

Emotional clap-trap is a waste of time...

• You cannot reconcile
with someone who has
his boot on your neck •

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SINCE the North hit the international headlines two years ago, we have had a surfeit of speeches on the border from southern politicians who had been silent on the question for years.

They were probably not even aware that the people, who lived in places like Belfast and Derry, and who laboured under the injustice of the Northern veto, regarded some of them as their own leaders — and expected great things from them.

But the lipservice to the ideal of a united country did not extend as far as a visit to the north to see how things were in the sacrificed six.

All that has changed now for the people of the north have learned during the past two years that the solution to their problems is largely in their own hands and that in earnest elsewhere, even in Dublin, is awakened only when they take matters into their own hands.

Growth

One result has been the growth in the number of Southern speeches on partition, and thankfully, there is at least emerging a much greater understanding of the problem. From it, a rejection of a real strategy for the peaceful solution to what has become known as the Irish Question.

Inevitable

I suppose it was inevitable after the bitterness of the happenings of the beginning of this century that the attitude to the northern situation should be largely an emotional reaction, rather than a reasoned position. Today, there is a new generation that is on the whole untouched by the bitter disappointment of those days and they are in a position to make a more rational assessment of the reasons for the problem.

Out of their reasoning may come the solution.

To look back over the 30 years since the creation of partition is a bit startling. Many leaders have come—and gone—protesting their belief in the ideal of a united country. Most have agreed that it should be brought about peacefully. Yet, no party, to my knowledge, in all those years, produced a detailed blueprint for the peaceful reunification of Ireland.

It seemed to be enough on an election platform to say that partition was an evil and that it must go. The flag would be raised and chests would swell with pride, the blood would get up and one's feeling of being involved in the patriot game was reinforced.

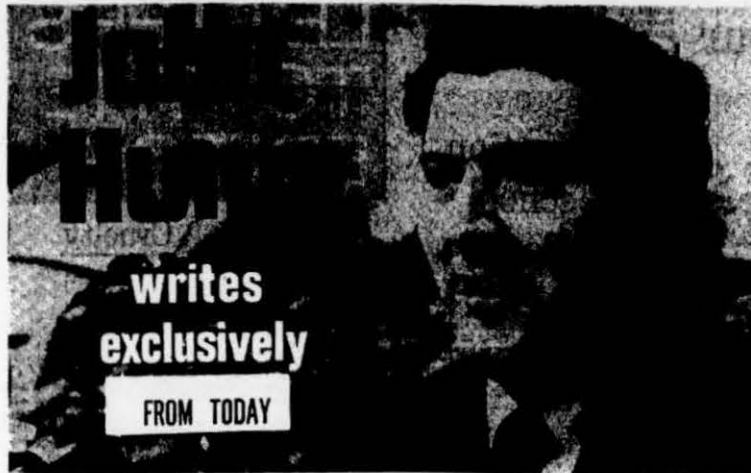
Meanwhile the border between the people of Ireland grew stronger and its real victims, the homeless and jobless, continued to emigrate.

The failure to produce a policy for peaceful reunification was due in part, I believe, to the lack of moral courage to face up to the emotional unpopularity of some of its consequences. For what is Ireland and what is the border that divides it?

Ireland is not a piece of earth. Ireland is its people. Without its people it is but a jungle. People of varying traditions, outlook and background together form the entity known as Ireland and unity of Ireland means community of its people.

Not a line

By the same token, the border is not a line on a map. It is a mental border between people, built on fear, prejudice and misunderstanding and strengthened by those who use sectarianism as a political weapon. Its peaceful eradication can only come through the development of understanding, friendship and through the smashing of sectarianism. This is the real task which faces those who genuinely want



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to solve the Irish problem. The weakness of such an approach is that it is undramatic. It does not offer the instant solution that so many people seem to want, nor does it offer the immediate and "glorious" achievement of a dream. It offers only the hard unpopular road of accepting that it will take time and patience and a long-term plan which should be worked at painstakingly. Its virtue is that it is the only road.

Too many years have already been wasted and there had been enough discipline and good sense during those years to work steadily with a planned approach to a peaceful policy, then we would be a lot closer to unity today than we are. The more time should be wasted on emotional claptrap.

The Civil Rights Movement, or a movement for reform, was an essential first step in such an approach. You cannot reconcile with someone who has his boot on your neck. It is of course true to say that the Civil Rights movement never had, at any stage, the unity of Ireland as an objective.

It sought only equal rights in the North and left all other questions to political parties.

This, of course, did not prevent individuals and political parties with much wider objectives from supporting the Civil Rights movement and there was nothing inconsistent in an Irish republican giving his support to such a movement. Yet it would be naive to ignore its effect on the Border question.

