

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



**Reference Code:** 2013/27/1589

**Creation Date(s):** 15 August 1983

**Extent and medium:** 3 pages

**Creator(s):** Department of Foreign Affairs

**Access Conditions:** Open

**Copyright:** National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

The Irish Dimension - Recent Exchanges

Background

It is clear, both from Mr Prior's comments to the Minister and from asides by his officials, that work is now starting (if it is not already underway) within the NIO on a new devolution initiative for the NI Assembly. It is difficult to escape the impression that, for the next stage at least, neither Mr Prior nor his officials wish to emphasise the Irish dimension. They would like the SDLP, perhaps fortified by the conclusions of the Forum, to join the Assembly and they feel that the prospect of "power-sharing" in some form should be adequate both to attract the SDLP in those circumstances and to impel the Irish Government to urge the SDLP to that decision. The most they would contemplate, and even this is far from certain, is the Parliamentary Tier of the A.I. Framework.

Recent Exchanges at official level

During an official level luncheon in London on 27 July (present were: Brennan and Merryfield of the NIO, Ambassador Kennedy and the undersigned), they raised this whole question very much in the sense that we would be extremely lucky to get any sort of power-sharing off the ground and that any insistence on an "Irish dimension" would bring it down.

I put a different argument to them for three reasons: (i) to stimulate a new appreciation of the Irish dimension, (ii) to raise the bidding on our side and (iii) because I believe the exigencies of the situation to have changed objectively during the past two years. The argument, which I described as purely personal - and necessarily so because we would have to wait for the Forum's report to formulate our Government's position - ran as follows:

- the most urgent necessity shared by both Governments and by the people of Northern Ireland now is stability: order on the streets and roads of Northern Ireland;
- instability had fed on alienation and disaffection which had taken a deeper hold among Nationalists during the past two years than at any time within memory;

- in these circumstances it was likely that, even under the most generous (to Nationalists) system of "power-sharing", order might not inevitably supervene - things had now gone too far for that;
- to attempt a "power-sharing" initiative in those circumstances without attacking the problem of alienation would be massively self-defeating, not just because probably neither the Irish Government nor the SDLP would lend their support, but because, even if implemented, "power-sharing" would be seen as an irrelevancy and that would be tragic;
- the problem therefore was to devise arrangements which would make the principle of authority in Northern Ireland and its agents on the street minimally tolerable to the nationalist community at large (arrangements which could permit the SDLP to express support for the security forces and e.g. to urge young people to join up);
- the only direction or area of action I can envisage which would meet this requirement would be in the area of the "Irish dimension": any initiative taken to counteract disaffection would need to be clear and, to people on the street, tangible; in effect it is necessary to give the principle of authority in Northern Ireland a visible Irish legitimacy: what I had in mind was not merely a Dublin ideological desideratum, but an objective practical requirement as much needed by Britain as by ourselves.

I put the same general argument on a personal basis to Mr Brian Mawhinney M.P., the instigator and (at Prior's behest) promoter of the present devolutionary system of the N.I. Assembly Act, with whom I had a long conversation while in London.

I had a general informal conversation with the British Ambassador here on 12th August. He asked, in a way which I felt reflected if not instructions at least briefing by London, whether the Parliamentary Tier would be enough in my opinion to meet the requirements of the Irish Dimension. Stressing again that I was

giving a personal view, I said it would only be so if the authority of the Tier were palpable on the streets and I was not personally clear as to how this might be devised. I went on to say that the Government of course looked forward to the establishment of the Tier.

M.J. Lillis

15 August 1983

c.c. PST  
PSM  
PSS  
Mr Nally  
Ambassador London