

Prime Minister

NORTHERN IRELAND

1. JEP came to see me on Thursday evening, following your reply to his Question in the House earlier in the day.

2. I remind you of what you said:-

"my Rt Hon Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, made it perfectly clear to the Irish ambassador that no commitment exists for Her Majesty's Government to consult the Irish Government on matters affecting Northern Ireland. That has always been our position. We reiterate and emphasise it, so that everyone is clear about it.

Mr Concannon: What about the constitution?

The Prime Minister: I said, 'on matters affecting Northern Ireland'. (Interruption) Does the right hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr Concannon) wish to ask a question in the middle of my reply to a supplementary?"

3. We both know that Enoch has a passion for logic and for the precise meaning of words. This passion sometimes leads him into erroneous conclusions.

4. The key part of your answer in the House last Thursday was that "no commitment exists for Her Majesty's Government to consult the Irish Government on matters affecting Northern Ireland."

.../...

5. Enoch said that your reply was not consistent with the Communiques issued following the Anglo-Irish Summits which have taken place since you became Prime Minister. I undertook to look at the wording of the Communiques and then to get into touch with Enoch.

6. The following quotations from the Communiques are relevant:-

(a) 5th September 1979

"The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach exchanged views about the prospects for political movement in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister confirmed that Her Majesty's Government's policy was to seek an acceptable way of restoring to the people of Northern Ireland more control over their own affairs; Her Majesty's Government would make moves to that end at the appropriate time. The Taoiseach indicated the need for any form of administration in Northern Ireland to be acceptable to both sides of the community there."

(b) 5th October 1979

(This meeting was between the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Irish Foreign Minister)

"The Ministers also discussed the prospects for political progress in Northern Ireland. They noted that the Secretary of State was engaged in continuing private talks with political leaders in Northern Ireland, and that in the light of these the British Government hopes before long to be in a position to put forward positive proposals for political development. The Irish Ministers emphasised the importance of an early initiative leading to acceptable political institutions which both sections of the community in Northern Ireland could support and sustain. .../...

(c) 21st May 1980

"They had a useful and constructive exchange of views about the prospects for political progress in Northern Ireland."

(d) 8th December 1980

"They accordingly decided to devote their next meeting in London during the coming year to special consideration of the totality of relationships within these islands."

(e) 6th November 1981

"The Prime Minister and the Tsaoiseach agreed on the need for efforts to diminish the divisions between the two sections of the community in Northern Ireland."

7. It is perfectly clear, from the quotations set out above, that you and other Ministers have discussed with Ministers in the Irish Republic the internal constitutional position of Northern Ireland. However, nowhere in any of the Communiques is there any commitment to consult the Irish Government on matters affecting Northern Ireland, though I can believe that successive Irish Governments have always been consulted about any so-called "initiative" by the United Kingdom Government in Northern Ireland, and that Irish Ministers would expect to be consulted.

8. We may note in passing, that we would not expect to be consulted about any change in the constitution in the Republic.

.../...

On 'discussion' described the N.I. changes in the sense that they were going to do. They were in fact not consultation

9. Having re-read all of the Communiqués issued since you became Prime Minister, it is clear that there has been, down to and including November 1981, an accelerating movement towards greater involvement by the Irish Government culminating in the Anglo-Irish Inter-governmental Council and the possible Anglo-Irish Body at Parliamentary Level of which members of the new Assembly (to be elected on 20th October 1982) could form part. *is what?*
10. For my part, I hope that the Anglo-Irish Body at Parliamentary Level will prove to be still-born.
11. Hopefully, it will not be necessary for you to meet the Taoiseach, (whomever he may be) at an Anglo-Irish Summit until after our General Election.
12. Enoch said on Thursday that if your reply to him meant that we were putting on ice the Anglo-Irish Inter-governmental Council and did not intend the new Northern Ireland Assembly to send representatives to the suggested Anglo-Irish Body at Parliamentary Level, then he thought that there would be a real prospect of bringing the official Unionist Party into communion with the Conservative & Unionist Party.
13. The answer which you gave on Thursday does not have, and cannot have, the implication which Enoch thinks that it does. So far as you are concerned (and despite what may have been said by the Foreign Office or the Northern Ireland Office) there is not and never has been any commitment to consult the Irish Government on matters affecting Northern Ireland.

.../...

14. Nevertheless, there are, I believe, compelling reasons why we should keep the Anglo-Irish Inter-governmental Council at the minimum possible level of activity, eventually allow it to wither away, to do nothing about the Anglo-Irish Body at Parliamentary Level and remove the vote from Irish citizens resident in the United Kingdom.

15. Such a policy would be wise even without the Official Unionist factor; but that factor is of quite considerable importance for two reasons:-
 - (a) 17 Northern Ireland seats in the next Parliament (of which 13 are likely to be Unionist of one kind or another).

 - (b) The longer term prize of ending the divorce between the Conservative & Unionist Party and the Official Unionist Party.

16. It had been reported to you (via Henry Brooke of all people) that Enoch was not going to seek re-election to Parliament. I am happy to be able to report that Enoch's Adoption Meeting, attended by representatives of the newly defined South Down Constituency, is to take place on Tuesday, 10th August. Enoch says that provided there is no D.U.P. candidate, he will win; if there should be a D.U.P. candidate, then the S.D.L.P. would win.

17. I am handing a copy of this note to Cecil Parkinson only. He shares our views on this subject, and I would like to talk to you and to him about it.

2nd August 1982


IAN GOW