

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2013/100/1050
Creation Date(s):	6 November 1983
Extent and medium:	25 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.

WEEKEND WORLD

November 6, 1983

Northern Ireland.

A New Way Forward ?

Live interview with Sir Humphrey Atkins MP,
Brian Mawhinney MP and Peter Bottomley MP.

THIS TRANSCRIPT IS THE COPYRIGHT OF LONDON
WEEKEND TELEVISION WHO MUST BE CREDITED IF
ANY PART IS USED.

WEEKEND WORLD

6 November 1983

BRIAN WALDEN

Hello and good afternoon. The deadly bombs that exploded in Northern Ireland on Friday, and the killing of a policeman yesterday, reminded us once again of how the problems of that troubled province still refuse to go away.

Over the years, one plan after another has failed to produce a lasting peace. And they failed, on the whole, because of the rigid and unyielding attitudes adopted by all sides in the conflict.

Now, however, the Government of the Irish Republic hopes to tackle that very problem, and see whether a much more flexible approach might not at last break the deadlock and pave the way to a permanent solution.

Tomorrow, Garret Fitzgerald the Republic's prime minister, will be discussing his ideas, here in Britain with Mrs Thatcher.

Her response will be crucial in deciding the fate of his initiative.

So today we're going to try and work out what sort of proposal he might come up with, and ask what chance it has of success.

But first, let's hear the latest news headlines from ITN and Carol Barnes.

(ITN NEWS)

(BACK TO WEEKEND WORLD)

BRIAN WALDEN

More than anyone else, it's this man who now holds the key to the possibility of a permanent peace in the troubled province of Northern Ireland.

Dr. Garret Fitzgerald, the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, hopes to launch an initiative for an eventual final settlement.

BRIAN WALDEN (Continued)

And it's here, amid the rococco splendour of Dublin Castle, that the foundations of Dr. Fitzgerald's initiative are being laid.

Since last May, a body known as the New Ireland Forum, composed of politicians from all parties in the South and some from the North has been meeting regularly to work out specific proposals.

DR. GARRET FITZGERALD speaking to delegates

Today we begin a unique attempt to bring peace and stability to this Island by facing reality. The reality of the tragic and frightening crisis of Northern Ireland. This is a critical occasion for the future of all the people of our Island. I say this with the.....

BRIAN WALDEN

Dr. Fitzgerald's belief is that after 15 years of strife, and British failure to produce a solution in the North, the only route to peace may be for his country to change its stance on the issue.

The idea is that if the Forum can agree such a change, they might trigger a shift in the attitudes of the other two sides, the Protestant Unionists and the British, entrenched attitudes which have their routes 60 years in the past, and which for 60 years have obstructed a solution.

Right from the time that Irish Independence first became a real possibility, following the Dublin Easter Rising of 1916, Republican politicians had a clear idea of what they wanted that state to be like.

They were determined to realise the age-old dream of an independent and united Ireland.

Unfortunately for the leaders of 1916 like Eamon De Valera, though their aspirations were shared by most of Ireland's Catholics, they were emphatically rejected by another section of the population.

BRIAN WALDEN (Continued)

Ireland's Protestants, concentrated in Belfast and the North, were horrified by the idea of an Ireland separated from Britain.

They felt British, and were deeply repelled by the idea of being incorporated into an Irish state that had cut all links with Britain.

They feared they'd be swamped by the far more numerous Catholics, and that a Catholic State would force upon them a way of life they found odious.

So the Protestants, led by Sir Edward Carson, resolved to resist any attempt to impose independence on Ireland. And they made it plain that they would be prepared to fight and die in the cause.

On its own, the threat from Carson's Ulster Volunteer Force might not have deterred Catholics from themselves using force, to achieve independence for the entire country. But the republican politicians knew, that if they'd been tempted to do so, they would have faced an opponent far more powerful than the Protestants.

The British Government, led by David Lloyd George, had firmly committed itself to support the rights of the Protestants.

It believed that the British people sympathised with their fear that they would succumb to Catholic domination in an independent Ireland. And because of that Lloyd George was convinced that any violence between the communities would prove very damaging to his Government.

JOHN BOWMANAuthor'De Valera and the Ulster Question'

Well, Lloyd George's government was sure that Ulster would fight, that the Protestants would fight and that they would have wide public support in Britain. He also knew that if Britain were to stand aside and allow this to happen that public opinion would be outraged and this would seriously threaten his government.

BRIAN WALDEN

The result of the British Government's position was a compromise.

In 1921 Britain granted independence only to the South of Ireland, an area that was almost entirely Catholic to be ruled from Dublin. The North remained part of Britain. And in the North the Protestants who outnumbered Catholics by two to one were given as the best safeguard of their rights their own Parliament at Belfast, where they could rule in a permanent majority.

