

Fenn optimistic on Anglo-Irish relationship

From Renagh Holohan, in Glenties

THE British Ambassador to Ireland, Sir Nicholas Fenn, told the MacGill Summer School last night that important advances had been made in Anglo-Irish relations in recent months. While difficulties remained, he was sure there was a window of opportunity and it should not be let pass.

Also speaking was the unionist MP, Mr Ken Maginnis, who made an impassioned plea for the maintenance of Northern Ireland as a state and said he was not prepared to see it become "the Irish Republic's Kuwait".

Sir Nicholas said the British Government had views of its own about Northern Ireland, but had no preconceived blueprint for its ultimate destiny. "There is no secret strategic or economic motivation. Whatever view one takes of the past, the present reality is not sensibly seen as a residual colonial problem . . . the issue is not something called 'the British presence in the North of Ireland'. We are not talking about real estate but about people: one million Irishmen profoundly alienated from the Republic and determined to be British.

"A secure future cannot be built upon fantasy. Northern Ireland remains British because that is the declared and continuing desire of a majority of its people. They will not be betrayed," he said.

Sir Nicholas said "the Anglo-Irish Agreement did not solve all the problems of the North, but it was one of those rare diplomatic instruments which changed the name of the game thereafter. Although it had profoundly alienated the unionist community, it had marked an important development in the politics of the North and had created institutions, the conference and the Secretariat, which proved their value every day.

"It transformed for the better the east-west relationship between London and Dublin, so that — almost for the first time — we are looking together as colleagues at the perplexing problems which

history has laid at our door," he said.

While Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom until the majority of its people decided otherwise, whatever emerged from the present uncertainties, there could be no return to the dictatorship of the majority which for 50 years was called democracy. Neither community in the North could impose its will on the other, Sir Nicholas said.

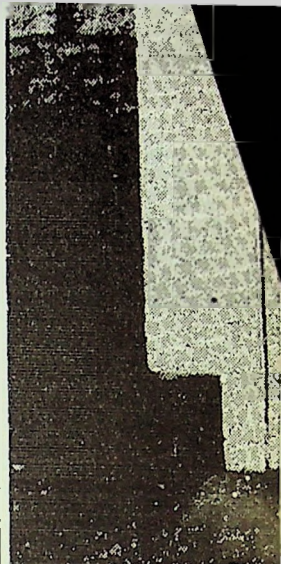
Mr Maginnis said he regretted that the prospect for any formal political breakthrough was in danger of becoming even more remote now than he had believed it to be five years ago when the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed. Peace, stability and reconciliation had not been achieved and their realisation seemed to have become of secondary importance as the two signatories were preoccupied with the struggle merely to justify the agreement itself.

He was sad to say that the events of the last five years, and especially those of 1990, had done absolutely nothing to reassure him that there was any real desire on the part of the Irish Republic to do other than maintain its aggressive attitude to Northern Ireland and especially to its unionist people.

"I have been convinced by both the words and actions of many of the most influential politicians of this nation and by the highest courts within this country that this republic really believes that it cannot endure unless it maintains its single-minded adherence to narrow nationalism as distinct from true democratic republicanism."

Mr Maginnis went on to quote from the judgment in the McGimpsey case and added that the primary threat to the North was the 1937 Constitution where the claim was real and had been expressed in aggressive, uncompromising and strictly nationalistic language.

"I am not prepared to see Northern Ireland become the Irish Republic's Kuwait. Only when government here has the courage and the confidence to realise that the Irish Republic is a nation as it presently exists and no longer requires some sort of ritual blood sacrifice to purify it, will the full potential of its people be redeemed."



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