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Title: Note to Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave, TD, from Dermot Nally, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach, referring to the preparation of a background memorandum to be prepared for a forthcoming meeting of Government and attaching supplementary notes on such matters as integration of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, direct rule, majority rule, withdrawal by British and independence and repartition

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NORTHERN IRELAND

Taoiseach

We have been in consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs about the background memorandum for the Government, which they are submitting for the meeting to be held on Friday.

The attached are some supplementary notes on the situation which you may find useful.

If contact at Prime Ministerial or Ministerial level is considered undesirable by the Government, it could be maintained, with reasonable confidentiality, by contact at official level. We still owe Sir Frank Cooper, Secretary to the Northern Ireland Office, a visit in London, as part of the continuing series of contacts at official level.



 15th September 1975.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Notes

1. These notes are supplementary to the Foreign Affairs memorandum for the Government on the Northern Ireland situation. They consider some aspects of

- (1) integration of Northern Ireland with the rest of the United Kingdom;
- (2) direct rule, as it is, or modified;
- (3) "majority" government, either with or without a British presence;
- (4) withdrawal by the British, either soon or following a period of increasingly apparent disinterest in Northern Ireland; and
- (5) independence, and repartition.

A conclusion is that perhaps the most likely option now is the continuance of direct rule with further attempts by the British to keep the political process going - following ultimately, if these attempts fail, by withdrawal which when it happens will be abrupt, and without notice.

2. The notes suggest the need for the government to -

- (1) consider their policies in relation to
 - (a) the SDLP, who may now be thinking of asking for a British withdrawal of support for the Loyalists, involving ultimately a British withdrawal. This line would be in conflict with what has been Government policy here of
 - (i) urging the British to discharge their responsibilities in Northern Ireland and
 - (ii) indicating that any change of the status of the North should be only with the consent of the majority of the population there, and
 - (b) the British who are now presumably formulating once again proposals for the future of Northern Ireland. (This would involve consideration of meetings at Ministerial and perhaps Prime Ministerial level. Crucial questions are the extent to which we should get ourselves involved with the British and whether the question of withdrawal should be broached with them. I think it should not.);
- (2) continue the build-up of the Permanent Defence Force to its establishment strength of 14,230 (as against a present strength of 12,800) and consider if intervention is possible in the event of widespread violence in Northern Ireland;
- (3) approve of a proposal confidentially to provide the Civil Defence here with provisions enabling them to cater for

20,000 or 50,000 refugees (at a cost of £320,000 or £800,000) and to go ahead with certain other preparations for an emergency inflow of distressed persons from Northern Ireland;

- (4) consider certain proposals in relation to
- (1) the reliability of the Northern auxiliary security forces
 - (2) British security briefings
 - (3) the alarmist attitude of the media here to Northern developments.

Department of the Taoiseach

15th September 1975.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Notes

Possibilities

1. These are numerous and unpredictable. Some are enumerated below.

1. INTEGRATION with the rest of the United Kingdom with Northern Ireland being ruled like, say, Wales. This would give the North an entrenched entitlement to financing similar to that of other regions and a better claim to more MPs in Westminster. It is not likely to be conceded because of -

- (1) British, and certainly Labour, antipathy to the idea of more Northern MPs, and
- (2) the fear of a violent backlash from "nationalists" here. The re-action to Mr. Heath's talk of integration after the Baldonnell meeting with the Taoiseach in September, 1973, is worth recalling.

2. DIRECT RULE -

- (1) as it . This can be ruled out, as a medium term solution, as providing no safety valve through the democratic process for local feelings, and, therefore, leading to endless attacks on the administration, and continuing instability.
- (2) modified so as to provide some stronger form of local participation in Government. Modifications could cover -
 - (a) a central advisory or supervisory body, made up perhaps of the Westminster MPs from Northern Ireland, elected by proportional representation;
 - (b) a further reform of local government, giving elected authorities more power, and ensuring either by the manipulation of electoral areas, or administrative arrangement, that the different communities got fair treatment. (It is noteworthy that in the 1920s the reform of local government here was one of the first priorities of the new government), or
 - (c) almost any other system of government which is acceptable.

Whatever the details a modified system of direct rule would require -

- (a) local participation by the two communities in the administration,
- (b) safeguards to ensure impartial administration of the law (as, say, housing allocations, appointments, civil rights etc.) and
- (c) special consideration of responsibility for security.

Direct rule of some sort has been the policy enunciated consistently and almost automatically by every British representative to whom questions as to options if the Convention failed have been put. The crucial question is the extent to which repeated failures - at Darlington, Sunningdale, and now the Convention - have weakened British will.

3. "MAJORITY" GOVERNMENT - involving a Stormont type executive, without provision for "power-sharing" or other participation by the minority. The undertakings in favour of power sharing given by successive British Prime Ministers and Governments are so numerous and so explicit that the volve-face involved in open support for this type of Government is, I think, out. If it comes, it will come only as a prelude to or consequence of withdrawal.

4. INDEPENDENCE - The likelihood of negotiated independence is remote. Relevant points are -

- (1) the impossibility of guarantees for the minority which are enforceable in the face of a hostile administration,
- (2) the likelihood of the withdrawal of all or most of the British subvention of £450m. a year and
- (3) the veto this country - and the UK and other countries of the Community - would have on membership by Northern Ireland in the EEC. Without membership, economic stagnation or worse is a certainty there.

"Independence" if it came about, could result in some form of "repartition", which would create a besieged state in the North-East corner of this island and almost guarantee a continuance of violence.

5. WITHDRAWAL - If the British abandon direct rule or decide not to support a "majority" Government, their only real option is withdrawal.

Again, the undertakings against withdrawal have been numerous and public. However, circumstances have changed with -

- (1) the repeated refusal of the "Loyalists" to accept the authority of the Governments of the State to which they profess loyalty;
- (2) the economic position of the United Kingdom which is making the £450m. a year they are now putting into the North an increasingly serious consideration;
- (3) the effect on British public opinion of the bombing campaign in British cities. This could give momentum to a campaign "to get out and let them fight it out themselves"; or it is just possible that the campaign could not be sustained for long because -
 - (1) as the Birmingham bombs showed, there can be a strong backlash even among "nationalists" and
 - (2) the campaigns are difficult to support, and expensive in personnel, most of whom are caught - amongst a violently hostile population.

2. A decision for or against withdrawal and how it would come about in the face of these and other considerations is impossible to forecast. However, it is obviously desirable to take a view here on probabilities.

3. The Convention is unlikely to present its report to London until about the end of October or mid-November. This would then be studied for, say, a month or two - and, on present appearances, rejected. If these assumptions are right, the new British

- initiative would be announced late in 1975 or early in 1976. Unless, therefore, the unexpected happens - and in the North, it is, of course, as likely as not that it will happen - the next few months will be spent by London, once again, in evolving policy in Northern Ireland. This course of further reflection, with yet one more initiative, seems to be the most likely prospect. The initiative would be announced or developed early in 1976 - and would be at that stage without prejudice to intentions or withdrawal from Northern Ireland.
4. The extent to which we should get ourselves involved in work on developing the form of the initiative needs consideration. If we are seen to be closely involved, the effect can be counter-productive in Northern Ireland, where Loyalist susceptibilities to Southern meddling are often underestimated. Again, it could be argued that - given our limited technical and administrative resources and the long British experience of running the North, - we can contribute only marginally. Further, the more we participate the more we facilitate the British in any plans they may be developing for shuffling off the Northern coil.
 5. These are strong arguments against open and active participation. However, whether we like it or not, we are involved. The SDLP have come to us twice, in August, 1974, and again in August, 1975, asking for explicit answers to certain questions. Behind these questions is the SDLP idea that if the Convention fails, the British Government should be asked to withdraw its support from the Loyalists, and that with the Dublin Government, they should provide joint guarantees for the security of the majority and minority in Northern Ireland. As it seems to be emerging, this policy would require the intervention of the Irish army north of the border and the SDLP are quite explicit on this - asking for the names of Army officers with whom they can communicate etc. They are also thinking of being appointed to act in the North as agents of the Irish Government - as the only sovereign government in this island, in the event of a British withdrawal (or, in fact, probably of a British indication of intention to withdraw).
 6. What would happen if the British said they were withdrawing can only be surmised. The most commonly held opinion is that majority and minority interests would attempt to consolidate their own position in the areas where they were strongest. This, bluntly, means civil war. What interest the British would have in maintaining "guarantees" in this situation is impossible to see. The most probable outcome is that they would get out as fast as their ships and planes would carry them.
 7. It is, of course, hard to see them being quite so naive as to let themselves in for the sort of odium which the explicit operation of a policy like this would bring. However, they need not be explicit to lead to the same conclusion. The important thing is that what the SDLP have apparently been thinking about off and on now for two years could if it were voiced openly by them lend support to the withdrawal which the British probably want anyway, and ultimately lead to anarchy in this island. This is apart altogether from the argument that in espousing this policy the SDLP would be explicitly urging what the Provisionals have been saying for many years now. The identification of the SDLP with the men of violence could probably not be more complete.