That settlement however was always rejected by the Republican leaders in Dublin. But over the next 50 years every attempt to change ran up hard against Protestant refusal, and the Protestants were supported by a British guarantee that they could remain part of Britain as long as a majority in the North wished it. So although no side softened its position, the government of the Republic came to recognise that unification was at best a remote possibility. To all intents and purposes it accepted the status quo.

JOHN BOWMAN

Author

'De Valera and the Ulster Question'

Well, for half a century after partition the situation was deadlock, what we had in a sense was a settlement but not a solution to the original question. The Unionists, the Protestants maintained not an inch, the South maintained its claim to the North, the British said they were neutral but were in fact supporting the Ulster Unionists. In time the South despite all the propaganda and all the rhetoric, settled back and allowed the situation to remain. They could only settle for a pious aspiration to Irish unity.

BRIAN WALDEN

In 1969, however, events took a turn which galvanised the Republic into far greater urgency over the North. Catholics in the Northern cities of Belfast and Londonderry took to the streets in protest against the widespread discrimination

BRIAN WALDEN (Continued)

they'd suffered and the two generations of Protestant rule. These marches came under direct attack from Protestant organisations and the street fighting sparked off a spiral of increasingly savage violence. Politicians witnessing these scenes from the Republic became deeply alarmed. For the spectacle of Catholics in the North coming under violent attack stirred public opinion in the South in a way it hadn't been stirred for generations. The strength of these feelings was driven home when in Dublin an angry mob burnt down the British Embassy. And the helplessness of the Irish authorities on this occasion made it absolutely plain how dangerous to them it could be if violence in the North were to get out of hand.

And what made this danger even more threatening was the fact a force had appeared on the scene in the North to organise and direct such violence.

In late 1969, the Provisional IRA emerged in the North to protect Catholics and with the ultimate aim of achieving Irish unification by any means whatsoever, even terrorism. And politicians in the South knew that this could have the most devastating repercussions for them.

JAMES DOWNEY

Author

'Them and Us: Britain & Ireland'

Politicians could see that the outbreak and continuation of violence in the North was bound to spill over into the Republic and they were appalled by the prospect. It is difficult to exaggerate how appalled, they could foresee bank robberies, murders of policemen, the fact that firearms which were very unusual were going to become available both for terrorist crimes and for ordinary crimes especially armed robberies, and they could see that this was going to have a quite appalling affect, first in straight money costs and secondly in the general impact on what had been a very stable, small, and relatively crime-free society in the republic.

BRIAN WALDEN

The government of the Irish Republic therefore, was desperate that events in the North should be damped down. Fortunately for them an answer seemed to be at hand. For the civil rights movement had given birth not only to the Provisionals, but also to a new Catholic party much more firmly placed in the political mainstream. Led by Gerry Fitt, a charismatic Labour leader, and an energetic former school teacher called John Hume, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, or SDLP, was explicitly committed to constitutional action and respected violence as a political instrument.

Jack Lynch, the then Prime Minister of the Republic decided to throw all the weight and influence of his government behind the SDLP, in the hope of preventing violence from taking deep root in the Catholic community of the North. For a time this policy looked like succeeding, but as every initiative for change collapsed in the face of Protestant opposition the influence of the SDLP began to wain.

Increasingly large sections of Catholic opinion came to the view that if they relied on the constitutional politicians they might wait a generation for redress of their grievances.

It was the death from starvation of a series of Republican prisoners on hunger strike in 1981 that brought home to politicians in the South just how seriously from their point of view the situation in the North had deteriorated. Among Catholics in the North who blame the deaths on the British refusal to grant the prisoners political status support for the Provisionals soared. And for the first time the Provisionals had prepared themselves to build on that support by developing their political wing, Provisional Sinn Fein.

The Irish Government regarded Sinn Fein and its leader Gerry Adams with the gravest apprehension. For Sinn Fein was militantly committed not only to Irish unification but also to revolutionary political change within the whole of Ireland.

And they began to make spectacular inroads into SDLP support amongst Catholics. Late last year elections were

BRIAN WALDEN (Continued)

held to a new Northern Ireland assembly, the latest attempt by Britain to find a constitutional solution. Sinn Fein scored resounding successes having already declared that they would boycott the assembly. And in the British general election last June they made yet further inroads into Catholic support.

In the constituency of West Belfast, Gerry Adams scored a spectacular victory over the legendary Gerry Fitt. A courageous advocate of non-violent politics. And in the Province as a whole Sinn Fein supporters learned that they'd won 42% of the Catholic vote. In the eyes of many observers Sinn Fein looked set to wipe the SDLP off the political map and from the point of view of the South, the North looked set to plunge into what, for them, looked likely to be the most dangerous period of instability yet seen.

