

PRIME MINISTER

Here is a long Foreign Office essay on Anglo-Irish relations, together with some comments by Sir Robert Armstrong.

The points for decision now are the frequency of meetings with Mr. Haughey and the timing of the next one.

In Venice Mr. Haughey mentioned September. There has been some recent press speculation in Ireland that a meeting is now being arranged. The FCO feel that September is too early, but that a meeting before the December Council would be worth while, and that this might take place in Dublin. They also recommend our agreeing to meetings at least once a year, with the participation of other Ministers and with a broad agenda.

Sir Robert Armstrong agrees with the drift of this, but recommends that we do not make a formal commitment to annual meetings, leaving them to be arranged as seems necessary - which will undoubtedly lead to at least annual meetings. He also suggests that there is a case for a Chequers session in preference to a Dublin session. In addition, he stresses the political advantages in relation to the north of having wide-ranging agendas for these meetings.

1. Agree that we should discuss with the Irish a November meeting?
2. Are you prepared to consider going to Dublin, or would you like to press for Chequers/London?
3. Would you prefer to adopt Sir Robert Armstrong's approach to frequency, which would avoid a formal commitment to a particular pattern of meetings?

MA

13 August, 1980.



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Ref. A02881

MR. PATTISON

Anglo-Irish Relations

Paul Lever wrote to you on 11th August to convey the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's recommendation to the Prime Minister that she should agree to establish meetings with the Taoiseach at least once a year with the participation of other Ministers and with a broad agenda.

2. There are two objections to this proposal, one general and one particular. The general objection is that the Prime Minister is becoming increasingly burdened with regular summit meetings of various kinds with broad agendas which do not always justify the amount of time and trouble which they demand. The particular objection is the obvious point that such regular meetings with Mr. Haughey will be offensive to Protestant opinion in Northern Ireland and with their sympathisers in the rest of the United Kingdom.

3. On the other hand the advantages of such regular meetings could be considerable. Paul Lever's letter spells out some of them. More generally, if the present political initiative in Northern Ireland shows any signs of success, it could only be helpful if it is reinforced by regular meetings between the Prime Minister and Mr. Haughey. If on the other hand the political initiative looks like losing its momentum, a regular series of meetings with Mr. Haughey will provide something on which to fall back and thereby refute charges that the Government are now bereft of ideas.

4. As the FCO say, the broader the agenda of a meeting the less the potential offensiveness to Protestant opinion in the North.

5. Finally there is the important point that Mr. Haughey has been led by the May meeting to look forward to regular meetings. We do not want at this stage to disappoint him.

6. I doubt whether it is necessary to lay down a regular frequency for these meetings. Recent experience suggests that there will be meetings at least once a year; a commitment to regularity will not add much. Indeed, it could well



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be advantageous not to be committed to meeting once a year or once every six months, but to be free to arrange a meeting when it was convenient to do so. There may be times when we (or the Irish) want to suggest one at quite short notice; there may be others when it would suit us not to be bound by a fixed schedule. It should be sufficient for present purposes to start talking about the date for the next meeting.

7. As to that, September is clearly too soon; we should give the talks in Northern Ireland a chance to see if any progress is possible; but we probably cannot and should not put off a meeting with Mr. Haughey beyond the end of the year. This suggests that some time in November - perhaps in the second half, just after the Debate on the Address and before the next European Council - might be a good time.

8. Mr. Lever's letter does not discuss where the meeting should be. Last time Mr. Haughey came to London; would the Prime Minister be ready to contemplate going to Dublin? I think she is entitled to say that this might be difficult, politically as well as from the security point of view. Another possibility is Chequers. It might be helpful if you could give the Foreign Office some indication of the Prime Minister's views on this.

(Robert Armstrong)

12th August, 1980

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

11 August 1980

Dean Mike,

Anglo-Irish Relations

In the communique issued after their meeting on 21 May the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach expressed a common wish 'to develop new and closer political cooperation between their two governments' and an agreement 'to hold regular meetings, on a continuing basis, accompanied by other Ministers as appropriate'. FCO and NIO officials have been considering how this commitment should be carried forward in such a way as to help over the Northern Ireland initiative.

Although no details have yet been worked out about the way in which 'political cooperation' will be pursued, the relationship set up by the Prime Minister's agreement with the Taoiseach matches in outline that between HMG and France (once a year) and the FRG and Italy (twice a year). We have no such relationship with the other small countries of the European Community and, other things being equal, there would be little advantage for HMG in treating Ireland differently. For obvious historical reasons, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom are already very close. Direct links already exist between Government departments in the two countries and there are grounds for arguing that there is no need for further institutionalisation - that the links work well and should be allowed to continue without change (indeed, in the past, the Republic of Ireland has been chary of getting too close to the UK partly for fear of being swamped and partly because it has seen the development of its own separate identity as requiring some degree of deliberate distance from the UK). However, in the context of the Government's initiative over Northern Ireland, a fuller development of relations between London and Dublin could offer important benefits to us, and could be of interest to the Republic.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has to consider how he can accommodate the SDLP demand for a wider, or Irish, dimension to any Northern Ireland settlement without making it unacceptable to the Protestants. At the same time we have to maintain the active cooperation of the Irish Government, from whom we are now getting the security co-operation which is essential to us, and whose acquiescence in HMG's initiative (despite their doubts about it) and lead in countering IRA propaganda, particularly in the USA we also need (Mr Haughey has recently come out strongly against US support for PIRA). We cannot express an interest in Irish

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unity nor give the Irish Government the role in negotiations on Northern Ireland that they want. But to keep Mr Haughey on board, we must give him the opportunity to maintain that he has an input. The SDLP and Mr Haughey both talk of the need to see the Northern Ireland problem in terms of three dimensions or axes, that is, between the two communities in the North, between Dublin and Belfast, and Dublin and London. The Protestants are not ready to accept a firm arrangement along the Belfast-Dublin axis which is what the SDLP want, but the Northern Ireland Office believe (and have good reason to believe) that it would substantially help the SDLP if some kind of institutional development could take place along the London-Dublin axis; for their part the Protestants, who recognise that they have no locus standi in the direct relations between the two sovereign states, could have no valid cause for complaint.

We believe that Mr Haughey also sees the value in developing this relationship, although ideally he would like it to develop along a different track: ultimately his eye is on developing the Dublin-Belfast axis and it is inevitable that he sees relations between London and Dublin primarily as a means to this end. He wishes to establish a close personal rapport with the Prime Minister because he hopes that it will help him to persuade HMG to accord the Irish Government a role in Northern Ireland negotiations. However, since Mr Haughey's tete-a-tete discussions with the Prime Minister in May there has been little hard information about what is in his mind. On the one hand it seems clear that he is keen on the possibility of an Anglo-Irish conference on Northern Ireland once it is apparent that our present initiative is not prospering. On the other, there is some evidence that he is looking for a structure to embody and give expression to the relationship between our two countries, and believes that it would have both a symbolic and presentational value, not least because it would be a substitute for the Dublin-Belfast axis which he knows is at present unattainable because of Unionist objections. Mr Haughey's ideas are, however, based on the assumption that the Northern Ireland initiative will break down and that the way will then be open for him to step in. It is essential for us to put across the message that this is not so, that an Anglo-Irish Conference on Northern Ireland is a non-starter, and that in the circumstances his interests can only be served by developing the London-Dublin axis on a more general basis.

The form that further cooperation takes and the speed with which it develops are important. Any outcome of the Northern Ireland initiative likely to be acceptable to the Protestants (for instance the 'second option') is likely to be difficult for the SDLP and the Republic to swallow. That is why political cooperation, which means the development of the

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London-Dublin axis, must move forward in parallel with the Northern Ireland initiative in a manner which will satisfy the Irish Government and the SDLP. It is true that Northern Ireland is bound to be a major feature on the agenda of any meeting. But at the same time we must not alarm the Protestants, who will be immensely suspicious of any discussions between London and Dublin which focus too narrowly on the North/South issues rather than Republic/UK ones. The broader the range of subjects covered, the less ground they will have for complaining. They will have no valid grounds for doing so, the more that Anglo-Irish political cooperation can be shown as paralleling eg Anglo-French and Anglo-German cooperation, with regular meetings at Head of Government and Ministerial level across the whole range of issues of common interest to them. The Northern Ireland Office are for these reasons particularly keen that HMG should indicate clearly that they are serious about building on the commitment to 'political cooperation' with the Irish Government and mean to give substance to it. It is worth adding that one of the proposals for future cooperation, the IONA concept ('Islands of the North Atlantic') put forward by Mr Biggs-Davison, is believed to have - if only because of the name - an emotional pull for both communities in the North.

The chances are that meetings along these lines would appeal to Mr Haughey if only as a second best, not least because they would visibly enhance Ireland's status as an equal partner of the UK in the European Community. He will of course understand the implications for the Republic's relations with the North.

The Way Forward

UK and Irish officials are planning to meet in early September to discuss the way forward. The aim will be to find out from the Irish, who have so far been reluctant to discuss this, just how far Mr Haughey is prepared to go and to explore possible areas for political cooperation.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Irish Foreign Minister are then due to hold their next regular meeting in early October. This will present a useful opportunity to take the first steps at Ministerial level. It would be helpful, in the wider context, for the agenda to cover other issues, eg EC questions, and an FCO Minister, if possible the Lord Privy Seal, will participate.

So far as the timing of the Prime Minister's meeting with the Taoiseach is concerned, I understand that, in Venice, Mr Haughey suggested that the next meeting should be in September. In our view this is too soon. (I gather in any case that you

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told Dermot Nally that a date in September would be difficult to fit in.) There will not be time for the necessary preparation if matters of substance are to be addressed, and if Mr Haughey is merely looking for a shift in HMG's policy so as to give him a visible role in Northern Ireland, he will come away empty handed. This argues for some delay; and it would be entirely credible with our objectives to exploit the link with the Community timetable in order to achieve it without appearing to rebuff Mr Haughey. Although Ireland's voice is not decisive in respect of likely Community business, it could none the less be useful to hold a meeting in the run-up to the European Council on 1-2 December. As for the future, the needs of our relationship with the Republic in the Northern Ireland context indicate that meetings ought to be envisaged at least once a year.

US Implications

The US Presidential election on 4 November is a potentially complicating factor for the Northern Ireland initiative. Even if Northern Ireland has not so far been an issue in the campaign it could easily become so, particularly if the initiative is passing through a difficult phase. For instance, Senator Kennedy has recently repeated his view that Dublin should be included in negotiations on Northern Ireland's future in a letter to the Ambassador in Washington. Between now and 4 November, therefore, it will be a helpful answer to charges that the initiative has broken down, that HMG are not pursuing it actively enough, or have failed to recognise the Irish dimension, if a meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach is already under discussion. This is a further argument for not going along with the September date suggested by Mr Haughey and for holding the meeting after the Presidential election, which in any case would fit in better with the European Community programme.

Conclusions

Taking all these considerations together, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary recommends that the Prime Minister should agree to establish meetings with the Taoiseach at least once a year, with the participation of other Ministers and with a broad agenda. We should let the Taoiseach's Office know, as soon as possible, that the September date suggested by Mr Haughey to the Prime Minister in Venice is too early; we should however propose that the first such meeting, possibly in Dublin, should be held whenever a convenient date can be found before the next European Council in Luxembourg on 1 and 2 December.

I am copying this letter to Roy Harrington and David Wright.

Yours Oba
Paul
 (P Lever)
 Private Secretary

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