



Prime Minister

CDP
22/6

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PRIME MINISTER

Anglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

As instructed at your meeting on Ireland on 21 June, I
--- now submit a draft speaking note for you to use with
Dr FitzGerald at Fontainebleau.

2. I am sending copies to the Foreign and Commonwealth
Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland,
Sir Antony Acland and Mr Robert Andrew.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

22 June 1984

DRAFT SPEAKING NOTEAnglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

When we last discussed Northern Ireland together (at Chequers in November 1983) you explained the importance of the New Ireland Forum and the time and effort you were investing in it. Although there is much in its report with which you would not expect us to agree, I know that it represents a considerable political achievement. We welcome the fact that all elements of constitutional nationalism have agreed on the need to take a fresh look at the Northern Ireland question, and that for the first time all have formally recognised the right of the Unionists as well as the Nationalists to maintain their own loyalties and cultural identity.

2. None of the "solutions" canvassed in the report is attractive from the British point of view; but we appreciate that the report is careful not to close the door on other possible approaches to the problem; and the examination in Chapter 5.2 of the framework within which progress might be made suggests that there is a good deal of common ground on which we ought to be able to build. I know this is your wish; and it is also mine.

3. It will not be easy. Although we have a common interest in ensuring peace and stability throughout

*Forum Rpt.
Considerable
Political
achievement.*

the island of Ireland, our domestic political requirements are different and to some extent conflicting. Any new initiatives on Northern Ireland will attract passionate criticism and misrepresentation. It is therefore important that we should be quite clear about the limits of what is possible for each of us and about the practical effects on the ground of any new measures which might be taken. From the British point of view it is a cardinal principle that there can be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of its inhabitants. I know this is also your position. At the same time we recognise your interest in what happens in Northern Ireland and your desire to find ways of helping to re-integrate the minority community into the political life of the Province. We are willing to continue to search with you for ways in which your interest can be given practical effect, while maintaining British sovereignty so long as that is the wish of the majority.

4. It is against that background that we have authorised the exchanges that have taken place between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr Dermot Nally. The ideas floated by Sir Robert Armstrong in Dublin in March were based on our understanding that you would like to explore with us ways of reassuring Unionist opinion about Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom in return for arrangements which would associate

the Republic in some visible way with law enforcement in the Province. But the proposals put forward by Mr Nally in May go well beyond this. I know that they were put forward as being without prejudice to the constitutional sovereignty of the United Kingdom in Northern Ireland; but in our view they would be seen, particularly in Northern Ireland, as amounting in practice to a significant erosion of sovereignty in very sensitive areas, notably security. That would not only be totally unacceptable to Unionists in Northern Ireland; it would also be unacceptable at Westminster.

5. At the same time we have taken very seriously the indications you have given us through Peter Barry and through your Ambassador in London that you are prepared to consider seeking to amend the territorial provisions of the Irish Constitution. I understand the historical background to those provisions. But the fact is that they constitute a serious obstacle to closer relations between the two parts of Ireland. As long as they remain part of your Constitution it is very difficult to promote any sort of closer relationship between the North and South without appearing to be making concessions to a claim of one state upon the territory of another.

6. I fully recognise the magnitude of the step which you would be taking in domestic political terms if you were to seek to have the territorial provisions of



of your Constitution removed; and I realise that you could attempt this with any prospect of success only if it were part of a package which included a significant element of an "Irish dimension" in the North.

7. From our point of view there are two problems about this. The first is whether there is in fact a realistic prospect of being able to carry a referendum in favour of deleting the territorial provisions from the Irish Constitution. I should be very interested to hear your view on this. It would not help either of us if you were to proceed with a referendum only to have the package rejected by the Irish electorate. That would make the task of reconciliation in Northern Ireland even more difficult than it is now.

8. The other problem is a practical and political one. Is it possible to devise new arrangements in Northern Ireland which we could accept, which would be enough to enable you to carry your referendum and which would at the same time command the support of both communities in Northern Ireland?

9. We have not yet reached any firm conclusions about this. The British Cabinet has not yet taken stock of the position we have now reached, and a good deal more work has still to be done. We shall also want to take account of the views expressed in our forthcoming Parliamentary debate on the Forum Report on 2 July. After that I think it would be helpful if there could be another talk between Sir Robert Armstrong and



Mr Nally in which the positions of both sides could be further explored. I hope that we shall by then have developed further ideas which could be put to you. If you agree that this is the right way to proceed, I would hope to be able to authorise Sir Robert Armstrong to come to Dublin for this purpose within the next two or three weeks.

10. Until this process of discussion of practicable possibilities is further advanced, it would in my judgment be premature to think in terms of a joint statement of principles. I should prefer to see more clearly, and in more specific detail, where we expect to be going before committing myself to a statement of principles to be followed in getting there.

11. I know that we both agree that it is of paramount importance that the confidentiality of these exchanges should be maintained. We warmly appreciate all you have done on your side to ensure this. We will continue to do the same.