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PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME: 3 MAY 1984

THE REPORT OF THE NEW IRELAND FORUM

Notes for Supplementaries

1. Will the Prime Minister express a view on the Forum report?

The Government's position has already been set out by my rt hon Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We shall want to study the report carefully, and also reactions to it, not least in Northern Ireland itself. I said in this House on 8 November last year about the Forum, "We would owe it to a new idea to give it a thorough intellectual examination to see whether it can contribute to the improvement of some of the problems of Northern Ireland."

2. Will the Government enter into discussions with the Irish Government about/on the basis of the Forum report?

I look forward to continued contact with Dr FitzGerald and his Government on matters of mutual concern. The Irish Government has a legitimate interest in the situation in NI and we try to keep them in touch with our thinking on Northern Ireland and to ensure that we know their views. Insofar as the Forum report provides the basis for the Irish Government's views it will no doubt feature in any

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3. Will the Government give a positive response in due course?

exchanges we have on that subject. I note the report says that the parties concerned are fully open to discuss other ideas.

4. Will the Government give serious consideration to any of the options in the report?

As my rt hon Friend has said, we will wish to consider the report carefully; it is clear on a first reading that there are parts which are unacceptable to us and parts which we can welcome. The task of all of us is to search for peace, stability and prosperity for the people of Northern Ireland.

5. Will the Government publish a White Paper in response?

As the report itself acknowledges, none of the illustrative models or any other change in sovereignty in Northern Ireland could be achieved unless they were freely agreed to by the people of Northern Ireland. There is no reason to expect such agreement or consent in the foreseeable future. The task therefore is to pursue the search for widely-acceptable arrangements without changes in sovereignty for which the required consent is lacking.

The Forum report is not an Irish Government document: it is produced by the four nationalist political parties. A response in the form of a White Paper

6. Will the Government provide time for a debate?

would not be appropriate.

My rt hon Friend the Leader of the House will take account of the views of Hon Members.

7. Will the Government refute the biased historical section in the Forum report?

The Forum report's historical analysis is one-sided and unacceptable and so are some of the other statements about HMG's policies. But I see no point in raking over the past; the important point is to deal with the very real problems of division, violence and alienation which exist in Northern Ireland today.

8. Did the Government see an advance copy of the report?

[Version agreed with the Irish]

There was no authoritative text of the report until it was finalised earlier this week. The Taoiseach did me the courtesy of informing me of the content of the report immediately thereafter.

9. Will the Government welcome the report as an advance in nationalist thinking?

There is much in the report which can be welcomed - as my rt hon Friend's statement made clear - as well as other things with which we cannot agree

10. Does the Government accept the Forum's view that the time has come to look at the problem in an all-Ireland context?

The task of all responsible people is to address the serious problems of division, violence and alienation in

Northern Ireland, and to seek to secure for everybody in the Province a peaceful and prosperous future. We must look at things as we find them in practical and realistic terms. The parties in the Forum must recognise that the agreement which they acknowledged is required is not going to be forthcoming for the foreseeable future in relation to the three models they have put forward.

11. Will the Government ignore Unionist objections and implement the Forum's recommendations?

The report acknowledges that the agreement of the people of Northern Ireland is required to any change in the Province's position within the United Kingdom. This has been the position of successive UK Governments. We believe that peace, stability and economic recovery will best be achieved under a form of government in the Province which is widely acceptable throughout the community.

12. Will the Government confirm that the future of Northern Ireland is no business of the Dublin Government?

The Forum has been produced by four parties, including one from Northern Ireland. We have always acknowledged the legitimate interest of the Irish Government in the situation in Northern Ireland. But the fact remains that the constitutional future of

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Northern Ireland is for the people of the Province and for this Parliament - the report acknowledges there could be change to the position of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom only with the agreement of the people of the North.

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The Northern Ireland Assembly

Does the PM not now accept that the Assembly has totally failed?

In Northern Ireland it is easier to destroy and dismiss than to build. The Assembly offers a way to develop better arrangements for government in Northern Ireland in the interests of all its people - Nationalist and Unionist - if only the parties are prepared to use it.

UUP proposal for administrative devolution

The UUP proposal offers a more sensible way forward.

The UUP proposals, like any others, must be widely acceptable throughout the community if they are to encourage peace, stability and economic recovery. The Government will carefully consider any proposals against that criteria. The tone of the UUP discussion paper is notable for its concern to recognise and respect the distinctive identity of the minority.