

SECRET AND PERSONAL

NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND THE IRISH
AMBASSADOR OF 16 NOVEMBER 1984

Present: Secretary of State
Mr Dorr
Mr Andrew
Mr Sandiford

1. Mr Dorr noted that this was his first courtesy visit on the Secretary of State, and thanked the Secretary of State for receiving him. He then proceeded to discuss the prospects for the Summit.
2. Mr Dorr said that recent months had seen an unusual and interesting process of discussion at official level which had, perhaps understandably, undergone some turbulence in the period before the Summit. Some months ago, the Irish Government had hoped that the Summit might be the occasion for agreement on major new measures, or at least for agreement on some general statement of principles. Their expectations were now considerably reduced, and Mr Dorr thought that the main question facing the Summit would be how far the previous process of discussion would be endorsed.
3. The Secretary of State agreed that it was understandable if, just before the Summit, each side drew back to assure itself that its position was defensible in all directions. He himself was left with two main thoughts. First, he knew that the Prime Minister saw the discussions as important, and that she had a high personal regard for Dr FitzGerald. The Secretary of State thought that the Prime Minister recognised the disillusion which would follow any break-down in the process of discussion, and the opportunities which any such break-down would give to extremists at each end of the spectrum. For these reasons, and more generally, he knew that the Prime Minister wished to make progress if possible. Secondly, however, the Secretary of State was aware of a feeling on the British side, which the Prime Minister shared, that there had been some change of course during the process of discussion, and that the Irish side now seemed to lay less weight than before on the principle that any arrangement agreed should be reciprocal.

4. Mr Dorr then offered a personal view of the discussions. He thought that, most simply, the joint objective was to persuade Irish nationalists to settle down to an acceptance that Irish unity would not come in the foreseeable future, and to that end - and on the merits - to persuade them that they should feel part of the existing arrangements.

5. Mr Dorr said that the Irish Government had entered into the discussions with the idea of reaching a balanced settlement. He thought that "balance" could be viewed in two senses; first, in the sense that Northern Ireland was in the view of the Irish Government at present unbalanced; and secondly, in the sense that it was desirable to have political balance in the outcome of negotiations. Mr Dorr added, however, that in his view a balanced outcome (in either sense) need not necessarily include arrangements which were reciprocal.

6. Mr Dorr repeatedly assured the Secretary of State that he was not seeking to confute, but merely to give his understanding of the history of the recent unusual exercise of "co-operative negotiation", as Mr Dorr called it, and to explain what had led the Irish to deliver their recent statement of position. The Irish had been disconcerted, in the discussions of 2/3 November, by the thought that the UK side appeared to be saying, suddenly and for the first time, that satisfactory arrangements for devolved government in Northern Ireland must be a part of any settlement reached. This had led the Irish to conclude that there must have been some misunderstanding in the earlier discussions; and that they had better set out their own position clearly. This they had done in their speaking note, and while Mr Dorr saw that this note might be psychologically upsetting (and he understood that it had been), he did not see that logically it need be so. Certainly, the speaking note was not to be seen as a defensive preparation for a break-down in the discussions. The Irish were as keen to make progress as ever.

7. The Secretary of State agreed that some misunderstanding might have arisen. It was not the UK view that agreement on a form of devolved government had to be reached before agreement could be reached on anything else. The UK did, however, share with the Irish a belief that satisfactory arrangements for devolved government were centrally important. The discussions had contemplated three fields of activity; (i) reserved matters such as defence and foreign policy, which would remain the preserve of the UK government, not open to consultative procedures; (ii) devolved matters, also not open to consultative procedures; and (iii) other matters, remaining with the Secretary of State, to which consultative procedures (if agreed) might apply. It followed that it was of central importance to have satisfactory arrangements for devolved government, both for general reasons of good government and because the scope of the consultative procedures would otherwise be so extensive that they would be unworkable.

8. The Secretary of State said that there was a second reason for putting emphasis on the need for arrangements for devolution. This was that any arrangements for institutionalised consultation which were visible and transparent, and which took physical form in the shape of an Irish presence in Belfast, operating under an Irish flag, would inevitably be seen by Unionists as a challenge - indeed they could easily become the subject of hostile attention; it would be difficult to obtain the Unionist acquiescence to such arrangements if there were no concomitant progress towards devolution. The Secretary of State emphasised that there was no particular model for devolution which he would wish to impose on the constitutional representatives of the minority (or the majority); but he did think that Mr Hume had opportunities - which he was not currently taking - to exploit recent conciliatory utterances by Unionists, with a view to reaching agreement on arrangements for devolution. Such arrangements were certainly not a precedent condition for Anglo-Irish agreement, but they did need to be worked at. The Secretary of State added that he had recently discussed matters with Mr Hume, and thought that Mr Hume might now be more interested in such possibilities than he had been.

9. Mr Dorr agreed that the Irish side had, from an early stage, perceived the three categories of matters in the government of Northern Ireland delineated by the Secretary of State. The Irish side had, however, thought that it would be difficult to get devolution going at the same time as new arrangements for Anglo-Irish co-operation. Mr Dorr thought that both sides agreed on the desirability of progress with Anglo-Irish co-operation and with devolved government; but the problem was the sequence of steps needed to get there. If the Irish government announced a constitutional referendum on Articles 2 and 3, the question would arise how the other side of the package would be described. Mr Dorr said that, again without wishing to be controversial, he thought that the UK proposals on institutionalised consultation were not yet sufficiently clear cut to enable the Irish government to embark on a constitutional referendum; and it would add further difficulty if efforts to secure agreement on devolution had to be made at the same time.

10. Secretary of State said that he thought that the matter of balance in the agreement being sought was difficult. He himself recognised that the Irish government's readiness, in given circumstances, to undertake a constitutional referendum on Articles 2 and 3 showed great courage. What was not clear to him was whether the degree of courage which would need to be shown by the Irish Government would be matched by the degree of impact which their action, if undertaken, would have in Northern Ireland. It was difficult to convey tactfully to the Irish Government that the heroism of their proposed action might not count for much, at least in Northern Ireland. A lot would depend on what was said during any constitutional referendum campaign.

11. Mr Dorr said that he understood that Secretary of State's point. The converse was that, while proposals for institutionalised consultation represented a considerable concession for the UK side it was not clear how significant they would be seen as by voters in a referendum in the South.

12. Mr Andrew commented that the principle of balance had also to be applied to the Unionists. The amendment of the Irish constitution might logically offer them some reassurance, but the psychological

impact was difficult to assess. If the other parts of any settlement were some involvement of the Republic as of right, even if only on a consultative basis, and arrangements for devolution which involved some form of power-sharing, then Unionists might feel that this was more than they should be expected to take. They might, perhaps, be more amenable if an Irish dimension were accompanied by arrangements for devolution which included an element of majority rule - if this possibility were pursued it would be necessary to include adequate safeguards to make clear that majority rule did not mean a return to the old Stormont.

13. Mr Dorr said that both the Irish and UK governments were concerned that all legitimate interests should be served. Both sides were therefore looking for arrangements which everybody could live with. Inevitably, however, it would fall to the Irish to deliver the nationalists and to the UK to carry the Unionists.

14. The Secretary of State said that one point which was difficult to express was the desirability and purpose of co-operation of security. During his visit to Dublin, Irish Ministers had explained that, if institutionalised consultation on security matters emerged as a leading result of the Summit, they would be denounced by many nationalists as having agreed to act as "patsy" in support of British security policies. The Secretary of State thought, however, that there was another way of viewing the matter. Institutionalised consultation on security would be particularly hard for Unionists to criticise adversely, given that they continually called for more effective action on security by the Irish government. One could conceive of a Joint Security Commission as having two aspects; first, it could guide practical techniques of co-operation, and secondly it could provide a forum for representations by the Irish government about the operation of security policy in Northern Ireland.

15. Mr Dorr said that the Irish found the distinction between the two aspects interesting. They would, however, see it as more useful to make a constructive suggestion in advance of events, rather than to criticise afterwards; and they thought it important that co-operation

on security should not vary with the fluctuation of political circumstances - it was too important in its own right for that.

16. Mr Dorr ended with a personal question. He wondered whether the Secretary of State found the Irish government's contemplation of constitutional change unsettling; was it too ambitious, and liable to cause too much disruption? The Secretary of State reiterated his dual view. On the one hand, he admired the courage of the Irish government in being prepared to contemplate so hazardous a venture, as being in their view necessary to take the measure of events. On the other hand, he simply did not know whether any such undertaking would produce adequate benefits in its effect of opinion in Northern Ireland, partly because so much would depend on what was said during a referendum campaign. Irish Ministers would be in a difficult position in commending the amendment of the constitution to the electorate.

17. Mr Dorr said, that in his view, a way could be found through that difficulty by emphasising the entirety of the new deal which would have been arrived at if the campaign were to be undertaken. The animating idea for the Irish government throughout recent discussions had been that the situation in Northern Ireland was so serious that historic measures were needed.

Graham Sandiford

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16 November 1984

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