

SUBJECT

SECRET AND PERSONAL



10 DOWNING STREET

3 December 1984

cc. IRELAND:
Meetings with
the Taoiseach
+ Master Set.
From the Private Secretary

file 16
a few / Cadock

MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE TAOISEACH IN
DUBLIN CASTLE ON 3 DECEMBER 1984 AT 1855 HOURS

During the afternoon session of the European Council, Mr. Nally (Irish Cabinet Secretary) approached us to say that the Taoiseach would like a bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss Northern Ireland on the morning of 4 December. On the Prime Minister's instructions, I subsequently told Mr. Nally that the Prime Minister had some misgivings about this. She thought that there was a risk of building up expectations in the press which could not be fulfilled; and that her preference would be to stick to the proposal for a meeting in the early months of next year. However, if the Taoiseach nonetheless believed that a meeting was important, she would readily agree. Mr. Nally consulted the Taoiseach and came back to say that, in his view, the press would be much more impressed by a failure to hold a meeting. In the light of this, a meeting was arranged immediately after the conclusion of the afternoon session of the European Council on 3 December.

The meeting began with some brief exchanges about progress in the European Council itself. The Taoiseach thought that a solution on wine was in sight but that integrated Mediterranean Programmes could prove very difficult. He did not discount the possibility that Papandreou would block enlargement unless he received satisfaction.

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Turning to Northern Ireland affairs, the Taoiseach explained the reasons why he thought it important that he and the Prime Minister should meet if only briefly. It would show that relations between them were carrying on normally. The Prime Minister agreed that it was important from the point of view of public presentation that it should be known that they had met.

The Prime Minister said that she found it difficult to understand the reaction in the Republic to her press conference following the Anglo/Irish Summit. She had made clear that the British Government would try to get a new political framework for a settlement in Northern Ireland. Far from brushing the problem aside, she had stressed the importance of their decision to meet again in the early months of next year. She had been very disappointed in the reaction of John Hume. Indeed, her inclination on hearing his remarks in the House of Commons had been to say that the efforts under way between the Irish and British Governments might as well be abandoned.

The Taoiseach said that Mr. Hume had been under great pressure. His first reaction to the outcome of the Anglo/Irish Summit had been supportive. But when he had heard the impact made by the Prime Minister's press conference in the Republic, he had gone too far in the other direction. The Taoiseach continued that there was no point in going back over what had happened at the press conference. He then proceeded to do precisely that. He was grateful to the Prime Minister for sticking to the line which they had agreed between them. Unfortunately, her answers to two of the questions - those concerning the models in the New Ireland Forum report and "alienation" - had come over abruptly and dismissively on television. He admitted readily that this had not been the impression of those actually present at the press conference. However, the overall effect had been unfortunate by focusing attention on the points in the New Ireland Forum report which the Irish Government was trying to move away from. It was a pity that the Prime Minister had not been able to refer positively to other aspects of the report. He understood her semantic difficulty with the

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word "alienation". But again the effect at the press conference had been to suggest that she did not understand the problem of the minority community. The phraseology used in her recent letter to him had been very much more helpful. He was very grateful for the letter.

The Prime Minister replied that nothing which she had said at the press conference should have surprised anyone. The Government had made plain many times in recent months that it could not accept the models in the New Ireland Forum report. "Alienation" was a word which she was loth to use for reasons which she had explained at the Summit. Against these points had to be set her positive approach to finding a new political framework for a settlement, her determination not just to play the problem away but to work actively for a solution, and her readiness to meet again within a short time. The fact that there was a problem in Northern Ireland was so obvious that it surely did not need to be said. But one thing was clear: one had to develop an extra sensitivity for commenting on the Irish problem. Her own style was to give a direct answer to a direct question.

The Taoiseach said that, after 800 years, extra sensitivity was indeed needed. He appreciated that the Prime Minister had been endeavouring to be positive. He recognised that he had contributed very largely to subsequent problems. "I gave the worst press conference in my life". The Prime Minister said she had been astonished by how big an issue the Irish press had made of it. The Taoiseach said that, for the UK, Northern Ireland was a subsidiary problem but for the Republic it was the most important issue in national life. However, he wanted to put these problems to rest and re-build. He would be making a speech next week in which he would try to steady things. But it would be very helpful if the Prime Minister could, in her press conference the following day, refer to the positive aspects of the New Ireland Forum report and recognise the problems of the minority community in Northern Ireland.

/The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister said that she was nervous of making any further comment on Irish affairs. Would it not be best simply to say that they had had a brief and friendly meeting and confirm their intention to hold further discussions early in the New Year? The Taoiseach said that it would be an enormous help to him if the Prime Minister could speak as he had suggested. The Prime Minister said that she would not want to give the impression of backing down or changing her mind. But, depending on the nature of the questions at her press conference and the tone in which they were asked, she would attempt to speak in terms helpful to the Taoiseach.

The meeting ended at 1912 hours.

I am sending copies of this letter to Graham Sandiford (Northern Ireland Office) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

CHARLES POWELL

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office.