



Prime Minister ³⁹

Ref. A084/2279

MR POWELL

This shows Dr. FitzGerald wildly over-optimistic. I am beginning to

The Prime Minister will wish to see the attached record of a conversation which Mr Goodison, our Ambassador in Dublin, had with the Taoiseach the other day, as an indication of the pressures which the Irish Government would exert on us to move faster with the process of discussions which I have been having with Mr Nally.

mm

Think that we may need a message from you to bring home to him that

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

18 October 1984

we are in a different world following the Brighton bomb, and must proceed more slowly.

CDF 19/X,

Sir R. Armstrong - to see

for next subject
← pm
Sir R. Armstrong
McClain
D

Mr Goodall

rec'd 18/10

SECRET AND PERSONAL

SECRET AND PERSONAL	
A	7895
17 OCT 1984	
FILING INSTRUCTIONS	
FILE No.

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS

1. When I called on the Taoiseach (about Remembrance Day) on 17 October he said that he had not yet had a full account of the Armstrong/Nally talks of 15/16 October. In particular, he had not seen Nally yet. He understood however that there were still some points of disagreement between us. He was concerned about this because of the urgency which he saw in getting on to the stage where he could set in motion a process leading to a referendum on the constitution. Did I really think that it would not be possible for him and the Prime Minister to reach final agreement on 19 November?

2. I confirmed that this was my view. I said that although they might possibly agree on further guidelines for the group there was no question about being anywhere near the drafting of an agreement as yet. There were still considerable divergences in our approach. The most we could hope for would be some kind of statement of principles.

3. He said that he regarded it as absolutely essential that HMG should be seen to be taking action on the ground in Northern Ireland, in such ways as restructuring the police force (an allusion which I did not take up), well before the local elections in Northern Ireland on 25 May. He did not attach credence to the stories which Sinn Fein were putting about that they would not make a big effort in these elections. I said that I thought it was possible that we could sign an agreement before May, for implementation subsequently thereafter. Could the elections not be fought on the issue of the agreement itself? He said he thought this would be disastrous. He was very anxious to get the Irish referendum through as quickly as possible after signature of the agreement because he envisaged serious danger of substantial terrorist activity in the Republic, both by Sinn Fein and by protestant paramilitaries in the interval between signature and implementation, in an effort to prevent the referendum succeeding. He was also concerned about the

requirement to ^{? debate} devote the budget at the end of January in the Dail. This was a constitutional requirement. He wanted to adopt the law which would provide for the calling of a referendum before then. The referendum itself would have to take place a month after such a law had been passed and this timetable would only just give time for the British to start putting the agreement into effect before the election campaign got under way.

4. I asked him what, then, would be his ideal date for the signature of an agreement. He replied that it would be the middle of December. I told him that I had no instructions, but my personal view was that this was quite impossible (I naturally had in mind the Secretary of State's view that we should not proceed too quickly). I said there were many outstanding points at issue, and when these have been resolved drafting would take time. I did not think it would be possible for us to have an agreement ready for signature before, say, the end of February. I admitted that Sir Robert Armstrong had said at one point that if a declaration of principles was to be made at his meeting with Mrs Thatcher we should have to proceed quite fast after that, but I did not suppose that Armstrong was thinking of anything earlier than the end of the winter.

5. Dr FitzGerald seemed really distressed by what I had to say. He said that nobody on the Irish side had said anything to suggest to him that our proceedings would take so long. He regarded it as absolutely vital that we should follow the kind of timetable he had outlined. I reiterated that I did not see how this could be done. I naturally promised to report the conversation at once.

6. We were alone. I have since informed Lillis briefly of this talk.

A C Goodison

Dictated by secure phone