

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister

Content that Sir

Robert Armstrong should ^{write} reply to

Mr. Powell in the terms attached?

FERS

10.11.

Ref. A083/3193

MR BUTLER

Yes - as Mr
has amended
not

Mr Enoch Powell MP made a speech in Dungannon, County Tyrone, on 28 October, in which he revived his old canard that the Northern Ireland Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were engaged in a conspiracy to work towards the creation of a united or a federal Ireland. By way of example he once again quoted from Mr Sloan's record of his now notorious conversations with Mr Clive Abbott of the Northern Ireland Office, attributing to Mr Abbott or the Northern Ireland Office views which he certainly never expressed as either his own views or those of the Northern Ireland Office. Mr Powell also refers to an intervention by Mr David Goodall, of the Cabinet Office, in a discussion of Irish neutrality at the British Irish Association meeting in September. Mr Powell himself was not at the meeting and did not hear what Mr Goodall said, and he is certainly totally misquoting and misinterpreting what Mr Goodall said.

2. The speech has not attracted much attention in the press, though two Irish newspapers picked it up. The speech certainly does not rate a public response. But, if nothing is said, Mr Powell will be able to argue that, because what he said has not been challenged or denied, it must have been true.

3. If the Prime Minister agrees, therefore, I should like to take advantage of the fact that I had a long conversation with Mr Powell a year ago about the Sloan-Abbott conversations and write to him about his latest speech on the lines of the draft attached. The draft has been cleared with the Permanent Under Secretaries of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Northern Ireland Office, with the Treasury Solicitor and of course with Mr Goodall.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

10 November 1983

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DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO
THE RT HON ENOCH POWELL MBE MP

I read with interest the handout of your speech at Dungannon on 28 October. As you referred to me in the course of it, in most friendly and courteous terms, I hope you will allow me to take up a couple of points in it with you.

As to your reference to Mr Sloan's conversations with Mr Abbott, I am sure you know that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland does not pretend and has never pretended to believe that the conversations never took place. I explained to you when we met a year ago why it seemed to me impossible to accept Mr Sloan's notes as a fair or accurate account of what Mr Abbott said during the course of these conversations. If Mr Abbott said anything resembling what you have attributed to him, it was as a description of views put forward by some people outside, not of views held by himself or by the Northern Ireland Office. We discussed all this when we met, and the Secretary of State made the position very clear in the debate on 10 December 1982; so I do not need to go over that ground again.



As to your reference to Mr Goodall, you were not at the British Irish Association meeting in September, so that you could not be aware that (as others who were present have confirmed to me) Mr Goodall did not make the remark you attribute to him or anything like it, and that it reflects a total misunderstanding of his intervention in the discussion.

Perhaps I could also make the point that the British Irish Association meeting was held, as I think you know, under Chatham House rules, under which participants are not to be quoted or to have any statement attributed to them by name without their agreement. Part of the purpose of these rules is to make it possible for officials and others in positions of responsibility to attend and contribute to the discussion without the risk of being misinterpreted and misreported. Chatham House rules do not apply just to meetings of the British Irish Association: they apply to a very wide range of meetings on all aspects of international affairs. I hope that you



would agree that it is in the public interest that officials should not feel themselves debarred from taking part in such meetings for fear that they cannot rely on other participants to keep the rules. Quite apart from the question of Chatham House rules, I would also hope that, as a senior Privy Counsellor and former Minister, you would recognise the unfairness of naming individual civil servants who cannot publicly reply even when publicly traduced.

The word 'traduced' is likely
to antagonise Mr. Powell: ?
Suggest 'misquoted' ✓