

CONFIDENTIAL

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The first full session - on politics - began at just before noon.

Present: Secretary of State Mr O'Kennedy
Mr Judd Mr Andrews
Mr Haydon Mr P Keating
Mr J Staples Mr McDonagh
Mr Mallet Mr Donlon
Mr R White Mr Swift
Sir Brian Cubbon Mr O hUiginn
Mr Ford Mr Dunlop
Mr Marshall
Mr Parkes
Mr Gilliland
Mr Pilling

The United Kingdom team remained the same for all three full sessions.

- 2.2 Mr O'Kennedy welcomed the Secretary of State formally. The meetings offered an opportunity to renew consultation and co-operation. He recalled that he and the Secretary of State had already had an opportunity to review broadly the day's programme of discussions. He welcomed the fact of the meeting which would allow a review of progress on the basis of a wide agenda. The Secretary of State had already been able to bring him up to date on the present political situation, and he looked forward to hearing more detail about that. It had also been possible to clarify misunderstandings, and to reassure each other that the aim was as far as possible to keep in close contact. It was important to let it be seen that the two countries were working together closely and avoiding public recriminations. There was a close relationship historically; many Irish people lived in England; and, as Mr Judd had said in the private session, both were now members of the Community.
- 2.3 The Secretary of State said that he had found the private talk very useful. They had talked about irritants and misunderstandings. It had not been possible to remove them all but they now had a better understanding. The two countries had close ties as he had cause to remember from having helped to negotiate the Trade Treaty. He hoped for a good day's talks which would lead to a better understanding and an awareness of each other's point of view.
- 2.4 He would now give an account of the political situation as he saw it. This was the constitutional responsibility of the United Kingdom Government but it was right that the Irish Government should know how he saw it. In the last 18 months, 8 political parties in the North had been effectively reduced to 4 by the local elections: OUP, SDLP, Alliance and DUP in that order. During 1977 he had wanted to see political progress but a succession of factors had got in the way, such as the strike last May; the elections in the South, the Queen's visit to Northern Ireland and the Downing Street meeting. Throughout all that time the Official Unionists had been intransigent and had refused to consider anything other than the majority Convention report. By great pressure they had been persuaded to consider seriously the framework proposals for interim devolution. Three parties had been very interested in the talks, perhaps most of all the DUP. But the SDLP had sent Austin Currie and Seamus Mallon rather than Gerry Fitt and John Hume. He had had two hours talk with SDLP leaders earlier in the week and had taken them through the

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

framework ideas. There would be a transfer of real powers to a partnership administration. A fair share of the power of governing would go to the minority. He had advised the SDLP to seize the opportunity represented by the proposals. If the talks were not resumed and the Conservatives were returned to office they might want a top tier of local government, British -style with majority rule. If a dialogue were continuing on the basis of the framework talks this would be much more difficult. The Irish Government could help to get this message across to the SDLP. The Irish Government might have been concerned by the decision to set up a Speaker's Conference on the number of seats in Northern Ireland. There had been no deal with the Unionists but Mr Foot had had to accept the implications for Northern Ireland of retaining the same number of seats for Scotland and Wales despite devolution. Mr Fitt had been on the Speaker's Conference and Mr Paisley not. There was no guarantee of legislation this Session and certainly no possibility of the work of the Boundary Commission being completed within two years. There were no moves to integration. All the Northern Ireland Departments and their permanent secretaries had been kept intact ready for devolution. The Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund Bill had been retained as had been the whole body of separate Northern Ireland legislation. If there were any changes in these arrangements, the anti-integrationists would have cause for concern. The Government were satisfied that the framework proposals for an interim form of devolution still offered the best prospect for progress. In this respect the Taoiseach's remarks after Copenhagen had been most helpful. There could be no doubt about the Government's commitment to help the minority, for example, the OUP had been shifted away from the majority Convention report, the Cabinet had worked successfully for STV in the European elections, Popleglass had been given the go ahead, the greatest financial inducements were now in the areas of highest unemployment and the Opposition at Westminster had been held to a bi-partisan approach. The SDLP had been in close contact with the Irish Government. It would be helpful if they could be given the message that the talks on the framework should be resumed in their own best interests.

