



## **An Chartlann Náisiúnta** **National Archives**

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2020/17/57
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
<b>Accession Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

625/2

SECURE FAX NO. 625

*Mr. h. Caspary*  
*M. K.*  
*7.1.91*  
*4/1*

IMMEDIATE

TO: HQ

FROM: BELFAST

FOR: A/Secretary Gallagher

FROM: Brian Nason

28 December, 1990

Subject: Article in Belfast Telegraph of 28/12/90 by Peter Brooke

Attached is text of article by Mr. Brooke as carried on editorial page of today's Belfast Telegraph together with text of accompanying editorial.

*1 cc PS4*  
*Mr. Nason; PS4*  
*Mr. Nason; PS4*  
*Mr. Nason*  
*Concise A1*  
*2 Mr. Basington*

# The way ahead

---

**'Both Governments must aim to reach a situation where each is ready to go the extra mile and be willing to review accepted wisdom'**

---

**Belfast Telegraph, Friday, December 28 1990**

625/3

# The way ahead . .

NEARLY a year ago I spoke in Bangor setting out my views on the need for political progress in Northern Ireland.

The year has seen a considerable amount of activity on the political front. I have talked with the leaders of the constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland, and with representatives of the Irish Government. Media coverage has blown hot and cold: "breakdowns", narrowly averted, were followed by "breakthroughs" that unaccountably failed to materialise.

So this is a good time to explain why the past year has seen real advances on the political front. After 20 years in which the political process in Northern Ireland seems to have moved in spasms people have got used to the "nine day wonder syndrome"; politics make the headlines for a few weeks or months, and then disappear for the next three or four years. No lasting progress can be made in that way, so I consciously set out at the beginning of this year to avoid this.

It would have been ideal if we had been able to reach agreement on everything within a few months. Failing that the best approach was to settle down to slow, painstaking resolution of difficulties. So I make no apologies for disappointing everyone by omitting to pull a rabbit out of the hat. This process will take as long as it takes.

A year ago some said progress on the political front could not be made and so should not be tried. This time was "not right". The various parties had mutually exclusive agendas, agreement would be impossible between them. Yet the areas of common ground among the parties were clear to anyone who looked.

## Unthinkable

And events during subsequent months have shown that the outlook was not as bleak as some people had feared. This year has nched up some solid achievements on the political front in Northern Ireland.

A year ago, for example, it would have been unthinkable to most that the parties would be discussing the possibility of talks dealing with relationships between both parts of the community in Northern Ireland and relationships between both parts of Ireland. That is one of the dividends of 1990 — people are talking.

Political development has been moved firmly to the top of everyone's agenda. The exchanges over the past year have provided that means, and the parties have demonstrated considerable flexibility and commitment to them. I believe that the political leaders were not just "going through the motions".

I believe that they were responding to a deeply-felt need among their electors. The people of Northern Ireland have had enough. They want a political structure to which all can give their commitment and support, and in which all can have a say in decision-making. The party leaders, I believe, were responding to that sentiment, and were right to do so.

By the Rt. Hon.  
**Peter Brooke,**  
Secretary of State  
for Northern Ireland

The second dividend is the scope for movement, and the leaders have seized it. It can only be good for Northern Ireland that these exchanges have involved all the main constitutional political parties. That shows willingness on the part of all concerned to play a full rôle in charting Northern Ireland's path over the coming years. I welcome that willingness.

Too many people in Northern Ireland prefer to opt out of anything to do with politics. The reasons are understandable, but will do Northern Ireland no good in the long term.

## Responsive

So the third dividend is to hold out the hope to people in both parts of the community that better and more responsive political structures are a real possibility; And that more people may be encouraged to consider playing a greater part, taking greater control over — and answerability for — their own affairs.

The fourth dividend? Politicians — not terrorists — have set the agenda. Sinn Féin have tried to adopt the language of accommodation, but that doesn't wash. They say they wish to talk without pre-conditions when they have imposed the biggest pre-condition of all, that they must be allowed to set aside democracy, and replace it with gangsterism.

This year's events have refocused public attention and debate back where it belongs on to the constitutional politicians who represent the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland. That is where the emphasis belongs and where it should stay.

The fifth dividend has been the prolonged and intensive discussions that I have had with the Irish Government on the issue of political development. It has been the most considered discussion of this issue in many years.

## Legitimate

As co-signatory of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Irish Government has committed itself to the objectives of the Agreement — peace, stability, and reconciliation — and will have an important rôle in any future overall talks. Both Governments have, through these discussions, been able to establish a real sense of constructive movement towards a common goal.

This sort of creative dialogue, conducted with clarity and maturity, is something that will produce long-term benefits. Both Governments must aim to reach a situation where each is ready to go the extra mile and be willing to review accepted wisdom.

We must both be prepared to step outside the

# The way ahead . .

625/5

**By the Rt. Hon.  
Peter Brooke,  
Secretary of State  
for Northern Ireland**

confines of dogmatic positions and to search for new mechanisms and structures to reconcile the legitimate interests and aspirations of all people in Ireland: structures which will balance cherished ideals with practical realities.

So the main effect of this year has not been to produce a simple answer to a difficult question, but rather to encourage new thinking about key issues, re-analysis of positions and goals, and re-evaluation of the validity of traditional aims in the context of the 1990s.

For old orthodoxies to break down, often all that is needed is for people to start questioning their relevance. This, above all, is what has characterised the past year. The inter-play of differing views on key issues has gone some way towards encouraging the un-freezing of positions and the consideration of ideas that might previously have been ruled out.

I believe that the conclusion that most readers will have drawn by now is that it is no longer

enough on either side to say "what we have, we hold", and leave it at that.

A thriving, vigorous political life, on which the whole fabric of society depends, is a process of give and take, in which long-term benefits have to be balanced against short-term gains.

It means a willingness to try and understand opposing views, even if it is impossible to agree with them, and a commitment to try to work out an accommodation which will mean no-one winning all, but which will also safeguard against anyone losing all.

I believe this past year has shown that the political parties in Northern Ireland are willing to work towards such an accommodation, and I am confident that this will continue over the next few months and that it will be encouraged by both Governments. The time is right for such an endeavour, and the time is now.

Belfast Telegraph, Friday, December 28 1990