



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

29 August 1984

Thank you for your letter PUS/L/961 of 10 August about the line which your Department proposes to take about the Northern Ireland Secretary's visit to Mr Barry in Dublin on 31 August.

The Prime Minister has now seen your letter and agrees the line.

I am sending copies of this letter to Graham Sandiford (Northern Ireland Office), Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office) and David Goodall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

C D Powell

R J Andrew, Esq., CB
Northern Ireland Office

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Permanent Under Secretary
R J Andrew CB

PUS/L/961

Charles Powell Esq
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London

Prime Minister
Agree proposed press line
on Mr. Prior's visit to
Dublin?
CDP
20/8.
MS

10 August 1984

Dear Charles,

I understand from Robert Armstrong that the Prime Minister would like to see the terms of the line we propose to take about the Secretary of State's visit to Mr Barry in Dublin on 31 August.

As in the case of previous meetings between the two Ministers, this one would not be announced beforehand. When it has taken place we would intend issuing a very brief non-committal statement on the same lines as on earlier occasions. This would say no more than that the Ministers met in Dublin on 31 August and that matters of common interest were discussed. The Irish have in the past kept to agreements not to speculate or comment on what was said at meetings between Mr Prior and Mr Barry.

In this case there is bound to be press speculation about the meeting and its timing. Whatever we say or do not say, it will no doubt be interpreted as a farewell visit. Bearing in mind Mr Prior's reference in his speech in the debate on the Forum Report to talks with the Irish Government, some commentators will probably see it as heralding a fresh initiative, to be followed up at the Prime Minister's meeting with the Taoiseach on 3 September.

We would want to avoid both implications, particularly the latter. Accordingly, we propose to brief press officers to say:

- i) the meeting was the 8th such meeting between Mr Prior and Mr Barry;
- ii) it was entirely informal and there was no set agenda;
- iii) a wide range of subjects was discussed; but, in common with all previous such meetings, we and the Irish have agreed that it would not be helpful to list them;
- iv) no significance should be read into the timing of the visit; it came at the end of the holiday

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period when it would be natural for Mr Prior and Mr Barry to take stock. (Mr Prior's personal position is of course well known in Dublin and since Mr Prior and Mr Barry have established a personal rapport it would not be surprising if some reference was made to it).

- v) The meeting was in no way related to the European Community meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, due to take place on 3 September. It remains the case, as mentioned by Mr Prior in the Forum Debate on 2 July, that a meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on Anglo-Irish matters is expected to take place before the end of the year.
- vi) Mr Prior made it plain in the debate on 2 July that there would be talks with the Irish Government about Northern Ireland. But this particular meeting did not herald any dramatic new development in Anglo-Irish relations following the Forum Report; it was part of what has become a regular series of informal meetings. It was a useful and friendly occasion.

If the Prime Minister is content, we will go ahead with the arrangements for the meeting on this basis. We will agree with the Irish that no announcement is to be made about the meeting other than the usual non-committal statement after it has taken place; and we will brief our press officers to handle questions on the lines indicated above.

Noted
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Perhaps I might add that following a request from David Barclay I have consulted Mr Prior about attendance at the Prime Minister's meeting with the Taoiseach on 3 September. He agrees that to avoid speculation about the nature of the meeting it would be better if he were not present. He will, of course, report to the Prime Minister anything of significance which emerges from his visit to Dublin.

I am copying this to Robert Armstrong and to David Goodall at the FCO.

Yours ans.

R J ANDREW



Ireland ditto P+17