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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

SECRET & PERSONAL

*In B M's file
Please keep to yourself
for the present.*

Northern Ireland

Meeting in London on 7th February 1986

*hvk
10.2.86*
Taoiseach

The British and Irish negotiating teams met in the Cabinet Office on 7th February from approximately 4 p.m. to approx. 7 p.m. The British side was headed by Sir Robert Armstrong, Cabinet Secretary, and included Sir Robert Andrew, Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Office, David Goodall, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Ambassador, Sir Alan Goodison, and Messrs Brennan and Stephens from the NIO. On the Irish side were Ambassador Dorr, and Messrs Ward, Donlon, Quigley, Lillis, O Tuathail and the undersigned. The main subjects discussed were:-

- (1) the recent elections in Northern Ireland;
- (2) the Conference;
- (3) devolution and the Assembly;
- (4) the Fund;
- (5) Parliamentary body;
- (6) Border security; and
- (7) your meeting with the Prime Minister.

Elections

The British side was that the results had been fairly good. There were now two views developing among the Unionists. On the one side there was the Taylor/McCusker approach that dialogue, based on participation by the British and Irish Governments and Northern Ireland interests should start - on the scrapping of the Agreement. Paisley was now also talking of a round table conference if the Agreement was "suspended".

Whether or not these views emerged from the views of the business community was not clear. That community were distinctly uneasy at where the politicians had seemed to be leading them. Nobody there wanted UDI. At the same time, there was still very great bitterness about the content of the Agreement and the manner of its negotiation.

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For the moment, the Unionist reaction seemed to be in suspense, pending their meetings with the Prime Minister which would take place from about the end of the present month.

The British side had found the SDLP reaction disappointing. John Hume's performance at the BIA had helped nothing. Now he was in the Philippines while Mallon was at home talking about RUC brutality. This was all taking place in an atmosphere of "uneasy calm". District Councils were due to strike their rates by about the middle of the month. There were suggestions that they would refuse to do this. There were many Unionists still talking about making Ulster ungovernable.

The Irish Government views on these points and on SDLP attitudes were developed at some length, in the general discussion which followed.

Conference

There was some discussion of the working of the Conference during which both sides agreed that it was highly desirable, if at all possible, to avoid confrontational approaches in which one side or the other seemed to be "winning". The question was put again, whether or not the Conference could, as we have argued, not be seen to work in its results, rather than through a series of communiques which really heighten suspense on both sides. The desirability of a tete a tete between Ministers, before meetings begin, was emphasised. Both sides appreciated the dangers which could arise from discussion centring on particular places or particular incidents which could result in physical actions by large crowds of protesters or agitators, directed at the RUC, or whoever was trying to maintain order. The SDLP attitude to devolution, as it had been set out in John Hume's Commons speech and in his letter to the Prime Minister was again emphasised.

Devolution/Assembly

The question was asked as to whether the SDLP would go into a new Assembly at all. Did they know how short the time was, taking into account the marching season, and the fact that the Assembly could probably be dissolved in August? There just did not seem to be enough time for them to reach agreement on devolution before the election - which seemed to be their aim at present. In reply to the comment that they were ready to enter into talks without pre-conditions,

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the British said that in this attitude they should be encouraged as much as possible. The British view of the John Hume letter was by no means favourable. Everything in the letter was equivocal. It had to be read against the fact that there had, on the ground, been a lot of triumphalism on the SDLP side. There was real expectation that now after the Agreement there should be an advance on their part. They had to say something which was not equivocal.

The point was made that there could well now be SDLP nominees to the Police Authority. This was a real move on their part.

As against this, the British side said that we could now be facing into a period of civil disobedience - coming up into the marching season yet again. John Hume might be waiting too long. He can't believe in the desirability of confrontation between the British Government and the Northern majority. The consequences of that would be "very disastrous".

The point was made that the Conference had still to develop many of its functions, particularly in the economic and social area, inside Northern Ireland. This would strengthen the inducement to Unionists to get into the administration with the SDLP so that they could get Dublin out - if that was what they wished.

