

*Subject
a matter*

SECRET

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE TAOISEACH
AT 1050 HOURS ON MONDAY 7 NOVEMBER 1983 AT CHEQUERS

Present:

Prime Minister
Mr. Coles

Dr. FitzGerald
Mr. Nally

Dr. FitzGerald said that a year ago it would have been thought that the British and Irish Governments, with at least four years to run in office, could tackle the problems of Northern Ireland at a steady pace, taking such time as was necessary. But he felt that the situation had been significantly altered by Sinn Fein's successes in the recent General Election. Those successes had been exaggerated (impersonation had been a factor). But Sinn Fein had succeeded in securing over one third of the Nationalist vote. They now had the resources to man full time advice centres. Dynamism and a sense of history were on their side and they were capturing the young. On the other hand, the SDLP's constituency organisation had never been strong, except in specific areas. As a constitutional party it was always liable to be outflanked. Its members were part-time and had to struggle to earn a living. The party did not have the resources to be effective.

There was a strong danger that in the 1985 local elections, unless the SDLP could make visible progress towards a constructive goal, Sinn Fein would become the majority party among the Nationalists. That would be a new situation, never contemplated in the past. Its effects were difficult to assess. But his own party's position in the Republic could be put at risk. The support for Sinn Fein, which was now minimal in the Republic, could increase. Atavistic, nationalist emotions in Irish society, which were present under the surface, could be released with the danger of domestic de-stabilisation. Externally, the possibilities of making progress with the British Government could be severely restricted. His own

/ Government's

SECRET

Government's authority to speak to the Irish/American audience would be eroded. The consequences of all this were unknowable but were very worrying. He therefore believed that it would be necessary to make progress in a shorter time than had originally been envisaged. Sinn Fein's successes also reflected the alienation of the people which had been growing over the years. This was creating social anarchy and was breaking down the structure of family life in a way no-one would have thought possible. People were beginning to look to IRA vigilantes rather than to the police as a source of law and order. There had been one or two incidents in Dublin in recent years which suggested that this trend could grow there. People would only support the police if they had clearly legitimate authority. In Northern Ireland, many people had never seen the existing police force as wholly legitimate. It was doubtful whether the police in their present form could command loyalty.

So it was necessary to find a way in which the nationalist population could focus their loyalty on the police. This was the minimum necessary to retrieve the situation and prevent slippage in the May 1985 elections. It would be necessary to work out improved police arrangements by then, though he did not know how this could be done. The Irish Government would reflect; they hoped we would too and that there could be further discussions.

There was a parallel process, represented by the new Ireland Forum, by which preconceptions were being reexamined. The Forum was having a significant additional effect in awakening people to the realities of Unionism and in putting forward possibilities of resolving the Northern Ireland problem other than the simplistic idea of Irish unity. The Forum would be looking at ideas of federation, confederation and joint sovereignty. In reply to a question from the Prime Minister, he emphasised that it was the Forum that was discussing these ideas. The Irish Government had not yet considered them. But in order to move people away from the simplistic ideas of the past, new thoughts of this kind would have to be considered. He hoped that the outcome of the Forum would be constructive in that three or perhaps even four political parties would commit themselves to an agreed analysis and to proposals with which the Unionists could live. It was necessary to

sensitise people in the South to Unionist concerns. That message was coming through very clearly in the Forum.

He had hoped that the Forum would complete its work by the end of the year. But it would take longer, largely because the Opposition had dragged its feet in the early stages. He now hoped, but was not sure, that the work could be completed by the end of January or at worst in February or March. It had to come to some conclusions. There had been suggestions that the Forum might continue even after it had presented its conclusions. He himself had initially been resistant to this but he would not pre-judge the matter. The Forum would report on the costs of violence, on economic prospects for the future and on political structures.

The Prime Minister asked what the terms of reference of the Forum were. Dr. FitzGerald said that the purpose of the Forum was to seek the means of peace and stability in Northern Ireland. There were no political pre-conditions and the wording contained no reference to Irish unity. Any solution could be considered.

The Prime Minister said that she understood from the Taoiseach that the Forum's proceedings had come as a revelation to some people in the Irish Republic. Dr. FitzGerald said that this was so. The Forum had at first been dismissed as a public relations exercise to help the SDLP. But when it had reached the point of public discussion, people were taken aback. They heard the Unionist view-point being expressed. Mr. John Biggs Davison, MP, had given very effective evidence (though the Taoiseach disagreed with him about almost everything). The Prime Minister commented that there was now a new awareness of the problem and that the facile solution of a united Ireland was no longer the sole solution under discussion. Dr. FitzGerald said that people sensed that Unionist opinion had to be accommodated if a solution was to be found. It was realised that there were two identities which could not be changed and which had to be reconciled. It was necessary to provide channels to permit two communities, while living together, to be able to express their loyalty in two different directions. So attitudes were changing but that did not mean that

/ everyone

everyone would accept the trend. The main point was that the centre of gravity of Irish thinking had shifted.

Commenting on the "World This Weekend" TV programme of 6 November, Dr. FitzGerald said that he was very concerned about its effects. The Irish Government had decided not to give interviews about the Forum. The programme had not even mentioned confederation as an idea which had merit. It had identified joint sovereignty as his own policy which he would visit London to present. This was a most unexpected development. He had not come to put forward any policy. He had informed the Irish press in advance that this Summit was an occasion for reflection. There would be no decisions.

Turning to another matter, he asked whether it would be possible to do something about the problem of impersonation before there were further elections in Northern Ireland. The SDLP had apparently been told by the British Government that because of lack of Parliamentary time it was difficult to do anything before the European elections. He wished to urge the Prime Minister to find time for this relatively simple legislative measure.

He wished to raise one further problem, namely the Dowra District Court case. After briefly rehearsing the details, he explained that he had raised this matter with the Prime Minister when he had met her at the European Council last June. A long time had transpired before the Irish Government had received any information from Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland authorities had taken the line that if the Republic presented evidence it would investigate. But the Garda were not prepared to make a formal complaint. The matter had been discussed again in September but nothing further had happened. Then the Garda Commissioner wrote another letter. The Irish Government were informed on 14 October than no reply had been received. Then last Thursday a letter had arrived claiming that a letter had been sent on 14 October. A notable lack of concern had been shown as to the whereabouts of the missing letter which was surprising in view of its delicacy. At first sight neither the Garda Commissioner nor the Department of

/ Justice

SECRET

-5-

Justice were satisfied with the reply that had been received. There was a problem of mutual confidence between the respective police authorities at the highest level.

The Prime Minister said that she noted the Taoiseach's concern.

The discussion ended at 1135.

A.J.C.

7 November 1983

SECRET



~~8 to~~
7

~~Subject~~

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 November 1983

Dear Sir,

Anglo/Irish Summit

I enclose a record of the tete-a-tete conversation between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach at Chequers today.

You will note that in the course of the conversation Dr. FitzGerald complained about the handling of the McGovern case. The Prime Minister would be grateful for comments on Dr. FitzGerald's remarks.

The Prime Minister has asked that this record should not be circulated beyond Private Offices except whether this is operationally essential.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to John Lyon (Northern Ireland Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*you see
for file.*

Brian Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

SECRET

NR