

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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Northern Ireland

Taoiseach

The attached notes are intended to pull some thoughts together on this subject - as a preliminary to your meeting with the British Prime Minister.

We are having a general brief prepared covering the topics likely to be discussed at the meeting, under the headings:-

- (1) Bilateral issues (which would be, predominantly, Northern Ireland)
- (2) Community issues (under which the current problems of the community including the British budget contribution, agricultural prices and the approach of the community to the 1% VAT limit would be the main issues) and
- (3) International issues (which would possibly include the Olympics, Afghanistan etc.)

The meeting is of vital importance and could affect the nature of the relationship between Ireland and the UK. It will attract intense publicity.

9th May 1980

C O N F I D E N T I A L

DRAFT

NORTHERN IRELAND

Notes

Historical

Northern Ireland originated in desperation following the world and national wars of the 1914-20 period. Instability was built into its structure not only because of the deep divisions between the different parts of the community there but also because, as it was set up, it covered a land area, the bigger part of which was inhabited by persons who wished to be integrated with the South.

British policy towards Northern Ireland has varied but has always had to take these facts into account. Their position, at various times, can be gathered from the extracts from various official documents from the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, to the present day, which are included in the Annex to these notes.

The instability of the area, in turn, gave rise to discrimination and abuses in law and administration, as the majority in Northern Ireland fought to entrench their authority. The inevitable reaction followed in either civil resistance or open violence. This reaction occurred either in isolation from or in association with other actions motivated by the desire of a minority in Northern Ireland for Irish unity. In or about the mid-1960's a movement for reconciliation as between the different parts of the community appears to have been starting but this movement never really got off the ground. The violence which developed in 1969 swamped it - and has persisted ever since.

The extent and the duration of this violence make any easy solution to the Northern problem impossible. Memories of the friends and relatives of the 2,000 dead and more than 20,000 injured in Northern violence make it likely that, at the least, a generation must pass before normal relations between the two parts of the community can be restored. They can be inferred from our history and experience in this island. The inference makes all the more urgent the need to start a process of reconciliation on a foundation that promises real and permanent peace and stability.

Consequences

The consequences of the present problems are, in part, political. They have divided the two parts of the community in Northern Ireland in a way almost unique in the civilised world. They have exacerbated divisions between the Northern and Southern parts of this island and they have made relations between Ireland and the United Kingdom unnecessarily troublesome and difficult. They also contribute to instability in part of the European Community which cannot but have harmful implications for European and American defence.

The social and economic consequences are at least as serious. Since the late 1930s, the "Imperial contribution" paid by Northern Ireland to the British Exchequer has moved from a position of surplus to a deficit of £1.2 billion. Not only has Northern Ireland not contributed for many years now to imperial services but the subsidies which the area receives from British taxpayers generally have been increasingly rapidly and on present prospects shows no sign of diminishing.

The Irish Exchequer will bear more than £80 million in direct extra costs

in 1980, because of additional security and for other reasons associated with the Northern troubles. This figure is in addition to other economic costs like lost tourism and industry, directly attributable to those problems. In British terms, this is roughly equivalent to Exchequer expenditure of £2.0 billion.

For Northern Ireland the consequences have been even more serious. Agricultural output, in total, is now lower than it was in the early 1970s. The output of industry is also lower. Shipbuilding and textiles are in substantial decline. More than 60% of the population are engaged in "services" - largely the public service. This is a phenomenally high figure. Unemployment in some areas is between 20% and 30%. Emigration appears to have started on a substantial scale in the 1970s.

What makes these problems even more difficult is the fact that there is, within Northern Ireland no hinterland to support new industry, no policies, framed in the conditions of Northern Ireland or of this island, for the promotion of agriculture or new investment and new industry and little regard, as is perhaps natural, in fiscal, regional and industrial policies framed in Westminster, for the special problems of the area. With the continuing violence there is the prospect of continuing instability, continuing lack of investment and continuing deprivation. The drag on both the British and Irish Exchequers must also inevitably continue.

British proposals

As they appear to be developing now, the British proposals seem to be seeking a solution within the context of Northern Ireland alone. The danger in this type of approach is that if it does not include an Iris

dimension, in some form - without necessarily using that expression - it will produce the same consequences as in the past. Power-sharing might meet this objection but there is no certainty and, in present circumstances, even power-sharing is doubtful.

