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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

CONFIDENTIAL

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To:

From:

Meeting between Taoiseach and Representatives of
Presbyterian Church in Ireland (Newry Presbytery)
on Tuesday 12 November, 1985.

- The meeting was arranged by Reverend William McDowell, Joint Convener of the Church's Government Committee. He was accompanied at the meeting by Rev. Roy Patten (Newry), Rev. Stanley Millen (Dundalk), Rev. John Ranken (Markethill) and Rev. Maurice Barr (South Down, South Armagh/Monaghan, Louth). Rev. Barr said that they were motivated purely by pastoral concerns in seeking the meeting with the Taoiseach. They were anxious about the welfare and safety of their parishoners and wished to exchange views on the security situation in Border areas. The tense political climate had generated fear among their people and this fear was heightened by the onset of the long winter evenings and the additional cover this gave for terrorist activities. Rev. Barr said that they all appreciated that security in the Republic had been intensified but there was a strong belief, - he was not saying it was a fact, - that Southern Border towns were being used as hideouts by terrorists. They hoped for an assurance that a high level of security would be maintained by the Dublin Government and that there would be full co-operation between the security forces on both sides of the Border. For most people in the North, the Border was a line on a map and it was hard for them to understand why maximum co-operation did not exist in the critical area of security.
- Rev. Patten said that the group represented the Newry Presbytery which covered both sides of the Border including South Down, South Armagh and parts of Louth and Monaghan. In his own area of Newry the issues were

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Secretary to
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W.K. 19.11.85
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ones of life and death and while he appreciated the real care shown by the Taoiseach for the plight of the communities in these Border areas, there was a belief among the RUC that while co-operation on a formal level was good, a free flow of intelligence information did not exist.

3. The Taoiseach said that the preservation of life and the security of all the people on this island was the Government's priority. They had to try and create conditions that would lead to an end of violence. This was the whole purpose of the present talks with the British Government. In reality this meant minimising the amount of support for the Provisional I.R.A. among the minority community. If opinion here could be shifted, a momentum would be generated which would erode the terrorists' base. If the families of those in prison could see that an end to the violence would bring about quicker release of their relatives, the I.R.A. would be undermined. Whether this succeeded remained to be seen but these tactics had to be combined with maximum efficiency in the security area. The Taoiseach said that while each police force operated in its own area you had to have close liaison between them. There had been problems in security co-operation and he accepted that the maximum benefit was possibly not being extracted from the co-operation. The utterances of the Chief Constable of the RUC from time to time did not of course help the situation but meetings were taking place at every other level between the security forces North and South. The Taoiseach noted the view that there was not a free flow of intelligence information and said that he would discuss this with the Minister for Justice. He went on to say that the exchange of intelligence information

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at the highest levels i.e. at an Inter-governmental level was total.

4. The Taoiseach expressed the hope that any new structures which might emerge from the Anglo-Irish talks would encourage the security forces to co-operate even more. In recent weeks the Government had introduced more intensive security procedures but he did not believe that the problem was simply one of people hiding out in the South. For instance, the intelligence information available in relation to the Maze escapees was that they were not hiding in the South. He accepted that there were murderers in both jurisdictions but no evidence could be obtained against them. The fact that there had been little use made of the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Act suggested very strongly that the RUC had no evidence on which to base prosecutions under that legislation. Every possible security methods had to be utilised to the full in bringing terrorists to justice but it was important not to alienate the public in general. The I.R.A.'s base had to be eroded and this could only be done by getting more and more families to bring pressure to bear on them. The Taoiseach emphasised that if any of the visitors had a particular problem in the security area he would be glad to do whatever he could to assist.
5. Rev. Patten said that the heightened fear in the Protestant community made it hard for these people to really hear what the Taoiseach was saying. They were suspicious and this suspicion made it all the more necessary for the Dublin Government to present its case in a much more forceful and direct way. Visits by Government Ministers to selected communities in Border areas, to explain what Dublin was doing in relation to security, would be a

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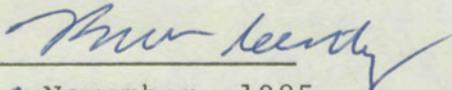
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great help. The Taoiseach said that he would certainly consider this idea. On the problems of presentation of the Government's case, the Taoiseach said that the goodwill of the Northern and British authorities would be important. If the RUC were willing to tell the simple truth that they had no evidence to give to the Republic in relation to alleged terrorists here, the situation would be considerably improved. They had a tendency to say the opposite and while he could understand the frustration that they sometimes felt, a false picture of the Republic's position was being presented.

6. Rev. Millen gave the Taoiseach a Memorandum from a trader in Dundalk complaining about customs clearance procedures at the Border. The Taoiseach undertook to take the matter up with the Minister for Finance.
7. The meeting concluded with expressions of thanks from the visitors for the Taoiseach's expressions of concern and support.


18 November, 1985.

c.c. ✓ Mr. D. O Ceallaigh, Department of Foreign Affairs.
✓ Mr. J. Kirby, Department of Justice.