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From SIR JOHN BIGGS-DAVISON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA
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cc. P. 104
P. 105
Mr. Lillis
Cairns + Mr. Keen A. 1.
Forum file

Doc. 21 Sept

To The Secretary to the New Ireland Forum

Sir,

I have the honour to submit, in an entirely personal capacity, my own views on the problem being considered by the Forum.

If it were thought useful, I would endeavour to make myself available.

A short statement is being issued to the news media; and I am sending copies of my submission to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and to the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and for Northern Ireland.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
your most obedient servant,

John Biggs-Davison

'NEW IRELAND FORUM'

A PERSONAL SUBMISSION BY SIR JOHN BIGGS-DAVISON, MP

(Formerly ^{an} the Official Conservative Spokesman on Northern Ireland and currently Chairman of the Conservative Parliamentary Northern Ireland Committee.)

In view of the origins of the New Ireland Forum, it is hardly surprising that the various Unionist, and the Alliance, Parties in Northern Ireland have refused to take part. As for Her Majesty's Government, the Northern Ireland Office has made it clear that whilst there is nothing to stop people in Northern Ireland participating in such discussions, they cannot affect the fundamental principle that Northern Ireland is and will remain part of the United Kingdom whilst a majority of its people so wish. The Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 sets this out and the Government of the Republic for its part in a communiqué issued after the Sunningdale conference in December 1973

'fully accepted and solemnly declared that there would be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland desired a change in that status'.

The object of this Submission is to place before the Forum facts and considerations which may be ignored in the absence of Unionist participants.

The purpose of the Forum has been stated by the Irish Government to be

'consultation on the manner in which lasting peace and stability can be achieved in a new Ireland through the democratic process'.

However the phrase 'new Ireland' is to be defined, it is my submission that 'lasting peace and stability' are most likely to be achieved throughout the island of Ireland if the Republic so amends its constitution as to give up its claim to the North. Such a gesture of goodwill would relieve the minds of many in Northern Ireland, both Catholic and Protestant, who wish for nothing better than good neighbourly relations with their fellow-Irishmen in the South. For many, if not most Northern Ireland men and women regard themselves as as much Irish as British. Indeed, Mr John Hume's opening statement to the Forum (30 May 1983) that 'the Protestant ethos... contains... a strong element of political allegiance to Britain' is misleading. Allegiance to the Crown extends across the religious divide to embrace many Catholics.

The separatist minority in the North is not to be equated with Roman Catholicism. It is too simple to divide the people of Ulster into those who call themselves 'British' and those who call themselves 'Irish'. Dr Garret FitzGerald was nearer the mark when he referred on 30th May to the 'Irish/Irish sense of identity of the Nationalist minority, and the British/Irish identity of the Unionist majority'. I know Ulster Unionists who describe themselves as Irish, and who take part in all-Ireland religious, cultural, economic and sporting activities.

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Mr Haughey's opening statement to the Forum (30th May) reads somewhat strangely. The former Taoiseach declared that:

'Britain... whether she recognizes it or not (is) acting in a partisan role, supporting unconditionally the basic Unionist position, by military, political and economic power'.

Many Unionists would assert the precise opposite, namely that successive British Governments before and since the Labour Administration of 1964-70 have tried to nudge the people of Northern Ireland, against the wishes of the majority, into the arms of the Republic and so rid themselves of an intractable problem. But British troops and many men of goodwill, on both sides of the Border, have found themselves between two fires. This in itself constitutes evidence of a kind. If the British Government, as Mr Haughey alleges, has been 'supporting unconditionally the basic Unionist position', why did it suspend Stormont? Why did it try to introduce a power-sharing executive, and why did it conduct a Border Poll?

The truth is that successive British Governments were persuaded that Catholics in the North had legitimate grievances which the Stormont authorities did too little to redress. The hope of that 'lasting peace and stability' which both sovereign Governments seek would be dashed if mainland 'military, political and economic power' were withdrawn. The resulting turmoil would not stop at the Irish Border or even the Irish Sea.

The Northern Ireland majority will not be coerced, bombed or bullied into the Republic: they would, if necessary, fight, even if mainland power were withdrawn. This is a fact which successive British Governments have had to face even when they have been tempted to seek an easy way out. The principal terrorist groups declare themselves to be in permanent revolt against the Government in Dublin and are determined to overthrow it. Can Mr Haughey be so sure that the withdrawal of mainland power from the North would not stimulate the forces of anarchy in Dublin as well as in Belfast?

