



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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Anglo Irish RelationsMeeting of Officials in Dublin on 7 November, 1988

The meeting took place in Iveagh House and was attended by Cabinet Secretary Butler, Ambassador Fenn, NIO Secretary Blelloch, NIO Deputy Secretary Ian Burns, NIO Deputy Secretary Tony Stevens, Mr. John Boyd from the Foreign Office and Joint Secretary of the Conference, Mr. Oliver Miles. On the Irish side were Secretaries Dorr and Mathews, Ambassador O'Rourke (who happened to be in Dublin), Assistant Secretary Gallagher, Joint Secretary of the Conference, Mr. O hUiginn, and the undersigned. The meeting began at approximately 7.00 pm and finished at about 11.30 pm.

The main subjects discussed during the meeting were how best to use the Agreement in order to achieve progress in relation to Northern Ireland and, in particular, how to use the Agreement to encourage the Unionists into discussions on their future. The British side pressed the advantages of moving "to or towards devolution" despite arguments that, in Northern Ireland, there was very little enthusiasm for it, either on the Unionist side or among Constitutional Nationalists. The British appeared to be arguing that the Secretary of State is anxious "to give away power". He sees the present state of politics in Northern Ireland as extremely unhealthy in that local or democratic participation is absent and is, in practice, fostering terrorism. His objective is to get the players on the pitch.

The British argued that there had been considerable pressure on the Unionists to come to discussions, earlier in the year, and they had been on the point of doing so last January. Since then, however, differences between the Governments and the SDLP/Sinn Féin talks had taken the pressure off them; and they now appeared to be in a position where everybody was seeking to talk to them but they were unwilling to come to any table. This was not a happy position for anybody.

There was then some discussion as to how the review of the operation of the Agreement could be used in the interests of both Governments and arrangements for giving effect to the understandings between the Tánaiste and the Secretary of State were discussed in some detail. There seemed to be agreement that it would be in the interest of both Governments that the review should take a "maximalist" position. In particular, the possibilities in Article 10, for further economic development, in view of 1992 were mentioned.

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There was further some mention of flaws in communication or in consultation under the Agreement, in particular, in relation to the right to silence, fair employment and the recent "Section 31" changes.

The importance of moves to reduce harassment and of taking a humanitarian view on the Birmingham Six case was stressed. The Guildford Four case was also mentioned, with a view to its reference, by the Home Secretary, to the Courts. Developments in relation to the Parliamentary Body were also noted.

The discussions at the meeting were wide ranging and frank, with each side putting its points strongly. There was general agreement that the meeting had been useful.



Dermot Nally

9 November, 1988.