

SECRET AND PERSONAL



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be SWRC 15

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Anglo-Irish Relations : Northern Ireland

Thank you for your minute of 5 June. The Prime Minister has noted that a note is being prepared on the proposal of the Irish Foreign Minister to amend, as part of a package, Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution and will be willing, when the paper is ready, to discuss it with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Northern Ireland Secretary.

I am copying this minute to Mr. Appleyard and Mr. Lyon.

A. J. COLES

6 June 1984

SECRET AND PERSONAL

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Prime Minister

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Ref. A084/1622

PRIME MINISTER

*mt*

To note that Sir Robert Armstrong is preparing a note on Mr. Barry's suggestion of amending the Constitution, so that you can discuss with the Foreign Secretary and Northern Ireland Secretary how this affects the options you have asked officials to prepare.

Anglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

*with A/C?*

Following your meeting with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 24 May, officials are examining the elements identified in that discussion with a view to presenting you with a range of possible options for further consideration (paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Cabinet Office Note for the Record of 29 May). Meanwhile both the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have seen the Irish Foreign Minister, Mr Barry; and you will have seen from Mr Goodall's minute of 31 May to Mr Coles that following those contacts the Taoiseach has notified us through Mr Barry that the Irish Government are now prepared, as part of a package containing an unspecified but substantial political quid pro quo from the British side, to seek to amend Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution.

*FERB*  
*S.G.*

2. This move is consistent with what has all along been the Taoiseach's personal view, and it was foreshadowed in the talks with the Taoiseach and others which Dr Brian Mawhinney MP recorded in the enclosures to his letter to you of 24 May. Nevertheless, it is surprising that it should have been made so soon after Mr Nally presented us with proposals on the Irish Government's behalf (to which we have not yet given a formal response) which appeared to exclude it. It is also significant that Mr Barry, who is said to be on the "green" wing of Fine Gael, and who up to now has been openly sceptical of the feasibility of such an offer in domestic political terms, should have associated himself directly with it. It seems likely that the decisive factors for the Irish have been their recognition of the magnitude of what they are asking of us in political terms with their proposals on joint authority, and the emphasis we have put on constitutional amendment as the touchstone for judging the

plausibility of any commitment by the Republic to accept the Union. The fact that Mr John Hume has apparently promised his support may well have been decisive in persuading Mr Barry of its political feasibility.

3. The offer is of course still surrounded by question marks. It is clear that the Irish will hope to extract a high political price for it. We do not know what the terms of any proposed amendments might be, and might find that they were almost as objectionable as the present Articles; and, as Mr Barry himself acknowledged, there can still be no guarantee that Dr FitzGerald's Government, even with SDLP support, would be successful in carrying the referendum which would be necessary to put the changes into effect. But the fact remains that the Irish have made an important move, and have done so in response to what they believe to be a major British concern. In principle, it could remove what has hitherto been an important plank in the Unionist claim that any arrangements for associating Dublin with the administration of Northern Ireland would be a concession to a direct territorial claim on the Province. If the Irish move becomes public knowledge, however conditional and imprecise it may be, it is bound to have a considerable impact on the climate in which Parliament and public opinion here will examine any proposals which may be brought forward, either from the Irish side or our own, for a new initiative on Northern Ireland. It therefore constitutes a significant change in the background against which we have so far been considering the Nally proposals.

4. I think that it would be useful to have an early discussion with the two Secretaries of State of the implications of this development for the range of options which officials have been instructed to prepare. I have arranged for a paper to be prepared urgently, which I hope will serve as a basis for discussion and will in particular enable you and your colleagues to consider whether there is a means of giving the Irish Government some measure of association with the administration

of Northern Ireland at the political level in a way which would go some distance to meet Irish aspirations but would not compromise British sovereignty and might just be saleable to the Unionists.

5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Antony Acland, Mr Robert Andrew, Sir Philip Woodfield and Mr David Goodall.

RTA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

5 June 1984

CONQUEROR