

I am very unhappy about these proposals

PRIME MINISTER F.O must take the lead - otherwise the relationship with the Taoiseach will be completely different way from other E.F.C. Anglo/Irish Joint Studies *at least. Suggest Douglas Hurd*

I believe you need to think carefully about the proposals in Sir Robert Armstrong's minute below for handling the Anglo/Irish joint studies. *Can't discuss on Monday*

It often happens that, at official level, the Cabinet Office take the lead on subjects which span a number of Departments: this is one of their main roles. But, in such cases the lead at Ministerial level is almost invariably taken not by you as the "Minister for the Cabinet Office" but by the Minister whose Department has the strongest interest in the subject. A good example is Community business: Lord Carrington chairs OD(E), and Foreign Office Ministers lead in the House on Community matters generally, but the Official Committee supporting OD(E) is chaired by the Cabinet Office. In the case of Anglo/Irish joint studies, we have been at great pains to set your meeting with the Taoiseach and the action flowing from it in a UK/Republic context, and this points to the FCO taking the lead at Ministerial level.

If, on the other hand, we organise ourselves in the way suggested in Sir Robert Armstrong's minute and in particular put the No. 10 Press Office in the lead in dealing with Press enquiries, this will give the impression, as Mr. Alexander says in his manuscript note below, that No. 10 are closely involved in the joint studies and that you personally are overseeing the exercise in a much closer way than would normally be the case.

There is another, perhaps obscure, point which may give us trouble in due course. If Bernard Ingham is in the lead on Press enquiries, it will rapidly become plain to the outside world that the Cabinet Office are running the exercise at official level, and this could well lead to demands from any Select Committee that decides to take an interest in the Anglo/Irish studies (as one is surely bound to do) for Cabinet Office officials to

/give evidence

give evidence to it. But, we have always tried to prevent the Cabinet Office appearing before Select Committees on the grounds that they do not have responsibility for matters of policy.

But Lord Carrington has made it quite clear to you and, separately, to Sir Robert Armstrong that he does not want the FCO to take the lead on all this, and you may take the view that you have no alternative but to go along with the arrangements proposed in Sir Robert Armstrong's note. I thought, however, that I should draw your attention to some of the drawbacks.

bjw.

19 December 1980



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Prime Minister

①

Agree?

Rmt

PRIME MINISTERAnglo-Irish Joint Studies

In this note I make proposals for the handling of the Joint Studies on which you and Mr. Haughey agreed on 8th December. I have discussed these matters with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Northern Ireland Office and Mr. Ingham.

2. Although the Northern Ireland Office will have much to contribute to the Studies, they are clear - and rightly so - that they cannot take any kind of lead, since the essence of the exercise from our point of view is that it concerns relations between the Republic and the whole United Kingdom, not just the United Kingdom's Northern Irish province. In normal circumstances the lead Minister and Department, for negotiations with an overseas Government, would be Lord Carrington and the Foreign Office. But Lord Carrington, as I think he has told you (and has certainly told me), feels strongly that neither he nor any Foreign Office Minister nor his Department should take the lead, though he accepts that they will have a major supporting role. His prime concern arises from possible suggestions that he and his Department are associated with "sell-out", e.g. over Rhodesia or the Falklands and are preparing to play a similar role in the Irish question. He has a subsidiary point, which I think is also correct, that it is in our interest for the lead on the Dublin side to be taken by the Taoiseach's office rather than the Foreign Ministry, and that objective is most likely to be secured if the lead on our side is seen to be taken by the nearest thing we have to a Prime Minister's Department.

3. At the official level, no problem should arise. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Northern Irish Secretary are content for the Cabinet Office to take the lead, both within Whitehall and vis-a-vis Dublin, and we are making arrangements accordingly. The proposal is that before Christmas we should tell the Irish Government that the Cabinet Office will be leading from our side (supported by the Foreign Office and other Departments



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as appropriate), that we imagine the Taoiseach's office will be similarly leading on theirs, and that we have in mind a first meeting at official level, probably in London, in the second half of January, to discuss and if possible reach agreement on the matters which are to be the subjects of studies and the way in which the studies are to be carried out. This timing would allow the Cabinet Office-led official committee, which we have now established, to clear its lines after Christmas with the Ministerial group which will oversee the project on our side. The meeting in the second half of January might in effect be the first meeting of a steering group, to which a series of suitably constituted sub-groups would report the various subject-studies.

4. The natural Ministerial group for this purpose would be a sub-committee of OD, reporting to OD as necessary. Lord Carrington does not wish to chair the group, for the reasons indicated in paragraph 2 above. He suggests that the Home Secretary should do so. The Home Secretary is a little reluctant, because he feels slightly tarred with the Sunningdale brush. But Lord Carrington does not regard that as a serious obstacle; whereas he would feel less happy about the only other obvious candidate, Lord Soames, who also has connotations of "foreign affairs" and Rhodesian sell-out. I have ascertained that the Home Secretary is prepared to take this on, and I recommend accordingly.

5. A sub-committee under Mr. Whitelaw might consist of the Lord Privy Seal, the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Trade and Energy, the Chief Secretary, Treasury, and the Paymaster General. The Lord President could be added to this, if you wish. Other Ministers would be invited ad hoc when their departmental interests were involved (e.g. Secretary of State for Industry or Ministers of Transport or Agriculture).

6. Lord Carrington feels strongly that the Foreign Office News Department should not handle Press queries on the Joint Studies: quite apart from his own position, there is the fact that Mr. Fenn, Head of the FCO News Department, handled the Press side of the Rhodesia Conference and Settlement. Press questions about the Cabinet Office are handled by your Press Office, and if the Cabinet Office is to be in the lead it seems logical that the No. 10 Press Office should handle queries about the Joint Studies. Mr. Ingham is, somewhat



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*NR a very practical idea:
the form are not likely to be
taken up by the kind of
distinction.*

reluctantly, prepared to accept this. If you wanted to appear to distance yourself a little from this, perhaps Mr. Ingham could depute the handling of the queries on this subject to, say, Mr. Anson.

7. As to questions in the House of Commons, those relating to some of the particular areas of study (e.g. citizenship or energy) could of course be answered by the departmental Ministers concerned. I am afraid that I think that you would have to take more general questions yourself. The same principle could be followed for questions in the Lords, with Lord Soames as the obvious choice to answer general questions.

8. It is bound to become known that the Cabinet Office is taking the lead, if indeed you agree that it should. We might as well be open about this from the outset, and at least gain whatever credit there is to be gained from not having the Foreign Office in the lead.

9. If you agree with what is proposed in this minute, we will set up the Ministerial sub-committee, the official committee will get straight to work, and we will be in touch with Dublin on the lines suggested in paragraph 3 above.

(Robert Armstrong)

18th December 1980

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