

THE CONSOCIATIONAL MODEL AND ITS DANGERS

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“What curious attitudes he goes into!”

“Not at all,” said the King. “He’s
an Anglo-Saxon Messenger – and those
are Anglo-Saxon attitudes.”

(Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*)

ABSTRACT

The model of ‘consociational democracy’ is no longer regarded in Anglo-Saxon countries as a curiosity but may be in danger of being accepted too uncritically as a model for the resolution of divisions within a society. This argument is applied in particular to the cases of Canada and Northern Ireland, to suggest that the effect of attempting to introduce consociational practices might make matters worse.

The Consociational Vogue

In a recent review article on ‘The Consociational Democracy Theme,’ Hans Daalder wrote that the model of ‘consociational democracy’ challenged ‘prevailing normative views, based mainly on American or British perspectives’ about ‘the conditions of effective and stable democratic rule’ (Daalder, 1974, p. 605). I should like to make two remarks about this claim. First, I question whether the attitudes to which Daalder refers are really ‘prevalent’, at any rate in America or Britain themselves. And, second, I should like to suggest that the battle has not only been won but is in some danger of turning into a rout. Less metaphorically, the ‘consociational democracies’ are no longer likely to be written off as being ‘isolated phenomena, mainly of folkloristic interest’ (Daalder, 1974, p. 604), but their relevance to other societies may now be exaggerated.

In the past few years in Britain, the aspects of the political system which have come under fire most frequently are precisely those where it deviates most clearly from the ‘consociational’ model: the artificial

opposition of parties whose members (it is said) largely agree on what should be done (and even more on the limits of what anyone could do) and the tendency for the alternating party governments to spend much of the time undoing the work of their predecessors and the rest preparing legislation much of which does not even reach the statute book before the next election puts it back at square one. It is also worth noting that at any time in the last few years anything from a quarter to a half of the electorate with an opinion has been shown by public opinion polls to agree with statements on the lines of 'Politicians should cooperate together to solve the nation's problems' or specifically to say that they would welcome coalition government. So far, then, from the prevailing mood in Britain being one in which the 'consociational democracies' are regarded as aberrations, it might be nearer the truth to say that there is a great deal of doubt about what had been thought of as the distinctive merits of the system: the electoral system that usually creates a majority party out of only a plurality of votes, and the winner-take-all allocation of political power to the party with a majority of seats in the House of Commons.

It is, in the nature of the case, difficult to prove that this chastened mood about our long-established political habits and political institutions is widespread. But the clearest sign was probably an active correspondence in *The Times* which took place between the February and October elections in 1974, when the unsettled parliamentary situation (the two major parties holding almost equal numbers of seats, the balance being held by minor parties) made reform appear a practical possibility. I pick one as an example, almost at random.

The first paragraph of the letter runs as follows:

Electoral reform seems nowadays to meet with general approval by the public if not by professional MPs. It would presumably, generally lead to minority or coalition governments and this might be no bad thing. It will, however, be quite ineffective in imposing upon the politicians the necessity for genuine consensus government unless it is accompanied by a major change in the constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom. This is the removal from the Prime Minister of the day of the power to require a dissolution of parliament. (*The Times*, September 21, p. 15 col. 7, letter by Mr. Anthony Sumption).

The significant part of this letter for the present purpose is the idea that minority or coalition government is desirable as a means to genuine consensus government. The writer's own piece of constitutional *bricolage* is significant only as a symptom of the tendency to cast around for foreign devices to import that people usually engage in when they are dissatisfied with their own institutions. But it is a nice irony that the device imported into France — dissolution of parliament before its

full term expires – with the object of making the system function more like the British one should now have its abolition proposed in Britain with the avowed object of making the system more ‘continental’!

The situation in the U.S.A. is, of course, in all kinds of ways different. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that the Anglophile supporters of ‘a more responsible two-party system,’ like Schattschneider and Beer have, correctly, seen themselves as going against the American grain. The norm in Congressional committees is one of businesslike cooperation, with unanimity highly valued and very little overt partisanship except on organizational matters. And the rule requiring a two-thirds majority for *clôture* in the Senate (combined with the reluctance of Senators to invoke it) is an embodiment of Calhoun’s notion of the ‘concurrent majority’, an essentially ‘consociational’ idea. The only ‘majoritarian’ feature of the federal system is the Presidency itself, and those who have in the past decried the ‘deadlock of democracy’ in the U.S.A. have tended to pin their hopes on a reconstruction of the parties behind the leadership of the President and (more difficult to institutionalize) a Presidential candidate-designate for the other side. But, under the impact of the abuses of Johnson and Nixon, the emphasis recently has been on cutting the Presidency down to size rather than building it up further. Restraining the Presidency inevitably means building up Congress: that is to say, trying to find ways in which Congress, through its committees, can gain some greater control over what is done by or in the name of the President.

In the intellectual climate I have described, I do not think that any further Anglo-Saxon breast-beating over past hubris in relation to our political institutions is called for. What worries me at present is that attempts to apply the ‘consociational model’ outside its original areas (especially in divided societies such as Northern Ireland or Canada) may make things worse. There is always a risk that proposals for institutional transfer from one country to another will partake more of sympathetic magic than of sober science. Maurice O’Sullivan, in his delightful autobiographical book *Twenty Years A-Growing* quotes an apposite Irish saying “Live horse and you’ll get grass” (O’Sullivan, 1953, p. 17). “Have proportional representation and a grand coalition and you’ll become Swiss or Dutch” is not perhaps so different as a mode of reasoning. Let me hasten at once to acquit the exponents of ‘consociational democracy’ of peddling it as a panacea. But I do think that someone who does not read the small print may go away with the impression that in order to turn a conflict-ridden democracy into a harmonious one all that is required is an effort of will by political leaders. Insufficient attention may be paid to the fact that, if the country is a democ-

racy, the leaders can continue to be leaders only so long as they have followers.

I should like to explore briefly the cases of two divided western societies: Canada and Northern Ireland. It is clearly of considerable practical importance to know whether an attempt to introduce consociational democracy into these societies would be likely to make for more harmonious inter-communal relationships or exacerbate a situation that is already uneasy in Canada and really grave in Northern Ireland. And although one can have only limited confidence in these matters I think the balance of probability is on the latter.

The Canadian Case

For Canada, I refer to Kenneth D. McRae's collection entitled *Consociational Democracy* (McRae, 1974). This book is a useful source of articles on the idea of consociational democracy in general and on the four 'classic cases' of Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria. But the last quarter of the book is taken up with a section entitled "Applications and Illustrations: Canada." The editor, like many Anglophone academics in Canada, is deeply committed to the cause of maintaining the territorial integrity of Canada. In practical terms what this comes to is that he is committed to trying to prevent Quebec from seceding.

The political implications that follow have been set out very clearly by John Meisel in his *Working Papers on Canadian Politics*. He states an 'axiom' as follows: "when two or more groups of people have it in their power to survive within independent political entities, the only workable basis on which they can arrange the political relations between them is compromise" (Meisel, 1973, pp. 184-5). And he then fills out the axiom in a way that makes it clearly tautological. (This is not a criticism: tautologies may be illuminating.) The choice, he says, is separation, force or accommodation. If force is ruled out and separation is to be avoided then "the sole basis on which accommodation between the two communities can rest is an agreement acceptable to both" (Meisel, 1973, p. 185). But what form should this 'accommodation' take? 'Accommodation' is a word of very non-specific meaning in this kind of context. If the parties to a dispute 'reach an accommodation' this means that *some* terms of agreement have been reached, but it does not entail that they should take any particular form.

There are two possible directions in which accommodation may be pursued that are compatible with the existing party system and are

indeed on the political agenda. The first is the attempt to make the Federal government truly 'bilingual' and 'bicultural' by selective recruitment, use of scrupulously bilingual forms and notices, etc. The second is to allow Quebec more autonomy so that French Canadians can feel that they are in charge of its economic and cultural destiny without concluding that they need complete independence to achieve their goals. I mention these because it seems clear that McRae's object is to advocate something different — though not necessarily incompatible with either of them. He takes 'accommodation' to entail the reconstruction of Canadian politics to make it fit the consociational model.

McRae puts his case in the "Epilogue" to the book with quite a rhetorical fervour. He describes a 'majoritarian attitude' as the "Achilles heel of the Canadian political system" and "the *damnosa hereditas* of Anglo-American democracy and Lockean political theory and liberal society" (McRae, 1974, p. 301). His argument is that the only alternative to "a more explicitly consociational political system" is "the separation or quasi-separation of Quebec," which "would still leave substantial minorities in Quebec and the rest of Canada" (McRae, 1974, p. 301).

McRae never makes it clear quite what he means by "modifying [Canada's] formal institutions along more consociational lines" but in the article by himself that he prints on "Consociationalism and the Canadian Political System" (McRae, 1974, pp. 238–61) he states the objections to the existing system from the 'consociational' point of view by saying that the two "weaknesses of the Canadian political system may be summarized by borrowing the terminology of Lijphart: *adequate articulation of the interests of the subcultures* is not guaranteed at cabinet level because of uncertainty and distortion in the electoral system, and *internal political cohesion of the subcultures* is not strong enough to assure that agreements reached in cabinet will be accepted by the electorate" (McRae, 1974, pp. 252–3, italics in original). I want to argue that both general theoretical considerations and the experience of other countries, properly interpreted, combine to suggest that the kind of political realignments that McRae is looking for could only be the consequence of and at the same time an accelerating factor in producing exactly the kind of breakdown in Anglo-French relationships that he is seeking to prevent. And the intellectual origin of this error is the mechanical transfer of supposed lessons from the experience of consociational democracy in Europe.

"Adequate articulation of the interests of the subcultures" and their stronger "internal political cohesion" (so that whatever the leaders agreed to could be counted on as acceptable to the followers) could, I

suggest, occur only as a concomitant of increased polarization between the English-speaking and French-speaking communities, with each community lining up solidly behind extremist leaders. Unity and an absence of challenge to leaders can come about when the issues involve communal identity of conflict. (For a more extended statement, see Barry, 1975.) To wish deliberately to create such conditions so as to create the possibility of resolving the conflict by 'consociational' means is, to say the least, reckless.

The existing Canadian party system is, as everyone agrees, one of 'catch-all' or 'brokerage' parties. Each party's support is, to an unusual degree even by the standards of other members of the 'Anglo-American' political systems in Almond's famous (or infamous) typology, spread across regional, occupational, religious and linguistic lines. In particular, the Liberal Party, which must be regarded as the dominant party for more than a generation past, depends for its position on its ability to attract heavy support in Quebec without forfeiting it in the rest of Canada. The primary site of inter-ethnic accommodation may thus be said to be the Liberal Party.

I suggest that the politicians of the major national parties are right to regard this kind of set-up as the best hope for the continuation of the existing federation. As in Belgium, they see the rise of exclusively ethnic parties not as the prelude to smoother co-operation but as the beginning of the end of the existing state. I think they are right. It is *not* necessarily an advantage for the most salient (or potentially salient) line of cleavage to be reproduced by the structure of political division. Communal cleavages are so potentially explosive that they can probably only be accommodated in the interstices of politics while the politicians ostensibly fight one another over quite different issues.

I have not referred to the way in which McRae ties up his preference for better "articulation of the subcultures" with a reform of the electoral system designed to replace the first-past-the-post single member constituency system by some other more proportional system. It seems to me that the desirability or undesirability of the kind of realignment McRae advocates is independent of any question about the way in which such a realignment might be brought about. I have no wish to get drawn deeply into that question unnecessarily but for what it is worth I offer the comment that there does not seem to be any *general* reason for expecting a more proportional electoral system to bring about an alignment into monolithic blocs along the most salient line of cleavage in the society.

It is surely excessively simple-minded to say that, because the 'Anglo-American' countries tend to have single-member constituencies

and broadly-aggregating parties, the first is the cause of the second. The structure of cleavages must also be taken into account. Where there are cross-cutting cleavages but one is more salient than the other, the logic of a single-member system is to suppress the less salient line of cleavage, and create monolithic communal blocs of the kind McRae apparently wants to see.

Northern Ireland provides a perfect test of this proposition, and it is worth noticing that practical politicians have been quite well aware of the way in which the political articulation of potential bases of division may be affected by the manipulation of the electoral system. Northern Ireland came into being with a system of elections in multi-member constituencies (by single transferable vote) to its own parliament. In the first general election, held in 1921 under conditions of great inter-communal tension, the established Unionist party was able to monopolize the Protestant representation. But at the next election, in 1925, "in Belfast there were four four-member constituencies. Eight candidates appealed for a Protestant anti-Unionist vote. Only one failed to get elected. There were three Labour and four Independent Unionist MPs in the new Parliament. Unionist representation went down from 40 to 32" (McCann, 1974, p. 192).

The response of the Unionist government was to introduce legislation providing for elections to be held in single-member constituencies. It is important to recognize that this was not necessary to ensure a comfortable majority of Protestant representatives. With proportional representation, Protestants were assured of two-thirds of the seats in accordance with their two-to-one ratio in the population. And although the eventual outcome of the change was indeed to increase the proportion of Protestant representatives, the condition for this to occur was that the Protestant vote should not be split between rival candidates in any constituency where the Catholic minority exceeded a third of the electorate. The Unionist leaders thus accepted a change from a system that made a Protestant majority certain to one that made a Catholic majority a theoretical possibility, in the hope (which was fully justified in the event) that the risk of letting in a Catholic on a split Protestant vote would force Protestant voters to unify behind the Unionist party.

Every general election would thus be simply a plebiscite on the issue of the Border: there would be no way in which a voter could simultaneously vote for or against partition and for or against alternative socio-economic policies that might cut across the Protestant-Catholic division. The Prime Minister, Sir James Craig, was quite explicit about the objective of suppressing any cleavages cross-cutting the Protestant-Catholic one. Introducing the bill to abolish proportional representa-

tion early in 1929 he went on: "What I have been afraid of under the proportional representation system was that certain members might be returned to the house who in a crisis on the one point of vital importance to Ulster might not stand on whichever side it was intended they should stand when they were elected to this house. Therefore, I personally will welcome this opportunity to get down to simple issues instead of the complicated ones that are inevitably brought before us under the old plan" (Hansard (N.I.), Vol. 10, 28, 29). McCann's comment seems apt in the light of the forty years of political ossification that followed: "The 'simple issues' were the border, whether Catholics should be allowed to sweep the floor in the City Hall, and so on. The 'complicated ones' were unemployment, houses, rents, wages and such things, irritatingly being 'brought before us under the old plan'." (McCann, 1974, pp. 192-3). In the election held in 1929, the Unionist representation went up to 37, the Independent Unionists lost one seat and the Labour Party two seats (See McCann, 1974, p. 193).

The experiment was given a further work-out in 1973, when elections were held for the new Northern Ireland Assembly that came into being at the beginning of 1974. For this purpose, the British government reverted to the pre-1929 system of election by the single transferable vote in multi-member constituencies. The objective was explicit: to reduce the pressures towards a monolithic Protestant vote and give a chance to parties (the Northern Ireland Labour Party and the newly-formed Alliance Party) that attempted to play down the Protestant-Catholic line of division.

The strategy succeeded to the extent that the Protestant vote was split between extremists and supporters of the 'power-sharing' constitution, while the Alliance Party, although it polled poorly, managed to obtain a few seats — something it could not have achieved in a single-member constituency system. Then, as if to allay any remaining doubts about the mechanics of the process, the British government called a general election for February 1974. This was held in Northern Ireland under the usual UK rules, and the single-member constituency system produced its usual effect of solidifying the Protestant vote, though this time behind a loose alliance of Protestant parties opposed to the pro-power-sharing Unionists.

In Canada, it seems to be a safe bet that the main effect of introducing a more proportional electoral system would be simply to spread the elected representatives of the existing parties more evenly round the country. As Cairns has pointed out (Cairns, 1968) the single-member system greatly exaggerates regional differences of support between parties, so that in terms of parliamentary representation the parties are

much more regionally-concentrated than is their distribution of the popular vote. Thus, except in a good year, the New Democratic Party is almost entirely a highly geographically-concentrated party in parliamentary terms, though it has minority support spread widely through the country, just as in Britain the Liberal party is, except in a good year, almost entirely a party of the 'Celtic fringe' even though there are few constituencies left in which it cannot now obtain over a fifth of the votes cast.

The change to a more even geographical spread of party representation might be regarded as desirable from various points of view, but McRae is not interested in minor changes in the representation at the Federal level of parties aligned on the existing 'catch-all' basis. I suggest that there is no reason to suppose that a change in the electoral system would have any tendency to further the kind of realignment that McRae is looking for. On the contrary, the example of Northern Ireland seems to imply that, once parties are aligned on the basis of communal cleavage, the single-member system is highly conducive to maintaining the kind of monolithic ethnic party that McRae apparently wishes to see in Canada.

The Northern Ireland Case

The question posed for the theory of consociational democracy by Northern Ireland is quite different from that posed by Canada. In the case of Canada, the question is whether it would be desirable for the party system to articulate the communal cleavage as a precondition to applying 'consociational' techniques of conflict-management. In Northern Ireland, the main line of party division has articulated the Protestant-Catholic cleavage ever since the Province was set up with its present boundaries and a quasi-autonomous status in 1922. Writing in 1971, Richard Rose observed that "The two major parties are exclusive on religious grounds — 95 percent of Unionist supporters are Protestants, and 99 percent of Nationalist supporters are Catholics" (Rose, 1971, p. 235). Although since then the Unionist party has splintered and the Catholics have unified behind a new party, the incidence of voting across religious lines is probably if anything even lower now. It is possible to imagine, if we could run the time machine back to the mid-1920s and cancel the change in the electoral system, that there might have been an alternative line of development. One could imagine a situation in which the pro-partition MPs (and perhaps also anti-partition MPs) were divided on internal socio-economic issues and in which

there were tactical voting alliances across communal lines. One could even imagine that this could lead to inter-communal governments within a framework of pragmatic acceptance of the Border.

This would not necessarily, of course, even over many years, have eliminated 'nationalist' aspirations among the Catholics. But it is interesting to note that, even after forty years with the Border as the main issue dividing the parties in Northern Ireland, Richard Rose's 'loyalty survey' in 1968 showed that only fourteen percent of the Catholic sample definitely said that they disapproved of the existing constitutional arrangements because they wanted a united Ireland. It may be added that although a total of a third (34%) of the Catholics expressed disapproval of the constitutional arrangements, the majority of them either expressed a preference for some new political deal within the boundaries of Northern Ireland or were pretty vague about what they wanted. Perhaps even more striking is the fact that another third (34%) expressed themselves satisfied with the existing constitutional arrangements and the remaining third (33%) said they didn't know. If these figures mean anything, they do not suggest that the Catholics formed a unified nationalistic bloc in 1968.

However, there is no practical profit now in speculating about what might have happened in the past if the Unionist party had not succeeded in structuring the politics of Northern Ireland along a single dimension of cleavage. The current situation is obviously one of great inter-communal discord, and it is unrealistic to expect any electoral system to do anything except mirror it (proportional system) as against exaggerating it (single member system).

We might offer this as a tentative generalization. It is sometimes possible to maintain a system of party alignments cutting across a line of communal cleavage. It is usually possible to shift from this to a system where parties articulate the communal cleavage. But it is extremely difficult if not impossible to move in the reverse direction, because of the primitive psychological strength of communal identification and the effects of social reinforcement on maintaining the political salience of communal identification. Sri Lanka in 1956 provides an instructive example of a case where politicians exploited the ethnic issue (Sinhalese hostility to the Tamil minority) in order to win an electoral advantage and then found that the powerful communal sentiments they had aroused could not be contained (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972, pp. 135-6).

There is, then, no realistic alternative in Northern Ireland to a system in which the interests and aspirations of the two communities are articulated directly by political parties. This being so, the choice is between

repression and accommodation. The first of these was, on the whole, the chosen instrument from 1921 until 1963. The Prime Minister from 1921 until 1940, Lord Craigavon "himself spoke of the regime as 'a Protestant government' and called it 'a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People'." (Rose, 1971, p. 92). No attempt was made to cater for the sentiments or the interests of Catholics, and the government relied for its maintenance on the ability and willingness to coerce the minority, notably through the para-military Protestant force, the 'B Specials'.

In 1963, Captain Terence O'Neill acceded to the post of Prime Minister and attempted to win the allegiance rather than the coerced compliance of the Catholic minority. Unfortunately, his efforts were largely symbolic (allowing himself to be photographed with nuns, etc.) which lost him support among Protestants without gaining it among Catholics. Apart from this he pinned his hopes heavily on economic development as a solvent of traditional hostilities but did nothing to meet the real political grievances of the Catholics: the unequal franchise and gerrymandered constituencies for elections to local authorities and the lack of any statutory protection against job and housing discrimination. At the same time, the new atmosphere (reinforced perhaps by the *Zeitgeist* of the nineteen sixties) led to a systematic and determined Catholic demand for improvement in the shape of the Civil Rights movement. Illegal 'civil rights' marches, and the undisciplined reaction of the regular police (the RUC) and the 'B Specials', led to a deterioration of relations between the communities. After O'Neill resigned in 1969, the British government became more and more heavily involved in the affairs of the Province, and in March 1972 took over direct control of the Province.

The lesson that has been drawn from this experience by the British political elite is that political accommodation in Northern Ireland is inseparable from the institutions of consociational democracy. Specifically, the official position of both Conservative and Labour parties, in government and in opposition, has been and remains one of exclusive attachment to the notion of a 'power-sharing executive' as the key to the salvation of Northern Ireland. The White Paper of March 1973 (Cmnd 5259) declared that the British government would devolve power on to a new Northern Ireland Assembly only on condition that there was an 'agreed understanding' to the effect that "executive powers will not be concentrated in elected representatives from one community only." (Para. 53, *The Times*, March 21, 1973, p. 5, col. 1). A 'power-sharing' executive was set up under the provisions of the White Paper which took office at the beginning of 1974 but collapsed at the end of May under the impact of a general strike by Protestant

workers that paralyzed the Province. In spite of this, both parties remain committed to the 'power-sharing' formula, and the constitutional convention elected in May 1975 was told in advance that its proposals must incorporate a 'power-sharing executive'. Since the elections to the convention produced a majority firmly committed to rejecting 'power-sharing' the prospect is one of deadlock.

It is not my intention to suggest that I have any alternative panacea to offer. In fact my own view of the prospects is extremely bleak. The experiment in accommodation launched by O'Neill has ended in disaster. At the same time, a return to the pre-1963 formula of coercion by armed and ill-disciplined Protestant forces would, after all that has happened since 1969, be the signal for a massacre of Catholics (especially in Belfast) rather than a mere return to the *status quo ante*.

These are the logically exhaustive possibilities for self-government in the existing Province. It is therefore hardly surprising that people should be casting around for alternatives to self-government in the existing Province. One is to keep the existing boundaries of Northern Ireland but to try to lower the stakes of inter-communal politics by integrating it completely into the United Kingdom. It would then retain local government authorities but these would have only the relatively weak powers of local authorities elsewhere in the UK – and even these might be further reduced by legally enforceable guarantees of non-discrimination in the allocation of jobs and houses by local councils. But would this save the British army from being shot at by men of violence on both sides and in any case is it really feasible in the long run to go in that direction in Northern Ireland, at the same time as Scotland and Wales achieve partial self-government under elected national assemblies?

Alternatively, self-government may be retained but the area of the existing Province changed (see Lijphart, 1975, pp. 105–6). There are of course many precedents for partition and transfer of populations as ways of alleviating conflict between different communal groups in a single polity. In the case of Northern Ireland this would entail re-drawing the boundary between North and South so as to transfer to the South those tracts of the present Northern Ireland that are predominantly occupied by Catholics, and some arrangement for the evacuation of the Catholic enclave in Belfast to the South or to the mainland of Britain. The truncated Northern Ireland could then either be semi-autonomous within the U.K. or could form a small independent state. Although this may now be the best hope of restoring stability in Ireland, it is certainly not an easy solution. The human cost of uprooting people must never be underestimated, and in any case an attempt to implement any proposal to transfer territory from Northern Ireland to

the Republic might itself occasion bloody resistance from the Protestants.

It is not necessary to pursue these possibilities further here. I mention them only to make the point that there is no easy alternative to accommodation between the two communities. It is therefore important to decide whether the British political elite is right to insist on a 'power-sharing' constitution as a guarantee that the Catholic minority will be accommodated. I believe that they are probably mistaken, and that this insistence makes some sort of accommodation less likely rather than more likely.

It is always tempting to seize on the visible institutional embodiments of accommodation and to attribute to them an exaggerated influence. The willingness of the leaders of the Austrian People's Party in 1945 to offer a 'grand coalition' and the willingness of the leaders of the Socialist party to accept the offer was deeply significant because it showed that they were prepared to act in an accommodating way. But the same attitudes might well have served to create a stable polity if the People's Party had formed a moderate government and the Socialist Party a moderate opposition. Before 1966, when the People's Party did form a government by itself, some writers in Austria had predicted disaster if the 'grand coalition' came to an end: they had made the mistake of taking as essential the formal framework of accommodation. What really mattered was that both sides behaved with restraint: the government did not threaten the position of the opposition nor the opposition the position of the government. (According to Bluhm (1973) the People's Party sent a deputation to London to find out from the Conservative party how to conduct a one-party government!)

In an exactly similar way there can be no question that it would be enormously encouraging for the future of Northern Ireland if a party representing a substantial proportion of the Protestant vote in Northern Ireland were voluntarily to offer a coalition to a party representing a substantial proportion of the Catholic vote and if this party were to accept. For it would show in the clearest possible way that representatives of both sides recognized the necessity for reaching an accommodation.

But the same real desire to reach an accommodation might be shown by a Protestant government trying seriously to remove the grievances of the Catholics and a Catholic party accepting the genuineness of the government's attempt and accepting the role of 'loyal opposition'. The beginning of just such a process of normalization did in fact occur in the early years of the O'Neill period. "The Nationalist Party. . . took half a step toward co-operation within Ulster in 1965 by accepting the

title of official opposition" (Rose, 1971, p. 99). All this was swept away (and so was the Nationalist party) with the rise of violence but it illustrates the way in which co-operation can develop without co-optation.

More specifically, there are two reasons why the experience of, say, the Netherlands does not support the constitutional requirement of 'power-sharing' in Northern Ireland. The first is the difference in the basis of cleavage. This is a tricky point in the case of Northern Ireland because the contending groups are defined in religious terms as Protestants and Catholics. Does this not mean that we can assimilate it to the religious cleavage in the Netherlands? Richard Rose, in the interesting last chapter of *Governing without Consensus* which pursues briefly a number of comparisons between Northern Ireland and other countries, appears to take just this line. "Among fully legitimate European regimes, the Netherlands, superficially at least, appears to have much in common with Northern Ireland. Within Dutch society religious differences are of major political and social importance: in addition to a Catholic party there are two Protestant parties — one fundamentalist and one middle-of-the-road — and two secular parties — one liberal and one Socialist. Each of these three major *zuilen* (literally, pillars) — the Catholic, Protestant and secular — has its own schools, newspapers, television stations and other institutions. These are meant to segregate each group from their fellow subjects" (Rose, 1971, p. 448). In spite of this, Rose continues, "modern Dutch politics is a record of peaceful, if sometimes incessant, bargaining about political differences among politicians who give full allegiance to the regime" (Rose, 1971, p. 448).

In seeking to show why, although both have "distinctive and multiple differences," Dutch experience does not offer much comfort for Northern Ireland, Rose picks on what I suggest is a mere epiphenomenon: the number of blocs and in particular the fact that none of them can hope to form a majority by itself. "In consequence of the necessity of coalition government, even that most controversial of issues — the relationship of church and state in education — was capable of compromise in the Netherlands. The two Christian groups combined to assure state subsidies to separate denominational schools. Either group, in combination with the secular *zuil*, could prevent the monopoly of the other sectarian groups. In a complementary fashion, the secular *zuil* secured the creation of a secular school system, paralleling the sectarian ones. By contrast, the division of Northern Ireland people into two groups, with one permanently in the majority, removes the need or possibility of coalition government with an alternation of groups in power" (Rose, 1971, p. 449; see also Rose and Urwin, 1975, p. 49).

This explanation, in terms of formal structural facts (fragmentation of groups, cross-cutting cleavages etc.) is of a kind that had a general vogue in social science in the nineteen sixties. A typical example was the reduction of a belief that one is a victim of injustice to a feeling of 'relative deprivation' and the explanation of that in terms of the frequency of interaction with those better off than oneself. This kind of mechanical approach has not been generally very successful and it would be surprising if it were. Contact with someone better off than oneself is not a simple stimulus clocking up the 'relative deprivation' count: its impact depends entirely on the framework of beliefs into which it is fitted. Similarly, the place to start in analyzing the effects of social cleavage is not its formal characteristics but its content.

On this criterion, the most important thing to notice about the Dutch blocs referred to by Rose is that they are divided on religious, or more generally cultural, questions. The only reason why there is ever any occasion for dispute between blocs differentiated in this way is that at least one is seeking to use political means to expand its membership while the rest are at least committed to maintaining their existing position. In the Netherlands, the secular liberals were seeking a hegemonic position in the nineteenth century while in Belgium, where evenly-matched Catholic and secular blocs faced one another, both were in an expansionist mood (see the respective contributions by Daalder and Lorwin, in Dahl, 1966). The Dutch 'pacification' of 1917 was made possible by the willingness of all parties to dig in behind their existing lines and forswear the possible gains of a *Kulturkampf*. Given this willingness to settle for a neutralization of the conflict, the obvious principle on which to do so was that of the caucus race in *Alice in Wonderland*: "All have won and all must have prizes." It has indeed been pointed out that the lush development of *verzuiling* in the Netherlands is the consequence rather than the cause of the settlement of 1917. There is nothing more conducive to the growth of organizations than the existence of patronage to be distributed.

The crucial point to notice is that the whole cause of the disagreement was the feeling of some Dutchman or (until the linguistic/regional issue displaced the 'spiritual' issue) Belgians that it mattered what *all* the inhabitants of the country believed. Demands for policies aimed at producing religious or secular uniformity presuppose a concern (even if a misguided one) for the state of grace of one's fellow citizens. By contrast, the inhabitants of Northern Ireland have never shown much worry about the prospects of the adherents of the other religion going to hell. There has been no attempt at proselytizing, and the question of schools has not been a serious source of division between the com-

munities. The Protestants use the state system while the Catholics patronize privately-run but heavily state-aided schools, and the official representatives of both sides are apparently happy to keep it that way (see Rose, 1971, p. 336). As far as I am aware, even in the current state of extreme hostility between the communities the school question has not been reopened by either side. Perhaps it would even be an encouraging sign if it were.

Since Rose is surely correct in describing "the relationship of church and state in education" as the "most controversial issue" where religious values are at stake, we should have to be puzzled by the lack of conflict on this score in Northern Ireland if we saw the dispute there as religious in origin. But it is not. 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' are ways of designating two distinct peoples, whose divergent histories are constantly kept before each succeeding generation: the descendants of the settlers, mainly from Scotland, planted in the seventeenth century as an act of British policy and the descendants of the indigenous inhabitants.

The two sides are communal groups identified by religious affiliation, rather than religious groups. There are two issues between them. One is the national issue: Catholics tend to be attached to the idea of a united Ireland politically separate from the rest of the British Isles; Protestants are attached to union with the U.K. or, failing that, an independent Ulster. It is, of course, a little too simple to say that this is a national issue rather than a religious issue. One of the standing objections of the Ulster Protestants to the idea of incorporation in the Republic is the very reasonable one that the Constitution of the Republic of Ireland which was introduced by the de Valera government in 1937 (specifically claiming validity for all thirty-two counties) is avowedly a Catholic constitution. The *Derry Journal* hailed it as "a magnificent confession of Faith" (McCann, 1974, p. 179), which is accurate but displays a frightening lack of understanding of the kind of constitution that would really be needed to enable a 32-county Ireland to live in peace.

However, I believe that it is still correct to place the emphasis on the factor of national identity for this reason. Suppose that the offending parts of the existing constitution were repealed and in addition that the right to divorce and birth control and to non-Catholic schooling were constitutionally entrenched in their place; would the Ulster Protestants drop their objections to joining the Republic? I find it very difficult to believe that they would. And if we ask why, we come back to the matter of a separate identity. This is manifested in a lack of sympathy for other aspects of public policy in the Republic, such as the attempt to build up the status of Gaelic, but it is not reducible to it.

The other issue dividing the two sides is that of relations between the

communities in Northern Ireland, not in cultural terms but in terms of power and material advantage or disadvantage. It is incidental to the second issue that the differentiation between the communities is religious: it could just as well be in terms of language, skin colour or (in principle) no more than descent alone, though I believe it would be very unusual for a politically-salient characteristic not to be marked in some way in addition to bare descent. That Roman Catholics were discriminated against under the Stormont regime (for example in relation to jobs and houses controlled by public authorities) is not in question. But the point is that the *content* of the discrimination was in no way intrinsically connected with their religious status, as would be a ban or tax on the observance of Roman Catholic worship or some other kind of action peculiarly enjoined by the Roman Catholic religion. By contrast, a job (as distinct from being out of work) and a place to live (as distinct from no place to live) may be said to be extremely widespread objects of human desire, and in the particular context of Northern Ireland their desirability was certainly not a matter on which members of the two communities disagreed. The disagreement was about who should have them.

There is also a political implication of this kind of communal conflict as against one between religious denominations that should be noted: the greater chance of recognized leaders being in a position to 'deliver' the consent of their followers to any deal they may make where the content of the issue is bound up with organizations. If the Catholic hierarchy approves of a settlement of the school question it is hardly open to lay activists to denounce it. But the relation between the Catholic Church and Irish nationalism has been much more equivocal. Nationalist aspirations are not defined by the Church and extreme nationalists have not been deterred by denunciation or even excommunication. 'Loyalism' among Protestant clergy reflects rather than leads 'loyalism' among their congregations and in any case there is more room for Protestants to transfer from one sect to another if they find their current one distasteful politically. The Rev. Ian Paisley, for example, is not a member of any established sect.

The second problem in applying the experience of 'consociational' countries to Northern Ireland is that the consociational democracies of western Europe are not countries in which the constitutional rules prescribe that governments should have more than a simple majority in parliament. It is one thing for the leaders of a number of parties to decide that stability requires them to join in an 'oversized' government. It is another thing altogether if the constitution requires them to join in an 'oversized' government or have no government at all. The second is a

recipe for instability because it means that any group of people (whether represented in parliament or not) who want to bring down the regime know that all they have to do to achieve their end is to make an 'oversized' government unworkable.

This point seems to me to have escaped one political scientist, Cornelius O'Leary of the Queen's University, Belfast, who has explicitly defended the mandatory 'power-sharing' provisions of the 1973 Constitution by invoking " 'the politics of accommodation' or 'consociational democracy' as practised in these [Switzerland, Canada and Holland] and other segmented societies (about which there is a rapidly growing literature)." (Letter to *The Times*, October 4, 1974, p. 17, cols. 6 and 7.) The confusion emerges plainly when he says that in these 'segmented' societies "the political arrangements ensure that minorities do share in power." To the extent that minorities share in power this is because the structure of electoral competition encourages it, given the existing alignments, or because the politicians choose to do things that way, either out of a sense of collective self-preservation (where the collectivity in question may be politicians versus other actors or the state versus other states) or because they believe that that is the way things *ought* to be done. (Daalder especially has emphasized the importance of historical traditions in this matter — see his article "On Building Consociational Nations," reprinted in McRae, 1974, pp. 107–124.)

Apart from the short-lived experiment in Ulster, there are two other examples of *compulsory* power-sharing that can be studied. One, which O'Leary draws attention to (while admitting that it was a failure), is the Cyprus constitution of 1959; the other is some experiments at provincial and national level during the closing years of British rule on the Indian sub-continent. These were likewise not encouraging. An analysis of these two cases concluded that "the most important lesson of all from experience. . . is this: power-sharing must stem from the will of the communities involved; it cannot be durably imposed upon them. . . Should we not recognize now that *mandatory* power-sharing and democratic majority rule are incompatible aims, and that no exercise in squaring constitutional circles can replace a painfully-won desire by both Protestants and Catholics to work together? Consensus, not prescriptive power-sharing, is the right objective." (H.V. Hodson, "Cyprus: The lesson is that people cannot be forced into power-sharing," *The Times*, July 31, 1974, p. 16.)

If I am right, then, the lessons of consociational democracy have to be applied with great care in Northern Ireland. Since the parties do articulate the most salient cleavage in the society, that between Protestants and Catholics, there is, I suggest, no question that the future

would be relatively bright if the leaders of the two communities saw the desirability of consociational devices (say a 'grand coalition' plus a *proporz* for various appointive positions) and were able to carry their followers with them in instituting them. But if it were possible in the near future for leaders of both communities to carry their followers with them on such a programme, and not be displaced by more extreme rivals, the situation in Northern Ireland would not be half as bad as it is anyway. Assuming that these relatively benign conditions are not met in the current Northern Ireland, the attempt to create power-sharing by fiat is attractive but, I suggest, ultimately misguided. If, however, there is a recognition by both sides that some sort of accommodation has to be reached so as to avoid an indefinite continuation (probably of steadily increasing intensity) in the present communal violence and the disruption of ordinary life, this could be done without any special political arrangements simply by the Protestant majority making conciliatory moves and the Catholic minority responding. Unfortunately, however, many Protestants probably believe that total victory can be achieved at an acceptable cost. So long as they continue to believe this (and it is not obviously an irrational belief) there can be no very bright prospect of accommodation in Northern Ireland.

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