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*a note let
My intt. Council
Marsh*

Note of a meeting to discuss progress on Northern Ireland held at 10 Downing Street on 12 May 1980

Present: The Prime Minister
The Home Secretary
The Lord Chancellor
The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence
(Mr Hayhoe)
Mr K R Stowe, Northern Ireland Office

Secretaries

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr R M Hastie-Smith

The Home Secretary referred to his letter to the Prime Minister dated 7 May and said that the particular reason he had requested this meeting was because of the importance of the forthcoming meeting between the Prime Minister and Mr Haughey on 21 May. Her meeting with Mr Hume, the SDLP leader, on 13 May would also be important, as what Mr Hume said would be likely to reflect the views of Mr Haughey to whom he would report back on everything the Prime Minister said. It was not clear exactly what Mr Haughey would be seeking, but he would certainly aim at extracting the maximum political advantage from the meeting. His general objective would be likely to be to carve out a major and widely recognised role for himself in negotiating the future of Ireland with Her Majesty's Government. This could create obvious difficulties both in Northern Ireland and at Westminster. Nevertheless it was important to try and keep him sweet because of the extent to which his efforts had improved the cross-border security situation in Ireland and also the extent to which he could cause that situation to deteriorate.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that it was Mr Haughey's aim to be seen to be involved in achieving political progress in Northern Ireland. It was important to show him some understanding of the preoccupation in Dublin with Northern Ireland.

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In discussion the following main points were made:-

- a. There could be no question of giving Mr Haughey any suggestion that the undertaking which had been given to the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland was open to negotiation or compromise. If that was what he wanted, he would get nothing out of the forthcoming meeting.
- b. Nevertheless Mr Haughey was a clever and pragmatic politician who needed to win an election in the fairly near future. There were a number of subjects of common interest which he would want to discuss with the Prime Minister, such as security and energy. He might also have new ideas of his own such as possible Irish membership of NATO or common citizenship. There would certainly be a price-tag attached to such ideas, but even so they might provide a basis for friendly discussion. At the meeting on 21 May, it was likely that Mr Haughey would be more interested in feeling out the position than in making proposals that would run the risk of bringing a rebuff which would frustrate his longer term aims. Nevertheless the meeting might be a difficult as well as an important one.
- c. Following the meeting with Mr Haughey on 21 May, it would be desirable to publish the Government's proposals for Northern Ireland in June. These proposals were at present being prepared by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for consideration by MISC 24. Although these proposals would provide a basis for further discussion and negotiation with the political parties, there would in fact be a lot of positive direction in the proposals which were eventually published. There would be one main option with two variations. Any proposals for an Assembly with legislative powers would have to be very carefully considered for their possible effect in reviving hopes for Scottish and Welsh devolution; on the other hand the political arrangements for Northern Ireland had always been different to the rest of the United Kingdom and without legislative powers it would be difficult to offer to the Northern Ireland minority some allocation of power.
- d. The tactics behind the proposals to be published would be to make it clear that power sharing was a possibility only if it was accepted by all the political parties. Such acceptance was unlikely to be achieved; but, unless the power sharing option was put forward, the SDLP would be unlikely to take any further part in the negotiations. If they could be shown that power sharing was not a possibility, they might be induced to accept the real degree of power allocation that the Council of the Assembly proposal might offer.

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The Prime Minister, summing up the discussion, said it was clear that the forthcoming meeting with Mr Haughey, and the preliminary discussion with Mr Hume would present considerable problems. To a large extent they would need to be listening sessions, but Mr Haughey could not go away believing and publicly stating that the Government was reconsidering its commitment to the Northern Ireland majority. A difficult decision would have to be taken over the question of legislative powers for the proposed new Assembly in Northern Ireland. In the longer term they would have to consider how the elected representatives of Northern Ireland in Parliament could be brought back into the process of Government from which they were at present excluded. The present situation was incompatible with real democracy.

Ans

Cabinet Office

12 May 1980

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