

NEW IRELAND

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QUESTIONS FOR THE FORUM FOR A NEW IRELAND

1. It was agreed at the Secretary of State's meeting on 29 March that a note should be prepared on the difficult questions which the Forum for a New Ireland ought to consider, with suggestions as to how they might be fed into its deliberations. The proposal arose at the end of the meeting, and was not examined in any detail.

2. There are three preliminary considerations:

(i) Is the Forum likely to duck the difficult questions?

(ii) Will anything we might prompt have any impact on whether or not it does duck them?

(iii) Can we engage in any exercise of this kind without running the risk that things will be traced back to us?

3. At this stage we can give no certain answer on whether the Forum will face up to or duck the difficult questions. Some of its participants would like it to face them. It would very probably serve the interests of Dr Fitzgerald and of Mr Hume if the difficulties over moving towards a "new Ireland" - whatever that turns out to be - were recognised, both in relation to the significance of the views of the majority in Northern Ireland and to the impact on the Republic of some form of closer association with the North. If these difficulties are ducked then the field is more readily left open to those who believe solutions can best be sought between

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the two Governments in London and Dublin; to those who believe that unity will bring its own solutions; and to those who do not appreciate that unity (or progress to it) will require fundamental adjustments on both sides, or who think it can be achieved within the unitary framework of the Republic as it is at present constituted. Neither the SDLP's nor Fine Gael's interests would be served if that happened. Mr Hume is on the record as saying that he wants the Forum to demonstrate the need for basic thinking in the Republic. And everything we know of Dr Fitzgerald, including the way in which he launched the Forum, points in the same direction. Similarly, a number of people outside the Forum will have an interest in airing some of these issues; unionists may, for example, wish to ask how it is that their Britishness or ^{the} principle of self-determination are consistent with movement to a New Ireland, or how the Irish Exchequer could maintain the present level of public expenditure in Northern Ireland. / Professor Crick has already indicated his interest ^{can} in making a contribution, which/be relied on to be to the point. The Alliance Party will submit a paper. the meetings will be public and so subject to outside scrutiny. There will also be journalists and others; This all suggests that, even if some participants are not keen on addressing difficult questions, these questions will not at least pass unnoticed.

4. It might well be possible for us to articulate certain questions in a more pointed way than might otherwise happen, or to ensure that they are raised with due regard to underlying complexities. But even if we can do this, it does not follow that our activities will increase the chances of the questions actually being faced. The problem, if there is one, will not be failure at an intellectual

level to know that questions exist. It will be that, though the questions are recognised, they are not addressed. In the end the nature of the debate in the Forum will depend on factors outside our influence. Our arranging for new questions to be posed, or for existing ones to be sharpened, is not therefore likely to have any significant impact on the final outcome.

5. We should have to proceed with the greatest of caution if it was decided we should prompt questions. Of the various ways in which we might do it none are without risk that, at the very least, we were exposed to the charge of having put people up to do our work for us. For example, remarks by those backbench MPs whom we could trust might well be thought to be Government sponsored, the more so if they were made in a way which ensured they were heard. There are few journalists or others whom we could totally trust, or if they were of any stature and competence, who could successfully be fed questions. The nearer one gets to Dublin and the Forum, the greater the risks. These are not, moreover, risks which the Government could readily run. It would be quite counter to its stand so far if it were to be thought to have involved itself in this way, and would imply some interest in an exercise which - at face value - does not sit easily with its policy on Northern Ireland. There could be severe embarrassment in Northern Ireland and in the Republic with both unionists and nationalists if the Government was thought to have associated itself in this way with the Forum or (as the case may be) to have meddled in it. If the Government was seen to have intervened it could be accused of interfering in internal Irish politics, given that the Forum may well expose basic differences between the Irish parties.

Conclusion

6. These considerations point to our warning Ministers of the limited value of pursuing this idea, and of its risks to them. They might, as a minimum, be advised to see how the Forum's discussions develop before contemplating anything of this kind so that any decision was grounded on knowledge of what questions had been aired rather than on speculation about whether they would arise.

7. Even if this conclusion is found acceptable it may be felt that advice should indicate some questions and methods of prompting them, so that Ministers can reach a view against an understanding of the alternatives. To that end, some examples are set out in the annex. Leaving aside the varying risks involved, these examples show that most methods of prompting questions will not lead, as the remit from the Secretary of State's meeting suggested, to their being fed into the deliberations of the Forum. They would rather have to be raised in some public way in the hope that the members of the Forum would notice them.

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SOME POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. What degree of autonomy for the North could be tolerated in a new Ireland, and what would be necessary; what would the implications of it be for other areas of the present Republic and for the existing constitutional structure?
2. What adjustments would be needed in the constitution, law and practices of government at all levels to reflect the fact that one-fifth of the population would be Protestant?
3. What would be the impact of a new association with the North on the economy of the South, the taxable wealth of Ireland as a whole and the demands on an all-Ireland Exchequer; could (or should) present levels of public services in the North be maintained; if their maintenance (with or without a general levelling) required subsidy from elsewhere, how would that subsidy be consistent with independence from other countries, and how would it effect relations with the UK in particular?
4. What tangible safeguards can be offered to those in the North who, in any form of new association, might feel their religion /identity /loyalties were under threat and whose consent would be forthcoming only if there were seen to be of substance?
5. What would be (would have to be) the impact of a new association with the North on the sense of Irishness of institutions in the present Republic, and the ways in which it is manifested; what

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changes would be needed to accommodate the fact that the Irishness was not shared by one-fifth of the population; similarly, what changes would be required in practices which reflected a sense of Irishness (eg teaching of Irish language and history)?

6. What links are envisaged with the United Kingdom either for the whole of the "New Ireland" or for Northern Ireland alone within that "New Ireland": (possibilities range from Ireland rejoining the Commonwealth to some kind of UK right to be consulted, in the converse of a strengthened Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council, about Northern Irish affairs); are these consistent with Irish sovereignty and neutrality, bearing in mind the difficulties posed for the Irish by any common defence arrangements even though such arrangements might well be seen as one expression of the Britishness of unionists?

7. Since there is no sign that the majority of the people of Northern Ireland are ready in the foreseeable future to give their consent to a united Ireland, what can be done to create a new relationship between North and South which goes as far as possible to meet Nationalist aspirations while recognising that reality?

8. In a "New Ireland" how would internal security be managed in the North; how far could the present South accept autonomy for the Security Forces in the North in dealing with violence within the nationalist community; conversely, what degree of autonomy would the North expect?

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METHODS OF RAISING QUESTIONS

1. No purpose is likely to be served, and severe risks would be run, if approaches were made to those actually participating in the Forum. The Forum will however be exposed to influence by:

(i) those who, while not participating, offer views to it, or to the world at large with the intention that the Forum should hear; and

(ii) the press, in addition to any report of (i).

2. In category (i): academics and other commentators from the UK and Ireland (there are many who have given extensive thought to these very questions - eg Crick and Rose in the UK, Lyons, Gibson in Ireland) who could offer views to the Forum or write serious pieces for journals or the press. Insofar as outlets are limited thought could be given to whether a symposium or conference might be held eg by BIA or at TCD - in Ireland would be better - of people of this kind. Would it be possible to encourage the setting up of an informal "think tank" of such people?

MPs who might be encouraged to speak out; non-Conservative MPs might be more readily listened to, and would carry less risk for Government.

3. In category (ii): the scope for prompting journalists who can be trusted and who will be listened to (? leader in the Guardian or Times) is probably limited, but some could no doubt be identified. Those who will be disposed to raise them may well not need or be ready to be pushed, eg Dr O'Brien. We could explore the chances of encouraging something overseas (in an organ which might carry weight in the Republic, as an English paper might not, but the scope would be small and the danger substantial.