

TIME TO GO

Commenting, in print, on current affairs is always dangerous—today's opinions etched on hard disk can return to haunt tomorrow. Yet, it can safely be assumed that when it comes to their "Irish Problem" the British Establishment can be depended on to display their usual arrogance, lack of tact, and crass stupidity.

Of course, one can almost sympathize with midgets such as John Major, Tony Blair, and Paddy Ashdown. No less giants than a couple of Churchills, various Chamberlains, Pitt, Disraeli, Asquith, Lloyd George, et al either threw up their hands in dismay or used "the province" for their own short-term political gain. Indeed, the only honorable man amongst a pack of cads (to use one of their own terms) was Sir William Gladstone. The Grand Old Spider, as Parnell once called him, actually did try to resolve the issue and, for his pains, was thrown out of office, his Liberal Party torn asunder. One can almost feel the three current party leaders shudder at the memory.

And yet, if there's a man, or failing that a statesman, amongst them, it's time for him to stand up and grasp this ancient nettle. After 25 years of violence, there's a hunger for peace in the North. Three months ago, most people familiar with republican politics would have predicted another generation of struggle. Now overnight, hard-liners have become doves and are holding out the olive branch. Whatever you do, Johnnie, Tony, and Paddy, don't refuse it. Too many peoples lives depend on your actions. It's time you dropped your catchwords of "terrorism", "democracy", and "majority". They have different meanings in different communities and we can argue them until the cows come home.

You have an opportunity of a lifetime! For god's sake, drop all preconditions now and get everyone sitting around a table. At first, they will insult each other, but, at least, they'll be talking. As you say, this is an Irish problem; it must have an Irish solution. That may take a long time, but "peace come droppin' slow." It won't come dropping at all until you jettison your dreary, antiquated Anglo-Saxon logic.

Think of it, old chaps, you could save the exchequer billions and wouldn't a Nobel Peace Prize look just smashing up on the mantelpiece of 10 Downing Street?