

Your enemy is and so a

By Dr John Alderdice,
Alliance Party leader

RECENT days have seen uncertainty, confusion and mistrust at an all-time high in Northern Ireland, and not without good reason. As fear rises, people draw back into their traditional protective postures. Each side looks at the other, and sees only a threatening enemy.

Nationalists identify unionists with historic Britain, and perceive them as determined to recreate the domination of the past. Unionists hear talk of 'peace with justice' as merely the latest manifestation of a long war whose purpose is to drive them out, or subsume and dominate them in an all-Ireland republic. Each can cite good evidence for their views, but they obscure another reality which is just as important.

Nationalists are frightened

Nationalists harbour a very deep fear of unionists. They see them as aggressive, defiant, and always on the side of the dominating authority. When they see unionist intransigence, and worse still experience the attacks of loyalist paramilitaries, they do not understand the fear that generates it, but are merely confirmed in their belief that unionists can never be trusted to be fair. They are nonetheless sure that if nationalists were in control they would be fair.

A fear which unionists find even more difficult to understand is the nationalist fear of being betrayed by the rest of the island. While unionists see Articles 2 and 3 as an irredentist claim, many nationalists feel in their bones that these articles actually represent the point, in 1937, at which the rest of the island accepted partition. To lose those articles is to allow southern nationalists to let go of the North without a conscience.

Fear makes nationalists turn to stratagems and outside support which will deprive the unionists of power, and will tie the south to them. This only increases unionist fears and confirms the unionist view of manipulative and untrustworthy nationalists. The result is unionist anger and

aggression, and the murderous behaviour of loyalists, which nationalists fear most.

Unionists are frightened

Unionists harbour a very deep fear of nationalists. They see them as manipulative, and always on the side of those who want to undermine the authorities. When they find little acknowledgement of any improvements in the state, hear explanations being given for the violence, and worse still when they continually experience the attacks of republican paramilitaries, they do not understand the fear that generates it, but are merely confirmed in their belief that nationalists can never be trusted to be fair. They are also most offended by suggestions that unionist unfairness is not justified.

Unlike unionists, nationalists do understand the anxiety of unionists about British betrayal, but despite their own deep anxieties about southern nationalists, they find it hard to understand why unionists prefer to trust to perfidious Albion rather than throw their lot with their nationalist neighbours.

Fear makes unionists turn to defensiveness and to outside or unconstitutional support which will protect them against being overwhelmed by nationalists. This only confirms the nationalist view of stubborn domineering unionists, and leads to the stratagems and murderous republican violence which the unionists fear most.

In short, the behaviour of unionists and nationalists, especially in times of uncertainty and fear, tends to bring about the very situations, which each fears most. The violence and clinging dependence which each side demonstrates, also alienates both British and the Republic of Ireland, fulfilling again the fears of betrayal.

Actions speak louder than words

In the current climate, whilst the Hume/Adams dialogue gave

nationalists great hope of an end to violence, it fuelled loyalist fears, and made violence from that side much worse. Nationalists do not understand that verbal reassurances to unionists to "trust Gerry Adams and John Hume, when they say that no-one has anything to fear", are perceived by the other as a very bad joke.

The transient sense of confidence that affected some unionists when Mr Major and Mr Molyneux reached an 'understanding' at Westminster, seemed to nationalists like the beginning of a return to the bad old days. Unionists simply couldn't understand how improving the procedures at Westminster and the re-establishment of the Conservative and Unionist axis should be seen as a threat.

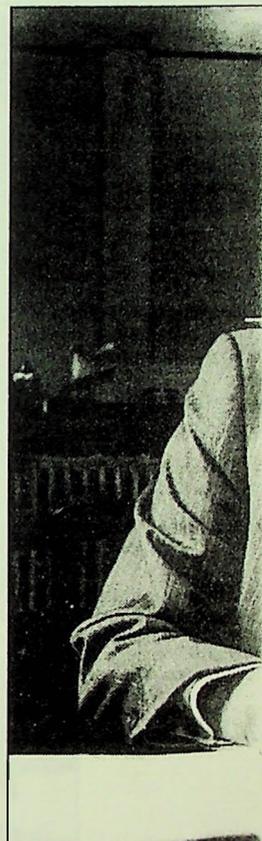
After all, if John Hume had both the Irish Republic and the British Labour Party in his pocket, why should unionists be denied this one friend in the world?

In fact, nationalists saw the failure of the two governments, especially the Dublin Government, to accept the Hume/Adams proposals with open arms, as leaving them without a friend who really understood their dilemma. They could not understand Mr Reynolds when he quite correctly observed that no solution could come about which emanated from only one side of the community.

How can this anxiety be reduced so that we stop doing things which make the situation worse, and produce what we fear most?

