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Ordered Withdrawal from Northern Ireland

1. The Government's policy on Northern Ireland was set out in its election manifesto as follows:-

"A central aim of Fianna Fail policy is to secure by peaceful means, the unity and independence of Ireland as a democratic republic. We totally reject the use of force as a means of achieving this aim.

Any progress on the lines suggested in Fianna Fail's Policy Statement on the North, published in 1975, would add greatly to the impact of our economic strategy by promoting confidence both North and South and facilitating a return to a normal economic and tourist environment".

2. In the Policy Statement issued in October 1975, referred to, Fianna Fáil called on the British Government to:

- (a) Encourage the unity of Ireland by agreement, in independence and in a harmonious relationship between the two islands and to this end to declare Britain's commitment to implement an ordered withdrawal from her involvement in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland.
- (b) Enter into an agreement guaranteeing appropriate financial support for a specified period to enable the transition to take place smoothly in stable economic conditions.
- (c) Promote in the interim the development of political institutions which will ensure civil rights and equality for all the people of the Six Counties of Northern Ireland and to ensure that security in the area operates impartially through acceptable structures.

and

- (d) Support the development of social, cultural and economic links between North and South through appropriate structures and institutions.

3. At the press conference at which this policy statement was launched the then Leader of the Opposition said that he did not regard it as a departure from the views already expressed by him in the past on the question of seeking a declaration of intent. The new policy statement included the appeal which he had made as Taoiseach at the Garden of Remembrance in July 1971 when he emphasised that "it would take nothing away from the honour of Britain or the rights of the majority in the North if the British Government were to declare their interest in encouraging the unity of Ireland, by agreement, in independence and in a harmonious relationship between the two islands". The change from this appeal for British encouragement of unity to the call on the British Government to declare her commitment to implement an ordered withdrawal was described at the press conference as "a natural sequitur". Its publication then was brought about by the changed circumstances in Northern Ireland following the conclusion of the Convention's discussions at that time.

4. In a later press conference the then Leader of the Opposition explained again that the new document on the North did not represent any change in policy. It was fully in accord with the Party's attitude on the North since the Party itself was founded. What had been asked for was not a stern declaration of intent to withdraw but that the British Government should encourage the unity of Ireland by agreement and consent. The call for a declaration of commitment to withdraw in an ordered way was an obvious sequitur to that. The statement on Northern Ireland was intended to fill the vacuum that arose following the conclusion of its deliberations by the Northern Ireland Convention and to induce thinking in the Unionist majority that change was ultimately inevitable. It was emphasised that the problem was still one for settlement by consent; that people must be united; that there was no point in uniting a piece of land.

5. In an interview reported in the Irish Press on 3rd November, 1976, Mr. Michael O Kennedy, T.D., then his Party's Spokesman on Foreign Affairs, pointed out that the first paragraph of the statement had clearly stated Fianna Fail's non-violent policy in relation to the North. The concept of force was totally rejected. This had been central to the policy. Fianna Fáil was not asking for " a premature withdrawal" but for a statement from the British Government declaring its intention of making an ordered withdrawal, and also of guaranteeing appropriate financial support for a specified period to enable the transition to take place smoothly in stable economic conditions. He added later that his party had never laid down a time scale for withdrawal. This was a matter for agreement after negotiations between the Governments and representatives of North and South.

6. The Leader of the Opposition issued a statement on his Party's Policy document on Northern Ireland in reply to criticism expressed by the then British Prime Minister, Mr. Wilson on the document. This further statement dated 7 November, 1975, stressed that the policy document had in the first place called on the British Government to encourage the unity of Ireland. When the British Government had done this the policy document went on to call on them to implement it by an ordered withdrawal from Northern Ireland. There was no time limit on this and no suggestions of precipitate action. On the contrary discussions were asked for between representatives of the British and Irish Governments and elected representatives of the North to consider arrangements for the establishment of acceptable institutions in the North and between the North and the South and for finance, security and law enforcement.

7. In the course of a speech in which he dealt with misinterpretations of the Fianna Fáil policy document in Cork on 30 November 1975 the Leader of the Opposition pointed out that the policy document started with a reiteration of the Party's firm commitment to progress towards unity only by peaceful means and he

restated the Party's total rejection of violence. Speaking on when the implementation of the process of Britain's disengagement from involvement in Irish affairs might commence, Mr. Lynch said: "The Fianna Fáil document prescribes no formula and sets no time limit for this purpose; it proposes consultations between all elected representative interests involved - Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland". Further he said that peaceful political progress requires political initiative not political stagnation or worse - political regression-the signs of which he felt were evident at the termination of the Northern Convention. It totally misrepresented the content and purpose of the statement to suggest that it envisaged any precipitate action or any unilateral decision to withdraw British troops from Northern Ireland.

8. Sixteen months prior to the launching of the Fianna Fáil policy document on Northern Ireland the Leader of the Opposition, gave an interview on the R.T.E. radio programme "This Week" on Sunday, 30 June, 1974)
in which the question of a British Government declaration of withdrawal was raised by the interviewer, Miss Olivia O Leary. In reply, Mr. Lynch made the following points:

- (1) that withdrawal of itself was not a policy; in fact it was a phrase capable of many meanings, the usual interpretation meaning that the British should leave by a particular date (say 1980/85) and this approach he did not favour;
- (2) the British should adopt a positive approach rather than a negative one; the negative approach being the declarations such as the Ireland Act, 1949 and Downing Street (1969) both of which reaffirmed the position of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and in the case of the latter declaration included the phrase "the border is not an issue";
- (3) that the British Government \angle instead of encouraging intransigence on the part of the

minority⁷ should encourage the idea of Irish unity.