JAMES DOWNEY

The Government and the political parties here were just appalled by the situation as they then saw it in the North. They've seen the Provos taking 10 per cent of the total vote in the Assembly elections, or say roughly one third of the total Catholic vote. They feared the SDLP, the greatest force as they saw it for stability and moderation, being chipped away by the Sinn Fein vote and the Catholic community in the North being delivered, as they saw it, into the hands of gunmen and obviously this created the fear that so much instability would arise out of it that would engulf politics on the entire island.

BRIAN WALDEN

So for Dr. Garret Fitzgerald, who'd taken over as Irish Prime Minister in November 1982, it became increasingly clear that something had to be done urgently to reverse the tide of events in Northern Ireland. What was not so immediately clear to Dr. Fitzgerald was exactly what could be done. To resolve the problem he turned to a proposal from John Hume, who for some time had been talking to all politicians in the South about a plan to rescue the SDLP which he now led. Hume had become convinced that the only hope lay in quickly finding a permanent solution to the problems of the North and he argued to Dr. Fitzgerald that if the Protestant opposition

that had destroyed all previous initiatives was ever to be overcome, the Irish Government would have to rethink their whole position. Specifically to calm Protestant fears, the Irish Government would have to be willing to settle for less than the full unification of Ireland they'd always sought. For Dr. Fitzgerald such an idea posed an immense challenge. For it had always been assumed that the commitment to reunification was deeply embedded in the national psychology of the Irish people. Any shift from that commitment could be expected to provoke serious political backlash, but despite that risk Garret Fitzgerald decided to pursue John Hume's plan. And he's done so not only because he believes the danger for the North is too great to ignore, it's always because he believes he's detected a powerful undercurrent of change in the minds of the Irish that might, for the first time, allow an Irish Government to argue for less than the full traditional claim on the North.

To try to judge the 'new mood' among the Irish people 'Weekend World' went last week to Ireland, and to the Parliamentary constituency of Dublin North East. The constituency is centred on the small town of Howth, on Ireland's East coast. It's a mixed area, where middle class villas dominate the sea front, but where inland there are a number of working class estates. The constituency has some light industry, and on the rural fringes there are beef and dairy farms. It's a quiet place and its inhabitants would like to keep it that way, but in recent years the people here have become increasingly concerned about the fall-out from the violent conflict in Northern Ireland. Maurice Manning, who represents Dublin North East in the Irish Parliament has been left in no doubt by his electors of the extent of their concern. It's been made plain to him that they, like Garret Fitzgerald, are coming to the view that a solution has to be found.

MAURICE MANNING, MEMBER OF IRISH PARLIAMENT, DUBLIN NORTH EAST

There's no doubt that very many people round here are deeply worried by what they see in the North. They see the breakdown of the political system there, they see the growing trouble, continuing trouble, they see this spilling over into the Republic and they've seen some of it already. And it's the realisation of how bad things are and how much worse they may become which has brought about a pretty dramatic change of attitude down here over the past year or two and it's this realisation, I think, which has brought about a new sense of urgency - people want to see a solution and they want to see it soon.

BRIAN WALDEN

Until recently, however, the inhabitants of Howth have only seen one way forward to a solution of the Northern Ireland problem and that's by the age old way of persuading the British to withdraw from the North and to incorporate it permanently into the Irish Republic. It's a view that Pearse McLoughlin, a fisherman and long-time local resident, expresses forcefully.

PEARSE McLOUGHLIN

The only real solution to the problems of Ireland are its reunification, that is the essential. There can be no peace in the nation until there is freedom, until the British leave our isle there cannot and never will be peace in the nation.

BRIAN WALDEN

Diehard sentiments like that, however, no longer represent the consensus in Howth they once did. Here at the regular meetings that MP Maurice Manning holds with his constituency activists many now feel that the time has come for a revision of the traditional objective. They feel that the chance of Protestants accepting unification is so remote, that Ireland must set its sights lower if the threat of Northern violence overflowing into the South is to be removed.

PRAGMATIC ACTIVIST

We must look genuinely at the Protestants and seek their agreement and see that they want. Find out their feelings and their attitudes in all these things and tolerate those things, and along with that we should also look at the fact that now for 60 years we have looked at, you know, the re-unification of Ireland, a 32-county Republic. I think it's time now, and urgently it should be looked at too, is at another alternative to the 32-county Republic.

