



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Mr Kieran -

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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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SECRET

Northern Ireland

Taoiseach

As arranged, Ambassador Dorr and Messrs Ward, Donlon, O Tuathail and I met Sir Robert Armstrong, Andrew, Brennan, Goodall and Mallaby in the Cabinet Office yesterday from approximately 1 p.m. to just before 5 p.m. Sir Robert had to leave the meeting to go to the Prime Minister, shortly before it ended.

In summary, the main points were:

- (1) the Prime Minister is determined to go ahead with implementation of the Agreement. Goodall said, privately, to me after the meeting that the discussion was about things on which the Prime Minister is a lot harder than the meeting might imply;
- (2) the impression that you may be softer or willing to go it alone, which is being fostered in certain quarters, is not helpful. Goodall was also at pains to emphasise this privately;
- (3) there is not a great deal of optimism in the Northern Ireland Office about the prospects for the "talks about talks";
- (4) the NIO and King personally are very much against a meeting of the Conference before 5th May when the Portadown march is due. They appear to be quite willing to go ahead with a meeting immediately after that;
- (5) it appears to be generally accepted that if there is to be a pause or interval between Conference meetings, there would be a firm date for resumption - so as to head off the possibility of deliberate prolongation of talks; and
- (6) the need for the Conference "to produce" was stressed. The British appeared to accept this but are urging discretion on timing.

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In detail, the meeting reviewed the situation in Northern Ireland, on which Sir Robert Andrew spoke at some length. He said the violence had been particularly bad at Easter and had not yet died down. Since about the beginning of March there had been 250 attacks on police homes and 45 families have had to move house. There had also been about 50 attacks on Catholic premises. Some of this was due to "football hooliganism" but some at least of the attacks were due to paramilitaries who were getting themselves organised.

On top of this physical violence there was now a move towards civil disobedience, including the possibility of the non-payment of rates and taxes.

The NIO felt that there was an urgent need for political dialogue before the security situation deteriorates further. They are encouraging dialogue and the recent correspondence between the Prime Minister and Molyneux and Paisley was directed to that end. They hoped that an early reply would be forthcoming on these "talks about talks" - possibly at official level. Armstrong added that their original diagnosis had been that the best course was to keep heads down but that while they still held to this view there might be other possibilities.

Wright and Tyrie were, so far as the NIO could discover, among those leading the paramilitaries. These two were however very cautious about the politicians because of what had happened the last time.

The question of leadership among the Unionist parties and the ability of the principals to bring their followers along was discussed without anything more firm emerging than that if the two leaders were satisfied to engage in talks they would be particularly careful to ensure that they did not have a repetition of their February experience.

The necessity to know where exactly the talks would be going was also stressed. On this, there was some discussion of the Northern Ireland "charter" document - which, it was emphasised, was limited. If there were to be talks in relation to the NI Constitution then documents like Kilbrandon, "The Way Forward", etc. would have to be considered as well as the charter. Also the principals would have to be engaged: there was no question of anybody fielding a "second level team", and stand back on the sidelines to denounce whatever emerged.

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We said that the Government here were committed to ratifying the Convention on Terrorism against a background of movement in relation to the administration of justice and/or other radical changes, looked to in the Agreement or in the accompanying communique. If the situation in September or October was still the same as it was now, with no ostensible change in the Northern judiciary and very little movement in other areas, then the Government here could face real difficulties. In reply to questions as to whether the proposal for two or three man courts was presentational or real, it was stressed that the case was real. The British argued that a three man court might be alright in a homogenous society but in Northern Ireland it could do a great deal of damage. They have obvious doubts as to practicability or whether it would really serve the objective we see for it. We said the reasons for it were both political and substantial.

On the Assembly, the British intention is to keep the body in existence for as long as possible. However, this may not be as extended a period as many might assume. A special meeting of the Assembly was being called "to talk about means of civil disobedience". Against this sort of background, the British could well find it hard to keep the body in existence. In the ordinary way, and excluding exceptional measures, the body would go out of existence at the end of October and there would be new elections in or about December.

On the question of the correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Unionist leaders, we repeated that your recent message delivered through Ambassador Dorr to Sir Robert Armstrong concerned talks as between the parties in Northern Ireland. If these talks were to take place it would be essential to have an idea beforehand as to what was likely to emerge - to avoid the danger that some time in the future, possibly before or in the middle of the marching season, the talks would break down, doing great damage to everybody. We also said that if there were to be any question of a pause or interval, the pause would have to run from a current date - and not from the date of the last meeting of the Conference i.e. 11th March. There would also have to be a clear understanding on everybody's part that the Conference would resume its meetings irrespective of whether the talks had concluded. In other words the talks should not be an instrument by which the Conference could be put into cold storage. We stressed also the necessity for both Governments to keep closely in touch, if necessary through restricted channels, about talks, negotiations, or contacts so that both Governments could be seen to be firmly backing the Agreement.

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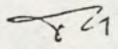
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On the Fund, we said that it was a great pity that the possible Commission willingness to consider, as an option, a direct contribution to an international fund, by way of an unallocated contribution, had not been followed up. Similarly, the option of direct contribution from some, at least, of the governments of the Community also seemed worth pursuing. The British took note of this and will be considering it further.

They also raised, very tentatively, the question of a referendum, as part of the divorce referendum, on Articles 2 and 3. The major difficulties in this area were outlined to them.

In general, we stressed that these review meetings were not intended, in any way, as an alternative channel to the Conference or as being in some way another means of doing the Conference's work. The present channel had a completely different function and purpose.

We also stressed at some length, our understanding of the difficulties which the NIO and the RUC, in particular, were facing at present in Northern Ireland and our appreciation of the importance of maintaining the integrity of the force and its ability to maintain order.



23 April 1986.

Copy to:

Tanaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Justice, Attorney General, Ambassador Dorr and Messrs Ward, Donlon, Russell, Lillis and O Tuathail.