

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Oifig an Aire Gnóthaí Eachtracha

Memorandum for the Information of the Government

Northern Ireland Situation

6 May 1983

1. The Minister for Foreign Affairs as requested at a Government meeting on 12 April 1983 submits this memorandum as background for consideration of policy in relation to Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs will report orally to the Government on their discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 5 May 1983.

Current Political Situation in Northern Ireland

2. There has been a major and deleterious shift in opinion in the minority community since 1981. This was clearly demonstrated in the October 1982 Assembly election when one out of three Catholics voted for Sinn Féin. It is obvious that the H-blocks hunger-strike had a large part to play in bringing about this change in opinion. The Irish Government, the SDLP, the Catholic Hierarchy and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace had all tried to influence Mrs Thatcher and her Government towards a more flexible and sensitive attitude to the problem without concession of political status. These overtures were rejected by Mrs Thatcher. Emotions were aroused in the minority community and the ineffectiveness of constitutional politics (SDLP) in the face of British intransigence was highlighted. Sinn Féin began to exploit successfully this situation and after electoral success in the two Fermanagh/South Tyrone by-elections became much more actively involved in politics. The Government had warned Mrs Thatcher that precisely these dangerous consequences would follow from her approach. Young unemployed people in deprived minority areas together with a traditional abstentionist vote combined to give Sinn Féin a 10% vote in the Assembly election. In the above circumstances the SDLP's standing in the eyes of the minority had suffered. In addition, the economic situation in Northern Ireland has continued to deteriorate and has resulted in disproportionately heavier unemployment and disaffection on the minority side. The unemployment rate for Northern Ireland is now over 21% but is much higher in some areas as the following figures for male unemployment demonstrate: Strabane 46.2%, Cookstown 37.9%, Dungannon 39%, Newry 37.7% and Derry 33.6%. The

British subvention (estimated at £1.3 billion in 1981/82) has propped up the Northern Ireland economy to some extent but the short-term picture is very gloomy with Coopers and Lybrand predicting 27.3% unemployment by 1985. All these circumstances - none of which have since been reversed - combined to give Sinn Féin a result in October last which shocked public opinion in both Ireland and Britain.

3. The SDLP has been placed in an increasingly difficult situation in recent years. Having been for a decade a highly creative political force in Northern Ireland, it has seen its various initiatives successively frustrated. As a result of the hunger-strike situation in 1981 it found itself unable to participate in the Fermanagh/South Tyrone by-elections and its authority was considerably reduced as a result. The main reason for the decision not to participate lay in the extremely anti-British state of opinion (see para. 2 above) on the minority side particularly in Fermanagh and an unwillingness to split the Nationalist vote and allow a Unionist candidate to win. The SDLP had been unable to influence the intransigent attitude adopted by the British and feared that their leadership of the minority would have been more endangered by participation than non-participation. In addition, the party organisation in Fermanagh was opposed to an SDLP candidature and one of its members even went so far as to sign Bobby Sands' nomination papers. Apart from the difficulties created by the Fermanagh/South Tyrone by-elections the SDLP also suffers from a severe shortage of finance and a lack of organisational effort in the various constituencies. The Party organisation is generally weak and it is now portrayed by its critics as a fatigued middle-class party which has failed to attract younger people. It has also suffered from defections on the one hand by people such as Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin and on the other hand by people such as Paddy Duffy and Michael Canavan who, although party members, are no longer taking an active part in politics.
4. The SDLP did not find it possible to participate in the Assembly for two reasons: because it was clear from the entrenched negative positions of both Unionist parties that neither executive power-sharing nor a meaningful Irish dimension would be available and also because of the disillusioned state of minority opinion.

