

SUBJECT

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Matter
cc Ireland: Pt 10: bit
Gen PM: Pt 2: North (Brill)
Env PM: Pt 11: Budget
(Extracts)
France: Oct 79: Anglo-French
Relations

Note of a discussion held in 10 Downing Street on Friday 11 September 1981 at 0945 hours

Present: Prime Minister
Mr. Whitmore

President Mitterrand
M. Vedrine

Northern Ireland

The Prime Minister said that she wished to thank President Mitterrand for not raising the question of Northern Ireland with the British Government or taking any other action as a result of the representations which had been made to him. She would like to explain the Northern Ireland situation to him which she believed was not widely understood in France. Northern Ireland was a divided country. Two-thirds of the population were Protestant and gave their allegiance to the United Kingdom: they, the Unionists, wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. The minority were Roman Catholic and most, though not all, of them seemed to have some affinity with the Republic of Ireland. Both communities had para-military terrorist groups, the UDA and the IRA. Though the Protestant terrorists had committed terrible crimes in the past, at the moment they were quiescent. Terrorism in Northern Ireland at present was coming from the IRA. When terrorists were caught, they were treated like ordinary criminals and were tried and convicted in the courts of Northern Ireland. All the prisoners in the Maze, whether Catholic or Protestant, had been sentenced by courts of law: they were not interned without trial. The British Government saw them as ordinary criminals who had put innocent lives in danger in pursuit of their own interests.

/Both the majority

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Both the majority and minority communities in Northern Ireland were represented in the British Parliament, and in the most recent by-election in the Province a representative of the hunger strikers had won a seat in Parliament. The problem was that the majority wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, whereas the minority preferred to be united with the Republic. It was part of the law of the United Kingdom that there could be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland except with the consent of the majority of the people of the Province. Opinion was tested from time to time by a Border poll. The last had been in 1973 and this had resulted in an overwhelming vote in favour of staying in the United Kingdom. The minority resented this situation, and such was the hostility between the two communities that rather than try to change opinion by persuasion, some members of the minority had resorted to the use of violence as the instrument of change. Successive British Governments had continually made efforts to reconcile the two communities. Various attempts had been made to restore to Northern Ireland responsibility for taking local decisions. But these had all been unsuccessful. The Protestants maintained that democracy meant majority rule and they could not accept that the minority should have any part in government. The minority, on the other hand, argued that since they could not become the majority in the foreseeable future, there should be some kind of arrangement for sharing power. The British Government's latest attempt to bring the two sides together had taken the form of proposing that there should be a council made up of representatives of all sections of the community in Northern Ireland whose role would be to advise the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but it had proved impossible to obtain agreement even on this modest measure.

The Prime Minister went on to say that the Government would dearly like to see an end to the hunger strike. It was a complete waste of young lives. The Maze was a very modern prison. Conditions there were amongst the best and most liberal in the world: even so we were constantly trying to improve them. The demands of the

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protesting prisoners amounted to a demand for prisoner of war status. But they were criminals and not prisoners of war. The Government and its representatives had to keep control of the prison and its régime, and it could therefore not grant the demands of the prisoners. There were signs that there might be a split in the IRA about the future of the hunger strike. Some of its members wanted to go on, while others appeared to want to see the hunger strike stopped. In the last week the families of the two hunger strikers closest to death had asked the authorities for medical help to save the lives of their relatives. The unwillingness of the families to see their husbands and sons die perhaps offered the best hope of bringing the hunger strike to an end.

British troops were in Northern Ireland to protect all members of the community from terrorism: indeed, they were first used on the streets of the Province to safeguard the minority community who undoubtedly at that time were not treated properly by the majority, though they now had equal rights. Nothing would please her more than to bring the two communities together, to restore normal life in Northern Ireland and to withdraw the British Army. But so far we had not found the way to do this. Recently we had tried to improve matters by practising greater practical cooperation across the Border between the Republic and Northern Ireland. The hope was that if the people of Northern Ireland and the people of the Republic lived more closely together, this might break down the hostility between the two communities within Northern Ireland. In the same context it was worth remarking that the British Government had had excellent cross-Border cooperation on security both from Mr. Haughey and now from Dr. Fitzgerald. The British Government continued to say constantly to the terrorists that the whole armoury of democracy was open to them in order to try to persuade the people of Northern Ireland that there should be a change in the constitutional status of the Province. But this approach had not been successful yet.

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The Prime Minister repeated that she was very grateful to President Mitterrand for resisting the blandishments of those who wanted him to make representations about Northern Ireland. She hoped that her explanation had been of some help to him. The situation was very difficult, but the difficulties were not of the British Government's making.

President Mitterrand said that he was grateful to the Prime Minister for taking the initiative in raising the matter with him. He had had many petitions on the subject but he had never personally received any delegations making representations. The matter raised a great deal of emotion in various quarters in France, both popular and intellectual. But he had not raised the question of Northern Ireland with her before because he regarded it as a matter which related to British sovereignty. He had confidence in the leadership and the people of the United Kingdom and respected their decisions in this area. He would not like to see Anglo/French relations undermined by a French intervention in what he considered to be an internal problem of the United Kingdom. But it was difficult to avoid pressure from journalists, intellectuals and other people who formed public opinion in France. The fact that young people were dying by their own wish and were sacrificing themselves in prison added a new dimension to the problem. It exaggerated the issues and increased antagonism. The result was that the kind of arguments advanced by the Prime Minister were pushed on one side, and the fact of British sovereignty was lost in a cloud of emotional reaction. The matter then went beyond the frontiers of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and had an impact on the world in which we lived. He repeated that since this was a question of British sovereignty, it was the Prime Minister's judgement which mattered and he wanted to make it clear that he would not substitute himself in place of her judgement and the judgement of a neighbouring country and friend of France. Even so he would like to ask whether there were ways of softening the problem. Was the IRA's strategy evolving as one death succeeded

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another? It was clearly desirable to try to stop the growth of international opinion on this matter, but he saw the difficulty of doing this since the problem was almost insoluble. The growth of feeling and passion escaped treatment by reason. He was grateful to the Prime Minister for talking to him about Northern Ireland. If the press asked whether he and the Prime Minister had discussed Northern Ireland, he thought that it would be good because of its effect on international opinion that they should say that they had talked about the matter but he would go on to say that the details of their discussion were confidential and he regarded the question as a matter of British sovereignty.

The Prime Minister said that this would be a very helpful response and she would add that she had taken the initiative and had explained the Northern Ireland situation to him.

Cancun

The Prime Minister said that she thought that it would be helpful if they had a word about the forthcoming meeting at Cancun. She did not want to see the hopes of the LDC's raised too high before the meeting and then disappointed by the outcome. That would mean that the efforts which the West were making would not get the recognition they deserved. That would be a bad result.

President Mitterrand said that he thought that they could deal with the matter by sticking to figures. The French Government at present gave 0.3% of their GNP in bilateral and multilateral aid. The figure of 0.6% of GNP which was sometimes quoted for French aid was misleading because half of it went to France's overseas departments and territories. France had now decided to increase its bilateral and multilateral aid to 0.7% of GNP by 1986/87. The United Nation's Conference on the LDC's which was going on now in Paris had fixed a figure of 0.15% as the amount of aid to be given to the least developed countries. This would double the

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amount of aid going to the least developed countries compared with the rest of the Third World. France thought that this was a fair target, though he did not think that the figure should be regarded as a fixed number. Rather it was something to be aimed for - an indicative value but not an obligatory figure. It would be more difficult for France to move in this direction than for the UK. The UK was already meeting this target but France was behind.

The Prime Minister said that the UK and the FRG had initially opposed this proposal because they did not want to set a new target within the overall pattern. But she had no objection to it. She thought it reasonable to give a proportion of overseas aid to the very worst off countries. The UK would now accept the target, and she believed that the FRG would do the same.

