

Prime Minister 8 (1)

Ref. A086/1051

MR POWELL

I have two comments on this:
(i) we knew the information in this minute before Easter. It is disingenuous of the Irish to present it as new;
(ii) I do not think that we can possibly undertake to keep the Irish government informed about our contacts with Unionist leaders.

The Irish Ambassador came to see me this afternoon, on the instructions of the Taoiseach, to report an indirect approach which the Taoiseach had received from Mr James Molyneux MP, and to let the Prime Minister know without delay the message the Taoiseach had sent to Mr Molyneux through that contact.

That is an internal UK matter.

2. It was evident from what the Irish Ambassador said that both the Taoiseach and he were under the impression that the Prime Minister was in direct touch with Mr Molyneux herself, as well as through the Chief Whip. If indications given are to be relied upon, it seems likely that Mr Molyneux will be making an approach to the Chief Whip, perhaps with a view to talking directly to the Prime Minister, very soon.

Agreed that this minute should be shown to Northern Ireland Secretary & Chief Whip?

CDP 7/4

3. There is no reason to think that Mr Paisley knows about this contact between Mr Molyneux and the Taoiseach, but the Irish Ambassador emphasised that it was not part of the Taoiseach's wish to try to divide Mr Molyneux and Mr Paisley.

4. The Irish Ambassador said that the Taoiseach was very anxious that the Prime Minister should know as soon as possible about this contact and about what he had said; and hoped that the Prime Minister and he could keep each other closely informed about developments.

5. The Ambassador asked what view the British Government took about the possibility of making political progress in Northern Ireland before the marching season. I said that there would be no objection on our part to starting political contacts before the marching season began: indeed, it could be advantageous that such contacts should have begun but should not be completed



when the marching season began. But it would have to be on the right terms: in particular, on terms which the unionists could not colourably claim as some kind of "victory" in relation to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I thought that we were probably sceptical about the prospect of getting contacts on that basis started ahead of the marching season.

6. The Prime Minister will no doubt wish to consider how the Chief Whip should be invited to respond, if and when he receives an approach from Mr Molyneaux. It may be that this calls for a meeting at an early date. I have not, however, copied this --- minute or the attached note to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Northern Ireland Office or the Chief Whip, though I should of course be perfectly ready to do so, if so instructed by the Prime Minister.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

7 April 1986

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

The Irish Ambassador called at his own request on Sir Robert Armstrong at 1700 on 7 April. Mr Mallaby was present.

2. The Ambassador said that he had been instructed by the Taoiseach, whom he had seen in Dublin that morning, to convey some information as soon as possible to the Prime Minister. He then read from a speaking note. The speaking note said -

A senior "clerical source" (by implication a leading figure of the Church of Ireland) had approached the Taoiseach after the latter's return from holiday on Saturday, 5 April, and said the he was making contact on behalf of Mr Molyneaux. Mr Molyneaux, having been re-elected as leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, felt strong enough to make contact with the Taoiseach and was in contact with the Prime Minister and the Chief Whip; he might later contact the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland too. The Taoiseach had responded by making the following points, to be passed to Mr Molyneaux.

1. The Taoiseach recognised that it was desirable in principle to make early political progress, before the marching season got going in earnest.

2. It would, however, be imprudent to embark on a process unless both Governments were convinced that the unionist leaders who would be involved would be able to deliver on the results.

3. Both Governments needed to be satisfied that any opening given at this stage would not be such as to encourage the hard liners to continue their present tactics.

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4. In view of the great dangers that would be involved in failure in such discussions - giving the initiative back to the men of violence before the marching season - the outcome of the discussions should in effect be pre-determined.

5. It would be necessary as a minimum to know in advance that the unionists would be willing in a devolved government to share executive power with the SDLP, though not necessarily in a Cabinet-style structure.

6. If all the above conditions could be met, the Taoiseach thought that it should be possible to give priority to talks on devolution vis-a-vis the Inter-governmental Conference for a period of up to 2 months; under no circumstances, however, could the Agreement be suspended or tampered with; the Taoiseach had added, in reply to a question, that the work of the Secretariat also could not be tampered with.

