

SUBJECT

C. Thastor Set



File DSG 21

c. Dr P. Cadogan

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

3 September 1984

Dear Len,

MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE TAOISEACH AT
NO. 10 ON MONDAY 3 SEPTEMBER: NORTHERN IRELAND

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach held a restricted meeting after lunch today to discuss Northern Ireland matters. Mr. Nally (Secretary to the Government) and Mr. Lillis (Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs) accompanied the Taoiseach. Sir Robert Armstrong and I were also present.

The Taoiseach said that his Government had taken pains to cultivate opinion in Northern Ireland. He thought that they had now got the trust and support of those nationalists who were not supporters of Sinn Fein. If anything was to come out of the discussions between the British and Irish Governments, it would be important for the Irish Government to be able to take the bulk of nationalist opinion with it. The discussions so far between Mr. Nally and Sir Robert Armstrong had been constructive. He recognised that it was going to be difficult to arrive at an outcome that would both be tolerable to the unionists and would end the alienation of the nationalists. But he was particularly encouraged by the spirit in which the discussions had proceeded. It was increasingly clear that the British and Irish Governments shared a perception of the problems and were trying to tease out together how to deal with them. He wished to put on record his appreciation of this. The Irish Government would in due course have to consult its own public opinion by means of a referendum. There were risks in this. It was difficult to see how his Government could survive defeat in a referendum. But, he had consulted his Ministers who were ready to take the risk. As to future procedure, he believed it had been suggested that there might be several days of intensive talks to see whether outstanding problems could be solved and common ground found.

The Prime Minister said that she had absorbed the results of the talks between Mr. Nally and Sir Robert Armstrong. She had been in politics long enough to know that often one started off with an idea but the real difficulty came in translating it into practical politics. The basic problem had been laid bare in all its difficulties. If it was something which could be resolved by reason and common sense, then it would be easy. But in Northern Ireland one was dealing with folklore, resentment and suspicion. This made a solution infinitely more difficult. There was a constant risk that what would help one community would induce hatred and bitterness in the other. She and the Taoiseach had to assess whether they could envisage steps which would satisfy both communities without blowing up in their faces.

The Prime Minister continued that it was important that the Taoiseach should understand that the suggestion of giving the Republic a right to be consulted about Northern Ireland affairs would be an enormous step with considerable risks. Any mention of joint authority had to be absolutely excluded. The Unionists would say it was tantamount to handing over Northern Ireland to the Republic, even if the other side of the bargain was recognition of the border. Nor could there be any question of disarming the RUC or the UDR as had been suggested in the course of the discussions. This would undermine confidence fatally. But she agreed with the Taoiseach that the Armstrong/Nally discussions should continue.

The Taoiseach said that on security matters there were really two aspects: a political aspect, what was the least that could be done and still bring along nationalist opinion; and a security aspect, what would actually improve security. The Prime Minister commented that one must not gain one and lose the other. There had to be a visible balance. For instance, security co-operation or joint policing would have to apply on both sides of the border. The Taoiseach contested this. It would only add an enormous complication and be unnecessary. The problem was the alienation of the minority community in the North, and the need to find a security system which would resolve it. He did not pretend to know the answer. There were various possible solutions. The present arrangements had to be changed in ways to make them acceptable to both sides in the North.

The Taoiseach said that he wished to stress again that his Government was prepared to face up to solutions which no previous Irish Government had contemplated. The Prime Minister acknowledged this but repeated that there could be

no prospect of joint authority. Any such notion would immediately lose the Government Unionist support. The Taoiseach should recognise what a very big step the offer of a right to be consulted on Northern Ireland affairs was. The Taoiseach agreed that arrangements must be found that did not destabilise the Unionists. Discussions should continue to see if such solutions could be teased out. The Prime Minister said that she could agree to this. But it would be a mistake to expect too much. She repeated that the offer of consultations was a major concession. The Taoiseach said that the two sides should work together as far as they could, and then it would be for each party to make a judgement as to whether the result justified taking the steps which would be required. He would have to consider whether his Government could survive. His Cabinet had many worries but had instructed him to continue the talks.

The Prime Minister asked how much longer the talks could be kept secret. Sir Robert Armstrong said that secrecy was fraying, but could probably be maintained for a bit longer. The Taoiseach said that it had been possible to disguise the current round satisfactorily under the cover of their discussion of Community business.

The Prime Minister asked what should be said to the press. The Taoiseach observed that as little as possible should be said. The best way to block off speculation would be to set a date for an Anglo-Irish Summit. The Prime Minister said that she would be going to Dublin for the European Council in early December. Was it really necessary for her to come to Dublin for a bilateral as well? Perhaps there could be a meeting at Chequers in November and a further meeting in the Republic next spring. The Taoiseach pointed out that both the last bilateral summits had been in the UK. If the next were held in the Republic it need not necessarily be in Dublin. Moreover, it was important to maintain the tempo of negotiations if there was to be a positive outcome before the local government elections in Northern Ireland next May. The Prime Minister doubted whether it was realistic to think in terms of moving this fast. After some further discussion, it was agreed that the meeting would be held on 19 November with the place to be determined. The annexed press statement was also agreed.

The Taoiseach asked whether any arrangement which the two sides agreed upon would be presented as the outcome of an inter-Governmental meeting or whether the parties in Northern Ireland would also be brought in. He saw advantage in the latter, particularly in involving the SDLP. This would enable them to support his Government in a referendum in the Republic. The Prime Minister said it was premature to try to settle this sort of question yet.

I am sending copies of this letter to Graham Sandiford (Northern Ireland Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,
Charles Powell

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Len Appleyard, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

PRESS STATEMENT

The Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, TD, who was accompanied by Mr. Jim O'Keefe, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs with special responsibility for European Community budgetary matters, came to see the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Margaret Thatcher, FRS, MP, who was accompanied by the Right Honourable Sir Geoffrey Howe, QC, MP, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and Mr. Ian Stewart, MP, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, at 10 Downing Street on 3 September 1984, as one of a series of contacts he has been holding with Heads of State or Government of Member countries of the European Community on current Community business, including enlargement and the Community Budget. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach agreed to hold the next of their regular bilateral meetings on Anglo-Irish affairs later in the year, probably in November.