

NORTHERN IRELAND: POLITICAL MOVEMENT

Points to Make

1. At our meeting on 4 December, Mr Haughey suggested that there was evidence that an opportunity existed to bring the Provisional movement round to a constitutional approach, and to abandon the so-called "armed struggle". He explained that Mr John Hume remained in contact with elements of the Provisional leadership, and that a proposal was being developed. Central to this was the idea that the two governments could make a joint statement, designed to make clear that the constitutional political process could provide openings for the Republican tradition.

2. In response I expressed scepticism about the likelihood of this approach yielding results. The evidence of a possible change of heart on the part of the Provisionals seemed elusive; and Mr Haughey made clear that he was guided wholly by what Mr Hume told him. (I have also expressed these doubts to Mr Hume when he raised the issue with me direct.) Our own assessment of the Provisionals' intentions and capability does not provide much encouragement, though there does appear to be a somewhat spasmodic internal debate about the possibility of a ceasefire and talks.

3. I must also emphasise our own determination to defend the rights of the people of Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom if they so wish. Since there can be no compromise on that central issue from our point of view - and since successive Irish governments have accepted that a united Ireland could in practice be achieved only with consent - it seems difficult to envisage a text which the Provisionals would regard as providing the basis for renouncing violence.

4. We will also maintain our position, which I believe you may share, that we cannot envisage direct negotiations with any organisation which espouses or supports terrorism.

5. Nonetheless, given the importance of the issue, and the need not to miss what might have proved an opportunity, I did agree that Mr Nally and Sir Robin Butler should consider the matter further. They were to examine, in particular, the prospects for devising an acceptable and viable joint statement.

6. They last met shortly before you took office. They jointly concluded that the draft under examination ("Draft 2" - copy attached), which Mr Hume had apparently supplied, posed considerable difficulties; that the exercise as a whole involved substantial risks; and that matters should not be taken further.

7. Since then Mr Hume has given us a further text, which apparently has the approval of the Provisional Army Council. (He emphasised that the Provisional movement did not expect him to give it to the British government, but to broker it initially with the Irish government.) This text, headed "Draft of a declaration which Sinn Fein suggests should be made jointly by the British and Dublin Governments" which we might call "Draft 3" (copy attached) represents a considerable step back from "Draft 2", which itself posed considerable difficulties. I need mention only two points:

- (i) first Draft 3 requires (in paragraph 4) the British Government to commit itself to a united and independent Ireland "within a period to be agreed" and "to use all its influence and energy to win consent for this policy." This amounts to a commitment to withdrawal against the wishes of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland;

- (ii) second, Draft 3, envisages (in paragraph 6) a commitment by the British Government to remove "the constitutional barriers to peace and reconciliation", by which is presumably meant partition.

8. Of course we would want to consider carefully any realistic suggestion that the Provisionals might abandon, or be brought to abandon, terrorism and switch to a political path. But in considering any proposal both Governments will, I believe, need to keep in mind the principles and framework enshrined in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. For example, particular attention will need to be paid to the implications, if any, for the acknowledgement in Article 1 of the Agreement that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

9. Against this background, I believe we have no alternative but to explain to Mr Hume that, while we appreciate his efforts and his good intentions, this exercise does not seem likely to bring success. This is unfortunate because in principle it is better for the Provisional movement to be writing papers than making bombs and shooting guns. But on the evidence of the paper the Provisional movement are out of touch with reality, and are not seriously interested in finding a basis for engaging in conventional political activity. Is your own assessment any more encouraging?

10. I would also want to stress to Mr Hume (who on some occasions appears to have found his efforts with the Provisionals a distraction from our overt political development initiative) that HMG regards the proper way forward as lying through renewed political talks in the three-stranded process. I hope you will be taking the same line. We do believe that, in

the medium term, a political accommodation reached through talks involving the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, and the two governments, is the best way to bear down on the Provisional movement, apart of course from security policy itself. There is evidence that the Provisionals have been worried by the prospects of talks going ahead, inevitably without their participation.

11. I am sure that neither of us would wish to see any report of these exchanges in the Press. However it is a possibility, given the involvement of people outside our two Governments. If there is any such report we would say that while we are regularly in touch with the Irish Government as well as Mr Hume and other political leaders, there is no alternative political initiative to the overt 3-stranded talks process under discussion and (if asked) no talk with paramilitaries.

12. I have it in mind to make a speech setting out clearly our position on Northern Ireland. The right occasion may not arise until after our Election, but I have not yet reached a conclusion on that. There are a number of reasons for making such a speech, including the need to steady the Province at a difficult time. But I would aim also to indicate to the Provisional movement the realities of our position and accordingly, by inference, the only basis on which they could expect to be fully accommodated in the political process: namely a clear renunciation of violence.