



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

31 October 1984

Dear Graham,

Anglo-Irish Relations: North Ireland

The Prime Minister held a meeting at 10 Downing Street this afternoon with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Northern Ireland Secretary to discuss the forthcoming Anglo-Irish Summit. Sir Robert Armstrong, Mr. Robert Andrew, Mr. David Goodall and Mr. Bryan Cartledge were also present.

Armstrong/Nally Talks

The Prime Minister said that there could be no question of the Summit taking decisions on the issues raised in the Armstrong/Nally talks. The question was rather whether it would be best to draw a line under the talks at the Summit and in effect admit their failure; or take stock of the point reached and authorise further detailed discussions.

The Prime Minister said that there was a case for deciding to round off the talks at the Summit. The more one got into the detail, the greater the difficulties appeared. The element of reciprocity, on which the talks had originally been based, seemed to her to have faded. There was a risk that the result of the talks might simply be to step up violence rather than reduce it. The Unionists would think that the Government had betrayed them. At the least, they would fear salami tactics, with what was now proposed in terms of an Irish dimension only a first slice. Against this background it might be better to contemplate some more limited arrangements in the field of security co-operation and the criminal law. Or the idea of border adjustments could be looked at again.

The Northern Ireland Secretary said that it was clear that Irish Ministers were depressed by the progress of the talks so far, even to the point where the Taoiseach seemed to doubt the value of holding the Summit. His own view was that acceptable arrangements could possibly still be

achieved including a Joint Security Commission with an advisory role, an Irish resident (preferably called a Consul-General) in Belfast and institutionalised consultation over a defined and limited range of issues, in return for which the Irish Government would drop their territorial claim and the SDLP would co-operate over devolution. The best course would be to put squarely to the Taoiseach at the Summit the steps which HMG could accept and would be able to defend to the Unionists. If, as was likely, the Taoiseach was unable to accept our offer we should at least be better placed to go back to the moderate nationalists in the North, and make clear that far from rejecting the Irish dimension, we had been ready to go a long way to meet their concerns. This would be better than simply allowing the Armstrong/Nally talks to collapse.

The Foreign Secretary agreed with some of the anxieties which had been expressed about the direction in which the talks were leading. But he believed that the premise on which the Government had entered the talks, namely that we could not afford to do nothing, remained valid. There was no question of the Government being bombed into concessions. But nor should they be bombed out of a search for a settlement. The aim should be to continue the talks in slow tempo, and explore the practical issues in detail. The consequences of collapse of the talks would be serious for constitutional nationalists in the North and for Dr. FitzGerald's government in the Republic. Mr. Andrew added that if the Summit were cancelled the Unionists and the IRA would both believe that they had won. This would make it more difficult to make progress towards devolved local government with adequate safeguards for the minority.

Concluding this part of the discussion the Prime Minister noted that there was a wish to avoid the break-off of the Armstrong/Nally talks at the forthcoming Summit. We should therefore use the Summit to take stock and show willingness to continue detailed talks, while making clear that the positions already set out by the UK side represented the limit of what we could offer. It must also be made clear that an essential part of any eventual agreement was that the SDLP should accept devolved government with safeguards rather than insist on power sharing. If the Irish Government were unable to accept this outcome, the UK would at least have a defensible public position.

Draft Communique

A draft of possible conclusions from the Summit was circulated. The Prime Minister expressed some reservations about sections (iii) and (iv). It was agreed that the text would be discussed further.

Consultation with the parties in the North

The Northern Ireland Secretary reported that he had informed the Irish Foreign Minister that he would be holding a further round of discussions with the parties in the North. He had said that it was possible that some of the issues discussed in the Armstrong/Nally talks would come up but he would be careful not to reveal the existence of the talks themselves. Mr. Barry had raised no objection.

The Northern Ireland Secretary said that he believed that he could get through a further round of discussions with the parties in the North without great difficulty, given that there was no need to alert them to the likelihood of an agreement at the Summit.

Venue of the Anglo/Irish Summit

Sir Robert Armstrong said that the threat assessment which had been prepared for the various locations for the Summit in the Republic revealed a significant risk. In the light of this, it might be best to take up the Taoiseach's offer to come to the UK for the Summit. This advice was endorsed by the two Secretaries of State. The Prime Minister concluded that Sir Robert Armstrong should tell the Irish Government that she accepted the Taoiseach's offer and would wish to invite him to Chequers for the Summit.

I am sending copies of this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Sir Robert Armstrong, Mr. Robert Andrew, Sir Antony Acland and Mr. David Goodall.

Graham Sandiford, Esq.,  
Northern Ireland Office.

Yours sincerely,  
