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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

19 February 1986

Dear Tim,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH

The Prime Minister saw the Taoiseach for a talk this evening. The discussion was mostly about the Anglo/Irish Agreement though Dr Fitzgerald also raised Sellafield at the end. I am recording the discussion of this latter point separately.

European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism

The Taoiseach led off by explaining that he had announced his Government's decision to sign the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism in advance of his meeting with the Prime Minister because his Press Conference at lunch-time had been an opportunity to secure maximum publicity. He hoped that the Prime Minister would find this decision helpful. Signature would take place the next week in Strasbourg, if possible on the Monday in order to precede the Prime Minister's meeting with the Unionist leaders. He hoped that the necessary legislation would go through the Dail before the end of the year. The aim was to have the tightest possible extradition arrangements. It might be necessary for the Irish Government to make some reservations under Article 13 of the Convention although they would avoid this if possible. Such reservations would be made known only at the stage of ratification of the Convention. There would be no public mention of them now.

The Prime Minister welcomed the Irish Government's decision, while pointing out there were of even more important issues on which early progress was essential.

Anglo/Irish Agreement

The Prime Minister said that her meeting with the leaders of the Unionist parties on 25 February would be very difficult indeed. She could not rule out the possibility that the whole Agreement might founder unless a way forward with the Unionists could be found. The situation in Northern Ireland was much more serious than the Taoiseach realised. She would

SECRET

deal with the main problems one by one.

The Taoiseach acknowledged the major problems which faced the Prime Minister. He had some to raise from the Irish side too. He hoped that, in her meeting with the Unionist leaders, the Prime Minister would lay great stress on devolution as a way of diminishing the role of the Intergovernmental Conference. There were also signs of division between the Unionist parties, with evidence that some of their members were keen to play an active part in affairs at Westminster. These should be exploited.

#### Statements by Irish Government Ministers

The Prime Minister said that she was consistently hearing that Irish Government Ministers were claiming much more for the Agreement than it in fact gave the Republic, even that it conceded joint authority. This was highly provocative to the Unionists.

The Taoiseach said that he simply did not understand this allegation. He had heard it from others but nobody ever produced documentary evidence to sustain it. He and his Ministers had been punctilious in avoiding such statements. His Government had no political need to claim more than was in the Agreement itself. It was not in their interest to make such claims.

The Prime Minister said that she had it on good authority that such statements had been made. We would go through the evidence and send the Taoiseach some examples.

#### Devolution: the Role of the SDLP

The Prime Minister recalled that Mr John Hume had made a positive statement, at the time the Agreement had been concluded, about the SLP's willingness to take part in discussions on devolution. But subsequently the party had done nothing to follow this up. Not only had they failed to live up to expectations on devolution, they had done nothing to support the security forces or even attend funerals of Roman Catholic members of them who had been killed by terrorists. Indeed she was tempted to say that we might just as well never have had the Agreement for all the difference it had made to the SDLP's behaviour. It was widely believed that the SDLP preferred the existing situation with the Intergovernmental Conference to devolution. Mr Hume had made matters worse by disappearing to the Philippines for a long period at the crucial moment and had not even been in the House of Commons to welcome his new SDLP colleague. Surely the Anglo/Irish Agreement should have meant more to him than observing elections in the Philippines. She had to ask Dr Fitzgerald whether Mr Hume was serious in his desire for talks on devolution.

The Taoiseach agreed that it would have been better if Mr Hume had not gone off to the Philippines: he had tried to dissuade him. But Mr Hume had made quite clear that he was ready to take part in discussions without conditions.

Indeed he had written in this sense to the Prime Minister from the Philippines. This letter should be a useful factor in her discussions with the Unionists. He could categorically deny that the SDLP preferred to have the Intergovernmental Conference rather than devolution. The Republic was no less anxious to see devolution come about. The question was: how could a productive discussion be launched? There seemed little immediate prospect of the Unionists being willing to take part in any talks. The task was to find some mechanism which would allow discussions to take place. Surely the initiative for this should come from HMG. Could the Prime Minister not call the parties together for a conference to discuss devolution? Her authority could be decisive.

The Prime Minister replied that the Unionists would say that the SDLP should come into the Assembly. A conference would have to be approached with caution. She doubted whether she herself should be engaged in it in the early stages. There had been conferences on devolution before. They had lasted interminably and got nowhere. There needed to be some degree of prior understanding on structures. It was no good reverting to power sharing. This was anathema to the Unionists.

The Taoiseach said that some effort must be made to get over the blockages which had held up progress in the past. Various ideas had been explored in the past which would have led to de facto sharing of responsibility for different departments among the parties rather than imposing collective responsibility. He hoped that HMG would come forward with some early proposals.

#### Security Co-operation

The Prime Minister said we were dissatisfied with the results so far of security co-operation under the Anglo/Irish Agreement. She recalled promises which had been made during the negotiations to deploy a Standing Task Force to the border area. Our information was that the Irish Government had in practice deployed only inadequate forces to these areas. There were particular weaknesses in surveillance and intelligence. These were exposed by the growing number of terrorist attacks in border areas. The Republic's response had simply not been good enough. She did not question the Irish Government's commitment and understood the difficulties. But we were simply not getting the security co-operation which we needed. There had to be a bigger effort. Co-operation between London and Dublin was good. It was with cross border co-operation that the difficulties lay.

