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Roinn an Taoisigh
Department of the Taoiseach

7th September, 1984.

Mr. Michael Lillis,
Assistant Secretary,
Department of Foreign Affairs.

Dear Michael,

I have made a few minor changes in the draft
which I think is otherwise perfect.

Yours sincerely,

Dermot Nally

Dermot Nally.

Personal + Secret
cc Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Minister.
Secretary, Mr. Nally

Tithe an Rialtais, Baile Atha Cliath 2.
Government Buildings, Dublin 2.

Taoiseach's Meeting with the Prime Minister,3 September 1984Anglo-Irish Matters

This part of the discussion took place at the end of lunch. The Prime Minister was accompanied by Sir Robert Armstrong and the Taoiseach by Mr Nally. Mr Charles Powell of the Prime Minister's Private Office and the undersigned were note-takers. The meeting lasted for approximately three-quarters of an hour.

The Taoiseach began by saying that events in August had confirmed our anxiety about alienation among Northern nationalists, especially in relation to security. On our side, we try to keep in touch with opinion both in the nationalist and the Unionist sections of the community. While it was easier, for obvious reasons, for us to remain in touch with nationalist opinion, we managed to have a fair degree of access to the Unionist side. It was vital that we bring the bulk of nationalist opinion with us in anything that the Irish Government would become involved in. We believed that our standing with the nationalist side was now fairly good. It was, in fact, quite difficult to maintain the confidence of nationalists. In his own experience, when, for example, being interviewed for a Northern Ireland audience, the difficulty was simultaneously to address the two sides; an example of the difficulty was that the Taoiseach sometimes found himself unconsciously addressing primarily one side or the other e.g. the Unionists. It is extremely important for us to try to maintain the confidence of the nationalists, by which he meant that section of the nationalist community which had not been alienated.

The Prime Minister interrupted to say: "You mean the SDLP?".

The Taoiseach said that while SDLP opinion was, of course, absolutely central in this matter, he meant, in fact, the entire section of nationalist opinion which was not alienated. We now believe that we have a fair chance of bringing that section of opinion with us. It might not be fully understood in London that from time to time it was necessary for us to take a strong line to reassure nationalists of our awareness of their problems. This was done with the intention of reassuring and ensuring that they did not come under Provo influence. What we are doing had to be tolerable to the Unionists and saleable to the Nationalists.

The Taoiseach, continuing, said that he found the discussions (in the Armstrong/Nally channel) so far to be very constructive. It was obvious that it would be very difficult for both sides to achieve two things: to reverse nationalist alienation and not to undermine Unionist confidence. He had been struck by the way in which the discussions had reflected the common desire to find solutions to common problems rather than to "negotiate". He believed that such an approach had never before been achieved in Anglo-Irish relations. He would like to record his appreciation of what was happening.

The Taoiseach, continuing, said that, from our point of view, it was necessary to try to find agreement on a solution which would

- bring Northern nationalists away from alienation and
- provide an adequate basis for us to approach a referendum, if necessary.

Obviously we could not attempt a referendum unless we were convinced that we had a chance of success. We are prepared to take risks, as you are. The hazard on our side, if we failed, would be that the Government could not survive. However, if there is something which is both right and good, we would go

ahead. He had consulted his Government. They are obviously concerned about the chances of success. But, so far as the Government are concerned, this problem takes precedence over all others.

The Taoiseach, continuing, said that in the next phase in the Nally/Armstrong conversations consideration was now being given to taking several days together for exchanges.

The Prime Minister said: We have both been in politics long enough to know that you start with an idea. The difficulty then is to translate that idea into practical politics. The problems then become bare in all their difficulties. We have to realise that if you were dealing with something which could be resolved by reason and sense it would be very different. The difficulty is that you're dealing with fear, suspicion and folklore. What one would wish to do to help one community is the very thing which would create fear in the other.

The Prime Minister, continuing, said that she had read the note of the latest round of discussions over the weekend. The problem was to find some way through in a way and at a rate which would not cause the thing to blow up in one's face.

The Prime Minister, continuing, said that she knew full well that any suggestion that you are giving to the Republic the right to be consulted in relation to Northern Ireland could cause violence. This was an enormous step for Unionists. Joint Authority is out at the moment (Note: this should not be read to suggest that it could be contemplated at a later stage: there was no such implication in the Prime Minister's tone). The Unionist reaction would be that they were being sold down the river. "You know the language that they use." The problem for the Taoiseach was should there be enough to win a referendum. Her problem was that any such thing as Joint Authority, any further move and "my people" would say that you are handing the North over to the South.

