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Note on the discussions with the British
on the Catherwood Proposals during the BIA
(afternoon of Saturday, 20 September), at Oxford

After the Taoiseach had phoned Ambassador Dorr, there was a drafting session in the bedroom of Sir Robert Armstrong. Present were: David Goodall, Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir Robert Andrew, Mark Elliott, Ambassador Dorr and myself.

After discussion of the points made by Dublin and the fact that the Taoiseach attached importance to a joint British Irish response, Sir Robert Armstrong began to draft (of which the result, written in his hand, is attached). Sir Robert's view was that separate but similar statements were desirable, with the British Government statement referring to the Prime Minister's proposals of last February.

After the British draft had been relayed to Dublin, we discussed a possible Irish draft with the British side (attached) and that was agreed.

During this session, the British side (Armstrong and Goodall) were quite dismissive of the Catherwood initiative. David Goodall referred to the disarray in the unionist house. The main thrust of the drafts was accordingly tactical. The British side (Elliott) had - as we had also - seen earlier texts of the Catherwood proposals.

Sir Robert Armstrong cleared the line in the British draft with the Prime Minister who was at Chequers. Later when Mr. King arrived, King redrafted the statement, shortening the earlier end paragraph which referred to the position of the British Government being that 'there can be no question of suspending the Agreement or the operation of the various arrangements set up under the Agreement' to a phrase in the second paragraph

'and while not prepared to suspend the Anglo-Irish Agreement would operate it sensitively in that connection'. Sir Robert made clear, however, that if we used the full phrase they would support us and further that they would instruct the spokesman to use the full phrase. King was aiming at making the text more positive (i.e. not ending on a negative note) for his speech that evening. There was no question of a change in substance (e.g. that "suspension of the Agreement" was out but that there could be a possibility of "suspension of the Conference" or "Secretariat") and King toned down slightly the positive language (e.g. omission of "very" before "ready to embark on such a Conference").

As regards the Catherwood text (as it appeared in full in the Irish Times yesterday) the only change from the earlier text is the omission of the phrase:

"and my personal hope is that the Secretariat could be put on other duties while a long term settlement is hammered out".

This is a concession to John Hume



Eamon O Tuathail

25 September, 1986.

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