

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code: 2014/105/737

Creation Date(s): 29 May 1984

Extent and medium: 4 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Access Conditions: Open

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(Material on Northern Ireland)

McDonagh
Draft submitted

by McCauley. Thank you. Taken on board in revised draft. In Kevin 28.6.84.

27
28.6.

Details have already been circulated of the Supplementary Estimate which is required to meet the cost of the New Ireland Forum from the beginning of this year up to the time its work was completed in early May. The provision covers the main expenses of the Forum which are borne on the Vote for my Department and include all administrative/consultancy costs as well as members' expenses.

This is the first opportunity I have had in this House to refer to the historic report of the Forum. I have been heartened by the overall response to its contents. It has been rightly seen, by all fair-minded people, as a valid analysis of the complex problem we face on this island, a problem which can only be resolved by a willingness to accommodate each of the two Irish traditions equally satisfactorily in new structures. Many commentators have avoided the temptation to make selective use of certain parts of the Report but have rather seen it as the Government sees it - as an agenda for possible future action. It is an agenda which can be extended - in line with what the Report itself intends when it states that the parties in the Forum also remain open to discuss other views which may contribute to political development. It is, I believe, vitally necessary to emphasise this openness and it is in this spirit that this Government will pursue its policies on Northern Ireland. If we come back to the purpose for which the Forum was established - the achievement of lasting peace and stability in a new Ireland -

we can readily see, knowing the conflicting traditions and viewpoints, that any one solution which was based on the dominance of one or other tradition would fall very short of achieving the Forum's aim. That the Forum avoided this pitfall is a tribute to its courage and to its realism. It has emphasised that the political arrangements for a new and sovereign Ireland would have to be freely negotiated and agreed to by the people of the North and by the people of the South. The Report is not, therefore, a set of demands and will never be interpreted as such by my Government. Its findings and conclusions are in accordance with our policies and we will pursue these urgently and in a spirit of generosity.

The recent European Assembly elections in Northern Ireland bring me to comment on some British media reaction to the results which implies that the situation may not now be quite so critical as was suggested earlier. I would earnestly hope that it is very much a minority viewpoint in Britain. It is I believe, based on too optimistic an interpretation of the election results.

This was a particular electoral test which cannot be validly compared with the results of other elections held in Northern Ireland in the past two years. The Government was, of course, heartened by the clearly increased support for constitutional nationalism but we still believe that, in the words of the Forum Report, "constitutional politics are on trial". It would be foolish, short-sighted and dangerous to adopt a sanguine view of the situation simply on the basis of results from one very particular type of electoral contest. The deterioration in attitudes has

become too embedded for anyone to honestly believe that anything short of a major reassessment of the position can bring about genuine political progress. ^{WP.} [During the course of the European Council in Fontainebleau, I had a very useful meeting with the British Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher. It was our first opportunity to meet since the publication of the Forum report. As I have said before, the usefulness of these meetings lies in the fact that they are private and informal. For this reason, it would not be appropriate for me to give details of what we discussed. I can say, however, that there is a realisation on the part of the British Government of the importance of the Forum Report and an acceptance that it contains the elements which any solution must cater for. [I expect that the official response of the British Government to the Forum Report will emerge during the forthcoming debate in the House of Commons.] My Government looks forward to a positive response and to an opportunity to play its full part in ensuring that the process of reconciliation between the two major traditions in Ireland is quickly realised. The Prime Minister and I have agreed to hold a formal bilateral meeting later this year, [probably in the Autumn]. I also had meetings in London last Wednesday with the leaders of the main opposition parties there, Mr Neil Kinnock MP, Dr David Owen MP and Mr David Steele MP. It was my first opportunity since the publication of the Forum Report to discuss with them my Government's attitude to it. I was encouraged by their response and by their concern to see the Dublin and London Governments enter into urgent discussions on the Report and the realities and requirements of this tragic situation which it has identified. I emphasised to each Party Leader that now that the Forum has finished its work, it is the responsibility of my Government

to see to the implementation of its policies as reflected in the Forum's Report and to impress on the British Government the continuing urgency of the situation and the need for it to reassess, in a positive way, its involvement in Northern Ireland.