An approach along these lines must, therefore, inevitably mean a continuing lack of identification of people with Government - and with the security forces who are there to protect their persons and property.

Further, an administration with responsibility for spending the best part of £2.3 billion (in 1980) and no responsibility for raising the taxes to finance that expenditure, is likely to spend most of its time making the case to Westminster for money - and blaming it for poverty, unemployment, bad social services, etc., when the reply is negative. No other region of the United Kingdom gets similar treatment; and the example could well lead to a revival of the devolution demands for Wales and Scotland.

The present allegiance of the Unionist groups is to no party in the United Kingdom. Recent experience has shown their willingness to maintain Labour in power, despite their nominal allegiance to the Conservatives. Their role is similar to that of the Irish members in the British Parliament before the 1920s as described by a modern historian:

"For as long as every social and economic advance had to be intrigued and fought for, and accepted with gratitude, even when it fell short of their demands, there could be no feeling of identity with the English Parliamentary tradition, no incentive for the Party to merge itself in the pattern of English politics. They were at bottom intruders with only a transient interest in the passing scene, and with only a momentary opportunity of influencing the events which were being daily enacted before their eyes."

The British do not take into account the fact that the Unionists do not use union for love of the United Kingdom but as a means of maintaining supremacy. The Curragh mutiny, the policy of "A Protestant State for a Protestant people", the Ulster Workers' Strike of May, 1974, illustrate the strength and depth of feeling on this subject.

We have ample evidence of the extent and capability of the armaments which Unionist supporters have acquired and the violence with which they are prepared to use them - if, for example, they do not see the British Army operating effectively in their defence. This violence is manifested not only in secret organisations like TARA, The Ulster Volunteer Force, The Ulster Defence Association, some of which have already embarked on lethal campaigns of random assassination but also in numerous statements over the years from both politicians and Church members as to the lengths to which the majority are prepared to go in order to defend what they see as their rights and interests. Mention has been made by Protestant clergyment - not of the Paisley persuasion - of the willingness of the majority to undertake a "Holy War" if, for example, the British Army were seen to be failing in what the majority see as their role in Northern Ireland.*

Remedies

If this interpretation is correct, an essential part of any settlement must be a guarantee which will remove fears, on the part of the majority, of:

- (1) discrimination and
- (2) deprivation.

Any proposals must provide the certainty of freedom of worship and the promise of relief from economic decline.

*Since 1972 there have been about /800/ sectarian or interfactional assassinations. Many of these are the work of Protestant groups.

Action under the first of these headings would necessarily involve decisions on State attitudes to divorce, mixed marriages, education, contraception, and a range of other subjects in which a wide and obvious gap would have to be opened between State and church. The State can say that it will uphold church law only in so far as the public interest requires it: the balance of enforcement must be for the churches themselves.

Some form of council (cf. the Nordic Council) with a temporary British presence, to uphold guarantees in these areas and to ensure enforcement through, for example, the European Court of Human Rights, might, if properly presented, provide one acceptable way of offering these guarantees.

Further goodwill could, perhaps, be shown by considering joint citizenship for those who want it, and voting rights in Ireland for United Kingdom citizens on the lines of voting rights in the United Kingdom for Irish citizens. In view of the Constitutional bar, this question would need to be examined, with particular care.

No solution will work if the majority see its acceptance as reducing or threatening their standard of living. Any proposal must, therefore, be accompanied by suggested policies for:-

- (1) Industry- which could be met by extending the tax regime for industry, throughout the whole island and letting the Industrial Development Authority promote Ireland as a unit. These measures would be followed up by a specific request to the United States to honour President Carter's assurance of 1977 of American investment, when hostilities cease;

- (2) agriculture - which could, perhaps, be dealt with by extending Irish support, research and development policies to the whole Island as one and, in particular, by taking Northern interests into close consultation in Brussels;
- (3) currency - which would involve abolishing the disability on Northern Ireland resulting from its having a currency which is over-valued, for United Kingdom purposes, to the extent, perhaps, of 20% and even more over-valued in Northern Ireland conditions, by reference to what is happening in the South;
- (4) energy - where Kinsale gas could, perhaps, be extended to Northern Ireland and, in the right conditions, the inter-connector between North and South made operable;
- (5) security - where a common court and policing system throughout the whole island, with uniformity of law North and South, would be the objective.

Agreement by the British would be necessary to continue subsidies for Northern Ireland, to be phased out over, say 20 years.

These subsidies would be used to ensure that Northern welfare services

are not lower than the British services in a period of, say, 5 years ahead, after which the system would be absorbed into the Irish system (which may or may not be on a par with or higher than British levels at that time. Differences between the systems now make straight comparisons of cash payments, North and South, irrelevant.)

What would be important would be the total involvement of the Northern people in working out these policies. This involvement will not take place while the majority perceive the possibility of continuing to "act" under the present British guarantee - which, on past experience, has been unconditional to the point of tolerating open revolt against Government and Parliament at Westminster.

At the same time, the risk of serious unrest if the guarantee were suddenly and unconditionally withdrawn cannot be ignored. This is an area where miscalculation could lead to an escalation of violence. It is, therefore, imperative that it be approached in a balanced way. The withdrawal of the unconditional guarantee and its replacement with a willingness to recognise British interest in a united Ireland must be matched by an Irish guarantee to proceed with care - and only by consent - with the supreme objective of achieving peace in this island.

One such possible approach is outlined in the second annex to these notes.

Comment

All of this is probably very far ahead of where we are now.

It is, however, no harm to look at the possibilities. One glaring deficiency at present is the absence of Northern representatives who could talk on behalf of the majority at any conference or meeting, to discuss the future of these islands.

Another necessary element would perhaps be the agreement, insofar as it was possible, of the main political parties here on the framework for a settlement.

The understanding, if not the active goodwill, of the European Community and the United States would also be essential.

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7 May 1980

Confidential

Declaration of British Interest in eventual Irish Unity

1. The Government's desire for a British declaration of interest in eventual Irish unity was most recently given public expression in the Taoiseach's speech to the Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheis on 16 February last:

"In my view, a declaration by the British Government of their interest in encouraging the unity of Ireland, by agreement and in peace, would open the way towards an entirely new situation in which peace, real lasting, peace would become an attainable reality".

2. Informal British reaction to this call by the Government has been to say that a declaration of the kind we seek would amount to a removal of the "constitutional guarantee". It would, British officials say, be a message to unionists that they would no longer have the support of the British Government which would, in fact, be signalling their acceptance of the nationalist aspiration. The British say they could not, on this analysis, make such a declaration. They consider that at the practical level its effects would be to provoke a strong, probably violent unionist backlash without any compensating reduction in I.R.A. violence. On the contrary I.R.A. violence, the British feel, might well increase also since the I.R.A. would interpret the British declaration as a sign of weakness and a signal of incipient withdrawal.

3. Our basic aim in asking the British Government to make the declaration of interest in Irish unity is presumably to encourage the unionist section and its leaders to recognise the realities of their political and economic position. The purpose of our seeking the British declaration would be to stimulate an evolution in unionist political thinking of which there are already some signs - that is an evolution towards a more open attitude to this State and towards recognition of our common interests in, for instance, the European context. The declaration is accordingly not conceived as

something which would of itself bring about an immediate and decisive result in constitutional/political terms. It would start and encourage unionist thought-processes leading towards reconciliation and agreement on all-Ireland structures, thought-processes which at present appear to be blocked by the British "constitutional guarantee" and by general anti-nationalist prejudice.

4. It seems appropriate to examine the possibility that the aim of giving a political stimulus to unionists could be achieved without specific withdrawal of the British constitutional undertaking. This would involve a declaration by the British of their interest in eventual Irish unity and of their desire to see all sections of the community in Northern Ireland reflecting upon the advantages to be derived from national reconciliation. The declaration would be completed or accompanied by an indication that the British would not meanwhile be withdrawing their undertaking not to change the constitutional position of the Six Counties until a majority desired change. The two parts of such a statement would be compatible. The net effect could be to produce the positive effects on unionist thinking which we want while avoiding the negative unionist reaction which the British fear.

5. A proposal for such a two-part declaration might have some chance of being accepted. A declaration along the lines suggested would represent a change in the British position, and a change which we would have brought about. On the basis of tentative discussion on a personal basis about a year ago with British officials, it would seem that the British might be seriously interested. However the British might ask us to make a counterpart declaration which they would presumably wish to commit us solemnly to safeguarding unionist interests and traditions and to working for a united Ireland on the basis of consent.

D.M. Neligan

May 1980