

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2013/27/1484
Creation Date(s):	17 February 1983
Extent and medium:	3 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
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Meeting between the Taoiseach and
Mr. John Hume on 17 February 1983

1. The Taoiseach met Mr. John Hume M.E.P. for an hour and a half over lunch at Government Buildings on 17 February 1983. Hume had requested meetings with each of the main party leaders in Dublin with a view to advancing his proposal for a Council for a New Ireland. He had already seen Mr. C.J. Haughey, T.D. and was going on to see the Tánaiste immediately after the lunch.
2. Hume began by talking briefly about two recent contacts with the British. He had led an SDLP delegation to a meeting with the NI Secretary of State at Stormont on 7 February. Prior had asked for the meeting to discuss aspects of the NI economic situation. When the SDLP began to offer comments on these matters, Prior responded by berating them for not participating in the NI Assembly. The atmosphere was so bitter that Hume thought of walking the delegation out of the meeting but he had refrained from doing so because he felt that Prior was simply in very bad form and was behaving out of character. Prior had, however, taken the same line on a TV interview later the same day and it is clear that there is at the moment a good deal of bitterness in Prior's relationship with the SDLP. Hume is on better terms with Lord Gowrie with whom he had spoken by telephone to-day about saving the Beleek factory. In the course of the conversation, Gowrie said that Mrs. Thatcher's relationship with the right wing Tories such as Powell and Gow had deteriorated recently for reasons unconnected with Ireland. The deterioration might have the unexpected side effect of at least making opinions on Ireland, other than those of the Tory right wing, heard in 10 Downing Street.
3. The Taoiseach opened the main discussion by referring to some aspects of the nomination of Bríd Rogers to the Senate. Press reports indicating that Hume would have preferred another candidate and suggesting that there had been no consultation with him were most unhelpful as were Mallon's comments that in his case the then Taoiseach had in fact obtained Hume's approval before nominating him. Hume replied by detailing his contacts with the media in relation to the Rogers nomination. He did not, however, reject the validity of the Taoiseach's criticism. Later on in the conversation he agreed that he would seek an opportunity publicly to welcome all three Northern Ireland nominations and specifically to indicate approval of the Rogers nomination.
4. Hume gave an analysis of the background to the SDLP's proposal for a Council for a New Ireland. They had nothing to show for their activities since the collapse of the Sunningdale arrangements in 1974. They had clung to the power-sharing within NI principle for the rest of the seventies and had taken considerable political risks by so doing, especially in response to

the Atkins initiative in 1978. There had, however, been no response from the unionists who were obviously determined to live with direct rule as long as the British were prepared to stick with it. One could not therefore expect any fresh political thinking from unionist politicians and it was also difficult to see any new moves coming from London in the near future. Meanwhile the Provos, were successfully moving in to the political arena in NI and it was now urgently necessary for constitutional nationalist representatives to push the Provos. aside and to seek progress towards a resolution of the problem. Hence the proposal for a Council which would bring together all nationalist parties on the island of Ireland to draw up a blueprint for a new Ireland. Obviously the best outcome would be an agreed blueprint which would seek to demonstrate to unionists that they had nothing to fear in new, agreed, all-Ireland structures. A favourable response from all nationalist parties would bring about a situation where for the first time in this generation, Irish nationalists would seize the initiative in relation to the NI situation rather than responding to British Government initiatives as had been done three or four times in the last decade. Hume said that there had been an excellent response to the proposal from ordinary unionists. He had received a considerable volume of favourable post and had also been meeting with a number of groups, including most recently a mixed nationalist/unionist group of Belfast lawyers (he mentioned Hewitt, Campbell and Porter) who encouraged him to press ahead with it.

5. In his meeting with Mr. Haughey, he had been given to understand that Fianna Fáil would support the proposal - indeed Brian Lenihan had already done so publicly last weekend - and that an announcement to that effect would be included in Mr. Haughey's speech to the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis on 26 February.

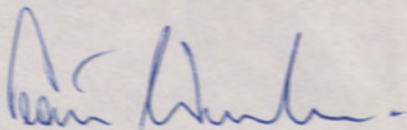
6. The Taoiseach referred to two of the main difficulties which the proposal involved. Firstly, it would hardly help the reconciliation of the two Irish traditions to exclude one of those traditions completely from a body set up to consider what form the new Ireland might take. Secondly, unless all-party agreement here could be reasonably anticipated in relation to the formation, functioning and report of the Council, it would obviously do more harm than good. Fine Gael and Labour would run the risk of being wrong-footed by Fianna Fáil for reasons which had nothing to do with NI. The exercise might also split the SDLP and open nationalist disunity. This would give the British and the unionists another excuse for doing nothing.

7. Hume agreed that the Council would effectively exclude unionist politicians though the unionist point of view might be presented by people such as Senator Robb. In setting up the Council, it would, of course, be made clear that this was only the first stage in a process which sought eventually to achieve agreement both with the unionists and with the British. The blueprint produced by the Council would be a nationalist negotiating document. Unionists were not therefore being excluded from the process. In regard to the second difficulty raised by the Taoiseach, the risks of inter-party disagreement were obviously

real and no one could predict the final outcome of the exercise with any confidence. There were risks for every party, including Fianna Fáil which could be isolated if, for instance, Fine Gael, Labour and the SDLP opted for a condominium approach under which the British and Irish Governments would move towards exercising joint sovereignty over NI. This had been the SDLP proposal to Whitelaw's Darlington Conference in 1972 and there were good reasons for believing that it might now be an attainable objective of policy. Hume said that he would have no difficulty in supporting the condominium idea and in bringing the SDLP with him, even if Fianna Fáil were unwilling to support it.

8. There was some discussion of detailed aspects of the proposal. Hume made it clear that he was not committed to the title "Council for a New Ireland", that he would favour an independent chairman, that the chairman should be able to appoint a secretariat and that that secretariat should not be drawn from the political parties.

9. The Taoiseach said that he would shortly raise the matter in Government and seek agreement to approach the leader of Fianna Fáil with a view to getting an agreed all-party response to the proposal within the next week or so. Hume said that he would tell the press that he had met the Taoiseach as part of his round of talks with party leaders and that the Taoiseach had indicated that the Government would shortly be considering the proposal.



Seán Donlon
17 February 1983