

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



**Reference Code:** 2000/6/659

**Title:** Notes on the situation in Northern Ireland,  
prepared by the Tánaiste, Erskine Childers, for  
the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch

**Creation Date(s):** 4 September, 1969

**Level of description:** Item

**Extent and medium:** 8 pages

**Creator(s):** Department of the Taoiseach

**Access Conditions:** Open

**Copyright:** National Archives, Ireland. May only be  
reproduced with the written permission of the  
Director of the National Archives.

NOTES ON THE PRESENT NORTHERN SITUATION

1. We examine the unity of Ireland as an objective - in depth. This memorandum is not concerned with the public relations campaign to show what happened in the North, but with subsequent policy.
2. It is essential to clarify the present situation.
3. Partition has had divergent effects at different periods since 1921.
  - (a) Thirty years ago the differences in social welfare, educational and investment benefits were less marked and the Nationalist Party was more active but still not effectual.
  - (b) The total Nationalist group were, as a majority, anti Republican in attitude, while there were divisions of opinion as to - abstention from Stormont; presence in Stormont without recognition of de jure status; presence with recognition; extreme Republicanism. Since 1921 there has been no Fianna Fáil type movement in Northern Ireland. On the basis of the Fianna Fáil evolutionary policy of 1932 to 1947 the Nationalist parties' policies have been weak, contradictory, unrealistic.
  - (c) In the last twenty years the social welfare benefits, educational facilities and capital investment have grown, while in contrast the discrimination has remained, even if diminished in certain fields, and, in the context of the Western world, is now accentuated. See photostats of Nationalist majority areas and unemployment. These can be used with

/elaboration

2.

elaboration and reorientation by the P.R. team.

- (d) The levels of social welfare payment, G.N.P. per head, employment in industry, exceed ours. See accompanying photostat.

- (4) (a) The Sinn Féin 1918-1921 policy, then later Fianna Fáil Six County policy, has always made it clear that the 300 year old settlers were regarded as Irish, that Britain legalised partition but that agreement without recourse to arms would be essential to bring about unity.
- (b) All parties in the South subscribe to an all-Ireland Parliament plus a local Parliament in the North without discrimination policy as an initial solution.
- (c) The use of the term "Our people" in the North can only be used in times of crisis, if at all.

5. The Lemass-O'Neill policy was inaugurated with a view to breaking down barriers of prejudice, making the two communities more mutually dependent with entry into the E.E.C. and the Trade Treaty in mind. This policy was based on the long term effects of greater sophistication and on growing induced ecumenism. There have been reduction of tariffs on Northern Ireland goods, the tourist and E.S.B. agreements, Foyle Fisheries, C.I.E., G.N.R. agreements and the liberalisation of road transport (some of these pre 1957).

6. In the last ten years, particularly since the Papacy of John XXIII, there has been a considerable growth in ecumenism in the North, characterised by non-sectarian Parish Councils, exchanges of sermons, joint community efforts, the Council of

3.

Churches in Belfast. Middle-class groups are meeting socially on a basis unheard of ten years ago. These groups only express themselves in limited ways, through clerical speeches, never reported by the Press, except heads of church pronouncements.

7. The educational programme in Northern Ireland is producing a new, more educated self-confident Catholic population.

8. The better education, plus the social welfare, health and investment programme, are having two divergent effects and one divisory effect.

(a) One hopes it may produce a more literate, lively movement, looking intelligently at the practical possibilities of unity.

(b) But it undoubtedly is producing a group of Catholics who ask, quite definitely: "How will the South and North afford the benefits of British administration in money terms? When that is worked out we will see". Or they are more conservative than this.

(c) This group and the much larger Protestant, more prosperous group, by their better circumstances, are highlighting the permanent, unemployable, discriminated against, poorer Catholic group and a smaller but quite perceptible group of Protestant workers who have suffered from poor housing conditions and permanent and semi-permanent unemployment.

9. A public opinion poll taken two years ago revealed a large number of Protestants - some 40%-50% - as saying they recognised partition would end some day. It also revealed

4.

a number of Catholics holding views as at 8(b).

10. Southern policy obviously can be seen as in two phases:

- (a) ad hoc decisions taken in the light of the present immediate crisis;
- (b) a permanent policy emerging if peace continues, if the British Army maintains public order, if the five points are reasonably well implemented.

11. The ad hoc policy must obviously be to spread the story of partition as far and wide as possible, highlighting the injustices perpetrated for 48 years.

12. Both the ad hoc policy and the permanent policy depend to a great extent on whether the great majority of the minority population will now adopt a strong Nationalist, political organisation united on entry to Stormont and Westminster, without a sectarian approach, taking the Fianna Fáil Party as an example in relation to not <sup>making</sup> fences too <sup>quickly</sup> high and willing to associate with us, privately or otherwise.

13. I may be wrong, but I believe this change is unlikely to happen. There are many conflicting forces at the moment, including those here.

