

FONIO 001/23

NIO BELFAST

GRS 1110

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DESKBY 22

FM DUBLIN 221840Z NOV 84

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 682 OF 22 NOVEMBER

INFO IMMEDIATE NIO (B) NIO(L)

DUBLIN TELNO 677: ANGLO/IRISH RELATIONS

SUMMARY

1. THE IRISH GOVERNMENT IS IN CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTIES WITH ITS SUPPORTERS AND THE PUBLIC AT LARGE OVER ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS AFTER WHAT ARE SEEN AS UNHELPFUL ELEMENTS IN THE PRIME MINISTERS PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE ANGLO/IRISH SUMMIT OF 19 NOVEMBER.

DETAIL

2. THE TAOISEACH SENT A MESSAGE TO MY LONDON HOME ON THE MORNING OF 22 NOVEMBER ASKING ME TO RETURN TO DUBLIN AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. I SAW HIM FOR OVER AN HOUR THIS AFTERNOON. MR SPRING AND NALLY WERE ALSO PRESENT.

3. DR FITZGERALD HANDED ME A COPY OF A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE PRIME MINISTER WHICH I UNDERSTAND HAS BEEN DELIVERED BY THE IRISH AMBASSADOR IN LONDON. HE SAID THAT WE FACED A CONSIDERABLE CRISIS IN OUR RELATIONS. HE FEARED THAT THE DEPTH OF FEELING IN THE REPUBLIC MIGHT NOT BE EASILY APPRECIATED IN LONDON. HE THEN WENT THROUGH THE MATERIAL IN THE LETTER. HE SAID THAT THERE WERE TWO POINTS IN THE PRIME MINISTERS PRESS CONFERENCE ON 19 NOVEMBER WHICH HAD GIVEN RISE TO PARTICULAR DIFFICULTIES HERE. FIRST THE PRIME MINISTERS REJECTION OF THE FORUM REPORT HAD GIVEN OFFENCE. THE PUBLIC HAD FOUND IT TOO SUMMARY AND THE GOVERNMENT FELT THAT SHE HAD FOCUSED ON THE WRONG ASPECTS OF THE REPORT INSTEAD OF THE SECTION DEALING WITH PRINCIPLES AND REALITIES. SECONDLY THEY FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND HER APPARENT REFUSAL NOT ONLY TO ACCEPT THE WORD 'ALIENATION' BUT ALSO TO ACCEPT THERE WAS A PROBLEM OF THIS KIND. IT SEEMED TO THEM THAT THE WHOLE BASIS FOR THE SUMMIT TALKS HAD BEEN THAT THE MINORITY HAD LITTLE FAITH IN THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND. THIS HAD BEEN RECOGNISED BY MR PRIOR IN HIS SPEECH OF 2 JULY AND ON THIS BASIS HE HAD FELT HIMSELF PERSONALLY JUSTIFIED IN REFERRING IN PUBLIC TO ACCEPTANCE OF THE IDEA BY HMG. THE REPUDIATION OF THIS WAS EXTRAORDINARILY DAMAGING TO HIM.

4. HE SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN AWARE OF THESE POINTS ON THE EVENING OF 19 NOVEMBER BUT HAD DECIDED TO REJECT ANY THOUGHT OF REBUTTING THE PRIME MINISTERS VIEWS. THE RESULT HAD BEEN THAT HIS PERFORMANCE AT HIS PRESS CONFERENCE AND IN THE IRISH PARLIAMENT HAD BEEN UNIMPRESSIVE AND POLITICALLY DAMAGING. HE HAD TRIED TO PRESERVE ANGLO/IRISH RELATIONS BUT THE ONLY RESULT HAD BEEN A SEVERE BLOW TO HIM. THIS WAS DISASTROUS WHEN AN OPINION POLL PUBLISHED ON 15 NOVEMBER (MY TELNO 655) HAD SHOWN THAT THE GOVERNMENTS POLICY OF PROMOTING A SETTLEMENT INTERNAL TO NORTHERN IRELAND WAS GAINING PUBLIC SUPPORT. MINISTERS HAD BEEN BITTERLY CRITICISED AT PARTY MEETINGS. SEVERAL SPEAKERS HAD SAID THAT THE MORALE OF THE IRA HAD BEEN BOOSTED. HE BELIEVED THE MORALE OF THE SDLP WAS VERY LOW.

