

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code:	2004/21/469
Title:	Note, by Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain D O'Sullivan, of a meeting held at Downing Street between Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave and Prime Minister Edward Heath, discussing the forthcoming Northern Ireland elections, proposed negotiations between the parties there, questions of discrimination and policing in Northern Ireland, the security situation, the proposed Council of Ireland, and the question of Irish government recognition of Northern Ireland.
Creation Date(s):	2 July, 1973
Level of description:	Item
Extent and medium:	9 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

SECRETMeeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister
in London on 2nd July, 1973.

The Taoiseach, accompanied by the Ambassador, arrived at Downing Street at 1 p.m. and the Taoiseach was received at the entrance by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister had with him throughout the meeting his principal Private Secretary, Mr. Robert Armstrong.

Discussion at the pre-luncheon stage was of a very general nature and did not at any point touch on the Northern Ireland situation. During luncheon there was a very general exchange of views on the outcome of the Assembly elections in the North. It was clear from the Prime Minister's remarks that the line-up which he would envisage for purposes of making the Constitution Bill work would be the Faulkner Unionists, the SDLP and the Alliance. There was an exchange of views about the possibility of an accommodation being sought by the SDLP with the Paisley and Craig Unionists. Mr. Heath did not see much future in an alliance of this nature and, in fact, leaned to the view that, if a link-up were to take place, it would be bound to lead in a short time to trouble.

The Prime Minister very much hoped that common sense would prevail and that there would be a joining together of the three parties who are prepared to make the constitutional arrangement work. He fully accepted that there is a strong dislike of Mr Faulkner in the SDLP and recognised that this could lead to delays in the formation of an Executive. One of Mr. Heath's hopes was that the prospect of another early General Election

.../...

- 2 -

which might produce quite a different picture might well impel the supporters of the White Paper to come to a workable arrangement.

The Prime Minister went on to say that he had instructed the Secretary of State to return to Belfast immediately for the purpose of having talks today with the leaders of the different political parties. Mr. Whitelaw will be returning to London later this evening to report on the results of these talks. Now that the elections have taken place the Prime Minister is determined that no time should be lost in trying to get agreement on the creation of an Executive. The Constitution Bill is expected to be through Parliament before the end of the present month and there is no reason why the Executive should not come into being immediately the legislation is approved. If the matter of creating an Executive were to be delayed until the Autumn there could be a serious loss of momentum and nobody could foresee what this might lead to.

The foregoing paragraphs summarise briefly the substance of the discussion during lunch.

After lunch the discussion turned to the other items in the agenda. The Prime Minister suggested that he and the Taoiseach might discuss first the question of imbalance in the Public Service. Here the Taoiseach emphasised the fact that in the higher reaches of the Civil Service very few posts are at present held by members of the minority. Unless some specific steps are taken to redress this situation it will take many years before a proper balance exists. The Taoiseach

.../...

- 3 -

suggested that one solution would be to retire prematurely and on full pay senior members of the Public Service with a view to making room for members of the minority population to fill their places. The Prime Minister then quoted figures to indicate that there had been a big change in recruitment during the past 10 years, and here he instanced the number of Catholics appointed to posts of Staff Officer and Executive Cadet. The Taoiseach pointed out that appointments at these levels were well below the level of the senior posts to which he was referring and that it would take years for some of these new entrants to reach senior posts. The Prime Minister undertook to keep the situation under the closest review. He doubted whether premature retirement would be a solution as this would inevitably give rise to criticisms from the majority. He was, however, advised that there may be ways in which it would be possible "to help discreetly" in bringing people from the minority into more senior posts.

The conversation then turned to the question of the RUC. The Prime Minister indicated that the Police Authority has been asked to look into the whole question of recruitment. Additional money has been provided for a building programme and there has been a substantial allocation of funds for better training of the Police Force. Special efforts are being made too to get the Royal Military Police to work with the RUC. This is beginning to have good effects. The Prime Minister said that the size of the Force had gone up from

.../...

- 4 -

3,890 in 1969 to something over 4,200 in 1972 but he did not have available to him separate figures on the recruitment of Catholics.

The Taoiseach talked about the lack of trust in the RUC which exists in many of the Catholic areas. This, he said, derives from the fact that the Police have not in many instances acted impartially. In Derry, the Police may have a modus vivendi, but it is absolutely essential that the Police Force whatever its composition should act fairly to all sections of the community. The Prime Minister said he agreed totally with the Taoiseach's view. He was, in fact, greatly impressed by the attitude of the Police on the occasion of his last visit to the North given the fact that so many of their members had been murdered in such appalling circumstances.

The Prime Minister then turned to the question of the Assembly. He said that it was, in his view, essential that it should get to work as quickly as possible. He very much hoped that a way could be found of getting an agreement on an Executive by the end of July. There may be difficulties in securing agreement as to who should be the Chief Officer, but common sense demanded that it should be somebody agreed between the three parties prepared to support the White Paper. Once the Executive has been formed then steps can be taken without too much delay for the devolution of powers to it.

.../...

- 5 -

On the question of the Council of Ireland, the Prime Minister said that steps for its establishment can hardly be taken until after the Executive has been constituted. He thought it might be wise to take a little time before coming to grips with the question of the Council. A lot of preliminary exchange of views between Dublin and London would probably be helpful. There would be no point in Dublin and London finding themselves in a squabble about the Council at the tripartite conference. He would therefore suggest that the best course would be for the two sides to work out the options privately in the first instance.

The Taoiseach said he could see some merit in this approach and he enquired whether the Prime Minister had in mind preparatory meetings at political or official level. The Prime Minister indicated that, so as to avoid giving the impression of collusion, it would, in his view, be preferable if the meetings could in the early stages take place at official level. If necessary, there could, prior to the tripartite conference, be a Ministerial meeting at which hopefully a reasonably agreed position in relation to the Council could be decided. The Prime Minister again reiterated his firm attachment to the idea of a Council which would be open-ended. A Council which was only a talking shop would be less than useless.

Reverting again to the question of the Executive, the Prime Minister said that he had instructed the Secretary of State yesterday afternoon to urge the political leaders in the North to put their minds to the job of forming an Executive without delay. He had also asked the Secretary of State to make it known to them that he (the Secretary of State)

- 6 -

would be at their disposal to give them any help he could. If necessary, he would be prepared to find a middle-man who would help them to reach agreement.

The Taoiseach at this point, enquired of the Prime Minister what his thinking was about the possible timing of the tripartite conference. In making this enquiry, the Taoiseach expressed the view that nothing would be worse than to allow the situation to drift. The Prime Minister replied that provided an Executive can be set up by the end of July, he would envisage the tripartite conference taking place in late September or early October. A lot of preparation for it would, of course, have to be made in the meantime between officials in Dublin and London. In reply to a question by the Taoiseach, the Prime Minister indicated quite clearly that he would not regard the tripartite conference as being a once-for-all exercise. There could, in fact, be a number of meetings of the conference before final agreement was reached.

The Prime Minister went on to say that there has been an increase in bombings in the North in recent times but the number of shootings has declined. He expressed the view that the more rapid the progress made with the constitutional process, the less motivation there will be for violence. If it is possible to get the right type of Executive, there will be less support for people of violence on both sides. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that the Assembly should be got down to work as quickly as possible.

The Prime Minister then turned to the question of extradition.

- 7 -

He quoted statistics of the requests for extradition made by Dublin in 1971, 1972 and 1973 and pointed out that the response has been quite positive. An entirely different picture emerges in relation to extraditions from the South. This situation provides those who want to be critical with a strong case in the House of Commons. The Taoiseach explained that the procedures in the South are indeed similar to those which obtain in this country. The decision to extradite rests with the Courts and it is not a matter in which the Government can interfere under the legislation as it stands at present. The Prime Minister remarked that if there was any help which Dublin could give in this matter, it would put him and his Government in a much stronger position in Parliament.

The Prime Minister then talked about cross-Border violence and enquired whether there was anything more Dublin could do in this matter. The Taoiseach said that he was at one with the Prime Minister in his determination to put down cross-Border violence. The Government has done everything it can to mould public opinion against violence. Two new Army contingents have recently been placed at sensitive points on the Border.

There was a brief reference to the use of rockets of Russian origin in the North. The Prime Minister indicated that they had no evidence that these had been made available by the Russians themselves. In fact, the indications are that this was not the case. The British Government had supplied the Russians with the serial numbers of some of the rockets captured and had asked for information as to the destinations to which these rockets had been exported. No reply had been received from the Russians.

- 8 -

The Prime Minister complimented the Taoiseach on his Blackrock speech. It was, he said, most helpful. The Taoiseach replied that he felt that a speech of this nature coming in advance of the Assembly elections would be opportune.

The Prime Minister then raised the question of the acceptance or recognition of the status of Northern Ireland. He said that the absence of such recognition or acceptance was creating difficulties for him. If we could advance on the position indicated in the Taoiseach's Blackrock speech, this would be a considerable help. Admittedly our agreement to sit in Council with representatives of the Assembly would be de facto recognition but the Prime Minister doubted whether this was really enough. The Taoiseach repeated what he had said in the matter in his Blackrock speech. He thought it would be unwise to get bogged down in legalities. He mentioned that the Constitution of the Republic was a written Constitution which could only be altered by a referendum; that an All-Party Committee had been considering the Constitution; that this had lapsed with the dissolution of the Dáil and that it was now proposed to reconvene the Committee which would continue its consideration of the matter. He could not, at this stage, give any undertaking as to whether it was likely that amendments or changes would take place until the Committee had reported.

There was a very brief exchange of views on the E.E.C. Both the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister laid emphasis on the importance of a suitable regional policy and the Taoiseach stressed the importance of North/South cooperation in the regional policy sphere. The Taoiseach also referred to the inevitable differences of view which must

- 9 -

arise between Dublin and London in relation to the common agricultural policy. The Prime Minister replied that his Government do not want to change the CAP but it is essential that they should keep prices under control.

There was no mention of the Strasbourg case during the discussion.

The atmosphere throughout was most friendly.

Attached is a copy of the agreed press communique.

The discussion ended at 4 p.m.

D.O.
2/7/73