

Text of letter to the Prime Minister from the Taoiseach

SECRET AND PERSONAL

22nd November 1984

Dear Margaret

I appreciate very much the fact that in your Press Conference you sought to make the points which it was understood between us you would make with a view to avoiding any embarrassment for my position. You will have noted that in my own presentation, both at my Press Conference and in the Dail, I was extremely careful to avoid creating any difficulty for your position.

Two very serious problems have emerged, however, and have created a sense of resentment on the part of public opinion in this State and, particularly, on the part of nationalists in Northern Ireland.

The first relates to the New Ireland Forum Report. At all times we have tried to avoid damaging Anglo-Irish relations in working to secure a report which, far from creating any difficulties in our relations, would rather create common ground. We have in our contacts with your authorities repeatedly pointed to the Realities and Requirements set out in the Forum Report (Paras 1 and 2 of Chapter 5) as containing the essence of the Report, we have repeatedly explained that the Requirements (para. 2) constitute its only proposals, and we have pointed out that the three illustrative models contained in the Report are not proposals.

The fact that in your Press Conference you referred to this part only of the Forum Report, and in the most dismissive terms, ignoring the actual proposals in the Report, and ignoring our stated willingness to discuss "other views", created a strongly negative reaction on the part of nationalists in Ireland, North and South, and has also contributed to the very misunderstanding of the Report itself which the Government here have worked so hard and as long to eliminate - starting on the day it was published.

I attach for your information a list of the 'Requirements' as set out in the Forum Report. These Requirements are, I believe, highly consistent with the positions that our two Governments share on the problem of Northern Ireland.

It would be a tragedy if, through a misunderstanding, an impression were maintained that you totally rejected the essence of the Forum Report which is contained in these paragraphs. The effect of that would be that people here would feel that there was no appreciation of the fact that a major and successful effort had been made to face

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the difficult reality of unionism and to acknowledge the rights of unionists. Should that position remain uncorrected, it would contribute to the recurring feeling on the part of nationalists in Ireland that no effort on our part to work towards peace and stability will ever be appreciated. That such a sad state of affairs has, alas, been created is evident from the triumphalist tone both of unionist politicians and the unionist press in their reaction to our meeting.

In the interests of our relations, and of creating an atmosphere conducive to progress, I ask you to find an early opportunity to acknowledge that the central core of the Forum Report does involve very considerable progress and is by and large consistent with our shared appreciation as reflected in our joint communique.

The second serious difficulty stems from your dismissal of the reality of alienation as a major problem affecting the minority community in Northern Ireland. Alienation as it now presents itself is not a problem which has always existed. People here are, furthermore, greatly confused by the fact that both Jim Prior and Douglas Hurd have publicly accepted that this specific problem exists. You say that you dislike the word: we, of course, do not set any particular store by that specific word. Any alternative word or words which describe the reality whereby many thousands of people are estranged in a fundamental way from the whole system of authority, security and justice in Northern Ireland would serve. It would be extremely helpful in the difficult situation that has now arisen were you to acknowledge the existence of this problem, as your apparent denial of its existence has in the minds of all people of goodwill in this State - and they are very numerous as the recent poll showed - undermined the sense that had been developing of common ground between our Governments and has thus suggested to our public opinion that there is little or no point in the Irish Government making any effort to find a common approach with yours.

Yours sincerely

Garret FitzGerald

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister
No.10 Downing Street
London SW1

AIDE MEMOIRE

For use by Ambassador Dorr in speaking to Sir Robert Armstrong,
Secretary to the Cabinet

It may not be understood in Britain how profoundly the Anglo-Irish relationship has been altered for the worse, in a manner that may be very difficult indeed to recover, by two aspects of the Prime Minister's presentation of the results of the Chequers Meeting at her Press Conference. The positive tone with which the Prime Minister opened the Press Conference, along the lines that had been indicated at Chequers, and indeed other positive references at various points in reply to questions, have in Ireland been totally overshadowed and obscured by two other features of the Press Conference:

First, the manner in which the Prime Minister appeared to dismiss the problem of the alienation of a large part of the people of Northern Ireland from the political, security and judicial systems there.

