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I met at my request with the Rev. David Lapsley Minister of Fisherwick Presbyterian Church Belfast at his Office on 14 June. Mr. Lapsley's father was born in Co. Donegal and left there for Northern Ireland in 1922. A number of his Aunts were burned out of their houses at that time. Mr. Lapsley himself was a missionary in Jamaica for a number of years. He said that he had been very much in favour of a united Ireland, though his desire for such had waned in recent years due to the activities of the Provisional IRA. He does however think unity will come eventually. He said that the Forum is seen by Unionists as being established in opposition to the Assembly in Belfast. Like many of the other Presbyterians I met he would like to see the SDLP take its place in the Assembly. He said he thinks very highly of Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin and said he did not have much time for the present leadership of the SDLP which had lost the initiative to Provisional Sinn Fein. He was particularly mis trustful of Seamus Mallon. (His views were shared by most of the Protestants or dissenting clergymen I met).

In his view the decision to go ahead with a constitutional amendment to prohibit abortion had lessened the stature of the Taoiseach in Northern Ireland. This is not to say that the Presbyterian Church is in favour of abortion. On the contrary they are opposed to it but do not wish to see the prohibition of abortion included in the constitution. He added that there would be a reasonably large number of individual Presbyterian clergymen who are not opposed to the ammendment.

He confirmed information we are getting from elsewhere that the younger Presbyterian clergymen tend to be more hardline than the older ones. In his view this to some extent explained why the Presbyterian Assembly was held in Dublin this year. Some of his clergymen colleagues thought it more appropriate that it was in Dublin that they appealed to the Queen for stronger security measures and made unusually hard statements, about e.g. ecumenism.

He was worried about the size of the PSF vote in the Assembly elections and felt very strongly that it could not be explained away by personation.

I explained the purpose of the New Ireland Forum to him. He said that he was personally well disposed towards the South and towards the Forum. He did not think he would have time at this stage to write a paper but he would be prepared to give oral evidence to the Forum in the Autumn.

Dhc

D. Ó Ceallaigh 20 June 83