Minority frustration was reflected in a 10% vote for Sinn Féin in the October 1982 election while the SDLP vote was down to 18.8% as against its 1975 Convention poll of 23.7%. The party is now clearly under threat from Sinn Féin which is highly active at constituency level with a wide range of advice centres and a large number of youthful party workers (mainly unemployed people). Sinn Féin also has the advantage of plentiful financial resources (obtained through fundraising in the US and racketeering and other illegal methods). The SDLP therefore finds itself in a desperate situation with a seemingly mounting drift of support in the minority community to the Provisionals. An important factor in John Hume's promotion of the Council for a New Ireland was his feeling that this was the only means available to retain political viability for the SDLP in the short term. It should be added that a major purpose of the project in Hume's eyes was to force on nationalist opinion North and South the necessity of confronting the difficulties both political and economic of accommodating the non-nationalist ethos in a pluralist Ireland.

5. Both Unionist parties have refused to participate in the Forum. Nevertheless a number of people of Unionist conviction seem likely to make submissions to its deliberations. It is noteworthy that the Newsletter (hard-line Unionist) in an editorial of 18 April saw some merit from a Unionist viewpoint in private persons of Unionist persuasion confronting the Forum with the Unionist case. The Alliance Party, for its part, while it will not formally participate is willing to consider making a submission to the Forum or holding parallel talks with the Government.
6. The Official Unionists (30% of the vote), the Democratic Unionists (23% of the vote) and the Alliance Party (9.3% of the vote) entered the Assembly with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The Alliance Party is fully committed to the Assembly but will not agree to devolved government unless the minority (i.e. the SDLP) is involved. While it supports the improvement and development of the Anglo-Irish institutional framework including the parliamentary

tier, it is opposed to any North/South institution such as a Council of Ireland on the Sunningdale model. In its recent meeting with the Government Alliance stated that their support ranged around 10%: it is not likely that it will rise materially above this through increased support from either majority or minority opinion for the foreseeable future.

7. The DUP while continuing to seek devolved majority rule government has been happy to take a relatively moderate stance in the Assembly and appears satisfied to continue with the Assembly indefinitely at stage one (i.e. scrutiny committees but not devolved powers).
8. The OUP position is crucial to the future of the Assembly. There is a split within the party between the leadership group, notably Molyneaux influenced by Enoch Powell, which believes that greater integration with Great Britain and an end to direct rule is the best way forward and those who still believe it is better and even possible to secure devolved government on Unionist terms. The leadership of the OUP has sought in various ways to bring the Assembly to the crisis point of seeking majority rule devolved government which the British Government would refuse to concede. This would precipitate the collapse of the Assembly and allow the OUP to pursue the "logical" course of greater integration and increased powers for local government. It is clear, however, that the rest of the OUP combined with the DUP and Alliance will not allow this situation to develop in the short term although it may eventually become inevitable.
9. Five committees (Education, Economic Development, Agriculture, Finance and Personnel and Environment) have been established together with a non-statutory security committee. Ministers and civil servants regularly appear before these committees. Assembly members clearly enjoy the status, financial remuneration

and opportunity to consolidate their political base and apart from the OUP leadership will be very reluctant to see it wound up.

10. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs in public comments on the Assembly have referred to it as a focus of division rather than reconciliation in present circumstances. This is because both Unionist parties had made quite clear well before the Assembly elections that they would remain unalterably opposed to power-sharing at executive level. There is no hope of the Assembly producing real political progress in this situation and it is in fact more likely to intensify the current political stalemate between the two communities in Northern Ireland. It is clear that any move now by the SDLP towards the Assembly would destroy the party's remaining credibility and viability and create an overwhelming political opportunity for Sinn Féin to win majority support among the minority community. Any similar move by the Irish Government would have the same effect and would be very damaging to the SDLP to the advantage preponderantly of Sinn Féin (rather than the Alliance Party).
11. The British continue publicly to express a desire for SDLP participation in the Assembly although privately they accept that this will not happen in the foreseeable future. Mr Prior has recently made clear again that without SDLP participation there can be no movement to the devolutionary phase two of the Assembly. The Secretary of State has on a number of occasions referred to the Unionists as the only people who can bring the SDLP into the Assembly. In response to the questions in the House of Commons on 23 December 1982 he had the following to say: "I believe that those most likely to persuade the SDLP to take part are the Unionist Members of the Assembly. I urge them to do all that they can in the interests of peace in Northern Ireland and to recognise that there are two traditions and identities and that unless both are properly represented in the Assembly there will not be peace or political stability."

