympathy and advice' to desist from violence;⁷² Fianna Fail speakers alleged that Costello's initial response had been 'pitiable';⁷³ the Coalition had been guilty of 'delay and vacillation';⁷⁴ they had failed to take 'firm and prompt action to quell this menace' until it had threatened the state and 'gravely set back' the cause of Irish unity.⁷⁵ In contrast to coalition governments - particularly one dependent for its majority on MacBride, the 'champion, friend and saviour' of the IRA - a Fianna Fail government had the unity, capacity and will to curb the IRA.⁷⁶

In what was to be de Valera's last general election as leader of Fianna Fail, many speeches were made which differed little from the appeal made by the party in their first contested election thirty years before. To Fianna Fail it was important to be accepted as the republican standard bearers, hence their emphasis on this occasion on working for 'the ideals of 1916 and of 1917 to 1921';⁷⁷ in fact, de Valera stated that Fianna Fail 'had stood by its principles, the same principles to which they subscribed

69. Bell (1971:300-3).

70. The Times, 29 Jan. 1957.

71. Irish Press, 19 Feb. 1957.

72. Speeches by de Valera, 15 Feb., Sean Moore, 18 Feb., Gerald Boland, 19 Feb. 1957, ibid.

73. Gerald Boland, 14 Feb. 1957, ibid.

74. Vivion de Valera, ibid., 15 Feb. 1957.

75. Sean MacEntee, ibid., 28 Feb. 1957.

76. MacEntee, ibid., 4 Mar. 1957.

77. De Valera, ibid., 4 Mar. 1957.

between 1917 and 1921 when they were the Sinn Fein party.⁷⁸ This was a ritualistic claim by Fianna Fail but may have been given particular emphasis on this occasion because of the presence of two rival republican parties, Clann na Poblachta and the abstentionist candidates of Sinn Fein. Fianna Fail speakers did not lack confidence in their party's past or future role: it was 'the greatest party' in Irish parliamentary history,⁷⁹ the 'finest national movement ever established';⁸⁰ its record on Partition, claimed MacEntee, was 'unblemished', it truly represented 'the idealism, the realism, the intelligence and the commonsense of the great mass of all classes of the Irish people. Because you know that in voting for it you will not only be voting for yourselves but for Ireland.'⁸¹ De Valera told a meeting in Bandon that 'there was no single day he was in office that the idea of a united Ireland was not fully before his mind.' Fianna Fail's goal was the achievement of Pearse's ideal: an Ireland, free and gaelic. 'If we make sure that this five-sixths is made really Irish we will have the preservation of the Irish nation in our hands. Time will settle the other thing.'⁸²

The Unionists meanwhile, in a bemused aside, reiterated their rejection for all the southern parties' unity policies: Fine Gael offered 'glowing words', Sinn Fein, 'the guns'; they had 'not yet received the de Valera bid, but we are not in the market.'⁸³ With Sinn Fein vigorously contesting the election and hoping to win support for their northern campaign, the two main Dail parties ignored the irredentist issue, agreeing, as Chubb has noted, 'not to touch such inflammable material.'⁸⁴ Although standing in only half the constituencies, Sinn Fein's percentage of the total vote was five per cent and they returned four abstentionist candidates.⁸⁵

Yet again, this election effected a change in government, de Valera forming his eighth and last administration in March 1957. In a television interview, he was asked if he thought there was a growth in support for violence. He replied:

I do not know. I would not like to be definite about that. As long as you have a problem and peaceful methods to solve it that are not very effective then you always have people who think that force ought to be used. My own view is that the peaceful line of approach is best, in fact, the only one.⁸⁶

Questioned on the IRA campaign at his press conference the following day, he regretted that no steps were being taken 'to remove the cause' of violence, Partition. Force, however, would not be effective 'and cannot

78. Ibid., 2 Mar. 1957.

79. Matt Feehan, ibid., 5 Mar. 1957.

80. J.O'Toole, ibid.

81. Irish Press, 5 Mar. 1957.

82. Ibid., 4 Mar. 1957.

83. W.B.B.Topping, The Times, 8 Feb. 1957.

84. Basil Chubb, 'Ireland 1957', in D.E.Butler, ed., Elections abroad, (London:1959), pp.183-222.

85. O'Leary (1979:44-5); Basil Chubb, The government and politics of Ireland, (Oxford:1970) see map 3.9, p.86.

86. BBC television, 7 Mar. 1957, reported Irish News, 8 Mar. 1957.

get the right solution'; abstentionist Sinn Fein TDs were 'living in the past': private armies would not be tolerated by his government.⁸⁷ Significantly, editorial opinion in Belfast's unionist press welcomed de Valera's return to power,⁸⁸ as, in contrast to Costello's 'tardy action' against the IRA, he was certain to be 'master in his own house.'⁸⁹ The Belfast Newsletter added the hope that the new government would produce 'no "plots", no attempts to destroy Northern Ireland by subterranean moves at Westminster and elsewhere while the gunmen fire their shots and plant their bombs.'⁹⁰

(d) Quiescence

One proposal current on de Valera's resumption as Taoiseach in 1957, was a suggestion by the Roman Catholic Primate, Cardinal D'Alton for a united Ireland within the Commonwealth. Asked about such a solution six years before, de Valera - while refusing to exclude the option of 'free association with other states' - had stated that he did 'not think the Irish people would even think about it...'.⁹¹ This was shortly after his return to power in 1951: in 1957 he was asked at his post-election press conference for his views on the D'Alton plan. By now he seems to have had a more open mind: there was 'no use' in making proposals in the south unless they were 'met with sympathy' in the north; he himself had put forward proposals which were 'not dissimilar' but to no avail.⁹² Again in 1958, at a London press conference, he was asked if a united Ireland would rejoin the Commonwealth: his reply was that 'adjustments would have to be made when the six counties joined the twenty-six. A conference would be necessary to settle this question and at such a conference the question of a new relationship with Britain would have to be settled.'⁹³ The Times made the complaint that even 'the most diligent questioning' had not led de Valera 'to break new ground': in fact, his reply - making allowances for the ratchet pulling in the opposite direction - was a significantly open one.⁹⁴

Another dimension to the Partition question after the War was the complications which it entailed for the defence strategy of the North Atlantic states. The coming of peace in 1945 had not resulted in any diminution in the strategic importance of Ireland: while Belfast and London reassured each other of their mutual interdependence, Dublin continued to emphasise the overall instability which resulted from

87. Press conference, Irish News, 9 Mar. 1957.

88. Editorials, Northern Whig and Belfast Newsletter, 8 Mar., Belfast Telegraph, 7 Mar. 1957.

89. Editorial, Northern Whig, 8 Mar. 1957.

90. Editorial, Belfast Telegraph, 7 Mar. 1957.

91. Irish Press, 17 Mar. 1951.

92. Ibid., 9 Mar. 1957.

93. Ibid., 19 Mar. 1958

94. The Times, 19 Mar. 1958.

Partition. De Valera - himself deeply pessimistic about the likelihood of another war - told a meeting in Glasgow University in 1948 that

...if Ireland were really an enemy of Britain and did things that one State which had been oppressed by another might attempt to do - side with a powerful enemy - it would be dangerous for Ireland.⁹⁵

Brooke was contemptuous of what he saw as attempts to use 'this unclean weapon' to attempt to bring pressure on the British government.⁹⁶ He thought southern arguments in defence of neutrality 'specious', paraphrasing them as:

We have a grievance and unless it is remedied we will lift no finger to save civilization even though war should threaten its destruction.⁹⁷

De Valera, for his part, obviously considered this dimension one of the few on which the south could offer concessions coveted by London: in 1951 he argued that whereas a divided Ireland would have no option but to remain neutral in a third world war, it would be 'difficult to say what a free Ireland would do.' But he refused to consider as a condition for unity that the Allies would be guaranteed bases on Irish soil - there would be no 'bargaining of that sort':⁹⁸ however, a year later, his emissary Jack Lynch, as a guest at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference at Ottawa, seemed to go further when suggesting that only a united Ireland 'would be able to take a full part in the defence of democracy.'⁹⁹ This approach secured the south's neutrality but made no impression on the Partition issue.¹⁰⁰

With Irish entry into the United Nations Organization in 1955, there were some hopes that the anti-Partitionist agitation would be carried to the floor of the General Assembly. Indeed the second Coalition government was challenged by Brookeborough to bring their charges of discrimination against his government to the U.N. Healy wrote to Conor Cruise O'Brien - then in the Irish foreign service - seeking advice on handling Brookeborough's challenge. O'Brien replied that the Department was

going very fully...into the question of what the most fruitful approach is likely to be bearing in mind both the desirability of having a full investigation on the spot, and the desirability of making it clear, should such an investigation be refused, that Lord Brookeborough's challenge was an empty one.¹⁰¹

In fact, through prudence and an awareness that a British veto would preclude the Assembly from considering the issue, the Partition question was not seriously raised at the U.N. during these years although there were occasional references to the unsuitability of partition as a solution to minority problems. By his last term as Taoiseach, de Valera was again parrying Dail questions about his lack of agitation on Partition, Irish membership of the U.N. being possibly an embarrassment in this regard, since to his critics it seems that he was ignoring an ideal forum

95. The Times, 19 Oct. 1948.

96. Ibid., 19 Feb. 1949.

97. Ibid., 31 July 1948.

98. Irish Times, 17 Mar. 1951.

99. The Times, 15 Sept. 1952.

100. See Patrick Keatinge, A place among the nations: issues of Irish foreign policy, (Dublin:1978) chs. 5-6 *passim*.

101. Conor Cruise O'Brien to Cahir Healy, 2 Apr. 1954, Healy papers, D2991/A/375C.

in which to raise the question.