Words of reassurance, which say that no-one has anything to fear, are worse than useless. They are neither believed nor believable, because in fact each side does have something to fear. The answer lies in the creation of a context that does not in reality threaten one any more than the other.

Only the British and Irish governments can do this. The two Prime Ministers are in a position to create the context for real progress. That is why the current initiative by Mr Major



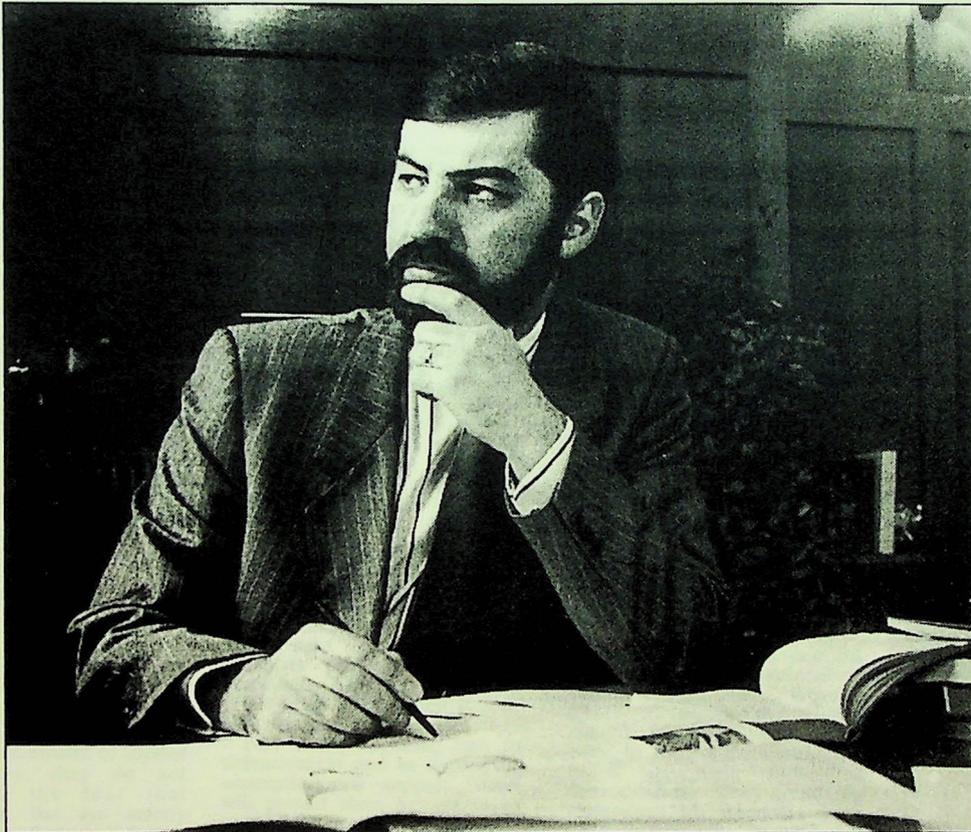
The behaviour of unionists most — Dr Alderdice.

and Mr Reynolds is so critically important.

What problems for the Major/ Reynolds initiative?

The outline of a settlement is clear. It must reflect the two sets of relationships — a self-governing, autonomous, responsible Northern Ireland, sharing Northern Ireland's Assembly, with strong provisions for minorities — in a decentralised North-South relationship and a reciprocal change in Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's constitution — and all this in a more democratised Anglo-Irish context. So, what problems do these two leaders face as they seek to achieve the settlement?

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What problems for the Major/ Reynolds initiative?

The outline of a settlement is clear. It must reflect the three sets of relationships — a fairly autonomous, responsibility-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly, with strong protections for minorities — institutionalised North-South relations, and a reciprocal change in Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's constitution — and all this in a more democratised Anglo-Irish context. So, what problems do these two leaders face as they try to achieve the settlement?

First, each will be tempted to address only the interests and concerns of those with whom they are closest. It is critical that Mr Reynolds shows by what he does, more than by what he says, that he is sensitive to the concerns of both unionists and nationalists. It is crucial that Mr Major, by what he does, as well as by what he says, shows sensitivity to the concerns of nationalists as well as unionists.

Secondly, they should not be surprised to find considerable resistance to their efforts, and not just from the expected quarters and combinations. They will need both steady nerves, and gritty determination to see it through. They will also need to be able to risk disappointing some of their friends in the short-

term, as well as surprise their opponents.

Finally, it is the relationship between the two of them which will be the healing factor, and so they must do all possible to maintain it. When parents fall out it is the children who suffer — and Northern Ireland has already suffered more than enough.

Of course there is more to our community than just fear; there is a common humanity, and a solid goodness in the heart of our people that has kept us, till now, from descending into complete chaos. After Shankill and Greysteel we know how it feels to look into the abyss. Please God, this Christmas we might know what it is, to be at the brink of peace.