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10. The Northern Ireland issue in the European context

France

The Mitterand Government has shown a closer interest in the situation in Northern Ireland than any French Government in present times. There have been indications from many sources that this interest - which was particularly evident during last year's H-Blocks hunger strikes - is deep and that it exists at several levels within the Socialist Party up to, and including the highest level. Officials at the Quai d'Orsay have acknowledged to the Embassy in Paris that pressure was put on the Government, mainly from grassroots level in the Socialist Party, to use its influence on the British Government on the H-Blocks issue. Indeed, the subject was discussed at the meeting between M. Mitterand and Mrs. Thatcher in September 1981. According to a French source, M. Mitterand told Mrs. Thatcher that the French Government did not intend to raise the hunger strike issue publicly and that the French side accepted that the issue was an internal one. However, he made it known that the French Government was under considerable pressure from within its own Party on the issue.

Foreign Minister Cheysson has made several public statements which describe the French Government's position. Among them was his statement at a press conference in Dublin on 3 October 1981. He said;

"We follow the initiatives taken by the Government of Ireland with the greatest sympathy. There must be a settlement acceptable to the Irish people".

"We trust that in the discussions between the Irish and British Governments progress can be made. If progress is made, and if we are called on for support in any manner, I can promise it here and now".

However, Mr. Cheysson added that France, in common with other EEC States, considered it improper to intervene in something which is not their business. "I have said we should not interfere in affairs for which we have no direct responsibility. It would be irresponsible to do so."

After his meeting with M. Mitterand on 15 December, 1981, the Taoiseach, Dr. FitzGerald, said that the French President had shown a deep interest in and concern about Northern Ireland and had promised to help practically in any way he can, short of interfering". Community and that therefore a political solution must be found. However, the Federal Government is not prepared. The former Minister for Foreign Affairs discussed Northern Ireland with Mr. Cheysson on 14 May last. The French Minister indicated during the private conversation that he had a special interest in Northern Ireland and that this was true of the French Government in general. He mentioned his discussions with Dr. FitzGerald in 1981.

Mr. Cheysson's remarks in Dublin last October represent, so far as is known, the most recent public statement on the North by a French Minister. The line he took then has been confirmed in subsequent contacts both formal and informal which the Embassy in Paris has had with French Foreign Ministry officials. In essence the French Government considers that Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the British Government and has clearly been unwilling, even during the H-Blocks dispute when there was considerable pressure from within its own party's ranks, to act in any way that could be construed as constituting interference in the affairs of an ally and fellow-member of the European Community. Nevertheless, it can be said that there is a considerable fund of sympathy and goodwill in French Government circles, at the highest level, towards finding a solution to the problem of Northern Ireland. In his public statements, Minister Cheysson left the way open for the translation of this latent sympathy into suitable practical assistance at an appropriate time to support any progress towards a settlement.

At present the predominant impression of French media commentators on Northern Ireland is one of deadlock with headlines such as "Ingovernable Irlande du Nord" and "Situation Bloquée". Following the Assembly elections, the outcome of which is considered in Paris to have sealed the fate of Prior's plan, interest in the media has begun to revive in other approaches to the problem with the Irish dimension being recently the subject of a couple of important articles in Le Figaro and Le Monde.

Federal Republic of Germany

In general terms German officials are conscious that the Northern Ireland conflict, while not of immediate concern or relevance to the FRG, poses nevertheless a disturbing political problem for the European Community and that therefore a political solution must be found. However, the Federal Government is not prepared to take any direct action itself in promoting such a solution, viewing the matter as exclusively one for the two Community partners involved. The Embassy reports that German officials are accordingly extremely reluctant to depart, even in private, from an attitude of careful neutrality in regard to Northern Ireland. This impartiality will probably have been reinforced in the aftermath of the Falklands crisis which provides them with a delicate reminder of the FRG's obligation towards the UK as a Berlin guarantor.

The Federal Republic's acceptance that a solution to the Northern Ireland problem is a matter for the Irish and British Governments and not the British alone was underlined by former Chancellor Schmidt when he spoke in the Bundestag on 2 April 1981 following a meeting with the former Taoiseach. He commented then that the talks which Mr. Haughey had with the British Prime Minister in December 1980 would ensure that Northern Ireland is no longer an internal problem of the UK but is seen as an international problem. This reference to the international dimension provoked a British response which included a call by their Ambassador in Bonn on the Chancellor and Lord Carrington was also reported to have raised it in subsequent discussions with Chancellor Schmidt. In London British complaints to the German Ambassador apparently concentrated on the timing of the Chancellor's remarks (vis-à-vis Unionist opinion) rather than their substance. On 12 May 1981 at a joint press conference with Prime Minister Thatcher the Chancellor clarified his statement to the Bundestag as follows: ".....there has been a misunderstanding a couple of months ago at the occasion of a visit of Prime Minister Haughey at Bonn. At that occasion, I said that I welcomed that the difficulties in Northern Ireland now had become an international matter. This was being misunderstood and perhaps I was at fault to use that expression. What I meant was and the sense was that I welcomed the fact that the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland were in contact about it - in closer and more intensified contact - nowadays than formerly and this, I think, is a good development." The former

Taoiseach and Chancellor met again this year in Bonn on 13 July. The discussions mainly dealt with economic and EEC matters but Mr. Haughey took the opportunity to brief Schmidt on the Government's approach to Northern Ireland.

