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Secret and Personal

22/11/84

Letter to P.M.

I appreciate very much the fact that in your Press Conference you sought to make the points which it was understood between us you would make with a view to avoiding any embarrassment for my position. You will have noted that in my own presentation, both at my Press Conference and in the Dail, I was extremely careful to avoid creating any difficulty for your position.

Two very serious problems have emerged, however, and have created a sense of resentment on the part of public opinion in this State and, particularly, on the part of nationalists in Northern Ireland.

The first relates to the New Ireland Forum Report. At all times we have tried to avoid damaging Anglo-Irish relations in working to secure a report which, far from creating any difficulties in our relations, would rather create common ground. We have in our contacts with your authorities repeatedly pointed to the Realities and Requirements set out in the Forum Report (Paras 1 and 2 of Chapter 5) as containing the essence of the Report, we have repeatedly explained that the Requirements (para. 2) constitute its only proposals, and we have pointed out that the three illustrative models contained in the Report are not proposals.

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The fact that in your Press Conference you referred to this part only of the Forum Report, and in the most dismissive terms, ignoring the actual proposals in the Report, and ignoring our stated willingness to discuss "other views", created a strongly negative reaction on the part of nationalists in Ireland, North and South, and has also contributed to the very misunderstanding of the Report itself which the Government here have worked so hard and as long to eliminate - starting on the day it was published.

I attach for your information a list of the 'Requirements' as set out in the Forum Report. These Requirements are, I believe, highly consistent with the positions that our two Governments share on the problem of Northern Ireland.

It would be a tragedy if, through a misunderstanding, an impression were maintained that you totally rejected the essence of the Forum Report which is contained in these paragraphs. The effect of that would be that people here would feel that there was no appreciation of the fact that a major and successful effort had been made to face the difficult reality of unionism and to acknowledge the rights of unionists. Should that position remain uncorrected, it would contribute to the recurring feeling on the part of nationalists in Ireland that no effort on our part to work towards peace and /....

stability will ever be appreciated. That such a sad state of affairs has, alas, been created is evident from the triumphalist tone both of unionist politicians and the unionist press in their reaction to our meeting.

In the interests of our relations, and of creating an atmosphere conducive to progress, I ask you to find an early opportunity to acknowledge that the central core of the Forum Report does involve very considerable progress and is by and large consistent with our shared appreciation as reflected in our joint communiqué.

The second serious difficulty stems from your dismissal of the reality of alienation as a major problem affecting the minority community in Northern Ireland. Alienation as it now presents itself is not a problem which has always existed. People here are, furthermore, greatly confused by the fact that both Jim Prior and Douglas Hurd have publicly accepted that this specific problem exists. You say that you dislike the word: we, of course, do not ^{SET} ~~put~~ any particular store by that specific word. Any alternative word or words which describe the reality whereby many thousands of people are estranged in a fundamental way from the whole system of authority, security and justice in Northern Ireland would serve. It would be extremely helpful in the difficult situation that has now arisen were you to acknowledge the existence of this problem.

as your apparent denial of its existence has in the minds of all people of goodwill in this State - and they are very numerous as the recent poll showed - undermined the sense that had been developing of common ground between our Governments and has thus suggested to our public opinion that there is little or no point in the Irish Government making any effort to find a common approach with yours.

Yours sincerely,