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From the Chief Minister



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Gerard Fitt Esq MP
Deputy Chief Minister
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12 April 1974

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Liam Gemmy".

I welcomed very much the frank discussions I have been able to have with you and your colleagues over the last few weeks about the serious political difficulties now surrounding the implementation of the Sunningdale Agreement. I think we agreed yesterday that it is in everybody's interest to bring this matter to a head reasonably soon. We cannot allow the present uncertainty to continue, because it will be exploited more and more by our various opponents. We must therefore seek a way ahead which has a prospect of commanding the support of the members of our respective parties.

It is against this background that you and your colleagues have undertaken to make soundings in your party over the next few days. I thought, therefore, that it might be helpful if I were to set out on paper what I see as a feasible proposition at the present point in time.

My idea is that we should by no means reject the fully-developed Council of Ireland as an ultimate objective but that we should appreciate that it can only be achieved in stages and that there is a limit to what can be accomplished at the first stage against the present background of public opinion.

I would hope to be able to carry within my own party a proposition on the following lines.

We should consider the report on possible areas of co-operation produced by officials of the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and decide in which of these areas the two Governments could

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productively work together. Personally I can see no reason why we should not agree to co-operate in respect of most of the matters identified in the officials' report. We could then make a formal agreement with the Republic to co-operate in all these areas as between Governments.

At the same time we could move at once to establish an Irish Council of Ministers with seven members from each side. This Council would have three principal areas of responsibility:

- (1) It would meet regularly, say every three months, to review the progress being made by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive in implementing the various co-operative agreements.
- (2) It would provide the forum for consultation about appointments to the Police Authorities and the other purposes envisaged in Article 15 of the Sunningdale Agreement.
- (3) It would have the functions with regard to human rights envisaged by Article 11 of the Sunningdale Agreement.

On completion of this stage we would have an Irish Council of Ministers, meeting regularly, we would have practical co-operation under way over a wide range of matters, and we would have the basis for "identification" of the Catholic community with the police.

Our future progress beyond this point would be dependent upon the degree of public confidence we could create. It would certainly be my hope, however, that once we can show practical benefits - and particularly in terms of some reduction in the level of violence - resistance to a further development of the concept of a Council of Ireland will diminish.

If, on the other hand, we are unable to find some basis of agreement

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between us, the inevitable outcome will be the collapse of the Executive. No-one can tell what will result from the chaos which will then ensue, but nothing can be more certain than that the spirit of a Council of Ireland, bringing together representatives of the two traditions in willing co-operation, will not be realised. I know very well the considerable difficulties you are bound to experience with your own supporters if you move in the direction I suggest. But I hope you will feel as I do that the power-sharing Executive is the most helpful development Northern Ireland has seen in half a century, and that it will be a great tragedy if we cannot find some basis on which we can continue to move towards our objectives, even if some of them must for the time being be deferred.

All good wishes for a pleasant Easter break.

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A B D FAULKNER