9. In replying to a later question "is not the eventual phased withdrawal of the British a basic Fianna Fáil aim?" Mr. Lynch is reported as saying :

"It is yes. The ultimate aim is that we here in this island can manage our own affairs through our own political and parliamentary institutions and I think we can do it very well and I believe we can do it in harmony, between this island and the island of Britain. I believe that will be conducive to higher standards of living and to greater economic progress in both islands and certainly in this."

10. The Cork Evening Echo carried a story headed "Fianna Fáil desire unity with North" on one of its issues at the beginning of June during the general election campaign. In the item the Echo's reporter Dick Brazil wrote that Fianna Fáil were not seeking from Britain a declaration of intent to withdraw. He said that the Leader of the Opposition had indicated that his Party's desire was for eventual unity and that they would like to see Britain implement a process towards that end now. The "real difference" between the Coalition and Fianna Fáil was that the latter wanted Britain to declare its intention to leave, Mr. Lynch was reported as saying.

11. The Tánaiste in the course of an R.T.E. interview on 8 July, when asked to clarify the phrase "ordered withdrawal" as in his Party's election manifesto said that ultimately the withdrawal of the British from Northern Ireland is the aim of all the people of this State. This policy was not the prerogative of any one group or party here. However the Government did not want a Belgian Congo type withdrawal situation to arise. Britain should leave in an orderly fashion with proper workable structures left behind. The overall aim was of course for a united Ireland.

12. More recently the Minister for Foreign Affairs spoke on a

Radio Ulster interview (13/9/77), on Government policy in relation to the request to Britain to declare its commitment to implement an ordered withdrawal. The Minister made the following points:-

- (1) Agreement on the North's future at every level was sought;
- (ii) A unilateral decision of withdrawal by Britain would not in any circumstances be desired or sought;
- (iii) Every step in relation to withdrawal should be taken by agreement between Governments and in consultation with Northern representatives;
- (iv) The Government's aim would be to bring back the political initiative to Governments and indeed Northern politicians as well.

13. Summary

Withdrawal Call: Context

(i) The call on the British Government to declare Britain's commitment to implement an ordered withdrawal from Northern Ireland must be seen in the context of the entire policy statement of October, 1975 of which it forms but part. The central aim of the policy is to secure by peaceful means the unity and independence of Ireland as a democratic Republic. Towards this end the use of force is totally rejected.

No stark declaration of withdrawal sought

(ii) There is no question of the Government seeking a stark declaration of intent to withdraw from the British Government. What is sought is firstly a change of attitude on the part of the British Government from that expressed in the Ireland Act, 1949 and the Downing Street declaration of 1969 which stated that in no event would Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland and further that the border was "not an issue". Instead

advocated is that the policy/elucidated by the Taoiseach at the Garden of Remembrance in July, 1971, when he advocated that the British Government should declare their interest in encouraging the unity of Ireland, by agreement, in independence and in harmonious relationship between the two islands. If this step were taken by the British men of goodwill, North and South, could then begin to discuss their differences in a rational way. To date the Unionist population has been propped up by Britain's declarations to maintain the union. This policy "makes intransigence a virtue and silences reason" as the Taoiseach said in the course of his Garden of Remembrance speech. It is unrealistic to expect Unionists to give up their 'not an inch' stance while that position is guaranteed to them by Britain.

Timetable for Withdrawal

(iii) No time scale or time table for withdrawal has been requested in the past or is envisaged now. This would be a matter for agreement after negotiations between the Irish and British Governments and representatives of North and South. The problem is one for settlement by consent. It is important to appreciate that it is people who must be united not just pieces of land. There would be no question of the "South" taking over the "North" and assimilating it into its existing structures. The negotiations envisaged would be about a new Ireland equally agreeable to North and South. Precipitate action was not suggested and would be most unwelcome. It is recognised that unity will not come about through instant or imposed solutions.

Ultimate Aim

(iv) All political parties in the Dáil desire the reunification of Ireland by peaceful means and this has been the consistent policy of all parties and Governments since the foundation of the State. Reunification, following reconciliation between Irishmen, cannot come about other than through withdrawal at some stage of the British presence in Northern Ireland. In calling for an ordered withdrawal at some undefined date in the future the Government are reasserting the national aim of reunification through peace, goodwill, cooperation and understanding, confident

that the people of this island can manage their own affairs through political and parliamentary institutions in harmony with each other. But of paramount importance is that the withdrawal sought, without any strict timetable attached must be well thought out planned and prepared. A situation such as that which arose in the Belgian Congo must be avoided at all costs. Every step in relation to withdrawal would have to be agreed between all the parties concerned. This would apply in particular to the matter of guaranteeing appropriate financial support to enable the transition to take place smoothly in stable economic conditions.

Roinn an Taoisigh

19 Meán Fómhair, 1977.

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Dhí*