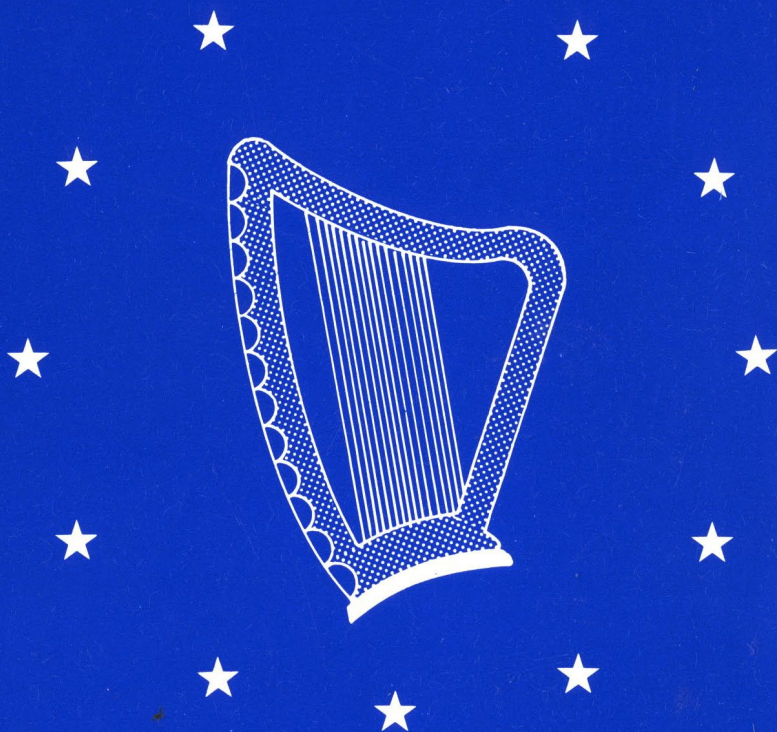


# A Proposal For Consensus



*"That Ulster people transcend the non-consensus parliaments of  
Dublin and London."*

NEW IRELAND GROUP

New Ireland Group  
Fountain Centre  
Castle Street  
Belfast

The New Ireland Group was formed as a pressure group in 1981 in the aftermath of the hunger-strike. It has an open membership and any person may attend three of the General Meetings without being obliged to join the Group. Its founders were chiefly concerned to rediscover the radical dissenting tradition among Northern protestants so that it might re-assert itself in the affairs of Ireland.

With limited resources and a membership of around 100, the New Ireland Group has taken opportunities in the Irish Republic and in Britain as well as in Northern Ireland to challenge conventional views about the British/Irish problem. We have put forward proposals, based on historical and socio-economic analysis, that would bring nearer to the people their fundamental democratic right to self-determination based on consensus, a more appropriate share of power at local community level, and a means of reconciliation.

We have held an open monthly meeting since our inception. Through letters to the press, articles in newspapers, public lectures, participation in debate, opportunity on the media, and through the work of our Chairman in the Irish Senate, we have endeavoured to publicise our ideas for the future of all the people living on this island without overlooking the need to relate positively to the wider world of which we are but a part.

The highlight of our effort was the production of a 40,000-word Submission to the New Ireland Forum.

We invite those attending this meeting to join with us in the building of consensus for the future of the people of Ulster and beyond. We desire to live in a country freed of sectarianism, and to create instead a society built on the freedom and good feeling of a vigorous, diverse and hopeful people, and based on fair play and equality of opportunity.

*This booklet is published as a continuation of the celebration at Emain Macha on 29th June, 1985. It celebrates the desire to know where we have come from, the effort to know who we now are, and some ideas on how we may live together in a new and creative Ireland. It is offered to an Ireland redeemed from the violations of the past, and reconciled after the violence of the present. It is a statement of hope that Ireland may begin again to be a light in a dark age of man.*

John Robb  
29 June 1985



DONEGAL, ULSTER, DALRIADA  
EMAIN MACHA  
*The Broken Heart of Ulster*

## Introduction

History tells us that the "Green Isle" was first inhabited by the Fomorians—gloomy giants of the sea and later by the Firbolgs who were described as dark, short and plebeian. Next in possession were the Tuatha De Danaan.

Around 350 B.C., the Celts, tall, with red-blond hair, invaded the country. Originally, these people spread over central Europe as they migrated westwards. Those from France invaded and conquered Britain while those from Spain conquered Ireland and are the people referred to as the 'Milesians'.

## Children of Ir

On its way to Ireland, the 'Milesian' fleet of 60 vessels was scattered in a storm, and Ir, the son of Milesius, was lost. The fragments of the scattered fleet collected, and later drew others from the mother country to Ireland. In order to secure their foothold, they had to overcome the Tuatha De Danaan. Heber, the son of Ir, was rewarded for his father's services, and his own, by obtaining the Northern section of the island; his descendants were to become known as Irians, a designation which included all the inhabitants of Uladh, with the exception of a small settlement of Picts known as the Dal Araidhe, who then occupied the southern part of Antrim and the greater part of Down.

The Irian princes presided at their palace of Aileach, in Donegal, until the time of Cimbaeth, who, at his queen's desire, built the great house of Eamhain (pronounced 'Aven') or Emania. This palace was erected around 300 B.C. As the Irish article 'an' is contracted to 'n', the name becomes nEamhuin or 'Navan'. The palace built for Macha, Cimbaeth's queen, was the outcome of a quarrel over the throne of Uladh (Ulster).

Aedh-ruadh ('Ay-rooa'), Dihorba and Cimbaeth had agreed to reign as kings over the Irians for seven years each, in turn. At the end of the first 21 years, Aedh-ruadh died. His daughter Macha then asserted her right to reign whenever her father's turn came around. She was opposed in this by Dihorba and his sons and this led to a battle in which Dihorba was killed and his followers defeated. Macha then assumed the sovereignty, and subsequently married the surviving monarch, Cimbaeth. She refused to condemn Dihorba's sons to death, putting them instead into slavery—"they shall raise a rath around me and it shall be the chief city of Ulster for ever"—Emain Macha, or Navan Fort.

The Irian line was to reign at Emain Macha over Ulster for six centuries. The

first of this line to become Ard-righ—Monarch of all Ireland—was a prince named Rudhraighe who lived around one century B.C. So honoured did his name become that the Irians became known as the Rudricians; and the dynasty continued as such until 323 A.D.—six hundred years in all, and no fewer than 31 of its rulers, from Cimbaeth to Fergus Fogha, occupied the palace of Emain Macha.

## Broken Ulster

In 323 A.D., the all-Ireland Ard-righ, Muredach Tirech, who was not an Ulsterman, had cause to resent the Uladhians, and determined to humiliate them. For this he enlisted the help of his three recalcitrant nephews, known ever since as 'the three Collas', whom he had previously expelled to Alba (Scotland). There they had obtained extensive lands because Aileach, their mother, was daughter of the king of Alba, and they had remained there until their uncle Muredach Tirech recalled them to Ireland with promise of land if they fought for him against Clanna-Rudhraighe. As a result of their mother's connections in Alba, they were able to bring secretly with them, across 'the current of the Mull of Kintyre' (the North Channel), some seven thousand men, who were then joined by a large force supplied by the Ard-righ, Muredach Tirech. They fought a fierce campaign against the Clanna-Rudhraighe, which resulted in the death of Fergus Fogha, King of Ulster, along with his three sons at Achaidh-Leith-Derg—now Farney, in present-day County Monaghan. Thus, this first plantation of Ulster coincided with the destruction of the palace at Emain.

What had been Uladh, now became the country of Clan Colla, and at its peak it was bounded by 'the four noblest rivers in Uladh or Ultonia', namely the Boyne, the Bann, the Erne and the Finn. Subsequently, this territory contracted to portions only of the counties of Louth, Armagh, Monaghan and Fermanagh. Nevertheless, some families survived from the fourth century plantation until that later plantation in the 17th century—and beyond: the Mag hIdhir or Maguires of Fermanagh, the O'hAnluain or O'Hanlons, descended from one of the Collas, the Macanas or McCanns, also descended from one of the Collas who had occupied the southern shores of Lough Neagh; there were also the MacMahons of Monaghan. The question we must now ask ourselves today—and, in particular, *today*—is:

*"Will any families planted by James I in Ulster be found, if sought for, after the lapse of 1,400 years?"*

## Migration of the Defeated

After the death of Fergus Fogha, many of the children of Ir and Rudhraighe moved eastwards towards Dal Araidhe; some went further across the sea to Argyll and Kintyre, some went to Leinster and Connaght, and some went to the land of the Ui Neill in Donegal. Those who moved to Dal Araidhe were moving into sympathetic territory for the people of that land (the southern part of Antrim and most of Down) were descended from Fiacha Araidhe, an ancestor of the



defeated Fergus Fogha. There would have been sympathy for the defeated members of the Royal House of Emania. The Rudricians, being a dominant people, soon established themselves in that area between Carlingford Lough and Slemish and beyond, and gave to this area their old and cherished name of Uladh, or Ulster.

The exiles made numerous attempts to recover their lost kingdom, none more arduously than Congal Claen in the sixth century. He was to be the last prince of the line which extended back to Cimbaeth.

## **The Last of the Great Line—Congal Claen**

Domhnall, before becoming monarch, or Ard Righ, of all Ireland, had persuaded Congal Claen to assassinate Suibhne Menn, the preceding Ard Righ, who had reigned 615-628. For a successful outcome of his persuasion, Domhnall had promised Congal that he would restore to him the position of his ancestors, that held by Fergus Fogha and his predecessors at Emania. Once Suibhne Menn was out of the way, however, Domhnall forgot his promise and tried instead to humiliate Congal. The latter then made a furious attempt to de-throne Domhnall, and as a result of his failure, was thrown into exile, where he remained for nine years. During those nine years, he collected an army of Picts, Britons, Saxons and men from Alba, and landed his forces at Dundrum in County Down. In the battle of Magh Rath (637 A.D.) which ensued, Congal was defeated and slain. Although he was the last prince of a great line which had been reduced to living in the smaller Uladh (Down and Antrim), this area continued, in spite of his defeat and death, to retain a distinctive position right up to the English invasion.

In summary, the territory which we now know as Ulster, plus an extension of this territory into Leinster and Connaght, was at the time of the battle of Magh Rath, composed as follows:

- (a) the lands of Ui Neill in Donegal
- (b) the extensive lands colonised by the three Collas on behalf of the Ard Righ, Muredach Tirech, and bounded by the four rivers—Boyne, Bann, Erne and Finn
- (c) the lands of the defeated Uladhians of Down and Antrim

## **Dalriada**

The great grandsons of Colla Uaish (the 'noble' Colla) were called Loarn, Angus and Fergus. These were the sons of Eirc, and were part possessors of Dalriada, an ancient principality of the Antrim coast, extending from the Bushfoot to the village of Glynn, near Larne.