Second, the tone with which the three 'options' mooted in the Forum Report were dismissed.

So far as the first point is concerned, we have, throughout, understood that it has been the appreciation on the British side of the profundity of this alienation, and the dangers it carries for the stability not only of Northern Ireland but of the whole island - and of the consequences of this for Britain itself - that has lain behind the sense of urgency with which the British side, as well as the Irish side, have tackled the problem of finding a way forward in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach, both in November, 1983 and at this recent meeting has laid the strongest possible emphasis on this aspect, and has explained that it is because of the threats that it poses that he and his Government have been willing to contemplate the most fundamental decisions, never hitherto considered by an Irish Government.

The Taoiseach read and noted the words used by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons on 2nd July last, when the Prime Minister was sitting beside him and, as we understood it, was thus giving her personal endorsement to her Minister's words, spoken on behalf of her Government.

The Secretary of State then spoke of 'the need for assurance and countering alienation', the character of which, as it affects a large part of the nationalist population, he graphically described in terms of the absence on their part of any sense of identification with many aspects of Government or with those whose job it is to uphold law and order; their resentment at the fact that there is so little scope for the expression of their Irish identity; and their exclusion from the effective exercise of political power. Following this authoritative statement of the British Government's position, the Taoiseach felt he was justified in recording in several speeches the fact that this alienation had now been recognised by the British Government. After

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the Prime Minister's Press Conference reference to alienation, he has now been accused of misleading the Irish people as to the British Government's position.

Against this background the Taoiseach heard with a profound sense of dismay - which he has publicly concealed at his Press Conference and in Dail Eireann at great political cost - the Prime Minister repudiate this factor of alienation in the words she used at her Press Conference, where her remarks about the word 'alienation' were not accompanied by anything to suggest that her objection to its use was merely semantic, and that she recognised the reality of what had been described so graphically to the Commons by her Secretary of State.

On the question of the Forum Report, the manner and tone in which the Prime Minister dismissed the three options, unaccompanied even by a reference to other parts of the Report such as the sections on Realities and the Framework for a solution - which contrary to the Prime Minister's statement in the Commons contains the only proposals in the Report - or the reference in Par. 5.10 to a willingness of the parties to take other views into account, has profoundly shocked the whole of Irish opinion.

These two elements in her Press Conference left the Taoiseach with the dilemma in his meeting with the Press and in a dozen radio and TV interviews shortly afterwards, of either rebutting or challenging the Prime Minister - a course which he unhesitatingly rejected - or of appearing in the worst possible light as apparently accepting the interpretation given by the Prime Minister. As is evident from the overwhelming reaction of press and public and political opinion in Ireland, the result of this has been a severe blow to the capacity of our Government to make further progress with the Northern Ireland issue, on which it had up to that point led public opinion so courageously and so successfully.

I understand that at their Party meetings on 21 November, the Taoiseach and the Tanaiste came under the most severe criticism from their Parties, which have hitherto been totally supportive of their approach to the Northern Ireland problem. Members whose bitter hostility to the Provisional IRA is a by-word described the effect of what had happened as being one of recruiting for the IRA, and, I understand, one member told of being informed by a factory owner in Northern Ireland of an approach by moderate anti-IRA Catholic members of his work-force - the only such approach he has ever had - to say that unless there was something positive behind all this that would emerge rapidly, they could not bear to think of the extent to which it would have strengthened the IRA. At the same time the morale of the SDLP, our sole bulwark against Sinn Fein/IRA in the North, has been shattered.

In the light of these reactions, the reasons for which and the significance of which may not be fully appreciated in London, the Government have asked that an early opportunity be provided to it for further consideration of its Northern Ireland policy. It would appear

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that the situation that now exists has overnight transformed the very favourable background to the talks illustrated by the public opinion poll published last Thursday.

An urgent review, at official level, of the new situation thus created, and of what possibilities may now remain for constructive action, now seems necessary here in order to enable the Government review to be carried out with, as a potentially crucial element, an assessment of how in the British view, the situation that now exists can be improved.

Consideration of the impact of these developments on the internal political balance within the Republic has been omitted from the above account of the situation. This should not be construed as suggesting that the impact has not been of major proportions.

