

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2014/105/825
Creation Date(s):	26 November 1984
Extent and medium:	6 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.

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

SECRET

NORTHERN IRELAND

Meeting with British Ambassador on 2 November, 1984.

The Taoiseach, accompanied by the Tanaiste, met the British Ambassador in the Taoiseach's Office at 2.50 p.m. on 22nd November. The meeting finished at 3.30 p.m.

The Taoiseach opened by referring to the considerable difficulty which had arisen in Anglo-Irish relations following his recent meeting with the British Prime Minister. He had written a letter to Mrs. Thatcher, a copy of which he gave to the Ambassador. He then said there were other things in the background which he would like to outline to the Ambassador. He said that it might not be possible to deal adequately with these things in a letter. For that reason he would outline them to the Ambassador.

There was at present a very grave crisis in Anglo-Irish relations. It would require skill, ingenuity and determination to get out of it. The reasons for the depth of feeling here may not be easily understood in the United Kingdom. At the meeting in Chequers, the Prime Minister and he had agreed lines. In her opening statement, the Prime Minister kept closely to these lines and throughout the Press Conference generally kept close to them. What she was saying most of the time was not negative. In fact, the greater part of the Press Conference was positive but there were two features in what she had said which had caused difficulties here. The first was the manner of presentation. The way in which the rejection of the Forum options was expressed in such brutal terms, focussed on parts which were not central to the report, had given offence. The Taoiseach then went on basing his comments on the attached aide memoire, concluding that he had not challenged what the Prime Minister had said at her conference, deliberately, in the interests of Anglo-Irish relations, but at a very heavy cost not only to the Government but even to the democratic system here. From the good position which had been built up so recently a great deal had now been effectively discredited. There had been the biggest boost to the IRA that he could ever remember. His Party members had, in fact, described the outcome in just that way. A factory owner had given a similar instance of just how much of what had happened would help IRA recruitment. The morale of the SDLP was shattered. They were in a state of shock. The Government had asked him to review this position but before he undertook that he would like to have the Ambassador hear the views of the Minister for Justice.

/.....

ROINN AN TAOISICH

Uimhir.....

2.

The Minister for Justice joined the meeting at this point. He said that the whole strategy of Sinn Fein was to tune finely the ballot box and the armalite. Often acts which were overtly terrorist were counter-productive in electoral terms, so far as Sinn Fein were concerned. The effect of the weekend had been to increase public tolerance of IRA activity and thus make the heightening of terrorism in the coming months not only possible but probable. It can be engaged in here, in the United Kingdom, and in the IRA without affecting public support. Not only had the tolerance level for this form of activity being increased but the number of safe homes from which the IRA could operate would also grow. The flow of information to the Gardai, on which much of the struggle against the Provisionals depended, would slow down. As the Ambassador knew a great deal of intelligence was shared with N.I. and with London. There could well be a reluctance to give that information. The moral authority of the Government had been diminished. The increase of IRA activity here and in mainland Britain over the winter was a real possibility and a real problem.

The Taoiseach said that he had not got this assessment when he had asked the Minister to join the group. This was the first time he had heard it. He thought it was as well that the Ambassador should hear the Minister's assessment. The problem now was how on earth to get out of all this. Who should do what? He had wanted to let the Ambassador know how we in Dublin see the situation.

The Tanaiste said that the damage cannot be overestimated. The annoyance and frustration which had been expressed at the recent Labour Party meeting had been as bad as he had ever seen it. There was great anger at the position in which the Government had been put. The Irish position on extradition could be endangered. It had been and would be the unrelenting policy of the Government to combat terrorism but that depended on goodwill and on the quality of Anglo-Irish relations for its effectiveness. The difficulties we have been put in affected -

- (1) the Government;
- (2) Anglo-Irish relations; and
- (3) the security of the State.

It would be a great mistake to underestimate the depth of feeling.

/.....

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

3.

The Ambassador said that he had taken careful notes of what had been said. He thought it would be injudicious to convey all of it; and he would act on this basis. He was himself acting without instructions and what he was saying now was personal and on his own behalf. He understood all the difficulties which had been mentioned, but before anything could be done or the matter brought much further he would like to say that nothing could excuse the personally abusive references which had been made. The word "disgrace" had been attributed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in relation to the PM herself on her actions. The Taoiseach himself had been described as saying that her actions were "gratuitously offensive". It some form of regret for these personal remarks was not expressed then it would be very difficult to recover any position.

The Taoiseach said that the Minister for Foreign Affairs had been in this office yesterday and that he had said here, in the Taoiseach's presence, that he had not used the word "disgrace". For his own part, in relation to the phrase "gratuitously offensive" used to describe what had been said, he wanted to emphasise that very many words which had been attributed to him were taken out of context. He understood the Party's reaction to what the Prime Minister had said but in his own presentation of what she had said he had also stressed the positive elements. He had not been fully reported in the press in that way and deeply regretted if that reporting had in anyway, or would in anyway, affect relations between himself and the Prime Minister.

The Ambassador said that what the Prime Minister had said about the three options was what British Government had said the Report was published and maintained ever since. The Taoiseach said that there was agreement on Prior's speech that he would not use the word "reject" on the third option. In addition, there was much in the Prime Minister's tone that caused the problems. What had been said before was not repeated in the same way. The "no, no, no" sequence was particularly unfortunate.

The Ambassador said that understanding is not reflected in what the British Government think. They had never really accepted the Irish thesis on alienation. Prior, and maybe Hurd, had, to an extent accepted it, but not the British Government. He had mentioned this to Michael Lillis and he was sure that he would tell the Taoiseach. At the same time he had been on himself to Hurd about a reference to "a nightmare" in Hurd's speech - which reflected what the Minister here had said on a particular occasion. Our whole attitude - on both sides -
/.....

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

4.

on this was not totally coherent. There was no one saying the same basic thing all the time. On alienation, Hurd was pointing again and again to the 12% recruitment figure for the RUC. In view of all this, the Irish Government might not be entirely surprised at the Prime Minister's attitude. He said he was not present at the talks with the Prime Minister and was not sure how she had reacted at them. He would, however, like to emphasise that the Irish Government had established the Forum without assent or consultation as far as the British Government was concerned. They had sought to create the obligation on the British Government to respond. That was not something that the British Government had accepted. The obligation to respond had been created only in the opinion of the Irish Government.

The Taoiseach said that he would take the Ambassador's points in order. The Irish Government had never asserted that all the minority were alienated. But they could not accept that there was not a serious problem. That was the reason he had been talking to the Prime Minister. That was the reason people had been suggesting an Irish presence in Belfast etc. That was the reason that the Prime Minister and he had been speaking so much about the security problem in minority areas. As far as he could gather, that was the reason why the JSC had been proposed. There might be argument about the word but the fact was that a large part of the population just don't accept the political system, the security system. It would have been alright if the Prime Minister had stopped short at the semantic point. As things were now we did not know how to control the situation or how to get out of it. We had moved from been in one of the most favourable positions ever achieved to this point. We had moved from a point where something could have been achieved, without the British Government's sovereignty being called in question at all and the Nationalist views, as they had come to be seen, following the Forum Report, respected also. We must now see if there is anything we can do to get out of the present situation: to retrieve what has happened: to diminish the intensity of feeling and frustration. We must do this because there is no other path - except civil war in Northern Ireland and perhaps grave damage to society in the South.

The Ambassador said that all recognised how serious the difficulties were but the policies of the two Governments were not easily reconciled. However disappointed or distressed the Taoiseach might feel now, he did have a very considerable effect on the Prime Minister. She does know now something of the nature of the problem as a result of the Taoiseach's talks. That does not mean that we can

/.....

(or the
udicial
ystem).

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

5.

see the answers. He did not see what she could say in public. The Taoiseach said that the short answer to that is a recognition of the problem of alienation and of the need to do something about it. The conclusion was easy but he would not like to have to write the script.

The Ambassador said that it would be difficult for the Prime Minister to do anything at present unless (1) she got a message from the Taoiseach; (2) there was an expression of regret for the personal comments that had been made; and (3) there was some further setting out of the Irish views on the two points in question. On a demur by the Taoiseach about (2), the Ambassador said that she would not be able to say anything while the papers said that the Taoiseach had described her actions as being "gratuitously offensive". The Taoiseach said that someone at the Party meeting had been reporting out of context. If there were to be an expression of regret that implied that the phrase had been used directly by him. He had no clear recollection of using it. A way of dealing with the problem would be to say that he was clearly concerned that selective reporting of a Party had given the impression that he considered the Prime Minister to have been gratuitously offensive.

The Ambassador said after what Mr. Howe had said that morning she was not going to come to the Dublin Summit - for security reasons. This could give rise to a new row. He could see the headlines - "Thatcher refuses to come to Dublin".

The Taoiseach said that this would do grave damage to the whole community. A Prime Minister was refusing to come to a member country of the EEC. No Head of State or ^{or her} Government should be prevented from carrying out his/normal duties by terrorist threats. If that sort of thing were to happen desperate damage would be done to the Community, to democracy, and to Anglo-Irish relations. The Ambassador said that he could not agree more. Really what was sought at present was some form of public statement from the Prime Minister. He did not know how this could be brought about. The Taoiseach reiterated deep regret that selective reports of a Party meeting should have given the impression which the Prime Minister so obviously has. He was horrified at these reports and deeply conscious of the damage they were causing. The Tánaiste said that he was a little taken aback by the suggestion that the Irish Government should not have been surprised by what had happened. Two hours previously they had just concluded what had been regarded as a constructive meeting. It was

/.....

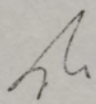
ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

6.

necessary to keep dialogue going so as to get some sanity in the historic mess in the North/Eastern Counties. If we are going to limit the dialogue, nobody could tell what the consequences would be. The Taoiseach said that his impression had been that the entire Summit had been related to the problem of alienation. That was what they had been talking about: that was what they were seeking solutions to: that was what the Irish proposals had been meant to counter.

At this point, the meeting concluded suddenly, as the Taoiseach had to depart, for another engagement.



26th November, 1984.

c.c. Mr. Sean Donlon, Secretary, Department of Foreign
Affairs
Mr. Michael Lillis, Assistant Secretary, Department
of Foreign Affairs.