1. Mr Garry 528/11
PRIVATE OFFICE
PUS
MR BOURN
MR MERIFIELD
MR GILLILAND
SIR EWART BELL |
MR BUXTON
MR COULSON
MR REEVE
LIAISON X 2
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5. THE CABINET HAD DECIDED THAT THERE MUST BE AN IMMEDIATE REVIEW OF THEIR NORTHERN IRELAND POLICY AND OFFICIALS HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO CONDUCT THIS AT ONCE. THEY WERE CONCERNED THAT THERE APPEARED TO BE NO HOPE OF CONSTITUTIONAL PROGRESS IN THE NORTH AND THAT THIS WOULD STRENGTHEN THE IRA.

6. IN A SOMEWHAT THEATRICAL MANNER, THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE WAS THEN BROUGHT IN TO GIVE US AN UP-TO-DATE APPRECIATION OF THE SECURITY SITUATION. HE SAID THAT THE PIRA AND SINN FEIN HAD BEEN CAREFULLY BALANCING THE APPEAL OF THE BALLOT AND THE ARMALITE. THEY WERE WELL AWARE THAT TOO MANY VIOLENT ACTS COULD AFFECT THEIR ELECTORAL SUPPORT. THE EFFECT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS WAS THAT WIDE SECTIONS OF THE PUBLIC WERE ANGRY WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM AND PUBLIC TOLERANCE OF IRA ACTIVITY WOULD BE INCREASED. THERE WOULD BE AN INCREASED AVAILABILITY OF SAFE HOUSES, THE FLOW OF INFORMATION WOULD BE REDUCED, THE MORAL AUTHORITY OF THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN DIMINISHED IN ITS DEALINGS WITH THE IRA AND HENCE ITS CAPACITY TO COPE WITH TERRORISM. THE PROBLEMS HE FACED WERE MORE SERIOUS THAN AT ANY PREVIOUS MOMENT SINCE HE HAD TAKEN OFFICE. MR NOONAN THEN WITHDREW.

7. MR SPRING SAID HE COULD NOT OVERESTIMATE THE DAMAGE WHICH HAD BEEN DONE. THERE WAS A COUNTRY-WIDE FEELING OF ANNOYANCE AND FRUSTRATION. THE IRISH GOVERNMENT HAD DONE THEIR BEST TO PURSUE GOOD ANGLO/IRISH RELATIONS AND HAD WORKED HARD TO COOPERATE WITH US IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM. HE STRESSED THEIR EFFORTS ON EXTRADITION. IT WAS NOW VERY DIFFICULT TO PURSUE THESE EFFORTS. SOMETHING WHICH HAD LAIN JUST BENEATH THE SURFACE HAD BEEN SCRATCHED AGAIN.

8. I SAID THAT I WOULD REPORT CAREFULLY WHAT THEY HAD SAID. I HAD NO INSTRUCTIONS BUT I FELT BOUND TO SAY THAT I DID NOT THINK THERE COULD BE ANY EXCUSE FOR PERSONAL ABUSE OF THE KIND I HAD SEEN REPORTED IN THE PRESS. IN RESPONSE TO MY CHALLENGE, THE TAOISEACH SAID THAT MR BARRY HAD NOT DESCRIBED THE PRIME MINISTERS WORDS AS 'DISGRACEFUL'. HE DEEPLY REGRETTED THAT CERTAIN PHRASES HAD BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO HIMSELF. HE DID NOT THINK THAT HE HAD USED THEM. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN INJUDICIOUS HAD HE DONE SO, THOUGH HE UNDERSTOOD THAT SOME PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE SAID THIS KIND OF THING.

9. I SAID I DID NOT THINK THERE WAS ANY REASON FOR THEM TO BE SURPRISED AT THE SUBSTANCE OF THE PRIME MINISTERS STATEMENTS. THERE HAD BEEN NO CHANGE IN BRITISH POLICY. WE HAD FROM THE FIRST REJECTED THE THREE OPTIONS IN THE FORUM REPORT AND WE HAD REFUSED TO ACCEPT THE WORD 'ALIENATION' ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS. THE MINISTERS AND I THEN WENT BACK OVER MUCH OF THE GROUND AGAIN.

10. DR FITZGERALD ASKED ME WHAT I THOUGHT COULD BE DONE. HE SAID HE WAS DETERMINED TO PURSUE THE CONSTITUTIONAL PATH, WHICH MEANT THE PATH OF DIALOGUE. I SAID I KNEW THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD BEEN IMPRESSED BY WHAT HE HAD SAID TO HER AT THE SUMMIT. I ASSUMED THAT HE WANTED HER TO MAKE A STATEMENT WHICH WOULD BE HELPFUL TO HIM. I THOUGHT THAT ANY SUCH STATEMENT WOULD HAVE TO SAY, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THAT HE HAD EXPRESSED REGRET FOR THE REPORTS OF CERTAIN EXPRESSIONS WHICH HAD BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO HIM. HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE DID NOT FEEL ABLE TO AUTHORISE HER TO SAY THIS AT PRESENT. HE SAID HE WAS NOT IN A POSITION TO VERIFY PRECISELY WHAT HAD BEEN SAID. HE WAS HORRIFIED THAT THESE WORDS HAD BEEN PUBLISHED, THOUGH HE WAS NOT UNHAPPY THAT THE MOOD OF THE PARTY MEETING HAD EMERGED TO THE PRESS.

IN CONCLUSION BOTH MR SPRING AND THE TAOISEACH STRESSED THEIR HOPES THAT THIS CRISIS COULD BE OVERCOME AND THEIR ANXIETY TO MAINTAIN A DIALOGUE.

COMMENT

12. DR FITZGERALD AND HIS GOVERNMENT ARE IN SERIOUS TROUBLE WITH THEIR PARTY, PARLIAMENT AND THE PUBLIC. THIS TROUBLE IS LARGELY DUE TO THE WIDESPREAD IMPRESSION THAT DR FITZGERALD HAS BEEN SUBSERVIENT TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND HAS FAILED TO ACHIEVE ANYTHING BY IT. RESENTMENT HAS FOCUSED ON THE PRIME MINISTERS PRESS CONFERENCE. I HOPE THE PRIME MINISTER WILL FEEL ABLE TO SEND DR FITZGERALD A SOOTHING REPLY TO HIS MESSAGE STRESSING THAT SHE IS COMMITTED TO A PROCESS OF DIALOGUE. BUT I DO NOT THINK WE CAN DO MUCH TO HELP HIM WITH HIS DOMESTIC CRISIS SINCE WE HAVE NO SUBSTANTIVE CONCESSIONS TO OFFER THE IRISH AT THIS TIME. I THINK WE ARE IN FOR A BAD PERIOD . THE IRISH GOVERNMENT WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO COOPERATE WITH US IN ANY FEILD PARTICULARLY OVER SECURITY. I THINK DR FITZGERALD CAN WEATHER HIS DOMESTIC STORM ONLY AT THE PRICE OF BEING SEEN TO TREAT US WITH SOME COLDNESS. I DO NOT THINK THAT IT WOULD BE IN HIS INTERESTS OR OURS FOR US TO RESPOND WITH ANYTHING BUT PATIENCE.

GOOD ISON