Finally the Government has had no alternative but to criticise publicly the selective revelation by the Secretary of State of some proposals put by the British side in the discussions at Chequers, which has raised serious questions about the possibility of such crucial matters being discussed in confidence in future.

4.15 The solution to both the historic problem and the current crisis of Northern Ireland and the continuing problem of relations between Ireland and Britain necessarily requires new structures that will accommodate together two sets of legitimate rights:

- the right of nationalists to effective political, symbolic and administrative expression of their identity; and
- the right of unionists to effective political, symbolic and administrative expression of their identity, their ethos and their way of life.

So long as the legitimate rights of both unionists and nationalists are not accommodated together in new political structures acceptable to both, that situation will continue to give rise to conflict and instability. The starting point of genuine reconciliation and dialogue is mutual recognition and acceptance of the legitimate rights of both. The Forum is convinced that dialogue which fully respects both traditions can overcome the fears and divisions of the past and create an atmosphere in which peace and stability can be achieved.

4.16 A settlement which recognises the legitimate rights of nationalists and unionists must transcend the context of Northern Ireland. Both London and Dublin have a responsibility to respond to the continuing suffering of the people of Northern Ireland. This requires priority attention and urgent action to halt and reverse the constant drift into more violence, anarchy and chaos. It requires a common will to alleviate the plight of the people, both nationalists and unionists. It requires a political framework within which urgent efforts can be undertaken to resolve the underlying causes of the problem. It requires a common determination to provide conditions for peace, stability and justice so as to overcome the inevitable and destructive reactions of extremists on both sides. Both Governments, in co-operation with representatives of democratic nationalist and unionist opinion in Northern Ireland, must recognise and discharge their responsibilities.

CHAPTER 5

FRAMEWORK FOR A NEW IRELAND: PRESENT REALITIES AND FUTURE REQUIREMENTS

5.1 The major realities identified in the Forum's analysis of the problem, as set out in earlier chapters, may be summarised as follows:—

- (1) Existing structures and practices in Northern Ireland have failed to provide either peace, stability or reconciliation. The failure to recognise and accommodate the identity of Northern nationalists has resulted in deep and growing alienation on their part from the system of political authority.
- (2) The conflict of nationalist and unionist identities has been concentrated within the narrow ground of Northern Ireland. This has prevented constructive interaction between the two traditions and fostered fears, suspicions and misunderstandings.
- (3) One effect of the division of Ireland is that civil law and administration in the South are seen, particularly by unionists, as being unduly influenced by the majority ethos on issues which Protestants consider to be a matter for private conscience and there is a widespread perception that the South in its laws, attitudes and values does not reflect a regard for the ethos of Protestants. On the other hand, Protestant values are seen to be reflected in the laws and practices in the North.
- (4) The present formal position of the British Government, namely the guarantee, contained in Section 1 of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act, 1973, has in its practical application had the effect of inhibiting the dialogue necessary for political progress. It has had the additional effect of removing the incentive which would otherwise exist on all sides to seek a political solution.

- (5) The above factors have contributed to conflict and instability with disastrous consequences involving violence and loss of life on a large scale in Northern Ireland.
- (6) The absence of political consensus, together with the erosion of the North's economy and social fabric, threatens to make irreversible the drift into more widespread civil conflict with catastrophic consequences.
- (7) The resulting situation has inhibited and placed under strain the development of normal relations between Britain and Ireland.
- (8) The nationalist identity and ethos comprise a sense of national Irish identity and a democratically founded wish to have that identity institutionalised in a sovereign Ireland united by consent.
- (9) The unionist identity and ethos comprise a sense of Britishness, allied to their particular sense of Irishness and a set of values comprising a Protestant ethos which they believe to be under threat from a Catholic ethos, perceived as reflecting different and often opposing values.
- (10) Irish nationalist attitudes have hitherto in their public expression tended to underestimate the full dimension of the unionist identity and ethos. On the other hand, unionist attitudes and practices have denied the right of nationalists to meaningful political expression of their identity and ethos.
- (11) The basic approach of British policy has created negative consequences. It has shown a disregard of the identity and ethos of nationalists. In effect, it has underwritten the supremacy in Northern Ireland of the unionist identity. Before there can be fundamental progress Britain must reassess its position and responsibility.

