



PM/85/19

Discussed on
of Arch.CDP
2/73PRIME MINISTERAnglo-Irish Relations: An Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Body

1. I have seen Douglas Hurd's minute to you of 1 March suggesting that we should encourage Michael Mates to go to Dublin in his capacity as Chairman of the All Party Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Group to explore current Irish parliamentary reactions to the possibility of setting up an Anglo-Irish parliamentary body. As Douglas makes clear there are cogent arguments in favour of this proposal as well as a number of drawbacks. Like him, I believe that on balance such a body could eventually play a useful role. But the issue requires careful consideration and handling in the light of the pace and content of the current negotiations with the Irish Government.

2. It seems to me that there are two questions here which need disentangling. The first question is of substance. We have always taken the line that it is for the two Parliaments to take the initiative. But the possibility of establishing an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Body has been put on the table by the Irish in the Armstrong/Nally talks, and it will clearly be necessary for us to give our supporters some form of steer so that what is put to the Dail, and to the Opposition at Westminster, is consistent with whatever agreement with the Irish may emerge from the current inter-governmental discussions.

3. The second question is of timing. I see the merits of Douglas Hurd's suggestion that we should seize the initiative. But Michael Mates' visit to Dublin would undoubtedly attract attention at a delicate stage in our

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confidential negotiations with the Irish Government. It might raise the wrong sort of expectations in Ireland and could unnecessarily arouse unionist suspicions that we were inclined to go further with the Irish than is in fact the case. The Irish Government might be worried that, by acting in advance of an inter-governmental agreement, we were playing the parliamentary card too soon and diminishing its value. My instinctive feeling is that it might be better for Michael Mates to wait until the main lines of whatever agreement we may reach with the Irish Government are publicly known, and the move towards the establishment of a parliamentary body can be presented as a further constructive measure, being taken by the two Parliaments in conjunction with the measures agreed on by the two Governments.

4. I should therefore like to suggest that we put this subject on the agenda for your meeting on 8 March. I would hope that there we might confine ourselves to discussing whether in principle Michael Mates should be encouraged to go, and the timing of his visit if we should decide in favour. The substance of what he would say when he got to Dublin might then be a suitable subject for consideration in the wider forum of the new OD(I) Committee, where we could examine the suggestion made by Willie Whitelaw that the Lords and the Senate should be included in any parliamentary body of this kind, as well as the other details which Douglas Hurd mentioned in his minute to you.

5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Lord Privy Seal, the Lord President and Sir Robert Armstrong.

GEOFFREY HOWE

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

8 March 1985