

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code: 2000/6/662

Title: Memorandum for the formation of the government, giving the views of the Minister for External Affairs on the attitudes and policies which might be developed in relation to Northern Ireland

Creation Date(s): Nov 1969

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 9 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.

Oifig an Aire Gnóthaí Eachtracha

05/14/192E



28 Samhain 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE GOVERNMENT

Policy in relation to Northern Ireland*Clárúcháir*1/12/1969
BS*Cuistia: timpéall**na n-éilís, lár-thoirt, ag
an gceannairc 2/12/69.**1. Molláig, 1969*1. Introduction

1. The past year has brought into question in a fundamental way the "solution" to the Irish question expressed in the Government of Ireland Act, 1920. This solution was a purely British one and was not sought by any element of Irish opinion. Certainly a minority of the Irish people at that time, roughly identifiable with the Presbyterian and Anglican communities in the North-East, did not share the majority view in favour of the independence of the whole country from Britain and was also opposed to Home Rule for Ireland. It was not their wish that subordinate parliaments should be created in Dublin and Belfast and, in this sense, the Stormont Parliament which Unionists have defended for 50 years was not something which they had sought for its own sake. This parliament, apart from being subordinate, found itself governing an area which was far from being homogenous. As a political entity it had no history; it was an economic absurdity, the effects of which are felt particularly harshly in Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh to the present day; it contained within itself, but to a degree highly accentuated in the small area of the North-East, the social and religious incompatibilities which those British politicians who had conceived it had used to excuse and justify dividing the area from the rest of Ireland; territorially it included an area of about half its total size in which the majority of the population was opposed to rule from or through Belfast.

2. Nevertheless, Stormont has governed for almost 50 years. The obduracy of Unionist control expressed through discrimination of all kinds against a minority, easily distinguishable

for being Catholic, helped to create in the minority a feeling of helplessness against which they reacted with an equally obstinate refusal to grant even a de facto legitimacy to the Unionist regime. The Unionist coalition was comprised of a wealthy Protestant landed aristocracy and a Protestant middle class, each determined to maintain its position in the community and, by playing on politico-religious fears, allying to themselves a basically Presbyterian farming community and a Protestant and Presbyterian working class. They had nothing to fear from the Catholic minority which, admitting itself to be disloyal to the idea of an Ulster state, took refuge in its own opposing culture.

3. Radical change has now come and it begins to be possible to distinguish the main reasons for this. The first breach of the Unionist monolith - revealing in fact its real nature as a coalition of diverse interests - was caused by the agreement to meet and discuss mutual problems between the former Taoiseach, Mr. Seán F. Lemass, and the former Prime Minister, Capt. Terence O'Neill. Their meetings, whatever their intrinsic importance, began a series of reactions which still continue. Two of these need to be mentioned - (i) the effect on extremist elements of the majority population of O'Neill's "treason" in allowing the former Taoiseach to visit him in Belfast and (ii) the beginning of new thinking among the minority in the North as to their place in society.

4. A really united and self-confident Unionist party would not have indulged - or suffered - the extremist reaction to O'Neill's initiative. The economically subordinate wings of the Unionist coalition with the apparent support of the Brookeborough clan seemed, however, to fear it excessively and quickly attempted to impose their views on the Stormont Government. In a sense both the landed gentry and the more liberal middle-class were put on notice that they governed only by consent of the yeoman farmers and the Protestant and Presbyterian working class who had the votes to make the

state ungovernable. The first revolt, one against any change in the status quo, came from them.

5. The second came from the minority. New leaders among them were quick to grasp the possibility of appealing over the head of a divided Unionist party to British public opinion. By demanding civil rights within the context of the United Kingdom they forced Stormont, already under pressure from a right wing which would yield nothing, into one impossible posture after another. In doing so, and in attracting well-publicised police repression for doing so, they revealed for all to see the unmistakably sick society which Unionism had created.

6. A series of incidents - October 5th, 1968 in Derry, the Burntollet ambush last January, the downfall of O'Neill in May following his failure to secure a more liberal mandate from the electorate in February, the Orange posturings of July 12th - led to a confrontation in Derry on August 12th which was seen to be a massive attempt to deny civil rights to the minority in the North; although its real circumstances were much more complex. The point was fatally made in Belfast on the night of August 14th/15th when Protestant extremists, encadred by B Specials and with perhaps the tacit connivance of the RUC, set about burning out the Falls Road area. The British government found itself forced to pour further troops into the North to prevent a possible civil war.

7. All that has happened since then has been a massive justification of the Civil Rights movement but, as seen from London, only within the context of British justice. Although the Unionist structure of control of the North by discrimination against the minority has clearly failed, there has been no overt recognition by London and neither overt nor covert by Stormont that the fundamental cause of the kind of society created in the north is the division of Ireland in the interest of a minority

of the people of this country, and only a belated acceptance of the right of the minority within the area cut off to advocate by peaceful means the idea of constitutional change. Nevertheless, in the light of the history of the past 50 years, even this recognition of a political right to advocate constitutional change is an immense step forward and it need not be doubted that the British Government is well aware of this. Equally significant is the revived direct interest and involvement in the North of both Westminster and Whitehall.

