

Ref. A086/893

MR POWELL

Prime Minister

Mr King will raise this with you immediately after Budget cabinet tomorrow.

It's a very tricky area, & you will probably want Mr. King to err on the side of caution.

Anglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

I understand that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is coming to see the Prime Minister tomorrow morning, to seek her agreement to the line which he proposes to take in a further meeting with Mr Molyneaux, at which the Chief Whip will be present.

CDD 17/3

2. He will, if the Prime Minister agrees, reiterate the Government's willingness to enter without delay into "round table" talks about the possibilities of devolution.

3. The question is what he should say about the operations of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. It seems that, in a recent private conversation with the Secretary of State, Mr Molyneaux indicated some readiness to enter into round table discussions on devolution, provided that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was suspended. When the Secretary of State said that there could be no question of that, Mr Molyneaux used the phrase "informally suspended", which he has apparently used before. The Secretary of State therefore has in mind, and will seek the Prime Minister's agreement, that he should say to Mr Molyneaux at 12.30 tomorrow that, if the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland agreed to enter into round table discussions on devolution, so far as the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference was concerned, he would want to make arrangements which ensured that the round table discussions on devolution were given first priority.



4. This would be an oblique way of promising a "pause" in the Intergovernmental Conference while the round table discussions went ahead. We have reason to think that the Taoiseach would understand and accept something like that, though it would be as well for the Prime Minister to speak to the Taoiseach (or me to speak to Mr Nally) if the Secretary of State was going to say something on the lines proposed to Mr Molyneux.

5. The danger would be that the Unionists would try to secure indefinite suspension of the Intergovernmental Conference, by entering into discussions and continuing them for six weeks, and then saying that some progress had been made and they would like to continue the process for a further period, of course on the understanding that there would be no meetings of the Intergovernmental Conference in the meantime. I think that it would be important for Mr King to guard against this possibility, by making it clear that, while he would want to be able to give priority to the round table discussions in the first instance, he could not preclude the possibility of needing to hold a meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference at some stage, if the round table discussions were at all long drawn out.

6. This is obviously a very delicate area: there is a great danger that, whatever the Secretary of State says to Mr Molyneux and however carefully it is edged about, Mr Molyneux will go back to Northern Ireland and claim that he has persuaded the Government to suspend the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It would therefore be very important that whatever form of words was used was put on paper and agreed with Mr Molyneux, so that matters could be clarified if there was any attempt to misinterpret what had been said.

MS

for

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

17 March 1986



CONDUMPTOR