BRIAN WALDEN

Argueents like that, of course, clash directly with those of the Traditionalists, who minimise the risks of violence and argue that it's a risk worth taking. But Pragmatists now believe that for a series of reasons they can argue to the people of Howth that not only is unification a pipe-dream, but an eventually re-unified Ireland would bring with it a whole crop of new problems. They point, for instance, to the enormous strains it would place on the Irish economy. It's already suffered greatly from recession and is severely depressed. While the Northern economy is suffering too, it's receiving aid from Britain to the tune of one thousand million pounds a year. For the south to cancel that aid in a unified Ireland would cause immense protest in the north. To take over payment of it, however, would produce immense strains in the south. People in Dublin North-East already struggling to make ends meet, might have to pay as much as an extra thousand pounds a year in taxes to meet the bill. For Tom Egan, who farms on the fringe of the constituency, that could signal near ruin.

TOM EGAN

I would say that we Irish farmers, if we had to pay more money, we would be completely out of business. It's very hard as it is, when you have to pay big high veterinary bills, pay for the thirty-day test, buy artificial, pay contractors to do some of your work, say such as silage which is a long drawn out job, it takes a long long time and it takes more labour, it takes more tractors, and it costs a hell of a lot more, so if it were another thousand pounds to us farmers, we could not afford it.

BRIAN WALDEN

It's possible, of course, that an outside agency like the Common Market might step in and help the Dublin government meet the cost of supporting the North. But the argument of the Pragmatist doesn't stop with the economy. There are political ways in which unification might disrupt the quiet lives of people in Howth. In the view of many, the transformation of Sinn Fein from a threat across the border to a force within the land, could be highly disruptive. Eugene McEldowney is a journalist living in the constituency.

EUGENE McELDOWNNEY

Well, Sinn Fein has said repeatedly that it's policy is not just simply a united Ireland and the removal of the British presence. They've made it quite clear on a number of occasions in all their policy documents that they are pressing forward in the ultimate for a socialist Ireland, a socialist Republic. Now obviously it's not going to be easy to switch off violence just like a tap if the British were to leave, I think there would be a residue of violence, and I think given the volatile conditions we have here with high unemployment and so on, you would have an ideal situation for the tender, the fuel if you like, to press on for this socialist revolution which I think would frighten a lot of people around here.

BRIAN WALDEN

But it's religion that gives rise to the greatest misgivings in the minds of the people of Howth about the cohesion of a unified Irish Republic. The hundreds of people who packed the Church of the Assumption last Sunday morning, like millions of others in the Irish Republic, are devout Catholics, and in recent months they've been reminded of how deeply they differ from the Protestants in the north. It was the Catholic Church in the Republic, who last year pursued a campaign to change the Irish constitution so as to make abortion not merely illegal, but unconstitutional.

And in the referendum that followed, the amendment was overwhelmingly endorsed. For many in Howth, the lesson of that vote was not lost. It indicated to them just how deeply entrenched were Catholic social attitudes, and it held out the prospect of a continuing and deeply divisive controversy over social issues if Protestant law and Catholic south were ever to be united. But for all the signs of changing mood in Howth, it's clear that the shift at this stage is limited and hesitant. There remains a deep strain of traditional Republicanism in most Irish people that won't disappear quickly. And while more and more people would accept a measure of concession to Protestant fears, too many concessions would deter them and might lead them back into the camp of the hard-liners.

MAURICE MANNING.

There is, without doubt, a new mood of pragmatism but it's very finely poised against the traditional commitments to unification. The problem is that if the politicians get too far ahead of the people on this, or if they try to force people into abandoning the idea of unification, that there could be a reaction, but the mood could change very easily, and the result could well be a hardening of attitudes back into the idea of unification.

BRIAN WALDEN

So at least as far as one constituency is concerned, Dr Fitzgerald's hope that Irish opinion may be on the move seems to be borne out. And what's more, it seems likely that this shift is not confined to North East Dublin. There's increasing evidence now to show that across the country the same change, though still capable of swinging back, is underway. But because public opinion in the Republic still remains so volatile, Garret Fitzgerald knows that for any proposal he may advance he requires a consensus of support across the whole Irish political spectrum. For it's only by keeping all the major political leaders with him that he can avoid the danger of a nationalist backlash. And he knows also that neither the Protestants, nor the British, will take seriously any plan that emerges from only one party.

BRENDAN KEENAN - Irish Correspondent 'Financial Times'

Consensus is vital for any plan because unless Fitzgerald can win cross-party support, neither the British government nor the unionists will believe that the whole people of the south are behind the initiative, and there would always be the fear that if and when he loses office, the government that comes in will tear up that plan and probably go back to the old Irish claim.

