

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2013/27/1484
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	22 February 1983
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	5 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
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22 February 1983

Private Secretary to the Taoiseach  
Department of the Taoiseach  
Government Buildings  
Upr. Merrion Street  
Dublin 2.

Dear Private Secretary

I enclose four copies of a Memorandum for the Government on the SDLP proposal for a Council for a New Ireland which will be considered at the meeting of the Government on Wednesday, 23rd February, 1983.

Yours sincerely

MF.

Private Secretary

MD

MEMORANDUM FOR THE GOVERNMENT

The Northern Ireland Situation

1. To facilitate discussion on Northern Ireland, the Minister for Foreign Affairs circulates summary reports of

- his meeting with the NI Secretary of State
- his visit to NI
- the Taoiseach's meeting with the leader of the SDLP on 15 February 1983.

2. The Minister wishes to have a preliminary discussion on NI with a view to formulating policy at an early stage. In addition, two questions arise for immediate consideration viz. a response to the SDLP's proposal for a Council for a New Ireland and the setting up of a non-governmental Anglo-Irish Encounter Group as envisaged in the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies published in November 1981.

3. The SDLP's proposal is described in detail in the report of the meeting between the Taoiseach and Mr Hume. It is proposed that the Council consist of representatives of the constitutional nationalist parties represented in the Dáil and in the NI Assembly. It would have a limited life and have the specific task of examining the obstacles to the creation of a New Ireland and producing an agreed nationalist blueprint so that discussions, involving Irish nationalists, Irish unionists and the British, on the real alternatives for a new Ireland could begin. Mr Hume says that the leader of Fianna Fáil has privately given him to understand that Fianna Fáil's acceptance of the proposal will be announced at their Ard Fheis on 26 February 1983. For reasons

connected principally with the need to contribute to the political survival of the SDLP in the run-in to the next Westminster elections in NI - one out of three nationalist votes in the NI Assembly elections went to Sinn Féin which continues to build up an effective political organisation in NI - the Minister for Foreign Affairs recommends that, in principle, the SDLP proposal be accepted. He recommends, however, that the Government consider the details of the proposal under the following headings:

- title and method of setting it up;
- terms of reference;
- membership, chairmanship and secretariat.

4. Possible titles include:

- Council for a New Ireland (SDLP suggestion)
- Inter-Party Committee to consider proposals for a New Ireland;
- Informal Committee on north-south relations;
- Conference for a New Ireland;
- All-Party Committee on Irish affairs;
- Irish Nationalist Assembly/Convention/Council/Conference.

Whatever its title, it would appear desirable that the body be set up by the Government and that it should report back to the Government at the conclusion of its deliberations. A Dáil resolution may, however, be required e.g. if a member of the judiciary is to chair its proceedings.

5. Possible terms of reference include the following:

- examine the obstacles to the creation of a new Ireland;  
(the SDLP's words)
- examine the obstacles to the coming together of the Irish people;

- consider and make recommendations on the arrangements required to meet the needs and aspirations of the two main political traditions on the island of Ireland.

It is expected that the main topics for consideration would include parliamentary and Government institutions, citizenship and nationality, the constitution, the law, the judiciary, economic and cultural issues, security, defence and international relations.

6. Membership of the proposed body would be drawn from the ranks of those already elected to the Oireachtas or to the NI Assembly. Although the SDLP envisage the exercise as one involving Irish nationalists only, it is suggested that the invitation to join in the exercise should be extended to all the parties represented in both the Oireachtas and the NI Assembly. It is further suggested that the only requirement for participation should be an undertaking to bring about political change only through peaceful means. While it is likely that all unionist parties, with the possible exception of the Alliance Party, will refuse to participate in this phase of the exercise, it seems appropriate that they should be given the opportunity to opt in should they so desire. Appropriate provision should also be made for representation by some independents. The total size of the body should be large enough to provide sufficient members for committees and sub-committees but not too large as to make it unwieldy. A minimum of thirty and a maximum of 50 members is suggested. The chairman or presiding officer could either be elected from the ranks of the membership or be appointed by the Government. In the case of an appointment, the prior agreement of the main parties would appear desirable. The question of the size and nature of the secretariat, the location and nature of meetings might best be left to the chairman/presiding officer.

7. The Minister for Foreign Affairs recommends that the Government authorise him to enter into discussions with all the main political parties represented in the Oireachtas or in the NI Assembly with a view to holding a conference to examine the obstacles to the coming together of the Irish people. In the event that the unionist parties decline to participate, the Minister recommends that the conference should proceed, that an independent chairman be appointed and that the conference be asked to conclude its business by the end of the year.

8. At the recent meeting between the NI Secretary of State and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Prior suggested that both governments should proceed now with facilitating the setting up of the Anglo-Irish Encounter Group, originally recommended in the official level Anglo-Irish Joint Studies published in 1981. The purpose of the group would be to promote exchanges between economic, social and cultural circles in the two countries. It is envisaged that it would be a private organisation independent of Governments. Action by both Governments is, however, required to set it up and it may also require some official financial support from both governments in its early years. Appropriate provision has already been included in the 1983 Foreign Affairs estimate. The Minister for Foreign Affairs recommends that he be authorised to take the necessary steps, in conjunction with the British authorities, to facilitate the setting up of the Anglo-Irish Encounter Group.