

Attendance

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# FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

THIRTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING,  
DUBLIN CASTLE ON TUESDAY, 15 DECEMBER 1995

Chairperson: Judge Catherine McGuinness

I hereby certify the following to be a true and accurate transcript of my shorthand notes of the above-named proceedings.

Michelle Coffey  
Doyle Court Reporters,  
2 Arran Quay,  
Dublin 7.

Telephone: 8722833  
2862097 (after hours)  
Fax: 8724486

Alliance question, and I think John Alderdice is asking it.

DR. JOHN ALDERDICE: I am very grateful Madam Chair, thank you very much. Two or three comments and then one or two questions. First of all I think that the studies which have been presented this morning are extremely valuable and I welcome them very much indeed. And I would have to say that I think the fact we are here discussing such matters and they have been requested is some testament to an increasing maturity on the part of the Republic of Ireland and I would pay tribute not just to the Forum itself, but indeed to Albert Reynolds, because when I was speaking to him at the time of the Downing Street Declaration about the function of the Forum, he made clear one of the issues he wanted to see addressed was one of the obstacles in the South to reconciliation in the island as a whole. I think it does represent an increasing maturity that issues of these kind can be thought about, spoken and dealt with, I would want to I have to say to be seen in that context.

The second thing I think is important to understand is that all the major churches operate on an island wide basis, therefore those things which happen in the North will generally be felt in the South and in the South will be felt in the North as being relevant not just because we are neighbours, but because in terms of being involved in church life, we are actually part of the same denomination - Presbyterian North and South, Catholics South and North - we can not simply separate the questions of the States North and South though they are separate jurisdictions when we are speaking about religious matters the religious jurisdictions transcend the statutory ones.

The third thing I want to say is whilst I value very much the two

papers which look at the sense of feeling, the examination of literature and history, I do find myself coming back to the paper which presents us with some figures. And one of the reasons for that is our experience in Northern Ireland, when you ask people in Northern Ireland for example, about whether or not they are fair employers there are very few who say other than they strive to be the best they can and such difficulties they have in ensuring fair employment is largely out of their hands, it's a matter of history, geography and so on. We have not been prepared to accept such comments insisted instead on looking at facts and figures and then trying to ensure change.

So I do find myself irrevocably drawn to some of the figures, I have to say that one of the very disturbing things is the table which refers to the up bringing of children in mixed marriages. It is extraordinary that when we read in the case of some of those, we are talking about figures in the 90%. Now, one either has to take a view that the Prods aren't really too interested in their religion, and there will be some who take that view, or to say there are other very powerful factors forcing us in that direction. And it does seem from what you said that Nai Temera is a very important factor in this regard. This is not a question of the State of course, it is a question of a church making a particular decision. There has however been some improvement as I note from the table and you refer to that between the 81 and 91 censuses and that is welcome, I suppose one would have to put that down, this is in a sense part of the question, would you put that partly down to increasing pluralism, increasing economic prosperity, and a degree of relaxation in terms of the regulations as far as the Catholic church is concerned on the up bringing of children in mixed marriage, and of course changes in some of the restrictive social legislation? But if that improvement has taken

place what can be done to make the improvement progress further? Should there be further relaxations for example, in the question of Nai Temera? Because it certainly seems to me, that however one suggests that everyone is trying to be terribly descent to everybody and we are all trying to be very pluralist, that's what people in the North have told me for years about fair employment, and quite rightly some of us have striven not to accept those matters until the figures show real improvement.

The next area which I think is a very difficult one, I don't know the answer to it and therefore I come back to the those of you who maybe able to help us. In the vexed question of the balance between a degree of integration of society as a whole requiring shared institutions which do not express particularly strongly the religious or political views of any one group, on the one hand in order to create a shared society, and the necessity on the other hand to have some particular institutions which express rather strongly the religious or cultural or political views of minorities in order that they can be self sustaining. In the North issues like the Irish language for example are a case in point, or in terms of the political aspirations of minorities the need for political structures which will transcend the jurisdiction in order not only to express some kind of aspirations but to sustain the needs of a minority. Is it the case that this is something and if so what implications dies it have in terms of hospitals, schools, other educational establishments such as universities, churches themselves, and indeed trans jurisdictional political structures which relate not just to Northern Ireland, but indeed not rest of the islands, or to put it rather shortly - as far as we would be concerned in Northern Ireland we have been trying to make changes in the North, when we come here as far as we are concerned what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the

gander. Thank you.

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