

SECRET

MASTER PERSONAL



23

subject: Ireland
Situation Pt 19

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

14 February 1985

ANGLO/IRISH RELATIONS: NORTHERN IRELAND

The Prime Minister held a meeting this morning to consider the Irish Government's response to the proposal made to them by HMG on 21 January to establish a joint body to consider various matters in relation to Northern Ireland. The Foreign Secretary, the Northern Ireland Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, Mr. Andrew, Mr. Goodall and Mr. Cartledge took part.

The Prime Minister said that she had not yet had an opportunity to consider the reply in detail. Her impression was that the Irish Government had moved some way towards our position but were arguing that what was on offer was not enough to justify their holding a referendum on changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. She was not surprised that Dr. FitzGerald and his colleagues were developing second thoughts about a referendum as the prospect loomed closer. But their growing realism about the scope and role of a joint body was a welcome development.

The Northern Ireland Secretary said that there were three main difficulties with the Irish Government's reply as well as a number of drafting points. The range of subjects for the proposed joint body to consider had been widened to include economic and social matters: the significance of security co-operation was played down, with the detail relegated to other documents: and the idea that the nationalist minority should express its views on devolution through the Irish Government was strengthened. All three points would make it harder to obtain the Unionists' acquiescence, though he recognised that there was probably room for negotiation on all of them. As regards timing, he thought it would be a mistake to bring negotiations to a critical point before the local elections in May.

The Foreign Secretary agreed that we should proceed deliberately. The Irish Ambassador had conveyed a message that his Government did not want to rush us.

In a brief discussion, it was suggested that the Irish Government's unwillingness to amend the Irish Constitution made

it the more important for us to stick to the terms of our proposal. We should also consider what alternative quid pro quo we might seek from the Irish Government, to minimise the effect of accusations from the Unionists that we were giving something for nothing.

The Prime Minister concluded that a very careful assessment needed to be made of the Irish Government's proposals and our further response. There was no reason to rush into a reply. The matter should be considered further on her return from Washington.

I am copying this letter to Jim Daniell (Northern Ireland Office) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

(C.D. Powell)

Len Appleyard, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

TMG.

SECRET AND PERSONAL