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Fine Gael Policy Document on Northern Ireland -

Reaction of Political Parties

(1) Northern Ireland Political Parties

(a) Official Unionist Party: Mr. Harry West on behalf of his party has rejected the policy document on the grounds that it would be completely unacceptable to contemplate the breaking of the link with Britain. While the document was therefore of no interest to Unionists he would be prepared nevertheless to have talks about it. The response of Mr. Thomas Passmore, Belfast Orange Leader and Unionist candidate for West Belfast was even more emphatic. In his opinion anyone who believed that Ulster should have home rule and break with the United Kingdom was no longer a Unionist.

(b) United Ulster Unionist Party: Mr. Cecil Harvey when asked to comment on the proposal said that his party had no interest in Irish unity and hence the Fine Gael document had no relevance to them. The reaction however of party leader, Mr. Ernest Baird, was somewhat more favourable. He would not dismiss the document out of hand; it would be less than fair in his opinion especially since Fine Gael's proposals represented a clear change in the basic attitude of the South towards Northern Ireland. The Unionist position however was that they would reject the breaking of the link with Britain, any minority veto and the "Irish" dimension. He welcomed the recognition by the South that Northern Ireland should play a full role in its own future, a role equal to that of the South.

(c) Unionist Party of Northern Ireland: Mrs. Anne Dickson, party leader, stated that the document ignored the reality of the situation in that the clear majority of the people in Northern Ireland wanted to maintain the link with Britain. The aspects of the document which dealt with co-operation on security and economic matters which could clearly be of benefit to both north and south were generally welcomed as a means of promoting goodwill though.

UPNI preferred to give emphasis to a solution to the security problem in Northern Ireland before the political aspect whereas the Fine Gael proposals gave greater prominence to the latter.

(d) Northern Ireland Labour Party: The reaction of NILP chairman, Mr. Alan Carr, was to dismiss the Fine Gael confederal Ireland plan as "academic ramblings" and of no relevance to the realities of life in the Province.

(e) Democratic Unionist Party: The response of DUP Secretary, Mr. Peter Robinson, was predictably total rejection.

(f) Alliance Party: Mr. Oliver Napier regarded the policy document as a further example of "political football" by Southern politicians in that its proposals were totally divorced from the political realities of Northern Ireland.

(g) Republican Clubs (Belfast): They welcomed the fact that the Fine Gael document was not proposing power-sharing but in general they felt the document did not offer any new initiative or proposal.

(h) Social Democratic and Labour Party: Of the Northern political parties the SDLP were the only party to support the idea behind the Fine Gael document. Gerry Fitt has stated that it would prove a useful basis for discussion which was the expressed intention of Fine Gael in preparing the policy document. Mr. John Hume was equally positive in his comment on the matter. He described it as "positive, constructive and extremely relevant to any debate on the future of Ireland".

(i) Others: Mr. David Trimble, former Vanguard member of the Constitutional Convention, described the confederal proposals as a realistic attempt to examine the problems but one which has not gone the whole way.

(2) Southern Political Parties

(a) Provisional Sinn Fein: They described the Fine Gael proposal for a Federal set up in Ireland as "a recipe for more years of repression, turmoil and strife in the 32 counties". They also rejected any acceptance of the two sovereign states in Ireland.

(b) Fianna Fail: Fianna Fail, while wishing to hold back any major policy statements on Northern Ireland until the publication of their own party policy document, are obviously in substantial agreement with the general terms of the Fine Gael document which they described "as worthy of careful consideration".

(3) British Political Parties

(a) Conservative Party: The reaction of the Conservative Party has been generally negative. Mr. John Biggs-Davison, former ^{deputy} spokesman, described the proposals as "schemes for the gentle annexation of the Province". He urged that the "British Dimension" of Northern Ireland should be remembered. Mr. Airey Neave considered that the document contained points worth discussing but that the plan as a whole was highly unlikely in the present circumstances to gain the consent of the majority of the Northern Ireland people. The Conservative Party policy on Northern Ireland remained unchanged by the Fine Gael proposals which were too rigidly based on existing political alignments and "is therefore likely to perpetuate rather than change them".