

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2021/52/103
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.

Secret

Meeting with members of the 32 County Sovereignty Committee, 6 July 1998

As arranged by Fr. Reid, I met with him in Dundalk the following members of the 32 County Sovereignty Committee (two from the North, one living in Dundalk, and one from Dublin and originally Cork):

Bernadette Sands
Cllr. Francis Mackey
Rory Dougan
Joe Dillon

Joe Dillon conducted most of the dialogue, though Cllr. Mackey conducted the meeting. Bernadette Sands was the note-taker.

I began by expressing respect for the dignity that Bobby Sands and his comrades had achieved for prisoners, though at a very high cost. I said the effect could be seen in the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. I also said that from a historical perspective the H-Blocks struggle had clearly laid the foundations for the creation of a strong political movement.

Ms. Sands, while expressing appreciation for these comments, said that Bobby Sands had not died just to create the present Sinn Féin, but a sovereign, united and independent Ireland, and I acknowledged that was so.

© DFA/2021/52/103

I then gave a fairly lengthy exposition of how I saw the current situation, stressing in particular three points:

- The importance of Nationalist/Republican political unity as the best means of achieving political advance, and the divisiveness and ineffectualness of violence, and the right of the Irish people to accept that unity would only come about by consent;
- As long as there was continued violence, the British could stonewall over the demilitarisation of the border areas;
- That it was not feasible nor right after 75 years to think in terms of a majority coercing a minority, and I explained the two-way consent mechanisms of the Agreement.

We also discussed at length some of the arguments about the 1919-25 period, and its relationship to Republican legitimacy there being agreement on some issues, but I made the point that in international law the Irish Government was likely to be regarded as having accepted the legality of partition in the 1925 Boundary Agreement (and that was one reason among others why no Irish Government had taken partition to an international court). The 32 County Movement's case was as set out in the attached document. I gave them Albert Reynolds' January 1994 speech to the UCD Law Society, and a couple of papers I had done on republicanism, self-determination and consent.

While desirous of accommodating Unionists, Joe Dillon raised the parallel of West Cork in the War of Independence, where many Protestants decided to leave. I said that my grandmother was a Protestant from North Cork, and that she had not left.

© DFA/2021/52/103

At the conclusion of the meeting, which was conducted in a relaxed atmosphere, I said that we would examine their document and come back with a response to it.

Interestingly, the subject of 'harassment' was not raised. Ms. Sands at the end did emphasise in a pro forma manner that they were a political organisation, not linked to any other organisation.

Mark Harrison

15 July 1998.

© DFA/2021/52/103