

Prime Minister.

5

We shall have to be very careful about the suggestion in para. 10.

Ref. A083/3128

PRIME MINISTER

mt

A & C. 3/11.

** in the briefing papers*

I am reporting to you separately on the outcome of my meeting in Dublin yesterday with Mr Dermot Nally, in which we agreed texts for submission to you and the Taoiseach for next Monday's Summit meeting.

2. I am also submitting separately the assessment for which you asked of the ideas being floated by the Irish for a new approach to the situation in Ireland.

3. Before my meeting with Mr Nally started, I was taken privately to see the Taoiseach. I had a quarter of an hour with him; the only other person present was Mr Nally. So far as I am aware, no one else (except I think Mr Lillis) knew that I had this meeting with the Taoiseach.

4. The Taoiseach told me about his visit to Athens from which he had just returned. He said that he thought that the Greek Presidency were making a real attempt to achieve progress at the European Council in Athens. He looked forward to discussing with you the various issues which would come up. He said that he would particularly wish to stress that the super levy proposed by the Commission would be completely unacceptable in Ireland; indeed, he said that it would be disastrous (I gather that it would be hardly less disastrous in Northern Ireland).

5. Dr FitzGerald then went on to the main purpose for his summoning me. He said that he hoped to take the opportunity of his meeting with the Prime Minister to tell her how things were going in the Forum for a New Ireland, which he was seeking to use as a means of educating those concerned in the realities of the situation. It would, however, be very important to him that nothing should be said to the press about this aspect of their conversations.

6. This led Dr FitzGerald on to his thoughts about "a new approach" on Northern Ireland. He said that he was very worried about the alienation of the minority in Northern Ireland, not only from the forces of law and order there but from the SDLP. If this was not



checked, there would be a great danger that by the time of the local elections in 1985 Provisional Sinn Fein (PSF) would have established an ascendancy, that they would oust the SDLP in the elections, and that the SDLP would disintegrate. That would immensely strengthen the position of, the PSF, and would be very bad news for us in Northern Ireland, but it would also be very bad news for the Republic, because this sort of political victory in Northern Ireland would strengthen the PSF's position in the Republic as well. So time could be working against us, because of the electoral deadline.

7. What was needed was to create something upon which the loyalty of the minority in Northern Ireland could focus. He thought that there was greater realism on both sides of the border about the aspiration to Irish unity. It was now recognised that that was not going to come for a very long time indeed, and that the union of Northern Ireland with Great Britain was an established fact which was not going to be overturned within the foreseeable future. There was scope for giving public expression to this greater sense of realism (though the Taoiseach did not make it clear whether he meant by that an amendment to the constitution or something less formal).

8. In exchange for that, the minority in Northern Ireland should be given law and order institutions on which it could focus confidence and "loyalty" (his word). The Taoiseach did not produce any specific ideas in this field, indeed, he said more than once that he had no specific ideas to suggest. He appeared to be thinking of special courts (with judges from the Republic as well as from Northern Ireland) which would deal with cases of violation of human rights, criminality and subversion. He seemed to think that some measure of joint policing would not be sufficient to focus the loyalty of the minority, if it was thought the police were merely operating under the existing system of law in Northern Ireland.

9. The Taoiseach asked how I thought you were likely to react to these ideas. I said that I thought that you would want not to exclude from consideration anything that might hold out the



possibility of reducing the level of violence, but that, with ideas still so very vague and unformed, your reaction would be bound to be cautious. You clearly would not want there to be any suggestion that you were considering possibilities which could affect the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, and it would be important to avoid any suggestion that "joint sovereignty" was at issue. Dr FitzGerald recognised the sensitivity of that from your point of view, though he reverted to the need (in his view) to provide the minority in Northern Ireland with some factor or presence in the law and order institutions which would provide a focus for their loyalty and thus prevent the PSF from gaining ground.

10. The Taoiseach said that he would be suggesting that it would be very useful if there could be private discussions of these matters between his people and your people. If the two sides pursued their own thinking separately over a period of months, there would be a danger that they would end up with two very different sets of ideas, and the process of reconciling them would be long. Thus time would be doubly wasted, It would be better if our thinking could be shared as we went along. Very few people in Dublin were privy to the sort of ideas he was mentioning to me: only a small group of Irish Ministers was involved and he had said nothing to the rest of his Cabinet. The discussions would have to be kept to a very restricted group of people, and some suitable umbrella would have to be found for them (perhaps the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council). He would not want the Foreign Offices involved on either side, because one never knew what got on to diplomatic telexes; and he would not want the Northern Ireland Office involved, because if they were what was being discussed would become known about all over Northern Ireland. He specifically spoke of discussions involving Mr Nally and Mr Lillis on the Irish side and Mr David Goodall and me on the British side, though he recognised that at some stage it would be necessary to bring in his Minister of Justice, if questions of courts were involved, and that we should need a similar input on our side.

11. I said that I would report this conversation to you.



12. I am not sending a copy of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary or to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in view of the nature and subject of the discussion.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

3 November 1983

conqueror