



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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NORTHERN IRELAND

Even though we are all deeply and anxiously occupied in restoring the economic foundations of national independence, Fianna Fáil constantly adheres to the political objectives it was founded to achieve.

We maintain our commitment to the ideal of a united, independent Ireland. Furthermore, we are convinced as outlined in the New Ireland Forum that it is only in unity that lasting peace, justice and prosperity will come to the island as a whole.

And let me assert immediately and categorically that our concept is one of unity in its fullest and deepest meaning and not one which is narrow or exclusive in any respect.

The unity of Ireland, achieved by constitutional political means, is not only the best way but the only way of finally bringing to an end the divisions and conflicts which have and are inflicting such a heavy cost, morally, socially and economically on our people North and South.

I would not wish there to be any doubt, either at home or abroad, about the policy of this party and this Government. We assert that the long-term and lasting solution which will finally bring tragedy and bitterness to an end must be new political structures which accommodate the diverse traditions of this island, guarantee the rights of all and substitute a community of interest and a community of purpose for confrontation and division.

The Irish people have too vivid a folk memory of domination and exploitation to seek victory or domination for any one section of the population on this island over any other. Their wish is a solution of this inherited problem which inhibits us in so many ways and time and time again brings on another era of tragedy and suffering. The British and Irish Governments acting together with foresight and a sense of history can achieve the political progress under which violence and injustice can be brought to an end. It was for this reason that at the Dublin Castle Summit of 1980 we began the process of finding a way forward by looking at the totality of relationships between the two countries.

I would like to recall also the words of the New Ireland Forum: "The particular structure of political unity which the Forum would wish to see established is a unitary state, achieved by agreement and consent, embracing the whole island of Ireland and providing irrevocable guarantees for the protection and preservation of both the unionist and nationalist identities."

We believe that the future constitutional arrangements for this island should be decided by all the people of Ireland acting together through their representatives to shape new institutions in which we could all take pride because of the wisdom and fairness of their provisions and the generosity of spirit they display. Under them the rights and beliefs of every individual would be guaranteed and all would feel secure.

From the beginning we have had our reservations about some of the implications of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But we have also acknowledged that it is an international agreement entered into between two sovereign Governments which cannot be abrogated unilaterally. Eamon de Valera said in 1926 in relation to Northern Ireland that "To recognise the existence of facts, as we must, is not to acquiesce in them." Despite our misgivings over the agreement we were prepared to take on board the hopes of the advocates of the Agreement that it would bring reforms and improvements in the position of the nationalist community. We could not be unresponsive to these basic humanitarian considerations.

In all our dealings with the British Government through the Anglo-Irish Conference and otherwise we have been entirely constructive and responsible. We have tried to achieve progress. We have sought in our security policy to protect the safety and welfare of all the people of Northern Ireland. The Garda Síochána is our Police Force and is responsible under our laws and Constitution to the people and Government of Ireland. It is not an Anglo-Irish Police Force. The resources that we as a State have

committed in the security area are committed solely because it is our judgement that they are necessary for the safety and security of all the people on this island.

Much as I would like to be able to do so I cannot claim that success has rewarded our efforts. Even now at the end of the twentieth century and after all that has happened, it seems that the historic inability in Britain to comprehend Irish feelings and sensitivities still remains. We have sought to make clear to the British Government that progress towards justice in Northern Ireland is in their interest as well as ours; that the furtherance of equity and fair play in Northern Ireland is in their interest as well as ours; and that a lasting solution of the problem of Northern Ireland is in their interest as well as ours. Retrograde steps, particularly where the administration of justice and the rule of law in Northern Ireland are concerned, can only have a damaging effect all round, and undermine the trust and confidence in standards and integrity that are essential for fruitful co-operation on security matters. Furthermore it would be naive to expect that public sentiment in Ireland toward extradition would not be affected by the distressing case of the Birmingham Six who are widely believed in this country and elsewhere to be innocent. The wisdom of and the necessity for the effective safeguards provided in the 1987 legislation has been clearly confirmed. These safeguards are now in place and it is on the basis of these safeguards, or not at all, that extradition will proceed.

I hope it is clear to all that we hold ourselves in readiness to respond to any concerns or proposals which the Northern Irish of the Unionist tradition might wish to convey on any of these issues. Is it not by now clear to them also that Northern Ireland as it stands at present is not a workable political entity? If it were, would we have these constantly recurring crises, depressing failures, shameful happenings and general disillusionment?

The year behind us has seen some profoundly saddening events in Northern Ireland, and in particular the horror of Enniskillen is deeply etched along with all the others. The graveyards are full of monuments. Is it not time for a new kind of monument — a monument to common-sense and the willingness of both traditions in Ireland to come together in mutual respect and a shared sense of responsibility for our common future? For our part, we will avail of any opportunity for open and honest dialogue, with the object of advancing the cause of peace on this island and justice and equality for all the people of Northern Ireland. I would greatly wish to have an opportunity to hear at first hand from the representatives of the Unionist tradition how they would see these things come about.

PERORATION

Before the change of Government there had been a tangible loss of faith in the future of this country. Doubts about the ability of any Government to find a way out of our economic difficulties were widely expressed. These doubts manifested themselves acutely in the market place but the malaise spread to every sector of national life. They were undermining all our hopes and ambitions as a nation. Commentators abroad and pessimists at home were talking about second-rate status. Even the most resolute were beginning to accept these assessments and succumb to a sense of failure.

We had to take on this situation resolutely; cut through the fog of doubt and re-establish a sense of purpose. The first steps were crucial. They had to be radical, even dramatic, to indicate firm purpose. Our determination to restore order in the national finances and reduce the national debt to a manageable size was a clear signal of intent. We have begun that task and we will see it through to success.

The support of the people for the measures we have had to take has been one of the most remarkable features of recent political history. Once again the Irish people have proved their maturity, their grasp of reality and their deep feelings of patriotic responsibility.

But I think we have proved something else, something which is deeply intertwined with the history and the philosophy of this great party. There has always been a refusal by this party to accept that the long struggle to survive and the sacrifices made were in vain. There has always been the instinctive