- 2.5 Mr O'Kennedy said that on the Speaker's Conference the Taoiseach had put on record his acceptance of the Prime Minister's reassurance that it had nothing to do with integration. But it had caused apprehension for the SDLP. They needed reassurance about this before they would agree to talks. They must feel that they approached them on an equal footing with everyone else. It was not new for Irish Governments to have contact with the SDLP. The Irish Government would wish to talk to all parties in the North but there was no opportunity with the other parties. He must make it clear that he could not speak for the SDLP. In his view the SDLP had been consistent and courageous. Any weakening by them would cause problems for everyone. The Irish Government were anxious to hear of progress made in continuing talks and would do all they could to improve the atmosphere of understanding. More Westminster seats for Northern Ireland had been seen as an ingredient in a possible deal including an acceptable form of devolution. Part of the fear now was that the chance to use that as a bargaining counter had gone. He accepted that there had been an effort to keep a bi-partisan approach but nevertheless some of the Conservative statements had not been very welcome. There needed to be scope to challenge speakers who made doubtful statements.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2.6 There must be no question or doubt about the Irish Government's political commitment to success on the security front. It would have serious political implications for his Government and for the minority in the North if misunderstandings developed.
- 2.7 Direct elections to Europe should be helpful. It should help to broaden thinking and strengthen partnership in Europe. He hoped that everyone would do everything possible to encourage the North to play a positive role in European development. Later we could expect joint help from European funds.
- 2.8 It sometimes seemed that statements from both Governments were made without regard to consequences but the Irish Government were careful in what was said. The basis of policy was to seek agreement, peace and understanding in the North and in all the relationships of the Irish Government. They did not ask for a stark declaration of intent but it was not feasible to expect a permanent silence in the South on the problems of Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach occasionally had to account to the Irish people. He recognised that the next moves were for the United Kingdom Government but he must ask that the talks should be got under way. His Government had maintained a deliberate silence on the Speaker's Conference and over the Fair Employment Report though the latter had shown a deeply embedded pattern of discrimination. He recognised that it had been based on out of date figures but it reminded us that the causes of discontent had to be eradicated in order to eradicate violence. He held no special brief for the Catholics but it was vital to give them a feeling of opportunity and involvement. He felt that the Community was particularly susceptible to pressure to help Northern Ireland economically because of the trouble there and the peace everywhere else.
- 2.9 The Secretary of State said that when the Irish Government talked about its aspiration to Irish unity, everything depended on how it was said. It was important to realise that it could harm political progress. It was better to talk to West and Paisley than to frighten them. A flavour of consent and agreement would help. It was vital to keep West and Paisley apart. As a result of the Speaker's Conference recommendations, there would not be 17 Unionist MPs. It seemed quite likely that there would be 5 anti-Unionists. Thus the percentage increase of anti-Unionists would be greater. An SDLP party at Westminster would be better able to respond to the Unionists and would have rights to see the Prime Minister and other Ministers.
- 2.10 The Fair Employment Report had reflected the past. There was now an Act, an Agency and an Ombudsman. The latter had only recently criticised the Paisleyite council at Ballymena. There was also an independent board to receive complaints about the police and a whole host of legislation was coming through.
- 2.11 Mr O'Kennedy said that on Irish unity it must be totally clear that, although PIRA talked of unity, the Irish Government were totally against PIRA. They were at least as antagonistic to the Irish Government as to anyone else. It was difficult to know what the SDLP's response would be to talks. They were concerned about 'power-sharing'. The Secretary of State said that only the Irish Government now used that phrase. Mr O'Kennedy commented that his Government had not invented the phrase. He hoped that it would be possible to reassure the SDLP and to bring them into the talks.

CONFIDENTIAL

R.

Mr Collins and Mr Donnelly and Mr Colwell from the Ministry for Justice, who had entered the room towards the end of the talks on politics joined in the discussion on security matters.

