



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2019/31/58
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
<b>Accession Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Note for Taoiseach's information

1. On 25 November the Taoiseach wrote to the three Northern Ireland MEPs inviting them to meet him to discuss matters of common concern relating to the European Community in the context of our forthcoming Presidency of the European Community. The Taoiseach had mentioned in his statement on Anglo-Irish relations in the Dáil on 23 November that he intended writing to the MEPs.
2. Mr. John Taylor said in the House of Commons on 23 November and in a Radio Ulster interview on <sup>24+</sup>29 November that Unionists should enter into discussions with the Dublin Government during our Presidency of the EC to discuss matters of mutual interest. He suggested that for those six months the Dublin Government should be treated as EC President and not as being Irish. He further said that because Irish Ministers would be so busy during the Presidency, and presumably not in a position to devote their full attention to the Anglo-Irish Inter-governmental Conference, the opportunity should be availed of to suspend the Anglo-Irish Agreement. This would overcome the Unionists difficulties about entering talks while the Anglo-Irish Agreement remains in place.
3. The Taoiseach responded by saying that while he could not visualise any suspension or extended interval between conference meetings during the Irish Presidency of the EC he would carefully examine any proposals put forward by Mr. Taylor.

*B. L.*

*Tin O'Connor*

# 1. Prospects for Devolution/Dialogue with Unionists

The arrival in July of a new Secretary of State drew some response from unionist leaders. Temporarily suspending their boycott of meetings with NIO Ministers, they saw the Secretary of State for preliminary talks on 14 August. Afterwards they appeared to hold open the possibility of continuing the dialogue. Mr. Brooke was at the centre of controversy over remarks he made after the meeting, suggesting that the Review of the working of the Conference held open the possibility of "alternative arrangements" to replace the Agreement. The NIO in a subsequent statement indicated that Mr. Brooke's remarks referred to possible changes in the working of the Conference.

There had been speculation earlier in the year that the British were planning an initiative on devolution for the Autumn. In the event, the more cautious view seems to have prevailed and it appears that the idea has been shelved for the time being. It remains to be seen what, if any, impact the Brooke talks with the Unionists will have on the stalemate; however the consensus remains that there is no immediate prospect of significant political progress. At a private meeting in Westminster in July, James Molyneaux told John Hume that while the basis for co-operation on economic issues certainly exists (talks below the level of leader are scheduled to commence between the SDLP and DUP in this area shortly), any wider discussions are still some considerable way ahead. This was further underlined by the recent rejection by Unionist leaders of an inter-party talks initiative proposed by Independent Unionist MP, James Kilfedder.

The Taoiseach's invitation to the Unionists to engage in dialogue without preconditions and in parallel to the Agreement remains on the table. While this has not been taken up, Mr. Molyneaux told Mr. Hume at that July meeting that he valued the "atmosphere" which he believed existed between Unionists and the Government.