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Fine Gael Policy Document on Northern Ireland -
Reaction of the Press (Editorial Comment)

(1) Northern Newspapers

(a) Irish News: It welcomes the publication of the Fine Gael document not because it believes it will of itself bring a solution to the problem but rather because this discussion document is the first instance where a political party in the South has attempted to spell out in detail the exact consequences and benefits of unity and the means through which this objective is to be achieved. For this reason it believes it will help dispel some of the doubts in the minds of the "unionist" population of Northern Ireland as to the intentions of the South to coerce the north into some form of a united Ireland. Furthermore it re-affirms the SDLP reaction in that it feels the document will be of considerable benefit in any future discussions on Northern Ireland.

(b) Newsletter: It sees the document as a subtle ploy by the South to re-introduce the concept of the Council of Ireland which it regards as a total failure having been rejected by the "vast majority of the Northern Ireland community". It believes that some consideration could have been given to two of the three advantages which were put forward as likely to accrue from Fine Gael's proposals (namely Co-operation on Security and Common interest in EEC Affairs) if no political overtones had been introduced (i.e. breaking the link with Britain). However the suggested advantage of linking Northern Ireland henceforth to the Republic both politically and economically runs completely counter to the views of the majority in Northern Ireland and could not be counter-balanced by reassurances proposed in the document. It nonetheless recognises the goodwill which the document attempted to engender between North and South and hopes that similar sentiments would also be forthcoming from other Southern politicians.

(2) Southern Newspapers

(a) The Irish Press: It sees the Fine Gael document, having got general acceptance at the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis, as being the basis of a new bipartisan approach by F.F. and F.G. on the north. It sees this as an effective counter-balance to the British bipartisan approach and in the absence of any clear policy emanating from the British on the north the probability of gaining acceptance there for an "agreed" Irish solution to the problem might be greater.

(b) The Irish Independent: It feels the document, which was not intended as an overnight solution in itself, adequately gives an account of the problems to be faced in Northern Ireland and of the benefits which might accrue from confederation especially in the context of EEC aid. In the absence of any British policy on the North at present and in view of the very real economic benefits which may be realisable through the confederation proposal it feels that the document may in fact generate sufficient interest in both Britain and Ireland to studying its implications in a reasonable and unemotional manner and if this were achieved then the policy document will have been a success. It views the policy document as a positive move by Fine Gael proposing constructive ways to solve the North's problems.

(c) The Irish Times: It feels that it was necessary for someone to produce a comprehensive document detailing the problems and possible benefits which could be derived from unity. It believes that the Fine Gael policy document achieved this by dispelling some doubts which Unionists may have had vis-a-vis unity, pointing out the anomalies of the present situation and by indicating the very real benefits which might be available to all, especially in an EEC context, thus clearing the way for frank discussion. This initiative from the South being all the more valuable at a time when British Government policy on the north is so uncertain.

(d) The Cork Examiner: It welcomes the Fine Gael proposals not particularly for their originality or their likelihood of success but because some sort of an initiative was required in the absence of one originating from the North or Britain. It believes however that the very real benefits and assurances given in the proposals will be ignored if for no other reason than they emanated from the South and are immediately suspect to all Unionist opinion.

(3) British Newspapers

(a) The Daily Telegraph: It equates the Fine Gael proposals for unity with the aims and methods of the PIRA both of which it says are doomed to failure because they lack the support of the majority. It considers the proposals for two states within a confederated Ireland as unrealistic and believes that the document does not advance the solution of the northern question.

(b) The Guardian: It adopts a very positive approach to the Fine Gael proposals considering as it does that they will form the basis for any future discussions about the North, the more so as Fianna Fail support clears the way for a bipartisan approach. The unique and praiseworthy features of the document are the combination of economic and political analysis not attempted heretofore by a political grouping and secondly the flexibility of the proposals in reaching a solution. It considers the recommendations in the document on a confederal system "can no longer be excluded from a short list of immediately relevant suggestions" and it may, after the British general election, provide the impetus for a British Government initiative on the North.

(c) The Observer: It believes that the Fine Gael plans for unity are bound to fail because of a fatal flaw in reasoning. Ulster Unionists have maintained the link with Britain at all costs in the past and will continue to do so in the future. References to the economic consequences of severing the link and joining with the South will not generate sufficient momentum to bridge this ideological gap. The Fine Gael proposals though well-meaning are bound to fail because they choose not to recognise this fact.