

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2013/100/1054
Creation Date(s):	16 February 1983
Extent and medium:	2 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Mr. Hume by way of H. Hume
2/11/82 *Copy for information*
W. Kirwan

Taoiseach

17. 2. 1983

W. Kirwan, Assistant Secretary.

SDLP Proposal of a Council for a New Ireland

1. As requested by the Secretary to the Government, I submit a briefing note on the above proposal, in preparation for your meeting to-morrow with Mr. John Hume, Leader of the SDLP. I have included a section on pros and cons of the idea. I have tried to make this reasonably even handed but it probably comes through that I favour proceeding with the proposal, if what I believe to be the necessary condition of all-party agreement on what it should do, can be reached. The Secretary to the Government has asked me to attach a copy of his minute of 29 October, 1982 which sets out his views on the matter and I am doing so.

2. I have not dealt, in the briefing paper with possible alternative ways of providing support for the SDLP, in order to prevent a drift of nationalist support in the North towards Sinn Fein, the Provisional IRA and the INLA, or with how the proposal would fit into a wider policy framework. The following are some very brief comments on these aspects.

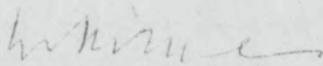
One possible view is that, while it would provide support for nationalists in the North, it would be seen as offensive and threatening by unionists and that an alternative policy approach could achieve the objective without the adverse consequence. We have adverted, both previously and in recent discussion, to joint Anglo-Irish decision-making (joint rule for short, although there could be a variety of formal situations) as a possibly attainable Irish objective in the not too distant future. However, to be really of assistance to the SDLP in the run-up to the Westminster election, any espousal of such an objective would probably have to be public. But public advocacy of it during that run-up period would almost certainly lead to a public rebuff from Mrs. Thatcher. There may be greater prospects of making progress on this by degrees through the Anglo-Irish Inter-governmental Council, if the objective is not overtly articulated -

/...

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.