

E.R. 13/9

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MR WOOD

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ROOM ANNEX

cc: Mr Brennan  
Mr Angel  
Mr Merifield -M  
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Mr Templeton -M  
Mr Abbott  
Mr Colvin, Cab. Off.  
Mr Barrie, RID, FCO  
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FORUM: KEY POINTS

1. I attach a note we have prepared by way of briefing on the handling of the Forum report. We have also prepared a revised summary and critique of the 27 April text which I will circulate shortly.
2. As Mr Barrie knows, copies of the attached note have already gone to Mr Burns in Washington and Mr Huckle in New York. I should be glad of the early views of the FCO on its wider circulation to posts.
3. I will leave to you to decide if this will be of any use to the No.10 Press Office, and to pass it on if you think it will.

S W BOYS SMITH

1 May 1984

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RESPONSE TO FORUM: KEY POINTSA. Background: the keys to UK policy

1. UK policy is based on an appreciation of the realities and on normal democratic principles, not dogma. It has five main elements.

(i) the principle of consent, that NI will not cease to be part of the UK without the consent of the majority ie self-determination.

(ii) a belief that the special circumstances of Northern Ireland must be reflected in institutions which command widespread support across the whole community. This was reflected in the emphasis given to the two traditions in the White Paper: they need both to be accommodated. The UK Government has not given either side a right of veto over internal arrangements - though in practice refusal to co-operate by either side frustrates any arrangement which is dependent on co-operation.

(iii) recognition that although security measures alone cannot defeat terrorism an effective security policy based on the enforcement of the law is of central importance.

(iv) acceptance that the strengthening of the Northern Ireland economy will continue to require substantial resources.

(v) promotion of Anglo-Irish relations in the interests of both countries ie no unionist veto but equally no clandestine deals.

2. It is not <sup>in</sup> the gift of the UK Government to produce any particular internal solution or a united Ireland. Internal structures commanding support can work only if there is co-operation. For the foreseeable future consent to Irish unity is not likely to be forthcoming. The task in these circumstances is to develop attitudes and mechanisms which allow Northern Ireland to be secure and prosperous in the coming years. Belief that a fundamental change is imminent - be it a united Ireland or return to pre-1972 - is unsettling and engenders fear and suspicion. The necessary accommodations, tolerance and respect between the traditions will not come easily. A key to their development is a recognition on all sides of the realities of the situation.

B. Key points about Forum Report

3. Can be welcomed/recognised/are helpful.

(i) unequivocal opposition to violence and all who advocate it.

(ii) the participants are fully committed to democratic and peaceful processes.

(iii) the reference to the discussion of other

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views than those contained in the report.

(iv) in so far as they go (see below) the references to distinctive unionist views.

(v) clear reference to the need for consent to unity to be freely given by the people of both the North and the South and that, were there to be a united Ireland, it could be on the basis only of full expression of both identities.

4. The following points are unhelpful/reflect weaknesses in the report:

- (i) <sup>is</sup> it/set out as a challenge to the UK government, based on a view of recent history which lays the blame for problems at the government's door. There are unrealisable assumptions about what the Government can deliver, especially in the form of changed unionist views.
- (ii) though the need for consent is clearly set out in the concluding principles it does not underpin the analysis in the way such an important matter should, and its implications, together with the likelihood of its being achieved, are not explored.
- (iii) the Report does not live up to expectations of a substantial development of Nationalist thinking to accommodate Unionists. There is little understanding of the unionist position, and of the

nature of their opposition to the principle of unity. Despite references to its "Britishness" and its historic roots unionism is not recognised as a belief of equal validity and stature, and is sometimes patronised. It has long been the Nationalist position that a united Ireland would need a Constitution with special arrangements to meet the Unionists. Dr FitzGerald's Constitutional crusade broke new ground in suggesting that changes should be made in the South in advance of agreement from Unionists to a united Ireland in the hope that with time consent might more readily be obtained. The concessions to Unionist views in the Report are all on condition of a united Ireland or joint sovereignty over Northern Ireland.

- (iv) the Report is thin for a year's work and the practicalities of unity are not squarely addressed: eg the changes required of the Republic to foster a more favourable view from unionists on which consent could be forthcoming; the economic and other consequences of actually incorporating Northern Ireland; the possibility of stability after unity, including from extreme nationalists; the manner in which joint authority might be made to work.

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- (v) the historical analysis is onesided in its failure to recognise the serious attempts by successive British Governments to find structures which would meet the situation in Northern Ireland, and the wide range of measures introduced to secure human rights in Northern Ireland.

5. Emerging from the above are two main points:

- (i) the Report is seen by its authors as a development in nationalist thinking (eg because it explicitly refers to strong non-Irish views by unionist; because it touches on aspects of society in the South which have a particularly confessional character; because it trails possibilities for unity other than a single unitary state).
- (ii) the points in (i) do not, by our perceptions, go at all far or break much new ground. For example, the acceptance of the need for consent is not new, but has been declared part of Irish Government policy for 10 years. There is nothing in the Report about what should be done if consent to a united Ireland or to joint sovereignty is not forthcoming. The participants must realise that the Unionist will not change their views about the fundamental issue on reading this Report, yet they refuse to consider that "reality". Because of this enormous gap, the

Report fails to address the problems faced by people living in Northern Ireland - Nationalist and Unionist alike. Moreover, the failure to consider the possibility of consent being withheld is liable to arouse suspicions about the genuineness of the participants' commitment to the principle of consent in Northern Ireland itself; Britain is invited to take the next step, but what in practical terms can it do that it has not already, and if it cannot, what is the way ahead? The Report muddles the need for consent to change in NI's status as part of the UK (on which all agree) with the position as internal structures. This misleadingly confuses a formal text of consent over the border - which is central to HMG's policy and has been accepted by successive Irish Governments - with the practical fact that internal political arrangements can work only <sup>if</sup> they are acceptable to all concerned - eq power can be shared only by willing parties. The attitude adopted towards unionists is not designed to encourage reconciliation and there is little self-criticism. The air of challenge to the UK is not a helpful basis for the authors to promote the dialogue they seek. On the other hand the principle in Chapter 5, taken in isolation, are broadly acceptable, and are arguably of themselves consistent with internal arrangements in Northern Ireland of the kind HMG would like to promote. The indications are that Dr FitzGerald wishes us to concentrate on this section rather than on other far greener passages.

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C. Questions

6. Some questions which can be asked are:

- (i) the "historical integrity of Ireland" and assumption that unity is founded in history and geography: does this fit all the facts (including unionist ones)? and is not the real question to deal with situation as it is now, not as some might wish it to have been?
- (ii) what evidence is there that the UK Government can change unionist views on the central question of unity?
- (iii) are unionists ready to contemplate unity in any form, or for the foreseeable future?
- (iv) if agreement to unity is needed, how in practice is it to be won?
- (v) would changes in the Republic significantly affect unionist views on unity? Has the report faced up to the nature of the changes which might be needed?
- (vi) does the report face up to the practical consequences of unity (eg security and economic)?
- (vii) what does the report offer of a practical nature the immediate future, given that (on any analysis) Irish unity in any form is a long way off?

(viii) is it really correct that the UK Government has not addressed the problems of Northern Ireland urgently, given its repeated attempts to find internal structure reflecting both traditions and the absence of the consent to unity which London and Dublin have both publicly recognised as essential since 1974?

(ix) in the joint sovereignty model what would happen (the report does not say) if the two Governments equally sharing authority should disagree?

(x) does the report, by its analysis and presentation, enhance the process of understanding and reconciliation of traditions?