



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2019/31/48
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

(N010)

Mr. Collinge
18/7

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,
SW1X 7HR
Telephone: 01-235 2171
TELEX: 916104

Taoiseach

To see plan

18/7

cc Mr. Neill: PPS
Mr. de launay; Mr. Flann
(1) Connelley

SECRET

17 July 1989

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs



Dear Assistant Secretary

A Unionist forum?

Paul Arthur mentioned over dinner last night an idea floated by Peter Robinson in a recent conversation. Underlining the privacy of his conversation with Robinson, he asked me to treat the matter in the strictest confidence.

Recalling the Task Force report's call for discussions on the direction which Unionism should take in future, Robinson aired the possibility of a forum of the Unionist parties for this purpose, along the lines of the New Ireland Forum. He envisaged that the forum, which would be convened by the two party leaders, would debate a number of options and settle on one clear policy, effectively either devolution or integration. The argument he would propose to put to Paisley would be that, divided at present between these two policy objectives, Unionists have no chance of achieving either. Unionism will be a more effective political force if it is clearly united behind one or the other option. Furthermore, with the Official Unionists moving steadily down the integrationist path, there is a clear risk that the DUP (few of whose members favour integration) will be sidelined completely unless it can find some way of asserting the devolutionist counter-argument.

Robinson, of course, as Arthur observed, has an obvious personal interest in doing all possible to line up Unionists behind devolution. This policy alone offers him the prospect of exercising some influence on Northern Ireland politics in the future. Furthermore, the creation of a broad Unionist front in support of devolution would help him out of the political isolation imposed on him by his membership of the DUP,

Robinson indicated to Arthur, however, that it is far from certain that Paisley would accept his proposal. There are those in the DUP who, while devolutionist in outlook, would not wish to see Robinson given a central role in determining Unionist strategy and would argue internally against his forum proposal. It became clear that Robinson was thinking, in particular, of Nigel Dodds (who is on close terms with Paisley and, indeed, is rumoured to have become the leader's new heir apparent). Robinson is also not entirely sure of Sammy Wilson's loyalties.

Even if Paisley were persuaded, Moylneaux would probably oppose the proposal. He could be expected to question the need for, or desirability of, such an exercise. Robinson would reply by underlining the tactical value of presenting a number of options to the Unionist community (as happened with constitutional nationalists in the New Ireland Forum) and of allowing the community to lend its formal endorsement, through its elected representatives, to one or the other option.

Arthur concluded with the personal observation that a unified Unionist position might make it easier for Unionist politicians to respond to the Taoiseach's invitation to dialogue and, in particular, to take part in the constitutional conference proposed by the latter some time ago.

Yours sincerely

*Refer to
in what
it was?*

David Donoghue

David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer