

SUBJECT MEETING RECORD

SECRET

cc MASTER

cc IRELAND:

meeting with the
Taoiseach PT19



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File 9
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10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

3 December 1988

Dear Stephen,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH IN RHODES
ON SATURDAY 3 DECEMBER

The Prime Minister had an hour's talk with the Taoiseach at the end of the European Council in Rhodes earlier today. The Taoiseach was accompanied by Mr. Nally.

The Prime Minister said that she was very sorry to see the Taoiseach so unwell. It must have been a great strain for him to come to Rhodes. She hoped he would look after himself. The Taoiseach congratulated the Prime Minister on her very successful visits to Poland and to Washington and on the tremendous world role which she was playing. She might not believe it, but she was very much admired in Ireland.

The Prime Minister said she might as well get straight to the point. Britain was on the receiving end of terrorism and felt very badly when other countries did not seem to be giving their full co-operation to us in tackling it. She particularly blamed the Belgian Government for overturning the results of due legal process in the Ryan case. This was ironic in view of all the help we had given them, with the extradition of those involved in the Heysel Stadium case. The Belgian Government's decision had landed the Republic with a problem, she recognised that. But once again their extradition procedures had been found wanting. We had made clear our dislike of the procedures when they had been introduced a year earlier, and our belief that they would not work satisfactorily. Nonetheless our Attorney General had tried hard to comply with them. In the present case, we had taken every possible step to act rapidly and in full compliance with the Irish Government's procedures. But even now, over a week later, no action had been taken to detain Ryan. She knew perfectly well that we could not expect a decision on extradition in that time. But it was the clear duty of the Irish Government either to issue a provisional warrant for Ryan's arrest or to back our warrants. Instead there had been a lot of niggling by Irish officials. Unfortunately we were all too used to this and it made us wonder whether there really was the resolve to co-operate.

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It was deeply disappointing that even when we were desperately in need of help to arrest a very dangerous man, he was allowed to remain at liberty. She sometimes felt that people in the Republic were quite incapable of seeing how such procrastination must look to people in Britain. The result was that we felt very let down and she had felt obliged to say so publicly.

The Taoiseach said that it was a great pity that every time he and the Prime Minister met they had to deal with some dispute like this. They never seemed to have time to talk about the situation in the North, about the Unionists or about the political prospects generally: it was always some outrage or crisis. He wished they could get away from this constant bickering. In his view, the Belgians were the villains of the piece. The Irish Government had fully expected Belgium to extradite Ryan to the United Kingdom and had received virtually no warning that he was to be dumped on them. They could not have issued a warrant in anticipation of his arrival. They were now going through their procedures. The Gardai knew where Ryan was and could pick him up whenever they wanted to, once the procedures were complete. But it seemed likely once again to be a complicated case, as all these extradition matters were. That was why he thought it would be much better to make use of the powers in the Criminal Jurisdiction Act to enable people like Ryan to be tried in the Republic. Of fifteen cases tried under that Act, fourteen had been brought to a successful conclusion. He would appeal to the Prime Minister to agree that in cases like this, Britain should supply the Irish prosecuting authorities with the evidence and they would try the case. It was no secret that Irish courts inflicted longer sentences for terrorist offences than did British courts. He had understood that the Northern Ireland Secretary was not unfavourable to this. He wished to emphasise that what he proposed was not a substitute for extradition, but simply a procedure that could be applied in some cases, particularly where extradition was likely to be difficult.

The Prime Minister said that she thought the procedure might be useful in some cases, but certainly not in all of them and probably not in Ryan's case. The real need was for an effective procedure to achieve what both governments wanted and that was the return of fugitives from justice to stand trial in the countries where their offences had been committed. She recalled the Taoiseach's letter to her of a year ago in which he had given a solemn assurance that, if experience showed the new arrangements to be less than satisfactory, the Irish authorities would bring forward proposals to deal with any problems which might arise. It seemed to her that the procedures had shown themselves unsatisfactory and she hoped they could be modified. The Taoiseach said that the Prime Minister was in effect saying that she wanted to cash his cheque. He would reflect and write to her about it. But he hoped she would also agree that more use should be made of the provisions for extra-territorial jurisdiction. The Prime Minister said that

there were difficulties: for instance over the attendance of witnesses, the provision of evidence, and limitations on the type of cases which could be handled in this way. Her main concern for now was to see Ryan detained and extradited.

The Taoiseach said that he hoped the Prime Minister would not underestimate the efforts which the Irish Government had made to help, for instance in handing back the Maze escapees. This had required a major military operation by their standards. There was another point: he and his Ministerial colleagues really did not know much about Ryan, except that he was some mad priest who was always travelling round Europe. The Prime Minister read out some of the material we had about Ryan's activities, which seemed genuinely to come as a surprise to the Taoiseach. He asked whether he could be allowed to have the material. The Prime Minister said she would have to see what we could properly release. She would write to the Taoiseach about it.

The conversation then moved on to a number of other issues. There was some talk about the proceedings of the European Council earlier in the day. The Prime Minister gave the Taoiseach an account of her visit to Northern Ireland a few weeks ago, saying that she drew encouragement from the warm reception she had received from Unionists. This suggested that their outright resistance to the Anglo-Irish Agreement was weakening. She referred to a number of measures which we were taking in Northern Ireland, in particular the Fair Employment Act. She also took the Taoiseach through our recent steps to strengthen the Government's powers to deal with terrorism. The Taoiseach opined that he had never understood why we allowed 50% remission to prisoners in Northern Ireland: in the Republic it was only 25%.

The Prime Minister said that she saw little early prospect of political progress in Northern Ireland. She had been disappointed by the performance of the SDLP who were showing very little enthusiasm for devolution.

The Taoiseach recalled that he owed the Prime Minister a letter on security co-operation. Now that he was feeling rather better, he would let her have a reply as soon as possible. Meanwhile the Irish authorities continued to turn up arms and explosives in the Republic.

The Prime Minister referred to the forthcoming review of the working of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It would be necessary to consult the parties in Northern Ireland, including the Unionists who had not been consulted before signature of the Anglo-Irish Agreement itself. The Taoiseach said that he would fully support this. The Prime Minister continued that she thought the review was best discussed through the machinery of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. The Taoiseach appeared content with this.

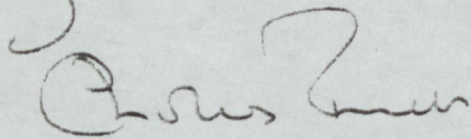
It was agreed to issue an anodyne statement to the press. I enclose a copy.

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It would be helpful to have early advice on the nature of the information about Ryan which we can let the Irish Government have.

I am copying this letter to Mike Maxwell (Northern Ireland Office), Philip Mawer (Home Office), Michael Saunders (Law Officers' Department) and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,


(C.D. POWELL)

Stephen Wall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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POSSIBLE ELEMENTS FOR A PRESS STATEMENT

- the regular meeting between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister took place at the end of the European Council.
- there was a frank exchange of views on a number of issues, including extradition, fair employment, security co-operation and the review of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.