

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Meeting between Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Peter Barry T.D. and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mr. Prior at Hillsborough on 19 October 1983.

1. Mr. Graham Angel, N.I.O., Mr. John Lyons private secretary to Mr. Prior and the undersigned accompanied the Ministers for the initial part of the meeting. The Minister and Mr. Prior later had a private conversation over dinner. The main points to emerge in discussion while officials were present are as follows:

(a) Prevention against Terrorism Act

Mr. Prior asked whether we had received a satisfactory briefing as promised at the last meeting between the two Ministers. Mr. Barry expressed gratitude for the helpful briefing which had been given;

(b) Kiltyclogher

Mr. Prior said that the position was unchanged on the possibility of replacing the bridge. The Minister raised the question of a proper footbridge being installed. After some discussion it was agreed that the N.I.O. would investigate this proposal. The British side were unaware that two people had drowned trying to cross the existing temporary footbridge;

(c) Plastic Bullets

The Minister queried whether there had been any progress in developing new tactics on riot control that would obviate the need for plastic bullets. Mr. Prior said that tests with water cannon had indicated that their use might be more lethal than plastic bullets. He said that only two bullets had been fired in September and asked Mr. Angel for copies of the reports on the two incidents (one in Derry and one in Belfast). Mr. Prior said that he now received reports on each incident. He felt that this element of control had an effect. They were not being indiscriminately used as in earlier times.

The last death had been in May 1982. So far this year only 605 plastic bullets had been fired compared to 12,000 in one month in 1981.

(d) H-Blocks

The escape from the H-Blocks had raised the temperature mainly because of the vigorous reaction on the Unionist side. Mr. Prior was grateful that there had been no criticism or adverse comment from the South. He acknowledged that it had been a major victory for the IRA. The Minister expressed concern about the way in which prisoners had been ill-treated in the period following the escape and expressed the view that there seemed to be a lack of control over the Prison Officers. The Secretary of State said that some prisoners had been injured at the time of the escape but that one had to bear in mind that a Prison Officer had been killed and another seriously wounded. He was not aware that ill-treatment had continued and asked whether it was Fr. Faul that we had listened to on this subject. The Minister said that we had other reliable information on this matter. Mr. Prior asked Mr. Lyons to comment. He said that one prisoner had lost his front teeth and that there had been some other minor injuries but that there was nothing else which he was aware of. There was some discussion on where the escapees might be. The Minister said that we would of course do everything possible to apprehend any of them who might be in our jurisdiction. Mr. Prior said that it was noteworthy that there had been no criticism of the South in Unionist circles and that our record in this area now seems to be accepted. Mr. Prior said that the Unionists had been concentrating on him and were always trying to get rid of him. What they would like is a new Secretary of State every 18 months so that they could get rid of each one before he got to grips with the complexities of the situation.

(e) Supergrasses

The Minister brought up the question of supergrasses and said that he had mixed feelings on the subject. Mr. Prior shared these mixed feelings but asked what he was supposed to do when people came forward offering information on other terrorists. They had to offer them legal assistance, to protect them and provide them with a new life if necessary. The escape of Lean had possibly changed the situation on supergrasses but it was not yet clear what the impact would be. Mr. Prior asked Mr. Angel what was Lean's status at this stage. Mr. Angel said that he was "in voluntary protective custody". Mr. Prior said that of the 28 people implicated by Lean it was probable that over half would have to be released, the others were implicated by other witnesses.

(f) Kinsale Gas

The Minister expressed gratitude to Mr. Prior for his efforts in reaching agreement on the gas deal. Mr. Prior said that both sides were to be congratulated on the conclusion of a highly successful project.

2. Mr. Prior asked the Minister for his views on the Summit and said that he hoped we were not looking for any new initiative at this stage. The Minister said he saw the Summit as setting the seal on a better relationship between the two countries. No major progress could be made until the Forum issued its report and this might not now realistically happen before February 1984. The Minister said that he was pleased by the number of people who had come to the Forum and with great candour expressed the Unionist point of view. The Forum was trying in a very serious way to face up to the situation in Ireland. He felt that it had gained in credibility and he hoped that its work would come to a successful conclusion. Mr. Prior agreed that the Forum was now being taken much more seriously in Northern Ireland and London. He mentioned that Austin Currie had told him that the leader of the Opposition was making a major effort within the Forum and that progress was

being made. The Minister agreed and said that part of the success in this regard had been the fact that the leaders involved regularly met to plan the work of the Forum. Politicians in the South were now faced with the choice between "trumpetry and reality". Mr. Prior reiterated that the Forum had won a degree of acceptance in Northern Ireland. He felt that Sir Charles Carter had put some very cogent and difficult economic arguments before the Forum. He asked the Minister about his reaction to Sir John Biggs-Davidson's views. The Minister remarked that he was "from the last century." Mr. Prior said that both sides were up against such right wing Tories as Biggs-Davidson and an MP called Murphy whom the Secretary of State described as a despicable twirp. He felt that Enoch Powell had people such as Molyneaux, Smyth and this group of Tory right wingers mesmerised.

Mr. Prior respected Powell as an impressive parliamentary operator. The Minister enquired as to the level of support which this group of right wing Tories had. Mr. Prior felt that there were thirty to forty M.P.'s who supported the integrationist line and looked to Enoch Powell for leadership. The Minister enquired as to what form of integration they were seeking. Mr. Prior said that they sought a Regional Council on the lines of a super local authority with no regional assembly or devolved Government. They would simply have the normal representation at Westminster. If there was no progress within the next year this group of thirty to forty would grow enormously. On the other hand, Mr. Prior said that there were people like Paisley who were schizophrenic. The DUP had attacked him some time ago at the Everglades Hotel in Derry in the same fashion as the Forum delegation were treated. They had screamed at him "Brits out" and had so badly damaged his armoured car that it had to be completely resprayed. The DUP were loyalists only so long as they got their own way and would as a last resort get the "Brits out" and go it alone rather than seek accommodation with the minority.

3. The Minister asked Mr. Prior what he meant by "progress" over the next year. The Secretary of State made three points in response: (a) an improved security situation; (b) a reduction or removal of the direct British Security presence i.e. the British Army and (c) progress towards a devolved power-sharing administration. The Minister asked what role he saw for the Irish Government in this situation. Mr. Prior started to speak about Articles 2 and 3 and changes in Southern attitudes when the Minister indicated that he was asking a different question. Mr. Prior said that if one was talking about unity by consent a large number of Tories would be sympathetic but very few would have any time for any form of enforced pressure for Irish unity. Mr. Prior felt that if the Assembly broke down or collapsed towards next Summer the reaction in the Tory party would be that everything had been tried and that there is no point in continuing to seek devolved power-sharing government but instead to move towards integration. Such a move would grow rapidly. We should not forget that the Unionists at Westminster spend their time cultivating the Tory right wing backbenchers. Biggs-Davidson was going round telling people that N.I. Catholics were against unity. The Minister questioned the number of Catholics whom Biggs-Davidson knew in Northern

Ireland. Mr. Prior agreed that it was a fictitious line. People in Great Britain did not want to know about Northern Ireland. They would prefer to get rid of it.

4. The Minister enquired about the general security situation. Mr. Prior felt that one could never be complacent. While the last few months had been relatively good he found that as fast as you got on top of one group of terrorists another group replaced it. He had to accept that as fast as people were imprisoned other younger people were recruited. The Minister strongly asserted that the problem could not be dealt with in a situation where minority views and political aspirations were not taken into account. Their aspirations and sense of identity were being ignored. Mr. Prior said that the SDLP should have tried harder and tried to work the Assembly. The Minister said that he was referring to Sinn Féin and the changing situation on the minority side. Where would the SDLP be in 2 years time if this slide continued? Mr. Prior repeated that the SDLP should have come in. He pointed to divisions in the SDLP similar to divisions in the South between Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. The Minister said that in his opinion Mr. Hume was very much in charge of a party which was united in its efforts to make progress at the Forum. Mr. Prior felt that his relationship with Hume had improved considerably in recent months and they were now getting on very well. Hume was no longer allowing Mallon to dictate the pace. In his experience the Secretary of State had found Mallon to be an extremely nice and engaging person but also the toughest to deal with in the SDLP. He did not give any ground on the aspirations of the minority. The Minister also remarked that he was equally tough on the Provos. Mr. Prior agreed but found people such as McGrady, Currie, Hendron and Hume a lot easier to deal with. The Minister asked what role could now be given to them as a party. Hume's Westminster seat had helped and the Forum kept them in the news but power-sharing was no longer the answer to the plight of the minority. Acceptance of power-sharing now by the SDLP would be seen by their Community as taking the "Kings shilling". Mr. Prior said that if they were no longer prepared to work within the system they were no longer a constitutional party. The Minister stressed that times had changed and hardened considerably. Some new structure which

incorporated a realistic Irish dimension was required. The Minister repeated that circumstances had changed and asked what would happen if there was no progress within the next two years. Mr. Prior felt that while there was a majority in favour of the Union the SDLP could have their aspirations but would have to work in the meantime within Northern Ireland. If they were not interested in working here (N.I.) and in power-sharing - what did they want? The Minister mentioned the question of security and the role it might play. Mr. Prior suggested that this topic be discussed over dinner.