- (a) The Civil Rights movement, much of it run by people who would be Left Wing Labour supporters, and various other small groups, plus the old Nationalist element, plus extreme Marxist Republicans.
- (b) ~~Here, as in the North,~~ there are people hoping chaos will reign because of a more satisfactory situation emerging - unification, dictatorship, etc..

/(c):

5.

- (c) There is the complication here of our being willing to police the North with Irish and British troops, which has its implications even though the policy is an ad hoc, emergency arrangement.
- (d) There are possibly several hundred thousand silent people on both sides in the North who will not disturb a more cooperative set-up by raising any divisive issues - who wish above all for peace. This could delay a Nationalist revival.
- (e) There are the Bogsidiers type of people whose immediate interests are totally different from those in (d).
- (f) There are plenty of people on all sides who place economic development as No.1 Priority.
- (g) There are the hard line Unionists and the Paisleyites.

14. Our policy cannot succeed without favourable press support. Perhaps we could have a summary of press comment. I would judge it as -

- (a) sympathetic to Catholic disabilities but deadly opposed to I.R.A. intervention;
- (b) confused and disgusted by religious bigotry on both sides, making them feel the problem was Northern Irish and "special";
- (c) not convinced that the historic unity of Ireland is so much a fact that <sup>any</sup> ~~no~~ change can take place as a result of any immediate campaign and that if Wilson were to enforce such a change the result would be disastrous violence. Some correspondents say this is a special Irish problem "we do not understand";

/(d):

6.

(d) the more intellectual correspondents refer to the economic side;

(e) perhaps the P.R. campaign may effect a change in our favour.

15. If we are to engage in a double programme to revive Nationalism in the North and to get press and Government support we cannot escape the economic argument. I have already been asked for the solution. The net <sup>current and capital</sup> subsidy is variously calculated as from £150 million to £220 million. It is absolutely essential to have a 32 County economic and finance policy. Are the Economist figures correct? How much of the total net investment by the U.K. can be found from other resources or be done without for a time? Will a united Ireland gain a total greater investment because of the larger total economic entity? How do we spell this out? Could we at least have an analysis of "The Economist" and other financial calculations prepared by the C.S.O., the Economic Section of Finance and by Social Welfare? If the campaign gets off the ground we need the answer.

16. If the campaign is to succeed we must have a policy for ending partition - a method of approach, a policy of implementation. We have none at the moment.

How do we re-vamp the former programme -

(a) all-Ireland Parliament?

(b) local Parliament with ending of discrimination?

(c) constitutional changes required to safeguard minority Northern interest? Awkward problems like divorce. I do not know if the constitutional provisions must apply if there is an all-Ireland Parliament.

/(d):

7.

(d) One problem not of our devising - the ne temere decree - but we can do nothing about this.

We cannot negotiate solely with the British. The original need remains to get consent, even grudging consent, from the Unionist majority. We must confer with some organisation. Whom? Without this we will not get outside support. How do we treat the Northern Ireland Government? What are the new conditions attaching to a Federal Government solution?

17. In 1932 we compromised our 1916 position as political realists. At present, bearing in mind the attitude of many of the minority and of the majority in the North, does our policy remain the same? Is there no case for not taking a leaf out of the 1932-1938 record? The timing of this I am not discussing.

18. Consideration of above depends on our assessment of the present situation as outlined above.

19. Assuming that everything remains chaotic and fluid, our published approach to a unity policy must assume some method of negotiation at some period at some point.

20. Assuming that there is peace and a working British plus Northern administration, how do we formulate policy? Are the public relations difficulties in going for the full original policy too great?

After forty-eight years of self government in the Twenty-six Counties would our electors not accept a gradualist policy? After six years of Fianna Fáil Government under the 1922 Constitution (gradually revised); after ten years of Commonwealth membership as a Republic, 1938-1948; after

/five



five years of extremely benevolent semi-neutrality in a world war; after 21 years of Republican government in increasingly close economic coordination with the U.K. - there is at least a case for considering a new form of policy. If we were now joining the E.E.C. the present official policy would look to some people extremely rigid.

21. Everything I have said presumes a tough control of the new I.R.A. Their incursion will spell disaster. The I.R.A. can only destroy any reputation we have and discourage unity in the Six Counties.

22. Any policy we adopt may be contemptuously rejected by the Unionists. Would the British Government alter their attitude if a gradualist approach were adopted? Would this in time win over liberal Unionist opinion?

23. How many of my colleagues believe we will succeed on the present basis? We may succeed, whatever the outcome, in persuading the present electorate that we did our best, but there will be no ultimate national advantage gained by this.

24. Everything I have said is obvious to my colleagues. As an older member of the Government I have tried to arrange my thoughts and beg leave to transmit these notes to them for consideration. I have no sovereign remedy in an appallingly difficult situation. But I do agree with members of the Government who, months ago, asked for a re-thinking of our unity policy.

Tánaiste.

26th August, 1969