



huc

Ireland
RW

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG
CABINET OFFICE

ANGLO/IRISH RELATIONS

Thank you for your minute of 13 January. The Prime Minister is content that Anglo/Irish relations should be handled in the immediate future in the way you propose.

If Mr Barry, when he meets the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on 24 or 25 January, suggests a meeting between the Prime Minister and Dr. FitzGerald in the margins of the European Council in March, Mrs Thatcher would be content for Mr Pym to reply that she would indeed expect to meet Dr. FitzGerald in the margins of that meeting.

I am copying this minute to Brian Fall (FCO), John Lyon (Northern Ireland Office) and Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

17 January, 1983

RW

Content that Anglo/Irish relations should be handled as proposed in the immediate future?

Ref. A083/0123

PRIME MINISTER

Agreed
ms

A.J.C. 14/1.

Anglo-Irish Relations

I held a meeting on 6 January with Sir Antony Acland, Sir Philip Woodfield and Mr Clive Whitmore to consider the prospects for Anglo-Irish relations following the change of Government in Dublin. Our expectation (now confirmed - see paragraph 4 below) was that Ministers could expect early overtures from Dublin about a return to normal relations, and we thought that Ministers would need to consider how to respond.

2. We concluded that the responsibility for the deterioration in Anglo-Irish relations under Mr Haughey lay with the Irish, and that it was for the Irish Government to take the initiative in restoring them. The British Government has no interest in seeking to force the pace, still less in appearing to woo or pursue the Irish. I assume that we do not expect or perhaps want to see before the Election any dramatic changes in Northern Ireland, of a kind for which we should want to seek some measure of support from the Irish Government; and any major development in relations between London and Dublin might be more unsettling than reassuring in Northern Ireland. Dr FitzGerald will no doubt understand that we are not in any hurry, and may have his own reasons for not trying to force the process. But it would not be in our interests to appear to rebuff any efforts which Dr FitzGerald may make to get relations back on to a more nearly normal footing; and the United States Administration might find it increasingly difficult to sustain its attitude of non-involvement if it appeared that we were resisting an attempt by the Irish Government to improve Anglo-Irish relations. In this connection we have to remember that President Reagan will be making his usual St Patrick's Day statement on 17 March.

3. Against this background, my meeting considered that the right course would be to let contacts between British and Irish Ministers resume, but take matters along as slowly and deliberately as possible, leaving it to the Irish to make the running. This would mean that

we would take no initiative ourselves; that bilateral contacts at normal Ministerial level should be well spaced out; and that we should avoid being drawn into discussion of possible new initiatives on the Irish question. The most appropriate first contact would be between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Mr Barry, preferably on non-Irish matters; the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Mr Barry would in any case both be at the meeting of the Council of Ministers of the European Community on 24 and 25 January, and that would provide an unforced opportunity for such a contact, if the Irish sought it. This could appropriately be followed by a meeting between Mr Barry and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if the Irish proposed it.

4. Since my meeting the Irish Ambassador has spoken to Sir Antony Acland on 11 January. He said that he had been in Ireland over Christmas and had joined in discussions with Irish Ministers on Anglo-Irish relations. The new Irish Government had concluded that they should work for better relations with London and proposed to set about this in a steady and deliberate way. They were considering the possibility of movement on extradition and on voting rights for British residents. As a first step they suggested that Mr Pym and the new Irish Foreign Minister, Mr Barry, should meet in Brussels in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council on 24 and 25 January, perhaps for half an hour. Mr Barry would like to see Mr Prior later, in London or Dublin, preferably at the end of January or in early February. Dr Kennedy said that he was instructed to ask for an early response. He also spoke in similar terms to Sir Philip Woodfield, though less formally.

5. Although the timing of the proposed meeting between Mr Prior and Mr Barry is rather sooner than we would have wished, the Irish have made it clear that they envisage no more than a preliminary and informal discussion and do not intend to get into substance. They have also stressed that they are seeking a 'steady and deliberate' approach to the restoration of relations. This is consistent with the view expressed at my meeting that Dr FitzGerald probably recognises that it would be unrealistic for him to look for any significant fresh movement from London in advance of a British General Election.

6. He is nevertheless likely before long to seek a bilateral meeting with you. He might well do this at the March meeting of the European Council, if not before. You told me that you would not wish to meet him before then, but might be prepared to meet him then; if he then proposed a Summit meeting in London or Dublin, you were likely to say that your schedule was very full, and you could not see any early opening for such a meeting. If Mr Pym meets Mr Barry on 24 or 25 January, Mr Barry may suggest a meeting between you and Dr FitzGerald in the margins of the European Council in March; Mr Pym will need to know how you would like him to respond. We think that it would in any case be unwise to give a negative answer to such an approach before St Patrick's Day, for the reasons given in paragraph 2 above.

7. Looking ahead to the question of contacts at junior Ministerial and official level, routine meetings on practical questions (nominally within the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council (AIIC)) have continued to take place in recent months, and we propose that the policy should be business as usual in this regard. It is possible that Mr Nally may approach me to suggest either an informal meeting or a meeting of the Steering Committee of the AIIC (which has not met since January of last year). I have no indication that he intends to do this. If he does, I shall consult you before making any commitment. But my present inclination is to think that, if our general position is to be as suggested in this minute, we should fall in with an Irish request if one is made. Meanwhile officials will continue their examination, on a strictly in-house and contingency basis, of the various ideas which have been put forward from the Irish side for developing the AIIC, including those aired by Dr FitzGerald during his election campaign.

8. I understand that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is in agreement with the general approach which I have described above, and has asked Sir Antony Acland to tell the Irish Ambassador that he will be happy to meet Mr Barry in Brussels as proposed. It has not been possible to put the point specifically to Mr Prior, who is on his way back to London, but before going on leave he too had endorsed the general approach. I am sure that he would be content

Prime Minister
Content for
Mr. Pym to
say that
you would
expect to
meet Dr.
FitzGerald in
the margins
of the European
Council?

A.J.C. 14
T.

For
mt



if Sir Antony Acland, when he sees the Irish Ambassador tomorrow, were to say that we would welcome, in principle, Mr Barry's suggestion for a meeting with Mr Prior.

9. I should be grateful to know whether you are content that we should be guided by the considerations I have set out in this minute in handling our relations with Dublin over the next few months.

10. Finally, I should add that security co-operation with the Irish, which was not affected when political relations deteriorated, remain satisfactory.

11. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State for Defence.

R.T.A.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

13 January 1983