8. At the same time, it is important by any means we can use to foster the democratic process in the North. The SDLP are the most cohesive and coherent of the elected representatives of the minority and, subject to the over-riding interest of peace in this island, should be given as much help as possible. If they disappear, the men of violence could well be seen to have won.
9. If these arguments are valid, a priority for the Government must be a decision -
 - (1) to maintain their basic policy of asking the British to discharge their responsibilities in Northern Ireland (by a system of direct rule or some other system suitably modified) and
 - (2) to discuss /through Foreign Affairs/ with the SDLP confidentially the policy options they are considering so as
 - (a) to try to ensure that what they ask for is not inconsistent with the Government's own basic policy, and
 - (b) to ensure a consistency of approach in any discussions with the British or future forms of Government.
10. If the approaches of the Government and the SDLP are not brought into line the differences will become more marked, and more public, with time. And there will be yet one more division to rack the North and speed the process of disillusionment among the British.
11. The second major area of decision relates to domestic affairs. To safeguard security here and provide for contingencies, without creating alarm, it would be desirable
 - (1) to build up the Permanent Defence Force to its full establishment of 14,230 (as against a present strength of just over 12,000); and
 - (2) to consider, whether in relation to developments in Northern Ireland the present capability of the Defence Forces should be improved. (In this connection, the advice of the Inter-Departmental Unit on Northern Ireland having considered military studies is that military intervention in Northern Ireland should be considered only if a situation of widespread violence arose, and only if -
 - (a) action on the political and diplomatic planes were unavailing,
 - (b) matters had become so bad in the North that intervention could not make them worse; and
 - (c) the Government were fully satisfied that the forces not committed to intervention were adequate to ensure the security of the State and especially of the Government here.)
12. This advice is based on an estimate that the capability of the Defence Forces for intervention in the North is extremely limited and if attempted would escalate violence both in the North and here to an incalculable extent. Effective

intervention is estimated to require a trained and equipped force about four or five times the size of the army at present. /And even this might not be able to guarantee essential supplies of electricity, water, etc./

13. It would also be desirable to decide on the proposals for the purchase of emergency supplies, at a cost of approximately £320,000 or £800,000 for 20,000 or 50,000 persons respectively, as outlined in the memoranda currently before the Government on the Relief of Distress. Supplies of blankets, for example, at the disposal of the Civil Defence Force for refugees etc. are sufficient to cater only for 600 people. In the event of widespread violence in Northern Ireland the numbers seeking refuge here could be very large. The supplies can be used for other purposes, in time, if they are not required for Northern contingencies.
14. Other areas for consideration would be -
 - (1) whether the case should be made to London for
 - (a) the exercise of such pressure as they can exert on Loyalist opinion - (e.g. for even stronger emphasis than they have put on the impossibility of devolved Government in Northern Ireland without participation by the minority),
 - (b) a more careful scrutiny of their security briefings (which have recently been hostile and inept); and
 - (2) whether some calming influence can be exercised on the media here to restrict television interviews etc. from referring repeatedly to "civil war", "army intervention in the North" etc. etc. which tend to build up some peculiar psychoses among the public here.