8. In the new circumstances there are possibilities for adopting an attitude and a policy in relation to Northern Ireland which could ease the way to the eventual realisation of the reunification of Ireland. Two things should always be present to the mind in this respect. The first is that a society whose origin is dishonourable and whose legitimacy is constantly challenged is at a considerable disadvantage in dealing with its neighbours and remains fundamentally impotent. The second is that this same society contains a substantial body of people ardently committed to the preservation of their own personality and peculiarities to the point of suicidal resistance if attacked direct. Policy therefore must be found in the narrow ground between these two basic factors and the following is suggested for the Government's consideration.

II Policy Suggestions

1. Basic Approach

Reunification of Ireland should be sought by peaceful means through cooperation, agreement and consent between Irishmen. The use of force for the purpose should be dismissed publicly as frequently as may appear necessary.

2. Short-term Objectives of Reforms in the North

Nothing should be done which might impede the implementation of the necessary reforms in the North. Gentle but firm pressure should be exercised to see these reforms achieved and public approval should not be withheld when substantial measures of real reform are implemented. Further action at the United Nations and in the Council of Europe to promote reform should be taken only if insufficient progress on reform seems to warrant it. Care should be taken to avoid action leading to complete direct rule from Westminster which would make the North a closer integral part of the United Kingdom - unless of course Stormont should ultimately reject genuine reform.

3. Dublin-London Relations

Maximise discreet contact with Whitehall on the question both at the diplomatic level and at the Ministerial level - under cover of other activities if necessary. Dublin's right to be heard on matters affecting the North and Britain's ultimate responsibility for the situation there should be emphasised. Bilateral talks should be sought with the British not alone on the solution of the short-term problems of reform in the North but also on possible approaches to a long-term solution. Avoid for the time being meetings in the full glare of publicity which would inevitably lead

to reactions in the North and on that account also lead to statements in Whitehall reaffirming the status quo. In the short run talks with the British on the North should be bilateral rather than trilateral involving Stormont.

4. Cooperation with the North

Maximise cooperation with the North in matters of mutual concern and encourage such frequent contact at Ministerial and official level as may be opportune. Consider giving further unilateral concessions to the North e.g. in the field of tariffs. Consider mutual programmes of economic development. This policy of cooperation should appear as a continuing process and Dublin should not be diverted therefrom by such temporary coolings of relations as have happened recently. Consider removing troops from the Border at the earliest date that circumstances permit.

5. North/South Intercourse

Encourage the maximum amount of contact at all levels in the private as well as in the official sector. In particular encourage (a) tourism in both directions; (b) cultural activities which would emphasize common cultural heritage rather than elements which might divide; (c) commercial contacts; (d) social contacts and (e) academic contacts including closer relations between educational institutions. Exchange visits by the young should be promoted e.g. through school tours or the Youth Hostel Movement. Greater recruitment to the Irish Civil Service from the North might be considered even though this might involve a relaxation of the Irish language requirement for Northern candidates.

6. Removal by Dublin of Barriers to Unity

Dublin should consider taking steps which would tend to convince Northern Protestants that they would enjoy full

civil rights and equality in a United Ireland. A broadly based study might be taken as to what should be done in regard to constitutional and statutory difficulties in respect of e.g. divorce, birth control and other disabilities and whether any reforms in the educational system are desirable, bearing in mind that a United Ireland would be a pluralistic rather than a confessional society. In teaching Irish history in the schools emphasis should be given to the positive aspects rather than the aspects which tend to be divisive. It may be necessary to consider a different role for the Irish language in a United Ireland and to take a fresh look at the appropriate time at national symbols. Care should be taken to avoid appearing to condone the activities of illegal organisations such as the I.R.A.

It goes without saying that economic and social progress here should be pressed on as fast as possible so as to reduce disparities between here and the North; in particular, social benefits here should be increased as circumstances permit.

7. Information Activity

Persistent but discreet information activities should be undertaken:

- (i) In Britain to influence prominent people in the political sphere, top officials, journalists, radio and TV and, through them, public opinion generally on the desirability of settling the Irish question;
- (ii) In the United States and Europe to remedy the ignorance and misunderstanding that exist in relation to the North and to Ireland as a whole and to produce a climate which might encourage the British Government to act to solve the problem.

This campaign should be in the nature of a "soft-sell", avoiding exaggerated or emotion-laden claims. It should preferably be carried out by officers with diplomatic training who could tailor their activities to the circumstances of the moment. Finally, it should include a conscious attempt within Ireland (a) to allay Protestant fears in the North and (b) to educate the Irish public on the realities of the situation.

8. Machinery to study, co-ordinate and implement policy

Consideration should be given to having a section in the Department of External Affairs responsible for the following functions:

- (i) To keep in touch with all aspects of Anglo-Irish relations having a bearing on the North;
- (ii) To study in depth possible long-term solutions (e.g. federal solution) as well as short-term problems;
- (iii) To create and maintain contact either by cross-border visits or otherwise with various responsible groups or individuals in the North, and, through the Embassy in London, in Britain;
- (iv) To guide and direct information activity abroad on the subject and
- (v) To act as a clearing-house for the activities of other Departments in relation to the North from the point of view of drawing attention to possible conflict with general policy and to encourage positive action where this is desirable.

This section would clearly have to work in very close liaison with the Taoiseach's Department as so many of the issues in relation to the North are also of direct concern to that Department.

9. This Memorandum, giving the views of the Minister for External Affairs on the attitudes and policies which might be developed in relation to Northern Ireland, is submitted for the information of the Government at this stage. If the Government so wish, he will submit specific proposals for decision after consultation with the Ministers concerned.