

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Meeting with SDLP Chairman, Seán Farren, 18 May 1983

I met with Seán Farren at his home in Portstewart on 18 May. He had returned from the United States the previous day. He hasn't given much thought to the role he would see himself playing in the Forum as he is uncertain how the SDLP forces will be deployed.

He sees two dangers for the Forum. It would be a mistake if it were to end up looking to British withdrawal as an immediate solution to the problem of Northern Ireland. Equally he feels it would be unproductive if it were to concentrate on ways of appeasing the Unionists. It must steer a middle way between those two ideas. The Nationalists have legitimate interests, as have the Unionists, and it is only when both are taken into account that progress can be made. Farren was particularly anxious that as many Unionist voices as possible should be heard by the Forum and he was helpful in providing lists of persons who might be contacted. The Forum must take account of Unionist fears.

He hasn't decided whether the Forum could best put forward one or a number of options. If a number are presented then naturally the Unionists would be more attracted to the softest option. The most important factor is that whatever emerges should be adopted by consensus and should be so imaginative as to engage the Unionists and the British in dialogue. He thinks the option with the best possible chance of finding acceptance is some form of condominium or joint rule. It would be possible for the British to accept it while guaranteeing the Unionists' interests even if the latter found it unpalatable. Nonetheless Ireland is a unique problem and will require a unique solution.

Farren, like others, is strongly of the view that this is the last chance for constitutional Irish nationalism. If the Southern politicians find it impossible to reach agreement then the Northern minority will consider themselves unwanted. In those circumstances people could well turn increasingly to violent forms of nationalism.

In terms of procedures he tends to the Hume view that the Forum should operate as a Committee of the Whole rather than have separate small committees, though he feels that the latter may become necessary if the Forum goes into detail about, for example, education. He sees virtue in having sessions of the Forum in public - especially when

submissions are being made by persons outside the Forum. He thought, however, that many of the sessions must of necessity be in private if politicians are to speak freely and make the necessary compromises.

Farren would particularly emphasise a need to examine the economic consequences of any proposals which might be made as well as the area of Church-State relations. In the latter connection he thought it essential that the various churches be encouraged to make submissions to the Forum.

*D. Ó Ceallaigh*

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19 May 1983