



**An Chartlann Náisiúnta**  
**National Archives**

**Reference Code:** 2021/48/151

**Creator(s):** Department of Foreign Affairs

**Accession Conditions:** Open

**Copyright:** National Archives, Ireland.  
May only be reproduced with  
the written permission of the  
Director of the National  
Archives.

Meeting with Seán Farren, 8 February 1994

1. I met Farren, the SDLP's economy and employment spokesman, in Portstewart.

Political Situation

2. Farren continues to emphasise the desirability of devolution - on acceptable terms and conditions, including adequate North/South structures - within Northern Ireland. His analysis of the political situation is therefore conditioned by the need, as he sees it, to keep lines open to the Unionists and, in consequence, by considerable caution about the future of relations between the SDLP and Sinn Féin.
3. He said that he could not predict what judgement Sinn Féin would come to on the Declaration, though his guess was that they would attempt some kind of skilful fudge, at the least leaving open the possibility of a future resumption of the campaign of violence. He commented, though, that in his view John Hume remained genuinely optimistic. He fears that Hume has been too fixated on Sinn Féin, and that some of his comments on Unionism have been, while perhaps accurate, too harsh (he contrasted this with the approach of both the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste).
4. Farren felt that should the proposed Forum for Peace and Reconciliation be established with Sinn Féin participation, the likely presence of the Alliance party would act as a useful counter-balance; he thought Alderdice's recent performance, including his taking on Gerry Adams in the US, had skilfully maximised his own and his party's credibility within the Unionist community. He commented that in his recent meeting with the SDLP John Bruton had been noticeably anxious about

how the Forum might work - the SDLP response on this point had been largely confined to emphasising the need for structures in which Sinn Féin could be involved.

5. Farren had heard on the news the Tánaiste's characterisation of the talks document forwarded by Mayhew as a "checklist". He presumed that there was little that would be unfamiliar to him as a participant in the 1992 round ("we haven't given Ancram much new to go on").
6. His view was that discussions in a reconstituted Strand I were likely to get bogged down quickly, especially if Sinn Féin were, or were to become, a player. It would accordingly be important that the Government take the lead in defining what was required of Strand II and focus on that. Internal institutions would therefore be agreed "almost as a residual". Nevertheless, devolution was worth aiming at, and new institutions could work - too much was perhaps made of the example of Belfast city council. He also felt that John Hume's distinction between "solving the problem" and "deciding who wields power" was not very helpful - the exercise of power within Northern Ireland was a legitimate and important aspect of any settlement.

#### Constituency Boundaries

7. In Farren's view, one answer to the current difficulty would be an increase in the number of Westminster seats to 18 (as is permitted) and a redrawing of the boundaries accordingly. This would allow the four current MPs to hold their seats and might thus reduce pressure for pacts with Sinn Féin in Mid-Ulster and Fermanagh/South Tyrone. He has (through his friend John Darby's CCRU links) put this idea to the NIO.

Fair Employment/Targeting Social Need

8. Farren confirmed that it continues to be the SDLP's intention to make a submission to the Review of Fair Employment due to be concluded next year, but said that it would be difficult to propose dramatic improvements to legislation which was working well (though recent cases had underscored the scope for reform in local council appointments). He commented that the recent Church leaders' statement, which he had publicly welcomed on behalf of the party, demonstrated considerable courage on the part of the Protestant churches. He agreed that the statement's call on the British to pay heed to recommendations made by SACHR and the FEC would provide useful leverage in forthcoming discussion.
  
8. Farren was despondent about the prospects for a major reduction in unemployment in Northern Ireland (and, by extension, for a further narrowing in the Catholic:Protestant unemployment differential). He instanced the case of Derry; despite major successes in attracting inward investment, and in refurbishing the inner city, unemployment remains stubbornly high. He pointed to research showing that, in both parts of Ireland, the high potential for the (re-) entry into the workforce of women and of emigrants means that only a fraction of new jobs are actually taken by the unemployed. Despite recent support for greatly expanded social employment schemes from people such as Sir George Quigley and Graham Gudgin of the NIERC Farren wondered how innovative a Conservative Government could be expected to be. He mentioned, however, that a working group involving the DED, ICTU and the CBI had recently been established.

Rory Montgomery  
10 February 1994