

Fears over joining EEC sparked resolution to prevent Republic citizens coming to live in the north

Stormont fears of southern invasion

Eamon Phoenix

THE prospect of British entry into the Common Market and the possible implications for Northern Ireland were considered by the Stormont Cabinet of Lord Brookeborough in 1961.

At its meeting on June 29, 1961, the Cabinet considered memoranda drawn up by the various departments in regard to EEC entry. The Minister of Labour and National Insurance, Major Neill, told his colleagues that he had received a message from Mr Edward Heath, the Lord Privy Seal in Mr Harold Macmillan's Cabinet, that the British Government would keep "very much in mind" the difficulties which would arise for Northern Ireland if the 1947 Safeguarding of Employment Act — aimed at excluding Southern workers — should be nullified. This at least showed that the Northern Ireland problem would not be overlooked but, beyond that, the Minister felt that it should not be taken as conveying any firm reassurance.

Major Neill observed that all sides seemed to be in favour of the United Kingdom joining the Common Market and while Northern Ireland might be given favourable treatment initially to

match that which the Republic, as an "undeveloped country" would attract, no long-term safeguards could be expected.

The Minister of Finance, Captain O'Neill, thought it would be important to emphasise in Parliament that while the government could make representations about local difficulties, there was little else they had the power to do.

For his part, the Minister of Education, Mr May stressed that no statement should be made on the government side depreciating or condemning the Common Market because of the likelihood that Northern Ireland would one day be a part of it.

In his memo of June 1961, circulated to Ministers, the Minister of Labour and National Insurance noted that the Treaty of Rome required that the free movement of workers should be achieved by 1972. Discrimination based on nationality in the employment sphere would be abolished. In recent discussions with the Home Office in London, wrote Major Neill, his Ministry had warned that "with the prospect that Eire might also become a member country", the automatic granting of permits to nationals of member countries could not be contemplated "in present circumstances".

In the matter of social security benefits and

family allowances, the Minister was adamant that if the South joined the Common Market, any relaxation of residence qualification "would remove one barrier against the inflow of persons from the Republic whose main purpose in coming here was to enjoy our higher standard of social services".

In his memorandum, the Minister of Commerce, Mr John Andrews estimated that "at least 75 per cent of manufacturing industry would either be neutral or actively in favour of joining the EEC".

Most flax yarn exporters would welcome membership since Germany and Italy were Northern Ireland's chief markets for their product. Moreover, firms such as James Mackie and Son might also have something to gain from free entry. In conclusion, the Minister observed that only a fraction of the North's total sales went to the EEC. On the other hand, he wrote, "our reliance on the UK market underlines the importance of belonging to a vigorous and expanding economy rather than one which is static or decaying".

In view of the sluggish expansion of the United Kingdom economy, he felt that the Stormont government "should hesitate to drag their feet on the general question".



• Forty years after this 1920's Unionist Cabinet — left, Richard Dawson Bates, Lord Londonderry, H.M. Pollack, Edward Archdale and John Andrews — no Catholic had yet held a Cabinet position and fears of a 'southern invasion' pervaded Stormont thinking on the prospects of EEC membership.

BBC chief denied bias charge

ALLEGATIONS of discrimination against Catholics by the BBC in Northern Ireland are highlighted in the documents.

In October 1961, the Dublin-based Sunday Press carried an article by Claudi Gordon, its well-known Northern columnist, alleging that the BBC had a "bias" on Catholics. "The local editorial department of the BBC", Gordon wrote, "as a matter of policy, has never employed a Catholic and, judging from recent indications, does not intend to. Exceptional ability counts for nothing if you dig with the wrong foot."

The article went on to allege that this situation stemmed from "an agreement with the Six County Government" in direct breach of the 1920 Act. The article stung the Northern Ireland Controller of the Corporation, Mr Bob McCall to write a reply in which he declared: "I am quite certain that there has not been any discrimination of any kind in any appointment by the BBC in Northern Ireland."

The BBC he stressed, was an entirely independent body, administratively independent of both Westminster and Stormont. "I can state categorically that there is no such agreement as mentioned with the Northern Ireland Government nor has there ever been any suggestion that there should be one."

Referring to allegations that the local editorial department had never employed a Catholic, the Controller said "that there are Roman Catholic members in the Belfast staff as a whole", though he did not deny the original charge.

Significantly, Mr McCall forwarded a copy of his letter to Sir Arthur Kelly, the Stormont Cabinet Secretary "so that you and I, suggest, the Prime Minister should be up to date."

Cars hijacked

HIAKED cars left outside pubs in Moira and Lurgan, have both been declared hoaxes. The RUC bomb squad examined a Renault 19 left outside premises in Moira's Station Road at 3.30pm on Tuesday, but nothing was found. The car had been hijacked on the Soldierstown Road.

Westminster avoids clash over vote clause

THE British government in 1961 backed down rather than forcing the Brookeborough cabinet to abandon a clause in the forthcoming Northern Ireland Bill which would deprive citizens of the Republic (not already on the electoral register) of the right to vote in elections for Stormont and local authorities.

In a letter to the Stormont Cabinet secretary, A J Kelly on June 8, 1960, Sir Austin Strutt of the Home Office in London expressed the "concern" of both the Home and Commonwealth Relations Offices over the unionist government's intentions, stating "our objections are policy objections."

