



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Initiatives to Start Devolution Talks

1. Initiatives to start devolution talks since the Agreement was signed have been numerous and unsuccessful. The political willingness to get talks going is still lacking and so efforts to find appropriate formulae have not worked.
2. The most recent opening is that outlined by Denis Faulkner to Ambassador Dorr on 21/11/86. Faulkner was nominated by Molyneaux to meet Dorr. He (somewhat vaguely) outlined a possible proposal to get talks started:-
  - (1) the Secretariat to be moved out of Northern Ireland and
  - (2) the Conference meetings to be suspended - possibly for 3 months, possibly for a year and without using the word "suspension".

Efforts should then be made to get the parties to agree to "integrated devolution". This would involve an NI administration (i) composed of the Secretary of State and the 17 Westminster M.P.s and (ii) having only administrative powers.

If talks were successful, the Agreement would be superceded by the new structure except to the extent that it forms a framework for "friendly neighbour" cooperation between Dublin and London (without involvement in internal Northern Ireland affairs). If the talks failed, the Agreement could not be continued with anyway as it is already dead in effect and will continue to be subject to very strong Unionist hostility - for so long presumably as its "ghost" continues to walk.

3. It is possible that a structure under which limited powers - only administrative ones - were devolved could be considered provided that the Conference retained the rest within its sphere of influence. However, in the long term the undemocratic nature of the Conference with so wide a sphere of influence would make some arrangement for further devolution, or for involvement of local politicians very desirable. However, the only clear message Dorr felt he was being given by Faulkner was that the Agreement as it stands will never be accepted by Unionists. The proposal may not be serious at all, but if the crucial points for Faulker - and possibly Molyneaux - are minimal nationalist representation and an end to the Conference functions in respect of Northern Ireland, the idea is a non-starter.

#### Outline of Previous Efforts

4. The first major effort was made by the British Government. Mrs. Thatcher met Molyneaux and Paisley on 25/2/86, and a joint statement issued after the talks said that the Prime Minister, "while reaffirming the Government's commitment to implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, made it clear that the Government would like to establish new arrangements for enabling Unionists to make their views known to the Government on affairs in Northern Ireland". She agreed to "consider positively a suggestion by Mr. Molyneaux and Dr. Paisley that the Government should call a round table conference to discuss devolution in Northern Ireland. She said that the Government would be willing to consider any system of devolution that would command widespread acceptance in Northern Ireland". Both sides were to reflect and then meet again. "It was understood that if after discussion with all concerned the ideas raised in our talks today bore fruit, we should need to consider what that meant for the work of the I.G.C."

Paisley and Molyneaux returned to Belfast and were unable to get the support of their parties. An exchange of

letters continued in March and April and the idea of 'talks about talks' to be held with officials was developed. However, there was no real basis for talks and Unionists used the excuse of the 9 May Conference to call off the whole exercise.

5. In the meantime in March Catherwood tried a proposal on Hume and Paisley in Belfast (attached Appendix 1). Hume objected to the references to the Agreement and undertook to try revising them, while Paisley was not happy about the possibility of a meeting of the Conference being invoked. (It was at this time that Paisley was reported to see a federal Ireland as the final long term solution).
6. On 5 April Archbishop Eames gave the Taoiseach a message from Molyneaux to the effect that he felt in a sufficiently strong position within his party to be on the point of embarking on private conversations with the Prime Minister and Chief Whip. Eames asked if the Taoiseach had a message from Eames and the Taoiseach noted the points (a) to (f) in response in Appendix 2. Molyneaux's reaction was positive and he sought a meeting with the Taoiseach. The matter was discussed with the British who were not encouraging and it was not pursued.
7. On 18 April the Taoiseach met Carson and Redpath and discussed the possibility of the Charter document forming a basis for talks (The Charter Group had developed their own version of a joint paper being discussed with SDLP representatives, but which had not been completed because of opposition from John Hume). The meeting came to no conclusion and was publicised immediately afterwards (probably by Ardill of the Charter group) causing much embarrassment.
8. Following some preliminary discussions between the parties, Catherwood decided to launch a second initiative in

September. In the course of these discussions Paisley told Hume that he favoured powersharing. It was indicated to Catherwood that aspects of the proposals were unacceptable but he launched them anyway on 19 September with only a minor amendment (Appendix 3). Hume delivered a speech in Brussels which by implication disagreed with the initiative and the response was also negative from the two Unionist parties (Appendix 4) on 19/9/86. The Governments (Appendix 5) made their position clear on 20/9/86. Catherwood continued into October to talk to the parties involved but it was clear that he had no basis for talks and his efforts were not helped by his own misrepresentations of the various positions.

9. A 'Belfast initiative' was tentatively begun early in October, at the Nally/Donlon - Bloomfield/Andrew meeting on 7 October. A draft text was provided (Appendix 6) by the British side. It was felt here that no useful purpose would be served by adding to the statement of 20/9/86. We did not intend that Article 11 should be invoked. We noted that there was no intention of suspending the Agreement or the various arrangements under it; any new statement would have to be coordinated with the Prime Minister's office; it was reasonable to assume that Ministers here would not wish to be involved in inter-party talks in Northern Ireland. Our commitment to devolution remained as set out in Article 4(b). A further draft was supplied on 17/10/86 (Appendix 7). The formula was unacceptable. It was felt here that an initiative at this time would not be likely to succeed and an abortive initiative would put back the prospects of success in the longer term. The British were also unconvinced of the value of the approach at this time.
10. There followed the Hadden/O'Leary initiative (Appendix 8) which none of the parties involved have been able to take seriously except possibly Molyneaux who has sought a further meeting with them.

11. John Hume has, in recent weeks, been in contact with the Charter group and with some Executive members of the OUP (Millar and Allen). J. McConnell (N.I.O.) has indicated, presumably from Unionists contacts, that little is expected to come of this and that neither Millar nor Allen were encouraging. Hume is understood to be continuing to try with the Charter group (who relaunched their effort to start talks in October (Appendix 9)). He has also agreed to participate in a further possible effort by the Chairman of the 4 major economic bodies (IDB, LEDU, E/Ulster and NIEC).
  
12. It may also be noted that Gow has indicated an initial positive response on the part of Molyneaux to meet the Taoiseach.

Anglo-Irish Section.

26 November, 1986.

Statement by British-Irish government.

It is the declared policy of the British government (supported by the Irish government) that responsibility for certain matters within the powers of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should be devolved within Northern Ireland on a basis which would have widespread acceptance within the community.

The British/Irish government therefore welcome the proposals which have been made by the major parties representing the majority and minority communities for a round table conference on this and consequential constitutional issues.

The British/Irish government has agreed with the Irish British government that certain matters now discussed directly between the two governments would, after devolution, be discussed between the devolved Northern Ireland administration and the Irish government.

The British/Irish government would naturally welcome the widest possible agreement between the majority and minority communities on the difficult issues which have been reserved to the British government in the Northern Ireland Act 1982.

The British/Irish government accept the urgent need felt by the Northern Ireland parties to achieve a settlement. It therefore gives priority to the Round Table conference and will not call for a ministerial meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference (during the Round Table Conference, except at the request of the leader of one of the parties) ~~for two months from the commencement of the Round Table Conference~~.

The British/Irish government reaffirms its total rejection of any attempt to promote political objectives by violence or by threats of violence and its determination to ensure that those who support such methods do not succeed.

In response to an approach by Mr. Molyneaux through Bishop Eames the Taoiseach made the following points:

- (a) he recognised the desirability in principle of early political progress in particular before the marching season
- (b) it would however be imprudent to embark on any process at this stage unless both the Irish and British Governments were convinced that the Unionist leadership involved could actually deliver
- (c) both Governments would need to be satisfied that any opening given at this stage would not be such as to offer encouragement to hardliners to continue to pursue their tactics
- (d) in view of the grave dangers involved in any discussions at this stage failing - the initiative would then be given back to the men of violence just before the marching season - it was vital that the outcome of any discussions should be effectively predetermined
- (e) in this connection the Taoiseach believed that it was necessary as a minimum to know that Unionists would be prepared in a devolved Government situation to share executive power with the SDLP, not necessarily in a Cabinet style structure
- (f) if all the above conditions could be met the Taoiseach thought it should be possible to give priority to talks on devolution vis-a-vis the Conference for a period of up to two months. Under no circumstances however could the Agreement be suspended or tampered with. In reply to a query from his contact the Taoiseach went on to indicate that the Secretariat at Maryfield was also not to be tampered with.

# Devolution 'only option for North'

Catherwood  
Fernuda

Full statement

Take  
A.D.

THE OPTIONS for a political settlement in Northern Ireland were extremely limited, Sir Frederick Catherwood, the British Conservative MEP, said in his lecture at Queen's University, Belfast, on Friday night.

It was not open to the UK Government to disenfranchise a million unwilling Unionists, he said. An independent Northern Ireland was non-negotiable and neither would integration be acceptable, firstly because the current status would be hard to change, secondly because the rest of Britain saw Northern Ireland as different, and thirdly because every British Government wanted to put a devolved government between itself and the North's problems. That was why every British Government kept coming back to proposals for a broadly-based Assembly and Executive. It was the only acceptable option.

Irish Governments could neither renounce the "Ark of the Covenant" of Irish unity nor could they consummate it. They could not assimilate a million Loyalists politically, they could not support Northern Ireland economically, and they would have much greater difficulty than the British in funding security. Nor could they go back on the Anglo-Irish Agreement. One or two of these problems might be overcome, but not all of them.

The million Loyalists in the

North were 20 per cent of the people of the island and were central to the politics of the Republic, which would prefer to deal directly with them under the clause which would allow the greater part of the Anglo-Irish Agreement to be subsumed in direct relations with the Northern Ireland Assembly. A broadly-based Assembly was therefore the best option for the Irish Government too.

For the Unionists, there was no option but to maintain the union. If integration was not an option for the UK Government, it was also not one for the Unionists; nor did they see a non-negotiated independence as possible. That is why the two Unionist leaders had put the proposals for a round-table conference in the form of a devolved Assembly in Downing Street in February.

"I do not think that the constitutional minority have the option of sitting tight. Just as it is wrong for the majority to press the minority too far, so I am sure that the minority would prefer talks and an agreed settlement", he said.

"Leaders of the majority and minority groups have said that both communities must find a way to live together in Northern Ireland with mutual goodwill — and so it is clear that both need an agreed form of Assembly and administration.

"From my reading of current opinion, I believe that all the party leaders would agree that, in order to achieve this, the UK Government should convene a round-table conference under Government chairmanship to negotiate, decide and then provide for relations with the Government of the Irish Republic.

"All parties would want to put forward their particular proposals for such alternatives and their ideas for a society in which both communities could live together in goodwill. It would be important that the conference should reach conclusions not later than mid-November.

"I believe that the leaders would also agree that, in this brief timetable, while both communities try to come to a lasting accommodation with each other, it is overwhelmingly in both their interests and in the interests of the UK and Irish Governments that there should be no activity at any level, from local government to inter-governmental level, which would disturb this vital conference or distract from it.

"So the leaders of each community should let each other know what each needed of the other to provide a window of goodwill for their conference. I am quite certain that both Governments would respect their wishes.

"I have no doubt that the

Unionists would be prepared to see that there are no further strikes or civil disturbances against the Anglo-Irish Agreement or any escalation, through boycott of institutions, while the round-table talks were in process.

"It is also quite clear that it would not be in the interests of the minority to press for action, under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which would prejudice chances of long-term reconciliation during this period. Changes made with goodwill under mutual agreement are infinitely more valuable than changes attracting ill-will because they have interrupted a process of long-term settlement. I cannot see either British or Irish Governments asking for a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference during this time, since neither would wish to bear the responsibility for the breakdown of the round-table conference. I am sure that both would wish to give priority to the round table over other issues.

"It would be extremely helpful also if there were no visible presence of the Anglo-Irish Agreement to provide a focus for those who want to disrupt the round table. I very much hope that the leaders of the constitutional parties can give a positive response to these suggestions as a sign to the UK Government that the time is right for a round-table conference to achieve a long-term settlement."

Catherwood  
September

Appendix  
3

Irish Times  
22-9-'86

# Unionists reply to Catherwood call for talks

From Helen Shaw, in Belfast

SIR FREDERICK CATHERWOOD, a Conservative MEP, last night urged a devolved solution in the North using the framework of the Anglo-Irish Agreement but including a North-South agreement.

Sir Frederick, speaking in Queen's University, called on the four main political parties in the North to convene a round-table conference under the British Government, using the devolution clause in the agreement to establish a long-term solution for the North. He said no meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference should be held in the two-month period of these talks to allow such discussions to take place.

The two Unionist party leaders, Mr Paisley and Mr Molyneux, said last night in a joint statement that they supported the idea of a negotiating conference to discuss devolution. During the period of such negotiations, however, it was "essential that the Anglo-Irish Agreement should not be implemented."

"We made it clear to the Prime Minister that the road to peace and stability lies in negotiation," they said, expressing the hope that the British Government would now have "second thoughts."

The SDLP leader, Mr John Hume, said that "since the Anglo-Irish Conference meets every two months or so it should not be difficult to find a fortnight for talks which don't coincide with a meeting of the conference. We are willing to sit down at any stage with the Unionist parties without preconditions to discuss the way forward."

"We will study Sir Frederick's remarks as he is obviously making an effort to break the deadlock. But there would be no question of the SDLP agreeing to anything that would supersede the agreement or to suspending it."

In Dublin last night there was no Government reaction to the call for a suspension of meetings under the Anglo-Irish Agreement to permit all-party talks to take place in the North. A Government spokesman said there had been no possibility yet for the speech to be studied in Dublin.

Sir Frederick said there was a two-month gap between the Loyalist marching season and the first anniversary of the agreement on November 15th. Politicians, he said, should grasp this opportunity to create their own mutual agreement which could supersede the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Both the British and the Irish Governments were facing general elections in the next year or so and both, he said, were eager to see a long-term solution to the North. Both favoured devolution as the only acceptable long-term settlement, he said. The only problem now was to create a "form of words" which could allow all politicians to hold talks without "eating their own words."

In Sir Frederick's proposal, a five-paragraph statement which he has sent to all the political parties and to the North's Secretary of State, Mr King, he says that in his reading of current opinion all the party political leaders would agree on the establishment of such a round-table conference to negotiate a Northern settlement and then decide on relations with the Government of the Republic.

(Continued on page 2)

Irish 20/9/86

Unionist Leaders' Reply to Catherwood

headline

Statements issued on 20 September 1986 in response  
to the initiative of Sir Frederick Catherwood M.E.P.

IRISH STATEMENT

"The Irish Government has noted with interest the initiative of Sir Frederick Catherwood and the proposals made by him. The Irish Government favour all constructive proposals aimed at encouraging the parties in Northern Ireland to reach agreement on a devolved system of Government in Northern Ireland on a basis which would secure widespread acceptance throughout the Community. They understand that the British Government would be ready to embark on a round table conference with the parties in Northern Ireland in the interval between meetings of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and they urge the parties in Northern Ireland to respond accordingly. The Irish Government's position in relation to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, like that of the British Government, remains that there can be no question of suspending the Agreement or the operation of the various arrangements set up under the Agreement".

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"The British Government have noted Sir Frederick Catherwood's proposal with interest. It bears a close resemblance to the proposal which the Prime Minister put to Mr. Molyneux and Dr. Paisley in February last when she told them that the British Government was prepared to take part in a round table conference with Northern Ireland parties on the possibility of introducing arrangements for a devolved system of Government in Northern Ireland and while not prepared to suspend the Anglo-Irish Agreement, would operate it sensitively in that context. The Prime Minister's offer stands. The Government would be ready to embark upon such a conference in the interval between meetings of the Intergovernmental Conference set up under the Anglo-Irish Agreement if the parties in Northern Ireland were to respond accordingly.

"Belfast Initiative - 7 October 1986"

The Government welcomes the readiness of the leaders of the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland to engage in talks about the establishment of devolved government in the Province. At an appropriate stage the Government would be willing to participate in these talks which would, of course, be outside the framework of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

That Agreement provides that if it should prove possible to achieve and sustain devolution on a basis which secures widespread acceptance in Northern Ireland a wide range of matters now falling to be dealt with by the Intergovernmental Conference would be removed from its consideration.

In that event the British and Irish Governments will, in accordance with Article 11 of the Agreement, undertake a review of the working of the Conference.

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17. 10. 86

Appendix 7

FOR ASST. SEC. O THATHAIL FROM P. COLLINS

THE FOLLOWING TEXT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME BY THE OTHER SIDE:

TEXT BEGINS

(1) BOTH GOVERNMENTS WOULD WISH TO ENCOURAGE ANY CONSTRUCTIVE EFFORTS TO MOVE TOWARDS AGREEMENT ON A DEVOLVED SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND ON A BASIS WHICH WOULD SECURE WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY.

(2) THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN ANY MOVEMENT TOWARDS DEVOLUTION IS THAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND SHOULD BE PREPARED TO ENTER INTO DISCUSSIONS WITH EACH OTHER ON THIS BASIS.

(3) SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF A SCHEME OF DEVOLUTION WOULD REQUIRE ACTION BY THE UK GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT, THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO BE INVOLVED IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE NORTHERN IRELAND PARTIES AT SOME STAGE. HOWEVER, THE PRECISE ROLE AND TIMING OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S INVOLVEMENT IN DISCUSSIONS IS A MATTER WHICH

COULD ITSELF BE DISCUSSED IN THE FIRST PLACE AS BETWEEN THE NORTHERN IRELAND PARTIES. THE IRISH GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT NEED TO BE INVOLVED IN ANY SUCH TALKS, WHICH WOULD NOT THEMSELVES FORM A PART OF THE ARRANGEMENTS SET UP UNDER THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT.

(4) WHILE THERE CAN BE NO QUESTION OF SUSPENDING THE AGREEMENT, OR THE OPERATION OF VARIOUS ARRANGEMENTS SET UP UNDER IT, BOTH GOVERNMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SENSITIVE OPERATION OF THE AGREEMENT WOULD BE ANXIOUS TO FACILITATE AND ENCOURAGE TALKS TAKING PLACE IN

THE INTERVAL BETWEEN MEETINGS OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE.

TEXT ENDS

YOU WILL BE AWARE OF THE BACKGROUND TO, AND THE PURPOSE OF, THE TEXT. MY COLLEAGUE, IN HANDING OVER THE TEXT, STRESSED THAT IT HAD NOT YET BEEN APPROVED BY ANDREW OR ARMSTRONG AND, THUS, HE IMPLIED, WAS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

M

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Hadden/O'Leary Initiative

1. Suspension of meetings for 3 months or duration of talks [or meetings only on cross-border issues].
2. Closure of secretariat office at Maryfield while talks continue.
3. Agreement to call for review of functions and scope of Ministerial Conference on any matter - not just devolution - if agreement can be reached on alternative mechanisms of recognising rights of both communities in Northern Ireland.
4. Agreement to consider reformulation of Articles 2 and 3 of Irish Constitution to remove all claim of jurisdiction over Northern Ireland, if agreement on other matters\* can be reached.
5. Any revised agreement to be submitted to referendum.

\* Methods according to ~~text~~ supplied to London.