About the year A.D. 506, these great grandsons of Colla Uaish assembled with their followers and sailed from ports in north Antrim such as Port Brittas at the head of Ballycastle Bay to lay the foundation of the Dalriadic Kingdom in Scotland. On reaching Scotland, Loarn ruled in the land known as Loarn to this day, Angus ruled in the islands of Isla, Jura and Iona, while Fergus ruled mainly in Kintyre and Argyle. The total eastern kingdom was bounded in the

south by the Firth of Clyde, in the east by the mountains extending from the shores of Loch Lomond to Loch Broom.

Of the three Collas, it is perhaps most appropriate that it was the descendants of Colla Uaish who established this eastern Dalriadic kingdom, for their great grandfather was well known to have remained very close in his heart to his mother's country—Alba. Indeed, after the war in Ulster against Clanna-Rudhraighe, he returned to Alba and lived there 15 years prior to his death from natural causes (in A.D. 335, during a visitation to the Royal House of Tara in Ireland).

In the original army of the three Collas, there were many Britons and we can but conjecture about the significance of the name Port Brittas, a name now extinct, when we stand at Ballycastle today and look across the North Channel at Machrihanish Bay on the coast of Kintyre at the spot where Fergus is believed to have first landed.

There, a stream approached the sea through a beautiful valley known to this day as Tir-Fergus, 'the territory of Fergus'. Fergus is reputed to have brought the Lia Fail (Stone of Destiny) with him from Ireland to Dunstaffnage Castle in eastern Dalriada, at the foundation of his kingdom. There it remained and we can only surmise that it was used as the crowning stone for the early Scottish kings (Scots being the name of the people brought by Fergus from Ireland) down to the time of King Kenneth McAlpine who united the Picts and the Scots of Alba in one kingdom and brought the Lia Fail in A.D. 823 from Dunstaffnage Castle to Scone. This stone, believed by some authorities to have come from Tara originally, was later, as every English and Scottish school child knows, to be removed by King Edward I of England in 1296, and carried off with its enclosing wooden chair, to be placed under the throne in Westminster Abbey, where the catholic and protestant kings and queens of England and beyond have been crowned on it ever since.

## **Destiny and the Lia Fail**

Might we be allowed to indulge in prophecy? Might we say that peace will only fall upon the archipelago of Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England, when the English, as token of repentance for violation in the past, can offer the Lia Fail to Ireland—and the Irish, as token of reconciliation, are able to say, "no: let it rest between us all on the Isle of Man". . . .

If, however, in this nuclear age, we are unable to anticipate such symbolic acts of redemption and reconciliation between those who have been split by the deep wounds of past violation, then, as surely as night follows day, nuclear madness will consume us all. Without a change of heart and the wish to heal, all the political solutions and humans rights declarations cannot now prevent the destruction of all life on earth. We must heal our own wounds first, by asking



those whom we have violated, for forgiveness. Only then can we enter into the building of consensus.

Emain Macha, today, is about healing for the wounds of the past, and hope for consensus building of the future.

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# A New Ireland for A New Era

## *Democracy? Consensus? Self-Determination?*

### New Ireland Forum's Challenge!

### The New Ireland Group's Response

## Introduction

A considerable section of the 40,000 word submission by our group to the New Ireland Forum was taken up with consideration of these questions. This leaflet is a brief summary of our conclusions in this respect.

As the British Empire was decolonised, the British system of democratic practice was inherited in the various colonial territories. In the mother country, where consensus of a sort had existed for so long, the right of the majority to rule was taken for granted; understandably, the British—especially the English—viewed democratic decolonisation of empire as the means of replacing minority colonial rule by rule of the majority among the local population. In doing so, they overlooked the position of minorities in the new “self-governing” territories. It is vital to make a distinction between living in a country such as Britain where consensus for the form of government exists, and living elsewhere, as in Northern Ireland or Ireland as a whole, where it has yet to be created. In the words, democrats are under obligation to affirm that the claims of consensus have priority over the right of any majority to rule in relation to the fundamental human right to self-determination.

## Framework for Change

On 15 March 1984, the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic, addressing a joint session of the Congress of the United States of America, made the following statement:

“Both London and Dublin Governments have a duty now to break out of ancient moulds and attitudes and to make the imaginative leap of understanding. The moral obligation (is) to put Northern Ireland, its people and their interests first”.

In chapter 2 section 6 of the New Ireland Forum Report it is stated that:

“The British and Irish Governments must together initiate a process which will permit the establishment and development of the common good between both sections of the community in Northern Ireland and among all the people of this island”.

In chapter 5, subsection 8 of the New Ireland Forum Report, it is stated that:

“Constitutional Nationalists fully accept that they alone could not



*determine the structures of Irish unity and that it is essential to have Unionist agreement and participation in devising such structures and in formulating the guarantees they require . . ."*

This subsection goes on to indicate:

*"It would be for the British and Irish Governments to create the framework and atmosphere within which negotiations would take place."*

## **Omissions**

The New Ireland Forum Report stresses a need for consent based on consensus yet it fails to spell out precisely what it means by either of these. Loyalist fears will not be diffused by the woolly use of the word CONSENT especially if they feel that the political context is being manipulated in order to oblige them to yield up such consent.

In the New Ireland Group we feel that the Forum Report does not deal adequately with these matters. There is no reference point with regard to what is meant by democracy. There is no indication of how the right to self-determination should be qualified in order to deal with the conflict of interests that may arise between those who lay claim to it. There is no attempt to define consensus nor any indication of how such might be achieved or measured in relation to the self-determination process.

## **Options**

In chapter 5, subsection 9, the Forum indicated that, in addition to the unitary state option, two structural arrangements were also examined in some detail—a federal/confederal state and joint authority. Subsection 10 states that:

*"The parties in the Forum also remain open to discuss other views which may contribute to political development."*

Presumably, with subsection 10 in mind, the Report alludes to systems in other European countries which have achieved consensus government in spite of a bitter legacy of feuding in their past history.

