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Tete-a-tete meeting between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, in Chequers, on 7th November, 1983.

Taoiseach
To see
please
9/11

1. The meeting began at approximately 10.15 a.m. and lasted for about 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours. The Taoiseach and Prime Minister then joined the other Ministers and officials, in plenary session, in which a separate note is available. The tete-a-tete meeting was attended by Mr. John Coles, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister and the undersigned.

2. The Prime Minister opened by inviting the Taoiseach to give a resume of the subjects they had been discussing privately, for a brief period beforehand. The Taoiseach said that the situation in Northern Ireland had altered significantly in recent times. The extent of the rise in the Sinn Fein vote could be exaggerated, particularly because of the larger number of constituencies in which they had stood and because of the amount of personation in which they had indulged, but, even taking these factors into account, the percentage of the vote which they had attracted represented a dangerous move for constitutional politics in Northern Ireland. One way or another, they had now more than one third of the nationalist vote. They had resources - where they came from he need not go into in too much detail; they had energy, and they were a young party who argued that history was on their side. They could pay full time organisers and run clinics. The SDLP, on the otherhand were a party made up of people of similar age and background. As a constitutional party, they were open to being outflanked. They were part-timers, and many of them had domestic problems. All of these factors made them a somewhat less effective political party than they might otherwise have been.

3. The real danger would appear in the May 1985 local elections. Unless the SDLP could show by then some visible signs of progress, within a constitutional framework, their position would be gravely endangered. Sinn Fein would then become the majority party, claiming to represent the nationalist vote in Northern Ireland. He could not emphasise strongly enough just what this would mean for the British and Irish Governments. Insofar as our State was concerned there was also some degree of risk. There were many soft-headed people in the country and there was a form of atavistic nationalist feeling just under the surface. Their activities could achieve some form of destabilisation nationally. There was also the impact of the movement on the American scene. Generally speaking, the Irish Government could claim to speak not only for the Irish State but for a more basic form of Irish nationalism, in the traditional sense. This was widely accepted in the United States but,

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if Sinn Fein managed to show that they had a large majority of the national vote in Northern Ireland - and in Ireland as a whole - then this claim could well be challenged. The consequences both for Britain and Ireland would be quite serious.

4. His analysis had led him to the conclusion that the time for dealing with the threat was shorter than he had previously envisaged. The increase in support for the Sinn Fein movement reflected a form of alienation on the part of a large minority of people in Northern Ireland. This was contributing to anarchy in society there, even within the family. There was, in fact, a form of disintegration of society. There seemed to be no effective movement, except the type of policies advocated and pushed by the IRA. This had spilled over, to a limited extent into the South where there were isolated incidents of, for example, knee-capping for "ordinary decent crimes". The IRA were arguing that they were the only people who could impose order. In Northern Ireland, as in other places, the people would give support only where they see the police as an arm of legitimate authority. The present forces there had not got the loyalty of the people. The basic question was how to tackle this sense of alienation and to provide a focus of loyalty to authority, and to the police which upheld it. How could this sense of political loyalty be developed and sustained - essentially to prevent serious slippage in the 1985 elections? He himself did not know quite how this could be done and he would be reflecting on the subject, in the future. He would be glad if the Prime Minister also would consider the question seriously.

5. Associated with these developments is the process going on in the Republic. The Forum was having a beneficial effect - essentially educational. What it was doing was bringing to light, for Southern nationalists, the depth and intensity of Unionist feeling. The process was opening up minds to solutions other than the simplistic solution of a unitary Irish State. Forms like federation, confederation and joint sovereignty would obviously come up for consideration, in this new atmosphere. The Prime Minister intervened at this point and said that this had not been mentioned before. She enquired as to whether you are going to look at it. She said again that the subject had not been mentioned before, at their meeting. The Taoiseach said that ~~this was a subject which he himself was not considering.~~ What he had been talking about ~~was~~ the type of subject which the Forum was or would be considering. In that context

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there was a movement away from the old simple concepts. At least three, if not four of the parties in the Republic were seriously considering new structures and ways in which they could be made acceptable and workable insofar as Unionist opinion was concerned - while at the same time remaining sensitive to nationalist concerns.

6. He had hoped that the Forum would conclude by the end of the year but it now seemed possible that the work would take longer than this. There was some chance that it could be concluded by the end of January - or at worst by the end of March. The question had arisen as to what should happen then. Perhaps, though he was not certain of this, and was certainly not prejudging the issue, there could be arrangements for keeping it in being - though not formally active. The body had done some useful work. He mentioned its recent report on the cost of violence in Northern Ireland and work it had done on the effects of division within the community there. It had been valuable also in its analysis of the economic possibilities for the future. It was working on political models for the future. All this pointed to the strong possibility that it might be adjourned rather than abolished when it had finished its work - though he had not discussed this question with his colleagues.

