

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Meeting with the Taoiseach - 27th August 1980

1. The Taoiseach received in his office this afternoon the following:-

Department of the Taoiseach

Mr.P.O hAnrachain  
Mr.W.Kirwan

Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr.A.O'Rourke, Secretary  
Mr.S.Whelan, Counsellor

The purpose of the meeting was to consider the preparatory work and to obtain guidelines for the official-level meeting with the British on 11th September 1980.

2. Arrangements for the meeting on 11th September were discussed in the context of the series of forthcoming meetings at different levels with the British. The broad basis for the 11th September meeting, as set out in the attached DFA note (Annex A) was agreed. In particular, the Taoiseach considered that the order of agenda items set out at page 2 of the DFA note should be followed. He stressed the overriding importance of the Northern Ireland question and the necessity to keep that item at the top of the agenda.

3. In regard to the composition of the Irish delegation, it was agreed that it would consist of officials from the Departments of the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs. The intention was to have a delegation of modest size which would not include technical experts from other Departments. The meeting on 11th September was seen as having an informal character, the purpose of which would be to review and assess the current state of official Anglo-Irish cooperation, including of course the question of Northern Ireland.

4. Discussion about the agenda for the 11th September meeting was based on Annex B attached. The following was agreed:-

-while Northern Ireland would be uppermost as an item on the Irish side, the manner in which Government policy was to be presented would depend on the outcome of the Taoiseach's next meeting with the SDLP scheduled for 4th September. In light of the results of that meeting, guidelines would be given to officials on the strategy to be followed when

presenting Government policy on Northern Ireland to the British on 11th September.

-the areas of economic and political cooperation identified in Annex B were accepted as covering the main agenda items for 11th September. Further consultation between Departments could take place as necessary in order to arrive at a firm draft agenda which could be put to the British. (Other than the strictly political aspects of the Northern Ireland question, there was no detailed discussion of the economic and political matters set out in Annex B, though the present position regarding proposed voting rights for British residents in Ireland was noted).

-the previous practice was noted whereby it was implicitly agreed that British readiness to discuss with us political aspects of the Northern Ireland question was matched by our preparedness to discuss with them matters of security. A similar approach could be followed for the meeting of 11th September. It was also agreed that security matters, when discussed at the political level, could more appropriately be considered at the Ministerial rather than Head of Government level.

5. In the broad context of deepening and extending Anglo-Irish cooperation and in particular regarding the question of Ministerial-level meetings in the economic and technical fields, the Taoiseach expressed his view that such meetings should take place with the British only if the need arose and on an ad hoc basis where specific projects were concerned.

6. On Northern Ireland policy, the Taoiseach indicated that there would have to be some modification of the British guarantee to the Unionists before we could move into the area of presenting detailed proposals on Northern Ireland. He did not consider it possible to secure movement on our side without first seeing a change of heart on the part of the British. Despite serious obstacles on the British side (e.g. the Tory right-wing), we should as a working principle continue to press the British on the question of a quadripartite conference. This was the message which the Taoiseach continued to relay to Mrs. Thatcher through third parties. Mrs. Thatcher, he said, would be reflecting carefully over the summer months on her Northern Ireland policy and he hoped to have her views at their next meeting. If, despite every effort on our part, the British proved to be totally unyielding in their attitude, then consideration would have to be given to adopting a much tougher line with them. The problem of the Unionists was essentially a British problem and one to which the British would have to address themselves

seriously.

7. Mr. O'Rourke said that the latest indications we had received from London suggested that there had been no significant movement in the British attitude. All the indications were that Mrs. Thatcher's Government intended to pursue the Atkins process to the very end. If that process failed, as was likely, the British might revert to the idea of 'progressive devolution', as hinted in the Discussion Paper. But as matters now stood, it appeared that the British were fully committed to the Atkins process.

8. The Taoiseach said he noted what was covered today and repeated that further guidelines would be forthcoming on Northern Ireland policy after his meeting on 4th September with the SDLP. He said that any further ideas or suggestions on the forthcoming series of meetings with the British could be put to him through the usual channels.

*SW*

27th August 1980