He recalled that when southern Ireland left the Commonwealth in 1949, "the government decided, with the full support of the opposition, that the Republic and its citizens should not be treated as foreigners", and should, broadly speaking, have the rights of British subjects,



• British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan

including the right to vote.

"Our first main objection is on the grounds of United Kingdom policy. Abolition of the privileged position of the citizens of the Republic under the electoral law of Northern Ireland might weaken the UK's contention that the

Republic is not a foreign country."

This, he added, would complicate the British government's relations with foreign countries with which it had treaties containing most favoured nation clauses.

The second major objection to the clause was that "a change of this kind in Northern Ireland law would furnish a pretext for raising at Westminster the possibility of the United Kingdom following suit."

There was no such possibility, "but ministers here wished to avoid the embarrassment that would be caused." The official fully appreciated the "strong domestic reasons" why Northern Ireland ministers should wish to go forward with the electoral clause, but the Home Secretary, Mr Rab Butler, had instructed him to impress the hope that they would not proceed.

In the end, however, following a subsequent meeting between Lord Brookeborough, the Stormont Minister of Home Affairs, Mr Faulkner and the British Home Secretary in September 1960, Mr Butler informed the Northern Ireland government that he no longer wished to press his objections to the bill.

Ploughmen argue over partition

THE partition issue with the Northern Ireland Government nor has there ever been any suggestion that there should be one."

The competition, held in the Republic that October, was won by a Northern Ireland competitor. The episode was relayed on October 18, 1954 by the British ambassador in Dublin.

Taxi driver foils hijack

A taxi-driver foiled a hijack attempt when he resisted two men who tried to take over his vehicle in west Belfast early yesterday.

The incident happened as the silver Peugeot 305 estate was passing the Children's Hospital on the Falls Road at 8.30 am.

Two male passengers grappled with the driver who stopped the car and ran off. The men later abandoned the vehicle.

Police are asking anyone with information to contact detectives at Grosvenor Road police station, telephone (0232) 650222.

TUC report claims government bias on state school spending

A TUC report published today discloses that government spending on education in the coming year "blatantly discriminates" against state-run schools in favour of grant-maintained schools.

The report Pre-Election Promises or Real Commitment presents an analysis of government expenditure on education and training, and reveals what it says is government mismanagement of £500 million of taxpayers' money.

The TUC is concerned that education spending plans are divisive and says the training budget is totally inadequate in the face of rising unemployment.

It says it has discovered that spending allocated to repairing the nation's dilapidated school buildings will be 10 times higher in the grant-maintained

sector than in local education authority schools.

The TUC believes that government "promises" of increased spending on education are no more than pre-election panic measures, aimed at influencing voters' opinions.

In reality, it maintains, government spending will have little impact on the education and training system.

The report says it has found further mismanagement and bias in: • £52 million spent yearly on assisted places schemes which support pupils in private education

• £50 million spent on the "discredited" City Technology Colleges schemes

• A further £2.8 billion ploughed into the grant-maintained system, encouraging more schools to opt out

Its general secretary, Mr Norman Willis, said: "All-in-all the verdict on the government's expenditure plans on education and training has to be that they do not show real commitment to the future needs of the economy or the needs of our people."

"At best they are an improvement on previous underfunding of the education and training system. At its worst they are a cheap pre-election gimmick designed only to win votes in the short-term."

Vintners call for VAT reduction

THE Vintners' Federation in the Republic is making a fresh plea to the Irish government for a reduction in excise duty and VAT on drink as a result of the widening of the limits yesterday on the amount of liquor that can be taken over the border.

Controls have been eased for persons outside the Republic for less than 24 hours. The limit on the amount of spirits per person, five litres of wine and 300 cigarettes. A total of £135 worth of goods can be purchased in the north.

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As in previous years, however, some files remain closed to researchers for periods of 30, 75 or 100 years or have had their cover-pages, or have had vital papers removed to facilitate access.

Of the files thus embargoed, the majority emanate from the Home Office — files transferred to Stormont from Whitehall — or the old Stormont Ministry of

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Housing report sparked land secrecy worry for Cabinet

THE Stormont Cabinet in 1961 moved swiftly to publish a report on areas for potential new housing in Belfast to prevent land speculation, according to confidential Cabinet files released today in Belfast.

At its meeting on February 9, 1961, the Brookeborough Cabinet considered the Interim Report issued by Professor Robert Matthew, its planning consultant on a major housing programme for Belfast to resolve the serious housing crisis. The report designated the land in the city region which was deemed suitable for large-scale house-building by or on behalf of Belfast Corporation. The report specified areas capable of accommodating a total of

5,000 new homes. "Announcing the report, the Minister of Health and Local Government, Mr Andrews stated that, to avoid any chance of leakage and possible allegations of speculation dealing in the lands designated, it was desirable to publish the report as soon as it had been printed and, at the same time, to commend it to local authorities for their attention."

A terse note in the file written by an official, Dr John Oliver, to A J Kelly, the Stormont Cabinet Secretary, reads: "We have treated the Interim Report with strict secrecy — as we do, not want the (Belfast) City Hall people to accuse us of any leakage whatever."

Closed files still hide many of their hidden secrets from the public gaze

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