One course of action which he emphatically rejected was any call for international arbitration: the dispute was essentially an Irish problem and it would be 'foolish' if 'in desperation' an Irish government was to put its solution at the disposal of any outside body.¹⁰² In general de Valera was disenchanted with the possibility of progress through international agencies. He was no enthusiast for the European Community, although one of his ministers, Gerald Boland, as early as 1957 thought that when the Common Market 'became a reality, it would go a long way to removing the border'.¹⁰³ Later that year, de Valera told the Ard Fheis that 'the nations of Europe could not lend much ear to our problems. They believed that our problems were very small indeed.'¹⁰⁴

Nor - although the fact that government records are still closed for the period must be borne in mind - does the nineteen-fifties seem to have been a particularly creative period in diplomatic initiatives on Partition: British ministers declined to discuss it,¹⁰⁵ de Valera admitting publicly that he had not had much opportunity of discussing it during these years.¹⁰⁶

There was one courtesy lunch with Churchill in September 1953 when both men were in power, but this was in the nature of a sentimental meeting between old adversaries, not an Anglo-Irish summit to discuss Partition.¹⁰⁷ On the Irish side, there followed the inevitable assumption that Partition had been debated: Gallagher, noted that there was 'no record' of that meeting but was certain 'that the opportunity was wisely used to further, somehow, the compelling dream of de Valera's life - the reunification of Ireland.'¹⁰⁸ The visit was followed by the inevitable Dail question on whether 'any new formula' had been evolved to settle Partition. De Valera replied, perfunctorily, through a parliamentary secretary, that 'the answer was in the negative'.¹⁰⁹ The brevity of de Valera's own note of the meeting, reveals the entrenched positions of both men:

I spoke first of a possible unification of the country. To this he replied that they could never put out of the United Kingdom the people of the Six Counties so long as the majority wished to remain with them. There were also political factors which no Conservative could ignore.¹¹⁰

Meanwhile de Valera was 'constantly making approaches' to the Ulster Unionists but without success.¹¹¹ Until there was 'some response' from Belfast, there was 'no use us saying we will do this or that.'¹¹² He continued to advocate his federal proposals throughout the 1950s although,

102. Irish Press, 20 Nov. 1957.

103. Ibid., 19 Feb. 1957.

104. Ibid., 20 Nov. 1957.

105. Interview, F.H. Boland.

106. Press conference, London, Irish Press, 19 Mar. 1958.

107. The Times, 16 and 17 Sept., 1953.

108. Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(3).

109. The Times, 19 Nov. 1953.

110. Longford and O'Neill (1970:442-3).

111. Irish Press, 19 Mar. 1958.

112. Ibid., 9 Mar. 1957.

clearly, he was all too aware of unionist lack of interest.¹¹³ He seems to have been as preoccupied by the other 'national aim' - the restoration of the language.¹¹⁴ Here was a policy-area where success depended on the collective national will in the south. But de Valera's own enthusiasm for this goal was not shared by his party colleagues who displayed cynicism on the subject.¹¹⁵

De Valera's final address to the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis, at the 1958 Ard Fheis, demonstrated this preoccupation.¹¹⁶ On this occasion - it should be remembered that he may not have known that this was to be his final speech to this particular assembly - he did not mention Partition. At the previous year's Ard Fheis, he had confided to the delegates that he had 'lived with this problem' of Partition for forty years: he had 'prayed and...hoped...and done everything humanly possible that promised success to try and solve this problem.' Delegates who, consistently since the party's foundation, had argued that only de Valera could solve this question, now hoped that he would live to see a united Ireland. De Valera replied:

I pray to Heaven that I will see this problem solved before I die. (prolonged cheering). I don't want any of you to think that it is more than a prayer to the Almighty. The Almighty has been very good to this nation. We have achieved wondrous things in the last forty years. We have seen wondrous things happen and, in God's mercy we may see the rest. But I cannot promise it to you and nobody else in this country can.

The delegates then 'stood and cheered for several minutes.'¹¹⁷ To the Dail, during the last debate on the estimates for his department he repeated a challenge which he had first issued on the eve of his election victory in 1932:¹¹⁸ its repetition now at the close of the de Valera era merely underlined the central disappointment of his career. While having no blueprint for unity himself, he stated that 'anybody who would get the solution would be regarded as one of the greatest men in Irish history.'¹¹⁹

113. *Ibid.*, 19 Mar. 1958.

114. See emphasis in last election campaign, *ibid.*, 4 and 5 Mar. 1957.

115. Interview Kevin Boland.

116. 1958 Ard Fheis, *ibid.*, 29, 30 Oct. 1958.

117. *Ibid.*, 20 Nov. 1957.

118. *Ibid.*, 28 Oct. 1931.

119. DE:170:1072, 17 July 1958.

PART THREE

CONCLUSION: DE VALERA'S IMPACT ON PARTITION, 1917-1959: HIS LEGACY TO HIS SUCCESSORS, 1959-1973.

...the two barriers to a united Ireland at the moment are Eire and Northern Ireland.

Malcolm MacDonald, August 1938.¹

...Ulster is a fact which (de Valera) must recognise, not a figment bolstered up by the British government as a counter to Sinn Fein. He does not understand this. Till he understands it, I fear that a settlement will always be unattainable.

Lloyd George to Craig, July 1921.²

We elders have failed to find a solution...we made no headway: so our successors must start from "square one".

Sean MacEntee, January 1970.³

One thing before them all was an Ireland free and an Ireland united. He was afraid once that he would not see the country united in his lifetime, but now that they were in Europe, he was sure that they would be going in as one nation. With faith in the country and the Irish language, he was certain that young people in the crowd would see Ireland united.

Eamon de Valera, in his last public speech, June 1973.⁴

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1. Malcolm MacDonald minute, 21 Aug. 1938, PRO DO 35/893/X11/234.
 2. Lloyd George to Craig, 21 July 1921, PRONI CAB 4/10/5.
 3. Sean MacEntee, Irish Press, 22 Jan. 1970.
 4. Irish Times, 25 June 1973.

He is the only visible Irish leader with the ghost of a chance of replacing the present chaos by a National Anti-Partition movement that will appeal to the new generation.

- William O'Brien, March 1927.¹

As to union in Ireland(,) my judgement is that it can only come about by the complete elimination of de Valera who is an unprincipled and utterly dishonest self-seeker....

- John Devoy, January 1924.²

...but until I die, Partition will be the first thing in my mind.

- Eamon de Valera, April 1938.³

(i) The Green Card

In 1924, Eamon de Valera was the victim of a 'Watergate' - his political opponents, then in power, authorized the planting of hidden microphones to overhear his discussion of political strategy. That de Valera was a prisoner at the time - interned by the Cosgrave government at the conclusion of the Civil War - offered the authorities their opportunity to overhear his prediction of their own inevitable failure in Irish politics: the 'vital weakness' of the Cumann na nGaedheal government, de Valera was recorded as saying, was that

it knew nothing of the psychology of the people. It was too passive. The people now didn't care about politics as such. They ceased to do so with the disappearance of the old Irish Party. Nationality was the only thing that mattered.

He believed the Cosgrave government 'incapable of feeling the nation's pulse'⁴ - a failing from which he himself was immune: had he not told the Dail during the Treaty debate that 'whenever I wanted to know what the Irish people wanted I had only to examine my own heart and it told me straight off...'.⁵ This claim that nationality rather than politics was what mattered in Ireland suggests a key to de Valera's subsequent career. Within two years of his release from jail, he had founded Fianna Fail; a year later he had brought that 'slightly constitutional' party into the Free State Dail; and in 1932 he began a sixteen year period of uninterrupted leadership which, if it did not prove that nationality was 'the only thing that mattered', demonstrated that the 'Green card' was a difficult one to trump, at least south of the border.⁶

1. William O'Brien (ex-MP) to Col. Nicholls, 17 Mar. 1927, O'Brien papers, NLI ms. 8506(9).

2. John Devoy to Maurice Moore, 29 Jan. 1924, Moore papers, NLI ms. 5,500.

3. The Times, 30 Apr. 1938.

4. Intelligence report of de Valera's prison conversation in Arbour Hill prison, 3 and 4 Jan. 1924, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/B/286/1-5.

5. DE:6 Jan. 1922, p.274, during the Treaty debate.

6. For a discussion of de Valera's playing the Green Card, see, J.R.Fanning, Irish Times, 19 May 1976.

(ii) De Valera and the nationalist 'myths' concerning Partition.

(a) Myth 1 : one nation

That the Irish self-evidently formed a single nation was the most central tenet of Irish nationalism. Never subjected to searching analysis, there was considerable confusion among nationalists on this point, the Ulster unionists being excluded or included in the Irish nation depending on the argument in hand. De Valera wavered between the view that the Ulster unionists were 'fundamentally Irish'¹ and that their preference for British citizenship should logically lead them to 'go over to Britain.'² He was firmly opposed to any 'two nations' theory: there was no 'racial difference' between the inhabitants south and north of the border.³ Geography was the final arbiter in determining the Irish nation: the map of the country was 'always in de Valera's eye',⁴ and, constantly throughout his public life, he gave visitors to his office a lecture on Partition and the 'map treatment.'⁵

From a scrutiny of his anti-partition speeches, from the cartographical propaganda which he originated and from the cumulative testimony of numerous witnesses, including journalists, politicians and diplomats, it is possible to delineate de Valera's detailed map-image of 'the Ulster question'. 'This Ulster', he told an American audience in 1920 before Partition was enacted, 'is a thing of the mind only, non-existent in the world of reality.'⁶ Such a statement taken along with his selective analysis of the Ulster results in the general election of 1918, demonstrates de Valera's highly subjective imagining of the geographical data: but he was not alone among nationalists in holding 'illusory or deceptive conceptions conforming to what one would like rather than necessarily to the truth.'⁷

His perception of the areal distribution of nationalists and unionists in the six counties may have been somewhat distorted but no more so than were Unionist perceptions.⁸ For instance, one telling propaganda point - arguably unanswerable and, in fact, unanswered - which he constantly made was that if county units had been used to determine the six counties, why had Fermanagh and Tyrone been included?⁹ He also believed Ireland to be

1. Irish Press, 13 Oct. 1954.

2. Ibid., 23 June 1948.

3. DE:112:931-2, 20 July and ibid., col.948, 21 July 1948; 'De Valera makes appeal for reunification of Ireland', 3 Apr. 1948, read into the record in the House of Representatives, 28 Apr. 1948 (by Walter A. Lynch).

4. Newsreel commentary during Second World War, quoted on RTE television, The Way We Were: 1940-1950, 22 Mar. 1976.

5. Maffey to DO, 20 Sept. 1939, PRO DO 35/1109/WX1/5; Menzies (1967:40); Gray to Roosevelt, 6 June 1940; interview with T.P.O'Neill.

6. Gaelic American, 24 Jan. 1920.

7. John K. Wright, 'Terrae Incognitae': the place of the imagination in Geography', Annals of the Association of American Geographers, vol.37, no.1, Mar. 1947, pp.1-15.

8. DE:112:932, 20 July 1948; see map published in Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 22-23 Feb. 1938, p.2954.

9. Cobban (1969:137).

too small an island to be partitioned: during the 1938 election, he pronounced the boundary line 'ridiculous': he had always thought it 200 miles long but had then 'got it carefully measured on the map' and found it 300 miles in length. 'Just think of it! A boundary of 300 miles in this small island which is only the size of Lake Superior.'¹⁰

Fundamental to his anti-Partition stance was his belief in natural boundaries: the exclusion of the six counties from the Irish polity was akin to 'cutting out Ireland's heart.'¹¹ He did admit that there was 'a certain amount of truth' in the arguments of those - such as political geographers and theorists of nationality - who argued that the boundaries of individual nationalisms were subject to change over time: his reply to such theorists - he was speaking in 1939 - reveals the key to his thinking on Partition. He quoted with approval from a recent letter of Mussolini:

"There is something about the boundaries that seem to be drawn by the hand of the Almighty which is very different from the boundaries that are drawn by ink upon a map:- Frontiers traced by inks on other inks can be modified. It is quite another thing when the frontiers were traced by Providence."¹²

(b) Myth 2: Perfidious Albion again.

The conventional nationalist complaint was that 'Providence (had) arranged the geography of Ireland' but that Lloyd George had 'changed it,'¹³ Britain's motive being 'imperial convenience'.¹⁴ Heslinga chooses de Valera's formulation of this viewpoint to illustrate what, in his view, was 'almost generally accepted' by Irish nationalists.¹⁵ De Valera described Partition as

a purely arbitrary act, inspired solely by considerations of British Imperial policy, and contrary to every interest of the Irish people. Imposed by force and maintained by subsidies, Partition is the worst of all the many crimes committed by British statesmen against the Irish people during the 750 years.¹⁶

De Valera was willing to admit that were it not for the concentration of unionists in the north-east of the island, Britain could not have effected her purpose. Initially, however, his view was emphatically that Britain had deliberately fomented Partition - her motive being strategic security.¹⁷ MacEntee's retrospective view was that while his views on this question 'mellowed later', he was, in 1917, 'firm in the conviction' that the difficulty with Ulster 'was due to British guile and nothing else.'¹⁸ De Valera did mellow later, claiming in 1939 that he believed he had never

10. Irish Press, 30 May 1938.

11. Interview, U.S. news agency, quoted Belfast Newsletter, 9 Feb. 1938.

12. SE:22:980, 7 Feb. 1939.

13. Quoted Mansergh (1965:216-7).

14. Frank Gallagher papers, draft ms, NLI ms. 18,377(7).

15. Heslinga (1962:67).

16. Quoted ibid.

17. MacEntee recording de Valera's views in 1916-17, MacEntee (1975).

18. Ibid.

thought Britain 'wholly responsible': and to a heckler at that year's Ard Fheis, he replied that there was 'no use in saying this matter can be solved altogether with Britain. It cannot.'¹⁹ He became appreciably more critical of Britain's responsibility in the wake of the 1949 Ireland Act, claiming that Westminster, which had created and maintained Partition, now intended to consolidate it.²⁰

On one point de Valera was adamant: he was not prepared to allow British ministers to escape their responsibilities for Northern Ireland.²¹ For instance, Chamberlain, across the table, at the 1938 talks, claimed that

...he could not too strongly emphasise that the London government possessed no legal powers or authority which would enable them to compel the Government of Northern Ireland to change their alleged attitude towards the minority in Northern Ireland, even if any discrimination was, in fact, shown against that minority.²²

This was an indication of the extent to which British ministers had neglected their responsibilities. De Valera, for his part, believed the key to breaking the impasse between north and south, lay with Britain and his own policy was invariably directed to London not Belfast. Also, through his juridical claim to the northern territory in his 1937 Constitution he challenged Britain's claim to the territory. It remained his fixed view from 1921 that the problem could only be resolved in 'the larger general play of English interest.'²³

(c) Myths 4,5,6: that Britain could effect Irish unity.

Myth 4 is concerned with nationalist expectations of British policy: it suggests that a united, politically stable Ireland would result if only Britain coerced the Ulster unionists into acceptance of such an outcome.²⁴ Nationalist expectations varied on the lengths to which British pressure on the unionists should go, from military coercion to economic and diplomatic persuasion. Ever since Partition had first been enacted, Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists had both been anxious to win British government support for their respective aspirations.

Pre-war, the British claimed to be a disinterested party and this was repeatedly stressed to de Valera between 1932 and 1939. De Valera, for his part, was again relatively moderate on this question: the purpose of the government's anti-Partition campaign in Britain, he told the Senate in 1939, was

not to beg the British people to do anything in the way of coercing those in the north-east who do not want to come in with us but to

19. SE:22:982, 7 Feb. 1939.

20. Irish Press, 14 May 1949.

21. DE:115:813, 10 May 1949.

22. PRO CAB 27/642 IN(38)6th meeting, 23 Feb. 1938.

23. Longford and O'Neill (1970:123).

24. Myth 3, concerned with the inevitability of unity is discussed in section iii below.

cease actively encouraging that section to keep out. He was not only opposed to the use of force by Irish nationalists to coerce Ulster, but rejected any use of force by Britain to compel the unionists into an allegiance which they did not voluntarily espouse. In fact, he suggested that he would fight alongside the Ulster unionists to resist any such coercion. What he expected of Britain was a public declaration of their commitment to Irish unity, the cessation of what he saw as the military coercion of the border nationalists and the ending of British economic support for Partition. 'What', he asked was the use of the south holding out economic attractions, 'if, when we offer something, twice as much is offered by the people who are competing.'²⁵

Britain came nearest to meeting de Valera's claims during the Chamberlain-MacDonald era in Anglo-Irish relations in the late 1930s. London was then insisting that her position was one of studied disinterestedness on Partition: its solution was an Irish problem and Chamberlain's government would support any agreement which de Valera could reach with the Ulster Unionists. As for Dublin's suggestion that Britain publicly declare her support for any united Ireland which would be agreed between north and south, MacDonald assiduously pressed for such a declaration from his colleagues during the 1938 negotiations, finally persuaded them to agree a draft being sent to Dublin, where it was considered unsatisfactory and was dropped because of the south's unwillingness to agree trade concessions to Northern Ireland in return.²⁶ The declaration was no advance on what successive British ministers had privately insisted was the case, but it would have marked a serious reversal for the Ulster Unionists and a gain for Fianna Fail had the latter accepted the terms on which it was offered. Subsequently, de Valera recalled that he had sought such a declaration but failed to get one 'that I considered to be of any value.'²⁷

Not only was de Valera privately assured that the British government would 'welcome the ending of Partition' if he could secure the 'willing consent' of Northern Ireland²⁸ but, at this period, London specifically rejected Ulster Unionist suggestions that it would be 'most helpful' if Britain affirmed its positive commitment to Partition as an imperial interest. The Chamberlain administration rejected this as putting the British government 'in a position to which they have never aspired and do not aspire.'²⁹ Yet within ten years Britain espoused just this position with their 'positive support' for Partition represented in the Ireland Act, thus starkly revealing the deterioration in Dublin's bargaining position caused by wartime neutrality and the repeal of the External Relations Act. The switching of the veto on Irish unity from London to Belfast must have represented for de Valera, the most serious reversal in his anti-Partition

25. SE:22;982-7, 7 Feb. 1939.

26. See above, ch.5:ii-iii.

27. DE:107:80, 24 June 1947.

28. Devonshire note, 21 Aug. 1938. DO 35/893/X11/234.

29. See discussion of the Andrews/Chamberlain/Londonderry correspondence in ch.5:iii;e above.

campaign. It was the 'contrary assertion' to that which he had been patiently requesting for the previous sixteen years.³⁰ The deterioration in the south's bargaining position was compounded by the extension of the British welfare state to Northern Ireland, further proof to Irish nationalists that London was determined to maintain Partition. In 1951, de Valera dismissed as 'political hypocrisy' attempts by London 'unctuously to suggest' that Irish unity depended on agreement between north and south.³¹ De Valera did not believe that British military coercion of the north would result in a stable united Ireland. Indeed Fianna Fail doubted whether this was within Britain's capacity.³² What they did expect was British encouragement for Irish unity rather than the political, economic and military support of Partition which was the basis of British policy, particularly after 1949. Whereas to London and Belfast this was merely a logical consequence of Northern Ireland's membership of the United Kingdom, Irish nationalists felt continued frustration at what they considered a policy designed to entrench Partition.

(iii) De Valera's Partition policy.

(a) Unity - inevitable but postponable

De Valera, it was said, regarded Irish unity as 'a moral goal as simple as salvation'.¹ In this he was not alone: the most widely accepted myth among nationalists is that what they see as the inherent absurdity of Partition will result in its eventual demise. Indeed, so certain was de Valera of this point that he suggested that 'all the misery of the intervening years' should be avoided by an acceptance by Ulster of unity.² It is also true that de Valera came to doubt this myth, as he admitted in his last public speech in 1973, but throughout his career he implicitly and explicitly presumed in his speeches that Partition could not be a permanent solution to the Ulster question. Unity, however, along with being inevitable was also postponable.³ If Fianna Fail supporters could not be told when to expect Irish unity, what did de Valera say on how Partition might be ended? In short, what was his Ulster policy?

His central tenet was that any attempt to end Partition by force would

30. DE:115:813, 10 May 1949.

31. Irish Press, 15 Sept. 1951.

32. See Gray to Roosevelt, 28 June 1940, reporting O'Kelly's views.

1. Patrick O'Donovan, 'De Valera, the Irish De Gaulle', The Observer, 31 Aug. 1975.

2. DE:147:200, 28 Oct. 1954.

3. See Aiken, Irish Press, 31 May 1938, ibid., 14 May, 1949; de Valera, 12 Oct. 1944; Derrig, DE:68:393, 14 June 1937.

fail. He had, in the 1917-18 period, threatened force against Ulster, but although these speeches were recalled by his political opponents in later years, they no longer represented de Valera's views.⁴ Although he often suggested - as in May 1926 - 'that military action should not be excluded',⁵ his essential strategy was to convert all Irish nationalists to his conviction that any attempt to unite the people of the island through the use of force would, not only, in all probability, fail, but that even if it were to result in unity, this would be intrinsically unstable and probably short-lived. On hundreds of occasions he spelt out this fundamental belief. In February 1939 after the outbreak of the IRA's bombing campaign in Britain, de Valera told the Senate that he considered the 1921 decision to rule out force as 'a wise one', adding that he had 'never retreated from that position in public yet nor in private.' However, he would, if he could see a way of doing it effectively, 'rescue' the border nationalists 'from the coercion which they are suffering at the present time.' But this, he added, would not solve the problem of Partition.⁶ The conclusion which de Valera drew from this consideration of the use of force to annex border areas was probably his central motive for thus thinking aloud: the message that force might push the border northwards but not solve Partition was probably intended for those Republicans then advocating the use of force to gain control of border areas.⁷ There was considerable interest in the Dominions Office when de Valera made a similar speech at his first postwar Ard Fheis in 1945. But again his purpose was pacific: any resort to force in such minority disputes, he concluded, would mean that 'civilisation, as we know it, will come to an end.'⁸ Maffey's summary in 1946 was fair, that whereas de Valera's government was 'sane and sound' on the issue of force, the 'blood-sacrifice tradition in Ireland is strong.'⁹

