

SUBJECT
C. Master

SECRET AND PERSONAL



VC
file 28

10 DOWNING STREET

5 October 1984

From the Private Secretary

Dear Graham,

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS: NORTHERN IRELAND

The Prime Minister held a meeting this morning with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to consider the handling of further talks with the Irish Government on Northern Ireland in the period before the Anglo-Irish Summit in mid-November. Sir Robert Armstrong, Mr. Robert Andrew, Mr. David Goodall and Mr. Bryan Cartledge were also present.

The Prime Minister said that she was worried that the Irish Government were trying to push the talks along too fast, and had unrealistic expectations from the Anglo-Irish Summit. She recognised that considerable progress had been made in reducing their earlier expectations of joint sovereignty or joint authority. But the more successful we were in scaling down Irish hopes, the greater pressure we should come under at the Summit to reach some agreement. She did not think that enough work had yet been done, in particular on the scope of the consultation which we were offering the Irish Republic on Northern Ireland affairs or on what would have to be offered to the Unionists to persuade them to accept an Irish dimension. The Prime Minister recalled that the Communique issued following her last visit to Dublin had aroused strong suspicions on the part of the Unionists. They would be very wary this time. Nothing at all had been said to them yet about the current talks. If they found out without proper preparation, before or as a result of the Summit, the whole exercise could backfire and lead to increased violence in the Province.

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The Northern Ireland Secretary said that it must be right to keep the negotiations afloat. But we had to avoid a situation in which we exchanged alienation of the Catholic minority for alienation of the Protestant majority. He believed that a workable scheme could be devised to allow the Irish Government a consultative role in Northern Ireland affairs. It was much less certain that the Irish Government could deliver changes in the Irish Constitution. In any case the Unionists would not regard that as an adequate quid pro quo for accepting the Irish dimension. They would say that the Republic's claim to Northern Ireland had never been more than an aspiration, and there was no need for the North to pay a price to see it renounced. It was necessary to consider what more could be offered to the Unionists. A lot of further work was needed on this. He also agreed on the need to talk to the Unionists before the discussions with the Irish Government progressed much further.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that Mr. Barry had made clear to him that the Irish Government would find it hard to continue the present co-operation unless there was also progress in the talks. If there were to be no evidence of progress within a reasonable time on the issues raised in the Irish Forum Report, Dr. FitzGerald's Government would draw increasingly heavy nationalist criticism. He thought that Mr. Barry that the understood role which could be offered to the Republic in Northern Ireland affairs would be modest. He agreed with the Northern Ireland Secretary on the need to offer offsetting gains to the Unionists. These should be in the direction of greater devolution of local government powers.

In discussion of what would need to be offered to the Unionists, it was suggested that they would be most attracted by restoration of local authority powers. Districts might be delimited so that Catholics would have majorities in some of them. It was pointed out however that

this might lead to Sinn Fein majorities in some districts. The Unionists would see it as in effect handing over a third of the Province to the Republic. The better course would be to devolve local rule for the Province as a whole, with safeguards for the minority.

A close link was recognised to exist between the powers to be devolved and the degree of consultation offered to the Republic. It was suggested that a clear distinction should be drawn between powers (defence, foreign policy, finance) which would remain with HMG; powers devolved to the local government which would not be subject to consultation with the Republic; and powers exercised by the Northern Ireland Secretary (for instance law and order in the Province) where the Irish Government would have a right to be consulted. A problem would clearly exist in that the matters on which the minority in Northern Ireland would look to the Republic for protection would extend beyond the powers reserved to the Secretary of State. Moreover, the Irish Government would not be interested in consultation limited only to security matters. This would expose them to charges by Mr. Haughey that they were just joining the British in propping up colonial rule. They would want there to be a political dimension and consultation would have to cover, for instance, appointments to public authorities. It was agreed that there should be scope for some widening of the areas where consultation would take place to cover, for instance, housing. But it was also recognised that it would not be possible to govern the Province effectively if it was necessary to consult with the Irish Government on every detail in areas where the Secretary of State exercised direct powers.

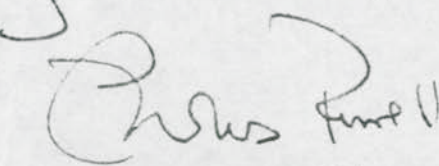
The Northern Ireland Secretary said that he was due shortly to have a further round of discussions with political leaders in the north. He thought it essential to be able to go over with them some of the ground being

BF/ discussed with the Irish Government. He also thought it important to be able to take a number of Northern Ireland Ministers, civil servants, and the Commissioner into his confidence. He would clearly have to be very careful in what he said to them. He would let the Prime Minister have a note of what he proposed to say. It was agreed that these contacts would not take place until after the next round of consultation with the Irish Government on 15/16 October.

BT/ The Prime Minister stressed that any statement of objectives to be agreed at the Anglo/Irish Summit would have to be in very general terms only. It should be borne in mind that she would have to make a statement to Parliament on her return. It was agreed that Sir Robert Armstrong would submit a draft in due course.

The Prime Minister concluded that Sir Robert Armstrong should be guided by the points made in discussion in his further contacts with the Irish Government and should discourage them from expecting too much from the Summit.

I am sending copies of this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir Antony Acland, Mr Robert Andrew, Mr David Goodall, Sir Philip Woodfield and Mr Bryan Cartledge.

Yours sincerely,


Charles Powell

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Northern Ireland Office.