President Mitterrand added that it appeared from all the aid figures which he had seen that the UK was the most generous donor by far. Britain was already meeting the target, and so there should be no budgetary problems for her in adopting the figure of 0.15% of GNP. He agreed that the Germans would now allow themselves to be convinced of the desirability of moving towards this objective, provided it was not treated as a rigid target.

The Prime Minister said that she was not sure how Mexico would arrange the agenda for Cancun. One view was that the agenda should be unstructured and that the meeting should proceed by general discussion. The opposite view was that the agenda should be specific and detailed. She did not want the LDC's to make demands on the West which we could not meet and then for us all to turn on the OPEC countries and demand that they produced more aid. She hoped that the meeting would finish on a constructive and understanding note, though this was not an easy objective in view of the excessive hopes which had already been raised.

President Mitterrand said that whatever the agenda, nothing would stop fundamental questions being raised and nothing would prevent

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the LDC's making speeches. There would be a host of demands, and so it would be wise for the West to have two or three arguments ready which would help to reduce the impact of the demands on us. He had certain ideas in this respect.

President Mitterrand continued that a theoretical discussion about the global negotiations had already been started. Much of this discussion turned on language and vocabulary, and these counted for much since they were part of propaganda. The Third World countries would want to discuss global negotiations as a whole. Until recently, however, the United States had been afraid of engaging in a too wide-ranging discussion and were generally opposed to talking about global negotiations. But the industrial countries at Cancun would have to talk about global negotiations. This did not matter, for the meeting lasted only two days, the Third World would talk and there would be no time for replies. It would not be wise to refuse a general discussion or to precipitate a clash at Cancun on this subject. We should avoid making promises, especially promises we could not keep. We should listen to the many Third World countries who would want to express their point of view and by listening to them we would calm them down.

There were one or two areas where we might be able to orientate positively the demands of the Third World. One example was the energy affiliate of the World Bank. This was an important proposal for the Third World, especially for the non oil producers. We must avoid substituting a new organisation for the World Bank or shaking up the World Bank in a way which reduced its effectiveness. But the Third World expected some kind of energy agency to be established in the World Bank. He had discussed this with Mr. Clausen earlier in the week. He was not much in favour of an energy affiliate but preferred to strengthen international arrangements in the field of energy policy by having improved guarantees and loans. If the UK, FRG and France could accept this approach, we should be able to respond positively and not defensively to the demands of the Third World and to avoid a disagreeable clash with them.

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The Prime Minister said that much depended on the oil-rich countries. Were they prepared to play a bigger part in world institutions in return for making more of their resources available?

President Mitterrand said it would be better if the debate was turned aside and the Third World was led to point the finger at the oil producers rather than at the West. We must try to get the OPEC countries to the front of the stage.

The Prime Minister agreed that OPEC had made the problems of the Third World much worse and that this must be made clear publicly.

President Mitterrand said that when making these remarks, he had forgotten to point out that the UK was an oil producing country. The Prime Minister said that we were not producing as much as we would like. Moreover, it had been one of the conditions of the development of the North Sea, that our oil prices followed world prices. President Mitterrand said that he did not want to pursue this now. He might want to talk about oil policy one day, but it was not an immediate concern.

European Community Matters

President Mitterrand said that yesterday they had talked about ways of giving the European Community a new thrust forward. He had been reflecting further on how to give substance to such a development, and one idea was that the Community should borrow on the international markets in the context of policies on energy saving, coal exploitation and new technologies. Such borrowings might also be important to us in steel and textiles, where British and French interests were similar. The Community had a level of credit vis-a-vis the lending countries which the individual member countries did not have, and we should take advantage of this. He envisaged the borrowing being done through the EIB. A development on these lines would be a powerful element in giving the Community

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a fresh impetus. He would like to see British and French Finance Ministers discuss this idea.

The Prime Minister agreed.

The meeting concluded at 1055 hours.

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11 September 1981

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