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S. 21539

BBC World Service Interview with Minister Lenihan

(Barry Cowan)

Presenterhe was first asked about the view that it could take a generation before a settlement was arrived at in the North.

Minister I disagree profoundly with the notion that this process is going to take a generation. I'm thinking in terms of years, a few years. It would be very very futile thinking and backward thinking, in my view, to think that this matter can be postponed for a generation. It's far too serious for that and in fact what you talk about - the various totum polls of extremism - will flourish if there is undue delay in this matter.

Interviewer You say a matter of years, I mean what would you expect to have happened in within, let's say ten years, if one uses that time scale?

Minister Well that's the sort of time scale that I think is more realistic than a generation and I would see the two parts of this island coming closer together within that ten years, structures established that will bring the two communities together in the North and ^{bring} the North closer to the South and bring the whole island closer to Britain in legitimate cooperation between two sovereign States within the framework of the European Community. That's the sort of thinking I have in mind and I would like to see it resolve certainly well within ten years.

Interviewer Within that ten year ^{period} /are you in fact suggesting that the will be a united Ireland?

Minister I'm suggesting that there will be a degree of closeness achieved that will in my view, make for the aspirations of people who desire a united Ireland, to make for those aspirations to realise themselves as it were.

Interviewer I'm not sure whether you're saying yes or no Mr. Lenihan



ster

Pardon, I've said yes of course

Interviewer

So you expect Irish unity within ten years?

Minister

I expect that we will have within ten years a closer degree of association that will make for unity among our peoples on this island. That's what I'm saying.

Interviewer

So how long therefore would you expect that the Protestants of Northern Ireland will be able to call themselves British?

Minister

Well now this is a very hypothetical matter. That's a matter for themselves if they wish to call themselves British. This is entirely a matter for the people concerned.

Interviewer

But is that compatible with

Minister

There are people living here in the Republic who like to regard themselves as British and they have been free to live here and vote and be citizens here since the formation of the State.

Interviewer

But the central question does remain though if you forgive me for pressing it and that is do you see the border in this country - the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic - disappearing within ten years?

Minister

The border as I see it is an anachronism and I think there is a growing sense that it is an anachronism but we can within this island surely shape structures that will allow people to preserve their traditions and I mean this in particular in regard to the Unionist population in Northern Ireland. We can surely devise structures between us that will enable them to pursue their independent traditions within a framework within a framework that will also satisfy the aspirations of people who believe in a united Ireland. I believe there is nothing incompatible with this at all and that if we apply our brains and intelligence to devising structures and devising a framework

one can accommodate the various traditions that exist in this island.

interviewer

But surely the Unionists have indicated, the Protestant people in the North of Ireland have indicated they want no part of what you're talking about.

Minister

I disagree, I believe that patience and debate and discussion will take people away from that negative rock that you refer to. The whole question that we must ask ourselves today is, can't we get away from the polarisation of Irish politics?

Press Section
24 March 1981