

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



**Reference Code:** 2014/105/746  
**Creation Date(s):** 19 April 1984  
**Extent and medium:** 3 pages  
**Creator(s):** Department of the Taoiseach  
**Access Conditions:** Open  
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# NEWS RELEASE

## Ulster Unionist Party

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Release Time: 8 pm Thursday 19 April 1984

Extracts from a speech by MR FRANK MILLAR, General Secretary Ulster Unionist Party and Assembly Member for South Belfast, to Young Unionists in Newcastle County Down

### UNIONISTS AND THE FORUM

A number of us in recent weeks have complained of Mr Prior's apparent willingness to suspend political development within the Province pending publication of the Forum Report. And in doing so I believe we have reflected a degree of Unionist anxiety and unease for which he should show some regard.

Having said that, it is clear the Forum Report will initiate a renewed national and international debate on the Ulster question. Whatever the internal tensions, the Hume/Haughey/FitzGerald triumverate will mount a major challenge to the unionist position and Unionists would do well to consider their response.

It is tempting of course to suggest that we need not respond at all for in truth the proceedings in Dublin Castle seem hardly relevant to the majority of people living in Northern Ireland.

The participants there say they seek constitutional change but only on the basis of consent, and they like everyone else know that consent is not forthcoming. So by its own criterion the Forum may be said to have failed.

Not surprisingly therefore many Unionists tend to the cynical view that the Forum has little in real terms to do with the making of a new Ireland, and everything to do with helping the SDLP fight off the Sinn Fein challenge. Some of course contend that the outcome of that struggle is of little real concern to us!

Certainly the outcome will be determined in the end by the SDLP who must themselves decide whether they are to offer a real and credible constitutional alternative to the Nationalist community.

The present indications are not good and it is certainly possible to argue that the SDLP now represents but a pale shadow of Sinn Fein, driven to guard their republican flank even at the price of a constitutional base within Northern Ireland itself. Time, and the European Election, will tell. But I want to tell you candidly that we should not underestimate their difficulties nor should we needlessly seek to compound them.

For the demise of constitutional nationalism - with all its imperfections - and the emergence of Sinn Fein as representative of mainstream minority opinion would surely signal the beginning of the ultimate nightmare for all the people of Northern Ireland.

Some I know feel this is the path on which we are already set. Our duty surely is to do all we can to prevent it.

To that end we should refrain in coming weeks from rhetoric of the kind which easily inflames fear and suspicion in our community. We face an election in June and inevitably some, for their own purposes, will see signs of sell-out and betrayal. We should think long and hard before we allow ourselves to be led up that particular mountain.

Whilst never dropping our guard we must beware those who would unnerve or mislead us, and resist the temptation to see in every polite diplomatic exchange evidence of some dark design. For the reality is that, however they seek to mask the fact, the leaders of Nationalist Ireland have failed to agree amongst themselves; and that the arguments advanced by the Forum Report will not persuade Mrs Thatcher

to begin the business of expelling Ulster from the Union.

Having said that, I would warn Unionists against a posture which appears either complacent or smug.

As the national and international spotlight turns once more on Ulster, this surely is the time for us to be both reasonable and generous.

Of course we must seek to thwart and obstruct our opponents in the attainment of their objective but to settle for that alone would be to settle for a hollow victory indeed.

Our purpose surely in the 1980's is to build and create. We must proclaim our political faith, not merely in reactive and defensive terms, but in the genuine belief that Union is best for all the people of Northern Ireland who can with courage and vision look to the future with more than a cynical eye.

To this end we must bring forward proposals for the future government of Ulster which have regard to political and constitutional reality but which, within the constraints of democracy and consent, afford real opportunity for involvement to politicians and political parties across the political and religious divide.