BRIAN WALDEN

It's at the New Ireland Forum at Dublin Castle that Dr Fitzgerald is trying to build the consensus he needs. And a confidential document obtained by Weekend World, describing the basic aims of the Forum, makes plain that the Republic is serious about compromise. It states: 'The Forum must be prepared to consider all options, including those which have hitherto not been examined, once they meet the criteria of pragmatism, durability and justice.' Garret Fitzgerald has already scored a considerable success, given the Forum's firm commitment to flexibility. That's because Charles Haughey, leader of the opposition Fianna Fail Party and the most traditionally Republican of Ireland's political leaders, has agreed to take part. The agreement of Mr Haughey to attend the Forum, however, has by no means guaranteed Mr Fitzgerald a smooth ride. Mr Haughey as the guardian of the ark of pure Republicanism is keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings. It's the difficult task of the Forum to come up with practical proposals for the future government of Ireland. They'll need to make sufficient concessions to tempt the Protestants and the British, whilst at the same time not making so many as to provoke Mr Haughey because, if antagonised, he might walk out and rally traditional Republican sentiment against any plan. The Forum is expected to conclude its work next March, but its likely outcome is already emerging. It's widely assumed that to cater for the broad range of opinion within it the Forum will probably produce more than one recommendation, all designed in one way or another to reassure the Protestants.

BRIAN WALDEN (contd.)

Unification is still likely to feature as one of the Forum's proposals. It's likely to be accompanied, however, by a range of guarantees to safeguard the rights of Protestants. This proposal is likely to arise mainly as a result of pressure from hard-line opinion within the Forum. And while it undoubtedly wouldn't alarm Catholics in the south that too much was being conceded, it would almost certainly prove totally unacceptable to the Protestants. They would be deprived of what they regard as their lifeline, the link with Britain, and any British government would undoubtedly accept their objections as valid. Because of this, the Forum is likely to produce another option. A Federal solution is likely to be the Forum's second main proposal. It's one that goes somewhat further than the first towards meeting Protestant demands. Essentially, Federalism would mean that Northern Ireland would have a considerable degree of self-rule within an all Irish federation. This should ease some Protestant fears of being swamped, but as with unification it would entail ending forever the link with Britain. It's an idea that's been mooted and rejected before, and it would be almost certain to be rejected again. It's joint sovereignty, a new idea, that's likely to be the Forum's third and final proposal. And it's the one which involves making the biggest concessions to the Protestants. The notion that underlies joint sovereignty is that instead of either Britain or the Irish Republic controlling the North, control would be shared between the two. To suggest such a scheme would be a radical break with the past for the Irish Republic. It would indicate an unprecedented willingness to compromise, and it's the only option that hasn't already been rejected in the past. Because of this, and because of the shift of public opinion in the Republic, it's now believed that a broad concensus could be rallied behind such a proposal and as a result, this is likely to be the option which the Irish government will push for in negotiations.

FERGUS PYLE - Political Writer 'Irish Times'

I don't believe it will be easy to get cross party support for joint sovereignty and there will be an awful lot of argument and discussion behind the scenes about it, but in the end I think all the parties have got a vested interest in some kind of agreement and there will be sufficient support among

FERGUS PYLE (contd.)

them to make a viable offer, and the joint sovereignty will be agreed and the government will be able to make it into its offer.

BRIAN WALDEN

There's no firm definition of precisely how joint sovereignty would operate. Indeed, it could be set up in a number of ways. Models for joint sovereignty that exist in other parts of the world couldn't easily be applied to Northern Ireland. So we've tried to work out how it might be developed in order to satisfy the aspirations and to allay the fears of both Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. The first step would be to agree that all the inhabitants of Northern Ireland could be citizens of both Britain and Ireland. This would enable the Protestants to retain their cherished links with Britain, whilst guaranteeing that the Catholics gets what they've always wanted - citizenship of the Republic. The next step would be to set up a local assembly in Northern Ireland which would be responsible for day-to-day administration. Everyone in the North could vote for this assembly, but because there are more Protestants than Catholics, the Protestants would be in control. But to allay the fears of the Catholics about this Protestant majority, there would be another level of government to which the government would be responsible. This council would consist of members drawn equally from the British Parliament, the Irish Parliament and the Northern Irish Assembly. It would take over the functions currently exercised by the Westminster Parliament, such as law and order. Over both these bodies would be an Anglo-Irish Executive which would be responsible for the formulation and direction of policy. This would be composed of equal numbers of minister from Britain and Ireland. It's the division of this Executive between Britain and Ireland which would embody the principal of joint sovereignty, and could cement the allegiance of both Protestants and Catholics to the new political arrangements. So joint sovereignty could solve a number of the historic problems besetting Northern Ireland.

BRIAN WALDEN (contd.)