7. The Taoiseach understood the wish of the unionists to be associated with and informed about the work of the Intergovernmental Conference.

3. The Irish Ambassador said that the first two of the points above had also been conveyed by the Taoiseach to Dr Paisley via Sir Fred Catherwood.

4. Mr Dorr said that the Taoiseach wished the Prime Minister to be aware of what had passed, and hoped to be kept informed of the British Government's contacts with unionist leaders.

5. In discussion, Sir Robert Armstrong wondered whether Mr Molyneux was seeking contacts which would not involve Dr Paisley. The Irish Ambassador said that his Government would prefer discussions on devolution to include both the unionist parties. He said that Mr Hume of the SDLP had not

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been told of the indirect contact that had been established between the Taoiseach and Mr Molyneaux but knew that the numbered points above represented the present position of the Taoiseach. Mr Dorr said, in reply to questions, that the numbered points above did not imply that the Irish Government would expect to be involved in talks about devolution; the contribution of the Irish Government would be willingness to give priority for a limited period to those talks vis-a-vis the Intergovernmental Conference.

6. Sir Robert Armstrong undertook to report what Mr Dorr had said to the Prime Minister immediately.

7. In a brief discussion of other matters, Mr Dorr agreed that the performance of the Royal Ulster Constabulary on Easter Monday had been most commendable. He pointed out that Irish Ministers, notably Mr Barry, had recently been careful to abstain from public comment on events in Northern Ireland. It was agreed between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr Dorr that an Armstrong/Nally meeting should take place in late April, perhaps on 28 or 29 April.

Cabinet Office
7 April 1986

MR PETER ARCHER (WARLEY WEST): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the safety of members of the RUC and their families.

MR KING

In the last month there have been 138 attacks on off duty members of the RUC and RUC Reserve, and their homes and families. The vast majority have taken place in predominantly Protestant areas. The whole House will wish to join me in condemning utterly these cowardly and disgraceful attacks on the men and women of the Royal Ulster Constabulary who have given such loyal and courageous service to defend the Province against terrorism and to uphold law and order.

The Chief Constable, with the full support of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland and of the Superintendents Association and the Police Federation, has put arrangements in hand to provide quick and effective assistance to police officers and their families who are subject to attack or other forms of intimidation. Extra patrols are being mounted in vulnerable areas and steps have been taken to provide suitable alternative accommodation for those unfortunate enough to have to move from their homes. In addition, the police are making strenuous efforts to bring the people responsible for this criminal behaviour to justice, and a considerable number have already been charged with serious offences associated with it.

I welcome the fact that the Churches and the more responsible political leaders have condemned without any qualification these outrages.

I look to the whole community to join together to defeat these acts of terrorism against its own Police Force, and to give every possible support to bring those responsible to justice.



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

The Prime Minister has noted the Irish Ambassador's approach to you yesterday to report on the Taoiseach's indirect contact with Mr. James Molyneaux. She is a little puzzled about some of the dates given for the contacts since she is under the impression that we knew about them in general terms before Easter. That is my recollection too.

The Prime Minister has also commented that we cannot undertake to keep the Irish Government informed in detail of our own contacts with Unionist leaders since that is an internal United Kingdom matter.

The Taoiseach's reported reply to Mr. Molyneaux does of course go beyond anything which we have said to the Unionist leaders, in stating explicitly a readiness to give priority to talks on devolution vis-a-vis the Intergovernmental Conference for a period of two months. We shall need to consider to what extent this affects our reply to the recent letter from Mr. Molyneaux and Dr. Paisley: or whether it is a point which should be renewed for discussion with Mr. Molyneaux alone.

The Prime Minister would be content for your minute and the note attached to it to be copied on a personal basis to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Northern Ireland Secretary and the Chief Whip together with a copy of this minute.

C.D.P.

C.D. Powell

8 April, 1986.

SMA