- 3.2 The Secretary of State said that the security situation was of great concern to both Governments. He and Mr O'Kennedy had had the opportunity of a brief word about it in their private meeting. The United Kingdom aim was to bring the violence to end in such a way that it did not recur. Therefore there were no political prisoners, cases were handled through the courts, there would be no amnesty, there were no repressive measures, they had co-operated to the full with Amnesty International. He had reserve powers to detain people by executive decision but they would only be used as a last resort. There would be no restoration of special category status. Support for the RUC was growing. The time was right for them to receive more backing from Church leaders and from the SDLP. He wanted the right percentage of the minority in the police. The SDLP should join the local security committees. There had been a marked improvement in security last year despite the lack of political progress. It showed that an improvement in the political situation would not necessarily help security in the short-term. After La Mon he had been worried about a Loyalist backlash but he was glad that none had taken place. A backlash was nevertheless an ever-present threat. It could be triggered by a speech from the South which seemed to pose a political threat at a time when all the violence in the North seemed to come from PIRA. Mr O'Kennedy said that his Government's speeches could not be interpreted as being politically threatening. The Secretary of State said that it was the interpretation by extreme Protestants that counted which was why it was so vital to keep the flavour of consent.
- 3.3 In co-operation on the Border it seemed that the two Governments were understanding each other more clearly. They had a common enemy and a common interest and should share a common assessment. Inevitably the Border was an ingredient in the security scene. The men of violence had roots on both sides and were no respecters of the Border. The top PIRA leadership was in the South. There was a promising measure of co-operation between the police forces and it was important for it to become closer still. Today's meeting would help to get across the message that we had achieved a good measure of understanding. The recent arms finds on both sides of the Border had been gratifying. It was useful that the JCC was meeting today. An early meeting between the Chief Constable and the Garda Commissioner would also be helpful. We should develop regular meetings at Ministerial and official levels where the discussion could be flexible and comprehensive. On security generally it might pay to have a lower profile. On sensitive topics we must avoid the trap of reacting and thus keeping a story alive.
- 3.4 Mr Collins said that he agreed on the need for a low profile. It was undesirable to tell a subversive organisation that one was winning. Any difference between the two Governments was probably only a matter of emphasis. In the South there was nothing but 100% commitment to stamp out the IRA. It was remarkable that the Prime Minister had been advised to ask the Taoiseach about the point. The Irish Government were as serious on the point as it was humanly possible to be. He had personally avoided any involvement in 'ping-pong' because it lowered the Garda's morale. They were doing

CONFIDENTIAL

their very best and we must not imply that we doubted them. Prior to 1973 his party had showed that they regarded the IRA as a common enemy. The police had been sent to the Border in very large numbers and the Government had stood up to some criticism. The Garda was growing in strength but he had personally been very much knocked back by the Prime Minister's question to the Taoiseach. He was delighted to hear about the Secretary of State's acceptance of co-operation between the police forces. He understood that the RUC were also pleased with it. How much closer could the co-operation become? He was also glad about the arms finds. He would like to see someone talking to the USA where they originated. It seemed that the arms found recently in Donegal had probably been brought across from the North after the failure of the arms searches in Donegal 3 or 4 weeks ago. The South had shown their sincerity over making explosives and controlling firearms. He recognised that it must be annoying that PIRA leaders could plan in the South but they would be pulled in as soon as an opportunity occurred. Over half the prisoners in Portlaoise were from the North and some in Mountjoy as well. He was also delighted that there was no backlash after La Mon. The South was wide open to terrorism because all the forces were up on the Border. A series of violent incidents in the South would cause his Government to pull forces back from the Border and thus play into PIRA's hands. It seemed that the United Kingdom were not matching the Garda man for man with the RUC on the Border. There were two sides to the Border and a double net was needed.

- 3.5 The Secretary of State said that he found Mr Collins' reply very encouraging. The references to a possible amnesty had sown seeds of doubt which had now been removed. In relation to the USA he was most appreciative of the Taoiseach's helpful statements. Mr O'Kennedy said that any PIRA support in the USA was certainly being undermined. His Government had made plain their attitude to Provisional Sinn Fein. The policies in the United States had been most effective.
- 3.6 Mr Collins said that a high proportion of the robbers in the South were subversively motivated. The Secretary of State said that there were soldiers and the UDR as well as police on the Northern side of the Border but he would be interested to know the comparative figures for the police alone.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

R.

At lunch the Ministers, the Secretary of State and Mr Judd, Mr O'Kennedy, Mr Andrews, Mr Collins and Dr O'Donoghue, were unaccompanied by officials.

4.2 It is understood that Irish Ministers raised:

- a. GAA at Crossmaglen;
- b. the slowness of traffic at the Omeath border crossing because of security checks; and
- c. complaints about the behaviour of UDR forces from Belfast in the Border area.

4.3 On the GAA, the Secretary of State was informed that the Provisionals issued leaflets at every GAA game in the South which gave a very prejudiced account of activities at Crossmaglen but an account which was widely believed. The Secretary of State said that it was possible to remove the anxiety, if the GAA would co-operate over cable laying. It would help if Irish Ministers could get this message across to them. On the behaviour of the UDR the Secretary of State said that he did not see that it made operational sense to use the UDR from Belfast at the Border except on vehicle check points.

4.4 No-one at lunch raised '2%'.

CONFIDENTIAL