

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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REPORT OF OFFICIAL LEVEL MEETING - LONDON
11th SEPTEMBER, 1980

Mr. Callaghan
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1. Composition of Delegations

The British side consisted of:-

- Michael Newington (Chairman), Head of Republic of Ireland Department, FCO
- Michael Moriarty, Assistant Under Secretary, NIO (Political)
- Joan Kelley, Assistant Under Secretary, NIO (Economic)
- Ambassador Figg, Dublin
- Ewart Bell, Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Civil Service
- Paul Buxton, NIO (Security)
- Peter Thomas, Republic of Ireland Desk, FCO
- Nigel Wenham Smith, Cabinet Office, London

The Irish side consisted of:-

- HE Eamon Kennedy, Ambassador London
- David Neligan, Assistant Secretary, D.F.A.
- Walter Kirwan, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach
- Paul Dempsey, Minister Plenipotentiary, Embassy London
- Hugh Swift, Counsellor, Embassy London
- Frank Murray, Principal Officer, Department of the Taoiseach
- Sean Whelan, Counsellor, D.F.A.
- Martin Burke, Counsellor, D.F.A.

NORTHERN IRELAND - POLITICAL

2. Newington invited Moriarty to state the British view on how they saw their Northern Ireland policy evolving over the coming months. Moriarty said that they were coming to the end of a slack period during which Mr. Atkins and some of his advisers had been absent on leave. Moriarty said that Atkins was still committed to pursuing his discussions with the NI parties to see what degree of cross community support existed for the proposals in the Discussion Paper. He could not speculate on whether there might be any such agreement or on when the whistle might be blown. There would be something in the Queen's Speech. At one extreme this might be a proposal for legislation in the Parliamentary session but there were lesser possibilities. It was not possible now to say what the position would be in mid-November. "The UK Government understands the Republic of Ireland's interest in the NI question but could not concede a negotiating position to the Republic vis-a-vis NI".

3. Ambassador Kennedy outlined the Irish Government's position as follows:-

- (1) The Taoiseach attached great importance to the development of the new and closer political co-operation between the two Governments and to the furtherance of the unique relationship between the peoples of Great Britain, of Northern Ireland and of the Republic, as agreed with the Prime Minister last May.
- (2) The primary matter of mutual interest in the context of such closer relations was the search for enduring peace and stability in Northern Ireland and throughout both islands, and to this end for a durable and equitable political settlement.
- (3) While the Taoiseach would be anxious when he next met the Prime Minister, to advance other areas of co-operation, in bilateral and multilateral spheres, his main emphasis would be on this continuing grave problem of concern to both Governments.
- (4) The Irish side appreciated the efforts of the British Government to find a way forward in Northern Ireland but the British side would be fully aware of the views of the Irish Government on the proposals in the White Paper i.e. that while we had not been dismissive of them, we had seen them simply as inadequate as a basis for progress towards "settlement dealing with all the dimensions of the problem.
- (5) It was our assessment that the continuing discussions were highly unlikely in the existing context to establish any worthwhile measure of agreement on central issues. This confirmed us in our view that the situation needed to be raised to a new inter-governmental level and considered in the context of closer political co-operation between the British and Irish Governments, with appropriate involvement of Northern Ireland political leaders.
- (6) It was of course for the British Government to decide on when they should draw final conclusions on the outcome of the discussions on the White Paper.
- (7) The Irish side wished, however, to give notice that the Taoiseach when he met the Prime Minister would be proposing that at an appropriate date, following the drawing of these conclusions, a conference should be convened for discussions between the Irish and British Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland, with a view to reaching agreement on

future relations between North and South in Ireland, between Ireland and Britain and between both parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

4. Newington said that the Irish views would be noted. He said he was hesitant to comment in detail on the Irish proposal but he felt bound to say that even if such a conference were convened, it was highly unlikely that all the main Northern Ireland parties would attend. The British had failed to get them to come to a Conference fully within the U.K. context. He wondered whether the Irish side had been sounding out Unionist opinion.
5. Moriarty said that he hoped the Taoiseach's advisers knew the risks inherent in the approach of which the Irish side had given notice. He did not see the present British Government turning around so as to bring the Irish Government into the negotiating process. "You would be deceiving yourselves if you thought that this could happen". He doubted if the British Government could bring along the Unionists to attend such a Conference even if they set out to do so. The proposal put forward by the Irish side was very difficult to visualise and would put the U.K. Government in a difficult position even if they had the will to proceed with such a Conference, something he greatly doubted. Moriarty said that he did not know where such a Conference would go or what avenues it would open up. He emphasised the importance of thinking two or three steps ahead and to consider fallback positions. What would happen if such a Conference were not held? Devolved government in Northern Ireland would provide accredited political leaders in Northern Ireland. It would then be "easier to bring about what you want".
6. Ambassador Kennedy said that by the time the Heads of Government met new thoughts might be to hand, bearing in mind that the meeting would apparently take place somewhat later than envisaged. He again expressed doubt about the adequacy of the British approach to the problem and recalled the House of Commons debate on the White Paper on 9th July which he considered to be very disappointing.
7. Moriarty responded that he was certainly not optimistic as to where they (the British) would be December. But the Unionist parties were a fact of life with which the British Government had to live. Any new proposal would have to be examined within existing realities. For many Unionists, the existence of a place, South of Newry was something about which they did not wish to know. The British side would not be blinkered in its reaction to the Taoiseach's proposal but they had to consider the political and security realities. At the same time, the British Government would be anxious to develop the unique relationship between our two countries but they did not favour its use to crack the Northern Ireland nut. A bit

of embodiment was now needed for the formula set out in the Communique issued after the meeting on 21st May last. That meeting had been a good start but what could be said after the second and third such meeting between the Heads of Government. "The walls of Jericho in Northern Ireland were not going to fall down very quickly". Officials owed it to their respective Ministers to see how there could be movement towards greater understanding and furtherance of existing relationships, based on the less difficult areas.

8. Mr. Kirwan said that the Irish side did not envisage substantive discussion of the approach of which they had given notice, in accordance with the purpose of the meeting of officials. He wished, however, to say that the Taoiseach's position was a considered one. The various elements had been fully considered. The Taoiseach was anxious to go beyond the existing context which it was clear from what British officials were saying, was most unlikely to make progress towards a durable settlement. In the Taoiseach's analysis, the position of the Unionists, to which Mr. Moriarty had referred, was not independent of the position of the British Government. The Taoiseach envisaged a Conference of an exploratory nature, held in a new context in which some of the parameters of the problem would have been changed. The Irish side were seeking new ways forward.
9. Ambassador Kennedy agreed that content for the closer co-operation was of course required. The Irish side would be putting forward proposals on this but Northern Ireland was our central concern.