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Reference Code:	2003/16/468
Title:	Dáil Questions addressed to Taoiseach Jack Lynch on the British government's Green Paper on the political future of Northern Ireland, with reply.
Creation Date(s):	2 November 1972
Level of description:	Item
Extent and medium:	4 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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QUESTIONS NOS. 3 TO 6 AND NO. 8

DÁIL QUESTIONS addressed to the Taoiseach
for answer on Thursday, 2nd November, 1972.

QUESTION NO. 3:

To ask the Taoiseach if he will make a statement with regard to the recently published Green Paper on the political future of Northern Ireland; and if any of its recommendations are in line with official Government policy on the future of Northern Ireland.

John O'Connell.

QUESTION NO. 4:

To ask the Taoiseach the Government's attitude to the recent Green Paper issued by the British Government in respect of Northern Ireland.

Liam Cosgrave.

QUESTION NO. 5:

To ask the Taoiseach if he will make a statement in connection with the Green Paper relating to Northern Ireland.

Gerard Lynch.

QUESTION NO. 6:

To ask the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the recently published Green Paper and the action the Government intends taking on the matter.

Gerry L'Estrange.

QUESTION NO. 8:

To ask the Taoiseach if he will arrange to have copies of the British Government Green Paper based on the Darlington Conference circulated to Members having regard to their interest in a solution to the Northern problem; and, if not, if he will arrange to have copies available on request.

Oliver J. Flanagan.

REPLY:

With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I propose to take together Questions Nos. 3 to 6 and No. 8 which relate to the Green Paper on the North of Ireland published by the British Government on 30th October. I have arranged to have copies of the Green Paper placed in the Library.

2.

On several occasions recently, I expressed the hope that this Green Paper would not be long delayed. I did so because I believe that it is to no one's benefit to allow the present situation in Northern Ireland to drift.

The Green Paper has now appeared. In a preliminary comment on the day of issue I said that it was a useful contribution in the development of political thinking and that as a paper for discussion it deserved very careful consideration.

The Green Paper is not a solution; and it is not a plan for a settlement. But it does outline some of the dimensions of a solution. It offers opportunities for further progress; and it is important that we do not let such opportunities slip.

I have said recently elsewhere that we live today in this island in a situation which we have inherited and which has developed to a stage of serious crisis. It is up to us to meet our responsibilities and to work to resolve that situation.

In broad terms, I believe, as I have frequently stated, that any settlement which is to work must be found in an Irish context; that it must be achieved peacefully; and that, because of this, it must be achieved politically.

I do not put forward these views as political demands by the Government. I see them rather as requirements which the facts of the situation itself have set.

What we are saying in this regard - and I would hope that our voice on this can be clearly heard and understood - is that all of us who live in Ireland today must share this island.

3.

We cannot do so on a basis of dominance or compulsion; and a separation based on the fears of another era is now seen clearly not to be feasible.

Seeing this clearly now, we must - all of us - accept our responsibilities and we must begin working towards an accommodation which will bring reconciliation and peace to the island. We have no other real choice. But we have, - all of us - real opportunities once we face realities.

The structures that existed hitherto in the North of Ireland did not encourage reconciliation or open up such opportunities. This is now recognised and accepted. But an absence of structures, and the general feeling of uncertainty and doubt as to the future to which this gives rise, can also make reconciliation difficult.

Steps must now be taken therefore to set up the right institutions. To be "right", they must have real possibilities for growth towards reconciliation and accommodation. I say growth, because I believe that it is preferable for all of us to think in terms of organic growth rather than in terms of rigid frameworks. In speaking of growth we must set no absolutes; and we must allow for development. If steps are taken now on these lines, (which respond to what I believe to be the requirements of the situation) it would be in the interest of all of us, not only to accept, but to support, such institutions and to encourage them to grow and develop.

In the North new institutions must be widely acceptable if they are to work; and they must guarantee the rights and identity of the minority - not only socially and economically, but politically as well.

4.

But the structures which are now to be built must also encourage, as an organic growth, a process of reconciliation in the island as a whole; and unless they do, they cannot bring permanent reconciliation in the North. The Green Paper seems to allow for the possibility of some institutional arrangements of this kind; and insofar as it does it calls for a response from us.

For our part, we in the Government are prepared to make such a response. We are committed to work for reconciliation; we are prepared to enter into negotiations with the British Government, and into discussions with representatives of all political parties in the North, which will take account, in addition to the Green Paper, of the statements of policy of both Governments.

We are prepared to consider seriously the working out of suitable institutions. But to be of value the institutions must not be either empty of substance or rigid in form; they must have real and serious functions; and they must have in them the possibility of organic growth and development.

Finally I wish to say that having at this time a simple plebiscite in the North about the Border, of which the result is a foregone conclusion in present circumstances, would introduce a new element of rigidity in a situation which is otherwise evolving. It would contribute nothing to progress in the general sense contemplated in the Green Paper and would inevitably be provocative to some. I would hope that, on reflection, those who feel that they must have a plebiscite would, in determining its timing and content, so arrange it so as to afford some possibility of making a constructive contribution towards shaping the future rather than confirming the sterile rigidities of the past which have left us with the present unhappy situation.