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INTER-DEPARTMENTAL UNIT ON NORTHERN IRELAND

Report of Meeting held on 7th October, 1974.

1. A meeting of the Inter-Departmental Unit on Northern Ireland was held in the Department of the Taoiseach, Government Buildings, on Monday, 7th October, 1974. The members present were:

Mr. D. Nally (Chairman), Department of the Taoiseach
Mr. S. Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs
Mr. T. O Cofaigh, Department of Finance
Mr. P. O Murchú, Department of Defence.

Also present were Mr. P. Colwell, Department of Justice (alternate member), Mr. S. Brosnan, Department of Defence (alternate member), Mr. W. Kirwan, Department of the Taoiseach and Mr. L. Murphy, Department of Finance. The meeting was held to review progress and to take decisions on further work on the studies assigned to the Unit by the Government decision of 18 Iúil, 1974, (S.19137), which had been previously considered at the Unit's meeting on 24th July, 1974. The two papers attached to the present note as appendices A and B had been circulated prior to the meeting. The table of population figures and explanatory note had been prepared in the Department of Foreign Affairs and the note ~~is~~ entitled Estimates of the Cost of Repartition had been prepared in the Department of Finance. The meeting also had before it one copy each of two large maps, prepared in the Department of Foreign Affairs which illustrated the distribution of population set out in the table of figures on this subject (these maps were not reproduced or circulated).

2. Mr. Donlon explained that the maps and the associated tables ^{referred} reached to the possible lines for a possible negotiated repartition of the present Northern Ireland area. In examining possible lines, his Department had proceeded broadly in line with the conclusions reached at the discussion at the meeting on 24th July. They had identified a minimum area which might be absorbed into the Republic and, also, a maximum area which would consist of the minimum area and additional areas. In attempting to identify the possible extent of these areas, they had proceeded by sweeping eastwards from the present border and including areas which, in aggregate, would give a Catholic population ~~a~~ majority in the total population of the aggregate area included. The tabulation had been done and the map drawn up on the basis of the figures from the 1971 Census of Population in the North. The smallest units for which figures were

available were the Local Government areas such as Rural Districts, Urban Districts and Municipal Boroughs. The approach had been to include a whole of a Unit in one area or the other. An exception had been made in the case of Armagh Rural District which embraced the city of Armagh which had a Catholic majority. The approach here had been to include half the population of the rural district in the area to be added to the Republic and half in the remaining area. INclusion of the additional areas which had been added to the minimum area to constitute the maximum area would bring the border of the maximum area more or less to the line of the Bann. An exception had been made in relation to Portrush and Portstuart Urban Districts and Coleraine Municipal Borough which had been included in the residual area of Northern Ireland. In relation to the maximum area, the idea had simply been to identify the largest possible area within Northern Ireland as presently constituted, which might be transferred to the Republic.

3. Some discussion then followed on the possible line of any repartition. The point was made that negotiated repartition might be an unrealistic concept. Any repartition seen ^{med} most likely to come about in the context of a violent confrontation within Northern Ireland. In this context, lines of division might ^{well} be decided by considerations of relative military strength rather than the wishes of the population of the areas concerned. Reference was also made to the fact that the minimum area taken by the Department of Foreign Affairs included a number of Rural Districts, contiguous to the present border, which had Protestant majorities. In Co. Tyrone and Co. Derry, a number of the areas with Catholic majorities were in the interior of the county away from the Border. Mr. Murphy suggested that Omagh Rural District and Omagh Urban District should be included in the minimum area rather than in the additional areas added ^{to} it to constitute the maximum area. Mr. Kirwan pointed out that the East Down Rural District had a substantial Protestant majority and that even when this area was taken together with Downpatrick Urban District, the aggregate population still had a Protestant majority. He mentioned that he had originally had some reservations about the list of areas proposed to be included in the maximum area. This was because it included a number of areas with substantial Protestant majorities, such as Coleraine Rural District, Dungannon Rural District, Dungannon Urban District and Cookstown Rural District ~~which had Protestant majorities and~~ which would be contiguous to a residual Northern Ireland, as it would be on the basis of the line proposed by the Department of Foreign Affairs. This had suggested that the border of the maximum area should be shifted further to the west.

He had attempted to draw a line on a basis which paid closer attention to the likely wishes of the religious majority in each individual Unit considered. However, when he had aggregated population figures he had found that the Protestant minority in the maximum area was very much less than the Catholic minority that would be left in the residual Northern Ireland. If one were to take the view that the minority populations in the two areas in the repartitioned area should be roughly equal in size, the designation of areas proposed by the Department of Foreign Affairs seemed broadly acceptable. It was agreed that for the purposes of the proposed studies of negotiated repartition, and especially for the financial analysis, being undertaken as part of these studies, the designation of areas proposed by the Department of Foreign Affairs should be adopted, subject to the transfer of Omagh Rural and Urban Districts from the additional areas to the minimum areas and the transfer of East Down Rural Districts and Downpatrick Urban District from the minimum area to the additional areas which with it make up the maximum area. Mr. Donlon explained that this crude approach based on Census information was a first approximation, undertaken to provide some basis for the financial analysis. His Department was pursuing enquiries, designed to secure more detailed, accurate and up-to-date information on the distribution of the population within Northern Ireland. They were receiving co-operation from the Catholic Church authorities in Northern Ireland. Some dioceses had already provided figures of the populations, Catholic and Protestant, of their parishes. He asked whether the Army authorities here had any further information on this question. Mr. O Murchú stated that they hoped to receive in the very near future information on the distribution of population in towns with a population under 2,000. The Department of Foreign Affairs would be given this information when it became available. Mr. Nally asked when the work on the detailed distribution of the population might be completed. Mr. Donlon replied that it might well take a further 5 to 6 weeks.

4. The Unit then turned to consider aspects of the financial analysis of the cost of repartition, referring to the note which had been ^{prepared} ~~aired~~ by the Department of Finance. Mr. Murphy referred to the difficulties raised in this connection also by the assumptions to be made as a basis of the exercise. The degree of population movement which might be expected in a repartitioned situation would be closely related ^{to} ~~with~~ the extent of violence which accompanied or proceeded the repartition. There could be quite a ~~range~~ ^{wide} in assumptions on this factor.

Following discussion on this point, it was agreed that for the purpose of the studies involved, Mr. Murphy might make a minimum and maximum assumption, perhaps 25% and ~~60~~⁶⁰%, as representing the limits of possible population movement.

5. Mr. Murphy referred to difficulties involved in putting ^{figures} on the housing costs of transfers of population. Following discussion on this point, it was agreed that an estimate of the total cost involved in the Government purchasing the houses of all those who might transfer from one area to another might be made. It was agreed that a steering group consisting of Mr. Kirwan, Mr. Murphy and Mr. Burke or Mr. Bolster of the Department of Foreign Affairs might be constituted to guide the further work on the cost of repartition. Mr. Nally enquired how long it might take to complete work on the financial and economic aspects of repartition. Mr. Murphy replied that it might take a further month.

6. Mr. Kirwan outlined developments in relation to the suggestion which had been made at the meeting on 24th July that Professor Norman Gibson of the New University of Ulster might be approached indirectly, perhaps through academic ^{circles} ~~socials~~, to undertake some studies in the general area. Professor Gibson had been approached through Dr. Kennedy of the Economic and Social Research Institute to prepare a paper on this area. He had been very keen to do so, and very conscious of the need for early completion ^{and} in publication of such a study. However, his other commitment had precluded ^{him} from committing himself to early completion of a paper on the matter. Attempts had been made to find some way of overcoming the difficulties which seemed likely to give rise to delay but these had been unsuccessful. There was a question of Dr. McAleese of Trinity College, who was an expert on trade matters, assisting Professor Gibson in relation to trade and tariffs aspects of the general study. As there did not seem to be anybody else who was competent to undertake a worthwhile study in this area, Dr. Kennedy had encouraged Professor Gibson to take on the project despite the possibility of delay. Professor Gibson had undertaken to complete the work as soon as possible but it might well be next Spring or even early Summer before results were available. The approach to Professor Gibson had been purely on the basis that this was something the Economic and Social Research Institute was interested in itself. The Professor was unaware of any initiative being taken by a Government Department in the matter. Professor Gibson was conscious of the need to bring ~~about~~ the dependence of the Northern Ireland Economy on Britain. For this reason, he had been considering, in conjunction

with Professor Tom Wilson of ~~the~~ Glasgow University who was another expert on the Northern Ireland ^eEconomy, organising a seminar on this subject this Autumn or Winter. Dr. Kennedy had undertaken to keep us informed about this and try and get invitations for representatives of Government Departments here. However, nothing further had been heard about the proposed seminar.

7.. Mr. Kirwan mentioned that Mr. Murphy had ^{done} a paper, commenting on one published by Dr. John Simpson, of Queen's University, Belfast, on the economics of an autonomous Northern Ireland. Mr. Murphy explained that Dr. Simpson's article had appeared in "Management", the journal of the Irish Management Institute. A further version of the article, in which some errors in the first version were corrected, had appeared in "Fortune" magazine. The article followed up arguments which had been put forward by Dr. Simpson at the meeting of the British-Irish Association in Oxford, last July. The general thesis was that the loss of financial support from Britain would not be as catastrophic for the Northern economy as had been argued by other commentators. This was because some of ^{the} monies payable at present by the British exchequer would henceforth be payable by the EEC ^{and} because much of Northern Ireland capital expenditure was paid for out of current revenue rather than out of borrowing as was done to a very considerable extent in other countries, including the Republic. Dr. Simpson's argument rested on various assumptions, including that Northern Ireland would be able to borrow on capital markets and that it would continue to be a member of the EEC. It was quite possible that Simpson did not personally believe the case he had put forward but had set it out in an effort to broaden the debate which until then had been, as he seemed to see it, rather one-sided. Mr. Kirwan suggested that Mr. Murphy's analysis of this question might be ^{incorporated} ^{on} operated into any paper of negotiated independence and negotiated reparation.

8. Mr. Donlon indicated that the question of the possible degrees of diplomatic recognition to be accorded to any ⁱⁿdependent Northern Ireland was being studied by the legal people in his Department. He would expect to have a paper on the subject within a further week or so. Mr. Kirwan indicated that formal observations ^{had not yet been received} ~~they~~ from the Office of the Attorney General. Mr. Quigley of that Office wished to discuss the matter with the Attorney General. However, Mr. Quigley had given his opinion on an informal basis. This was to the effect that any positive move to insert something into our domestic law, recognising an independent

Northern Ireland would be debarred under the Constitution. - However, it was not our practice to make provision in our domestic law for the recognition of any State. There was no need to do so and Mr. Quigley thought that it would be unwise to do so in relation to Northern Ireland.

9. Mr. Nally referred to the further study which the Unit was to undertake on likely flashpoint areas. He enquired whether any progress had been made in identifying such areas. In discussion on this matter it was agreed that the location would be related to the population balance within the community and to the strength of local feeling. It was agreed that it might be easier to pinpoint such areas when the further information being obtained on the distribution of the population was to hands.

10. Mr. Nally then referred to the proposed elaboration of Discussion Paper No. 2 to take account of possible IRA takeovers of certain areas in the event of British withdrawal. He enquired from Mr. Colwell whether the Department of Justice had any observations to make on this matter. Mr. Colwell indicated that the information available to his Department on the strength of the IRA provided the basis for ^{an as-} insurance that there was no possibility of IRA takeovers of any areas within the Republic. The security forces would be in a position to deal with attempts of such takeovers. Within Northern Ireland, there was no doubt that the IRA would attempt to take over certain areas, contiguous to the Border. They might well have the overt or tacit support of the local populations. As regards other areas, deeper within the Northern Ireland area, even areas with strong Republican sympathies, it was unlikely that the IRA would make any enduring attempt to take over such areas, as they would be unable to hold them. Mr. Colwell undertook to provide a note on this subject within ~~two~~ ^{four} weeks.

11. Mr. Donlon expressed the view that the Unit and the Government would have to consider the question of planning for the possibility of a further Loyalist strike in the North. This was a possibility which could come to a head in the relatively near future. Fr. O Connor, the Director of the Down and Connor Relief Advisory Service and other reliable informants had indicated that a further strike in the near future was a real possibility. Fr. O Connor was coming to Dublin for a meeting with officials of the Departments concerned with Northern Ireland matters on the 18th October. He wished to satisfy himself

that our facilities for the reception of refugees from the North were satisfactory so that he could, with confidence, assure the people in his organisation in Belfast that this was the case. It might also be necessary to consider whether, in the event of a further strike or in the event of a civil war situation in the North, we would provide material supplies. In this connection, the current thinking among the Catholic population there was that, rather than evacuating their areas, they would seek to sit tight in future. Mr. O'Murchú enquired whether there was any understanding as to which Department might undertake such planning. His Department had accepted the responsibility for planning for the reception for refugees. But he was not aware of any decision in relation to planning for the provision of supplies and equipment within Northern Ireland. ^{Mr. Colwell} He asked for some information about the Relief Advisory Services to which reference had been made at the meeting. Mr. Kirwan explained that these had been established by the Catholic Church authorities in the North, to make plans for various distress situations which might arise. The idea was to ²forstall the IRA taking the leading role in plans for such eventualities. The first organisation had been established in the Down and Connor diocese and the Director was Fr. O Connor, who had visited Dublin in order to introduce himself and inform Departments concerned on the existence of his organisation. Cardinal Conway had set in motion the establishment of similar organisations in the other dioceses in the North. Fr. O Connor, at least, was very conscious of the danger of his organisation being ~~inf~~filtrated by the IRA. For this reason he had started off with a completely new organisation, with a committee hand-picked by himself and the local organisations were tightly controlled by the Parish Priest in each parish. More generally, he was making a serious attempt to minimise the possibility of IRA infeltration of his organisation. Mr. Kirwan emphasised that no request had yet been made to us for the provision of supplies and that Fr. O Connor and his organisation had been planning on the basis that they would have to provide their own requirements of emergency cooking equipment, tinned foods, bedding and the like. However, in the event of any of the ^{regulated}situations arising, the relief organisations might not prove equal to the demands made on them and requests might well be made to us for the provision of material supplies. The Unit agreed that it would be desirable to submit a Memorandum to the Government, informing them of the contacts with the Northern Diocesan Relief Advisory Services, seeking directions as to the attitude to be adopted in context ^{advis} with these organisations and raising the question of possible planning arrangements

for the possible provision of supplies to the Catholic areas in the North, in the event of a further Loyalist strike or of a situation of widespread violence. The meeting then concluded.