

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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23/5/80

Wester.

Mr. O'Reilly
A Forum

These are just a few random thoughts
11/12/80
D. M. Burke

Forum

Possible objectives for the Government

1. The primary objective should be the production of an agreed report, the purpose of which will be to encourage Unionists and the British to engage in dialogue about the future of the island, (islands?) aimed at assisting/peaceful and stable conditions. ^{the creation of}

2. The constitutional problem is central. The present constitutional position (in which the majority, supported by Britain, have ensured the union) has clearly not led to peace and stability. It is doubtful if simple Irish unity would at this stage solve the problem. The Forum should try to put forward a model (or models) which would take account of the two views on sovereignty. Some of which came to mind are:

- (i) A Federal Ireland - allowing for central Government with few powers, strong governments in Dublin and Belfast (perhaps with separate police authorities) and some way of providing an outlet for the Britishness of the majority in Northern Ireland. I doubt if joint citizenship would be enough.
- (ii) Joint Rule of Northern Ireland by London and Dublin
This has the merit of involving the Irish Government in ruling Northern Ireland. It would be very cumbersome administratively and all previous attempts at condominium have failed. It would not be impossible however given suitable determination on the part of both Governments. The Unionists would most likely oppose it, as might the republican paramilitaries. One possible way might be to take up Prior's idea of an American style executive in Northern Ireland on which would serve a representative or representatives of the Irish Government
- (iii) A package on Sunningdale lines envisaging a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland, some body to take account of an all-Ireland dimension and a body to take account of the Anglo-Irish dimension on which the British as well

as Northern and Southern politicians would be involved

3. The economic objective should be:

(i) to describe the economic cost to the South, North and Britain of the troubles. It should include not only quantifiable costs but should attempt to describe those which are not easily quantified.

e.g. lost tourist revenue

lost investment.

(ii) to describe the cost of the various constitutional models. One example which springs to mind would be the cost to the State of joint rule. If the British agreed to joint rule would the state be jointly responsible e.g. for Health and Social Welfare in Northern Ireland. Or would Britain continue to be responsible but with the money being paid through Dublin?

(iii) An attempt should be made to quantify the economic advantages which we believe would accrue were peace and stability to exist.

4. Church State relations

The State is seen as a sectarian Roman Catholic entity by an increasing number of Northern Protestants. The anti-abortion amendment controversy has not helped. The Forum must spell out how the fears of the Protestants would be rendered null and void in any new arrangement.

However it has also to be pointed out that Protestant clergymen in Northern Ireland and some Protestant institutions (e.g. the Orange Order) play a major role in Unionist politics and that this is one of the reasons why Catholics have been unable to accept the Northern state.

The Government should set as its objective in the area of Church-State relations a situation which would be common to both North and South. To bolster Protestant intransigence in Northern Ireland while preserving Catholic purity in the South must surely be unacceptable. What is being sought is a meeting of minds within

the North and within the island. This will involve harsh decisions in the area of the Irish Constitution including e.g. divorce, contraception and the idea of the family.

This is not to say that the objective should be to produce a secular society. Far from it. The purpose should be to ensure that non-Catholic concerns play a more important part than heretofore in the South and non-Protestant concerns likewise in the North.

5. The definition of Irishness should try to highlight those elements of Irishness which are deemed to be common to Irishmen of all traditions. It should not deny the differences between Irishmen. It could usefully explore some of the social and educational areas where such differences exist, e.g. education, sport and language.

6. The Government's objective should be to describe those elements which foster division on this island, emphasising those over which we have control and can do something about, and to propose a solution or solutions which will unlock the stamete and start the dialogue. The role of the British Government will be crucial here. The best chance of moving that Government is for the Forum to put forward imaginative proposals designed to meet ^{the} needs of the different participants to the problem. If the proposals are sufficiently imaginative they will attract support in the British media and in influential circles in Britain which will be an encouragement to the British Government to act. They might also attract considerable support among thinking unionists.

This is not to state that we should abandon our aspiration to Irish unity. If our position is that Irish unity can only be arrived at by consent then the proposals should be seen as trying to create conditions in which that consent is most likely to be forthcoming.