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① Sir Enda 380/3
② POL

PAB/1820/RE

cc: PS/Lord Gowrie (L&B) (M)
PS/PUS (L&B) (M)
PS/Sir E Bell
Mr Marshall (M)
Mr Wyatt
Mr Angel (M)
Mr Abbott (M)
Miss MacGlashan

PS/Secretary of State (L&B) (M)

CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: STATEMENT BY THE TAOISEACH AND THE SDLP

1. You will have seen press reports of a joint statement made in Dublin yesterday by the Taoiseach and the SDLP (Messrs Hume, Mallon, McGrady and Hendron) on the Secretary of State's proposals for devolution. The statement said that both sides considered "the proposals as they were emerging were unworkable" and "deficient in that they concentrated on the details of an administration for Northern Ireland without due regard for the broader dimensions of the problem". Another "failed initiative" could only lead to further frustration. Political progress should be pursued through the Anglo Irish process.

2. The radio and press in Northern Ireland have presented this statement as a rejection of the constitutional proposals. While it is undoubtedly unhelpful, I am not sure it amounts to this. We know that the SDLP plan to hold a final meeting to decide their attitude to the proposals once the leadership have had their wind-up session with the Secretary of State (and they are still eager to hold this session). The views set out in the joint statement are no surprise - in fact the wording used is rather mild. Again, the statement does not say the party will refuse to stand for elections, stand on an abstentionist ticket or try to wreck the Assembly.

3. It was perhaps to be expected that the SDLP and the Taoiseach would use the occasion of their first major meeting after Mr Haughey's accession to the premiership as an opportunity to make a splash. It is very likely that for their part the SDLP are up to their usual game of using the Irish Government to put pressure on HMG: when they next see the Secretary of State they will no doubt complain that they are not being "given enough" on North/South relations and the Anglo Irish process. But on the whole I think the joint statement has let us off lightly.

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4. Unionists of course will be enraged once more at the sight of the minority leaders running off to Dublin in this fashion.



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Political Affairs Division

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