The Unionist case is founded on the democratic will of the distinct Ulster people and the right to self-determination successfully asserted by Southern Ireland. It follows that any form of 'new Ireland' will still contain a Border. Nevertheless this should not constitute a barrier to all-Ireland co-operation.

There are probably few if any independent sovereign States in the world which have closer links already than the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Recognition of an 'Irish dimension' to the Northern Ireland 'problem' requires also a corresponding recognition by the Republic of a 'British dimension' even to its own internal relationships.

Those who design a 'New Ireland' must reckon with reality. It is inescapable that Northern Ireland can neither be coerced nor seduced into the Republic. It is futile and insulting to suggest that Ulster Unionism is less love of the Union than hatred of Rome and that if the Republic, with its Catholic ethos, became a permissive society, a United Ireland could be brought about 'by consent'.

Rather, there is a mutual interest in the preservation of the distinctive Irish contribution to Western Christian civilisation. It is not a question of contraceptives but of the Crown. Abortion is as repulsive to most Northern Protestants as an all-Ireland Republic -

whether Catholic, socialist or secular.

Mrs Thatcher has spoken of a 'unique relationship' between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and also of standing 'rock firm for the Union' of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The dialogue must primarily be East-West (London-Dublin) rather than North-South. The form of devolution contemplated by successive British Governments since the suspension of Stormont can only increase the distrust of the Unionist majority in that Government's good intentions. Moreover, it also alarms Nationalists, who fear that the way is being paved to a revival of devolved government on the old Stormont model of Protestant ascendancy.

But the chief impediment to the closer association of the two sovereign partners in these islands is Dublin's failure so to amend its constitution and its policy as to honour the solemn Tripartite Declaration of 1925 under which the Free State accepted the Border as the international frontier.

It is the frontier between two Community partners whose ties are multifarious. The Anglican, Roman Catholic and other communions transcend the Irish Border. Both countries benefited when their currencies were at parity, and the recent separation of the Irish pound from the pound sterling has been mutually inconvenient and detrimental to business in both countries. A number of learned societies, and societies less learned, some of them still styled 'Royal', function on both sides of the Border. The British Isles (including the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) form a Common Travel Area. The Commissioners of Irish Lights constitute a 'Trinity House' for the whole island; and Parliamentary Questions have shown that they are accountable to the Oireachtas Eireann as well as to the United Kingdom Parliament. It is to be hoped that legislation to provide full reciprocity of voting rights will soon be enacted. The question of Parliamentary association is discussed in the Report of the Proceedings of the Fourteenth British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association held in London in June 1983. A copy of these proceedings is annexed.

Such links could be further strengthened without impairing national sovereignty. The pattern of such bodies as the Nordic Council is worthy of consideration. The felicitous acronym IONA (Islands Of the North Atlantic) has been invoked by some of us. But the immediate, over-riding interest of the two sovereign powers is the irreversible defeat of terrorists bent on overturning by violence the constitutional order, in both South and North, and its replacement by a republic not so much Catholic as 'Cuban'.

NOTE ON THE NORDIC COUNCIL

Like the islands of the North Atlantic, the lands grouped around the Baltic have a history of both conflict and co-operation. From 1397 to 1523 they were united under Danish leadership in the Union of Kalmar.

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Between 1563 and 1720 there were wars between the Danish-Norwegian and the Swedish-Finnish Kingdoms; and in Napoleonic times they were on different sides. The Russians conquered Finland and in 1814 the King of Denmark/Norway was forced to cede Norway to the King of Sweden. This did not prevent the Norwegians claiming independence which they finally gained in 1905. Finland became independent in 1917 after the Russian Revolution.

The Nordic Council, formed in 1953 (Finland acceded in 1955) is a joint Parliamentary body. In 1962 on its initiative, the Nordic Convention on Cooperation - the Helsinki Convention - was adopted. The Statutes of the Nordic Council are accepted as part of national legislation and in 1971 were incorporated in an international treaty. A Council of Ministers was to be created. To the Helsinki Convention was added a Cultural Agreement (1971), a Transportation Treaty (1972) and an Environment Protection Convention (1974).

The Nordic Council consists of seventy-eight representatives of national legislatures plus about fifty Cabinet Ministers who have a voice but no vote in the Council's plenary assemblies.

Sources

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