12. Although the security situation in Northern Ireland has been comparatively good in recent months there has been a number of major incidents (Ballykelly explosion, murder of Judge Doyle) combined with a steady stream of murders carried out by the PIRA, INLA and to a lesser extent by loyalists. It is clear that the paramilitary organisations still retain the capability of carrying out acts of violence on a continuing basis although for tactical reasons related to Sinn Féin's political advancement the PIRA may have scaled down its activities. In this context it is interesting to note Danny Morrison's comment on violence and the run-up to elections as reported in the Sunday Observer of 17 April 1983:- "We would like to think that the IRA would appreciate when to take an expedient holiday for a week."

#### Westminster Election and Northern Ireland

13. The next Westminster election which could be held in June or October of this year will be of crucial importance in relation to the contest between the SDLP and Sinn Féin. As a result of boundary changes 17 seats instead of 12 will be available and of these at least five would have a Nationalist majority. The SDLP at its party conference decided to contest every constituency and if it holds its present support should be confident of at least two seats (Foyle and South Armagh/Newry) while Sinn Féin are almost certain to win in West Belfast. In Fermanagh/South Tyrone and Mid-Ulster the outcome will very much depend on the attitude adopted by the DUP and OUP. The DUP have proposed to the OUP a deal whereby the OUP are given a clear run in Fermanagh/South Tyrone and the DUP a clear run in Mid-Ulster. Recent information which has become available from Official Unionist sources indicate that such a deal will be done. The only other possibility of a Nationalist win is in South Down where a good SDLP candidate could conceivably oust Enoch Powell if the DUP contest the seat and split the Unionist vote. On present information therefore the likely outcome is 9 OUP, 4 DUP, 1 Independent (J. Kilfeddar<sup>e</sup>), 2 SDLP and 1 Sinn Féin. One positive element from this will be an authentic SDLP presence (Hume and Mallon) at Westminster where the SDLP case has not been effectively put forward.

#### British Government Approach

14. It is clear that no new British initiative on Northern Ireland can be expected before the next General Election. Election fever currently grips Westminster and the local elections which were held on 5 May

in England (except London) and Wales but not in Scotland are likely to be the main factor in Mrs Thatcher's decision on whether to hold an election in June or later. The results show the Labour Party holding its own in the industrial areas of the North of England with the Conservative Party maintaining its grip on the West, Midlands and the South generally. The Alliance made no breakthrough and suffered a setback in Liverpool where the Liberals lost control of the Council to Labour. Elsewhere the Liberals made some small gains but the performance of the SDP was disappointing. In terms of votes case the Conservatives had a 7% lead over Labour while the Alliance polled about 20% of the poll. The overall picture, therefore, is a diminishing Alliance challenge combined with a steady consolidation of the Labour Party's position. Projections based on the local election returns would give the Conservatives a clear overall majority in the House of Commons but their lead of 7% of the votes is not so wide that it could not be overtaken during an election campaign. By failing to dispel the election fever the Prime Minister has allowed a momentum to develop in favour of a June date which she may now find it difficult to resist. The better dates from a Conservative point of view are early in the month (9th and 16th, for example). The problem with a late June date is that it would give the opposition parties the benefit of a longer campaign. The Conservative Party manifesto is being drafted at present and it is expected that it will be available to the Prime Minister soon. Mr Prior has expressed public confidence that the manifesto will contain a positive reference to his Assembly. Against the background of Mrs Thatcher's failure to endorse the Assembly, either in the Commons or during her visit to Northern Ireland, not everyone shares Mr Prior's confidence.

