

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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To:

As Revised following  
Taoiseach's comments

From:

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting between Taoiseach and British Prime Minister,  
Mrs. Thatcher, in Charlemagne on 22 March, 1983.

1. The Taoiseach and Prime Minister met, by arrangement, in the British Delegation Rooms at 8.30 a.m. The Prime Minister was accompanied by Sir Robert Armstrong, Secretary to the Cabinet and one of her Private Secretaries, Mr. John Coles. The Taoiseach was accompanied by the undersigned. The meeting lasted 45 minutes.
2. The Prime Minister opened with a general discussion of the way things were going at the European Council. She enquired as to what was on the Agenda for this morning and mentioned her particular concern for the situation in Ethiopia. She said that with the Community's food surpluses, it seemed a great pity that what was happening should be allowed to continue and hoped that some intention to be of assistance, as discussed at the dinner of Heads of Government last night, would be incorporated in the communique. The Taoiseach expressed agreement and said that he had made the same point to his own officials last night. The Prime Minister then invited the Taoiseach to open the discussion.
3. The Taoiseach said that he would like to begin with the issue of security. He then went into detail on three cases - involving Paris (on which contacts are to be made through the London Embassy and Foreign Minister Cheysson), the Stronge murder and four members of the RUC (on which the Taoiseach indicated acquiescence in the use of the CLEA, if that seemed best). The Prime Minister expressed her appreciation of the Taoiseach's statement, which she said was "very helpful". The Taoiseach stressed that the Director of Public Prosecutions who was responsible, was totally independent. The Prime Minister enquired as to whether if CLEA were used extradition would be ruled out. The Taoiseach said that the issue in the Shannon case was, in fact, the other way round and he assured the Prime Minister that the extradition approach, if it failed, would still leave open the CLEA subsequently. The Taoiseach said that the whole issue of extradition, in the North, was emotional. In practice, the number of cases involved was very small. What was important was the perception rather than the reality.
4. The Taoiseach then went on to say that we are interested in the re-activation of the official level contacts which had been operating after their November 1981 meeting - without publicity. Sir Robert Armstrong said that there had been

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meetings of the AIIC at Ministerial level but no meeting at senior official level since the meeting in Dublin in January, 1982. The Prime Minister agreed as to the desirability of reviving the contacts but said that it was important to go slowly on all this. Obviously with security, everything could be got under an umbrella. The new forum complicated things. "You know the reactions it has caused".

5. The Taoiseach said that the official contacts were available and could consider the foundations for future action. The Prime Minister said that it was obviously to the advantage of both parties to keep in touch.

6. The Taoiseach then mentioned the SDLP. He said that one purpose in establishing the forum had been to provide support for the SDLP. They had made a proposal for a Council based on nationalist opinion. He had taken the proposal and changed it in such a way as to open it to Unionists. It was important to support the SDLP as a political movement, in place of Sinn Fein. The Prime Minister said that the SDLP has a base. It can go to the Assembly if it wishes. The Taoiseach said that the young people in the North were being alienated from the political process. If the SDLP went into the Assembly they would become even more alienated.

7. The Prime Minister then enquired as to whether the forum were established purely to help the SDLP. The Taoiseach said that that was part only of the purpose. Perception of dangers in Northern Ireland went further than the realities. The forum was to show Unionists that the future could be less destructive from their own point of view than what they might have been imagining. He had dealt with the question of confederation some years ago. The reception then by people like Paisley, Harry West and Martin Smyth had been a great deal less strident than might otherwise have been expected. The forum, could, perhaps, show how Unionists could retain their British identity. The Prime Minister said that if we pursue the forum it could be "very very damaging" in relation to the Unionist case. It revived all the Sunningdale ghosts. However, the question was not for her but the Assembly. It was up to them to decide on the public position they take up. The Taoiseach emphasised that even with the SDLP alone it would be open to a forum so constituted to open up to representations from Unionists who are not members of any party. The Prime Minister said that they would not take part in the forum. She herself gets this reaction immediately and sharply. She knows this because of the way in which she had to deal with PQs - every Tuesday and Thursday.