## **Self-Determination**

The United Nations Covenants on Human Rights affirm in Article I clause 1 that *"All (our italics) peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."*

The implication of this affirmation is considerable for the current situation in Ireland. After all, if Republicans affirm the inalienable right of the people of Ireland to self-determination and Loyalists affirm the inalienable right of the people of Northern Ireland to self-determination, the unqualified right to self-

determination must set us on a collision course. We therefore conclude that the right to self-determination must be qualified by the need to achieve consensus. *Whatever else, democracy was not intended to undrewrite majority rule, neither the Irish form of it nor the Northern Irish form of it.*

## Democracy

The democracy of the founding fathers has been described as “taking the people into partnership”. Where the feeling of partnership exists, in other words where there is consensus, majority vote is the most important aspect of the democratic process. Where, however, consensus does not exist, majority vote becomes majority rule. In such situations, a significant minority may wish to secede, as did Irish Republicans in the aftermath of the 1918 General Election, when there were Unionist majorities in only four out of the thirty two counties of Ireland, as did Northern Loyalists when they opted for secession from the arrangements of the treaty between Britain and the Provisional Government of Ireland in 1922.

Short of secession, however, there are numerous political devices available for the achievement of consensus without which all claims to unity among the people are false.

## Consensus

- (i) What do we mean by consensus?
- (ii) What are the means of achieving consensus?
- (iii) What are the means of assessing consensus?

### (i) Meaning

Any community which can agree on how to govern itself while respecting the fundamental human rights of the individuals in it has a right to self-determination. This is the ideal basis of consensus—the **right** to BE, tempered by the **need** to BELONG.

In relation to the bitter sectarian division in Northern Ireland, consensus could be defined for practical purposes as a state of affairs acceptable to the majority in *each* of our sectarian communities. Such an interpretation is flawed and could not be sustained in the long run; nevertheless, it could be a useful expedient with which to initiate political movement in preference to continued stagnation.

### (ii) Means of Achieving Consensus

The South as well as the North of Ireland inherited the British system of parliamentary democracy. As a result, we have both been slow to grasp that majority rule, acceptable in Britain where—until recently—there had been consensus, is inappropriate in Ireland where thus far consensus has eluded us. It is to European and other models that we should now be looking if we are to



capture imaginatively this challenge of consensus. Switzerland, Yugoslavia and South Tyrol come to mind. In the long run, consensus is as much a question about the distribution of power and the right to participate at local community and district level as it is about structures at regional and national level. We need in particular to look at:

- (a) The use of citizen's vote, e.g., proportional representation, the unitary list system, proportional voting, straight referenda, multiple choice referenda, etc.
- (b) Distribution of political, social and economic power as it affects the relationship between the citizen where he lives in community, and the central institutions of the state. In our submission to the New Ireland Forum, we put forward a Ten-Point Plan to deal with the problem of the increasing centralisation of institutional power in contrast to the increasing feeling of local community powerlessness.
- (c) Structures at regional and national level, e.g., relevance of confederation, federation, consociation, cantonisation, etc.

### **(iii) Means of Assessing Consensus**

- (a) By sectarian head-count on separate electoral registers.
- (b) By determining the appropriate percentage of the vote that would indicate consensus for each option under consideration, e.g., to ensure that over half the Protestant population had not voted against an all-Ireland, would require a vote of 70% + of votes cast in a referendum in favour of the all-Ireland option. To ensure that over half the Catholic population had not voted against remaining in the United Kingdom would require 80% in favour of the U.K. option in a referendum.
- (c) It would not be necessary to use separate electoral registers or to think of weighted voting in sectarian terms if the sophisticated method of multiple choice referenda as advocated by the Ecology Party was to be instituted.

## **New Forum for a New Ireland**

With a clear appreciation of what we mean by self-determination in relation to democracy and consensus, we are in favour of asking the European Parliament to fund a Northern Ireland Forum so that the people in Northern Ireland who are reticent about attending the New Ireland Forum or who adamantly refused to do so might now have an opportunity of responding to the findings of the New Ireland Forum and of making alternative proposals of their own. There is no way in which Northern Ireland at present could be absorbed into a unitary Irish State without violence, nor is there any way in which it can remain indefinitely a British colony in Ireland without violence.

## Forward Movement

Because we believe that the bitter conflict between the people of Northern Ireland is related to the unresolved conflict between London and Dublin about Northern Ireland, we now challenge the two governments to make a joint declaration of support for the principle of self-determination based on consensus and to indicate that they will act as joint guarantors for any solution based on this fundamental democratic right.

In the aftermath of such a declaration, it would be incumbent on both governments to set up a constitutional convention in Northern Ireland: it would operate in a political climate which would have been changed significantly by a joint declaration on the right to self-determination based on consensus; and with the benefit of the publication of the findings of the proposed *Northern* Forum, the elected representatives would have greater opportunity—and more pressing reason—than heretofore to enable consensus to emerge for the future.

