

CDD

PRIME MINISTERANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS: NORTHERN IRELAND

At your meeting on 14 February you had a first discussion (A) of the Irish Government's reponse to the proposals we had made to them for a joint body. Four main problems were identified:

- (i) the Irish wish that the body should cover economic and social matters;
- (ii) the relegation of security cooperation;
- (iii) the strengthening of the idea that the nationalist minority should express its views on devolution through the Irish Government; and
- (iv) withdrawal of the Irish offer to amend their constitution.

Subsequently Sir Robert Armstrong has had a further meeting with the Irish (B) which has taken matters further forward on points (ii) and (iii) above. Some ideas have also been produced on alternatives to amendment of the Irish constitution, e.g. a statement by the Irish Government that it accepts the constitutional position of the North. The Foreign Secretary and Northern Ireland Secretary have considered the results and are generally favourable towards them (see Foreign Secretary's minute at C).

Points for decision

Points on which you will want to focus discussion are:

- (i) To what extent is the draft agreement acceptable in itself, provided certain other conditions are met? In

particular, how far if at all are we prepared to meet the Irish Government on allowing the Joint Body to consider economic and social matters? (see para 4 of Foreign Secretary's minute and para 13 of RTA's minute). Will this not provoke the Unionists, particularly in the absence of an Irish undertaking to amend their constitution?

(ii) What quid pro quo should we seek in terms of amendment of the Irish constitution or some declaration by the Irish Government designed to reassure the Unionists? While amendment is no longer really on offer, the alternatives (see paras 3 and 4 of RTA's minute) are not very convincing. This is a crucial political calculation.

(iii) What should we seek from the Irish Government in terms of an undertaking to 'deliver' SDLP involvement in moves towards devolution in the North? The commitment proposed in the Foreign Secretary's minute - that the SDLP would participate substantively in inter-party talks on the next steps towards devolution - is pretty half-hearted. (It's what the SDLP are supposed to be doing now.)

(iv) What is the time-scale for further discussion with the Irish? They are pressing for early agreement and leaking information to the press to try to promote this. Your inclination has been to go more slowly, see the colour of their money, and think in terms of a summit later in the year. In practice, you will have to discuss this with the Taoiseach when you see him at the European Council in Brussels.

(v) Meanwhile, the Foreign Secretary is suggesting that he and Douglas Hurd should visit Dublin for Ministerial discussions a week before the European Council. Agree to this? Or does it increase the tempo and raise expectations too much? Prefer to suspend all further contacts until you see the Taoiseach?

(vi) Finally, when should the new OD(1) have its first meeting? Should not all the questions above be considered by them?

Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Body

This is a separate issue raised by Northern Ireland Secretary (D). You were inclined to think that this was not a matter for the Government; and might anyway cause difficulties e.g. with critical reports and therefore be burdensome. Agree not to encourage formation of such a body (recognising that it may happen anyway)?

C.D.P.

7 March 1985

PRIME MINISTER

CDP

IRELAND

I attach a note for tomorrow's meeting.

The situation is that the FCS and RTA are clearly keen to clinch a deal with the Irish, and are not too fussy about obtaining a counterpart in terms of an Irish undertaking to 'deliver' SDLP cooperation in talks between the parties in the North. They are also keen to press ahead with further meetings with the Irish, which seem to me to risk getting you to the finishing line too soon.

The key question, of course, is: what are you getting from the Irish in return for what you are being advised to give? The answer on the evidence before us is: not enough.

The best course might now be to freeze everything until you see Garret FitzGerald in Brussels. There you will want to tell him quite precisely what you need from him if you are to accept the draft agreement as regards:

- (a) an Irish Government undertaking to accept the constitutional position of the North; and
- (b) the cooperation of the SDLP in moves towards devolution.

CDP

7 March 1985