

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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Meeting with British Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher,

Downing Street, 21st May, 1980

Notes on Presentation

1. The British have published proposals and discussed them at a protracted conference "for transferring to elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland greater responsibility for the conduct of their own affairs."
2. That conference has ceased. There can be no question of its success or failure since, in British terms, its purpose was simply to ascertain "the highest level of agreement" among the different interests in the North. In the sense that they have done this the conference has been a success.
3. Mrs Thatcher herself has not been openly close to the Conference. On all the probabilities she has, however, been close to it in fact. She will, therefore, be more than slightly committed to the process of which it is part.
4. All our information is that the British have not yet come down firmly on what the ~~real~~ step should be. One option is to go for an assembly and press ahead with the legislation etc. despite opposition. Another possibility is to publish a White or Green Paper with a further narrower range of options.
5. One way or the other they are continuing the debate in a Northern Ireland or United Kingdom context. From what is known of Mrs. Thatcher, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to shift them from this stance.
6. We can say that the approach is "inadequate"; that for all the historical reasons which are so well known, it will fail. The most likely answer is that it should be given a chance and that the British intend to push ahead with their proposals on this basis.
7. These approaches are totally different. One side says, pragmatically, continue with the process. The other side says that it is foolish to continue with proposals where failure is virtually inevitable.
8. In these conditions it seems most likely that the best conclusion to emerge, from our viewpoint, would be agreement for a further examination of possibilities in the area of relationships between the two islands, with the promise of continuing review of what is happening in Northern Ireland. This type of solution would be a considerable advance on British historical interests which have always been sensitive to suggestions of intervention in Northern Ireland (or UK) affairs.

The way in which any proposals are put forward will, obviously, have an obvious bearing on whether we can attain even this objective. If Mrs Thatcher is faced with maximum demands, in cold print, in the form of a draft communique, no matter now "informal" or "unofficial" the text, there is a strong possibility that she will react unfavourably and this reaction will colour her attitude to the meeting. Our suggestions could be put more broadly in an oral presentation, to, say, the Ambassador, with the suggestion that the precise details would be filled in by the Taoiseach when he meets the Prime Minister, in the wider context of world tensions today, and particularly, the type of threat facing Europe. This sort of presentation, while it might not lead to such precise results, at this meeting, runs less risk of going seriously wrong. It should, I think be seriously considered.



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16th May, 1980

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Objections by Mrs T.  
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