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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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SECRET

Taoiseach's meeting with Cabinet Secretary Armstrong

Following the meeting at official level yesterday, the Taoiseach had a meeting with Sir Robert Armstrong lasting almost half an hour. The following are abbreviated notes of the discussion.

Taoiseach: John Hume's meeting with the Prime Minister was positive. It gave an impetus to carry things further. It was important that every effort should be made to discover more of the Unionist position. I understand that the Prime Minister will be pursuing this. Is powersharing a possibility? I have been under the impression that you may be underestimating the ability of the Unionists to go along with measures to accommodate the Irish dimension. There had been what I took to be indications from the OUP at least, that they would go along with the idea of a conference.

Armstrong: I accept that the proposals in the paper are not formally linked to any form of devolved Government or administration. It is not complete.

Taoiseach: it seems to be a form of the lower option mentioned before by Mr. Hurd.

Armstrong: It is a great deal more than that. There are things in it specifically designed to recognise the Irish dimension. Paragraph 10 says that the body would concern itself with measures to recognise national identity, to protect human rights and to prevent discrimination. That is a very wide mandate.

If there were not a devolved Government, matters would be different and would certainly not be unmanageable.

Taoiseach: I doubt if it is sufficient to attract the support of the minority. It seems to be a long way short of that.

Armstrong: there may be presentational difficulties. We are certainly not committed to the document in its present form, insofar as presentation is concerned. The substance of the document has been agreed at Ministerial level.

Taoiseach: at the pre-Chequers meetings, we seemed to be not too far apart. Could we get back to that position? It seemed then that what was involved was the resolution of practical issues. The suggestion that our involvement should be clearly consultative was a particular difficulty.

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Armstrong: the present document envisages a single body acting different modes, instead of a number of bodies. If the Taoiseach wished, it might be better to look at a number of bodies, as in the pre-Chequers discussion. That was obviously a matter for consideration.

Taoiseach: a poll before Chequers had indicated a very large measure of support among the people for the sort of ideas being contemplated. The fall out of the Chequers meeting had done very considerable damage here, to the Government and to myself personally. However, there are indications that people remained reasonably open to the sort of arrangements being considered before Chequers.

Armstrong: this could all be considered in the papers being produced now. There was one very significant feature in all this: the Prime Minister does not want to stand pat. She had told John Hume this and she had told President Reagan.

Taoiseach: the basic question is do we come back to the framework in the present paper or do we need another structure. How can we progress this matter and when? We could not have another Summit of the kind we had just experienced.

Armstrong: yes. There is full agreement on that. What about a reasonably full meeting in the margins of the European Council?

Taoiseach: I am not sure that that would provide sufficient opportunities, but first we must, in a document, identify what the issues are. Would a preliminary informal discussion be useful? I have an invitation to address the Oxford Union, which I am considering seriously. Could I leave that suggestion with you. (When Sir Robert was leaving the meeting I asked him to consider and let me know when we were next talking what would be the most suitable occasion, insofar as the Prime Minister was concerned, for this type of informal meeting. He said he would.)

Armstrong: the official group have arranged to meet again in the week beginning 4th February.

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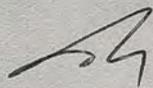
Taoiseach: the essential point is that there must be a structure or process sufficient to produce political involvement on the part of the minority and to carry them along to a point where they could support the security and judicial systems. There could be no question of the Irish Government becoming involved in something which involved responsibility but no power. On the judicial front, the Joint Court seemed to be on. The basic mood is right. This was an opportunity that should not be missed.

Armstrong: and a need!

Taoiseach: the IRA are not as strong on the ground and could be financially embarrassed at the present time, as a result of pressure from Ireland, the UK and the USA. If measures were devised that caught the public imagination, the consequence could be that they would be quite demoralised and would cease to become an effective element. [This strategy could be assisted by other measures which the Taoiseach mentioned to Sir Robert.]

Would it be possible that I could have an opportunity of speaking with Secretary of State Howe, perhaps after the Minister had seen him in London in February? I knew him before and would like the opportunity of renewing the acquaintance.

At this point the meeting concluded.



22nd January, 1985.

Minister for Foreign Affairs.
cc. Tanaiste
Minister for Justice
Mr. A. Ward, Secretary, Department of Justice.
Mr. S. Donlon, Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs - would you please send a copy to Ambassador Dorr please
Mr. M. Lillis, Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs.