

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister

You will wish to discuss this at her briefing meeting tomorrow

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4/11

Ref. A05889

MR. ALEXANDER

I understand that you have now received, via the Irish Ambassador, a formal request that the Tanaiste, Mr. O'Leary, who is the leader of the Irish Labour Party which is the other partner in the Government Coalition, should attend the first 15 minutes of the conversation between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on Friday morning.

2. Mr. Nally mentioned this to me on the telephone this morning. He said that Mr. O'Leary was "behaving rather strangely", and that the Taoiseach felt obliged to make this request in order to placate the Tanaiste.

3. As you know, the Tanaiste insisted on being present when the Taoiseach saw the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland last week.

4. There are other precedents. Last time there was a Coalition of Fine Gael and the Irish Labour Party in Dublin, Mr. Cosgrave, the Fine Gael Taoiseach, was accompanied on his first visit to London by his Tanaiste, the then leader of the Irish Labour Party; they came together to see the Prime Minister's predecessor, and in fact he entertained them both. The only difference was that they came so quickly after the election which they had just won that they had not yet formally taken office.

5. It is clearly very difficult for the Prime Minister not to accede to this request. The problem, of which Mr. Nally is fully aware, will be how to get the Tanaiste out once he has been allowed in. Mr. Nally's suggestion was that he and I might remain outside for 15 minutes, and then come in, as a signal to the Tanaiste to depart. I wonder whether a better plan might be for the Prime Minister to have the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with her for the first 15 minutes, so that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland could take the initiative and lead the Tanaiste out after 15 minutes, if he showed no signs of moving on his own account. He could then take the Tanaiste over to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to join Lord Carrington and Senator Dooge.

6. No doubt the Prime Minister will wish to discuss this at her briefing meeting tomorrow.

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ROBERT ARMSTRONG

4th November, 1981

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