

Peter Utley's
memorandum

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cc MA.

May 28, 1984.

Dear Michael,

Last Friday I had what was for me a very valuable conversation with Jim Prior. We found ourselves in a quite remarkable measure of agreement about Ulster, and he suggested that I should make a memo of the conversation and send it to you

He also suggested that I should see the Prime Minister to talk about these very general ideas. Thus encouraged, I write to ask whether she would be willing to have such a conversation. Obviously, I would come whenever she wanted me.

Yours ever,

Peter. [UTLEY]

Memo of a conversation with Jim Prior

1. However intrinsically unsatisfactory the Forum Report may be, HMG must make some constructive response to it reasonably soon if there is not to be a deterioration in Anglo-Irish relations which would almost certainly produce bad effects on security in the North.

2. On the other hand, a grand and elaborate initiative launched with too much drama would be foredoomed. In particular, Dublin's idea of a round table conference of all the parties concerned would be fatal.

3. It must be remembered that the Fitzgerald Government, the unionists and the SDLP are all so politically placed that they cannot afford to express themselves as wholly satisfied with any agreement which may be reached. The aim therefore, is not glorious harmony, but acquiescence.

4. From HMG's point of view the only concrete advantage to be gained from agreement with Dublin is an improvement in security co-operation plus the presentation of a common front against the IRA in a manner sufficiently dramatic to impress both that organization and its potential sympathizers abroad. This, however, is vastly worth having.

5. However, it is not worth having at the cost of accepting any diminution of Westminster's sovereignty over Ulster, which would produce Protestant violence. This, therefore, is the principle on which HMG cannot compromise or be suspected of compromising.
6. Without any such compromise the two Governments could create a Security Commission. Its machinery could include regular and frequent meetings between the heads of the two police forces and the military authorities on both sides of the Border; the Republic would be asked to abandon its objection to direct contact between the armies.
7. However illogically, Dublin would regard the establishment of such a Commission as a "concession to Britain" requiring some reciprocal concession from us. The most obvious form for the quid pro quo would be a further development of the Anglo-Irish inter-Governmental Council—to include regular summit meetings with no bar on the discussion of anything of common interest, and the creation of new functional institutions to promote inter-Governmental co-operation on practical matters. The trouble is, of course, that there are very few obstacles to inter-Governmental co-operation at the moment, but it might be prudent

even to create a few unnecessary institutions. The importance of the cosmetic aspects of this exercise should not be underrated.

8. Even this would not be enough to satisfy Dr Fitzgerald's requirements, which are dictated by domestic politics. HMG should therefore consider setting up an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Consultative Assembly, recruited from the two Parliaments but also open to representatives from any Assembly which may exist in Northern Ireland. This body would be essentially "unboycottable", since attendance would be purely voluntary. Its terms of reference could be so constructed (one hopes) as to prevent it from simply being a focus for Catholic discontent in Ulster.
9. So far all this would horrify the Unionists, and grave trouble would arise if they were not compensated by some equally impressive concession. The obvious concession is a return of local government powers to the Province. Their most recent proposals for this are very hopeful indeed, and show a much greater appreciation than ever before of the fears of the minority.
10. The SDLP, though it might be gratified by the development of the "Irish dimension" sketched above, would not be so happy about the return of

local government powers. It would demand something closer to legislative devolution with built-in "power-sharing". There is some scope for manoeuvre even here: it would be possible to conceive of an Assembly which had administrative as well as purely local government powers, that is to say which controlled subordinate legislation in the hands of Ministers of the Crown. I have in mind something roughly approximating to the role designed for the Welsh Assembly under the abortive Devolution Bill. Anyway, it would not, I imagine, be difficult to think of a formula which would amount to "local government plus". This is an area worth investigating, and I think the man who has thought most about it is Patrick Macrory.

11.

What we both think essential is that a speech should be made by the Prime Minister by the end of June (maybe in the Commons) which would define in broad but very clear terms the Government's view of where we go from here. After that, it would be a matter for individual and private discussions between the two Governments and between HMG and the various parties in Northern Ireland: no general conference please!

T.E.U.