

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Department of Modern History

## The Queen's University of Belfast

Belfast BT7 1NN Northern Ireland

Telex 74487

D. W. Harkness  
Professor of Irish History

Telephone 45133 Ext. 3424

3 June 1983

*cc'd Wm Liller  
+ Alex Burke*

*13/1*

Dear Dr O hEocha,

'No paper safeguards could protect [us] against maladministration' (from Dublin)  
James Craig to David Lloyd George, Nov.1921 (Cmd 1561, p.6)

This submission is made to the Forum out of respect for the sincerity of John Hume's effort to find a role for the North's minority community, and because, as a student of Unionism, I feel able to make a few points which Unionists themselves may deem beneath their dignity to make. Why, after all, should Unionists respond to the spider which seeks to lure them into its den? They have no wish to be swallowed and no amount of soft talking could possibly alter the fact that the small Northern Ireland unit is much better placed attached to the large United Kingdom polity than it could ever be as part of a mere 32-county Ireland.

John Hume genuinely seeks to reassure Northern Unionists. He seeks a New Ireland that would guarantee them full religious freedom. Yet he makes a fundamental error in seeing them as Protestants rather than Unionists. It is their Britishness as a whole that Northern Unionists are determined to preserve. Part of this involves a religious context in which Roman Catholicism is not dominant. (Current debate in the Republic has made it perfectly clear that in a democracy the majority, which may embrace one denomination, has a right to have its ethos protected by, or reflected in, the law. Northern Protestants may agree but are not likely to volunteer themselves into a society in which they will be a minority.) But the religious factor is but part of the wider cultural heritage of Britishness which has infinitely more attraction to Unionists than the Gaelic and Roman Catholic Irishness which formed the basis for Irish separation from Westminster rule and which has been emphasised since. I do not believe that politicians in the Republic have the slightest idea how deeply unattractive their state is to Northern Unionists (and I would point out that this term includes a substantial body of non-Protestants).

This utter lack of attractiveness is strongly apparent in the economic and political sectors as in the religious and cultural. How can a 'failed economic entity' hold out attraction to Northern Ireland? Northern Ireland itself never was nor never pretended to be a viable economic entity. It is a regional part of the United Kingdom economy, and it makes little economic sense to detach N.I. from the larger U.K. and attach it to a struggling, peripheral, smaller unit of doubtful economic viability. Ireland is in trouble, north and south. Rational economic argument could be developed for the readmission of the Republic to the United Kingdom. This may be politically or emotionally unacceptable to the citizens of the 26 counties, but the idea that their irrational atavisms are sufficient reason to require Northern Unionists to throw in their lot with the Republic is preposterous.

The political record of independent Ireland holds no attraction to Unionists. Nothing beyond slogans of injured national right have been offered; no practical

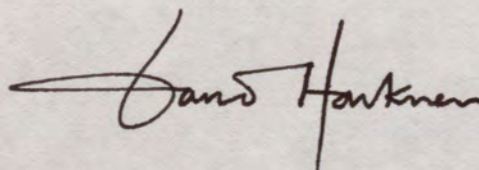
evidence of concern or understanding has been forthcoming in the past. Now the Forum does at last promise at least an awareness that the New Ireland would have to be very different from the present Ireland. (Maybe, however, the present Ireland will seem more attractive to its citizens than the New alternative. Personally I cannot see an iota of attractiveness in the North - only terrible problems - from the perspective of a citizen of the Republic.)

Perhaps as an historian I could add a further personal reflection that there has existed in this century a considerable number of untidy boundaries and unhappy minorities, cut off from the nation of their aspiration because human patterns have not readily conformed to geographical features. The northern minority is not unique, and coming to terms with this might be the basis of making a success of U.K. membership. Now that the mismanaged Stormont has gone and protective legislation has been enacted, the most likely scenario for peace and the greatest happiness of the greatest number may be the present arrangement, however unpalatable this might be to a few.

In my view the Forum should seriously consider this and then concentrate on wider structures, embracing these islands and the E.E.C., concepts of dual nationality, international freedom of movement, international co-operation in the supply of services (e.g. fuel and power) and the management of resources. The 'independent nation state' is an out-of-date concept and peace and neighbourliness within N.I. and between the Republic and the United Kingdom require much wider recognition of this and much wider discussion of the nurturing of a threatened global ecology - ocean resources, forests, minerals and food growing areas. Let the Forum recognise that no paper constitution for a New 32-county Ireland will be of the slightest interest in the North, and that co-operation in wider, trans-national enterprises, where neither Oraneness nor Greenness is relevant let alone triumphant, offers the best hope for the future. The most destructive outcome of the Forum's deliberations would be a dogged return to green nationalism. The most positive may well be a recognition of the irrelevance of 'independence' and a concentration on such matters as flexible citizenship, much wider economic co-operation rather than competition, and the peaceful cultivation of cultural diversity.

May your vitally important deliberations go well.

Yours sincerely,



Dr C. O hEocha,  
Chairman, New Ireland Forum,  
Dublin Castle, DUBLIN 2.

DWH/OJ