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TAOISEACH'S MEETING WITH BRITISH AMBASSADOR

1. The British Ambassador, Nicholas Fenn, is to call to see the Taoiseach at 4 pm on Monday, 23 May. This note sets out the background to this meeting and seeks to clarify the issues so that the Taoiseach may know what to expect from the meeting.

REASON WHY MEETING WAS REQUESTED

2. Fenn was called back to London "for consultations" which took place on Wednesday and Thursday, 11 and 12 May. He met, (separately so far as I am aware) with the Prime Minister, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Tom King and Douglas Hurd. Before going, he said, half facetiously, that he was being recalled "to give an account" of himself. (I took this to mean that he would be asked about the view from Dublin which he has been reflecting in his reports).

3. After he returned, Fenn came to see me (on Monday, 16 May). In the course of a long discussion he seemed very worried about what he had learned in London of the views of the Prime Minister and, to an extent, even of Geoffrey Howe. Speaking frankly and personally he said that he had not been so worried about the state of the Anglo-Irish relationship (with which he sees himself as professionally involved) at any time since he came to Dublin eighteen months ago.

4. It appears that, in the course of an hour-long meeting, Mrs. Thatcher had spoken to him extremely trenchantly about Irish policies and about the views of the Irish Government as he has reported them. More worrying, from his point of view, was the fact that, when he spoke of building on the "common interests" of the two countries, she had virtually denied that there was now anything other than a minimal common interest between Dublin and London.

5. As a result, Fenn has come back from London seriously concerned about a deep vein of distrust towards Dublin which he thinks has now developed at the highest levels of Government in London but which has not really emerged as yet to public view - notwithstanding the turbulence of recent months in Anglo-Irish relations. Geoffrey Howe's Derbyshire speech was a deliberate effort to put a good face on things but it covered a much deeper and sharper reaction to recent developments - particularly on the part of the Prime Minister herself.

6. Some of this was already evident in Mrs. Thatcher's very personal letter of 27 April to the Taoiseach. (This letter was treated as so personal to Mrs. Thatcher that, although he delivered it to the Taoiseach, Fenn himself was not allowed to see a copy at the time - he read it for the first time in London a week ago). But it appears that Mrs. Thatcher spoke more strongly still at her meeting with Fenn and gave him a direction to make her views clear privately when he returned to Dublin. This is the reason he has requested the present meeting.

ND
Secretary, DFA
20 May 1988