



CABINET OFFICE

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From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

Ref: A082/0384

6th December 1982

Dear Mr Powell,

I have been reflecting on our conversation of 1st November.

On the particular matter of Mr. Sloan's conversations with Mr. Abbott, I gave you an account of the inquiries which I had made. You were able to add to my knowledge in two respects:

- (1) The manuscript notes, photocopies of which Mr. Molyneaux sent to Mr. Gow, were not (as Mr. Gow and I both understood them to be) the notes which Mr. Sloan made during his interviews, but they were an intermediate stage between the notes made at the time of the interviews and the typescripts which Mr. Molyneaux sent to Mr. Gow on 29th June and 18th August 1982. You told me that you had copies of Mr. Sloan's original notes - indeed you showed me a copy of one page from them - and you said that you had worked from those notes in producing the copy of the typescript with red underlinings which you sent to Mr. Gow and to me on 21st October.
- (2) Mr. Sloan had given an oral account of his interview with Mr. Abbott on 26th January 1981 to Mr. Molyneaux on the evening of that same day, and an account of his interview on 17th November 1981 to you on or very shortly after that day. I told you that this had not emerged from Mr. Sloan's discussion with Mr. Payne, in which Mr. Sloan indicated that he did not give Mr. Molyneaux the typescript notes until May 1982, but said nothing about oral briefings immediately after the interviews. Indeed in the discussion Mr. Sloan told Mr. Payne that he had met you only once, and then only socially on an occasion when he was seeing Mr. Molyneaux and you came into the room.

As I told you, as a result of my inquiries I was faced with a clear conflict as between on the one hand Mr. Sloan's notes of his interviews with Mr. Abbott, and Mr. Sloan's assertions as to their accuracy as a record of what Mr. Abbott said, and on the other hand Mr. Abbott's assertions, which I myself tested in

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The Rt Hon J. Enoch Powell, MBE, MP

two long discussions with him, that Mr. Sloan's notes are so inaccurate, incomplete, misleading and distorted as to bear little relation to what he actually said. They could not both be right; there was of course no verbatim record of either of the interviews; and I could see no way of resolving this conflict with certainty. I hope that I was able to say enough to make clear to you why, given other circumstances, including the way in which Mr. Sloan's notes came to be made, the failure to check them with Mr. Abbott at the time, and the long delay before they were produced, I had reported to the Prime Minister as my conclusion that those notes could not be relied upon as an account of what Mr. Abbott said, or as satisfactory evidence upon which to call in question Mr. Abbott's integrity and the veracity of his rebuttals of Mr. Sloan's account of his answers to Mr. Sloan's questions.

You explained to me that you had regarded Mr. Abbott's answers to Mr. Sloan's questions, as reported by Mr. Sloan, not so much as significant in themselves as illustrative (if not probative) in a more general context of what you saw as a persistent determination - one might even say a conspiracy - on the part of Northern Ireland Office officials over a long period of years but particularly since May 1979 to bring into being the institutions of a devolved and at least potentially "power-sharing" government in Northern Ireland, against the wishes of many people in Northern Ireland, in pursuance of agreements reached between them and officials of the Irish Government in Dublin wholly or partly without the authority or knowledge of British Ministers. You drew attention in this context to changes in the policy of members of the present Government as between the statements made by the Conservative Party on Northern Ireland before the Election in May 1979 and the policies they followed and the statements they made after they took office; and you attributed those changes of policies, which you thought mistaken, to the advice which Ministers had received from Northern Ireland Office officials, and specifically to what you described as a lack of candour on the part of those officials in the advice which they gave to Ministers in the British Government and in particular in the information which they gave to Ministers about the contents of their contacts with officials of the Irish Government in Dublin. You believed that Northern Ireland Office officials had been determined to work for the establishment of an assembly in Northern Ireland, in order that such an assembly might provide a Northern Ireland component for the so-called "parliamentary tier" of Anglo-Irish relations which successive Taoiseachs in Dublin had been known to favour. (In that connection you reminded me that in a speech which you made on 25th September you had said that in his interview with Mr. Sloan on 26th January 1981 Mr. Abbott had made observations which could not have been made without foreknowledge of the Bill which Mr. Prior (not then yet Secretary of State for Northern Ireland) was subsequently to introduce; I told you that Mr. Abbott had said that the observations which he had made - which were not as reported by Mr. Sloan - had not been based on a foreknowledge of Mr. Prior's Bill, which was not at that time under consideration and of which he had no such foreknowledge, but were related to proposals for "rolling devolution" which had been advanced some months earlier by Dr. Brian Mawhinney and were in the public domain and on the table at Mr. Atkins's conference which ended in the autumn of 1980.)

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These are of course serious charges, and I accept that, if well founded, they would constitute a serious reflection on the professional integrity of the civil servants concerned and as such would be of much concern to me, as the Joint Head of the Civil Service, as well as to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

It is for the Secretary of State to answer for the policies and management of his Department and the conduct of his officials; but I have consulted him, as I told you I would, and the Prime Minister. What follows is written on their authority and with their agreement.

At no time have Ministers of Her Majesty's Government taken the view or been advised by officials that their freedom of action with regard to constitutional arrangements for Northern Ireland is limited by agreements, open or secret, with the Irish Government. Ministers have not entered into any such agreements; nor have officials of the Northern Ireland Office.

There have of course been over the years many contacts at many levels and in many Departments between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the Republic, which have had the objective either of improving co-operation between the two Governments on matters where such co-operation was or could be of common interest (notably on the question of cross-border security and on economic links of various kinds), or more generally (and particularly between December 1980 and November 1981) of improving relations between the two Governments and between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. In the course of such contacts both Ministers and officials of the British Government have on occasion informed representatives of the Irish Government about political developments and prospects in Northern Ireland, and those representatives have expressed their views on those matters. It does not follow, nor is it the case, that Her Majesty's Government, or officials of that Government, are in some sense dancing to the tune of the Irish Government.

Her Majesty's Government's objectives and intentions in proposing the establishment of an assembly in Northern Ireland were explained by the Secretary of State and his colleagues in the Parliamentary proceedings on the Bill to give effect to that proposal. So far as any Anglo-Irish body at Parliamentary level is concerned, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have made clear that it will be up to the two Parliaments concerned to decide about this; and it will be a matter to be decided in agreement with the two Parliaments to what extent members of the Assembly should participate.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Robert Armstrong*