

Please see further amendments  
no



There are two remaining issues:-

1. Do you agree with Mr. Prior that para. 10 of the draft letter should be deleted?

2. You were previously worried about the expression of confidence in the latter part of the last sentence of para. 7. Are you prepared to agree to it in the light of what Mr. Prior and Sir R. Armstrong say? The alternatives suggested by Sir R. Armstrong seem to me worse, but the expression of confidence could be attributed to the Secretary of State alone.

Ref. AO82/0313

MR BUTLER

Discussions between Mr Geoffrey Sloan and Mr Clive Abbott

Thank you for your minute of 17th November.

FERB. 1.12.

2. I have written to Mr Powell, to offer him the opportunity of seeing the record of the meeting which Mr Gow and I had with him on 1st November. He has accepted the offer, and I have sent him the record, under cover of a letter seeking his help in elucidating the point referred to in the third paragraph of your minute.

3. As to the second letter to Mr Powell, I have amended the draft to take account of the Prime Minister's suggestions on paragraphs 8 and 9, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's suggestions on paragraph 9. I attach a revised draft accordingly. There remain two points outstanding:

The point is not an issue in this correspondence. No. I am content to omit it!

i. The Secretary of State has questioned whether paragraph 10 (the reassertion of the constitutional guarantee) is necessary in the letter to Mr Powell. It clearly is not necessary; it seemed to me that it might be helpful to end the letter with such a reassertion, but I am of course perfectly content to omit the paragraph, if the Prime Minister agrees that I should do so.

ii. You said that the Prime Minister would prefer to delete the expression of opinion in the latter part of the last sentence of paragraph 7. You will have seen the Secretary of State's views on this, as contained in paragraph 4 of Mr Lyon's minute of 24th November. I think that this sentence goes to the heart of Mr Powell's allegations that Northern Ireland Office officials have been conspiring with Irish Government officials to reach agreements without telling their Ministers. I should very much prefer to

Attached at flag A ->



retain the sentence, which (like Mr Prior) I believe to be true.

I deliberately phrased that part of the sentence as an expression of Ministerial confidence in the integrity of officials. The point could of course be expressed differently: for example:

*open or secret -*

Ministers have not entered into any such agreements ~~(or understandings)~~. Nor have officials of the Northern Ireland Office ~~or officers of any other Department of Her Majesty's Government~~ sought or made any such agreements or understandings with officials of the ~~Irish Government~~.

*These flat factual assertions are even more dangerous than the expression of opinion, in my view.*

or: Neither Ministers nor officials of the Northern Ireland Office or of any other Department of Her Majesty's Government have sought or made any such agreements or understandings with Ministers or officials of the Irish Government.

I should still prefer the original formulation, with its expression of Ministerial confidence, to either of the alternatives. Of the two alternatives I slightly prefer the first to the second.

4. I am sending copies of this minute and the revised draft to Mr Lyon and to Mr Gow.

*RA*

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

29th November 1982

*I have this difficulty -*

*while the existence or otherwise of an agreement can be ascertained - I do not see how you can make a dispute an*

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*understanding. I am anxious in this letter to stick to verifiable facts. (as we not therefore shorten it or close (see para 4))*

DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO  
THE RT HON J ENOCH POWELL MBE MP, HOUSE OF  
COMMONS

I have been reflecting on our conversation on 1 November.

2. 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 29 June and 18 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 21 October.

(2) Mr Sloan had given an oral account of his interview with Mr Abbott on 26 January 1981 to Mr Molyneaux on the evening of that same day, and an account of his interview on 17 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.

3. 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 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.

4. 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 or understandings reached between them and by 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 25 September you had said that in his interview with Mr Sloan on 26 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.)

5. 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.

6. 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 discussed the matter with him, as I told you I would, and with the Prime Minister. What follows is written on their authority and with their agreement.

7. 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 ~~or~~ ~~understandings~~, open or secret, with the Irish Government. Ministers have not entered into any such agreements ~~or understandings~~, <sup>nor have</sup> and ~~they have every confidence that~~ officials of the Northern Ireland Office, ~~and of other Departments~~



~~of Her Majesty's Government have not sought  
or made any such agreements or understandings  
with officials of the Irish Government.~~

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. It is the fixed policy of Her Majesty's Government, and of Parliament, as enshrined in the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973, that there can and shall be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom except by the agreement of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. At all times this fact has informed and continues to inform the conduct of policy in the Northern Ireland Office and Her Majesty's Government's dealings with the Government of the Republic of Ireland.



Included  
File AA  
4  
cc NIO  
Ian Gow

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

ca

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

DISCUSSION BETWEEN  
MR GEOFFREY SLOAN AND MR CLIVE ABBOTT

Thank you for your minute of 29 November (A082/0313), which I have shown to the Prime Minister.

On the two outstanding points, the Prime Minister would be content to omit paragraph 10 of the draft letter, since the reassertion of the constitutional guarantee is not in issue in this correspondence. On the latter part of paragraph 7, the Prime Minister would prefer to confine the statement to verifiable facts. The existence or otherwise of agreements is verifiable: that of "understandings" is not. With this in mind, she has suggested that the words "or understandings" should be deleted from the first sentence of paragraph 7 and that the second sentence of paragraph 7 should read:-

"Ministers have not entered into any such agreements nor have officials of the Northern Ireland Office".

I am copying this minute to the recipients of yours.

F.R.B.

2 December 1982

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