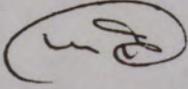
5. The Secretary of State said that if the SDLP wanted something beyond power-sharing which had a strong Irish dimension there was no possibility that the Unionists would "have it". The Minister pointed out that the Unionists would not have power-sharing anyway. They had entered the Assembly on a platform of no power-sharing.
6. Mr. Prior disagreed that this was their sole objective (stopping power-sharing) in entering the Assembly. He had hoped that the SDLP would have come in at the beginning and gradually gained acceptance for weighted majority devolved government. He pointed to three official Unionists whom he felt would share power. He named Raymond Fergusson and John Carson but neither he nor Angel could remember the third person. He said that he had broached power-sharing informally with Paisley who had not ruled it out. He was not in a position however to pursue this while the SDLP remained outside. Molyneaux and his close colleagues (Smyth/Powell) were opposed to the Assembly but the party as a whole wished to go in. Paisley was very much in favour but one wondered what his long term objective is.
7. Mr. Prior felt that if the Assembly is to be wrecked the objective will be total integration and the timing will be important. He referred again to the particular timespan of one year at which stage the Assembly's uselessness might be becoming apparent to all concerned if there was no progress. One should not forget that the controlling elements within the OUP not excluding Martin Smyth had as their objective

total integration. Their party as a whole might eventually be brought round to that point of view.

8. The Minister asked about the unionist population and whether its views differed from the Unionist parties. The unionist community Mr. Prior felt was more moderate than its politicians but they still continued to vote for the same politicians with their dogmatic approach. Mr. Prior pointed to the Alliance Party. It was a great pity but they had failed to really cross the divide between the two communities. They continued to lose ground. The DUP were a working class party which would in normal circumstances be Labour Party orientated. The Minister felt that Sinn Féin was attracting the working class vote on the other side. The Secretary of State felt that it would be more a Militant Tendency vote than a Labour Party vote.
- 9.1. Mr. Prior repeated his earlier view that he could not see the SDLP giving up power-sharing unless some major move was made towards the Nationalists which would be totally unacceptable to the Unionists. He felt that he should stick to power-sharing as the only way forward. The Minister said that in 1912 Home Rule would have been acceptable but in 1922 it was not enough. We were dealing with fundamentally changed circumstances. Mr. Prior said that he could understand the point being made by the Minister. It was less easy now than it had been in Brian Faulkner's day. Mr. Prior felt that the Sunningdale type operation was now impossible. It would bring out all the worst possibilities on the Unionist side.
10. The Secretary of State referred to February 1982 and that his initiative had been dealt a disastrous blow by the defeat of the coalition government and the subsequent behaviour of Charles Haughey's Government over the Falkland islands. The Minister said that there were flaws in the initiative and that if the coalition had stayed in government it would have spotted them and opposed many aspects of the initiative. Mr. Prior asked what was to be done now. The Minister repeated his view that circumstances had changed, power-sharing was not only not possible but it would not provide a solution. The Minister felt that we had a different set of cards to play with now. Mr. Prior did not directly

respond to this indicating that it could be discussed over dinner. He instead referred to the Unionists and the fact that they were powerful in Parliament during the 1970's. They were no longer powerful in that sense and no one (apart from the Tory right) would pay attention to them in this Parliament. The Tory right wing was very interested in Ulster but the left wing element was not. The Minister made the point that it was the other way round in the Labour Party.

11. Mr. Prior referred to the Liberal Party conference and the way in which "way out groups" had pushed through a policy unacceptable to Steel. The Secretary of State felt that the majority of Liberals did not want power and were more interested in sponsoring various "Liberal" issues while in perpetual opposition. Steel badly wanted power and had been virtually destroyed by the last election. He felt that Steel no longer had the determination to carry on and that his influence would diminish. The Minister pointed to the disappointment involved in getting 25% of the vote and only a handful of seats. Mr. Prior said it was a disgrace to see Labour get 200 seats with only a slightly greater proportion of the vote. The Ministers adjourned for dinner at this stage.
12. In a separate discussion which I had with Graham Angel I asked him about allegations of reductions in staffing and overtime at the H-Blocks. He said that the N.I.O. had carefully investigated this and it was untrue. Staffing and expenditure had increased and he felt that the Secretary of State was in no danger of having to resign. He said that the Hennessy report was expected in November (confidential). He said that there was no change in the position on Crossmaglen GAA grounds and that he would have our suggestion on a foot bridge at Kiltyclogher examined and would be in contact about it.
13. The Minister who had arrived at Hillsboro at 6.00 p.m. left three hours later. The attached statement was agreed as background briefing for the media.

  
Martin Burke  
20 October 1983