Although opting for political rather than military means to undo Partition, it cannot be presumed that all members of Fianna Fail disapproved of force. As has been shown throughout this text, there were always some extremists in the party who advocated force and many more who would be reluctant to become Britain's 'policeman' in preventing the south being used by others as a safe haven.¹⁰ The thrust of de Valera's entire career was to discourage any resort to force: as he confided to Maffey, 'with all emphasis', in July 1940, his government would never attack the north: 'No solution there can come by force. There we must wait and let the solution come with time and patience.'¹¹

De Valera did share the conviction of nationalists that for as long as Partition remained, sporadic violence was inevitable. And he was willing

4. See for instance, McGilligan, DE:30:878-881, 5 June 1929; Cowan, himself advocating force, DE:115:823.

5. Notes on de Valera's statement, 23 May 1926, Austin Stack papers NLI, 17,087.

6. SE:22:979-80, 7 Feb. 1939.

7. Plan advocated by Tom Barry, Coogan (1970:116).

8. Tory to Stephenson, 9 Nov. 1945, PRO DO 35 1228/WX101/106, commenting on speech reported Irish Press, 7 Nov. 1945.

9. Maffey on meeting with de Valera, 18 May 1946, PRO CAB 129/10, CP(46)212.

10. See speech by Vivion de Valera, DE:273:1613-14, 26 June 1974. Interview with Martin Corry.

11. Maffey to DO, 17 July 1940, PRO CAB 66/10 WP(40)274.

to exploit this factor as a lever in attempting to erode British confidence in Partition. Occasionally, he seemed to use this argument in a threatening way but as his record in government shows, he was not only implacably opposed to the IRA, but specifically rejected in the 'thirties and again in the 'fifties their suggestions that his government could reap the political benefits of an IRA campaign obliging the British to negotiate on Partition. It remained his conviction that the political stability and strategic interests of the two islands would be best served by some amelioration of Partition but although this strategic dimension remained a potential catalyst,¹² de Valera's attempts to link the defence and Partition issues in the 1938 negotiations proved unsuccessful and when Britain attempted to strike a bargain in June 1940, de Valera declined. This latter decision, remained, for London, the test case on this question whenever it was considered after the War.

Although his own foreign minister throughout the 1932-48 period, diplomacy did not prove for de Valera a fruitful means of making progress on Partition. His most creative period in Anglo-Irish relations was from 1932 to 1939: his concentration was on issues other than Partition until the very close of this period, when, with Republican extremists forcing him into a position of intransigence, he merely exacerbated an already hopeless position. Thereafter, the War and the decline in his electoral fortunes which followed it, combined with unsympathetic governments in London, precluded any useful attempts to make progress through diplomacy. One of the most senior Irish diplomats with long experience of de Valera's attempts to interest London in the issue, concluded that de Valera's error was that he believed that Partition 'could be solved by logical argument.'¹³

Although always a believer in propaganda, it was not until after the War and in particular his loss of power in 1948 that de Valera decided fully to explore the potential of this approach. It, too, proved futile: no worse moment could have been chosen to attempt to interest the world in what were, relatively, the insignificant grievances of the northern minority.

Yet another approach which proved unavailing was Fianna Fail's protectionist economic policy. British ministers in Chamberlain's government were probably correct in their advice to de Valera that the best response from Dublin would have been to woo the north with trade concessions rather than use an economic weapon which had enough leverage to alienate the unionists but not sufficient to divide their ranks or oblige them to prefer unity. Moreover, given the scale and type of industry in the north, and the agricultural surpluses both south and north, de Valera's assertion that the island of Ireland would form a balanced economy was ill-founded.

12. That Britain was likely to subsidise Northern Ireland for as long as Irish defensive policy was not 'closely co-ordinated with hers' was MacEntee's conclusion after fifty years in anti-Partition politics. MacEntee, Irish Press, 20 Jan. 1970.

13. Confidential source.

One faction within Fianna Fail - of whom Lemass seems to have been the earliest and strongest proponent - advocated functional co-operation with the north as useful in itself and at least not harmful to the anti-Partitionist cause. Although there was greater emphasis on this policy in the Lemass years, it was during de Valera's leadership of the party that agreements were reached which resulted in 'the linking of the electricity grids, the establishment of the joint Foyle Fisheries Board, co-operation in the prevention of farm stock disease and other developments.'¹⁴

Compared to his successors as leader of Fianna Fail, de Valera laid great emphasis on one aspect of Partition: the injustice of the boundary as drawn. This may have hidden a personal conviction on his part that a readjustment of the border - while not a solution - would have represented an improvement. This was a point on which there were genuine differences between nationalists: one school, represented by O'Shiel, believed that the 'absurd and ridiculous' border was 'better a hundred-fold' than 'an effective and workable one';¹⁵ de Valera, on the other hand, laid such stress on how truncated the northern state would be if there were to be a plebiscite among border nationalists that he was sometimes presumed to be calling for a redrawing of the boundary.¹⁶ Yet this was never explicitly party policy and Chamberlain in the wake of the Munich agreement, when the Sudeten parallel was in both men's minds, recorded de Valera as not seeking the cession of territory.¹⁷

(b) De Valera's federal policy

From 1921, de Valera had advocated a federal solution to the Ulster question: his political difficulty was not in selling this to the Ulster Unionists - they had no interest whatever - but in convincing his supporters that local autonomy and external association were consistent with the proclaimed goals of Republicans at Easter 1916. To rally support in defence of the Republic was a simpler proposition than to persuade anti-Treatyites to believe their forlorn sacrifices in the Civil War had been in defence of Document No.2. Yet this, in fact, was de Valera's programme and, indeed, with the establishment of Fianna Fail, his achievement. At the conclusion of the Civil War, in a letter of clarification to the Irish Independent, he again put on record his proposed federal solution to the Ulster question. This had the effect of reminding the defeated Republicans of some of the 'small print' in what de Valera hoped would once again become their political programme. That he forwarded a copy to McGarrity in America was a further indication of the essential importance he attached to

14. Longford and O'Neill (1970:471).

15. O'Shiel to cabinet, n.d. but Nov. 1922, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7/B/288.

16. See DE:109:1-6, 26 Nov. 1947. That it was always tempting for southern leaders to call for a plebiscite in border areas was mentioned by MacBride, interview Sean MacBride.

17. PRO CAB 27/642 IN(38)6, 23 Feb. 1938.

keeping his political programme before those whose proclaimed intention was to revert to force at the first opportunity.

In his letter to the Independent, de Valera stressed what the Republican cabinet of 1921 had agreed as their Ulster policy: in 'an earnest desire to be just and fair', they had proposed

that the fullest measure of local autonomy consistent with the unity of Ireland as a whole should be granted to the aggregate of those areas in which by a majority vote the residents demanded a separate Parliament. We were prepared to take as the unit of area for the plebiscite either the constituencies prior to the Act of 1920, or any smaller unit, such as the Poor Law Guardian or the District Council areas.

By that proposal, Derry City and the greater parts of the Counties of Tyrone and Fermanagh, as well as South Armagh and South Down, would be represented directly in the National Parliament. On no plea could the "Ulster" minority demand anything more.¹⁸

Throughout the rest of his career, de Valera used the fact that he had won the agreement of the 1921 cabinet for such a policy as an 'imprimatur' to shelter this policy from extreme republican criticism.

It was in 1938 that he most formally expressed his revised version of this federal offer when he envisaged local autonomy being devolved to a Belfast parliament controlling six counties. This may have been an attempt to interest London in negotiations - Craigavon's rebuff was predictable - but given its timing, it seems more plausible that its immediate purpose was to put Fianna Fail back into the centre of anti-Partitionist agitation which extreme Republicans were in danger of usurping. Another beneficial effect was that it rendered Dublin's approach to Partition more plausible to the outside world while its very rejection by the Ulster Unionists gave it more respectability to potential Republican critics than might have been the case had the offer been seriously considered. In F.H.Boland's view, de Valera had come to the conclusion that there was 'no chance' of unity 'without a fight and that he certainly didn't want' and his federal offer was 'a prophylaxis against a clash.'¹⁹

Another factor may here be considered: de Valera had an almost missionary zeal to effect societal changes in Ireland on a considerable scale but that all members of his cabinet did not share his vision of an ideal Ireland is manifest from their own testimony and indeed his.²⁰ In February 1939, for instance, he told the Senate that he was speaking for himself when he said that he would 'not to-morrow for the sake of a united Ireland give up the policy of trying to make this a really Irish-Ireland - not by any means.' He instanced the language restoration policy as one which he would not abandon even if that resulted in a united Ireland

I do not know how many would agree with me. I would say no, and I would say it for this reason: that I believe that as long as the language remains you have a distinguishing characteristic of nationality which will enable the nation to persist. If you lose the language the danger is that there would be absorption.²¹

18. De Valera to editor, Irish Independent, typescript copy, 20 July 1923, McGarrahy papers, NLI ms. 18,375(10).

19. Interview, F.H.Boland.

20. Interview, Sean MacEntee, Irish Times, 19 May 1976.

21. SE:22:988-9, 7 Feb. 1939.

Although his twentysix county emphasis can be understood in terms of making the best of his limited political options, given his overall 'Irish-Ireland' goal, his speeches would also be consistent with a belief that a federal solution with local autonomy to Ulster was preferable as an interim measure, to a unitary state in which his emphasis on Gaelic, Catholic and Republican values would prove unacceptable. His belief was that the restoration of the language was the most urgent political priority: his claim that, once restored, it would cross the border, indicates that the assimilation of the Ulster unionists was his ultimate goal. Unionists however, saw in the south's language policy 'a sort of awful insanity':²² Brooke insisted that they had no wish to 'live in a so-called paradise...'.²³ De Valera's settled conviction, however, was that he

had no fear that his dream of restoring Irish would run counter in any way to his other dream - the reuniting of the country. His view would be that the Northern Unionists were, at bottom, proud of being Irish; that the history, tradition and culture of the historic Irish nation could not fail to attract them...²⁴

In short, de Valera's state-idea, the establishment of an Irish-speaking, autarkical, neutral, independent, united Ireland was an implausible scenario from the outset: but even he must have appreciated that its chances of being realised were greater if it were to be attempted in two stages. In February 1940 he claimed that as long as 'they had five-sixths of the national territory and three-quarters of the Irish nation safe, they had a seed from which unity must grow'.²⁵ In his last election campaign in 1957 he claimed that if 'we make sure that this five-sixths is made really Irish we will have the preservation of the Irish nation in our hands. Time will settle the other thing';²⁶ and after he had retired from party politics, he claimed that 'France was France without Alsace and Lorraine... Ireland is Ireland without the North.'²⁷

(c) No solution?

Another dimension to de Valera's approach to Partition was an emphasis on opportunism. Gallagher outlined de Valera's duty as preparing for the disappearance of Partition 'which he must be ever ready to aid when the right moment comes and the right combination of circumstances arises'.²⁸ In 1951 de Valera told the Dail that 'circumstances may come our way again - we cannot create them, we can only avail of them...'.²⁹ In 1938 de Valera told the Senate that in the consideration of political choices, he had always posed one question to himself:

"Are we making towards ultimately having one State - one national State, or not? Are the things that we are doing going ultimately to

22. Hugh Shearman, Anglo-Irish relations, (London:1948) p.241.

23. The Times, 18 Mar. 1947.

24. Longford and O'Neill (1970:459-60)

25. Irish Press, 19 Feb. 1940.

26. Ibid., 5 Mar. 1957.

27. New York Times interview, 1963, reprinted, Profile, May 1973.

28. Gallagher papers, 18,375(3).

29. DE:126:2022, 19 July 1951.

mean a national State or not?"³⁰

He was also on record as never having believed in a 'policy of trying to coax' the Ulster unionists. They deserved justice, but no special priveleges and he claimed in 1938 that a policy based on their conversion was likely to succeed.³¹ Stressing that all the south were agreed on the desirability of unity, de Valera told the Ard Fheis that year:

We have a third of the people in the six counties with us. The difference between one third and one half is only one sixth, so that if we only win one sixth of the population in that area we will have a majority there.

When we have that majority we can listen to people talking about plebiscites. I believe it will not take long to get that majority.³²

This claim must be considered in the context of the higher birth rate among the north's Roman Catholics. Even Unionists acknowledged that their future hegemony was insecure in this respect: as Maffey put it to London in 1945, the Unionists were 'fighting an insidious enemy who is gaining upon them. Their ballot box is not safe over a period against the Catholic birth-rate.'³³ De Valera shared this belief: he stated in a news agency interview in 1939 that 'We shall have to let time and the natural forces do their work',³⁴ and he confided to an American diplomat during the War that Partition 'would be solved by the natural increase of the Catholics...who would, at a propitious time, call for a plebiscite to end partition and British occupation in the North.'³⁵

An associated fear for unionists was that migrant workers from the south would in time become residents and then voters.³⁶ There is also some evidence that northern nationalists attempted systematically to organize the financing of land purchase schemes whereby Catholics could borrow finance to enable them to buy Protestant farms. Although attempts may have been made to interest the Dublin government in supporting such schemes, there is no evidence that this was tried on any substantial scale.³⁷ The Unionist government was, in any case, aware of this danger and there was a deep instinct in both northern communities to sell land only to co-religionists.³⁸

However all hopes of an anti-Partition majority within Northern Ireland - whether through 'peaceful penetration' from the south, the purchase of Protestant farms, the higher Catholic birth rate or the conversion of unionists proved ill-founded.

Given how fundamental the expectation of unity was to Fianna Fail supporters, it is not surprising that, with so little progress to report, de Valera placed such emphasis on the inevitability of unity: Partition,

30. SE:22:978, 7 Feb. 1939.

31. Irish Press, 7 June 1938.

32. Ibid., 24 Nov. 1938.

33. Maffey, PRO CAB 129/2 CP (45)152 annex I.

34. Associated Press interview, 17 Mar.(?1939)

35. See Carter (1977:68).

36. See Irish News, editorials, 4 and 20 May 1937.

37. Healy papers, D2991/A/148.

38. Interview John Montague

being 'inherently absurd' could not last; it was 'on a rotten foundation and it will totter and end.' Nationalists needed merely 'to make up our minds to make the proper assault.'³⁹ de Valera, however, never spelt out what he believed the 'proper assault' to be. Although never admitting that the problem was insoluble, he did accept that Fianna Fail - in the absence of any help from London and Belfast - had no solution. During the postwar election campaigns, in his last address to the Dail on the Taoiseach's estimate and in his last speech to the Ard Fheis on Partition, he repeated that he could make no promises on unity, adding that 'nobody else in this country can.'⁴⁰ Nor was this merely a pessimism which derived from three decades of failure on the issue: to the 1931 Ard Fheis, before Fianna Fail had ever reached office, he had attempted to dampen expectations by insisting that it was not possible to show how Partition could be ended.⁴¹

On his retirement from party politics at the close of the 1950s, he could point to no success in what had been over forty years of political opposition to Partition: diplomacy, propaganda, economic coercion had all proved unavailing; nor did the south prove to be the political or economic utopia which he had sometimes predicted would attract sufficient unionists to create a northern majority against Partition. In fact - as had so often been predicted by northern-born members of Fianna Fail - conversions in the north were from nationalist to unionist ranks, many of them presumably on the grounds of the economic attractions of the north's membership of the United Kingdom.⁴² Far from abolishing Partition, de Valera's years in politics marked its entrenchment.⁴³ Positively, in Fianna Fail's book, he had undone the Treaty settlement and through Articles 2 and 3 formally disputed the south's acceptance of the boundary in 1925: he had indeed 'subverted the Free State' as was Fianna Fail's initial purpose,⁴⁴ but the Republic which had resulted from all of these efforts was confined to twentysix counties with the Ulster unionists even further alienated by de Valera's southern policies.

39. New York Times, interview, reported in Irish Press, 20 Mar. 1940; Irish Press, 23 June 1948.

40. Irish Press, 30 May 1951; ibid., 20 Nov. 1957; DE:170:1072, 17 July 1958.

41. Ibid., 28 Oct. 1931.

42. Donnelly, Fr. Coyle, among others; see also Todd (Millstreet) delegate to 1943 Ard Fheis, Irish Press, 29 Sept. 1943.

43. Once boundaries are established, no matter how arbitrary, they tend to 'harden', Mitchel (1971:58), Orme (1970:249-50).

44. Interview, Kevin Boland.

(iv) Responsible 'in any way at all...'?

(a) '...inside a temperamentally different state'

De Valera's biographers state that after the Civil War, the 'lack of progress towards Irish unity was...the great tragedy in his political life'; 'it would, however', they add, 'be grossly and manifestly unfair to hold him responsible in any way at all for the continuance of partition.'¹ One of his most senior political colleagues, MacEntee, retrospectively took a more critical view of Fianna Fail's approach to Partition. Although he credits de Valera with being 'a great man, a Moses even, who led a small people out of bondage',² he also accepted that the south's approach to the Partition issue had been a failure. Writing in January 1970 he admitted:

We elders have failed to find a solution for the problem; and after fifty years we may be forgiven for thinking that perhaps we went the wrong way about it. Maybe we were too rigid in our approach, too tenacious of our own point of view, too proud to temporise or placate. Whatever may have been the reason, we made no headway; so our successors must start from "square one".³

Whereas MacEntee is prepared to admit that his generation of politicians was unrealistic in its approach, opposition politicians tend to reserve this criticism for de Valera.⁴ Dillon's verdict is that he was 'quite remote from reality...his mind was quite closed' on the Partition issue; in MacDermot's view, on this central goal in his career, he achieved 'nothing'.⁵ It is true that, judged from his public record, de Valera's lack of understanding of the Ulster unionists seems manifest: but privately he is recorded as having a more sophisticated view. His experience at the League of Nations, he confided to Devonshire, had 'taught him how stubborn and difficult this minority problem was, and that it needed endless patience and goodwill to deal with it'.⁶ More revealingly, in December 1939, Gallagher recorded his analysis of the Ulster question.

Discussed Partition with the Chief and what makes it so grievous a wound. He felt that the thing that made the deepest wound was not the division of a territory but the separation of the people - the division of the personnel of the nation.

Gallagher then added a recollection of an earlier conversation in which de Valera had outlined his perception of the Ulster unionist viewpoint:

...the problem...was on(e) of a group now in power fearing to become a minority inside a temperamentally different state. That was the essence of the persistence of Partition and it should be approached from that point of view.'⁷

1. Longford and O'Neill (1970:470).
2. MacEntee (1975).
3. MacEntee, Irish Press, 22 Jan. 1970.
4. Interview, Patrick McGilligan; John Kelly, 'FF on the north: crooked talk on a breathtaking scale', Hibernia, 4 Oct. 1979.
5. Interviews, James Dillon and Frank MacDermot.
6. Devonshire note, 4 Oct. 1938, PRO DO 35/893/X11/247.
7. Frank Gallagher, typed note, 20 Dec 1939 of two conversations with de Valera on Partition, Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(11).

Given these insights, how does one explain the naivete of de Valera's scenario for his 'ideal Ireland'? He can scarcely have believed that the Ulster unionists, already alienated by the 'temperamentally different state' which he had inherited from Cosgrave, could be coaxed into accepting the even more alien Ireland he was determined to shape. There was, of course, a minimum republican core of Fianna Fail's programme which was non-negotiable: unless de Valera achieved or continued to aspire to these goals, he could not sustain his support or satisfy his own conscience. Already with local autonomy and external association he was straining both: in these policy areas, given his commitments, he had no option but to pursue his programme of substituting Document No.2 for the Treaty. But what was also true, was that there were optional 'extras' in de Valera's programme to which he was personally committed, but to which many of his cabinet colleagues were indifferent if not hostile, which were not essential to retain electoral support and which served only further to alienate the Ulster unionists.

Examples would include his particular commitment to the compulsory dimension of the language policy, his extraordinary reference to the 'special position' of the Catholic Church in a constitution avowedly shaped for a united Ireland and his economic pursuit of 'frugal comfort'. The point is, perhaps, best made by comparing his approach to all of these questions with that of his partner in government and eventual successor, Lemass. Moreover, de Valera's ideal Ireland proved not to be feasible even south of the border which is an indication of how unrealistic it was as a long-term programme for the entire island.

Cobban's verdict seems fair when he suggests that 'the gulf dug between the Ulster Orangemen and Eire became almost impassable after the treaty, though not necessarily as a result of it.' He suggests that de Valera's decision to opt for 'a uni-national state' inevitably resulted in Partition being entrenched.⁸ However conciliatory and generous de Valera believed his policy towards the Ulster unionists to be, they perceived him as belonging to what Herz epitomises as 'the exclusivist, xenophobic, expansionist, oppressive' school of nationalists:⁹ however overstated this might be, the significant point is that it was the unionist perception of de Valera.¹⁰

(b) Who are the Irish?

Pre-Treaty alone, the futures which de Valera envisaged for the Ulster unionists included, expulsion, coercion, assimilation, accommodation and even, briefly in August 1921, self-determination, based on the right of

8. Cobban (1969:164)

9. John H. Herz, 'The territorial state revisited: reflections on the future of the nation-state', reprinted in J.N. Rosenau, International politics and foreign policy, (New York:1969 ed) p.89.

10. David Harkness, Irish Times, 19 May 1976.

counties to opt for exclusion from the Republic.¹¹ His biographers assert - and in a concluding chapter which is obviously based on interviews with their subject - that de Valera 'has given conclusive proof by his actions and by his public assertion that to him a Northern Irishman is as Irish as one from any other part of Ireland.'¹² This may represent de Valera's preferred personal rationalization at the end of his career, but it is an incomplete and misleading summary of his views. He is on record as saying that the Ulster unionists were 'fundamentally Irish',¹³ and that 'no matter how the world goes, these people and ourselves are going to live on one island here.'¹⁴ However his deepest belief was that Ulster unionists were only entitled to remain in Ireland on the condition that they renounce their unionism and opt for Irish citizenship. Consistently he argued in this sense, suggesting to the 1939 Ard Fheis that a sponsored scheme of population exchange between the emigrant Irish in Britain and Ulster unionists would, while costly, prove worthwhile in the long term.¹⁵ After the war he repeatedly suggested that the eventual choice for the unionists was either assimilation or emigration with compensation.¹⁶ And that he did not change his mind on this point is clear from interviews he gave after his retirement from party politics. To the New York Times, in 1962, he stated: "If in the North there are people who spiritually want to be English(sic) rather than Irish, they can go and we will see that they get the adequate, right compensation for their property."¹⁷

The historian David Harkness questioned de Valera on this issue in 1964. He asked if it were his view that the north should for 'the sake of cartographical tidiness, be annexed, or forcibly expelled or forcibly integrated or destroyed, or could it be persuaded of the error of its assumptions and led willingly back to its national membership?' To de Valera, notes Harkness, 'at least in retrospect, the analogy of Cyprus, as it was in the early 'sixties, was a helpful analogy...'. His belief was that the minority citizen, be he Turk or Ulster Unionist, 'must decide his priority: land or allegiance. If the former was more important, then he must accept subjection to the political will of the majority of the island; if being Turkish or British was the more important, then he should return forthwith to the favoured country, Turkey or Britain. The matter was as cut and dried as that.' None of this endeared de Valera to the north. In Harkness's view the Ulster unionists perceived him as a man 'deluded by notions of British interest' and unaware of how, to them, his policy was 'unattractively Catholic, unpalatably anti-British, of unproven political stability and of uncertain economic viability.' Moreover, Fianna Fail was 'associated inevitably with IRA physical force methods' and because the party's 'actions were never designed to win hearts, the response to those

11. Ch.2:ii-v above.

12. Longford and O'Neill (19 0:471).

13. At the 1954 Ard Fheis, Irish Press, 13 Oct. 1954.

14. DE:126:2027, 19 July 1951.

15. Irish Press, 14 Dec. 1939.

16. At Slough Town Hall, reported Irish Press, 19 Mar. 1951; *ibid.* 23 June 1948; to Massachusetts State Legislature, reprinted in 'With de Valera in America and Australia: world appeal against Partition', Irish Press, Dublin, 1943.

17. New York Times, interview, 1962, reprinted, Profile, May 1973.

actions was an intensified bitterness and hostility towards Dublin.¹⁸

Moreover, the unionists recognized all too clearly, the ratchet effect, not surprisingly, since they were its intended victims. De Valera's offer of October 1938, for instance was categorised by Craigavon as yet another example of a further demand from the south 'before the ink (was) dry' on the Anglo-Irish agreement of April;¹⁹ and the south's neutrality was, for Craigavon, the 'culminating point' in the policy of accepting 'concession after concession' from London, a 'process which we have foreseen in the North for the past forty years.'²⁰ Unionists would have agreed with Dillon's summary of Fianna Fail's policy that once they 'deluthered' the north into accepting unity, they would then put them 'in a republican pocket'.²¹ Indeed in his Evening Standard interview of October 1938 at which he outlined his federal policy de Valera was questioned specifically on the ratchet. He was asked if the Ulster unionists could rely on not being victims of a subsequent unilateral initiative, if they were to accept his terms. He replied that he could not 'guarantee all the to-morrows to come...'.²² Given such an approach, it is little surprise that the Unionists never revised Craigavon's initial verdict on de Valera's attaining power in 1932: 'There is now no question. De Valera has forever destroyed any hopes of a united Ireland.'²³

Political philosophers commenting on the problems posed by minorities have often adverted to de Valera's approach to the Ulster unionist minority within Ireland. Field notes that the Irish

refuse to recognise the right of Northern Ireland to vote itself out of the Irish Republic. Mr De Valera is reported as saying in that connection, "self-determination only applies to nationalities". He did not explain what practical criterion of nationality there can be except self-determination.

Field understands how 'people belong to a particular nationality because they think they do', but difficult to understand how it can be maintained that 'they belong because someone else thinks they ought to.'²⁴ A similar point is made by Crick with his dismissal of 'objective criteria to coerce the unilluminated.'²⁵ Popper suggests that the 'utter absurdity' of the theory of self-determination

must be plain to anybody who devotes a moment's effort to criticizing it. The principle amounts to the demand that each state should be a nation-state: that it should be confined within a natural border, and that this border should coincide with the location of an ethnic group; so that it should be the ethnic group, the "nation", which should determine and protect the natural limits of the state.

But, argues Popper, 'nation states of this kind do not exist'; and this is so because 'the so-called "nations" or "peoples" of which the nationalists

18. David Harkness, Irish Times, 19 May 1976.

19. Interview, Sunday Dispatch, 23 Oct. 1938.

20. Lady Craigavon's diary, 15 Nov. 1940, PRONI D1415/B/38.

21. Dillon, DE:56:2192, 4 June 1935.

22. Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 16-17 Oct. 1938, p.3282.

23. Quoted in Harkness, Irish Times, 19 May 1976.

24. G.C.Field, Political theory, (London:1955) p.246.

25. Crick (1964:77).

dream do not exist. There are no, or hardly any, homogeneous ethnic groups long settled in countries with natural borders.' Popper cites the Irish case among examples where the principle of national self-determination has failed. As ethnic minorities are found everywhere, Popper believes that the proper aim cannot be to "liberate" all of them; rather, it must be to protect all of them. The oppression of national groups is a great evil; but national self-determination is not a feasible remedy.²⁶

The self-determination principle could not be applied to Ireland, simpliciter, as de Valera advocated in the United States in 1919-20.²⁷ The problem in Ireland was that geography determined the putative boundaries of the state while the self-determining majority, by, and for whom, the state was to be created, was not coterminous with the geographical island. This left the custodians of the putative united republic - of whom de Valera was the leading figure in his generation - with a virtually insoluble problem: their followers expected more than was politically possible.

However, no matter how inadmissible the natural boundary theory might be to political geographers, they do accept its importance when believed: 'If a people believes in "natural" boundaries, and ascribes to certain features of the physical environment a mystical, irrational function, then this belief becomes an unshakable basis for national action.'²⁸

Pounds concludes that

if any principle governing the size of states emerges, it is that they are - or try to be - at least as large as the nations which form them. If a state falls short, and part of its nation lies beyond its borders, it is likely to have an irredentist policy. Since the primary objective of a state is to preserve its own culture and traditions, such aims, pursued with whatever means the state has at its command, must be regarded as normal.²⁹

Given the significant nationalist minority contiguous to the border, an irredentist lobby was inevitable in the south. The complicating factor was the fact that the coveted territory included almost one million unionists with no desire to be redeemed.

(c) Aspirational politics

Was de Valera's anti-Partitionism merely an example of Frankel's aspirational politics? Was not Irish unity to de Valera a long term aspiration, 'rooted in history', of particular concern to the party extremists, providing 'purpose or direction, or at the least, a sense of hope'; perhaps, even a response to the powerlessness of the south on the issue, an 'escape into day-dreams...'?³⁰ The American historian, David Miller, suggested that a great many southern voters took solace from the

26. Karl Popper, 'The history of our time: an optimist's view', in Conjectures and refutations, (London:1963) p.368.

27. Cobban (1969:passim, especially, 137; 163-5).

28. Cohen (1964:191).

29. Pounds (1972:40).

30. Frankel (1970:32-3), see ch.3:ii:g above.

South's constitutional claim on the north: they 'no longer want the North actually to be incorporated in their country, but...still want the law to say that it should be...'. For many people in various societies, writes Miller, the law 'symbolically enshrines what ought to be.'³¹ Cruise O'Brien, suggests the term 'low intensity aspirations' to describe attitudes south of the border towards unity: 'the aspiration is there: diffuse, elusive, persistent, cryptic, lightly pervasive, a chronic mist.'³²

That at government level, there was an element of hypocrisy concerning unity was asserted by a former British Ambassador to Dublin, Andrew Gilchrist. Perhaps reflecting the London view of the south's irredentist stance, Gilchrist concluded that 'the policy of both Dublin and London is founded on hypocrisy. Why not? A well understood hypocrisy...is a normal aspect of political life; and the demand for Irish unity falls into this category.' Dublin's passionate commitment to Irish unity, was, he argued, 'a mere bogey. Any Irish Government is inescapably the custodian of a myth... and the maintenance of the myth, in however tepid a form, is probably helpful rather than otherwise and is in any case unavoidable.'³³

(v) De Valera's legacy: Articles 2 and 3

Articles 2 and 3 of the 1937 Constitution represent de Valera's most formal legacy on the Partition issue. To the fundamentalists within Fianna Fail, these articles remained sacrosanct, although, as will be shown presently, significant revision of Article 3 was tolerable to senior members of the party during the quiescent decade of the 1960s, when the Partition issue faded,¹ and Lemass's imprint was most deeply felt on the party's anti-Partition strategy.²

Although de Valera's successors as Fianna Fail leader would always claim that their policies were consistent with the de Valera orthodoxies, there was now no pretence that his Constitution was suited to a united country. Indeed, it became virtually axiomatic for those advocating constitutional reforms in the 'sixties and 'seventies to cite the need to appease the northern Protestants as the appropriate grounds on which to justify change. Some evidence of this approach can also be seen in the report of the 1967 Committee on the Constitution.³ Initiated by Lemass, who, after his retirement from the party leadership, himself served on this Committee, its recommendation of a change in Article 3 shocked, at least

31. David Miller, *Fortnight*, Nov. 1975.

32. Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Crane Bag*, vol.1, no.2, 1977.

33. Letter, *The Times*, 28 Sept. 1977

1. Lyons (1971:537); interview Patrick Gormley, MP, *Sunday Press*, 31 May 1964; that 'the "pan" feeling, once acute' often dies down, 'as it apparently now has in Eire where the return of Northern Ireland to the Free State no longer is considered a do-or-die issue' was argued by Bernard Fall in 1964. See 'Sociological and psychological aspects of Vietnam's partition', *Journal of International Affairs*, 18, 2, 1964, pp.173-4.

2. J.J.Lee, 'Lemass and his two partnerships', *Irish Times*, 19 May 1976; interview Michael McInerney; interview Sean Lemass.

3. *Report of the Committee on the Constitution, December 1967*, (Dublin:1967).

Kevin Boland, who saw himself as one of a dwindling group within Fianna Fail who were faithful to the original core of republican doctrine.⁴

The working papers of the Committee reveal that a sceptical approach to Article 3 was invited from the outset: a composite list of suggested amendments circulated to each member and used as the basis for discussion, assumed that Article 3 had been naively drafted and had proved counter-productive. The drafters of the Article in 1937 were excused on the grounds that to that generation Partition may have seemed 'provisional'; but, by 1967, it was argued, 'so far from looking provisional', Partition had 'hardened to a degree which only the vaguest of optimists can think of as temporary.' The commentary added: 'Where the fault lies for this we need not enquire.'

If the commentary was diplomatic - it was known to have originated from within Fine Gael⁵ - it was also pessimistic. The 'only hope - and it is a slim one - of achieving Irish unity' was thought to lie 'in mutual tolerance and a better understanding by each side of the other's aspirations and convictions.' Were not Articles 2 and 3 'too polemical', presenting as 'legalistic claims of right' what, to any outsider, 'would seem highly intricate and doubtful'? Whereas it was not suggested that the legitimate aspiration to unity ought to be renounced,

there ought to be nothing disgraceful in making a gesture to North-South ecumenism by deleting from Article 3 the words "and without prejudice to the right of the Parliament and Government established by this Constitution to exercise jurisdiction over the whole of that territory (the island of Ireland)"

Apart from the possible gain in goodwill, the commentary concluded, 'the lack of realism in these words which the experience of the last 45 years has made patent ought to justify their disappearance.'⁶

As can be seen from the initial draft of the report, the 'careful consideration' given to Article 3 by the Committee was due to the fact that

...it has been the cause of some friction in North/South relations. Without in any way relinquishing our right to re-integration of the national territory, we feel that it would now be appropriate to adopt a new provision to replace Article 3.⁷

With these prefatory remarks omitted from the published report, the Committee recommended changing the wording to read as follows: 'The Irish nation hereby proclaims its firm will that its territory be re-united in harmony and brotherly affection between all Irishmen.'⁸

Boland, then a member of Lynch's government, was astonished by this suggestion believing it to be 'the first formal public indication' of Fianna Fail's 'departure from Republican principles'.⁹ However, his attempts to exonerate Lemass - while castigating all of his other former

4. Kevin Boland, We won't stand (idly) by, (Dublin:n.d.(1974)) Ch.4 passim. Hereafter, Boland:1974.

5. Interview, John M.Kelly.

6. Composite list of possible changes in Constitution, circulated to the Committee, March 1967, confidential source.

7. Preliminary draft of Committee's report, ibid.

8. Report of the Committee on the Constitution, December, 1967, pp. 5-6.

9. Boland (1974:29).

colleagues - for signing the completed report is not only unconvincing, but, from the working papers of the Committee, unsustainable.¹⁰ That the Committee was chaired by George Colley, an aspirant to the party leadership, focussed particular attention on the 'heresy' of the Committee's recommendations and was considered to have been damaging to Colley's 'reliability' on the national question.¹¹

With the Civil Rights Campaign within Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, the renewal of an IRA campaign of force, the fragmentation of the Unionist monolith and, eventually, the abandonment by Westminster of the Stormont solution, it was inevitable that what may be termed another 'interventionist' wing within Fianna Fail should grow in strength. It is beyond the scope of the present work to chart the party's handling of northern policy during the 1970s. But that the party leadership could be circumscribed by internal party critics invoking the name and orthodoxies of de Valera - even when the critic in question knew little of the founder's policy - was manifest.

The quickening of expectations in the south which followed on the northern troubles, focussed further attention on the Constitution. Jack Lynch, the third leader of the party, insisted in 1972 that it was 'not suitable for a new Ireland' and allowed that its critics were fair in seeing it as 'narrower and less generous' than the original principles of Irish nationalism had promised.¹² That the professional politicians were generally complacent about the Constitution in this regard is clear from Cohen's survey of the Irish political elite in 1969 when 'virtually no respondents' believed that the clause in Article 44 mentioning the 'special position' of the Catholic Church was inimical to unity.¹³

In 1972, an Inter-Party Committee on the Implications of Irish Unity was established. Again the politicians scrutinised de Valera's Constitution. Again, no changes resulted from their deliberations. Indeed, on this occasion there was not even a published report, the main difficulty arose from Fianna Fail's insistence on the retention of Articles 2 and 3 and opposition deputies' scepticism and hostility towards the same articles.¹⁴

Although the working papers of the Committee are relatively cursory in attributing views to individuals, the known positions of the various members - de Valera's son, Vivion, was among Fianna Fail's representatives - demonstrate the wide divergence of approach among the southern parties towards the irredentist articles framed a generation before. Discussing

10. Committee's minutes and working papers, confidential source; Boland (1974:ch.4 *passim*).

11. See Colley's comments DE:269:218-9, 21 Nov. 1973; and his letter, Irish Times, 8 Feb. 1977.

12. Jack Lynch, 'The Anglo-Irish problem', Foreign Affairs, vol. 50., no.4, July 1972, pp.601-17.

13. A.S.Cohan, 'The question of a united Ireland: perspectives of the Irish political elite', International Affairs, vol. 53, no.2, Apr. 1977, pp.232-54.

14. Michael O'Kennedy, speech, Irish Times, 29 Jan. 1977.

their general approach to constitutional change in the context of the south's aspiration to unity, some members argued for a twentysix county approach, while others believed that this 'could be construed as diminishing the claim to a united Ireland'. Fianna Fail believed that the 'revision of the Constitution should await actual moves towards unity'; some argued that Articles 1 to 3 were 'not conducive to unity by consent'; some believed that a 'short 26-County Constitution, embodying our aspirations towards unity', would be sufficient. Clearly there was no consensus: one group stated that the 'few changes' already suggested scarcely merited the rewriting of the existing document while others insisted on the necessity for a 'new Constitution...'. Michael O'Kennedy, summarising this discussion, emphasised the Committee's lack of knowledge of northern opinion and proposed that all northern political parties and independent elected representatives should be invited to appear before the Committee.¹⁵

The only unionist grouping to accept the invitation was the New Ulster Movement (NUM), a liberal, 'centre', non-party movement in the north. In its submission it accused the Committee of attempting to work with 'narrow, unrealistic terms of reference', they were 'playing with words' - something which was 'now endemic in Republican thought and polemics...'. In contrast to the 'healing balm of time and diplomacy' which southern leaders had applied to Anglo-Irish relations and with considerable success, 'no effort' of a similar kind had been used in dealing 'with fellow Irishmen in Northern Ireland...'. In fact southern political leaders - from de Valera to Lynch, had failed to understand the north: the 'significance of this failure by Republicans to recognize Ulster Unionists for what they are, and not the descendants of Theobald Wolfe Tone, awaiting national baptism cannot be overestimated.'

In conclusion they emphasised the 'persistence of the Southern will to coerce the Protestant North.' There had been 'few lulls in the overall campaign', the last of them initiated by Lynch on 11 July 1970 and explained by his foreign minister, Hillery later that month to the NUM. Hillery had

'advanced two propositions which he reiterated many times:

- (i) Let us not talk any more about "territoriality" but about people.
- (ii) Let us recognise that there are two cultures, two traditions in Ireland and both of these must be equally respected: neither must be considered to be superior or inferior to the other.'

NUM concluded their memorandum with the regret that both of these principles had been 'repudiated several times since' by Lynch: their hope was that their memorandum would encourage the Committee 'to cast a cold eye on Southern behaviour in recent years...' and to abandon 'the false god of national sovereignty...'. Deliberately avoiding other constitutional changes, they called for the abandonment of the 'irredentist claim on which the IRA can call to its aid Article 2 of the 1937 Constitution': this

15. Inter-Party Committee on the Implications of Irish Unity, minutes, 2 Nov. 1972, confidential source.

was 'where the major issue lies.'

Among others to criticise Articles 2 and 3 were opposition politicians in the south - notably Conor Cruise O'Brien and Garret FitzGerald:¹⁷ in the north Ian Paisley believed that de Valera's Constitution was 'the cancer' in the island's politics.¹⁸ Meanwhile the northern nationalists - now represented by the SDLP - took comfort from the south's formal constitutional claim.¹⁹

As republican orthodoxy became more important within Fianna Fail, there was less willingness by Lynch to query the Constitution.²⁰ When the Coalition government signed the Sunningdale Agreement, by which the south recognised that northern consent was a precondition for unity, Boland, believing this to be repugnant to the Constitution, formally challenged the Sunningdale settlement through the courts. Although unsuccessful, it remains true that this action further circumscribed the Coalition's policy options, while to Fianna Fail, it must have served as a salutary reminder of how vulnerable southern politicians could be if they questioned the old orthodoxies.²¹ It was little surprise that the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis which followed Sunningdale suggested that the sovereignty enshrined in the 1937 Constitution and 'achieved by Fianna Fail under the leadership of Eamon de Valera, will not be altered except by the consent of the people in a referendum.'²²

When Lynch was asked whether, had he been negotiating at Sunningdale, he would have insisted on Articles 2 and 3 being written into the agreement, he contented himself - he must have been aware that to make any such insistence would have resulted in no agreement - he contented himself with the assurance that he would have ensured 'that our constitutional position would be maintained as well as the British constitutional position being maintained and written into the agreement.'²³ Yet the defenders of the Sunningdale agreement could point to the parallel British declaration in the Agreement that London would support a united Ireland if it had majority support in the north, the SDLP claiming that this was 'the precise declaration sought from the British by Mr de Valera in 1949.'²⁴ There were misgivings within Fianna Fail on the Sunningdale Agreement - Vivion de Valera hinted at his own reservations²⁵ - and when the power sharing Executive collapsed some months later, offered his analysis of Partition which evoked the accolade from Blaney: '...thanks be to God there is still a de Valera in this House.'²⁶

17. For Cruise O'Brien, Irish Times, 1 Feb. 1977; for FitzGerald, see 'FitzGerald: hamstrung by Articles two and three', Irish Times, 29 Dec. 1977.

18. Ibid., 29 Nov. 1971.

19. Interviews with John Hume, Paddy Devlin.

20. For Lynch's period of enthusiasm for constitutional change see, Irish Press, 22 Feb. 1971.

21. Brian Faulkner, leader of the NI Executive believed the Boland action significant; interviews Brian Faulkner, Kevin Boland.

22. Clar, 1974 Ard Fheis.

23. RTE Radio This Week, 17 Feb. 1974.

24. Hugh Logue, reported Irish Times, 17 Jan. 1974.

25. DE:271:12, 13 Mar. 1974.

26. DE:273:1606-14 for de Valera's speech and col. 1614 for Blaney.

De Valera's legacy on Partition was not confined to Articles 2 and 3. His successors as leaders of Fianna Fail - no matter how different the political context in which they found themselves - were obliged to claim that their policy on Partition was consistent with that of the founder. This was despite the fact that the detail of de Valera's policy remained relatively obscure - and certainly undebated within the party. In particular there was no interest in recalling those aspects of his policy, most vulnerable to republican criticism but which represented his attempt - no matter how unavailing - to interest the Ulster unionists in Irish unity.

All nationalist policy on Partition may be subjected to what we may call an orthodoxy/heresy test - the orthodox claim being for Pearse's unitary, separatist, Gaelic Republic and the 'heretical' policies being deviations from this in an attempt to formulate a realistic policy. De Valera, in his time, had been a leading 'heretic', not only with his 'county option' proposals of August 1921, but also with the kernels of his subsequent policy, external association and local autonomy for the north. Yet these dimensions to his policy, which he had, with some difficulty, managed to preserve despite the criticism of his more 'orthodox' supporters, subsequently proved to be of little interest to the party. They preferred to remember the legend of de Valera as the principal champion of Irish unity, thereby ignoring, for the most part, the creative, essentially political dimensions of his policy - the 'heretical' aspects. The choice in short for the leadership of a party such as Fianna Fail was between the comfort of Pearse's orthodoxy or the pursuit of a heretical, but more realistic policy designed to meet the politico-geographic realities outlined in Part 1 above. While de Valera himself had been a brilliant and indefatigable exploiter of the fact that his former colleagues in the pre-Treaty cabinet had approved his 1921 'heresies' of external association and local autonomy, his own successors seldom exploited his 'imprimatur' when testing the tolerance for a debatably 'heretical' policy.

Although, as has been shown, his own record on Ulster reveals him as invariably pragmatic and occasionally heretical or revisionist, de Valera was invariably invoked as the test of 'fundamental republicanism' within the party. Indeed, his granddaughter, Sile de Valera TD, in 1979, was among the leading dissidents in the parliamentary party who precipitated the early resignation of the party's third leader, Jack Lynch. There is further irony that her attack on Lynch should have been made at a commemorative ceremony for Liam Lynch, leader of the Republicans at the close of the Civil War.²⁷ In de Valera's last meeting with him, at which he persuaded him to abandon military resistance to the Free State, Liam Lynch was concerned that the decision reached fell short of fundamental republicanism. Years later, de Valera recalled the occasion to Gallagher:

'When the meeting broke up, the Chief of Staff, Liam Lynch and de Valera were walking together down from the farm-house where they had come to the agreement when Lynch said: "I wonder what Tom Clarke (1916 leader) would think of this decision". De Valera stopped in his tracks. "Tom Clarke is dead", he said, "He has not our respons-

27. Sile de Valera, speech at Fermoy, Irish Times, 10 Sept. 1979.

sibilities. Nobody will ever know what he would do for this situation did not arise for him. But it has arisen for us and we must face it with our intelligence and conscious of our responsibility." 28

On this occasion, at least, de Valera sided with Thomas Paine that 'the most ridiculous and insolent of tyrannies' was the 'vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave.'²⁹

28. 'De Valera' typescript in Gallagher papers, NLI ms. 18,375(6).
29. Thomas Paine, The rights of man, quoted Ronald Segal, The struggle against history, (London:1974 ed) frontispiece.

SECRET.

307005.

North East Ulster Draft Clause

The following constituencies of North East Ireland, viz: the Boroughs of Belfast and Derry, North, South, East, and Mid Antrim, North, South, and Mid Armagh, North and South Derry, North, South, East, West, and Mid Down, North and South Fermanagh, and North-East, North West and South Tyrone, may by vote of their registered electors (or adult inhabitants) severally elect to be directly represented in the Irish Parliament; provided that if all of them, or a smaller number ~~territorially~~ contiguous and forming a ~~contiguous~~ group territorially continuous group do not so elect they shall be entitled to maintain a legislature possessed of local governing powers set out in the Act of the British Parliament known as "Government of Ireland Act, 1920" (10 & 11 Geo. 5. Ch. 67), and provided they shall be entitled to the same representation relatively to the rest of Ireland in the Irish Parliament as they would have been entitled to in the British Parliament under the provisions of the above mentioned Act.

Should the constituencies enumerated opt to be directly represented in the National Parliament, it is agreed that a Convention be executed with their elected representatives safeguarding any lawful interests peculiar to the area, and for this purpose a Commission shall be appointed consisting of _____ persons nominated by the National Government and _____ persons elected by the representatives of the area mentioned.

To provide adequate and just representation for the ~~political~~ political minority, the Irish Government agrees to take into consultation the representatives of this minority with a view to devising a scheme of proportional representation which will secure this object.

TOPCAIPEACT PEABUAMHAC
na hEireann.

IRISH DELEGATION OF PLENIPOTENTIARIES

Appendix I: North East Ulster Draft Clause, October 1921, de Valera's revise of Griffith's original draft. SPO DE 2/304/1: See note 16, p.49.

DRAFT DECLARATION BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM AS
COMMUNICATED TO MR. DE VALERA.

The attitude of the United Kingdom Government on the question of partition can be briefly defined. They regard any alteration of the present position as a matter which would have to be discussed between the Governments of Northern Ireland and Eire. No development in the direction of ending partition could take place except with the consent of the Northern Ireland Government.

It is no part of the policy or intention of the Government of the United Kingdom to oppose any arrangement which might be freely and voluntarily entered into between the Government of Eire and the Government of Northern Ireland. If, at any time in the future, conditions should change so as to cause Northern Ireland to become favourable to the development of closer relations with Eire, or to the establishment of a United Ireland, the United Kingdom Government, for their part, would welcome such an improvement in their mutual relations and, far from raising any difficulties, would, on the contrary, be ready to take any practicable steps to facilitate any arrangement desired by the two parties.

Appendix II: Draft declaration by Neville Chamberlain, forwarded to de Valera, January 1938. Later withdrawn. PRO DO 35/893/XII/287; See note 23, p.144.

NOTE ON SOURCES

De Valera confided to his biographer T.P.O'Neill that he did not put down on paper what his policies were going to be. He always said: "If you write something down people know what you're going to do...are warned and may be in a position to stop you. So always keep your policy under your hat." 1

That de Valera followed this practice throughout his career is clear from the perfunctory records which mark his approach at every level of his political activity. It was at his suggestion that the fourth meeting of the National Executive of Fianna Fail in December 1926 decided that the results of votes at such meetings should not be recorded.² Austin Stack, after a meeting between representatives of Sinn Fein and Fianna Fail in August 1927, complained to de Valera that the Fianna Fail negotiators would 'put nothing in writing'.³ During the Second World War, de Valera informed Mulcahy that it was his government's policy to do their work orally as far as was possible.⁴

The minutes of de Valera's cabinet meetings provide the most striking evidence on this point: making no attempt to record the contribution of individual ministers, they are merely a record of decisions taken and, on crucial occasions, are not even that. For instance, vital discussions on the strategy to be adopted during the protracted Anglo-Irish negotiations of January to April 1938, are not even mentioned in the agenda.⁵ It is no exaggeration to conclude that for this and other vital periods, no known record exists of the deliberations of de Valera's government meetings: all that is recorded is the attendance, venue, date and duration of the meetings.⁶ Nor were there any diarists in his cabinets, certainly none who subsequently published their accounts or made their private papers available for research; only one member of a de Valera cabinet has ever written a book about his career in government and he, Kevin Boland, only served in de Valera's last administration and was prompted to go into print only when he had severed all connections with Fianna Fail. If secrecy and silence were a condition of accepting a ministerial portfolio from de Valera, it would come as no surprise to this researcher. In addition to this, his own extensive collection of private papers, on which the Longford and

1. Interview T.P.O'Neill.

2. Fianna Fail National Executive, minutes, 16 December 1926.

3. Stack to de Valera, 27 Aug. 1927, Austin Stack papers, NLI ms. 17,092.

4. De Valera to Mulcahy, 12 Feb 1941, Mulcahy papers, UCD P7A/215.

5. There is no mention at all of the Anglo-Irish negotiations in the cabinet minutes for January to April, 1938, SPO CAB G1/1-31.

6. See also the fact that no record was made of any deliberations by the cabinet on the MacDonald-de Valera talks of June 1940, SPO CAB G2/155-170 passim.

O'Neill biography is based, remain closed to research until ten years after his death (August 1985).

One consequence of all of this is that the researcher is often obliged to rely solely on the evidence of Malcolm MacDonald, Neville Chamberlain, Richard Mulcahy, David Gray or Sir John Maffey for a particular episode: two other witnesses, Erskine Childers and Frank Gallagher, come, as it were from within de Valera's 'circle' and may be considered more sympathetic witnesses. But it is extraordinary that a political career such as de Valera's which spanned such a considerable period of time must now be studied for so many important episodes through the perspective of opposition politicians or the politicians and diplomats of Britain, America and Germany.

One long-neglected Fianna Fail source has been used in this research - the newspaper reports of de Valera's speeches. Here one can read his 'thinking aloud' on Ulster - rarely scripted, and sometimes prompted by a heckler into revealing more than he intended. A sympathetic witness, Henry O'Neill (?Frank Gallagher) wrote of his 1930 speech to the Ard Fheis:

He is no orator in the accepted sense: carefully fashioned sentences, carefully spoken, artfully-prepared climaxes, studied play upon the emotions of his audience, these are things very foreign to him. Sometimes he speaks best when he speaks without notes of any kind. He moves his audience most when he moves himself by the thoughts that come to him, and are put into words as he stands there.⁷

De Valera did not use a professional script-writer; he was author of his own speeches. In later years, his virtual blindness made it necessary for him to rely on his ability to outline his policy while 'thinking on his feet.' The researcher in twentieth century Irish politics is deeply indebted to those journalists who recorded so accurately the lengthy political speeches of Irish politicians in the era before the 'supplied script' became the norm.

The most creative period in de Valera's attempts to deal with Partition through diplomatic dealings in London was during Malcolm MacDonald's time at the Dominions Office. Here, the researcher is fortunate in the standard of MacDonald's memoranda and cabinet papers.⁸ This writer is also indebted to Mr. MacDonald's kindness in answering many queries pertaining to this research.

7. Henry O'Neill, *The Nation*, 8 Nov. 1930. See also de Valera's comments, *Irish Press*, 9 Nov. 1932, *ibid.*, 13 Oct. 1937.

8. For a discussion of British source material in the 1930s see Ch.4:ii:b above, pp.95-97.

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