5.2 Having considered these realities, the Forum proposes the following as necessary elements of a framework within which a new Ireland could emerge:—

- (1) A fundamental criterion of any new structures and processes must be that they will provide lasting peace and stability.
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- (2) Attempts from any quarter to impose a particular solution through violence must be rejected along with the proponents of such methods. It must be recognised that the new Ireland which the Forum seeks can come about only through agreement and must have a democratic basis.
- (3) Agreement means that the political arrangements for a new and sovereign Ireland would have to be freely negotiated and agreed to by the people of the North and by the people of the South.
- (4) The validity of both the nationalist and unionist identities in Ireland and the democratic rights of every citizen on this island must be accepted; both of these identities must have equally satisfactory, secure and durable, political, administrative and symbolic expression and protection.
- (5) Lasting stability can be found only in the context of new structures in which no tradition will be allowed to dominate the other, in which there will be equal rights and opportunities for all, and in which there will be provision for formal and effective guarantees for the protection of individual human rights and of the communal and cultural rights of both nationalists and unionists.
- (6) Civil and religious liberties and rights must be guaranteed and there can be no discrimination or preference in laws or administrative practices, on grounds of religious belief or affiliation; government and administration must be sensitive to minority beliefs and attitudes and seek consensus.
- (7) New arrangements must provide structures and institutions including security structures with which both nationalists and unionists can identify on the basis of political consensus; such arrangements must overcome alienation in Northern Ireland and strengthen stability and security for all the people of Ireland.
- (8) New arrangements must ensure the maintenance of economic and social standards and facilitate, where appropriate, integrated economic development, North and South. The macro-economic and financial implications are dealt with in the study by DKM Economic Consultants published with this Report, which is based on a range of assumptions with regard to the availability of external financial transfers.

- (9) The cultural and linguistic diversity of the people of all traditions, North and South, must be preserved and fostered as a source of enrichment and vitality.
- (10) Political action is urgently required to halt disillusionment with democratic politics and the slide towards further violence. Britain has a duty to respond *now* in order to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland are not condemned to yet another generation of violence and sterility. The parties in the Forum by their participation in its work have already committed themselves to join in a process directed towards that end.

22/1/84

"Insulting"

"GRATUITUOUSLY INSULTING" — we now know the extent of the Taoiseach's feelings when he heard or saw Mrs. Thatcher's press conference this week. He kept quiet for the country's sake, he said, but the comments of Mr. Hurd seem to have been the final straw as far as his patience was concerned.

We have to remember that Dr. FitzGerald is a naturally courteous man, slow to use personal comments about anyone and by nature disposed to take the optimistic view. The fact that after a long close session of personal talks with Mrs. Thatcher which he hopes will lead somewhere he sees fit to tell the British Prime Minister what he thinks of her public performance speaks volumes.

London may feign surprise over his comments but those with some savvy over there must know that a wide chasm has now opened between London and Dublin — and all because Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Hurd showed an insensitivity to feelings here which is almost incomprehensible.

It has been obvious from the end of the talks that anger in this country was directed not so much at their outcome but at the personal attitude of Mrs. Thatcher when she spoke to newsmen afterwards.

Compounding this anger has been the impenetrable stance of Mr. Hurd when he was questioned. Either the man does not understand the complexities of the problem he has been sent to oversee or he has simply parroted the comments made by Mrs. Thatcher in London. He got his answer from the Tanaiste.

While officials are meant to be getting down to working out a way in which the minority can become more involved in decisions affecting their lives in the North, British political leaders have been throwing out the window every potential solution offered to them.

Does Mr. Hurd actually believe that if his government throws in enough police and soldiers and improves security (to use that old phrase) then after a time the problem will go away? Worse still does Mrs. Thatcher believe this? If she does then God help the North. For London has learned nothing.

No Wonder every party in this country has become infuriated. No wonder the Taoiseach finally said what he had to say. No wonder Mr. Barry described the press conference as "disgraceful". The IRA have never had such a success in their lives before.

