

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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1. British Labour Party Visit to Dublin, 24-26 February 1983

Northern Ireland Steering Note

1. Our side may wish to express appreciation for the positive development in Labour party policy since their 1981 Conference. Labour's commitment to the achievement of a united Ireland by peaceful means and with consent as the ultimate solution to the problem of Northern Ireland is close to the approach of the Government. In view of the doubts which some Labour leaders have about their official policy and the attitude of politicians here to it the opportunity might be taken to emphasise our welcome for the fact that a major British party has chosen to address the fundamental political cause of the Northern Ireland tragedy. The visitors might be encouraged to develop those political elements of their official policy which most closely correspond to our concerns, i.e. the need for a real political dialogue within Northern Ireland and for a developed Irish dimension.

2. Given signs over the past year that the Labour Party's relationship with the SDLP has been somewhat strained, it might be considered desirable to explain our understanding of the difficult situation the SDLP have found themselves in throughout the period of the Prior initiative. It will be necessary to draw attention in this context to the failure of the Assembly to create political movement in Northern Ireland, to the threat from PSF and to the possible implications of the next Westminster election for nationalist representation in the North. Above all, the SDLP's role as the major constitutional nationalist party in Northern Ireland pursuing policies which correspond to those of the British Labour Party and the Government here must be emphasised. Other groups which the Labour Party visitors might mention simply do not have the voter support that would be required to counter the advance of PSF. It may be desired during the talks to bring Foot and his colleagues up to date on the Government's consideration of the SDLP proposal for a Council for a New Ireland.

3. Some of those on the Labour delegation may raise the question of Labour Party and Trade Union organisation in Northern Ireland.

It could be pointed out to the visitors that the Trade Union movement has survived in a healthy condition in Northern Ireland precisely because it has avoided involvement in political and constitutional questions. Any attempt to involve unions there in the organisation of a class-based party or an extension of the British Labour Party would damage not only the cause of Labour in Northern Ireland, while contributing nothing to a political solution, but would also affect Trade Union relationships throughout these islands. It should also be stressed that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions exists as an all-Ireland body and that anything which would adversely affect this position cannot be said to contribute to the implementation of the British Labour Party's policy of promoting Irish unity. The ideological attitudes of some of those on the delegation might be answered by suggesting that the fundamental political problem of Northern Ireland cannot be resolved through seeking to prematurely impose a pattern of class-based politics there.

4. Labour's support for the status quo regarding the voting rights of the Irish in Britain might be welcomed while our side might also refer to the extension of reciprocal rights to British citizens here. Labour's reservations on the Prevention of Terrorism Act insofar as they are expressed in a way corresponding to our concerns might also be welcomed. The party's official opposition to the use of Plastic Bullets (although not shared by some members, including Don Concannon) is also a matter which might be mentioned in a positive way.

5. Should the Labour Party raise the issue of extradition we could explain the background to our position on this issue and also the significance of the recent Supreme Court decision in the McGlinchey case. On the security situation in Northern Ireland we might also mention our concern that nine persons have recently been shot dead by the security forces there and that if it is perceived that a "shoot to kill" policy exists then the minority could become even more alienated.