The Taoiseach said that much of this criticism was wide of the mark. The Irish Government had doubled the number of army units on the border. There were well over a thousand police in the immediate border area. Complaints about inadequate security co-operation had been investigated through the Intergovernmental Conference, as a result of which the Irish

Government had received an apology. He acknowledged that there were different methods of policing in the Republic and in the North. The Garda were less sophisticated in their methods than the RUC. In particular they did not conduct adequate surveillance though at least they did not have the problem of no-go areas which existed in the North. They were ready to learn from the RUC in this and other areas. He did not believe that there was any significant difference in numbers of police on each side of the border.

The Prime Minister repeated that the perception in the North was very different. There had to be more, and more effective, activity in the security field if the Agreement was to be shown to achieve results. As it was terrorist activity had actually increased in the border areas since signature of the Agreement.

#### Consultation with the Unionists

The Prime Minister said that she would need to be able to propose to the Unionist leaders next week some structure of consultation which would enable them to feel that Unionist views were taken fully into account in the work of the Intergovernmental Conference.

The Taoiseach asked whether the Prime Minister had any specific proposals in mind. The Prime Minister said that we were still reflecting. She had to find some means of preventing a head on confrontation with the Unionist leaders when she met them.

#### Irish Government's Complaints

The Taoiseach said that the Prime Minister had spoken frankly. The Irish Government were also unhappy with some aspects of the workings of the Agreement. Things which had been promised had not been done. For instance, the Irish Government had been told last October that a Code of Conduct for the RUC would shortly be introduced. They were still waiting for it. When the Irish Government had enquired about progress through the Joint Secretariat, they had been given incorrect information. There had been very little progress towards ensuring that UDR patrols were regularly accompanied by the RUC. The Irish Government had expected this to be brought to an advanced stage shortly after the Agreement. They had recently sought figures for performance in this area through the Joint Secretariat but had been told that such figures did not exist. The result was a perception among the nationalist community in the North that nothing much had changed as a result of the Agreement. He acknowledged that this was not entirely fair and that the decline in support for Sinn Fein at the elections had been a positive step. But there had to be continuing progress if the momentum was to be maintained. Ambiguity about violence on the part of the Unionist politicians was very disturbing and contrasted unfavourably with the SDLP's record. Their readiness to permit participation by the paramilitaries in Unionist demonstrations and marches was a particular concern. He would like to have seen more done by HMG to embarrass the

Unionists on this point.

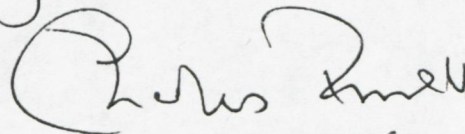
The Prime Minister said that, listening to the Taoiseach, she could understand why the Unionist were alarmed. It was not as though we were under any obligation to clear the details of the Code of Conduct with the Republic. That was a matter for the British Government and the RUC. Nor did we have to report to them on the number of UDR patrols accompanied by the RUC. It seemed to her that the Irish Government was altogether too demanding while failing to understand adequately the very serious and difficult situation which HMG faced. As far as the majority in the North were concerned, the Nationalists had got everything from the Agreement and the Unionists nothing. That was why it was vital to get improved security co-operation across the border, to make the SDLP play a constructive role in the discussion of devolution and to devise structures to involve the Unionists in the operation of the Agreement. Without these steps there was a serious risk that it would all come unstuck. The United Kingdom was fully committed to the Agreement and determined to make it work. But to do so required at least the grudging acquiescence of the Unionists. This could not be obtained unless there was real progress in the areas she indicated.

At the conclusion of their meeting the Prime Minister and Taoiseach agreed that the press should be told that they had reviewed the working of the Anglo/Irish Agreement to which they were both committed. The Prime Minister had welcomed the Irish Government's decision to sign the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism.

I should be grateful if you would let me have as soon as possible examples of statements by Irish Ministers which we regard as making unjustified claims about the Agreement and the role which it gives the Republic in the affairs of the North. The Prime Minister will want to write to the Taoiseach about this.

I am copying this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office); and on a strictly personal basis, for the purposes of the meeting on 20 February, to the Private Secretaries to the Lord President, the Home Secretary and the Chief Whip.

Yours sincerely,



Charles Powell

Jim Daniell Esq  
Northern Ireland Office.

## MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH

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1. We face a serious and increasingly difficult situation in the North - both in terms of terrorist attacks and unionist reaction.
2. Essential to achieve rapid and visible improvements in cross-border security coordination and cooperation. Do not question commitment but effort is not adequate.
3. SDLP ATTITUDE to devolution and to the security forces unreasonable and must be changed.
4. Irish government must avoid statements about the Agreement which antagonise Unionist opinion.

5. We are considering possibilities for improved consultation with unionists and may discuss with Molyneaux and Paisley on 25 February.

6. Want to know whether Irish government are ready to sign European Convention on Suppression of Terrorism.

7. Cannot have an early meeting of the Inter-Governmental Conference in present climate. Must wait until after your meeting with Molyneaux and Paisley.

8. Do not want to press idea of Anglo-Irish Parliamentary body for the time being - only

antagonise unionists even more.

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9. Aware of concern about Sellafield. But recent incidents played up by the press and are in fact relatively minor. Arrangements agreed for improved liaison with Irish authorities.