7. In reply to a question from the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach said that its basic terms of reference were to consider how peace and stability might be achieved in Northern Ireland. These terms of reference did not include any reference to Irish unity. It was open to the body to consider any type or form of solution. The Prime Minister enquired as to attitudes to the Forum on the part of the participants and public. The Taoiseach said that it had been extremely valuable in this sense. Though Unionists were not formally participating, many of that persuasion had given evidence before it. He mentioned, in particular, John Biggs-Davison. The system was that one person from each delegation was nominated to question witnesses. Biggs-Davison had given a most impressive performance. Though people did not necessarily agree with his views, it was obvious that his information and briefing were excellent. Similarly, Church representatives had appeared before the body and had made persuasive cases. The Prime Minister remarked on the new awareness of the facts of the problem, on the Unionist side. She remarked on their continuing sense of loyalty to the United Kingdom. The Taoiseach mentioned also that the body had given focus to many forms of Nationalist opinion. The basic question remained of how

who were able to represent that viewpoint.

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to accommodate the two identities in a parallel way. Loyalties were pulling in two different directions and this would have to be taken into account while setting a framework within which people could live together. There were still lots of verbal Republicans around. The Prime Minister said that they had identified the problems but she had not yet seen any solutions.

8. The Taoiseach went on to say that he had been very concerned with the Brian Walden programme. They had in fact been so sensitive to this problem that they had refused to put anybody on the programme and had certainly not had anything to do with its construction. He valued highly the understanding which had developed where neither the Prime Minister nor himself went in detail into what happened at their meetings. The programme had dealt with a number of issues and had then focused on the subject of joint sovereignty, as what he was coming to the Prime Minister to put before her. *It* ~~That~~ had certainly not been his intention *to focus on this concept*. Insofar as the press were concerned, he had stressed that the purpose of the meeting was to reflect together on the nature of the problem and how it might be solved - both in relation to the European Community and Northern Ireland. He had stressed that he would not be looking for hard decisions or conclusions at this point. The Prime Minister said that the programme would cause trouble for her in Parliament. All that had been done or said so far pointed to questions but not to solutions. She then went on to question the extent of personation in elections in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach said that he understood there was a possibility of legislation to deal with this subject coming before Parliament. He would urge the Prime Minister that this should be looked at before the European elections next year. If there was any way in which personation which was extensively practised by Sinn Fein could be dealt with effectively, it would obviously be most helpful. The sooner this was done the better. The Prime Minister then went on to say that she had the impression that the register for Northern Ireland might well contain the names of many people who are not resident there. The Taoiseach said that there were ways in which this could be dealt with, through the ordinary machinery. What he was concerned with was the extent and pervasiveness of actual personation. The figures for the number of pink forms issued would, in themselves, indicate the seriousness of the problem. The Prime Minister said that both of them would have to reflect further on the entire problem. The Taoiseach said that any solution must provide a new focus without depriving the majority of their focus of loyalty. The Prime Minister said that

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that was his analysis which she did not necessarily share. Insofar as she was concerned it was important to stress that as between the Taoiseach and herself the question of joint sovereignty had not been raised. What the Forum did or did not do was a separate issue. The Taoiseach said that, insofar as he was concerned, he had not been discussing joint sovereignty with the Prime Minister. What he had done was to present his analysis of the situation, as he saw it. There had been no question of discussing specific policies or actions.

9. The question then came up of how press queries should be dealt with. The Prime Minister said that the essential aim was to ensure that democracy could work in Northern Ireland in an atmosphere of stability and order. She was increasingly concerned with this. The Taoiseach said that the problem was how to deal with continued violence and destabilisation in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister said that it was necessary to reflect on the underlying problems. The Taoiseach then went on to say that references to democracy in Northern Ireland often reflected nothing more than the concern of the Unionists for majority rule. The Prime Minister then said that any press statement must reflect the objective that democracy should not be undermined by forces of intimidation and terrorism. The Taoiseach mentioned their shared concern about this and how to reduce the degree of instability in Northern Ireland. While the Forum was in session neither of them were in a position to consider specific proposals. After some further discussion, the form of words incorporated in the Joint Communique was agreed.

10. Before leaving the meeting, the Taoiseach raised the question of the Dowra affair. He described the background in some detail and said that so far as he could see now, while police cooperation on the ground was continuing, the structures for that cooperation were not operating properly. He had raised the issue with the Prime Minister in Stuttgart on the 21st June last. Then we had been a long time waiting to get something back from Northern Ireland. More recently the Commissioner had written to the Chief Constable and had received a reply, which he had seen the day he had left Dublin for the present meeting. This had not given time for a proper consideration of the issues but he had the feeling that the reply might well not be adequate.

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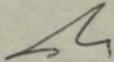
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The Prime Minister asked if the question was being dealt with in the discussions between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State. The Taoiseach said that so far as he knew it was not. The Prime Minister said that it was important that some satisfactory conclusion be reached in the case.

11. At this point, the meeting broke up - to join the plenary session.



9th November, 1983.

cc. Mr. Sean Donlon, Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs