

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2008/148/727
Creation Date(s):	14 February 1978
Extent and medium:	3 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.

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

Northern Ireland Policy

1. The Taoiseach in the course of his "This Week" interview on the 8th January said by way of reply to a question asking if he thought the time had come for the British Government to make their long awaited declaration of intent: "I think it has yes. You see this declaration of intent can be interpreted in a very stark way. We never intended that they interpretate it as 'The British Government can get out at the end of a certain year'. What we want them to do is to indicate their interest in the bringing of Irish people together and their indication as well that they have little to offer to Ireland as a whole and that therefore they could start the process of bringing Irish people together".
2. Notwithstanding what he actually said, the Taoiseach's statement was in many quarters, on the subject of a declaration of intent, interpreted in a stark way. This comes across in the correspondence received in relation to the statement both in the letters which were critical of it and also indeed in some of those which favoured it (particularly letters received from the U.S.). The critics have concentrated on the word 'withdrawal'; leaving aside altogether the word 'ordered' which is of course a fundamental part of Government policy. Invariably this particular facet of Government policy tends to get quoted out of context.
3. Perhaps in the context of the Taoiseach's forthcoming Ard Fheis speech, reference might be made again to the 'ordered' part of the policy. It might be no harm to say once again that the Government are not suggesting any instant or imposed solution to the Northern Ireland problem; that it prescribes no particular formula and sets no time limit for unification; that it proposes consultations between all elected representative interests concerned - Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic. It might be no harm to emphasise that it totally misrepresents the content and purpose of the policy statement to suggest that it envisages any precipitate action or any unilateral decision to withdraw British troops from Northern Ireland. Furthermore, that every step in relation to withdrawal would have to be taken by agreement between the two sovereign Governments involved, involving the Northern elected representatives.
4. Unionist spokesmen tend to see the Government's call for an ordered withdrawal as an attempt at a takeover bid on the part of the Republic. One of the answers to this is that our policy is not to acquire extra territory but to unite all the people living on this island. There can be no question of the "South taking over the North" and assimilating it into its existing structures. There would have to be negotiations about a new Ireland and the package agreed upon at these negotiations would have to be one which would be acceptable to all parties.
5. All political parties here are in favour of unification by agreement achieved through peaceful means following negotiations on the lines already mentioned. Re-unification cannot come about other than through withdrawal, at some stage, of the British presence in Northern

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

-2-

Ireland. Thus all political parties, whether they openly advocate it or not, are in favour of British withdrawal at some time or other. Otherwise, unification is only a paper policy. Is it not logical, if this is the aim of all, to seek to achieve unification on a planned basis through peaceful means, co-operation and understanding.

6. A solution along federal lines has been suggested more than once in the past and was mentioned again in recent correspondence. As the Taoiseach in his foreign affairs article in 1972 the United Ireland sought is not one in which the present State in the South "takes over the North and assimilates it into its existing structures." There would be negotiation but it would have to be about a new Ireland. In such negotiation it would be the aim and hope of the Government here to win the consent of the majority in Northern Ireland to a means by which both parts of the country could come together in a harmonious relationship. A federal solution might be the type of structure which would be most beneficial for this purpose.
7. In the foreign affairs article the Taoiseach said that the 1937 Constitution as it stands is not suitable for a new Ireland. He also gave as his view that it would be better to regard the new Ireland as an entirely new political entity which should work out and enact for itself its own Constitution. In the Irish Times article published immediately after Christmas he indicated that he adhered to the view that the time to discuss a form of Constitution that would be acceptable to Northern unionists as a basis for the unity of Ireland would be when elected representatives of North and South get around a table to discuss the future of the country. The Irish Times article concluded with the following sentence:

"Pending developments along these lines
[representatives from North and South getting
together following a British declaration of
its interest in Irish unification] I certainly
would not favour piecemeal amendments of the
Constitution, proposed in the hope that they
would advance the prospect of unity."

In the foreign affairs article the Taoiseach indicated that he did not exclude the possibility of preparatory work on a new Constitution being undertaken now. This divergence of approach has been commented on by Miss Geraldine Kennedy in a current affairs article in the February issue of Magill. Archbishop O Fiach in recent interviews has taken a different line on Constitutional change to that expressed by the Taoiseach. In effect he suggests that the Republic should spell out in advance the sort of Constitutional offers or safeguards that it was prepared to make to accommodate the majority community in Northern Ireland. Northern unionists tend to see our expression of the aspiration for unification as a request to them for a unconditional surrender of their particular aspiration. Are we saying to them in effect that we will talk to you about conditions for the future after you get sufficient sense to see that there is no

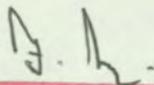
ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

-3-

future for your aspiration? Should we not be prepared to recognise both aspirations and attempt to devise some Constitutional formula to cope with them in a future all Ireland context whatever form this might take? We could show evidence of our good faith at this stage by undertaking the preparatory work which the Taoiseach referred to in his foreign affairs article.

8. Is it timely yet to point out that Northern Ireland's economic future would be much brighter in an all Ireland context than has been the case to date. Our growth rate is the best in the EEC at present whereas the economy in Northern Ireland can be considered somewhat sterile. Only time will prove the validity of this argument of course but it is a matter for consideration whether it is appropriate now to make public reference to it.
9. Insofar as EEC matters are concerned Northern Ireland at present has very little say. Pending direct elections to the European Parliament Northern Ireland has no Parliamentary representatives in the present European Parliament. Closer economic co-operation between North and South must surely result in greater EEC assistance for joint projects particularly in border areas which have been undeveloped in the past. Furthermore if we had a unification arrangement of any type whatever Northern Ireland interests would have a greater say in EEC decision-making at all levels whether through working parties and committees in Brussels or the European Council itself. From brief discussions which I have had with Northern Ireland officials I get the impression that insofar as EEC matters are concern they feel left out of things.



14th February, 1978.