

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2014/105/826
Creation Date(s):	28 May 1984
Extent and medium:	5 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
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Barry-Prior Meeting

The meeting took place over lunch in Brown's Hotel, London, on 25 May 1984 from 12.30 p.m. to 2.30 p.m. Ambassador Dorr was present for an hour and ten minutes. No British officials attended.

The following account is based on notes read to me by Mr Dorr supplemented by a debriefing session with the Minister which covered the period when the Ambassador was not present. (The Ambassador will supply a more detailed account as far as his own participation was concerned.)

Prior said that there had been a meeting between the Prime Minister, Howe and himself the previous day. They had discussed the ideas transmitted by Nally to Armstrong. The Prime Minister had been "very negative". Howe had been more positive and more interested. (Prior urged the Minister to encourage this interest on Howe's part during the Community weekend of reflection for Ministers for Foreign Affairs.) Prior said that his basic feeling afterwards was that it would have been better had the meeting not taken place at all. Lord Carrington had told him to expect this sort of reaction from the Prime Minister: he (Carrington) had had to deal with it several times on Rhodesia.

The Prime Minister had been quite negative to the Irish ideas. Should Articles 2 and 3 be up for change a lot of things could open up (Prior did not press for them to be changed). Prior said that, as to future procedure, the British would require some time: they were not yet ready to respond definitively on the last Nally-Armstrong round.

By way of parenthesis, Prior said that he had just spent an hour with Utley of the Telegraph. Utley, he said, was Thatcher's principal speech-writer and had influence with her. He had urged Utley to write a paper for her outlining some ideas of his own.

Prior then outlined some of his own ideas which he would hope to sell if nothing more than the Sunningdale declaration was on offer from us. They had not found favour with Thatcher. He had no idea how far he could sell them to the Cabinet.

- Closer and more organised cooperation on security in border areas but with each set of security forces keeping to its side of the border;
- A joint security commission within the AIIC framework involving Prior and our Minister for Justice plus the Chief Constable and the Commissioner and also possibly Army personnel on both sides; the Southern role would be monitoring security policy e.g. we would have an effective mechanism to complain about UDR misbehaviour; Prior would see this body meeting every month;
- An ombudsman-type institution in Northern Ireland comprising three nominees: one by Britain, one by us and one by agreement of both sides in the North; the functions of this institution to cover the whole field of discrimination;
- A Northern Ireland Assembly: he believed Unionists were now ready to agree to blocking mechanisms and 50% of Committee Chairmanships;
- A Northern Ireland Executive comprising Prior with two Ministers (presumably British) plus four or five Ministers from the Assembly who would get on with running their Departments;
- An Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Tier;
- A more institutionalised AIIC with a clear definite role in e.g. tourism, communications and agriculture (Prior observed that "sovereignty" had largely been conceded in agriculture; why not go the whole hog?).

Prior foresees the debate on the Forum Report for the week beginning 2 July. He sees it as being combined with the annual issue of the renewal of direct rule. He would try to persuade

the Prime Minister to speak: her doing so would be seen as being unusual. She might do so if progress were being made in this channel. Prior saw the time for "action" as before the Autumn: you never knew what untoward events could take place at any time, so the sooner the better.

The Minister gave as a preliminary reaction to Prior's ideas that they were inadequate; that they would give a boost to the IRA but that he would think about them.

Prior said the Prime Minister had said that the Sunningdale declaration would "change nothing".

On the political problems facing any initiative in London, Prior said that the Unionists were sustained in their intransigence by the Tory Right; he could deliver the rest of the Party but only the Prime Minister could bring the Right. It was essential to decouple the Tory Right from the Unionists. Only she could do that. So far as he was concerned, she must win and keep the credit for any initiative if it is to work. She remains the key to a solution.

On the situation within the North, Prior reported an unprecedented readiness to move on the part of Unionist opinion. He said that the Chief Constable had reported a greater degree of stability in both sections of the community than had been the case for years.

On our proposal of a statement of principles, Prior said he strongly favoured it himself but she was completely opposed until she knew and agreed what exactly was being proposed (i.e. how exactly it would work out in practice).

Prior said that Thatcher had asked Prior and Howe to consider repartition with "high compensation" to those on both sides who would have to move.

There followed exchanges on a series of points raised by the Minister during which Prior took notes.

1. The Minister showed Prior an updated list of issues current in Anglo-Irish relations pointing out that there was no evidence of British action on a great number of points. Prior asked the Minister to write to him about this.
2. Robinson investigation: Prior said an investigation was in hand. We would be informed.
3. Carlingford Lough: Prior took note of our suggestion that the Northern security people, rather than boarding vessels in the Lough, should, where they dock on our side, ask the Garda Siochana to search them and otherwise wait until they dock on the Northern side before searching them themselves. He said he would take this up with the Navy and the RUC.
4. Supergrass trials: Prior said these were coming to an end.
5. McGlinchey: The only point Prior added to our information was that he himself had urged the DPP to go to a full trial regardless of the prospects of the verdict.
6. Prisoners in Northern Ireland: He and Scott are doing their best to be helpful in a number of ways. The Minister (who had independent corroboration of this) said he appreciated that but urged a trickle of early releases in cases where Prior had discretion. Prior explained that he was trying to release people after 10 years in cases where in Britain they were held for a minimum of 20 years.

7. Kiltyclogher: Prior said he would bang the necessary heads together in the North to have the metal footbridge put in place.
8. Road closures: Prior raised a case which had been cleared through officials the previous day. The Minister urged some openings, no further closures and, in particular, the opening of Lackey Bridge.
9. Crossmaglen GAA ground: The Minister confirmed the suggestion that the Army should requisition the field of the Handicapped Committee as an alternative right-of-way. He also urged early settlement of the outstanding compensation issue. Prior, saying he would try to help, added "Would you like to have it yourself (meaning Crossmaglen)?"

Security Talks

Prior said that the fact that the official talks agreed between himself and the Minister for Justice last year had not developed was to be regretted. He asked the Minister to try to get them moving.

M.J. Lillis
28 May 1984

c.c. Personal & Secret
Taoiseach
Minister
Secretary
Mr Nally