



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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SECRET AND PERSONAL

Northern Ireland

Taoiseach

The meeting, as arranged, took place in the Cabinet Office, London, yesterday from approximately 11.30 a.m. to approximately 3.15 p.m. It was attended by Sir Robert Armstrong, Cabinet Secretary, David Goodall, FCO, and Chris Mallaby, Cabinet Office. The meeting was joined later by Sir Robert Andrew, Secretary, Northern Ireland Office. On the Irish side, Ambassador Dorr and Secretary Donlon attended, with the undersigned.

In the beginning, I spoke privately to Sir Robert Armstrong on -

- (1) possibilities of movement, within the framework of the Agreement and their assessment of Paisley and Molyneaux. In particular I mentioned what our three major concerns would be if there were to be an interval between Conferences;
- (2) relationships within the Conference;
- (3) our reaction to their "message" in the U.S. - as you mentioned to the Prime Minister; and
- (4) the necessity for improving liaison and work processes in the Secretariat - which are, apparently, suffering from deficiencies on the British side.

I have mentioned separately the outcome of these discussions.

In plenary session, we discussed -

- (1) the current situation in Northern Ireland;
- (2) Border security;
- (3) the U.S./E.E.C. funds; and
- (4) the parliamentary body.

This is a brief note on the main conclusions. Ambassador Dorr is doing a fuller note.

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The British are of the view that both Paisley and Molyneaux were very much shaken by what happened to them after their meeting with the Prime Minister on 25th February. The beginnings of the revolt were evident at the press conference in London and were obviously continued even on the aeroplane on the way home. The British are now uncertain as to what Molyneaux's political strength is - in fact, they appear to think that he is looking for a way out. This may mean either that he would be prepared to go along with a courageous initiative now, with the possibility of failure or that that he might simply be wanting to get out of politics altogether. They say that Paisley is "exhausted" and "being run from behind". Robinson and McCusker were the moving spirits in the repudiation. There seemed to be preparations on the Unionist side for the possibility of violence but no planning, as yet. They are anticipating a Spring and Summer campaign of obstruction, with the Portadown march as the next test.

On the RUC, there was some brief reference to the Paisley/Molyneaux advertisement in the Irish News. They had the feeling that the RUC did not deliberately hold back on the day of action. While there were points on which criticism could be made, no lives had been lost in what had been a most difficult and trying day. They don't think that the professional loyalty of the force is in question - any more than is that of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

The Loyalists generally are at sixes and sevens. The British anticipate continuing non-co-operation with withdrawal from councils, possibly non-striking of rates etc.

The Prime Minister is absolutely and totally unqualified in her commitment to the Agreement. She made this abundantly clear at the recent series of meetings. She offered to implement the Agreement "sensitively" but said there was no question of its being suspended, discontinued, or modified.

On the offer of a round table Conference, the British say that the SDLP and the Alliance would probably take up the offer but not the Unionists. The British say that they do not see themselves as proposing alternative systems of devolution at present. The mere fact of their being the proposer would mean that the proposals would be rejected. They see their role as being overtly catalytic. They are ready to move if they see any signs that movement will produce results. Their reading is that Molyneaux would wish to have something on these lines developing; Paisley would go along with the ideas; but that these two are not masters in their own house, at present.

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The question of whether discussion on devolution, whether or not it involved the two Governments, would be a once-for-all play was discussed, without firm conclusions. It was suggested to the British that Peter Robinson might not be as strong, within his party, as their analysis might be leading them to suspect. There were references to the fact that power cuts had taken place during the day of action - the British said that they had deliberately not attempted to invoke their emergency counter measures. There was some criticism of statements by Seamus Mallon - which did nothing to improve the situation but exacerbated it in many respects. The situation had been potentially very, very dangerous.