It is possible that the manifesto may not promise a continuance of the Assembly and that the section dealing with government in Northern Ireland may be deliberately phrased in an ambiguous way to save Mr Prior's face to an extent, while at the same time leaving the door open to the expansion of local government powers favoured by Tory right-wingers.

15. British Government sources continue to emphasise that the Assembly is in fact working well and that the members participating are seen to be using the committee system with the hope of further development.
16. There is, of course, considerable doubt as to whether Mr Prior will survive in his present office or indeed in government should Mrs Thatcher win the next election. A name sometimes mentioned as a possible successor to Mr Prior is that of Ian Gow, the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, who is an avowed integrationist.
17. Following the announcement of the *New Ireland Forum* (Forum for a New Ireland), the British in the course of official contacts, expressed fears that it would hinder development of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Their public reaction was not, however, as sharply critical as might have been expected although they have clearly sought in briefing e.g. in the United States, to dismiss it in advance as an ineffective body. Mr Prior's most recent comments, on the eve of the meeting of Party leaders involved in the Forum, and in the Commons, have been presented as a fairly positive reaction. Nevertheless, these comments may be seen to be a variation on the main British theme i.e. that the Forum's main impact will be to highlight the difficulties in the way of a unified Ireland. In this regard Mr Prior stated in the Commons that "if some questions can be asked by the Forum or within the Forum on the real attitude of the Republic's Government towards unity we might be able to make some more progress".

British Opposition Parties

18. While on present indications it is likely that Mrs Thatcher will be the next British Prime Minister it is worth noting that the Labour Party is formally committed to the belief that Ireland should, by peaceful means and on the basis of consent, be united. Their recently published policy document states that while respecting the rights of the Northern Ireland people to remain within the UK, the party does not accept that this means that Unionist leaders can have a veto on political development. Labour say that in Government they will initiate early discussions, involving inter alia, the Irish Government "on how best to proceed with our policy of unification by consent". The party's short-term objective is to establish an agreed devolved administration in Northern Ireland, pending which they would continue with direct rule. There is room for considerable doubt as to how seriously a Labour Government would seek to implement the stated long-term aim of unity.

The SDP/Liberal Alliance has not yet formulated a Northern Ireland policy but it is likely from the position adopted by individual leaders, such as Shirley Williams and David Steel, that the Alliance as a participant in Government would be open to involvement by the Irish Government and the European Community in solving the Northern Ireland problem.

Anglo-Irish Contact

19. It is likely that there will be continued Ministerial contact during the coming months although this might be affected by the timing of the British election. Despite Mrs Thatcher's unwillingness to contemplate any significant development in Anglo-Irish relations in the short term, she has indicated acquiescence to a slow reactivation of the official level contacts which followed the November 1981 summit. (There has been no meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council at official level since 20 January 1982.) It is likely that there will be a meeting of senior officials in the near future to discuss areas of future cooperation.

Encounter Group

20. At the meeting in February between the Northern Ireland Secretary of State and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Prior suggested that both governments should proceed with facilitating the setting up of the Anglo-Irish Encounter Group, originally recommended in the official level Anglo-Irish Joint Studies published in 1981. The purpose of the group would be to promote exchanges between economic, social and cultural circles in the two countries. It is envisaged that it would be a private organisation independent of Governments. Action by both Governments is, however, required to set it up and it may also require some official financial support from both governments in its early years. Appropriate provision has already been included in the 1983 Foreign Affairs estimate. It is intended to take the necessary steps in conjunction with the British authorities, to facilitate the setting up of the Anglo-Irish Encounter Group. This topic will be discussed at official level if the proposed meeting mentioned above (para. 19) takes place.

The U.S. Dimension

21. Despite recent difficulties with elements of the Irish-American community arising from the election of NORAID's Michael Flannery as grant marshal of the New York parade, the Government's position on Northern Ireland received significant support from the U.S. Administration and Congressional leadership as well as from all major editorial commentators during the Minister for Foreign Affairs' recent visit. However, the difficulties to be faced in presenting the Government's case in the U.S. should not be underestimated. On the Irish-American front, there are considerable resources available to groups such as NORAID who oppose a moderate nationalist solution to the problem of Northern Ireland. In addition the British Government wields considerable influence with the U.S. Administration in vigorously pursuing their objective of ensuring that the United States stays out of Anglo-Irish affairs as far as possible. In the coming months it will be important to follow up on the successes of the Minister's visit by intensifying our efforts to explain the Government's approach to the Northern Ireland problem and to Anglo-Irish relations with particular reference to the work of moderate nationalists in the Forum.

Cross-Border Economic Cooperation

22. The whole area of cross-border economic cooperation was most recently considered by the Irish and British Governments in the context of the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies published in November 1981. At that time consideration was given to a wide range of existing and potential cooperation in the economic and technical spheres.
23. Four specific cross-border studies, commissioned by the two Governments, have been completed since 1977. These are Derry/Donegal communications study (1977), the Mourne Fisheries Study (1978), the Newry/Dundalk report (1980) and the Erne catchment report (1980). These reports are at different stages of implementation.
24. Two possible areas for economic cooperation which have received publicity in recent months are the proposed gas pipeline and Harland and Wolff.
25. The economics of a pipeline for the delivery of Kinsale gas to Belfast have been under consideration since 1980. In December 1981 following discussions between the Tánaiste and the responsible British Minister, a framework was established within which officers could examine and report on the major terms and conditions which might apply to the supply of natural gas to Northern Ireland.
26. At two meetings between the Northern Ireland Minister of State Butler and the then Minister for Energy Reynolds on 18 May 1982 and 28 May 1982 broad agreement was reached on the main features of an agreement for the sale of Kinsale gas to Northern Ireland covering price, quantity and supply period. A major stumbling block in finalising the agreement has arisen in trying to find a formula for sharing exchange risks and in reaching agreement on a price escalator for the proposed 20-year duration of the agreement. The situation was last reviewed at Ministerial level in February 1983 and a further Ministerial level meeting is likely to take place to try to resolve the differences between the two sides.
27. In April 1982 the then Taoiseach raised the matter of a possible order for Harland and Wolff of a bulk carrier intended to supply

coal to the ESB generating station at Moneypoint. The possibility of an order from the only Irish company that might be involved in the operation of a bulk carrier, Irish Shipping Ltd., had been excluded long before the Government took office. The possibility of an order for Belfast was pursued with various parties including non-Irish shipping companies which had submitted tenders for the ESB shipping trade. The matter was given detailed attention by the Minister for Industry and Energy. Ultimately the view had to be taken that the potential financial penalty at this stage in planning a contract with a shipping company on the basis of a ship order being placed in Belfast appeared too high. A delegation from the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering workers has accepted an invitation from the Taoiseach to call on him. Their broad aim will be to examine the possibility of obtaining orders in the heavy engineering field from semi-State agencies and Irish industry.

28. The possibility of an electricity inter-connector between Ireland and Britain has been kept under review although present over-capacity means that the project is unlikely to proceed for some time. One recent development is that the British authorities, following representations made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, have agreed to provide customs facilities at Sydenham airport in Belfast for flights to Dublin. This will make it feasible to continue the Dublin/Belfast airlink.
29. Following a joint submission made by the Irish and British Governments the European Communities adopted measures to assist the border regions over a five-year period, 1980-85. The measures relate to the development of tourism and craft industries on both sides of the border. The total expenditure is £32m., of which approximately £21m. is being spent in this State. The Communities provide for 50% of the expenditure. Following a submission made by the British Government, which was supported by the Irish Government, the European Commission has agreed to support an urban renewal programme in Belfast, thereby releasing an equivalent sum (approx. £70 million) for housing development in the city. The matter is now on the agenda of the Council of Ministers and it is hoped that agreement on it will be secured before the end of July.

Administration of Justice in Northern Ireland

30. There are four security issues which have received publicity in recent months, the strip searching of female prisoners in Armagh jail, the alleged "shoot to kill" policy of the security forces, the matter of segregation between loyalist and republican prisoners in the Maze prison and the use of plastic bullets. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and officials of his Department have since the beginning of the year expressed concern to the British authorities on these issues which are a source of potential propaganda for the paramilitaries.
31. The prison authorities have since adopted new procedures on strip searching in Armagh. The series of RUC shootings which had led to a widespread belief that the RUC had adopted a "shoot to kill" policy has apparently ceased. This was a matter which the Minister for Foreign Affairs discussed with Mr Prior. There is concern that if the demands by prisoners in the Maze prison for segregating republican from loyalist are not met violence could erupt there, leading to increased violence outside the prisons. Confidential attempts are being made within Northern Ireland notably by Catholic priests to defuse the issue. Though there have been no deaths from the use of plastic bullets since April 1982 a number of organisations remain active in their attempts to have them banned from use.

Ministerial and Official Contacts

32. The annex attached gives an indication of the extent of contacts at Ministerial and official level between North and South and between the Irish and British sides dealing with the topic of Northern Ireland and/or the implementation of the joint Anglo-Irish studies. The Minister for Foreign Affairs hopes that all the departments concerned will from now on do their utmost to intensify and expand North/South and Anglo/Irish cooperation at all levels.

Annex

Ministerial and Official Contacts

1. There are a very large number of areas, particularly in the economic and security spheres where close continuous cooperation takes place between officials and their counterparts in Northern Ireland and in London as well as between the semi-State agencies under their aegis. The cooperation in areas where contacts were initiated prior to the publication of the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies in 1981 has continued. Much of this cooperation is of a technical nature. The last time a detailed survey was concluded of contracts on a North/South basis in the economic sphere in June 1980 it revealed contact and cooperation in 36 separate areas ranging from trade promotion to drainage to Manpower services.
2. The Department of Foreign Affairs, which has a coordinating role in this area, has continuous contacts with British and Northern Ireland officials on political, economic and security matters. It would be impossible to list these contacts many of which take place by phone. At a minimum there would be several such contacts each day.
3. The Department of Foreign Affairs also has a role in the implementation of the decisions taken at the time of the establishment of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council in November 1981. The following is a list of the Anglo-Irish Ministerial meetings which have taken place in this framework since January 1982:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Subject</u>
29.1.82	London (inaugural meeting)	Minister for Foreign Affairs and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Anglo-Irish relations
30.3.82	Dublin	Minister for the Gaeltacht and Welsh Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	Minority language problems
31.3.82	London	Minister for Foreign Affairs and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Anglo-Irish relations
17.5.82	Belfast	Minister for the Environment and NIO Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	Cross-border infra-structure
14.5.82	Dublin	Minister for Industry and Energy and NIO Minister of State	Kinsale Gas
28.5.82	Belfast	Minister for Industry and Energy and NIO Minister of State	Kinsale Gas
16.8.82	Derry	Minister for Fisheries and NIO Minister of State	Fisheries
3.11.82	Dublin	Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Office Minister of State	EEC issues
1.2.83	London	Minister for Foreign Affairs and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Anglo-Irish relations
3.2.83	Dublin	Minister for Industry and Energy and NIO Minister of State	Kinsale Gas
10.2.83	London	Minister for Industry and Energy and NIO Minister of State	Kinsale Gas
12-14.4.83	North Wales	Minister for the Gaeltacht and Welsh Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	Minority language problems

4. Since the publication of the Joint Studies and the establishment of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council the technical routine contacts at official level have continued. In some areas there has been a significant increase in the range and level of cooperation. This is particularly though not exclusively notable in the following areas: gas pipeline negotiations, improved telephone communications, the broad field of transport, tourism and education. In general terms when an increase in activity has occurred it reflects either a shared interest or a definite desire on the part of our interlocuters to improve the range of contacts. In other areas there may be scope for utilising the potential for development opened up by the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies.