

OVO, CP O/R to note

Prime Minister 21
The Irish still

Ref. A084/3396

MR POWELL

(d/v)

The talks with the political parties have been unrealistic not- proceeding? no expectations.

EDP 23/12.

In PAA's box

and 19/12

attached

I enclose a minute to the Prime Minister reporting a meeting on 17 December of the Armstrong-Nally Group.

2. Officials are now in the process of preparing further submissions to Ministers, in the light of the Chequers Summit and its aftermath, your minute of 12 December and this latest meeting of the Armstrong-Nally Group, with a view to enabling the Prime Minister to discuss the whole question further with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary gets back from his overseas tour in the middle of January.

3. I am sending copies of this minute and the enclosure to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

18 December 1984

This whole minute shows that the Irish want more than we can give and always will. I doubt whether we shall find a way forward no.



Ref. A084/3397

PRIME MINISTER

Anglo-Irish Relations

Mr Nally and Mr Lillis came to London on Monday 17 December for a further round of Armstrong-Nally discussions. They were accompanied by Mr Sean Donlon, Permanent Secretary at the Department of External Affairs, and Mr Noel Dorr, the Irish Ambassador in London. Mr Goodall and I were accompanied by Mr Andrew, Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Office, and by Mr Alan Goodison, the British Ambassador in Dublin.

2. I had explained in advance, and I repeated at the outset of the meeting, that I had no fresh instructions from Ministers since the Chequers Summit meeting. In the circumstances the purpose of the present meeting had inevitably to be exploratory and tentative. It had been agreed at Chequers that discussions should continue: the meeting would enable us to take stock of developments since the Chequers Summit and their implications for our discussions, and to consider how best to proceed.

3. On the Irish side, Mr Nally agreed that discussions at this stage would have to be exploratory and tentative.

4. All of the Irish participants emphasised the profound personal and political setback to the Taoiseach and his policies as a result of the aftermath of the Chequers Summit. The Summit itself had gone well, and, if it had stopped at the communique, there would have been no problem. The problem was what the Irish press had made of your press conference, and the reaction to the subsequent press conference by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. They fixed on two particular consequences of these events:



- (a) What had happened had killed any prospect of bipartisanship in Ireland on the issue of Northern Ireland. Until then the Taoiseach had hoped that the Opposition would at least lie low. The attacks which Mr Haughey had made on him, and the attacks which he had been obliged to make on Mr Haughey in reply, had ensured that bipartisanship on this issue was dead.
- (b) The effect of the aftermath of the Chequers Summit, and particularly of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's statement that there could be no executive role for the Irish Government in Northern Ireland, had been to highlight the inadequacy, in Irish eyes, of arrangements which gave the Irish Government a purely consultative role in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Thus public attention had been drawn to the most sensitive and difficult issue arising from the previous discussions, and that would inevitably affect their approach to the issue in future.

5. So there was no disposition to conceal the fact that the aftermath of the Chequers Summit had made more difficult the discussions to the continuance of which the Summit had agreed. But Mr Nally said, making it clear that he was speaking on the Taoiseach's instructions, that the Taoiseach was still committed to a broad and balanced set of measures which would include amendment of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. He thought that such an amendment was necessary to give much-needed durability (he even used the word "finality") to whatever emerged from the discussions. He and his colleagues made it clear that the Taoiseach had by no means given up hope of winning a referendum on this matter, if the balance in the rest of the measures was right.

6. Mr Andrew, developing the ideas put forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at Chequers for a Joint



Security Commission which would cover security in the widest sense and also legal matters, such as mixed courts and harmonisation of the criminal law, suggested that, if those matters were covered by a joint body of some kind, it was difficult to see what else there could be which could be the subject of separate consultative arrangements. The Irish side said that a joint body concentrated primarily on security matters would create an impossible situation for the Taoiseach: it would be very difficult for him to agree to such a proposal. He would be accused of putting the Irish Government in to "do the dirty work" for the British on security matters, without any corresponding balance of advantage for the nationalists. A Joint Security Commission would need to be balanced by some kind of joint arrangement in the "political" field.