**In our view, a non-violent, economically viable future challenges us to work out the conditions that would make it possible to achieve such consensus for a new and radically restructured Ireland. To the Northern Protestant we would say, the English do not want you, the Europeans do not understand you, Americans will forever try to deride you—but the rest of Ireland needs you.**

# Consensus Democracy

Steps, which we would advocate to be taken by the London and Dublin Government on the one hand, and by the people of Northern Ireland on the other, to enable the democratic resolution of the problem of Northern Ireland in four phases, are listed as follows:

- 1 SHORT-TERM—day-to-day government in the immediate future.
  - i. To acknowledge formally that Northern Ireland, as at present constituted, is a *consociation* of two identities and to ensure that reference to “the people of Northern Ireland” should be interpreted in that light.
  - ii. To ensure that representational politics at local and regional level are allowed to reflect equal rights in relation to all hopes and fears of the two traditional identities of the *consociation*.  
*In advance of the achievement of consensus, consociation is a necessary compromise if we are to anticipate seriously any significant reduction in state and citizen violence.*
2. INTERMEDIATE TERM—Preparation for Constitutional Movement
  - i. To affirm jointly that the right to self-determination is based on the achievement of consensus. This qualification of Article I, clause 1 of the United Nations Human Rights Covenants (signed and ratified by Britain, signed only by the Irish Republic) would also have significance far beyond Northern Ireland in relation to the growing world problems of minority rights and freedoms viz-a-viz the assumed right of majorities to rule.
  - ii. To set up, at an appropriate time, a Northern Forum so that individuals and groups could respond from a Northern perspective to the findings of the New Ireland Forum, the Interim Report of the Assembly’s Devolution Committee (especially the section submitted by the DUP and Alliance Parties), The Way Forward (OUP), The Way Ahead (ULDP), Sinn Fein Policy Document, Workers Party Policy Documents and so on as well as making alternative proposals of their own concerning our social, political and economic future.
3. INTERMEDIATE TERM—Promotion of Constitutional Movement.
  - i. To agree to underpin jointly a constitutional convention in Northern Ireland and to act as guarantors for any solution which can be clearly shown to respect self-determination based on consensus.
  - ii To hold, in parallel with the Constitutional Convention, an ad hoc ‘community convention’, inviting attendance of community groups, trade union organizations, minority groups, marginal groups and so on, and to engage such in discussion with regard to matters of social economic and political importance. Using a



regularly published news-sheet to publicise its findings and proposals, such a 'people's convention' could act as a catalyst to the Constitutional Convention to encourage the participants to break out of old moulds and reach for new opportunities.

*In preparing and in promoting constitutional movement, the people must be mobilised as well as the politicians.*

Once the London and Dublin Governments had jointly agreed to support and underpin a Northern Constitutional Convention charged with finding consensus, they should also agree to act as joint guarantors for the outcome provided such outcome is clearly seen to respect fundamental democratic principle and human rights.

#### 4. LONG-TERM—an independent Irish people.

To state that the people should be independent is not to pre-empt the form that such independence should take. To draw a line around a six-county Northern Ireland, a nine-county Ulster, a 32-county Ireland, the archipelago as a whole and so on, is no guarantee of independence of the contained people.

Separatism of one sort or another has more to do with majority rule plus gun-sovereignty politics. We would therefore suggest that freedom of conscience and consensus democracy that acknowledges interdependence will be built into the foundation of any serious attempt to create an independent people in Ireland. *The right to be* must of necessity be tempered by *the need to belong*. As democrats, we should strive to involve the maximum number of people in determining the direction the solution will take; it is undemocratic to pre-empt that direction. Nevertheless, we exercise our democratic right in stating where we stand in relation to that direction. We therefore emphasise that for us, an all-Ireland solution based on consensus seems to be the solution most likely in the long term to resolve, once and for all, the cycle of recurring sectarian violence with which this island has been plagued for so long. Following the building of consensus, we believe that the social and political energy at present focused on "the Northern problem" would be released to deal with the social, economic and political matters which need the urgent and undivided attention of all the people living in this island.

During the period of the Northern Forum, Constitutional Convention and 'People's Community Convention', we will continue to aspire to the building of consensus among the people of Ireland. To that end, we look forward to the day when the people of the North will have sufficient trust and confidence in each other to enable our representatives to invite the representatives of the rest of the people of Ireland to participate in an all-Ireland constitutional convention.

Such a convention would be empowered to thrash out a constitution

which would reflect that degree of consensus that must be the basis of any claims to unity. The constitutional proposals and all amendments to them should, we suggest, require a 66% majority vote in the North and a 66% majority vote in the South to have them ratified adequately by the people.

We are concerned lest the British and Irish Governments believe that they can solve the problem of Northern Ireland over the heads of the people of Northern Ireland. We believe that they must now take full responsibility for their role in perpetuating our conflict, firstly by acknowledging the suppressed conflict that still exists between them about Northern Ireland, and then, in response to this, by encouraging the *people* to move forward on agreed principle, as outlined above, rather than continuing as Governments, to search in vain for an agreed solution.

## Alternative Building of Consensus—a new foundation

If the Governments will not move to break the impasse in such a way that the people can determine their own future, freely, on the basis of consensus, then the people should in future consider voting for candidates who seek a double mandate—one mandate within the existing local, regional and national systems, the other to an interim building of consensus for the people of Ireland as a whole. Such a building might take place on a site in the North symbolically acceptable to all of the main Irish traditions. The building of consensus will herald the end of majority rule plus gun claims to sovereignty from either London or Dublin.

# Alternative Building of Consensus

## Democracy?

The election of councillors, assemblymen, TDs and MPs is held up as an example of representational democracy. People are offered choices (candidates and policies) and the means of making those choices (votes). What could be fairer, more democratic? The end result should be to create, in the community, a sense of involvement in the decision-making process.

Does it? Many (sometimes most) of the electorate fail to make choices—they don't vote. They, and those that do, regard their local councils with cynicism or indifference. There is a sense of remoteness from those who exercise power.

So, in an attempt to take back power, local community organisations spring up—tenant's associations, rate-payers associations, welfare rights associations, community councils, environmental groups and so on. They soon find that they have no power. They can resolve to do this or that but the power to change need into reality lies elsewhere.

## Consensus

Consensus means involvement *and* power. That is, the power to make of the street, the village, the town, the district, workplace—what-so-ever those who live or work within deem necessary for their well-being and just as importantly, for the well-being of the generations to follow.

Can we therefore not take back that power, the power to decide where the boundary lines of our community shall be, the power to decide what we want for our communities, the power to make of our communities what we wish for them?

This does not mean that communities, each pre-occupied with its own affairs, should isolate themselves one from the other. That is the negation of consensus.

Should consensus be achieved, different communities would be able to live harmoniously in their own areas. Furthermore, the greater the number of institutions and organisations which reach across local community boundaries and in which members of communities relate and share, the more likely they are to find a stable relationship with each other. Nevertheless, communities cannot be divorced from the land with which they are identified. Those who put consensus on the table for self-government must inevitably point to land and vice versa.

In today's world of easy communication people concerned about the need for consensus government (government based on consensus democracy as opposed to majority rule plus gun sovereignty) perceive consensus in the context of the inter-dependence of a world community of consensus governments themselves based on consensus among local communities.

In the global village of the future—if the world as we know it is to survive—



the consensus to which we allude will be based on the principle of 'share today and conserve for tomorrow'; such consensus resists alignments or military pacts. Increasing consensus will reflect decreasing violence.

## Violence

*Violence is the expression of a non-consensus society.* Without consensus, violence will, in the end, follow.

The boundaries of nations and the smaller areas within have been determined historically, in almost every case, by violence.

Some say that an attempt has been made at achieving consensus in a big house (Westminster) with people elected to it from a designated area called Great Britain and Northern Ireland. There is also another big house (Leinster House) with elected people in it from the 26 counties of this island. In neither house can consensus for government or sovereignty in relation to Ulster be put on the table. Nor indeed is there consensus for the boundaries of the territories which each house claims responsibility for.

## Partition & Violence

Both houses are in themselves a barrier to consensus for any kind of Ulster. Unless Ulster people ignore, in order to transcend, both of them, they forfeit any wholly Ulster identity.

The only worthwhile Ulster in Ireland that can evolve is that Ulster which is the agreed creation of those who transcend partition in sufficient numbers to knock the symbols of consensus failure—Leinster House and Westminster—into their consensus areas wherever that is. Consensus is a defence of democracy betrays it.

In times past, boundaries changed as much by internal fighting as much by external conquest. Around A.D. 1500, Ulster was approximately the size of one Irish county and has varied in size ever since. The latter day majority-rule-plus-gun formula for conquest and sovereignty, adopted by London and Dublin, has given us no real Ulster at all and certainly no hope of a consensus Ulster. *Partition is an expression of violence.*

## Transcending Partition

As would-be communities in the world in which we find ourselves, all we have is electoral machinery and the symbolism of the land we aspire to.

Analysis of our problem—the absence of consensus—is not worth much without practical suggestions which would acknowledge among other things, the need for a transcending symbolism. *Why not, therefore, consider the historic Navan Fort, Emain Macha, near Armagh, as assembly place for the transcendents of the non-consensus parliaments?*

Already the proposal for a Council of the Islands, brought together by the people of the islands in a manner which transcends partition, gives us hope for

a new departure in the search for consensus.

Therefore, we asked those standing in local elections in Ireland in May/June to seek a dual mandate and to indicate whether or not they would join in a symbolic building of consensus at Emain Macha.

If local councillors and would-be local councillors throughout Ireland were to recognise, on that spot, the symbolism of Irish harp with its many strings, then an elected assembly open to all the people and communities of the undefined Irish regions, meeting there on a regular basis, might herald the birth of consensus finding in an area which has not been pre-determined in its extent as is, for example, Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the 26 counties, the six counties, the archipelago of Great Britain and Ireland.

Furthermore, we could symbolise the hope for a new consensus among world communities by creating a blue United Nations type of flag, with a circle of stars representing the many inter-dependent nations and place our consensus symbol—the harp, with its many strings, in the centre. In deference, *not to our claim to sovereignty but rather to our aspiration to it*, one of the stars would be missing. The appeal of such dual mandate could in time deliver a few strange faces at Emain Macha, seat of the King of Ulster and the Ard Rí of all Ireland, so very long ago.

Whether or not we obtain an encouraging response, we propose to hold a meeting at Emain Macha at 4 p.m. on Saturday, June 19, 1985. The purpose of the New Ireland Group is to facilitate the *Building of Consensus*.

*"Ourselves With Others"*

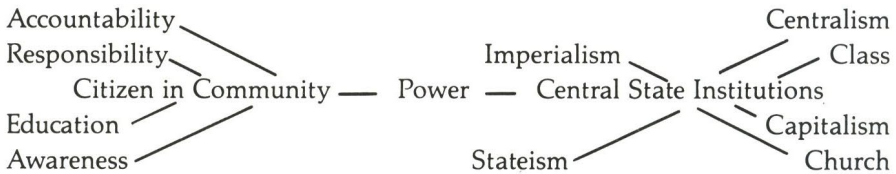
# Local Government

## COMMUNITY COUNCILS

or

## PARTY POLITICAL PLATFORMS

?



## Community: Fragmentation or Integration

The word community has been much abused in recent years. People claiming to represent 'community' all too often relegate community to a second place when seduced by the interests of capital, class and the upward pointing ladders of the central institutions of the state.

The vested interests of centralism, class, capitalism and, in Ireland, church, have fragmented integrated community life.

With the advent of the high-technology, post-industrial era, the New Ireland Group believes that the restoration of community is essential if we are to meet the challenges of the times with hope for sanity and survival.

## A Challenge to All who stand in the Local Elections in Ireland

If, as seems likely, we continue to develop super-technology, the technology of the robot and the micro-chip and if we retain conventional attitudes towards full employment for 6,000 going on 8,000 million people, we could render the planet barren in a short time. The development of high technology must either result in fewer women/men hours in conventional production employment or alternatively lead, in a world of finite resources and vulnerable self-regulating mechanisms, to ecological disaster.

There is, however, a very real danger that the solution, which will be advocated by those who control us, will be one that transfers people from conventional hours on production lines to conventional hours in so-called service industries. Such runs the risk of exchanging one form of suffocation by another as more extensively educated people are forced to take up uncreative, unproductive, unimaginative jobs, intentionally or unintentionally designed to increase the complexity of cross-controls on our lives.

If there is to be a drastic cut in the hours of appropriate (necessary) production line employment, access to those hours must increasingly be shared. If we do



accept the principle of *appropriate* production with access to necessary employment to meet basic need, the question of who determines that need, in terms of what is appropriate, will also engage us. At a time when fewer and fewer seem destined to control the technology, it is more important than ever before that they be absolutely accountable in relation to production, profit and distribution to global need and local effect.

Outside of employment, with more women and men hours in community, there is bound to be a demand for increasing opportunity for creative activity such as work, a fair share of social space, in which elegant choices are no longer exclusively the prerogative of the privileged, and sufficient devolution of power to enable collective participation to become an effective reality.

In the New Ireland Group we would urge a *share today, conserve for tomorrow philosophy* and we would advocate consideration of a new human right—the right of access to an equal share of appropriate employment in the region and a reasonable share for each region of the employment available to the nation as a whole. We are opposed to the direction of labour; we believe in the re-location of opportunity so that, more and more, the regions of the nation and the communities of the region may decentralise necessary employment, and relate it to individual and collective community development.

In the context of an industrial society, unemployment is a scourge. In the context of post-industrial, high-technology society, failure to provide opportunity for creative activity and effective political participation, combined with inequitable distribution of appropriate employment, its products and profits, makes a travesty of the words “justice and equal opportunity” and makes a mockery of those who talk about them, and preach “law and order” at the same time.

## **The Minority People and The Marginal People**

Classical scholars will know that the word police, encompassing the system of regulation of a city, town or district for the preservation of order and enforcement of the law, is derived from the Greek ‘polis’—meaning a state. Once the polis—the city, the concept of the old Athenian city state—expands beyond a certain size, the sense of a single community is lost—satellitism, sectionalism and stratification develop; the idea of health and wholeness in community becomes compromised by the interests of class, capital and sectarianism. The increasingly powerful central control of the value systems—which sustain these interests—ensures that even where, by virtue of distance from the centre, community integrity does still exist, it is under continual threat.

It is not surprising that in the more vulnerable communities—into which professionals commute, if they go at all, and to which the police with reluctance are posted or patrol, where overcrowding, poverty and unemployment abound, where the complexities and language jargon of the state institutions are least understood—the impression gains credence that “their laws are not our laws”—“the police is theirs not ours”—the property, capital and space, the opportunity

for elegant choices, which they have, are protected by those laws and orders which are “theirs” not “ours”. Justice and opportunity seem to be at a premium and “law and order” the justification.

In a society without consensus, the governing group, who are responsible for the laws and the orders, will also be the controllers of the police. It is therefore inevitable, at times of heightened social or sectarian tension, that the police will be perceived, portrayed—or even behave—as the upholders of those who have institutional power and as the oppressors of those who feel they are denied a fair share of it. It is essential that a citizen’s charter of rights and opportunities be drawn up to cope with the birth pangs of the new era, if it is not to destroy us.

The New Ireland Group is in process of drafting such a charter; we are concerned here to mobilise our people to respond to the challenge where they live, and, in so doing, to seek response from the central institutions to which we relate. In so doing we believe we shall be promoting a resurgence in the health, enterprise, and esteem of the people.

## **Individual and Collective Community Development**

*The Challenge of the High-Technology, Post-Industrial Era*  
POINTERS:

### **1. The Tripartite Co-Operative Concept.**

Tripartite representation to be introduced increasingly in all of our enterprises and institutions in order to promote constructive dialogue, better understanding, increased awareness and good feeling based on trust. This concept should, in the first instance, be applied in nationalised or semi-state enterprise, and in all enterprise controlled remotely by capital located outside of Ireland.

The concept is based on the formation of a tripartite co-operative council which would consist of representatives of the three groupings which are essential to the good running and relevant purpose of any enterprise.

- i. *Consumer or community representation*—in service enterprise, e.g., schools, hospitals, representation from such as ex-patients associations and parents/pupils associations; in production enterprise, representation from the affected local community.
- ii. *Operative representation*—representatives elected annually at an annual general meeting of *all* the operatives of the enterprise or institution concerned.
- iii. *‘Institutional’ representation*—representatives of all institutional interests where the power base is located elsewhere, e.g., (a) those with the authority to speak on behalf of the state institutions to which the enterprise relates such as professional heads of departments and shop stewards, etc., and (b) interests of the capital used to fund the enterprise.

By adopting the tripartite approach, the interest of capital, state and

state institutions would be balanced by the interests of the working operatives as well as those of the community in which a particular enterprise is located.

In the case of small locally based enterprise where such an approach could be suffocating, a set period of time such as a half-day per month should be set aside for full and open discussion concerning problems and purpose.

