

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



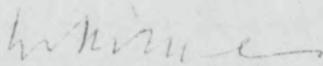
<b>Reference Code:</b>	2013/100/1054
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	16 February 1983
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	2 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
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what I previously referred to as a policy of creeping condominium. But, as previously implied, this is not of much use to the SDLP.

3. Another conceivable alternative course might be to consider reverting to pursuit of the non-boycottable Executive, based on the Northern Ireland Assembly, not, as Mr. Prior put it to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, a power-sharing but rather a power-distributed (by Prior) Executive. Mr. Prior said that John Hume had raised the matter with him. It must, however, now be very doubtful whether the SDLP members would or could take their seats in the Assembly. It is also doubtful, of course, whether Mr. Prior would try for this approach - he backed away from it previously in the face of Unionist and other opposition or even if he did, whether he could get support for it in the British Cabinet or the Conservative Party. Unless, there was cross-community support for the proposal, it would require new legislation. There is also the question as to quite how non-boycottable such an Executive would be - but this point also applies to other lines of approach which unionists might resist. Ultimately, maintenance of any such arrangements depends on the resolution of the British to face up to the reaction.

4. The question certainly requires further consideration but, just now, I do not see any tenable alternative course which would have the necessary political impact on the nationalist population in the North and support for the SDLP. Apart from any intrinsic benefits - to which reference is made in the briefing note - I would see the proposal as carrying us through a period when there may be little prospect of meaningful political progress on the Anglo-Irish front, given Mrs. Thatcher's views and dominance.



16th February, 1983.