



SECRET

(7)

cc Blyp
PC

Prime Minister
CDD
29/1

B.07299

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

Policy on Northern Ireland

The purpose of your meeting of Ministers on 30 January will be to consider next steps in policy on Northern Ireland. The papers for the meeting are a minute by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland of 10 January and a minute by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary of 15 January; and an assessment of the results of the Northern Ireland by-elections on 23 January (Mr Ward's letter of 28 January to Mr Powell). The JIC will circulate before your meeting an assessment of the seizure by the Garda on 26 January of substantial quantities of arms and ammunition in an area of the Irish Republic not far from the border with Northern Ireland. This seizure resulted from close co-operation between the Garda and the security forces in Northern Ireland.

FLAG A _____
FLAG B _____
FLAG C _____

2. The Ministers attending the meeting will be the Lord President, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Lord Privy Seal, the Defence Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Chief Whip.

HANDLING

3. You may wish to start the meeting with a short discussion of the situation in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should be asked for his assessment of the by-election results. The 15 Unionist MPs resigned in order to demonstrate in the by-elections the strength of Protestant opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. They must be disappointed with the result, since they lost one of the 15 seats to the SDLP and also managed only slightly to increase the aggregate vote for unionist candidates in comparison with the

SECRET

general election of 1983. Unionist leaders appear to have no clear plan about what to do next. There are signs of differences among the Unionist MPs on whether to remain in the House of Commons. If the unionist political leaders do not in the coming weeks continue to give a strong lead to the Protestant community, there may be an opportunity for the Government to begin to persuade moderate unionists that the Anglo-Irish Agreement is no threat to them and indeed can produce results of benefit to them.

4. You will no doubt wish to move quickly to a discussion of overall policy. The minutes from the two Secretaries of State agree that the major task now is to work to diminish unionist opposition to the Agreement, by means of a three-part policy:

- a. the Government should stand firm on the Agreement and make it work;
- b. the Government should seek to influence moderate unionist opinion towards acquiescence in the Agreement by steady and reasoned reiteration in public - and to influential unionists in private - of the reasons why they have nothing to fear from the Agreement and by producing results from enhanced co-operation with the Irish Republic against terrorism;
- c. the Government should press the SDLP to participate in the political structures in Northern Ireland and to move towards devolution; and to adopt a more positive public attitude towards the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

Do other colleagues agree with this policy? On a point of style, it may help if the Government maintain a buoyant as well as determined line in public, refusing to be infected by an atmosphere of gloom propagated by unionist opponents of the Agreement.

5. You might then structure the discussion to cover the important aspects of policy.

SECRET

Security Co-operation

6. The Irish Government have argued in the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) that their efforts in co-operation against terrorism are already sufficient. The co-operation is considerable but more could be done. The seizure of arms in the Republic on 26 January is an encouraging sign. Does the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland intend, as a means of reassuring unionists about the Agreement, to let it be known publicly that the seizure resulted from cross-border co-operation? Do the security forces in Northern Ireland know of other arms caches or terrorist hide-outs in the Republic, so that further such successes could be achieved soon? The announcement of several successes from cross-border co-operation could begin to influence moderate unionist opinion. The Irish may claim, when we press them to do more in co-operation against terrorism, that they have insufficient police resources; but we should point to their major interest in the success of the Agreement and argue that they should pull out every stop to deliver results against terrorism and thus help to overcome the major hurdle of unionist opposition to the Agreement. This might be your major message if you accede to the Taoiseach's request for a meeting when he is in London from 18 to 20 February (Mr Appleyard's letter of 27 January to Mr Powell).

Devolution

7. Under the terms of the Agreement, devolution offers unionists a way of reducing the range of the subjects covered by the IGC. Unionist leaders have boxed themselves into a negative position in opposition to the Agreement, and devolution could provide an alternative to violence or to the absurd idea of UDI as a way out of the box. The SDLP, following their success in the by-elections, should feel strong enough to make moves at least towards participation in the political structures in Northern Ireland and perhaps towards devolution. How does the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland view the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's idea of another exercise

3
SECRET

SECRET

of exploratory talks like that conducted by Mr Chris Patten in early 1985? Does the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland consider that elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly should be held in the Autumn, rather than our simply allowing the Assembly to expire when its four year mandate runs out in October? If so, is it certain that the SDLP would participate in Assembly elections? Would the unionists, in their truculent mood, participate? Could the SDLP be persuaded to make an unconditional statement of readiness to talk to the unionists about devolution (even if they would be bound to set conditions to their actual agreement to devolution)?

The Royal Ulster Constabulary


8. A statement by the SDLP supporting the RUC and encouraging Roman Catholics to join would be useful in itself and would help to reassure unionists. Does the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland think that the SDLP can be persuaded to move on this following their success in the by-elections?

Possible meeting between yourself and Unionist leaders

9. It is likely that, following the by-elections, Unionist MPs will request a meeting with you. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will probably advise that you should agree to a meeting, notably for two reasons: first, the Government should not put itself in a position of refusing contact; and second, unionist leaders have been avoiding contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the chances of re-establishing it might be increased by his attending a meeting between you and the unionist leaders.

Parliamentary Matters

10. In preparation for your meeting, the Lord Privy Seal will have discussed two Parliamentary matters with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Chief Whip. The first is whether there should be new arrangements in the House of Commons for handling Northern Ireland business and perhaps for informing


SECRET

the House of the work of the IGC. The Lord Privy Seal's minute of 22 November 1985 drew attention to a dilemma: new arrangements which reduced the differences between Northern Irish and general United Kingdom business in the House would tend to further the integration of the Province into the United Kingdom and thus to go against our objective of devolution; yet new procedures which tended to emphasise differences between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom would not be welcome to Unionist MPs. Does the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland think that the House of Commons is the right forum for keeping unionists informed of the bulk of the work of the IGC, or would he prefer direct contact between himself and unionist leaders if they would agree? Is the present time, when unionists are without a clear policy, the right moment for offering them some arrangement?

11. The second Parliamentary matter is the question of establishing an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary tier in accordance with Article 12 of the Agreement. The Lord Privy Seal is likely to suggest that an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary tier should have no formal powers and that questions of membership, etc. should be explored through the usual channels. Some Conservative MPs who oppose the Agreement, for instance Sir John Biggs-Davison, are supporters of a Parliamentary tier.

The Irish Constitution

12. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland suggested in paragraph 6 of his minute that we should press the Irish Government to amend Articles 2 and 3 of their Constitution. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, in paragraph 8 of his minute, doubts that the Taoiseach could secure support for this in a referendum. The right policy is probably to



SECRET

maintain pressure on the Taoiseach, so as to increase the chances that a change might be possible in due course. But our major effort to influence the Irish Government should be concentrated on gaining results from co-operation against terrorism.

C L G Mallaby

C L G Mallaby

29 January 1986



Covering SECRET

B.07299

00241
MR POWELL

Northern Ireland: Meeting of
Ministers on 30 January

The attached brief replaces the one
I submitted on 17 January before postponement
of the meeting of Ministers.

C L G Mallaby

29 January 1986