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① Sir E...
② Mr Carr...
③ 201. PC 2/8

CONFIDENTIAL COVERING [redacted]

29/8

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B)

- cc: PS/Mr Scott (L&B)
- PS/PUS (L&B)
- PS/Sir Ewart Bell
- Mr Brennan
- Mr Merifield
- Mr Gilliland
- Mr Abbott
- Mr Edis
- Mr Reeve
- Mr Boys Smith - o/r



NEW IRELAND FORUM

1. The Irish Press of 18 August carried an 'exclusive' report of an allegedly leaked discussion paper circulated to members of the New Ireland Forum and titled 'Framework for Discussion of Fundamental Problems'. The Secretary of State may wish to see the full text attached which has reached us from Margaret Van Hattem. The Irish Press report, written by John Wallace formerly of the Belfast Telegraph, quoted sections of the paper which posed in very general terms the difficult questions which would have to be resolved by the Republic were they to create conditions favourable to a 'New Ireland', including that of the Catholic ethos of the existing state. The story was in the context of the forthcoming referendum on the anti-abortion constitutional amendment. The document had obviously been passed to Wallace by a political figure involved in the Forum who was also opposed to the constitutional amendment as an example of excessive Catholic influence.

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used

2. The attached telegram from the Dublin Embassy confirmed the authenticity of the Irish Press report and points to the likely author and source of the leak. It does not, however, clarify the exact status of the document. Wallace's article claimed that it had the endorsement of the four party leaders in the Forum. This could have been embarrassing for Mr Haughey who supports the constitutional amendment. Fianna Fail TDs David Andrews and Jim Tunney have described the paper as a discussion document prepared for the September meeting of the Forum and denied that it had the endorsement of the party leaders. The Irish Times report of 19 August, which seems to be well informed, claims that it was compiled by Dr O'hEocha,

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the Forum chairman, on the basis of discussions in the Forum to date and with regard to the terms of reference. This would explain the tentative title.

3. Almost all subsequent press reports have been based on the original Irish Press story. A significant exception is a report by Margaret Van Hattem and Brendan Keenan in the Financial Times of 19 August titled 'Irish may Concede on Unity' and which quoted parts of the Forum document not printed in the Irish Press. Unfortunately her report was considerably distorted by subediting which removed the important qualification 'as a unitary state' from a reference to unification. It was obvious from the report that the FT had obtained a separate copy of the Forum document. Ms Van Hattem has supplied this copy to the Cabinet Office in strict confidence.

4. The document clearly results from a series of meetings between the four party leaders who have been meeting with Professor O hEocha as a kind of steering committee. It is both a report on areas of consensus which have emerged and a programme for further discussions by the Forum. It begins by admitting that there are differences between the parties and that each will have to face difficulties in surmounting these differences. The paper does, however, record areas of agreement between the party leaders. Presumably the inclusion of this section accounts for the confusion on whether the document had been endorsed as a whole by the leaders. It also seems likely that this area of consensus will figure largely in the final Forum report. The four points of agreement listed are:

- " - Before there can be fundamental progress, it is necessary that the British Government undertake a major reassessment of its own position and of its historical role in failing to come to terms with the widespread abuse of power in Northern Ireland since 1921 or to accommodate the nationalist position;

- Similarly, Irish nationalists need to conduct a major reassessment of their position and historical role and their failure to convince the unionist population and the British Government of the merits of the nationalist aspiration;
- Among the principal reasons why the structures of Northern Ireland do not work is the fact that they deny to the nationalist section of the community in Northern Ireland (i) an adequate involvement in decision-making and (ii) an adequate symbolic and administrative expression of their Irish identity and aspiration;
- It is necessary both to understand fully and adequately to accommodate the problems posed by loyalists in any new structures".

Of these points, the first and the third implicitly make demands on HMG. The first point seems to seek some form of British endorsement of the desirability of Irish unity.

5. The remainder of the document poses a series of questions which the Forum must resolve. These are couched in very broad and imprecise terms. The latter part of the paper is often repetitive but three areas are highlighted and these will presumably feature in the Forum report.

- 5.1 Changes will be necessary in the Republic to accommodate the Protestant ethos in, for example, family law, Church/State relations and education. This was the aspect of the paper highlighted in the initial Irish Press report.

5.2 Considerable attention is given to the 'political' aspect of Ulster Protestant separatism, including the Loyalists' sense of Britishness. The question is posed: "is there an Irishness, are there political structures which can accommodate both nationalist and unionist positions?" It is interesting that the Forum has not shirked the issue of the unionists' Britishness though no indication is given of the type of structures which might comprehend both loyalties.

5.3 Reference is also made to the relationship between a New Ireland, Britain and the 'international world' in terms of how new structures could be maintained with outside help, which presumably means a bid for financial subvention.

6. The encouraging feature of the paper is the attention paid to Unionist opinion in Northern Ireland. Although at one point described as the "pretext" for British obstinacy, the paper taken as a whole treats Unionist opposition to a united Ireland as a crucial factor in its own right and suggests Nationalists and the Republic should contemplate radical changes to try and accommodate the Unionist tradition. The worry is the implication that more sedulous wooing of Unionists by the Republic should be in some way supported by the British Government.

A.

G L ANGEL
25 August 1983