The British say they can stand the withdrawal from local councils, the non-striking of rates, and other attempts, at making Northern Ireland "ungovernable". The most dangerous of all situations, so far as they are concerned, would be a prolonged strike - which would produce chaos for the people in the province. Their reading is that when Loyalist politicians generally come to realise what they are facing - when they have come to the abyss, the serious talking can start. Again, they repeated that Molyneaux "has had enough". He may well peter out; and that Paisley is exhausted.

On the discussion of UDI, which seemed to be the logical conclusion to which many of the current events were leading, there was general agreement that references to this were highly undesirable, especially because of the effect which the references could have on the morale of the RUC and of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. This was apart altogether from the fact that the British expressed in the strongest possible terms their opposition to the whole idea. They said that no British Government could contemplate UDI on any basis other than one which followed agreement, to take into account, in particular, minority problems.

On Border security, the British pressed, again, their point about surveillance and about task forces. They were answered, with some irritation, to the effect that these points had been made before, that they had been taken on board, and that there were channels through which the matters could be discussed - more particularly, the recently established quadripartite group of police and officials from both jurisdictions. If surveillance was a problem it should be settled among people who knew the difficulties, at first hand. If it could not be settled there, and there was no evidence to that effect, as yet, then it could be raised elsewhere. Raising it in the present group, or at Prime Ministerial level simply caused confusion and ill-feeling. Action must be based on facts and on policing expertise. Neither were present at yesterday's discussion.

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On task forces, the discussion was similar, though not as warm.

In relation to EEC money, the British said that they contributed 20% of everything spent by the Community, through the Budget, and that on average, they had to contribute, in addition, 45% of whatever projects financed from this, that, with existing stringency, any programmes to be financed from EEC money, could only be financed by withdrawing money from other Northern Ireland programmes. They seemed to be thinking of a better co-ordination of the structural funds, so as to produce a "model" for the sort of integration contemplated for these funds under the European Act, in the post-Fontainebleau mood. They asked for a joint British/Irish approach to the constitution. We put to them the question of whether they had considered a 70% rate of recoupment under the special Northern Ireland provisions - as was available under the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes or indeed for the special Belfast programme, which was, in our estimate, already being contemplated by the Commission. They appeared to indicate that they had not considered this approach.

We asked if "additionality" or the size of the Exchequer contribution, was the difficulty, as they appeared to indicate, whether they had considered if the American money could be used to finance the balance outstanding after the EEC contribution. This also appeared to be a completely new thought.

The meeting, on this point, was almost totally unsatisfactory - in that the British had come, apparently, without preparation, and without going into points which may, or may not, be valid, but should at least be considered.

On the parliamentary body, there was some discussion, the upshot of which was that the enthusiasm on the part of the Northern Ireland Office, in particular, for this move, at the present time, was a great deal less than marked.

In conclusion, the British will probably continue to press on Border security and on measures which can give comfort to the Loyalists. We stressed strongly that while we took their points on these issues on board, and would do everything we could to help, we expected a similar approach from them. There was a great deal of slowing down in relation to the Code of Conduct, about which we had talked, in considerable detail, last year. It was also imperative

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that by the time the legislation on the Convention of the Suppression of Terrorism was ready, possibly next September or October, there should be visible and significant movement in relation to the courts. Action on "mixed" courts, on supergrass trials, on the re-organisation of the courts to include, for example, something equivalent to the Office of President of the High Court here and on extradition, so as to give reassurance on the way in which extradition cases were handled was necessary. We would prefer if the British waited until after the extradition legislation before raising questions of speciality or of the right to question witnesses afterwards. In relation to prima facie evidence, in extradition cases, which I mentioned separately to Mallaby, he said that there was in existence a British White Paper proposing that prima facie requirements should be abolished as between countries where it already existed, insofar as the British were concerned. I also mentioned to him that though we had signed the Convention without reservation, this did not necessarily mean that there would be no reservation on ratification.

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11 March 1986.

Copy to:

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

Extract on EEC to Robin Fogarty, Deputy Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs.