

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2008/148/709
Creation Date(s):	November 1978
Extent and medium:	4 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Taoiseach's meeting with British Prime Minister,
Monday, 27 November, 1978

Northern Ireland: Suggested headings

POLITICAL MOVEMENT

- need to seek a way out of the political stalemate which currently exists in Northern Ireland
- urge Prime Minister to ensure that all possible steps are taken to devise, in the interim, structures of government which would involve power sharing, partnership or participation - however described - on a basis acceptable to both sections of the community
- SDLP position: difficulty in retaining the support of the minority community in the absence of a local forum

SPEAKERS CONFERENCE

- a Bill to increase Northern Ireland's representation in the House of Commons has been published. It amends the House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act 1949, which sets out the number of parliamentary constituencies for the United Kingdom, so that the number of seats for Northern Ireland should be "not greater than 18 or less than 16".

It also provides that this formula should be taken by the Boundary Commission to mean 17, unless it appears to them that it should be the higher or lower figure.

We have received confirmation of recent newspaper reports that the Northern Ireland Secretary of State had agreed to look seriously at the SDLP proposal for P.R. in Northern Ireland at Westminster elections. The feeling is however, that the proposal is unlikely to become a reality.

Our attitude to Northern Ireland M.P.s at Westminster can be summed up in the words of the historian who in describing the Irish Parliamentary Party in the last century spoke of the members as

"intruders, with only a transient interest in the passing scene and with only a momentary opportunity of influencing the events which were being daily enacted before their eyes."

H. BLOCK SITUATION

The Department of Foreign Affairs have supplied a note on Long Kesh.

/...

John Hume recently raised the question of the case taken to Strasbourg by four of the protesting prisoners on the issue of conditions in the H. Blocks. It has been argued on behalf of the prisoners that the Prison Authorities have been withholding as privileges, things which they (the prisoners) consider to be actual rights. Mr. Hume expressed the view that the British were on weak ground in relation to the punishments they were administering in the H. Blocks. The Attorney General's views have been sought on this.

Ambassador Donlon recently reported that the Provo cause and its fellow travellers were getting great mileage out of the H. Block situation and the enquiry into interrogations at Castlereagh Barracks. This publicity is providing support for Mario Biaggi's Ad hoc Committee's proposed "peace forum" and demand for Congressional hearings.

If the H Block situation could be resolved in whole or in part, the PIRA and kindred organisations would have much less going for them both here in Ireland and abroad than they have at present.

ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS

(1) British Financial Assistance to Northern Ireland 1974/75 to 1977/78

	1974/75	1975/76	1976/77	1977/78
Totals	£553 m.	£776 m.	£757 m.	*£1076 m.

*This includes a £250 m. special payment to cover redemption of Northern Ireland Electricity Service Borrowings. It is probably a once off item. In any event Northern Ireland is costing the British taxpayer over £800 m. per annum at present.

(2) 1969/1977 estimated total cost to this country of Northern Ireland troubles, approximately £200 m. for extra Gardai, damage, IDA grants etc. plus economic losses from lower tourism etc.;

(3) Gross Domestic Product (at constant 1970 prices) per person at work here as a percentage of Northern Ireland -

84% in 1970 and 1971	88% in 1973	94% in 1975
90% in 1972	91% in 1974	93% in 1976

The average figure for the Republic for G.D.P. per person at work for the years 1974 - 76 was 93% of the corresponding Northern Ireland figure as against 84% in 1970 - 71. There are no figures for G.D.P. in Northern Ireland available for 1977. In the Republic there was, in 1977, an increase of 5.2% in G.D.P. per person at work over the 1976 figure. It is unlikely that the Northern Ireland figure will match this.

(4) ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

- Since London Agreement the following have been established Anglo-Irish Steering Group; North-South Group; Derry-Donegal Group; Erne Catchment Group; Newry-Dundalk Group.
- All Groups are working well. Derry-Donegal recommendations are being implemented or examined further. Erne Study by

Consultants/about to start. Newry-Dundalk study by Departments concerned is under way.