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8. The Taoiseach mentioned Unionists who are not in politics, giving as an example Mr. McCartney (who had, of course, since joined the Official Unionist Party) who had visited Dublin some years ago. It was very good for the people in the South to see his vision of the future. The SDLP were also helped in this way. The Prime Minister said that the SDLP were "your problem". She agreed that help should not go to Sinn Fein. But the SDLP were anti-Unionist - that was her problem. The Taoiseach said that one must have both sides in mind. There were limits to what each could do. The Prime Minister referred again to the Assembly. She said obviously the Unionists will use it. They get publicity from it.

9. The Prime Minister then went on to enquire as to how the Taoiseach thought the Westminster election would go. There would probably be 12 Unionists. How would the other five seats go? The Taoiseach said that with the number of parties the result was more than usually unpredictable. He thought that one outcome might be three SDLP and two Sinn Fein. The Prime Minister enquired as to whether the Sinn Fein people were on the border. The Taoiseach said there and also West Belfast. John Hume was more or less impregnable in Derry. Armagh and Tyrone were also reasonable prospects. The Prime Minister then mentioned Gerry Fitt in Belfast, whom she described as "a very very courageous man." The Taoiseach agreed but said that the candidature of Gerry Fitt in West Belfast which seemed to be necessary to qualify for severance pay from the British Parliament could weaken the SDLP's chances. The Taoiseach then went on to say that Enoch Powell's seat in Down was not totally safe. The Prime Minister enquired as to who was the danger. The Taoiseach said perhaps the SDLP. The Prime Minister indicated that Powell thought he would keep the seat - however the whole situation was tricky, with 17 seats.

10. The Taoiseach then went on to say that it was important that the issue Northern Ireland should be left open in any British election. It was important that there should be no tie-up with the old Local Government system. The Prime Minister said that she would stick by "our undertaking". The other party were however coming out with different statements. She did not know of the extent to which bipartisan policy would hold up in these conditions. She just was not sure what would happen. The Taoiseach said that the present situation should be left alone, as far as possible. The Prime Minister said that she had not yet written her manifesto. The problem was whether Labour would stick with their bipartisan policy. Sir Robert Armstrong raised the question of the influence of the large

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Irish population in Liverpool, Glasgow and one other place. Mrs. Thatcher enquired from him as to whether the Scottish Nationalists had been responsible for "one of those letter-bombs sent to me".

11. The Taoiseach then mentioned the Encounter organisation adumbrated in the joint studies. Work on this side reached a certain point where Chairmen had been considered viz. Sir David Orr and Ken Whitaker and thought it would be useful if progress could be made. The Prime Minister said she would like to consider this. Orr was perfectly acceptable. Sir Robert Armstrong said this had been the position and, as far as he knew, Sir David Orr would still be able to accept. The Prime Minister commented that he would probably be better than anyone else. Sir Robert Armstrong then mentioned that what had been thought was 6 people on each side, including, perhaps, a Junior Minister. The Prime Minister said that we would have to be careful about Junior Ministers. They could lead to a clash the first time the organisation met. She was also concerned about security. The British-Irish association was mentioned as having held meetings in Oxford Colleges and Lambeth Palace but the Prime Minister said that it could be different with a new organisation and that further consideration should be given to the question so that things could be worked out. It was important that whatever happened should not involve massive security.

12. At this point, 9.10 a.m., Foreign Secretary Pym arrived. The Prime Minister summarised the conversation up to this point by telling him that it had concentrated around

- (1) The Forum, on which she was anxious about the effects on Unionist opinion;
- (2) Security on which many helpful suggestions had been made;
- (3) The "Koenigswinter suggestion", on which further details will be worked out.

13. She thought that activities for the moment should be totally behind the scenes. This would be the most promising type of mechanism. The Prime Minister mentioned the Irish Rugby Football Union as an example of a

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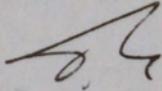
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North/South organisation and the Taoiseach mentioned the many other organisations set up on All-Ireland basis including the RDS, Churches, ICTU etc. The Prime Minister said that it was necessary to be careful now about what not to do, with an election coming. The Taoiseach said that it was important to revive the old relationship.

14. There was then discussion on the text of the communique, which issued, as attached.



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Dermot Nally

22nd March, 1983.