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22 JUL 1992

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FROM: PAT RANSFORD
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DIVISION
22 JULY 1992
(X 6572 OAB)

cc Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr D J R Hill - B
Mr Petch - B
Mr Durbin - B

MR HILL

THE NORTHERN IRELAND ELECTORATE

The note of 20 July from yourself and the attached note of 16 July 1992 from Mr Jardine raised interesting issues.

2. I find the analysis very cogent. But there are a number of factors which it still seems to me could tip the balance towards a small Catholic majority in the early part of next century and possible towards a majority in favour of a united Ireland. There are a number of areas where behaviour could alter. The differential birth rates and changes in this are mentioned. One wonders how much the political/communal tensions in Northern Ireland might influence relative birthrates or whether other factors in the society such as different social mores explain why birth rates have dropped less sharply in the NI Catholic community, than in the Republic and less in the NI Protestant community than in GB (I believe).

3. Migration patterns may have also changed, as brought out in Mr Jardine's note. If measures which have been brought in to reduce discrimination in areas such as education and employment succeed one might expect the differential to reduce further. Of course that may depend on how far it is possible to reduce inbuilt inequalities in an economy beset by the effects of the troubles.

4. Thirdly, the underlying reasons for voting patterns could bear further consideration. One hypothesis might be that Catholic support for Unionism is partly explicable as adaptive survival behaviour - crudely put "if you cannot beat them, join them" and that voting for the Alliance may also represent a desire to support the least sectarian version of Unionism in a State where Unionism of one kind or another predominates. Similar motives were on the other side adduced in the recent West Belfast election result where it was assumed that Protestant votes helped to secure Dr Hendron's victory in preference to Mr Adams. This is not to deny that there are real feelings of a "British" or "Northern Irish" identity among Northern Catholics which may influence their political loyalties (including possibly preferences for living in a more secular state than that of the Republic) but to suggest that support for 'nationalist' parties could, if nationalism is not eroded by other factors in coming decades, be inclined to increase if there were a realistic chance of

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their winning an election. While some support could of course be eroded by the prospect of radical change in the status quo, it is at least a reasonable hypothesis that a closer balance between the two populations would bring changes in the political climate.

5. It would be interesting to see the 'convergence' scenarios adjusted for possible changes in migration patterns. At the end of the day, of course, so many new factors could come into play that the future, as ever, remains unpredictable. But it does seem worth having some strategies that do not suppose that a possible majority for constitutional change early next century is totally distant or remote as a probability.

signed

Thank you for sending me a copy of your minute of 20 July to Mr Bell, together with his interesting enclosure from Edgar Jardine.

MS P RANSFORD

In case there is any misapprehension, I should say that my own analysis has been based on assumptions consistent with the conclusion of Mr Jardine's notes that it will be a very long time before Catholics form a majority of the population in Northern Ireland, if indeed they ever do so; and that the Catholic community will always be larger than the strictly nationalist community (unless and until the present community divisions are healed and significant numbers of protestants begin to favour Irish unity).

My concern about the present formula in Article 1(2) of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is not that it is ever likely in practice to bring about Irish unity but that it feeds the sense of political and constitutional insecurity within the Unionists community and thus undermines our ability to promote constructive political development within Northern Ireland and a close and co-operative relationship between the two parts of Ireland.

SIGNED

David Hill

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FROM: D J R HILL
Political Development Team
22 July 1992

UNDER/
SEC

741/7

16 JUL 1992

CENT SEC

cc Mr Thomas
Mr Bell
Mr Alston
Mr Watkins
Mr Maccabe
Mr Cooke
Mr Petch

MR D A HILL

THE EMERGENCE OF A CATHOLIC/NATIONALIST MAJORITY

Thank you for sending me a copy of your minute of 20 July to Mr Bell, together with its interesting enclosure from Edgar Jardine.

In case there is any misapprehension, I should say that my own analysis has been based on assumptions consistent with the conclusions of Mr Jardine's note: that it will be a very long time before Catholics form a majority of the population in Northern Ireland, if indeed they ever do so; and that the Catholic community will always be larger than the strictly nationalist community (unless and until the present community divisions are healed and significant numbers of protestants begin to favour Irish unity).

My concern about the present formula in Article 1(c) of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is not that it is ever likely in practice to bring about Irish unity but that it feeds the sense of political and constitutional insecurity within the Unionists community and thus undermines our ability to promote constructive political development within Northern Ireland and a close and co-operative relationship between the two parts of Ireland.

SIGNED David Hill

D J R HILL
Political Development Team

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