

do not ^{am very} ^{sure} ^{we} ^{can} ^{take} ^{this} ^{matter} ^{much} ^{further} ^{not} ⁴⁵

Prime Minister



PM/84/164

PRIME MINISTER

Agree:

Yes (i) position papers to be prepared by UK and not exchanged with Irish.

On what ^{is} ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{minutes}? (ii) Giff and DH to provide day-by-day political direction to RTA's group;

We need our own ^{talks} ^{Irish} ^{Committee} (see para. 6)? (iii) establish a wider Ministerial Anglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

CDD 23X

1. I have seen Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 18 October reporting on the latest round of exploratory talks with the Irish. I have also seen his minute of 17 October recommending a widening of the circle of those involved, to which you have agreed; the recent report from H M Ambassador at Dublin on his conversation with the Taoiseach last week; and your own comments on the present state of play contained in Mr Powell's letter of 19 October to the Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and in his minute of 20 October to Sir Robert Armstrong.

2. There has been a marked increase of realism and lowering of expectations on the Irish side since your conversation with the Taoiseach on 3 September, when you made it clear to him that joint authority was not on offer and that what we were contemplating was limited to institutionalised consultation. The latest round of talks however illustrates the complexities and far-reaching consequences of introducing such arrangements, especially in the light of the Irish Government's anxiety to be able to present them to their constituencies North as well as South of the border as giving Dublin an effective say in important aspects of the government of the Province. This anxiety is understandable given the magnitude in Irish domestic terms of what Dr FitzGerald will be asking from his

/own



own electorate if he seeks to amend the Irish Constitution by referendum (as we have in effect been pressing him to do). But it gives us a very difficult hand to play with the Unionists. Dr FitzGerald's desire to move faster than we consider either wise or practicable, as manifested in his conversation with Mr Goodison, is an added complication.

3. I nevertheless continue to believe that the process we are engaged on represents the least unpromising way forward on the Northern Ireland question. An understanding with the Irish Government which removed or shelved the territorial issue for the foreseeable future, obliged the Southern Irish to accept a share of responsibility for security in the North and modified the existing institutions of the Province in ways which enabled the minority to identify with them would be a great prize - always provided that it could be attained without alienating the Unionists to the point of no return.

4. I agree with Sir Robert Armstrong's view that the exploratory talks have reached a stage where further substantive progress is dependent on a political input.

Your meeting with the Taoiseach in mid-November will provide the opportunity for another frank discussion with him both of the problems and of the prospects for progress. Until that has taken place, we cannot judge where the Irish bottom line may lie nor will they come to terms with the equally real constraints on us.

5. It could be helpful in focussing discussion at your meeting with the Taoiseach if officials were to prepare a clear statement of the positions reached by both sides in the exploratory talks, setting out the extent of the provisionally agreed common ground and the differences both of substance and presentation which remain.

/Sir



Sir Robert Armstrong reports that the Irish have agreed to co-operate in producing such a paper. But there are evident dangers in agreeing or exchanging papers with the Irish at this exploratory stage, when we must be able truthfully to deny that any commitments of any kind have been entered into. For this reason, I am inclined to think that any working paper designed to help us judge just how real the apparent areas of agreement are and how big are the gaps which remain should be prepared only by one side (our own) - but after consultation with the Irish. The Irish might of course want to prepare a parallel paper for their own use, which they might discuss with us; and presumably their paper would in practice cover substantially the same ground as ours. But we would still be in a position to make it clear publicly that there was no joint or agreed paper, and that no paper or papers had been exchanged. I think it is very important that whatever paper we prepare on our side should clearly state its conditional character, and that it should be carefully scrutinised and approved by Ministers before it is used as a basis for discussion with the Irish.

6. Indeed it seems to me that we have reached a point where we require closer and more systematic political scrutiny of these exchanges than has been possible up to now. I therefore welcome your decision to hold a meeting to discuss the issues further with colleagues before the next round of talks between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr Nally. Meanwhile I should like to suggest that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I should assume joint responsibility for providing day to day political guidance to Sir Robert Armstrong's official group; and you might like to consider establishing a small committee of Ministers under your chairmanship (on the lines of ODK) to which we could report. You

/have

SECRET AND PERSONAL



have already agreed to Sir Robert Armstrong's suggestion for bringing in the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General: and I think it would be helpful to include the Lord President, the Lord Privy Seal and perhaps the Secretary of State for Defence.

7. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'G. Howe', written in a cursive style.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

23 October 1984

SECRET AND PERSONAL