To begin with, both Catholics and Protestants would be guaranteed, in perpetuity, the citizenship of the country to which they feel the strongest allegiance. And neither community could achieve ascendancy over the other in the daily life of the Province. Beyond that, other benefits might emerge. Because the institutions are seen to be fair, the administration of law and order and justice, for instance, might be much more widely accepted. Catholics in the North would probably accept joint sovereignty, because it so explicitly recognises their Irish identity. However, for all the apparent safeguards that it could offer to the Unionists, their response is unlikely to be welcoming. They've maintained firmly over the year that they would resist any change in the status of the union between Britain and Northern Ireland. And despite the efforts of the Irish government to meet their fears, joint sovereignty would almost certainly hit the same solid wall of rejection as other attempts at compromise in the past.

BARRY WHITE - Leader Writer 'Belfast Telegraph'

Well there would be a very hostile and violent reaction from Protestants to the idea of joint sovereignty. It's something that would unite all factions from the extremist right through to the moderates. It would be seen as a betrayal of the Unionist constitutional position, a severing of the guarantee which the majority now has, a guarantee of their position within the UK. So that one could see a uniting off all factions and a resistance to this at all costs.

BRIAN WALDEN

Sentiments like that might be expected to make Garret Fitzgerald give up the whole enterprise right now. But almost certainly, he's never had any high hopes of immediately encouraging response from the Unionists. And indeed he's not directing his arguments primarily at them, he's directing them at their guarantors - the British Government. He hopes that a joint sovereignty proposal might be enough to get the British to use their undoubted pressure to persuade the Protestant Unionists to fall in line, and Dr Fitzgerald's meeting with Mrs Thatcher tomorrow is a vital first step in the process.

BRIAN WALDEN (contd.)

But on the face of it it's likely to seem very risky to the British government even to think of doing as Dr Fitzgerald might wish, and try to compel the Unionists to accept joint sovereignty. After all, for over sixty years the Protestant Unionists have held out a grim threat to Britain. They've always made it clear that they're willing to fight to defend what they see as their essential freedoms. But with the safeguards offered to them by a plan for joint sovereignty, Britain might hope that that threat may diminish-with some Protestants at least, recognising it as a reasonable offer. Others, however, might still be willing to take to the streets to resist with force any change in their present status, and the British government will never be absolutely certain how genuine is the threat. It's a nasty risk to have to take.

BRENDAN KEENAN

The threat that the Protestants might fight, the Protestant backlash, has been at the back of the minds of successive British governments in all their dealings in Northern Ireland. In the past, British governments have chosen not to test the will of the Unionists and have given way when confrontation with their community seemed likely. And there's no doubt that if joint sovereignty were to be imposed on them significant Protestants might fight, and if that were to happen the bloodshed could be very serious indeed.

BRIAN WALDEN

Mrs Thatcher may conclude that the risk of Protestant violence is enough to justify rejecting Garret Fitzgerald's approaches. But she's not likely to do so hastily, for Dr Fitzgerald could argue that other vital considerations should be set against it. There could be important benefits for the British, in Dr Fitzgerald's view, in going along with his plan and trying to introduce joint sovereignty. To begin with, Britain's basic concern for the Protestants should be satisfied by the guarantee of their link with Britain. And beyond that, advantages would lie in a calming of the increasingly violent tensions of the law. Those tensions, according to a report published last week by the Forum, have cost the British tax payer nine billion pounds since 1969.

BRIAN WALDEN (contd.)

What's more, the ever-present bombing threat that the IRA poses to the people of Britain could recede, and the deaths of British soldiers protecting what might come to be seen as the unreasonable demands of intransigent Protestants, would cease and the troops could be brought home. To have been responsible for all that would be a major political triumph for a British prime minister.

JOHN DESBOROUGH - Chief Political Correspondent 'Daily Mirror'

There must be enormous attraction for the Prime Minister in accepting a proposal for joint sovereignty, it could hold out the hope of bringing peace, stability and a return to normal life to Northern Ireland. After all, governments over many years have sought to bring back Northern Ireland to a normal way of life, and to take the violence off the streets. They have failed, and if such a proposal could bring peace to Northern Ireland, what a fantastic political and personal triumph that would be for any prime minister.

BRIAN WALDEN

So Mrs Thatcher, as she contemplates her choices, will be engaged in a very complex exercise of weighing risks against benefits. But however difficult she finds her predicament, she'll have to give some indication of how she feels when she meets Dr Fitzgerald tomorrow. That's because Dr Fitzgerald, given the risks he's taking in the face of Republican opinion at home, urgently needs signs of encouragement from Britain to protect the work of the Forum from political attack. It's already becoming clear than many Irish politicians don't share Dr Fitzgerald's optimism that the British government will address the issues constructively. Only three days ago, Charles Haughey attacked the summit as a waste of time in the light of known British policy. So if Dr Fitzgerald can take home with him no encouragement from Mrs Thatcher, the traditionalists in Ireland could desert the Forum and wreck the whole enterprise. So if Britain has any interest in a settlement along the lines likely to emerge in the Forum, Mrs Thatcher will have to indicate now to Dr Fitzgerald just how willing she might be to deal with Unionist opposition. So what should Mrs Thatcher do?

BRIAN WALDEN (contd.)

With me in the studio today, I have three influential Tory back-benchers who take a particular interest in Ireland. Brian Mawhinney, who represents Peterborough, Peter Bottomley, the MP for Eltham and Sir Humphrey Atkins, MP for Spelthorne, who was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from 1979 to 1981.

We'll be back in a moment to hear what they have to say.

END OF PART ONE

BRIAN WALDEN

Mr. Bottomley it seems likely that the new Ireland Forum is going to suggest joint Sovereignty as a possible solution to the terrible problems of Northern Ireland and if they do it seems very likely that the government of the Republic will press that option. Do you think the British Government ought to accept that option?

PETER BOTTOMLEY, MP

I think they ought to be willing to accept anything in the long term so long as we're left with the acceptance of the constitutional position, which most people know, and that what's going on in Northern Ireland at the moment must continue - which is to try to get 15 years of peace because if there's going to be any progress at all it requires the Republic to say we will have no part of supporting violence, we don't want to get reunification against the wishes of the majority. So I think it's better for the British Government not to say instantly yes we accept or no we don't accept but to try to build the East-West relationship between London and Dublin and get an understanding on the conditions which make even joint-sovereignty possible.

BRIAN WALDEN

But with that reservation basically you rather favour the idea, don't you?

PETER BOTTOMLEY, MP

I favour allowing the people in the South to express their view that they don't want to see forced reunification. And I also look forward to not having instant solutions, but consideration of all sorts of alternatives so the confidence can build up that no one feels they're going to be hijacked one way or another.

BRIAN WALDEN

Mr. Mawhinney how do you react to the proposal of joint sovereignty?

BRIAN MAWHINNEY, MP

Well, I welcome the fact that the people in the Republic are re-thinking their position. That has got to be encouraging. I have a suspicion though about people setting goals. Ireland is preoccupied with goals, rather than with the politics of day to day living and the economy and security, and I believe that the way forward is to seek acquiescence rather than agreement. You can't have agreement on grand political designs which are mutually exclusive and I believe it's important that the government in the South and the British Government should look for small areas of

mutual vested interest where they can work together perhaps putting a little pressure on both parties in the North to see it that way and build from the bottom up, rather than from the top down.

BRIAN WALDEN

But as I understand Southern, indeed Catholic sentiment in Ireland in general, they don't regard joint sovereignty as being mutually exclusive. They think that it gives both communities in Ireland a chance to have the sort of sovereignty that they want. Now, have you no sympathy for that at all?

BRIAM MAWHINNEY, MP

Well, yes I'm entirely in favour of the people of Northern Ireland deciding which way they want to go constitutionally and of course they will do that under pressure from the Republic, as well as under pressure from Great Britain. But even having watched your excellent film I'm not quite sure what joint sovereignty means and again, joint sovereignty will work or will fail on the basis of how it affects the daily lives of the people. Who sets the taxes? At the time of the Falklands War, would the Irish Prime Minister or the British Prime Minister have been speaking for the people of Northern Ireland? It's at that level, at the day to day level, where things need to be built up and confidence established rather than setting these great goals. I don't rule out the goals. I think that we've got to build up from the bottom up.

BRIAN WALDEN

I see, so I take it then that you don't entirely rule this idea out but you're less sympathetic to it than, for instance, Mr. Bottomley was?

BRIAN MAWHINNEY, MP

My problem is that I don't really understand what it means.

BRIAN WALDEN

Alright. Sir Humphrey, how do you react to joint sovereignty?

SIR HUMPHREY ATKINS, MP

Well, I think the most fascinating thing in what we've seen this morning has been the evidence that Mr. Fitzgerald is approaching this problem in quite a different way. Er, he has recognised that it is necessary to persuade the people of the North that closer cooperation, even leading to joint sovereignty, is in their interests and that they should support it. Now, nobody's done that before - this is a great step forward. But I think what we have to remember is that joint sovereignty, or any of the other suggestions

put forward, means persuading the people of Northern Ireland that they're going to stop being part of the Kingdom. They've been part of this Kingdom for 400 years and they don't want to stop being part of this Kingdom. If they can be persuaded by somebody that it is in their interests to do so then the British Parliament wouldn't stand in their way - this is what we've always said. But there can be no possible question, I don't believe, of the Parliament of the United Kingdom saying to a number of citizens of this Kingdom we don't want you as full citizens any more.

