

Ref. A085/2488

MR POWELL

Anglo-Irish Relations: Date of Summit

I shall be reporting separately on my latest conversations with Mr Nally, as a basis for the Prime Minister's forthcoming meeting with the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Northern Ireland. In the margins of our meeting I discussed privately with Mr Nally the possible timing of an Anglo-Irish summit.

2. I said that the end of October was beginning to look increasingly difficult from a practical point of view. The Prime Minister would still be in Nassau on 21 and 22 October. On 23 October she would be recovering from the return journey from Nassau and preparing for a statement to the House of Commons on the following day on the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. On 24 October she would have to answer Parliamentary Questions and make a statement on CHOGM. If an Anglo-Irish agreement were signed on 25 October the Prime Minister would be unable to make a statement in the House of Commons before the weekend, and would thus not have an opportunity of giving a guiding steer to public discussion, particularly in Northern Ireland, over the weekend through the medium of a Parliamentary statement. If the agreement was not signed until 28 October it would not be possible to have a debate in the House of Commons before prorogation. After The Queen's Speech, on 6 November, the debate in reply to The Queen's Speech would continue until Tuesday 12 November, and it would not be possible to debate an Anglo-Irish agreement in the House of Commons until after that date. The Prime Minister would have to be in her place in Parliament at least on the first and last days of the debate on the Address. This

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suggested that the earliest possible days for signing an Anglo-Irish agreement after 25 October would be Friday 8 or Monday 11 November. I had not checked these dates with the Prime Minister's diary but I was pretty sure that Monday 11 November would be the day of the Lord Mayor's Banquet and I thought that the Prime Minister would be reluctant to be out of London for the best part of the day and to face a major press conference when she had one of the biggest speeches of the year to make in the evening.

3. Mr Nally said that he thought that the Taoiseach would have much preferred to complete and sign the agreement before the end of October, but would no doubt understand the pressures on the Prime Minister. The Taoiseach was still anxious to avoid leaving a clear weekend between the date of signing and the debates in the Dail and the House of Commons. If a Monday or a Tuesday was impossible, the Taoiseach might accept a Friday; that could be 25 October or 8 November, but Mr Nally thought that Irish Ministers would be extremely reluctant to go beyond mid-November.

4. I did not discuss the possibility of having a summit at the weekend, for instance on Saturday 9 or Sunday 10 November.

5. I agreed with Mr Nally to leave this subject for further discussion when we next met.

6. I am sending copies of this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

RIA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

30 September 1985

Believe it or not - the Irish
certainly wait - this was written
2 before I knew that the Prime
Minister might be in
New York on 24 October. RIA