

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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1. In its "News Focus" page, the "Irish Times" on June 6, 7, 8 and 9 devoted the whole of that page to an analysis of the Northern situation since 1968. The former northern editors of that newspaper who reported events for most of that period were given a page each for each day the analysis lasted. Fergus Fyle covered the 1968-71 period. He was followed by Henry Kelly who covered the 1971-72 period and then by Renagh Holohan for 1972-73 and finally by Conor O'Clery who surveyed the situation from 1973-76.
2. This particular feature covered a representative range of political and ecclesiastical opinion-formers, such as John Robb of the New Ulster Movement, John Laird, an ex-OUP MP in the old Stormont Parliament, Bill Craig, former Home Affairs Minister in the Stormont Parliament era, Austin Currie of the SDLP, the Catholic Bishop of Derry, Most Rev. Dr. Edward Daly and the Rev. William Arlow of the Irish Council of Churches.
3. The mood of recollection which this series of articles evoked found an echo on the ITN "Weekend World" programme which was broadcast on 11 June at 12.00 noon. It was jointly presented by Brian Walden and Mary Holland, formerly of RTE's "The Politics Programme". Extensive use of old news reels was made to help the viewer recollect the major events in the North since the outbreak of disturbances there, though particular scenes did not necessarily harmonise with Mr. Walden's chronological narration of events as they occurred over the past decade. Nonetheless, the narration was impartial. Mr. Walden at the end of his introductory narrative explained that the object behind the current review was to find out "just where Northern Ireland Protestants and Catholics stand at the moment".
4. The programme was divided into two sections. The first dealt with the effects that the disturbances of the last decade have had on the Protestant and Catholic communities of Belfast. The second was an investigation into the possibility of a political solution being found which would find overall acceptance.



Possibilities such as an independent Ulster and federalism were discussed. An account of these discussions is given further on in this paper. Ms. Holland interviewed all the persons who participated in the programme and all interviews were filmed and taped, it seemed, in Northern Ireland.

5. Ms. Holland's story commenced with the congregants of Duncairn Presbyterian Church gathering for their usual Sunday service. This area is described as being near the New Lodge area of North Belfast and most of those going to worship had once lived there but now only return every Sunday to attend service. The congregants, the viewers were told, had fled from the area during the upsurge of violence in the early seventies and had become increasingly alarmed by the growing Catholic presence there. The narrator explained that the British Army have always viewed the New Lodge area as a Republican "stronghold". At this stage the local Westminster MP for the area, Mr. John Carson (OUP), was interviewed. He described to the interviewer that he had owned a shop in the Duncairn Gardens which had been destroyed by a bomb explosion which he explained was the work of the PIRA. He also pinpointed other shops nearby which had suffered a similar fate.

6. At the end of the service two congregants, Joseph and Carolina Mills, are filmed making "a rare and brief visit to their old home" in the New Lodge which they vacated for a new home in the Seaview area further to the north of Belfast. Mr. and Mrs. Mills, the narrator explains, lived in the New Lodge for 34 years but because of the "tension", so explained Mr. Mills, they decided to leave.

7. The film account then latches off to cover briefly a Protestant crowd protesting about housing and the Housing Executive last week. The local Presbyterian Minister is to be seen taking part. This Ms. Holland laces with a comment regarding the "high handed way" in which the British Government has treated them since the advent of Direct Rule. Mr. Mills is then shown in his home commenting on what he thinks about that Government and refers to the abolition of Stormont, the disbandment of the 'Specials' and the disarming of the RUC as leaving his people "naked".



8. The question of a devolved government for Northern Ireland is then discussed with Mr. Carson in an interview Ms. Holland has with him, prefacing it by saying that to many a locally elected parliament running everything is not feasible in the foreseeable future. Mr. Carson said "he would like to see" a devolved government.

9. Breaking away temporarily from the interview, Ms. Holland refers to Protestant "satisfaction" with improvements in the security situation and to promised increased representation in Westminster. She suggests that to some Unionist politicians "total assimilation might be the best way forward" and that if the link with Britain were strengthened they might be prepared to abandon local control over their local affairs. She adds, however, that local feelings on the subject are "complex". Mr. Carson does agree, in the interview, that "anything that would bring us closer to the United Kingdom" would be "very welcome for Northern Ireland".

10. Ms. Holland then refers to "a certain satisfaction" among Protestants that they have resisted a power-sharing executive and a Council of Ireland which opened the possibility of increased links with the Republic. This comment is given credence when Mr. Carson refers to his party pledging they "wouldn't share power with people who are prepared to see an end to the Union and those type of people who are calling for power-sharing". This he instanced as being "the SDLP" whom he said are bent on "the destruction of the Union with Great Britain."

11. The film account at this stage turned to New Lodge today which was described as "a traditional Republican stronghold" and which has seen the fortunes of the PIRA rise and descend but despite this, the narrator said, they "have maintained a presence over the last 10 years". The attacks on the British Army there now have decreased but the amount of persistent surveillance of the population by means of census and the use of sophisticated electronic gadgetry are, the narrator said, irritants to even moderate Catholic opinion there.



