

New Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Body  
From: Sir John Biggs-Davison, M.P. 24/83



RECEIVED BY

16 - 1 DEC 1983

PRIVATE OFFICE

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

(1) Dr Enn <sup>2/2</sup> Dr  
② Mr Gove <sup>M Russell</sup> Sir  
③ Mr Hayes <sup>Mr Hayes</sup>

Yours truly,

④ GEN/4

30th November, 1983

I am sorry for the delay in replying to your letter of 8th August about the possible Parliamentary Body embracing the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic.

Herewith my replies to your questions :-

(i)

Functions: "Should the Parliamentary body be mainly advisory, and if so to whom; and what subjects? Or should it be mainly deliberative, and if so again on what subjects?"

Answer: It is not possible wholly to separate the functions of advice and deliberation. In normal circumstances deliberation precedes the giving of advice. If the Parliamentary body is to be set up within the framework of the 1981 communique and White Paper, then it seems to follow that it must report to the Anglo-Irish Inter-governmental Council; but this would not necessarily prevent its reports being laid before the Parliaments of the respective countries.

As to subjects, it could be a mistake to specify these too closely in advance. In practice, it would be difficult to prevent such a body from discussing anything that it wished.

(ii)

Composition: "Should it just consist of members of the House of Commons and the Dail, or should the House of Lords and the Senate also be involved?"

Answer: It would be advantageous to include members of the House of Lords and of the Seanad, as these would provide an element of greater weight and balance to the discussions. Inclusion of such representatives would also make it possible to incorporate representatives of such minorities as the Catholic Unionists, whose voice at present goes largely unheard at any level.

Question: "Ought there to be delegations from the European Parliament, bearing in mind that a number of bilateral links are now concerned with or affected by shared membership of the European Community?"

Answer: The European Assembly is concerned mainly with economic questions. It might be of advantage to have a very limited number of members from that Parliament, perhaps not exceeding twelve.

Question: "Whatever the basis, should the delegations be of equal size?"

Answer: Yes. Suitable numbers might be twenty-five from Great Britain, twenty-five from Northern Ireland and twenty-five from the Irish Republic.

Question: "Should Members of Parliament be selected on an all-party basis, as might be a Select Committee; should the Northern Ireland Members of Parliament have what might amount to ex officio-membership?"

Answer: Yes. If Northern Ireland were allowed to have as many as twenty-five members, then it would be possible for all Westminster Northern Ireland Members of Parliament (seventeen) to be of the new body together with a few peers and representatives from the European Parliament as indicated above.

Question: "What kind of association would it have with the Northern Ireland Assembly?"

Answer: In the strict sense, none. It might be possible to nominate one or two members to represent that Assembly but in its present state that would probably be unwise.

(iii) Constitution. "How should it be funded and staffed"?

Answer: By subventions from the respective Governments; in the event of the above proposal as to composition being acceptable, in the proportion of two-thirds by the United Kingdom and one-third by the Irish Republic. Any secretariat should be similarly funded; but care needs to be taken to ensure that the members of the proposed body are enabled to control their own finances and staffing within an agreed budget.

Question: "Would it have joint chairmen, one from each side?"

Answer: Yes. They could preside alternatively, or at alternate sessions.

3.

Question: "Would it meet in committees or plenary session?"

Answer: Probably both. As noted above under (i) it would not in practice be possible to prevent the proposed body from discussing whatever it liked, and it follows that neither would it be possible to prevent it from setting up committees. The proposed body might well meet alternately in the two capitals. Meetings in Belfast might also be possible.

- (iv) Role of the two Governments: "What sort of government lead would be required, bearing in mind the need for the Parliamentary Body to be effectively and firmly set up with all-Party support?"

Answer: Leadership would of necessity have to be firm, with the object of persuading the Republic's Government that a Parliamentary body, in order for it to be a success, would have to include a substantial representation of Northern Ireland as well as of mainland Unionist opinion, if it is fairly to reflect the consensus of Unionist opinion in these Islands as a whole.

Question: "What sort of part should the Government play in the subsequent development of the Parliamentary Body, bearing in mind that the nature of their involvement might have some effect on the kind of subjects which were discussed and might be influenced by what those subjects were?"

Answer: In practice, as indicated above it would have to be accepted that very little could be done by Governments to influence the scope of discussions which might develop in such a body, except perhaps by the withholding or making available of information. Direct influence by Governments on the deliberations of the body would be small, unless members of the Anglo-Irish inter-governmental Council were ex-officio members of the body, or it otherwise contained within it substantial representation of Governmental interests.

*Yours etc,*

*John*

The Rt. Hon. James Prior, M.P.,  
Northern Ireland Office,  
London, SW1P 3AJ.