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**"Towards a New Ireland": Proposals by the Social
Democratic Labour Party**

1. Preliminary Examination

In their preliminary examination of the Northern situation, the SDLP criticism of the inherently unstable nature of the area originally partitioned is in line with Government analysis of the root of the problem as expounded more fully in, for example, the Taoiseach's article in "Foreign Affairs". The SDLP document goes on, however, to ascribe the growth of "Catholic ascendancy" in the Republic to the effects of the partition settlement and in this they may not be entirely sound, nor relevant.

2. Declaration

The document is rather confusing in regard to the Declaration of Intent sought from the British Government. It refers to unity "on terms which would be acceptable to all the people of Ireland" (p.2).... "democratically agreed to by all sections of the people of Ireland, North and South" (p.3).... "on terms acceptable to all the people of Ireland, North and South" (p.7). These may be simply attempts to "blur the edges" or may be intended to emphasise all-Ireland involvement in a settlement but it could be construed as accepting a lesser guarantee than that given by the British i.e. simple majority in the North. At a time when formulae such as a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority or "the consent of the Unionist majority" are being bandied about it is regrettable that this document is not more clear-cut on this point.

3. On the detailed proposals for minority participation in government one could speculate on whether the system would achieve this objective as well as, say, the Alliance proposals for Chairmanship of functional councils. If however

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the SDLP are satisfied that the system of 84-member assembly and 15-men executive can meet their needs then the Government cannot demur on this aspect of the proposals. In discussion, however, it would be interesting to hear how they envisage this in operation and how they expect to avoid a situation of being constantly over-ruled in assembly and cabinet.

4. The aspect of the SDLP's proposals which most concerns the Government is, of course, the plan for Joint Sovereignty. In principle this would certainly warrant Government Support. From our point of view such a condominium arrangement would bridge the gap between our de iure claim and the present de facto position in regard to the North. Whatever misgivings we may have, therefore, it is unthinkable that we should not endorse the proposal once it has been put forward. It is probably a high bargaining position rather than a realistic demand at the present time. It would be more appropriate as a second interim stage after experience of greater participation over the next 5-6 years say, the impact of E.E.C. membership, the effect of positive British Government encouragement of moves towards unity and, in particular, the effect of some years of genuine North-South co-operation on a council of Ireland. Initially the most that could be sought - and this would still be a high bargaining position - would be Irish involvement in an external check on Unionist dominance.

5. In discussion, it will be necessary to get some elaboration of the outline for Joint Sovereignty given in "Towards a New Ireland" and also to get some indication of where, in practice, it may be negotiable. (The SDLP claim that all of their proposals stand interdependently and cannot be

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diminished in any respect is out of place in relation to a document which is to be the basis of consultation and bargaining). Amendment of our Constitution would seem to be necessary if we are to participate in the Treaty of Joint Sovereignty - the document suggests (page 8) that Article 3 would have to be amended or removed. If at any time such a sharing in the government of Northern Ireland were accepted by the British, the time would then be opportune for what the Taoiseach has referred to frequently - a new constitution to deal with the new Ireland which such an arrangement would create. There is no difficulty therefore in giving an undertaking that constitutional changes would be put before the people to accommodate such a big step towards Irish unity.

6. The proposed National Senate is, perhaps, something of a misnomer; one usually associates a Senate with a legislative body but in this case a deliberative body only is envisaged with scope for executive functions. The title would more appropriately be "Council" and while this may seem a reduction in status it need not make any difference in practice. The choice of title may thus be a tactic to provide for an appearance of compromise in later negotiation. If, in a revised situation, we were to continue to have a senate, it would be confusing. As matters stand our Senate (and Dáil) would be electing members to the new National Senate of Ireland.

7. The greatest defect in the SDLP document is that the condominium proposals bang so much together that, failing its acceptance one finds it difficult to salvage a lesser arrangement out of the various inter-related parts. Thus for example, the British might adopt the SDLP proposals but substituting a one-man arrangement for the two-man Irish/British

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system of control, veto of legislation etc. In that event the SDLP proposal not to have parliamentary representation at Westminster could lose them a valuable forum for criticism, review and question.

8. In regard to financial arrangements, it is envisaged that we would have to contribute towards the subvention for Northern Ireland in the ratio of our G.N.P. to Britain's. At present levels of assistance and relative national incomes, this would mean an outlay of the order of £3m. It may seem outlandish that we should have to contribute to maintaining a higher standard of living in the North but it may not, in practice, be the burden on the 26-County body of taxpayers which it at first appears. If joint projects and services are financed from a joint fund these would be a net gain. Again, the document does not stipulate parity of social services with Britain and a reduced level of services in certain areas may be envisaged.