

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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APPENDIX II

Chronology of Proposals for Devolution of Power  
to Northern Ireland

- September 13th,  
1981 Appointment of Mr. James Prior as Northern Ireland Secretary.  
Mr. Prior revives idea put forward by Conservative back-bencher, Dr. Brian Mawhinney, for a devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland. Mr. Prior asks Mr. Mawhinney to write him a detailed description of the proposal. In Mawhinney's scheme, a 70% vote is required for any policy decisions. Unless a 70% vote is reached, Secretary of State retains power of decision.
- November, 1981 Anglo/Irish Inter-Governmental Council is established. The timing of an inter-parliamentary tier to the Council is postponed for reference to parliaments of Great Britain and Republic of Ireland.
- January 11th,  
1982 In conversation with the SDLP, Mr. Prior floats the idea of creating an Executive in connection with a Mawhinney-type Assembly. Members of the Executive would be appointed by the Secretary of State from both communities and would, thus, constitute a power-sharing agreement. The concept of "rolling devolution" upon which the present White Paper is based was also mentioned. The SDLP raised the possibility of making a connection between the proposed inter-parliamentary tier to the Anglo/Irish Inter-Governmental Council and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- January 13th,  
\* Lord Gowrie "dual allegiance" interview with Irish Times: "why not 1981 have people living in the North who regard themselves as Irish administered as Ireland and Britain".
- January 14th,  
1982 Julia Langdon, Guardian's political correspondent, publishes the idea of a nominated Executive as one of the most likely options to emerge from the Northern Ireland Secretary's ideas.
- January 17th,  
1982 John Hume describes idea of nominated Executive on RTE radio interview as most important idea which had emerged from SDLP contacts with Mr. James Prior.
- January 19th,  
1982 Mr. James Prior, in meeting with Alliance Party, says that nominated Executive idea is not a serious option. Instead, he outlines a plan for "rolling devolution" in two stages. First stage, an Assembly with committees. Second stage, an Executive with agreed powers.
- Final week  
January, 1982 Mr. James Prior and Lord Gowrie, in an interview with Mr. T.E. Utley of Daily Telegraph, says that their latest thinking is to establish an Assembly with scrutinising committees and in a second phase, that the Northern Ireland



Secretary would set up a mixed Executive by appointment consisting of himself, his junior Ministers and Northern Ireland politicians who might or might not be members of the Assembly.

End January,  
1982

Northern Ireland question time in House of Commons. Right-wing Tory MPs, Julian Amery, Nicholas Winterton and John Biggs-Davison and others make it clear to Mr. Prior that they oppose any plan for devolution and favour total integration of Northern Ireland with Great Britain. Active lobbying is now going on by members of Conservative Party back-benchers lobbied by Mr. James Molyneaux and Enoch Powell of the OUP who oppose Mr. Prior's scheme.

January 28th,  
1982

Mr. Prior briefs Conservative Northern Ireland Back-Bench Committee and gives detailed account of his thinking. His thinking is now characterised as "rolling devolution" in three stages: an election to an Assembly with committees; mixed Executive of Ministers and Assembly members approved by a weighted majority of 70% of the Assembly; and ultimate transfer of powers to Executive of Assembly members which would be ratified by a weighted majority of the Assembly. Mr. Prior admits that the second stage (appointed Executive) is not particularly attractive or an easy concept. He admits it may have a part to play.

January 29th,  
1982

Mr. Prior, in meeting with SDLP, says that he has dropped the idea of an appointed Executive from outside the Assembly. SDLP counters with request for beefed-up role for inter-parliamentary tier of Anglo/Irish Council which would, according to SDLP plans, take responsibility for many matters which Mr. Prior wishes to allocate as responsibilities to the Northern Ireland Executive. Mr. Prior makes it clear that he sees no linkage between Assembly and the Anglo/Irish Council.

January 31st,  
1982

Mr. Enoch Powell, OUP, threatens on BBC radio to impede the passage through Parliament of any Bill according devolution.

February 16th,  
1982

Mr. Prior's draft plans are first considered by the Overseas Defence (OD) committee of the cabinet. The OD committee includes the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Leader of the House. Mr. Prior's plans get overall approval. It is reported in the press, however, that Mr. Prior is dismayed at the level of personal hostility displayed by the Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher.

Mr. Prior delivers speech to Conservative Bow Group. In his speech, Mr. Prior considers for the first time the possibility that "rolling devolution" plans may fail. He attacks the integrationist line on Northern Ireland. He enumerates two principles for devolution. Firstly, final agreement must be reached among Northern Ireland parties and must not be imposed from outside. Secondly, his aim is to create a framework within which Northern Ireland parties may work together.



End February,  
1982

Allegedly, letters sent from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, (Dr. Doodge) of the government of the Irish Republic, to exert pressure on Mr. Prior for increased recognition of Nationalist population rights in Northern Ireland and the Irish Dimension in devolution plans.

March 2nd,  
1982

Irish Times publishes details of increased recognition of the Irish Dimension through a speeding up of establishment of the parliamentary tier to the Anglo/Irish Inter-Governmental Council to which members of any Northern Ireland Party would be free to go upon their own volition. In addition, the Irish Times reports that the White Paper will have a section expressing the legitimacy of Nationalist aspirations. The inter-parliamentary tier would have no actual powers. Mr. Prior describes the Irish Times revelations as "rather garbled and most unhelpful".

March, 1982

In early March, Mr. Prior has a disastrous interview with the Official Unionist Party. The Official Unionist Party seeks an end to the Anglo/Irish Summit Conference process and thus the parliamentary tier and is unwilling to accord any form of power-sharing, qualified vote or recognition of the Irish Dimension to the Nationalist population of Northern Ireland. Shortly after this interview, Mr. Molyneaux, leader of the OUP, obtains a decision from the OUP Executive to break off its talks with the Northern Ireland Office. OUP will, however, contest elections to the Assembly.

Following a meeting in Dublin, the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic and the SDLP, describe the Prior plan as "deficient and unworkable". The SDLP does not decide to cancel its participation in elections to the Assembly.

Canvassing is continuing among Conservative back-benchers, reportedly by Mr. Ian Gow, Mrs. Thatcher's Parliamentary Private Secretary, to conjure up support for opposition to Mr. Prior's plans.

March 26th,  
1982

Mr. Prior's plans go back to OD committee of cabinet. Again Irish Times alleges that the Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, is only serious opponent. The plans are approved. Mrs. Thatcher's opposition was widely reported by the press as being to the Irish Dimension of the White Paper. This could, however, have been a ploy to gain Unionist support.

April 5th,

Mr. Prior presents government's plans for devolution of Ulster to the House of Commons. The next day, the White Paper is made available.

Source: IIP files, Irish Times.