

CONFIDENTIAL & PERSONAL

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
STORMONT CASTLE
BELFAST BT4 3ST

Telephone Belfast (0232) 63011
Telex 74272



PERMANENT UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE
K. R. STOWE C.B. CVO

25 February 1980

PUS/1139/B

C Whitmore Esq
Private Secretary to
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Prime Minister,

Interesting and mildly

encouraging.

ms

KRW

27i

Dear Clive,

I visited Dublin on Thursday 21 February for meetings with officials. The talks were useful and there were some interesting matters arising of which you should be aware.

First, it was clear that the new Taoiseach, his near-Presidential style of government, and his thinking about Northern Ireland (he described it as "his first political priority") were exercising the minds of officials. They seemed to be aware that his policy towards Northern Ireland had a large element of sleight of hand in it particularly as regards his declared intention to take an international initiative. I was specifically asked by Dermot Nally to convey to you, with regard to this, the Taoiseach's present view that (notwithstanding what he said in his Ard Fheis speech and press conference afterwards) he envisages only that he will see Mrs Thatcher and have a few words privately with her in the margins of the next European Heads of Government meeting and would suggest then that the next Anglo/Irish bilateral meeting might take place in late April. I deliberately did no more than receive this message and say I would pass it on to you.

Secondly, the discussions on security were satisfactory. Irish Government officials were content, as we were, with the substantial increase in Garda/RUC cooperation. The message was very clear that so far as the new Taoiseach was concerned he was expecting the competent authorities and in particular the Gardai to deal rigorously with crime, including terrorism, wherever they found it without waiting for Ministerial guidance. They had noted the positive speeches which the Chief Constable and the GOC had made in Northern Ireland recently which

1.

/complemented....

CONFIDENTIAL & PERSONAL



C Whitmore Esq (contd)

complemented their attitude, namely that the professional heads of the security forces were getting on with the job without any overbearing from local politicians.

We established in the security discussions that the Republic's Government was reviewing the effectiveness of its law relating to crime and terrorism, just as we were in the North, and agreed that it was desirable for further contact to be made about this so as to avoid one government either getting left behind or pushed out in front of the other.

We spent some considerable time explaining to the officials the nature of the Conference in Northern Ireland and sought particularly to convince them (and may have succeeded in so doing) that the Government was determined to make progress in this matter and it was engaged in serious negotiation with the Parties attending without having a pre-conceived plan to be imposed behind a Conference facade. We took them to task for the Republic's Government's dismissive approach to the Conference and they sought to assure us that it would be wrong to assume that it was in fact dismissive; it was rather, as Dermot Nally put it, that the Conference was inadequate because of its exclusion of Irish unity. We pointed out that if we had not excluded Irish unity from the Agenda there would not have been a Conference at all - they may have taken the point.

Arrangements are being considered for meetings between the Foreign Minister Mr Lenihan and Lord Carrington and, later, my Secretary of State. The Ambassador, Sir Robin Haydon, and I concluded that the Secretary of State's meeting might profitably be put back until the end of March, so as to be distant from the next substantial spell of Conference meetings early in March. We also had in mind that if - as may happen - the Republic wish the Taoiseach's flight of fancy about an international initiative on Irish unity to glide slowly into something less significant, it would be in our interests to allow this to happen. It will be interesting to see whether Mr Lenihan helps such a process by not referring publicly to the "initiative" when he sees Lord Carrington or whether he re-awakens interest by stirring up renewed speculation about a meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister to discuss Northern Ireland which we should



C Whitmore Esq (contd)

then have to put down. What is clear and without question is that however Mr Lenihan plays it can be assumed to be how the Taoiseach wants it played.

I am copying this letter to Michael Palliser and Robert Armstrong. My Secretary of State has, of course, seen it.

*Yours sincerely,
Ken Stowe*

K R STOWE