In relation to the SDLP, the British argued that there was a strong feeling among many in the North that with Dublin in the Conference there was just no point in the SDLP engaging in talks on devolution. They were very happy to let Dublin do their work for them - see in particular a recent article by Roy Lilley in the Belfast Telegraph. This was an argument which Dublin would need to address in speaking to the Prime Minister - and in other dealings on Northern Ireland. /We gave the usual arguments against, at the London meeting./

Fund

Developments in the US were reviewed. The State Department was, apparently, in a fix, as a result of the Gramm/Rudman Act. There was no lack of good will in trying to implement the President's wishes and the wishes of the Speaker but something more than good will was needed. It should also be mentioned that there had been talk of tax aids for investment - as well as the fund. There was a great necessity for speed - to prevent Biaggi from meddling and

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fouling the whole thing up. There was also the difficulty that if the Americans were providing well over 90% of the total, they might have to impose audit etc. requirements. Approaches were being made in Canada and Australia where, again, there was lots of good will.

On the EEC front there were difficulties, of which we all knew, about the EEC contributing to our fund. There were, however, strong possibilities of a special programme linked to the mechanism of the Agreement similar to some urban renewal schemes of some years ago. The British were pursuing this line (I checked separately with Armstrong on the Prime Minister's attitude).

The important thing in America was to get Schultz re-engaged. The British were thinking of a message from Howe, with this object in view. On the taxbreaks, Ambassador Dorr mentioned conversations with a representative of the Chase Manhattan Bank which seemed to imply that encouragement was being given by the administration to the American banking system for investment in both parts of the island.

Parliamentary Body

Don't call this a parliamentary tier! (The implication is that there would be a large framework of institutions, of which the "tier" would be at the head. The British dislike this concept, as things are at present with the Unionists.)

Reference was made to the early day motion in the Commons and to the possibility of Northern Ireland representation through Westminster. Nobody had, as yet, thought out what exactly the body would do. Would it simply organise an exchange of visits, with a detailed review of what was going on in an east/west as well as a north/south axis? Or would it have power actually to summon people? This latter concept could give rise to very considerable difficulties - and seemed unlikely to be on at all.

Another question was whether the body should flow from the Agreement or from the Anglo-Irish Studies of some years ago. In the latter context it could be linked to the AIIC. It seemed important that there should not be a parliamentary relationship between the body and the Conference.

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Border Security

The British made a strong case for -

- (1) enhancement of co-operation across the Border;
- (2) better threat assessment;
- (3) greater resources and equipment on the southern side, with special reference to more intelligence and better surveillance.

They said that the impression which had been created that the violence after the Agreement had not, after all, been too bad was wrong. They had had a great deal of luck in Northern Ireland. They had got many carloads full of explosives etc. before the bomb had gone off. There was a great deal of intimidation. In fact they had now to think of an extra infantry battalion - to deal with IRA threats - not primarily against Loyalists etc. The security forces in the North were under considerable pressure - and the effects of this should not be minimised. Could the task force be assigned to the Border - rather than be located in Dublin? Was there anything they could do to help in relation to training, or equipment, or resources?

The Irish side replied to these points by indicating that an invitation from the Commissioner to the Chief Constable to a meeting had been outstanding for a considerable time. That forum seemed to be the proper place in which to raise many of the points which had been made.

Next, operations south of the Border, including surveillance intelligence, etc. operations were done in a very different way from north of the Border where the atmosphere was completely dissimilar.

Again, attitudes to "task forces" were different. In fact, definitions of what constituted a "task force" could also be different.

One way or another, the best thing to do would seem to be to have the Chief Constable meet the Commissioner and isolate what exactly was required and how far it could be provided within existing arrangements. When that channel had been used to the full any deficiencies could be looked at.

Meeting with Prime Minister

The sort of offer from John Hume which was on the table, in relation to devolution was emphasised again: so that the Prime Minister could be aware of it when talking to the Taoiseach and to the Unionists. In relation to her

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conversations with these, it would seem right that she should say that there were some powers of government which just could not be devolved including security and the courts, finances, and certain human rights questions. But, subject to this, the way was completely open for Unionists to be involved in the administration of Northern Ireland and, in fact, the Agreement had been devised in a way which might even be taken as encouraging this. The talks with the Unionists might not, at present, be necessarily successful but that was no reason why they should not be undertaken.



10 February, 1986

Copies to

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

P.S.

The need to have the RUC accompany the UDR was mentioned - as was the need for statistics to show developments on this since Hillsborough.

The Convention on Terrorism was mentioned separately as being of considerable concern.