The removal of injustice in the north, if it came about, would remove one of the great pains that exists between the Irish people. Its disappearance will assuage not only the victims of injustice, but, paradoxically, it will be of great benefit to those who perpetrate it—for it did them the most harm.

It is also evident that a state that has survived on injustice is bound to be radically altered by the end of partition. Indeed, the great strength of the Civil Rights simple strategy was to pose for the Unionist party the question of whether a party that was founded on injustice and that seemed to need it for its survival, could in fact survive the creation of a Just Northern Ireland?

Maintenance

It posed other questions: was the link with Britain and its maintenance the first principle of Unionism? If so, why were Unionists afraid to demonstrate its benefits to all the people of the North? Could they survive if they abandoned their sense of mentality? These simple questions, which the C.R. movement

brought to the surface, has shaken the Unionist monolith to its foundations — even before full justice has been granted in the North.

Reunification

Full civil rights in the North are an essential prerequisite to the eventual and inevitable coming together of both parts of Ireland. Reform is therefore the first step in this direction. Reconciliation is the achievement of full justice in the North—the second step—would then be much easier and the third, reunification would be but a matter of time, because the real border, that which divided the people of the North, would be gone.

It would not, of course, be a reunification by coercion. It would be by agreement and by consent of the majority in the North. It would not resemble in any way the unity that seems to be envisaged by some of those in Dublin, who have so recently discovered their "own people" and whose loudly proclaimed pure republicanism seems to me to be nothing more than the pursuit of Catholic victory. How that can unite Ireland I don't know.

It goes without saying that the achievement of full justice and equality in the North—and it has still to be achieved—would produce a radical change among those in the North traditionally opposed to the state. People who had fought for civil rights would have to be prepared to accept civil responsibility; to accept that the problems of the North demanded that all get involved at every level in their solution; to eradicate the evils of an employment and emigration. There could no longer be any opting out.

At first glance, such acceptance and involvement would appear to strengthen and give permanence to the present divisions of Ireland. The reality, though, would be quite the opposite. For the first time, the real border in Ireland would be under heavy attack—the mental border between the people of the North, the border of prejudice and distrust that

can only be removed by the promotion of better understanding and friendship on a basis of justice.

The spilling of sweat together, rather than blood in the joint effort to build the North and wipe out, as a priority, its serious social and economic ills of unemployment and emigration — problems which in themselves heighten the divisions—will do more for real unity than any amount of flag-waving, any amount of emotional speeches.

The Orange card was played on the Unionist side and the reaction to it though predictable and understandable, meant that nationalism and things Irish became equated with one religious viewpoint.

This reaction played straight into the hands of those who had cynically played the card to achieve their political objectives. The divisions of Ireland were strengthened and deepened to the advantage only of those prepared to use sectarianism as a political weapon. So long as this state of affairs continues, so long as things Irish and republican are allowed to be associated with only one religious tradition, then so long will Ireland remain divided. The Unionist will be very happy in the knowledge that he can win any time on a two-to-one head count.

The completeness of the divide and the size of the problem of reconciliation is seen by the fact that the actions and reactions of the early part of this century to the settling up of the Northern state have resulted in what are virtually, two confessional states in Ireland, neither of which is worthy of the best in the Irish people.

What we must now be striving for in the whole of Ireland is a party of prejudice, justice and sectarianism. In short, in creating a Ireland that we seek to create our aim must not be to overcome the Northern Protestant but to seek his help and cooperation.

We cannot do without him. How else can one create a country where Catholic, Protestant and disenter will go together as equals for the betterment of us all? Is the right to the ownership of

the national conscience or to a surplus of Irishness. Those, and there are many of them, who believe that their version of what is Irish is the only authorized version, are among the greatest enemies of a truly united country. Their intolerance drives everyone else away and makes a mockery of the true republican ideal in which intolerance and superiority have no part to play.

The free and equal participation of all traditions would be made much easier if the South of Ireland had a more liberal constitution. This can be achieved by scrapping it with a completely new one.

The advice of all shades of opinion, in all parts of the country should be consulted in its drafting and, if approved in the right spirit, it could well prove a model for many states throughout the world.

Such a move, though it will remove some of the objections of the Unionist party to a united Ireland, will not sweep them towards it one inch, but it will allay the fears of a lot of Northern Protestants. Then we more and more of those today who are questioning their real identity and who are prepared to discuss openly the pros and cons of a united country. They are disenchant and disillusioned with the righteousness of the Northern state.

They realize, too, that the Unionist Party can only survive as a party of prejudice and sectarianism.

In short, in creating a Ireland that we seek to create our aim must not be to overcome the Northern Protestant but to seek his help and cooperation.

What a Ford won't do is nobody's business.