The Prime Minister, continuing, said that Jim Prior is going. She had said to him, as long as you want a job in the Cabinet you can have one. He is going, but not by her wish. As we know, he is going to the GEC, which is a very important and very distinguished job. She had not yet decided who will come in his place. There is no question of disarming the RUC or the UDR - this would undermine the confidence of the Unionists. (Note: this point was made without any linkage with the previous one.)

The Taoiseach said that there are two aspects to our common problem. Firstly, there is a political question: in what circumstances and in what degree of assurance to the minority can we win public opinion to back a referendum. That is the political question. Secondly, there is the fundamental security question: in what circumstances could we change the security system so as to reverse the problem of alienation.

The Prime Minister then referred to the idea, advanced earlier, of a "strip" along the Border.

The Taoiseach said that we had made it absolutely clear from the very beginning that such a concept is out of the question. We do not have a problem on our side of the Border. We should not create new no-go areas. This concept would involve the creation of three borders where at the moment there is one from a security point of view. For security reasons, only, quite apart from all the other problems it would bring, the idea was undesirable.

At this stage the Prime Minister launched into a somewhat confused presentation of security problems on our side of the Border. She said that she had been told that there were some problems. She then referred to the murder of the Stronges and to stories of lack of co-operation with the Gardai in the Tidey investigations in Leitrim.

The Taoiseach said that the presumed murderer of Stronge had been extradited. He also said that, as she knew, we were

extraditing people to Northern Ireland without having any idea as to the basis on which they were being prosecuted.

The Prime Minister then made a confused reference to a cache of arms and then referred to the Tidey case. She said that while our action in the Tidey case had been "magnificent" she had been told that our policemen had difficulty in getting cooperation from local people in the investigation of the case.

The Taoiseach said that of course there were cases of intimidation of the local community. This intimidation and the whole situation would be much worse if the RUC were coming across the Border. They would make such incidents much worse. It would create three borders and make the whole situation unmanageable.

The Taoiseach said that the problem we face is alienation among nationalists in the North and the question was: What sort of security system would work? We do not pretend to have the answer to this. Neither do you. In 1922 we had set up an unarmed force in circumstances of civil war in our own State which won majority support. The problem was to find a solution which would be equally successful in today's circumstances.

The Prime Minister said that most of the work of the RUC involved the problem of terrorism.

The Taoiseach said that the RUC were a perfectly adequate force where ordinary crime was concerned. He said that if, for example, a crime took place in the Divis Flats it would be adequately investigated by the RUC. On the other hand, they would arrive in military transport and down on the street, while the investigating officers were dealing with the particular crime in the building, the situation was that the RUC transport was being guarded by a group of men who were also taking up defensive positions against a possible armed attack. In other words, the RUC were forced to behave as a force of occupation. The question was: how do we get over such problems?

The Prime Minister said that the security system must be acceptable to the majority. They too could resort to the tactics which had been adopted by the minority (sic.). The Taoiseach said that he was very well aware of this problem. The Prime Minister was aware that many of his own relatives were Unionist and he would not wish to do anything which would make the situation worse. The Taoiseach said that the problem of seventeen years' trouble must be faced by both Governments. It was difficult for both of us.

The Prime Minister said that there was no possibility of Joint Authority. None. Any suggestion of involving Irish police in Belfast would make those police vulnerable to attack.

The Taoiseach said that he fully realised this.

The Prime Minister said: I do not think you realise how far the concession of joint consultation is an enormous step.

Armstrong intervened to say that the "political strength" of such a step, the right to be consulted, would be enormous.

The Prime Minister said, Yes, you could imagine Enoch Powell taking up the situation as a sell out.

The Taoiseach said he could also imagine political opponents in Dublin taking the same line so far as we are concerned.

The Prime Minister said "Why do you think it (Note: what was involved was not specified) would end alienation?". She felt that a large part of the Catholic community wished Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK.

The Taoiseach said that the evidence was that a large section of the Catholic community would be prepared to tolerate the idea of remaining in the UK if the political circumstances were right. The most urgent problem was that alienation is emerging among the most moderate and stable sections of that community. He mentioned the remarks of the Bench in two recent Court cases ('congratulations on aim' and 'sent to the Supreme Court of Justice') and he said that the effect of this,

together with problems which had arisen, in relation to the RUC, was to create a feeling on the part of the moderate and even middle-class professional people such as doctors and lawyers, that there was no possibility of justice in Northern Ireland. We have to change the judicial system and the police system. In saying this, he accepted that a very genuine attempt was now going on to find a solution by the two sides. Those talks must continue.

The Prime Minister said that the talks involving Armstrong and Goodall must go on. But some would say that what is going on is, by analogy with a Methodist saying, "the first step to Rome". In other words, what is going on would be seen as the first step to the Republic. The danger is that you could lose "them" (Note: meaning, presumably, the Unionists). Armstrong said that there was a safeguard here in the referendum.

The Prime Minister said that this was, of course, fundamental. "I must not alarm my people."

The Taoiseach said that we would go as far as we could. Both Governments would have to make a judgement when the time came as to whether they could go forward. We should both put the public in Northern Ireland, who have had fifteen years of Hell, first. We have a duty to them. The Government in London would survive. The Government in Dublin would also, unless the dangers created by the Provos would overwhelm us. We would not hold back from the necessary action.

The Prime Minister said that she faced two problems. Firstly, over the next fortnight, she would have to decide who will replace Jim Prior. Secondly, there was the question: how long can we keep those talks going? (Note: meaning the secret Nally/Armstrong exchanges). There was an element of leakage beginning to get out.

The Taoiseach said that our public opinion was less aware than it seemed some journalists in London were of the existence of the exchanges. We presented the situation as being continuing informal exchanges about the Forum Report. For example, we had been able to keep the emphasis on Community matters so far as the present meeting was concerned, partly by using this device.

The Prime Minister said that the two sides were not talking about matters such as the EEC. We were talking about mythology, folklore and fear.

Armstrong intervened to say: "and the lives of men".

The Prime Minister said: "Yes, and the lives of men and women". She asked what are we going to say in public about the present meeting.

The Taoiseach said that we would not have to say very much. One thing that would block off speculation would be to name the month of the Summit meeting.

The Prime Minister said that she would be coming to Dublin for the Euro Council on 3rd December. Was it really necessary that she should come to Dublin for the bilateral meeting?

The Taoiseach said that it might be possible to hold the bilateral meeting elsewhere in Ireland and he mentioned Ashford Castle.

The Prime Minister asked: "When?".

The Taoiseach suggested November at the latest.

The Prime Minister then said that one might envisage the Summit meeting with a further bilateral meeting in April of next year.

Armstrong intervened to remind the Prime Minister that the local government elections, which is the deadline we are concerned about, take place in May of next year.

The Taoiseach said that it would be necessary to envisage an earlier conclusion than April. On our side, if we were to have a referendum it would be necessary to have a debate both in the Dáil and in the Seanad and a whole new system should be put into operation on the ground in Northern Ireland well in advance of May.

The Prime Minister said she was worried about the speed with which things would have to be done. Unless the territorial claim were withdrawn, "we would not have a hope of getting anything through".

The Prime Minister suggested that both sides should enter the 19th November in their diaries and decide later as to the exact location.

In discussion, the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister agreed that they would say to the press they would hold the bilateral meeting later in the year, possibly in November. They also agreed on the way in which the discussion of Community matters could be referred to.

The Taoiseach said he wanted to raise a matter for consultation, and not to get her reaction there and then. We believed that a statement of principle would be useful and that it would let the public know where we are going. He felt that it would be desirable to issue such a statement before he and she met in November.

The Prime Minister said "Let's consider that".

The Taoiseach said that there was another question he would like to mention in the same way. If the two Governments can agree on the system of a way forward, would the agreement be made public purely on an intergovernmental basis or would it be possible to bring in the parties. There would be an important advantage in the latter procedure in that it would enable the SDLP to support the Government authoritatively in a

referendum, if necessary. He said he believed that they will support us in such an event but it would be extremely useful both to them and to us to be able to come out of a conference in which such a move had been agreed. He asked the Prime Minister to reflect on this.

The Prime Minister said, "We are not at this point yet".

The meeting concluded with a further brief discussion of the communique.

Just before breaking up, the Prime Minister said, "We are walking on eggs".

The Taoiseach replied that he was aware of that.

The Taoiseach mentioned the Gas Pipe Line affair. The Prime Minister simply threw up her hands, and smiling, said nothing.

Note: In a discussion afterwards with Mr Nally, Ambassador Dorr and the undersigned, the Taoiseach remarked that:

- the Prime Minister had confirmed what Armstrong had put to our side;
- her briefing on security questions had seemed confused;
- she had not rejected the suggestions which had not yet been agreed in relation to a statement of principle and a conference.

M.J. Lillis

4 September 1984