



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2017/10/75
Creation Dates:	23 June 1987
Extent and medium:	6 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

QUESTION NO: 1

DAIL QUESTION addressed to the Taoiseach
by Deputy Geraldine Kennedy for answer
on Tuesday, 23rd June, 1987.

QUESTION:

To ask the Taoiseach if he will be seeking to make progress on the devolution objectives provided for in Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement at his forthcoming Heads of Government meeting with Mrs. Thatcher; his views on devolution as a means of getting the Unionists involved in the current Anglo-Irish process; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

REPLY:

It is not the practice to outline the subjects to be discussed at such meetings. The Deputy will be aware that Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement provides that the Intergovernmental Conference shall be a framework within which the Irish Government may put forward views and proposals on devolution in Northern Ireland, insofar as they relate to the interests of the minority community.

Mr. Collins,

*This must be useful for reference to
letters etc. Copy to 21539 and 24404(?)*

BR

Possible Supplementary Question

QUESTION:

What are the Government's views on devolution?

REPLY:

The Conference is a framework for the expression, in appropriate circumstances, of Irish Government views on this matter. I do not propose to preempt the position by making a statement now in reply to the Deputy's question.

[**Note:** This was originally part of the approved formal reply to the Question but was deleted by the Taoiseach this morning. He may wish to use the material in response to such a supplementary question.]

Possible Supplementaries

1. QUESTION:

Can the Taoiseach not encourage talks between the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland to achieve devolved Government?

REPLY

The Government welcomes and encourages any movement towards constructive dialogue. Our Election Programme made this clear.

2. QUESTION:

What can the Taoiseach offer the Unionist Community?

REPLY

There must be Unionist participation in dialogue. That is self-evident. You cannot come to grips with the problem without Unionists. As the Forum Report said "The starting point of genuine reconciliation and dialogue is mutual recognition and acceptance". Unionists have, as the Forum Report also stated a right to "effective political, symbolic and administrative expression of their identity, their ethos and their way of life". We have said that we are attentive to all constructive views which may be expressed to us by members of the Unionist Community.

3. QUESTION:

✓ What are the Government's views on devolution?

4. QUESTION

The Tánaiste has dismissed devolution as an option. Is this Government policy?

REPLY

The Tánaiste's comments should not be taken out of context. His references were to devolution on its own. The Government have consistently sought to have the problem looked at in a comprehensive way, as the Tánaiste made clear on that occasion. There are three dimensions involved - North/South relations, the relations between the two communities in Northern Ireland and, of course, the Anglo-Irish dimension. We have made it clear that we are willing at any stage to hold discussions with the political representatives of any section of the population in Northern Ireland which may offer an opportunity for progress. We wish to maintain the political process and will be attentive to all constructive views by members of the unionist community.

Note for Taoiseach's information

1. Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement contains the following provisions in relation to devolved government:-

- (a) It is the declared policy of the United Kingdom Government that responsibility in respect of certain matters within the powers of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should be devolved within Northern Ireland on a basis which would secure widespread acceptance throughout the community. The Irish Government support that policy.
- (b) Both Governments recognise that devolution can be achieved only with the co-operation of constitutional representatives within Northern Ireland of both traditions there. The Conference shall be a framework within which the Irish Government may put forward views and proposals on the modalities of bringing about devolution in Northern Ireland, in so far as they relate to the interests of the minority community.

2. There is no specific reference to devolution in the Governments Northern Ireland policy statement as published in their "Programme for National Recovery". It does state that:-

"Fianna Fáil are willing at any stage to hold discussions with the political representatives of any section of the population in Northern Ireland which may offer an opportunity for progress"

The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs in an interview with the 'Irish Times' on 11 May was asked if devolution was something which did not appeal at all to Fianna Fáil, even in the context of the Agreement. The Tánaiste's response was:-

"On its own, as a principle, I don't see any future in devolution".

The full text of the interview is attached.

- 4. In a written reply to a Question from Deputy De Rossa last week, the Tánaiste said that no progress had been made on bringing about devolution in Northern Ireland - text of reply attached.
- 5. The political situation in Northern Ireland, in the aftermath of the British Election, is sensitive with Unionists likely to return to

Westminster, amidst indications of a willingness to engage in political dialogue. There have been hints from Unionist quarters of talks with Mrs. Thatcher and what Unionists describe as "an education process" has been commenced with letters to all M.P.'s setting out the Unionist case. The tactics may well be aimed at giving the appearance of reasonableness and attempting, thereby, to get the SDLP and the Dublin Government "off-side" on the devolution issue. The joint O.U.P./D.U.P. Task Force (established to find consensus among the Unionists on an alternative to the Agreement) may report to the Party leaders in the next few weeks. Its leaders however, - Frank Millar, Harold McCusker and Peter Robinson - have been preparing the ground for political movement. Before the British Election was called, Robinson spoke of a 'twin-track' approach from Unionists - sustained opposition to the Agreement on the one hand, with the offer of an alternative to the Agreement and its replacement on the other hand. Millar also responded positively to suggestions by Sean Farren (SDLP) that security could be one of the matters devolved to a new N.I. administration.

In view of the changing situation and the obvious attempts by Unionists to establish negotiating stances, the reply to Deputy Kennedy's question has been deliberately confined to the formal position regarding devolution.

6. The Taoiseach has in recent months answered three Parliamentary Questions from Deputies O'Malley and Kennedy relating to various aspects of Northern Ireland policy. The Dáil Debates on these questions are attached.