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To:

From:

New Ireland Forum

Meeting with Dr. Martin Mansergh, Fianna Fail, 21 April, 1983

1. On 20 April, 1983, Dr. Mansergh had asked, on the instruction of Deputy Haughey, whether any advantage would be seen by the Government parties in Dr. Mansergh and I meeting to tease out some of the issues for discussion at the meeting of party leaders on 21 April to discuss arrangements for the Forum. The Taoiseach agreed that I should have such an exploratory discussion with Dr. Mansergh ad referendum to the party leaders.

2. We met at 12.15 p.m. in the leas-Cathaoirleach's room in Leinster House. He said that he had been asked to raise three matters: the name of the body, the number of representatives for each party and the chairmanship.

3. On the name of the body he said that Fianna Fail suggested, not for their own but for the SDLP's sake, that there was considerable merit in reverting to the title originally suggested by the SDLP. The word "Forum" had connotations of a larger and more loosely organised body than was now intended. The Taoiseach had wished that participation be open to the Alliance and other parties. It was now clear, however, that representation would be confined to the four "core" parties. The work to be done would therefore be essentially what the SDLP had envisaged for a Council for a New Ireland. Given the line they had taken, the title of the body would make no difference to the way unionists regarded it. Reversion to the title originally proposed could be of considerable help to the SDLP since it now appeared that a Westminster election was fast approaching. He added that Mr. Haughey was not unduly hung up on this question of title.

4. I responded that I apprehended that the Fianna Fail proposal would give rise to considerable hesitation on the part of the parties in Government. I pointed out that "Forum" had been used several times in the agreed statement of 11 March. I believed the parties in Government might well consider that to have a title different from that proposed by the SDLP would indicate openness to submissions etc. from representatives of non-nationalist opinion, an aspect to which the Government Parties attached importance; and that it would encourage such submissions from Northern Ireland. I thought that the Taoiseach was publicly on record as saying that the body was not the same as the original SDLP proposal.

5. Dr. Mansergh suggested that the Government side, who were anxious to help the SDLP, should give greater weight to the impact of the title on any election in the North. He had made sounding on various sides in the North and there was a real possibility that Sinn Fein could win a number of seats in the Westminster election. Where would the Forum be if Sinn Fein made substantial political gains at the expense of the SDLP? I suggested that the important thing for the SDLP, in relation to the Forum, was the

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fact of getting it established and working and that change from the previously agreed word "Forum" would make little difference to Northern nationalist opinion.

6. Dr. Mansergh suggested that symbolism was of great importance in elections and urged that the reasons for the Fianna Fail proposal ought to be most carefully considered. He indicated that Fianna Fail could alternatively accept, as a less preferred outcome, the title "New Ireland Forum". I undertook to report their proposal and reasoning but suggested that both sides might need to consider further possible compromise titles.

7. On the composition of the Forum he indicated that they envisaged 20 full members, composed as follows:

Fianna Fail	Fine Gael	Labour	SDLP
7		8	5

The Government parties could divide the figure for their combined membership between them as they wished: Fianna Fail assumed that the Labour Party would want more than 1 representative. I said that I would report this proposal but that I thought that, as regards membership, the Government parties had been thinking of equal membership, on the basis there could be appropriate recognition of party strengths where it became necessary, because full consensus could not be reached, to determine which were the majority and minority views. Dr. Mansergh was somewhat incredulous in regard to this approach. His understanding had been that there had been suggestions of equality of membership between the two larger parties. In any case, equality on any basis was unacceptable to Fianna Fail. I again emphasised that the notion of equality of membership need not exclude some departure from that for determining majority and minority views. Dr. Mansergh doubted very much whether any such approach would be acceptable to his party. As the largest party they would require 1 member more than Fine Gael.

8. On Chairmanship, he said that they would again suggest as their first and second preferences Mr. Justice Brian Walsh and Professor Colm O hEocha, President of University College, Dublin. The other names put forward from the Government side were not acceptable to Fianna Fail. They had not, however, closed any doors on other names. I said that the Government parties' position was a mirror image of this. They were not supporting the names suggested by Fianna Fail but were not closing the door on other suggestions. He asked what was now the nomination of the Government parties. I said that the "live" suggestion was Professor F.L.S. Lyons, former Provost of Trinity College, Dublin. He said Professor Lyons was totally unacceptable to them. By way of explanation, it was considered that the ideology coming through his lectures on Culture and Anarchy in Ireland indicated a certain identity of view with the Taoiseach in

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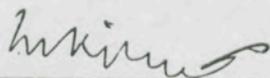
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regard to, for example, the constitutional crusade. It appeared that the Taoiseach might well have drawn on these lectures in developing his own ideas. Professor Lyons would be seen as being oriented too much in one direction. He asked me why were Mr. Justice Walsh and Dr. O hEocha unacceptable to the Government parties. I said that I did not know and he asked me to treat what he had said about Professor Lyons as being "off the record".

9. I suggested that it would be most unfortunate if at their meeting to-day, the party leaders were able to reach agreement on all issues other than chairmanship. This could lead to the media writing down the Forum. I indicated that at official level we were still considering suitable candidates. I mentioned that two further possibilities had occurred to me, one a retired senior civil servant and the other a senior university figure but that as these had yet to be raised with the Taoiseach I could not mention names. I encouraged him to have the search process continued on their side. He commented that the difficulties tended to confirm his personal doubts about the merit of going for an independent non-parliamentary chairman. He thought that even yet consideration might be given to suitable parliamentarians. He would suggest Dr. John O'Connell, T.D. I refrained from comment.

10. I raised the date of the first meeting. Dr. Mansergh agreed that it should be as soon as possible after the Donegal by-election on 13 April and did not exclude 16 April: he had in mind the possible calling of a Westminster election at end May and the desirability of having the Forum meet at least once before the British election date was named. As to the nature of the first meeting it was clear that Fianna Fail had not thought much about this. He suggested, however, that as a public session, there should be an opportunity for all members to speak. He said that as regards working methods, Fianna Fail had always considered that there might be committees: there was no question of Mr. Haughey being reserved about this. On the Secretariat, he did not exclude that Fianna Fail might wish to have somebody on it: I explained the Government's position. On expenses of members, they were aware that Mr. Hume was to see the Minister for Finance that day to discuss that aspect.

11. In regard to members of other parties and independents, Dr. Mansergh made clear his concern at the dangers of too pointedly excluding them, thus alienating an important segment of opinion who, in other circumstances, might have taken a sympathetic interest in the proceedings. I said that some thought had been given to this aspect but pointed out that it was clear from the proceedings at and minutes of the previous week's meeting that the Party Leader had unanimously agreed, in regard to membership of the Forum, not to go beyond the terms of the agreed statement.



W. P. Kirwan
Assistant Secretary
April, 1983.