BRIAN WALDEN

How would you react if the British Prime Minister, who after all will be talking to Garret Fitzgerald and has to give her recommendations to the British Parliament if there are going to be any recommendations, how would you react if she told you that she was thinking, well, I'm not a voter in the Irish Republic, it's not for me to interfere in their politics, but Garret Fitzgerald is a quite remarkable chap, it may well be that he's going to be the best Irish Prime Minister we're ever likely to deal with and if I can't do something to encourage and assist him then the violence in the North is just going to go on and on and on and on. Would you have any sympathy with that approach?

SIR HUMPHREY ATKINS, MP

Then what she ought to do in my view is what she's going already. Which is to establish and maintain the closest possible links with Dublin and to encourage every kind of cooperation between this country and the Republic. Cooperation on security is the most obvious one - it is in everybody's interests that we should get rid of terrorism, but there are wider things that we can do. I mean most recently there's been this er purchase of gas through a pipeline for the North of Ireland from the Republic and cross border cooperation of all kinds. If we can develop that and people can see that the North and South can live and work closely together this will be the most enormous benefit to everybody - what it would lead to in the long term I can't say, but it would be progress rather than the opposite.

BRIAN WALDEN

Granting that and granting because Mr. Mawhinney mentioned it as well, granting that it's all very fine to have this sort of co-operation, we can't just brush aside the political problem, can we? At this very moment, Garret Fitzgerald is on a tightrope with this, he faces a possible green backlash - now are you telling me that it is not wise for the British Government to do everything it possibly

can on the direct political issues, to assist the Irish Prime Minister at this stage?

SIR HUMPHREY ATKINS, MP

If that means trying to persuade the Protestants that they've got to leave the Kingdom the answer must be no, because that would be disastrous for everybody.

BRIAN WALDEN

Supposing it means trying to persuade the Protestants to accept for the North joint sovereignty?

SIR HUMPHREY ATKINS, MP

Again, what exactly does that mean? Brian Mawhinney put one or two questions to you, you produced a very ingenious erm possible way forward I don't know whether that is what is in mind. We must explore that a good deal more. But do bear in mind, we must always bear in mind, here are a large number of citizens of this Kingdom who want to stay citizens of this Kingdom. And you wouldn't like it if suddenly the British Government turned round and said to you oh, you're not going to be British anymore we're going to let somebody else rule half of you, you wouldn't be best pleased.

BRIAN WALDEN

Alright, now I come back to you Mr. Bottomley, because you had greater sympathy for this plan quite obviously than Sir Humphrey and we're back to it again you see and this is the problem I want to put to you. You see the difficulty, don't you? Directly any plan is brought up, including joint sovereignty, it comes up against the old, old story that the Protestants in the North will not have any change of any sort and that therefore we can't ask them to have that sort of change. Do you accept that as an all-time veto on any progress?

PETER BOTTOMLEY, MP

It's not a question of veto at all and this is where talk about guarantees doesn't help because everyone knows what the constitutional position is and what it'll remain and this is freely given consent. Let's look at the plan that may move towards joint sovereignty and I think it's a big mistake to go into too much detail during the next year or two even. The SDLP...

BRIAN WALDEN INTERRUPTS

You mean so that we can kid everybody...

PETER BOTTOMLEY, MP

No, not kid anybody at all, but build confidence. The SDLP can join the Northern Ireland assembly and they need to be told by the parties in the South to do that. Charles Haughey and his party in the South can wreck the New Ireland Forum and is quite likely to if he thinks it's to his advantage. Whether he does or doesn't, the people in the Republic must say we are not going to force people in Northern Ireland to face forced reunification. Once you could then get 15 years of peace and stability other things become possible. Of course, not only is Garret Fitzgerald perhaps one of the better Prime Ministers from our point of view, but from the Ulster Unionists point of view we've got one of the better Governments in London, so let's try to damp down the final solution to move to interim ones.

BRIAN WALDEN

But just very quickly Mr. Bottomley before I come to Mr. Mawhinney to ask him what will happen, it's all very well saying fifteen years of peace and stability, what we have had is fifteen years of absolute chaos, what's to say that we're not going to get another fifteen years of that?

PETER BOTTOMLEY, MP

Because people have seen that it hasn't got anyone anywhere.

BRIAN WALDEN

Sinn Fein haven't seen that, the Provisional IRA have not seen that, a lot of the Protestants in the North have not seen that Mr. Mawhinney, what do you think will in fact happen as opposed to what you were talking about should happen?

BRIAN MAWHINNEY, MP

I think one of the guarantees of continued violence is that people insist on talking about constitutional ends, rather than day to day life. They are mutually exclusive and you cannot get agreement around a table in advance. So you have got to look for those areas of mutual vested interest. Out of this quorum for example I see a possibility of the British Government trying to help in security for the South, SDLP and the Assembly...

BRIAN WALDEN

I must stop you there, unfortunately. And thank all of you gentlemen very much. Thank you very much.