7. We spent a certain amount of time discussing the possible nature of a relationship with the Irish Government on political matters. The Irish side suggested that our concept of "joint sovereignty" or "joint authority" was too pure: we appeared to be asserting that anything which implied a requirement to agree something with the Irish Government was a derogation from or a dilution of sovereignty. They hinted that Her Majesty's Government's policies on Gibraltar and Hong Kong suggested a more flexible attitude to sovereignty than that. They argued that it should be possible to find ways in which the British Government retained unquestioned sovereignty and authority in Northern Ireland while still giving the Irish Government a degree of effective say in some at least of the decisions that were reached.

8. At one moment it was suggested that it might be possible to make some decisions - for instance about appointments to particularly sensitive bodies - subject to agreement between the two Governments, while other decisions were simply left as matters for consultation. On reflection the Irish side came away from that idea. I reminded the Irish side that you had



said at Chequers that the facts of life were such that, if the Irish Government was given a right of consultation, that consultation would inevitably be genuine: we should not just be able to sweep the Irish point of view on one side, even if we wanted to. They accepted that, but argued that the problem was to find some way of demonstrating it. We were left with the rather vague idea that it should be possible to find some sort of institution or process, which would safeguard ultimate British sovereignty but would ensure that the Irish Government was, and was seen to be, fully and effectively consulted.

9. I emphasised again that I had no instructions or mandate from Ministers on this matter. It did not seem to me that Ministers would be able to accept something which gave the Irish Government an absolute right of veto where the right of consultation was conceded. This was not so much a matter of philosophy as of acceptability: the unionists would be quick to represent any such concession of a right of veto as "letting the Irish Government in by the back door". I suggested and they agreed that we were most likely to make progress if we got away from generalities and thought in specific and detailed terms of processes. I said that we were not ready to embark on that course, and I should have to seek fresh instructions from Ministers before we could do so.

10. Looking forward to the future, I said that I thought that both sides had always recognised that the discussions would become more complicated and more difficult, the further down the road we got. Our discussions had sprung from a sense shared by you and the Taoiseach that it was not possible to go on doing nothing. If something on the lines suggested by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland did not meet the Irish requirement, then Ministers faced an unpalatable choice: was it better to look for something "deeper" on the lines of the set of measures which we had been discussing before the Chequers Summit, or was it better to do nothing? It might be that



✓ Ministers would decide to do nothing, because it proved to be less difficult than doing something. I thought that it still remained your view that it was difficult to go on doing nothing. The Irish side stressed with considerable emphasis that the Taoiseach regarded doing nothing as very dangerous indeed: in the wake of the aftermath of the Chequers Summit and the "triumphalist" reaction of the unionists, the mood among nationalists in Northern Ireland and in the Republic had deteriorated, and, if nothing was done, the situation would become increasingly favourable to "the men of violence" in Northern Ireland, and in the Republic of Ireland as well. I suggested that the problem was to find some set of measures which the unionists would not regard as threatening but which would represent to the nationalists a real assurance that they could have confidence in the institutions and process of government in Northern Ireland as taking due account of their identity and interests.

11. We recalled that the Chequers communique committed you and the Taoiseach to another Summit in the early months of 1985. I suggested that we could probably not have another Summit simply "to report progress". If you and the Taoiseach were to meet again in this sort of timescale, it must be with an assurance of a positive outcome. It would be better to postpone the Summit until after the May elections in Northern Ireland, rather than have another Summit with an inconclusive or (still worse) negative outcome. The Irish side reluctantly accepted the logic of that view: what the Taoiseach wants and needs is an early and (in his terms) successful Summit.

12. I said that on the British side we should need to seek further instructions from Ministers before taking discussions to the next stage. We should now do this, in the hope of being able to have a further meeting of the Armstrong-Nally Group towards the end of January: we could not move faster than that, because you were now going to Peking and early in the New Year



the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary would be out of the country until 14 January. We should collect our thoughts, reflecting on the Chequers Summit and its aftermath and on the discussions at this meeting, and seek instructions from Ministers on the basis of which we would hope to have a further discussion in the Armstrong-Nally Group in five or six weeks' time.

13. The Irish side were content with this. They emphasised that they would like to consider what the arrangements would be both if agreement was reached on a measure of devolved government in Northern Ireland and if there was no such agreement and no devolution.

14. I am sending copies of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R.A.' with a stylized flourish.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

18 December 1984