

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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AIDE MEMOIRE

For use by Ambassador Dorr in speaking to Sir Robert  
Armstrong, Secretary to the Cabinet.

22/11/84

It may not be understood in Britain how profoundly the Anglo-Irish relationship has been altered for the worse, in a manner that may be very difficult indeed to recover, by two aspects of the Prime Minister's presentation of the results of the Chequers Meeting at her Press Conference. The positive tone with which the Prime Minister opened the Press Conference, along the lines that had been indicated at Chequers, and indeed other positive references at various points in reply to questions, have in Ireland been totally overshadowed and obscured by two other features of the Press Conference:

First, the manner in which the Prime Minister appeared to dismiss the problem of the alienation of a large part of the people of Northern Ireland from the political, security and judicial systems there,

Second, the tone with which the three 'options' mooted in the Forum Report were dismissed.

So far as the first point is concerned, we have, throughout, understood that it has been the appreciation on the British

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side of the profundity of this alienation, and the dangers it carries for the stability not only of Northern Ireland but of the whole island - and of the consequences of this for Britain itself - that has lain behind the sense of urgency with which the British side, as well as the Irish side, have tackled the problem of finding a way forward in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach, both in November, 1983 and at this recent meeting has laid the strongest possible emphasis on this aspect, and has explained that it is because of the threats that it poses

that he and his Government have been willing to contemplate <sup>the</sup> most fundamental decisions, never hitherto considered by an Irish Government.

The Taoiseach read and noted the words used by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons on 2nd July last, when the Prime Minister was sitting beside him and, as we understood it, was thus giving her personal endorsement to her Minister's words, spoken on behalf of her Government.

The Secretary of State then spoke of 'the need for assurance and countering alienation', the character of which, as it affects a large part of the nationalist population, he graphically described in terms of the absence on their part of any sense of identification with many aspects of Government or with those whose job it is to uphold law and order; their resentment at the fact that there is so little scope for the

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expression of their Irish identity; and their exclusion from the effective exercise of political power. Following this authoritative statement of the British Government's position, the Taoiseach felt he was justified in recording in several speeches the fact that this alienation had now been recognised by the British Government. After the Prime Minister's Press Conference reference to alienation, he has now been accused of misleading the Irish people as to the British Government's position.

Against this background the Taoiseach heard with a profound sense of dismay - which he has publicly concealed at his Press Conference and in Dail Eireann at great political cost - the Prime Minister repudiate this factor of alienation in the words she used at her Press Conference, where her remarks about the word 'alienation' were not accompanied by anything to suggest that her objection to its use was merely semantic, and that she recognised the reality of what had been described so graphically to the Commons by her Secretary of State.

On the question of the Forum Report, the manner and tone in which the Prime Minister dismissed the three options, unaccompanied even by a reference to other parts of the Report such as the sections on Realities and the Framework for a solution - which contrary to the Prime Minister's statement in the Commons contains the only proposals in the Report

- or the reference in Par. 5.10 to a willingness of the parties to take other views into account, has profoundly shocked the whole of Irish opinion.

These two elements in her Press Conference left the Taoiseach with the dilemma in his meeting with the Press and in a dozen radio and TV interviews shortly afterwards, of either rebutting or challenging the Prime Minister - a course which he unhesitatingly rejected - or of appearing in the worst possible light as apparently accepting the interpretation given by the Prime Minister. As is evident from the overwhelming reaction of press and public and political opinion in Ireland, the result of this has been a severe blow to the capacity of our Government to make further progress with the Northern Ireland issue, on which it had up to that point led public opinion so courageously and so successfully.

I understand that at their Party meetings on 21 November, the Taoiseach and the Tanaiste came under the most severe criticism from their Parties, which have hitherto been totally supportive of their approach to the Northern Ireland problem. Members whose bitter hostility to the Provisional I.R.A. is a by-word described the effect of what had happened as being one of recruiting for the IRA, and, I understand, one member told of being informed by a factory owner in Northern Ireland of an approach by moderate anti-I.R.A. Catholic members of his

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work-force - the only such approach he has ever had - to say that unless there was something positive behind all this that would emerge rapidly, they could not bear to think of the extent to which it would have strengthened the I.R.A. At the same time the morale of the SDLP, our sole bulwark against Sinn Fein/IRA in the North, has been shattered. In the light of these reactions, the reasons for which and the significance of which may not be fully appreciated in London, the Government have asked that an early opportunity be provided to it for further consideration of its Northern Ireland policy. It would appear that the situation that now exists has overnight transformed the very favourable background to the talks illustrated by the public opinion poll published last Thursday.

An urgent review, at official level, of the new situation thus created, and of what possibilities may now remain for constructive action, now seems necessary here in order to enable the Government review to be carried out with, as a potentially crucial element, an assessment of how in the British view, the situation that now exists can be improved.

Consideration of the impact of these developments on the internal political balance within the Republic has been omitted from the above account of the situation. This should not be construed as suggesting that the impact has not been of major proportions.

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Finally the Government has had no alternative but to criticise publicly the selective revelation by the Secretary of State of some proposals put by the British side in the discussions at Chequers, which has raised serious questions about the possibility of such crucial matters being discussed in confidence in future.