## **2. Tenants Associations and Community Councils**

All houses in the country should be linked to small tenants' associations which would have a statutory obligation to meet a minimum number of times per annum and to elect annually representatives to form the local community council. The local district council embracing a number of local communities might function best if direct representation from the people were balanced by indirect representation through the local community council.

## **3. Local District Councils**

We should aim to create a council of local communities rather than a party political platform at local community level. Thus the local district council embracing a number of local communities might best serve the people if direct representation of the people was complemented by indirect representation through community councillors nominated by the respective local community council.

The Regional Assembly would be elected by 'proportional representation' in the usual way. In any bicameral arrangement, however, consideration should be given to the setting aside of seats in the second chamber for representation selected by the local district councils.

## **4. Community Guilds**

The formation of community guilds would be the means of convening on a regular basis, and by statute if necessary, the *network* of agencies both statutory and voluntary that deal with a particular aspect of community living: health, education, ecology, law and order, employment and work, use and ownership of land and other resources, sport, art and entertainment and so on. 'Awareness for action' might be their motto.

## **5. Citizens Advice Bureaux**

The Citizens Advice Bureaux, supported by an effective library and audio-video cassette network service, would have a significant role to play in conjunction with the community guilds, the community councils, the tripartite co-operative committees, and local tenants associations. Furthermore, the citizens advice bureaux would play a significant role in reducing the degrading effects of clientelism on today's parliamentary party politicians, particularly in the Irish Republic. People should receive their entitlement within the law; if they cannot



receive it within the law, then it is the duty of parliamentary politicians to seek to have the law changed. People should not be led to believe that politicians can obtain for them, things to which they are not legally entitled. Parliamentary politicians, be they of parties or independent, need much more time for parliamentary participation where *listening* could transform what, in recent years, has all too often been vapid delivery into vacant space.

## 6. Community Forum

The establishment, by statute, of the community forum as a central focus in community life. A chosen topic of importance to the community *as a whole* could be ventilated quarterly, or biannually, under the aegis of the community council and appropriate community guild. Such would be an outlet for the citizen and give insight to the politician. It would also be a further means of raising the level of consciousness at local community level. For example, how is the land used in our community, how is it owned, who profits from its currency? For what are we educating people, how we are using resources and talents and who determines how they should be mobilised, and for what purpose? Where does the power lie to shift public assets in and out of our community, such as hospitals and schools? and what controls do we have on them? How should the community relate to the state as a whole, so that the most appropriate use is made of scarce resources? Do we conserve, or do we squander? Are we good trustees of what we have been given in trust? Should we be replacing a centrally controlled state, or region, by the concept of a 'community of communities'?

## 7. Simplified tax system

In order to generate a new appreciation of health, enterprise and self-respect in community, our people should be encouraged to take back responsibility, and become more accountable to each other at local community level. Nothing would have a more catalytic effect in this respect than a new method of tax collection and tax apportionment. The tax levy in relation to earnings, ownership etc., should be collected on a percentage basis for local, regional and national purposes. The knowledge that a considerable percentage of taxable income had been collected for local purpose, would have a welcome impact on local community awareness, which should result in much greater local community participation in relation to the definition of priorities, and the effective use of resources. Nevertheless, such a system would require built-in protection, to overcome the effects of local community nepotism, and local community 'street imperialism'. In considering such matters, it seems important to consider the balance that is needed between power located at community level, and the amount of power that the community should be prepared to devolve to the central institutions, so that different communities at different stages of

development are obliged to relate to an overall strategy for community development at regional and national level.

If, for example, for the country as a whole, 10% of tax was allocated to the centre, 20% to the region (the province) in which we are located, and 40% to the locality in which we live, this would leave 30% over for central use, to achieve, on a sliding scale, balance between the deprived and privileged communities.

There is no particular significance in the choice of these figures, other than an indication of how we might generate much more interest in what goes on at local community level. The redistribution of economic power towards the weak, the deprived, the small and the peripheral, and away from the big, the powerful, and the prestigious, is essential if the redistribution of political power is not just to continue to be highminded sentiment with no cutting edge.

#### **8. National social service**

A period of national social service for all school leavers should be obligatory, the opportunities within it being optional. Possibilities are endless. Rural children exposed to work in an urban setting and vice-versa, people in the North working in the South and vice versa, voluntary service on an exchange basis with young people in other parts of the world, work with the handicapped, community work with the old, work in the courts, work in the prisons and in rehabilitation of prisoners, work in association with the police, work on the sea, work on the land, work in hospitals, and so on. The object must be to ensure that no longer can it be said in Ireland that "the one half doesn't know how the other half lives, further that they barely know the language that they speak".

#### **9. Third level education as an alternative experience**

Third level education, whether practical, in the arts, technical or academic, should be perceived increasingly as opportunity for alternatives rather than the end point of a highly selective—and quite destructive—production line processing. Teaching and research should become orientated towards local community need, and less towards that determined by academic frontiers men.

No one can stop original thought; this said, however, the ethos of the society in which it flourishes is bound to have an effect on the direction in which it is going. Likewise, the ethos of a society should determine how we use the academic freedom which we value for our research workers. At the same time as we encourage this freedom, there should also be an expectation of research workers, that they expose their methods and conclusions in such a way that the social implication of their results, in terms understandable to the rest of us, may be evaluated, so that they can be used for constructive purpose in a manner that we *feel* is appropriate.

## 10. Redemptive politic

The need to encourage the holy men throughout the world to address themselves, with greater urgency than ever, to the need for symbolic acts of healing for the deep wounds caused by violence in our past history. No political or social solution on its own will be enough to heal the effects of violation, unless we are able to anticipate a movement in the spirit too. Change of heart and transformation in the human spirit is vital, if civilisation as we know it is to survive.