The new government of Chancellor Kohl which took office in October is unlikely to take a different view from the basic premise of the previous administration that Northern Ireland is a disturbing political problem within the European Community but that it is a matter to be resolved between Dublin and London. It should be noted, however, that the new Chancellor and the British Prime Minister are in Mrs. Thatcher's words "on the same wavelength" with regard to NATO and many European Community issues. Kohl and the other members of the new Federal Government will probably wish to avoid any danger of putting this relationship in unnecessary jeopardy and it can be taken that they will not make any public statement about Northern Ireland.

When German officials are persuaded to comment in private a good deal of tacit support for our policy of unity by consent emerges. They have not commented as yet on the Prior initiative (due perhaps to the situation created by the Falkland crisis referred to above) but the failure of successive British initiatives in Northern Ireland has not been lost on them and they offer very little resistance to the thesis that reunification in some form is the only practicable long-term solution. Though the analogy is in most respects invalid, German aspirations in regard to unification of the two Germanies may play a subconscious role in this respect. Despite the fact that the Federal Republic has a mixed Protestant and Catholic population, Germans as a whole tend to sympathise with the plight of Northern Ireland's minority. This applies also in Bonn official circles, though the latter have a fuller understanding of the need to win the majority's confidence as a precondition for Irish unity and of the political expertise on the part of the Irish Government which this calls for.

The major issue in FRG media coverage of recent months has been the Assembly elections. The reactions to their outcome were uniformly pessimistic with correspondents highlighting the boycott approaches of the SDLP and Provisional Sinn Féin, Unionist scepticism and general public indifference. The consensus was that in view of the PSF showing the Assembly was unlikely to bring a

so...tion any nearer and constituted a defeat for Prior and the British Government.

The German media have occasionally speculated on links between German terrorists and the PIRA/INLA. A recent example of this was an article in the 26 May 1982 edition of Die Welt (FRG's leading right-wing daily) based on a report prepared by the Federal Office for Criminal Investigations (BKA) in the context of attacks on British property in the FRG. This BKA report referred to links between the INLA and West German terrorists and although it may be taken as authentic its content was fairly speculative. From contacts with the German authorities concerning matters related to attacks on British personnel and property there, the Embassy has the impression that German officials have little reliable information on the nature and extent of collaboration between German and Irish groups engaged in terrorism.

European Community

Various efforts have been made in the European Parliament to get the Community involved in the political aspect of the Northern Ireland question. The results so far, apart from some publicity surrounding such activities, have been insubstantial. MEP's from North and South in Ireland have been active in putting questions, taking resolutions and contributing to debates.

In general it may be said that the Community's likely involvement at present appears to be confined to the economic field e.g. funds for Belfast housing (pl. see section 4 (vii)). Questions in parliament on more political issues (e.g. plastic bullets (pl. see section 3 (ii)) have been regularly answered on the basis that the European Political Co-operation framework is not concerned with the internal affairs of Member States or their bilateral relations. However, in recent months three draft resolutions have been proposed, with MEP's McCartin, Hume and Lalor taking the lead, which all seek a greater political involvement by the Community. Last month a draft resolution in reply was tabled by MEP's Paisley and Taylor declaring that the Community has no competence to make proposals on the constitutional and political affairs of Northern Ireland. The McCartin draft was

significant in that it is the first draft resolution on Northern Ireland which has gone forward on behalf of the EPP group (the Lalor resolution was not sponsored by the EPD). All the resolutions have been referred to committees of the Parliament.

The Haagerup Group is an informal one composed mainly of Liberal MEPs and named after its chairman Niels Haagerup, a Danish Liberal, who describes himself as "Chairman of the informal working party on Northern Ireland of the European Parliament". A delegation from this group visited Northern Ireland in June last and it included MEPs McCartin and Maher. Controversy surrounded the visit with Fianna Fáil MEPs claiming Haagerup's group had "a distinct bias in both compensation and complexion" and accused the group of being pro-British. On the other hand MEP John Taylor said the visit was "politically motivated and inspired by Southern Irish MEPs who favoured a United Ireland".

Haagerup issued a statement at the time saying his group came "to listen and to learn, not to pronounce on a very difficult problem". In July he wrote to the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Collins, proposing a visit by his group to Dublin. The Minister replied saying that in principle he would be glad to meet the delegation and would nominate a representative if unable to do so at the time of the actual visit. However, Mr. Haagerup has not supplied further details to date.

Anglo-Irish Section

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