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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

18 June 1985

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Dear Charles,

Anglo-Irish Relations: Discussion between the Foreign Secretary and the Taoiseach

The Foreign Secretary met Dr FitzGerald in the margins of the Accession meetings in Lisbon and Madrid on 12 June. Dr FitzGerald relayed to him the anxiety which he and many of his colleagues felt about whether the agreement now under discussion would have enough substance. The Foreign Secretary thinks that the Prime Minister would wish to know of the Taoiseach's remarks.

Dr FitzGerald gave the impression that he was not acutely concerned about the precise timing of the agreement or its terms. He had not studied our latest text. He was, however, worried that once it had been entered into there would be no immediate evidence that it was having any great effect in improving the lot of the minority community in the North.

The Foreign Secretary pressed Dr FitzGerald to explain what he felt was needed. Dr FitzGerald referred first to the proposed study of the possibility of setting up joint courts. He said that while he understood the need to approach it with caution, he very much hoped that the study would lead to action. The Foreign Secretary said that as Dr FitzGerald knew Lord Lowry had very strong views on this subject. Dr FitzGerald acknowledged that this was true, but said that he would not like to think that Lord Lowry would prove a permanent stumbling block. The Secretary of State said that even without Lord Lowry there were bound to be serious practical difficulties on this front. The Unionist politicians, unlike John Hume, were not aware in any detail of the content of the dialogue and we would have enormous difficulty in bringing them to accept specific steps of the kind which the Taoiseach had in mind. It was important to concentrate on the fact that an agreement of the kind envisaged would represent an historic achievement.

The Foreign Secretary went on to recall that he and Mr Hurd had had discussions with Irish Ministers in Dublin of the useful impact of the policy of releasing some terrorist prisoners on parole at a rather earlier date than previously laid down. The trouble was that arrangements of this kind could not be publicised without seriously undermining the

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confidence of the Unionist community. Dr FitzGerald wondered if we could envisage issuing a statement indicating that a policy of early parole could be considered in six months time if that period passed without violence. He pointed out that some Unionists as well as nationalists were imprisoned in the North for terrorist offences. An offer of this kind would therefore have some appeal in both communities.

Dr FitzGerald also asked if it might not be possible for us to offer an increase in the proportion of British Army officers in the UDR. It would also be helpful if adjustments could be made in the way in which the UDR and the RUC were deployed. He hoped for example that new ways could be found of deploying the police in areas which at present were unpoliced.

The Foreign Secretary explained that while he was not able to make a positive response to these points, he would nevertheless ensure that they were reported.

Dr FitzGerald raised the question of leaks. There had been one story last week describing the Irish as very anxious to make progress on the subject of joint courts which was followed shortly by a story in the Sunday Times stating that there was no chance of progress in this area at all. The Irish felt sure that both these leaks had come from the British side and were puzzled by the fact that the first leak had started a rumour which the second had served only to knock down. The Foreign Secretary said that leaks were regretfully taking place on both sides. There was no reason to suggest a deliberate British plan of destructive leaks.

Later in the day, in Madrid, Dr FitzGerald explained his concern about doubts in his own party, Fine Gael, about the agreement now under discussion. He added that John Hume was not the man he had been. He mentioned that there was discontent in the ranks of the SDLP about Hume whose recent visit to the USA had upset a number of his fellow party members. Some members of the SDLP were now saying that they should withdraw the SDLP's support for an agreement. Dr FitzGerald had responded to these indications by telephoning Hume in the US to request him to get in touch with Seamus Mallon, the deputy leader, by telephone in order to get him back on board. Hume had duly done this but the Irish Government were still far from confident about the ability of Hume and Mallon to keep the SDLP on the right track. They therefore intended to bring a third member of the SDLP leadership into their confidence about the planned agreement.

I am copying this letter to Jim Daniell at the NIO and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,

Len Appleyard

(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

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