

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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S 19003.

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To: Secretary to the Government

From: W Kirwan, Assistant Secretary

Northern Ireland Policy

1 Since the Taoiseach's resumption of Office, he has seen notes prepared here on (1) the question of an Anglo-Irish Summit Meeting (2) the question of votes for British citizens resident in the State in national elections here. Apart from these and other notes prepared on specific topics or areas, assuming that the Taoiseach would wish to review policy in this area with officials at an early date, as foreshadowed by him during the General Election campaign, I undertook a general review of the background against which the Government's policy in relation to Northern Ireland, the broad lines of which are set out in the Programme for Government, must be carried into effect. I also sought to formulate suggestions for the possible main lines of an approach to implementation of policy over the next 6 - 9 months but, naturally, in a longer-term perspective.

2 The attached paper presents the results in summary form. It is essentially a personal contribution, prepared on my own responsibility, although I believe, in the light of discussion in recent months, that on many <sup>- but not all -</sup> points, other officials concerned with Northern Ireland policy, in this Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs would be in agreement with the approaches suggested. I am copying the paper to the Department of Foreign Affairs. The paper is not exhaustive in its coverage and its summary form may make it read somewhat typically in places. I am preparing a further paper, to elaborate, where necessary, on the thinking behind the suggested approaches. This can be submitted later, if desired.

3 It may be helpful to set down briefly here, the salient features of the background and the main sweep of the approach suggested, with the postulated benefits and with explanations ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> the way in which the elements are balanced, in their impact on

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other principal "actors", a vital feature in my perception.

The following are the key features identified:

- (1) The Provisionals and the INLA have, over recent months, struck numerous further blows in their campaign of violence while the Provisionals have made a substantial political advance in the Assembly elections.
- (2) These factors have further exacerbated polarisation in the North, with particular reference to the reactions of unionists. The Assembly election result, with the vote for the Provos, confirmed for unionists their perception of the Fermanagh-South Tyrone results in 1981. In their present mood, there is no hope of agreement to meaningful minority participation in devolved government or of unionist participation in any parliamentary tier. The British appear to have reacted to the unionist mood by deciding on a new security policy, characterised by the recent "shoot-to-kill" incidents. On the other hand, the British reaction to Irish policy on the Falkland Islands crisis has given some reassurance to unionists that the Prime Minister has set her face against worrisome (for unionists) Anglo-Irish dealings about the North.
- (3) Constitutional nationalism in the North, as represented particularly by the SDLP, is in disarray, as a result of strains caused in deciding their reaction to the Prior initiative, the Assembly election result and the reverses suffered by the Anglo-Irish process and in relations generally. Morale is shaken; money, new blood and worthwhile political outlets are lacking; the leader is away too much and relations with parties in the State have been complicated by actions and statements by leading SDLP figures.
- (4) Anglo-Irish relations have been very bad since May last. The differences, over the Falklands, in particular, confirmed the British Prime Minister in her feeling that she should have followed her personal instincts and natural supporters in the Tory party and been much more cautious in her involvement in Anglo-Irish approaches. Her negative feelings may have focussed primarily on the previous Taoiseach and Government but her reserved attitude to joint Anglo-Irish approaches to political progress is very likely to survive the change of Government in Dublin. Her distrust of the Foreign Office and changes in personnel in relevant Whitehall Departments will not promote a favourable attitude to resumption of an Anglo-Irish process.

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- (5) There has been a vacuum in Irish policy as to what can or should realistically, be done in the short-term, in the face of two central facts:
- (a) political progress in respect of the North necessitates dealing with the British Government, the sovereign power in possession;
  - (b) there is no early prospect of conjuring away the question of how Northern Ireland is to be administered within the UK.

4 As I see it, the main elements in an Irish response to this situation should be:

(1) Strike hard at terrorists

More effective and tougher action is necessary even in domestic, Twenty-Six County terms and, I believe, could obtain public support, if perceived as part of a wider policy, with sufficient nationalist content. In the North, it is difficult to see how polarisation can be reduced unless nationalist Ireland is seen to strike harder at the extremist fringe which perverts its ideals. Tougher action would be welcome to the British Government and would help to lay the basis for a resumption of an Anglo-Irish process. It would, obviously, have a favourable impact unionists. \*curtailing the flow of funds to the violent groups and their political fronts and in arresting and reversing their apparent momentum of "success".

- (2) Tougher security action, not perceived as having an all-Ireland price-tag would be the single most effective step in improving unionist attitudes. To refrain from outright condemnation or dismissal of the Assembly or public advocacy of power-sharing would also help, as would action that would visibly confer significant economic benefits on unionists. It will, however, be important, that the Government not be perceived by Northern nationalists as being more concerned with conciliation of unionists than with the interests of the Northern minority.

- (3) Move to set up Convention for a New Ireland, as proposed by SDLP. This would be the single most effective way to meet nationalist concerns and would also take the Government through what will inevitably be, largely, a mark-time period, in respect of dealings with the British. Presented in the right way, the

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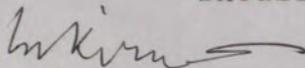
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Convention could have a favourable impact on many unionists while setting the Opposition party here on a road on which having agreed an ultimate destination, they might find it more difficult to object to road improvements designed to speed the journey. Other elements to meet nationalist the concerns would be to refrain from support for/Assembly or for the SDLP taking their seats, to pursue, with prudence, ways in which the British could operationally accord greater recognition to the Irish identity within the North and, again with prudence, pursue abuses in security policy or its execution; and give practical support to the SDLP.

- (4) Restore atmosphere of confidence with the British but do not appear over-eager. Build from the ground up, recognising that the period to the Westminster election will be a mark-time period. Give early signal of desire to restore friendly relations by proceeding with legislation to confer voting rights on British citizens. (I note that there is a convergence between my ideas here, and those in the Department of Foreign Affairs briefing paper, "Anglo-Irish Relations since the Establishment of the AIIC" which we have passed to you previously. That and the assessment, by the Ambassador in London, of the Thatcher Government's prospects and attitudes provide a very good basis for reviewing Anglo-Irish relations but there are some additional specific aspects of dealings over the past 9 months of which the Taoiseach should be aware and which I am setting down.)



W Kirwan  
Assistant Secretary

31 December 1982