12. Like the Mills of Seaview, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Mayers were the New Lodge family that were interviewed. The viewer was told that this family live in the same street from which the Mills had to leave. Mr. Mayers was considered as one of the lucky ones in that he had a job at the docks which is near his home. His area is one in which unemployment is high. Mr. Mayers is shown reading a portion of the Epistles at mass in St. Patrick's Church which serves the New Lodge area. This particular film clip is accompanied by a comment that Catholics have still a sense of being excluded on the grounds of their religion.

13. In an interview with Mr. Mayers he comments on the inability of Protestants to concede a political role to Catholics and says it is always "no" including "power-sharing" and that "everybody who is not a Unionist is a Republican by definition and also by definition is a terrorist which is not true of course". Mr. Mayers did recognise that there had been changes for the good in the past 10 years such as the abolition of Stormont, the local government reforms, the introduction of P.R., the Fair Employment Agency and Equal Opportunities Commission. These changes he described as a "step in the right direction" but he and his wife were "pessimistic" for the future and referenced this to how today's teenagers have faired out and wonder what hope is there for the younger children.

14. Mr. Gerry Fitt MP (SDLP West Belfast) who was described as living close to the New Lodge area was interviewed and in the words of Ms. Holland his opinion of the collapse of Sunningdale was described as "a tragedy of missed opportunity". He described it as "one of the greatest political experiments that had ever taken place in Anglo-Irish relations" but said "it is not easy to visualise anything such as Sunningdale emerging in the very near future". This mood of pessimism, Ms. Holland suggested, put leaders like Fitt under pressure and increased the hand of those who saw a united Ireland as a prerequisite to any solution. Mr. Fitt said that there are those in the SDLP whose idea was along those lines but he added that he would "unreservedly ... oppose anyone" who would hold the view that "one can do away with the border" and that there will be "a Utopia ... overnight".



15. A film clip showing a drinking club in the New Lodge area showed an occasion where the feelings of the revellers were uncompromisingly supportive of the PIRA and where there were numerous slogans pasted on the walls calling for support of the men in the H-Blocks, one of which read "Castlereagh created H-Block". The meaning behind it was to emphasise that there are others within the Catholic community whose idea of a solution is not similar to that of the SDLP and it is a pressure with which it must contend.

16. Ms. Holland concluded by referring to a state of war weariness and summarised as follows:

"In the last 10 years Catholics have seen some political progress but it has been won at an enormous price in suffering and the Catholics' hopes of full equality which seemed so real during the Civil Rights marches and agitation have not been realised. As a result they seem to be losing confidence that any solution can be achieved within the context of Northern Ireland.

"Meanwhile the Protestants too have suffered. Their old certainty about the permanence of their State has been shaken. They have lost their own government and they are confident that Britain will back them in any circumstances. Their anxieties have made them more determined to insist on the return of a government based on majority rule and the maintenance of the link with Britain. So today the gulf between the two communities looks as wide as ever it has."

17. Ms. Holland introduced the second half of the programme which dealt with possible solutions by referring to the traditional aspiration among Catholics in the North for Irish unity. This, she said, had been given a "boost" recently by the emergence of a new interest in the Irish Republic in the idea of Irish unity and all that it implies. She referred to the commitment by all three major parties to actively pursue the question of reunification. Among Catholics in the North it has become apparent in the last 10 years that there can be no question of coercing Protestants into a



united Ireland and among those Catholics actively thinking about how some reassurance and guarantees for Protestants could be worked out in the context of an all-Ireland solution, the idea of a federal Ireland has been emerging as a possibility. This idea is not new, said Ms. Holland, as a leading Belfast lawyer, Mr. Desmond Boal, had, in 1973, seen it as a way of safeguarding Protestants' interests in an "all Ireland solution".

18. One person who now, among Catholic opinion in the North, is advocating a solution along federal lines is Mr. Seán Farrell, a university lecturer and vice-President of the SDLP. In his introductory remarks he referred to the Northern Protestant tradition as a "defensive one in political terms" and which he opined has "prevented them" from adopting a "very dynamic and positive approach" in the North and the United Kingdom.

19. Ms. Holland referred to the absence of detail on how a federal arrangement would operate but sketched <sup>it</sup> in the following terms:

- (i) two Parliaments; one for a 6-county state and the other for a 26-county state, one being located in Belfast and the other in Dublin;
- (ii) each Parliament would be responsible for matters such as education, health, welfare, housing and local security - (something akin to the old Stormont Parliament);
- (iii) there would be a federal all-Ireland Parliament having responsibility for national defence, foreign policy including EEC affairs and major industrial and economic strategy; and
- (iv) all 3 Parliaments would be elected on the basis of P.R.

20. Mr. Farrell said that Protestants of the North could expect from such an arrangement a substantial degree of influence in the federal all-Ireland Parliament certainly proportionately "much



greater" than is open to them in Westminster at present. He estimated this to run at about 25% of the total representation basing it on the overall Protestant population in the island totalling  $4\frac{1}{2}$  million people. He thought their aligning with political elements in the island could be a "possibility" and would in turn give them "access" to power and influence. Likewise those Catholics in the North whose aspiration is for a united Ireland could find the same opportunity for influence and power by aligning with a group or groups in the south. It would guarantee their rights in the Northern state and protect them from discrimination there.

21. Ms. Holland's view was that what upsets the prospects of such a solution being acceptable to Northern Protestants just now is that in such an all-Ireland Parliament there would be a Catholic majority and that "once the link with Britain had been cut the federal Parliament dominated by Catholics could simply vote the two State Parliaments out of existence and take over their powers". So for the moment matters will rest but it shows that "some Catholics are, at least, trying to think of ways to accommodate the Protestants".

22. The focus of the programme then turned to new political thinking in the unionist camp. Ms. Holland outlined that Protestants too now realise that regard has got to be taken of the "needs and aspirations" of the Catholic minority in that there is now a feeling abroad that there can be no "going back" to the pre-1972 era of Stormont rule though she added this attitudinal change is not evident in "mainstream" unionism. Signs of reappraisal however, it seems, are evident among surprising quarters such as the UDA of whom it was said that the police had succeeded in drawing "its teeth" insofar as its involvement in sectarian violence is concerned. A short account about its political clout such as in 1974 when it played no small part in bringing about the collapse of the almost 5-month-old power-sharing Executive and with it the whole Sunningdale settlement was given.



23. A John McMichael of the UDA was then interviewed and said that people are "starting to question whether their long-term aspirations are realistic" and suggested "would it not be better to find common ground with each other". At this point the idea of the creation of an independent state of Ulster was mentioned and was referred to as an idea of Bill Craig in 1972 and had again been discussed in the U.S. in 1975 but had been dropped due to lack of interest. John McMichael was again interviewed at this stage and referred to "politicians" who "have not really shifted very far" in their thinking since then and referred to the "gap" in the thinking of the politicians and what the people are saying. Tommy Lyttle also of the UDA, while disagreeing somewhat on whether politicians have "shifted", said they have moved a little but what was needed was a "touch of honesty" from them in that they should tell their people those solutions<sup>that</sup> are feasible and those that are not. Paisley, interestingly enough, was specifically mentioned in this regard.

24. The programme then mentioned that details regarding the independence proposition were not yet available but it appears that it could be sketched out as follows:

- (i) a president elected by the people who would select his administration which would be composed of representatives from all sections and who would be free to operate the "governing process" without having to yield to the pressures of majority opinion;
- (ii) there would be an elected chamber which would have committees run on lines similar to Congressional committees in the U.S. and this would operate on a checks and balances basis which would ensure that the rights of either side were not infringed and that interests of both were protected.

25. Glen Barr was credited with this particular form of Presidential rule on the U.S. model and was introduced as a person currently studying the independence idea in the U.S. and that he was advising the UDA in the matter.



26. When asked why he favoured the independence idea, he referred to a united Ireland or federal Ireland solution as being anathema to Protestants in the North and a return to majority rule on old Stormont lines as being totally unacceptable to "Roman Catholics". It was for these reasons that he believed independence is the best solution because he was convinced that people of both religions in the North have more in common than with say a Cork person or a person from Bradford.

26.1. Ms. Holland described the solution as removing both sides from the mantle of conflicting political aspirations and would give ~~the~~ <sup>an</sup> opportunity for the emergence of "class politics".

26.2. Ms. Holland then queried Mr. Barr on how he hoped he could sell his ideas to Catholics given his opposition to power-sharing in 1974. He explained his stand on that issue then as representing a sudden threat to his "constitutional position" and therefore he had "had no alternative but to go back into the tribal camp for security". (I interpret this statement to mean an opposition to the Council of Ireland idea which was proposed as part of the Sunningdale package as I can remember Barr referring to it on television then as bringing Northern Ireland "t~~y~~undling" into a united Ireland - this moreso than power-sharing per se.) He explained that he owed his position as leader of the engineering union in Derry since 1972 to Catholics and this represented his first involvement in public life.

27. Summarising Ms. Holland said that the "trouble" with the independence idea is that most Catholics in the North "deeply distrust the idea" and their representatives would argue that Protestants have been under "severe pressure" from Britain in the past 10 years and have failed to compromise sufficiently to enable a political agreement to be reached. In an independent Ulster, so the argument runs, with the link with Britain cut, the Protestant majority there would be under "much less pressure" there to compromise and that given their reluctance to compromise previously they would hardly do so then and anyway, given an independence



situation in operation should anything go wrong for the minority they would be entirely defenceless. In any case Protestants in the North at present would oppose the independence idea placing their best bet for the future in the continued link with Britain.

Analysis

It appears, on the basis of the impressions conveyed by the programme's participants, that direct rule will continue to operate for some time to come, that is until there is some significant move forward by both communities to negotiate an acceptable compromise solution.

*F. X. O'Donoghue*

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