- Cross Border Drainage: £5 m. approximately of E.E.C. money allocated for joint North/South programmes for Blackwater (Ulster) and Finn.

IRISH M.P.'s IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

After the General Election of 1874, fifty nine Home Rule M.P.'s, led by Isaac Butt, took their seats at Westminster. The Irish party quickly saw that they had no hope in trying to conciliate and convince the House of Commons by rational debate. Joseph Biggar together with Parnell in 1875 introduced a new tactic into the parliamentary assembly - the policy of obstruction. Both Biggar and Parnell intervened in the discussion of legislation unconnected with Irish interests. But their main work of obstruction took place during debates on Ireland.

During the debate on the Peace Preservation (Ireland) Bill in 1875 the Irish members gave notice of fifty-nine amendments. They gave notice of sixteen bills in 1876 and fifteen in 1877. During the debate on the South Africa Bill (to annex the Transvaal) in 1877 seven Irish members including Parnell, held up the bill for 26 hours by continuous speeches. Parnell claimed that he must use his right as an Irish member to take "that part in the debate on English measures which English members frequently took, with disastrous effects, in the debate on Irish measures".

The annual debates on the estimates was a favourite occasion for obstruction. In 1877 at the committee stage of the army estimates the Irish members forced seventeen divisions. The debates on the Irish estimates were lengthy and bitter inquests took place into the state of Ireland. The Irish members also availed of the opportunity to raise a matter on the adjournment of the House to call attention to some aspect of the Irish question which they considered unjust. New rules and deadlines had to be drawn up to cope with the situation which arose because of the tactics employed by the Home Rule party. During the debate on the Coercion Bill in 1881 Irish members gave 41 hours of obstruction. Biggar in fact was one of the 37 Irish members who were suspended the following day for disorderly conduct. New rules again were required and this gave rise to the closure motion as we know it today which was then introduced as an amendment to Standing Orders.

In 1887 the Tory government introduced the Criminal Law Amendment (Ireland) Bill one of a historic chain of coercionary measures. The Parnellites had brought down a succession of Tory and Liberal governments by their policy of playing off one party against the other. Guillotine motions as they are now known were introduced firstly in the House of Commons in June 1887 because of the obstructionist tactics of the Irish contingent. To obtain acceptance of the guillotine motion the Government of the day had to use the other newly created device of the closure.

After Parnell's departure the Irish party continued to attack the policy of coercion and involved the Commons in a new campaign of obstruction which recalled the stormiest days of Parnell's leadership. On one occasion the business of the House was held up for a week by the Irish. As a result of their tactics Balfour had to lay before the House a new set of resolutions imposing much more

severe punishment than before upon those members who persisted in defying the Speakers authority. In the early part of this century events became intangled in the liberal struggle to break the power of the Lords ^{to} veto legislation. The tactical opportunity came with the passage of Lloyd George's "People's Budget" in 1909. The Lords vetoed the Budget and two general elections followed. In January 1910 the balance of power in the House of Commons was as follows: Liberals 275, Torys 273, Labour 40, Irish Nationalists 82. The Irish members were now in a key position which they had not enjoyed since 1885. In the new general election in December 1910 the parties emerged with the following seats: Liberals 272, Torys 272, Labour 42, Irish Nationalists 84. This was the Parliament which enacted the Parliament Act of 1911 reducing the Lords' veto to a delaying power of two years. Following this Act the third Home Rule Bill was presented to the Commons in 1912 (two earlier Home Rule Bills having been vetoed by the Lords).

The role of the Irish members was to a large extent a negative one. They acted as a catalyst and an irritant on the English party system. On one occasion they used the rules of the House to compel the Prince of Wales to withdraw from the public gallery. Their position was summed up by Professor F.S. Lyons: ".....They were at bottom intruders with only a transient interest in the passing scene, and with only a momentary opportunity of influencing the events which were being daily enacted before their eyes".