The Irish Times 22/11/84

Falling Back

So this is the new British initiative: first Mrs Thatcher's "out . . . out . . . out" today, then Mr Hurd's laying down, on Irish soil, for the Government of the Republic, the limits of interest it is to be permitted to take in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

Mr Hurd is, incidentally, too clever by half talking of people from the Republic who don't go North and therefore do not know what's going on. He is hardly an expert so soon.

And that he and Mrs Thatcher lay down the law to the Taoiseach in the manner they have done, calls for stronger words from the Irish Government than have so far been issued.

A thin time indeed for nationalism, the last few days. Are the Unionists wise enough to understand that a downfacing of Nationalists — as they see the Chequers meeting — is not necessarily entirely a good thing for their cause? Certainly not something to be overweening about.

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For among the consequences of the events of the past few days are that old images and arguments have been invoked to take on new life and once again become the stock-in-trade of political debate. Is it now clearly back to talk of colonialism, to planters and native Irish? Mrs Thatcher seems to see it in Kiplingesque light, when the majority people of Ireland are "England's oldest foe."

In fact, what Irish nationalism has been trying to say in the Forum — and elsewhere all down the years — is that England's nearest neighbour can be England's close friend, but not in a subservient role and not easily while Ireland is split.

The attitude of the Provisional IRA and other subversives will be predictable, but the reaction from moderate Nationalists in the North may be even further despondency and a feeling of isolation not only from the Northern establishment but also from Dublin.

Politicians always have to pick up the pieces and get on with the job. It seems that the North is now back to about the year 1926.

HIS MASTER'S VOICE

THE IRISH PRESS 22/1/84
THE BRITISH Government's position on the North, stated bluntly by Mrs. Thatcher on Monday, was underlined yesterday by Mr. Douglas Hurd.

The Northern Ireland Secretary was even less accommodating to nationalist opinion than his Prime Minister. Mrs. Thatcher rejected all three options from the report of the New Ireland Forum. Mr. Hurd declared that the Republic can have no say at all in the governance of the North.

The Government will be pleased to learn however, that "if from time to time, Ministers from the Republic wish to put forward points of view to us about Northern Ireland . . . we should be ready to discuss that advice calmly with them."

And the SDLP must be delighted to know that Mr. Hurd will have no objection if the party continues to cherish an aspiration towards Irish unity—just as long as it learns the political realities.

With a condescending swipe at the Dublin visits of Mr. John Hume, the Northern Secretary went on to spell out his version of those realities: that there must be dialogue between the parties in the North and that the Official Unionist document, *The Way Forward*, might, with a few amendments, provide the blueprint for future development.

There is a close similarity between Mr. Hurd's remarks and a recent controversial speech in which the Unionist leader, Mr. James Molyneux, advised nationalists to forget about Irish unity since it would never come about in any of their lifetimes.

We warned then that British Government thinking was moving dangerously close to that of the Unionists. The truth of that warning has now been confirmed by Hurd.

Does Mr. Hurd know anything about even the recent history of Northern Ireland? Has he any appreciation of grassroots unionist attitudes?

If he does, he must know that it was the unionists, with their sectarian policies and cultural apartheid, who ensured that Northern Ireland could not function as a political unit; that it was unionists who wrecked the power-sharing assembly; that unionists have never accepted any form of institutionalised power-sharing; that local government powers were removed because unionists could not be trusted to use them fairly and that, at grassroots level, there has never been the slightest indication of a change of heart on the part of unionists.

Mr. Hurd wants to turn back the clock and restore some form of Stormont parliament. It cannot be done. Too much has happened since the days of Stormont. Northern Ireland will not be reformed by internal tinkering—constitutional change is necessary.

Mr. Hurd believes that too much is being made of nationalist alienation from the Northern system. Has he no eyes to see? Ten years ago Sinn Féin was a political non-entity. Today it is the fourth largest party in the North and is pressing the SDLP for the lion's share of the nationalist vote. That is the measure of alienation and Mr. Hurd's latest remarks will ensure that the process continues.

It is now clear that Dr. FitzGerald was unwise to participate in the Chequers summit and should certainly have had no part in the charade of an agreed communique which agreed nothing of any value to constitutional Irish nationalism.

Yesterday the Taoiseach rebuked Mr. Hurd. The rebuke should have come on Monday—from the Taoiseach to Mrs. Thatcher.

Mr. Hurd believes that the fight against terrorism "depends to a considerable extent" on co-operation with the Republic. Mrs. Thatcher takes the same view.

Our Government must make it clear to the British that the fight against terrorism depends, first and foremost, on realistic political progress.

The Republic has, of course, its own security needs. But these do not necessarily coincide with those of Britain and the Taoiseach should now make it clear that if there is to be no co-operation on the political front then there can be no co-operation on policing.

If the British Government wants to walk the unionist road, let it walk it alone.

Haughey waving all Forum flags in brilliant bid to reach summit

THE SPEECH which Charles Haughey made in the exchange of statements on the Anglo-Irish summit at Chequers was the most important he has made in the present Dail.

Indeed, it could be argued that it was the most important he has made since he became leader of Fianna Fail. Its significance is widely spread, but above all it represents a psychological watershed for the man himself.

Its echoes go directly back to that period prior to December, 1979, and the well-judged seriousness with which he viewed his own career at that time. He was free, then, from the arrogance, duplicity and weakness which have characterised both his periods in power and in opposition since taking over the leadership of the Fianna Fail Party.

And on Tuesday it was as if he recognised this, and decided to take action about it.

In taking action, he seized the initiative from Garret FitzGerald. He did so in circumstances where plainly he was right. Everything he said in his speech is borne out by the facts, such as we know them. And unless the Taoiseach can come up with very convincing answers to the contrary answers which would be clearly and emphatically at odds with the things which both he and Margaret Thatcher have put firmly on the public record — then that initiative must remain in the hands of the Opposition leader.

ISSUES ONLY

He also took the initiative in an entirely political mould. Contrary to wide interpretations of the speech itself, no word of it represents a personal attack on the Taoiseach. It is entirely concerned with the issues, and it is devastating in the quotations it uses.

It represents an irreversible breach in bipartisanship. But was not that breached already? And it signals an all-out political attack on the Taoiseach and Government, which up to now was implicit in everything that Charles Haughey said about their performance, but generally incoherent in presentation.

Nothing about Tuesday evening's speech was incoherent. It was a brilliant tour-de-force, sustained, economical, very carefully balanced.

NEWS ANALYSIS

BRUCE ARNOLD assesses Charles Haughey's response to the weekend Summit and reckons it was one of the most important speeches the leader of the Opposition has made.



Charles Haughey... using an opportunity to the full.

of the community can identify."

And in citing the Forum Report, and the fact that in the dialogue between the two Governments started with the summit "we will not be found wanting in our openness to any ideas that may further the objectives of the Forum Report as I cited them..."

Garret FitzGerald is referring back to an interpretation of the Forum Report limited to one single paragraph on fundamental criteria.

That paragraph (5.2), which refers to the need for any new process or structure to take into account the need to provide lasting peace and stability, can be used to make a nonsense of the three Forum options, as well as of any other options involving political movement. And, on the face of it, this is precisely the interpretation that has to be placed on everything so far said by the Taoiseach, and certainly everything said by the British Prime Minister.

an equally compelling gloss on the Forum Report, and the responses and interpretations of it made by the Taoiseach and other ministers.

Central to it, he claimed, was the same idea contained in the election speech by FitzGerald, in November 1982, that there had to be a radical rethinking of British policy. In other words, the rejection of the British idea that there was greater risk in action, than in doing nothing.

National politicians of all parties believe the reverse, and are committed to that belief. On it pivots the proper interpretation of the achievement of peace and stability. That this can not be done through security, or within the confines of Northern Ireland itself. Hence the options.

But to all appearances that position has been abandoned by Garret FitzGerald. It has certainly been rejected by Margaret Thatcher.

It is politically fashionable now to reject the Forum options as belonging to the past, and to put a substantial part of the blame for this situation on Charles Haughey's head, because of the stance he adopted in the closing months of the Forum debates, and then immediately after the publication of the report.

In military terminology, Charles Haughey, in the aftermath of the publication of the Forum Report, was in possession of an isolated patch of ground over which flew the tattered flag of Irish unity. Garret FitzGerald was in possession of all the other political territory, with new standards flying over it, the Confederal flag, the flag of a new federation, and the flag of joint authority.

ALL THE FLAGS

These have been surrendered in favour of a single Forum banner of peace and stability within Northern Ireland.

Never slow on the uptake, Charles Haughey has taken over the other options, and now flies all the Forum flags which all of us have been led to recognise by the missionary zeal of the Taoiseach and his many Forum Report exponents.

A final judgment, as is the case with any realm of confidentiality surrounding the aftermath of a summit, can only be made in qualified terms.

What Charles Haughey achieved on Tuesday was control of the terms. He said that the Taoiseach had been humiliated. This must seem to have been the case unless and until Garret FitzGerald can show the opposite.

Three other general points should be made about it.

In timing it comes at a crucial period from the Government's point of view, when they are facing a most difficult series of challenges on economic and social issues, and when their popularity has received a number of adverse blows which are likely to have a demoralising effect on the fringes of each party, the less stable of the backbenchers and those who hold grudges against leadership or against the Coalition idea itself.

Equally crucially, the speech comes at a point in Fianna Fáil's affairs when that party, having accepted, with an insignificant handful of exceptions, the democratic will in favour of the present leader, finds itself, mid-term in this Dail, like an empty barrel, noisy, echoing, and waiting for something to fill the space.

Since the barrel is a political party, leadership is the necessary ingredient. And the speech gives that. It provides a positive focus.

Thirdly, the speech shifts the ground, for the first time in this Dail, from Garret FitzGerald to Charles Haughey. And the onus is on the Taoiseach to recover it. He has given no indication that he can.

STEPS FORWARD

Garret FitzGerald is claiming important steps forward as a result of the talks, and asserting that a process has begun, between Britain and the Republic of Ireland, through which "a system of security must be provided, deriving its authority from a political system with which those sections

They are neither of them interested in political movement outside the framework of Northern Ireland itself. And while this is legitimate enough for Margaret Thatcher, in Garret FitzGerald's case on a very narrow interpretation of what is important in the Forum Report in order to justify his position.

SKILFUL

No one can blame Charles Haughey for seizing avidly on the obvious opportunity offered by this. What is surprising is the skilful way in which he has done it.

He gives a logical chronology of Government thinking on the North: Garret FitzGerald, in November, 1962, during the general election, calling for a complete and radical rethink of British policy in order to avoid "chaos" in Northern Ireland; Michael Noonan, last August, claiming that the British Government "share our sense of urgency"; Peter Barry, in July, claiming "Britain is now more interested in solving the Northern Ireland problem than at any time in the past ten years".

Garret FitzGerald again, in September, claiming that Britain recognised alienation as the problem, and that both governments were approaching "from the same perspective"; in the same month, Peter Barry claiming that relations between the two countries were about to be "transformed".

Charles Haughey gives

Charles Haughey claimed that Garret FitzGerald had failed to deliver any of the things which he had repeatedly claimed, over the previous two years, needed to be delivered if peace and stability were to be brought to Northern Ireland. This also must be the perception unless until an alternative interpretation can be offered.

Charles Haughey claimed that Garret FitzGerald had done grievous damage to our national political interests and our pride. On the face of it Margaret Thatcher's unequivocal rejection of every Forum option, and her rejection of a political role by the Republic in Northern Ireland affairs, certainly damages our pride, and, if it leads to a continuation of violence and instability in the North, will continue to damage our nearest and most telling interests as well.

The onus is on FitzGerald to put this right.

And yet he has locked himself into a situation where he can not really say any more than he has said until the next summit with Margaret Thatcher, in the new year.

That is a wonderful restraint to be under. If it coincides with the kind of seriousness in attack — and, militarily at least, the no-holds-barred approach — which Charles Haughey signalled on Tuesday...

In domestic political terms a new level of battle has been joined. No one should underestimate the seriousness involved on Charles Haughey's side. Once again, he is fighting for his own political life, and it is the only life he knows or loves.

Irish Independent 22/1/84