

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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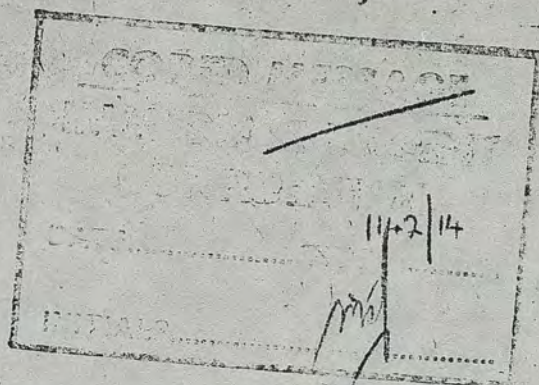
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IMMEDIATE

TO HQ
FOR NELIGAN

FROM LONDON
FROM SWIFT

MMMLLOLP



1. I HAVE HAD CONVERSATIONS IN THE LAST FEW DAYS WITH NEWINGTON IN THE FOREIGN OFFICE AND MARSHALL IN THE NIO AND THE FOLLOWING TELEX IS BASED ON WHAT THEY TOLD ME.

2. WHEN LAST I HAD INTENSIVE DISCUSSIONS WITH THEM AT THE BEGINNING OF APRIL, THE NIO WAS CLEARLY CONSIDERING TWO ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES. THE PROPONENTS OF EACH STRATEGY RECOGNISED THE DIFFICULTIES IN BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE SDLP AND THE DUP ON THE KEY ISSUE OF POWER-SHARING. THE MORE PERSIMISTIC DID NOT CONSIDER THE GAP BRIDGEABLE AT THIS STAGE. THEY THEREFORE FAVOURED ISSUING A GREEN PAPER IN THE EARLY SUMMER WITH A NARROWER RANGE OF POLICY OPTIONS THAN IN THE ORIGINAL ATKINS PAPER. IN EFFECT, BECAUSE THEY WOULD NOT THINK THE GAP BRIDGEABLE AT THIS STAGE, THEY THOUGHT IT BEST TO KEEP THE PROCESS GOING. A MORE OPTIMISTIC GROUP FAVOURED A WHITE PAPER WITH A SINGLE PACKAGE OF GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS WHICH, THEY HOPED, PAISLEY AND HUME COULD BE PERSUADED TO ATTEMPT TO SELL TO THEIR RESPECTIVE CONSTITUENCIES. TEMPERAMENTALLY, MRS THATCHER SHOULD BELONG IN THIS GROUP AND IT WOULD APPEAR THAT IN FACT SHE HAS BEEN CONSISTENTLY PRESSING FOR PROGRESS IN THE CONFERENCE. IF IT WERE DECIDED TO PRESS AHEAD WITH A SINGLE BRITISH GOVERNMENT PACKAGE OF PROPOSALS IT SEEMED THEN, AND INDEED STILL SEEMS, THAT THAT PACKAGE WOULD BE BASED ON MAJORITY RULE WITH SAFEGUARDS BUT WITHOUT ANY SIGNIFICANT ALL-IRELAND DIMENSION EXCEPT INSOFAR AS A DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT COULD WORK OUT ITS OWN RELATIONS WITH THE SOUTH.

3. SINCE THE MIDDLE OF APRIL, WHETHER BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY HEARD FROM NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICIANS OR BECAUSE OF WHAT WAS SAID IN DUBLIN ON 15 APRIL, SUPPORT AMONG BRITISH OFFICIALS FOR THE OPTIMISTIC POINT OF VIEW HAS DWINDLED. IN ADDITION, ATKINS IS SAID ALSO TO RECOGNISE THAT THERE IS NOW LITTLE PROSPECT OF REACHING AGREEMENT IN THE CONFERENCE OR AS PART OF THE CONFERENCE PROCESS ON AN ACCEPTABLE FORM OF DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, THIS STRATEGIC QUESTION HAS NOT YET BEEN RESOLVED. ATKINS' REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE TO DATE HAS NOT YET BEEN CONSIDERED BY THE FULL CABINET. IT REMAINS POSSIBLE THAT WITH THE PRIME MINISTER'S MORE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE DISCUSSION (IN CONNECTION WITH HER MEETING TODAY WITH JOHN HUME AND NEXT WEEK WITH THE TAOISEACH), THE IDEA OF MAKING CONCRETE PROPOSALS AT THIS STAGE MAY AGAIN GAIN STRENGTH.

4. IT REMAINS THE INTENTION OF THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES TO PUBLISH A PAPER, WHETHER WHITE OR GREEN, BEFORE THE SUMMER. OFFICIALS ARE NOT YET CLEAR HOW BEST TO SYNCHRONIZE THIS WITH THE RENEWAL DEBATE IN EARLY JULY. IT IS STILL INTENDED TO INTRODUCE CONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION IN THE NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT BUT EARLY 1981 IS NOW REGARDED AS A MORE REALISTIC TARGET DATE THAN AUTUMN OF THIS YEAR.

5. BRITISH OFFICIALS ARE NOT PREPARED TO GO SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT THEIR NOW VERY LIMITED EXPECTATIONS OF SUCCESS FROM THE CONFERENCE PROCESS EFFECTIVELY CONFIRM OUR VIEW THAT THERE IS NO ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION POSSIBLE WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE INTERNAL NORTHERN N IRELAND DIMENSION. THEIR TACTICAL DESIRE TO KEEP THE CONFERENCE IN BEING PUTS OFF THE NECESSITY PUBLICLY TO ASSESS THE RESULTS. SHOULD THE CONFERENCE BE BROUGHT TO AN END OR IF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WERE TO CONFIRM THAT THEY SAW LITTLE OR NO HOPE OF PROGRESS ON THAT BASIS TOWARDS AN ACCEPTABLE FORM OF DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT IT WOULD THEN BECOME NECESSARY TO MAKE A CHOICE AMONG THE POSSIBLE FALL-BACK POSITIONS, SUCH AS THE ENHANCED POWERS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES SUGGESTED BY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY MANIFESTO, THE ACCEPTANCES OF DIRECT RULE, THE IMPOSITION OF MAJORITY RULE WITH CERTAIN SAFEGUARDS FOR THE MINORITY, OR A RADICAL BROADENING OF THE DEBATE TO INVOLVE ALSO THE NORTH-SOUTH DIMENSION AND THE ANGLO-IRISH DIMENSION.

6. BOTH MARSHALL AND NEWINGTON MAINTAIN THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAVE NOT GOT A REAL CHOICE BETWEEN CONTINUING TO PRESS FOR DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT ON THE BASIS OF THE CONFERENCE WHITE PAPER AND, AS AN ALTERNATIVE, ATTEMPTING TO SET UP THE SORT OF THREE-WAY PARALLEL DISCUSSIONS WHICH WE HAD USGGESTED. THEY MAINTAIN THAT IT IS "A FACT OF LIFE" THAT ANY STEP ON THEIR PART TOWARDS OUR PROPOSALS WOULD NECESSARILY MEAN THAT THE UNIONISTS WOULD WITHDRAW FROM ALL CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS. THIS WOULD NOT ONLY MEAN THAT THERE WOULD BE NO POSSIBILITY OF PROGRESS ON THE INTERNAL NORTHERN IRELAND PLANE BUT THERE COULD BE NO POSSIBILITY EITHER OF PROGRESS NINORTH-SOUTH DISCUSSIONS BECAUSE A SINE QUA NON FOR SUCH DISCUSSIONS WOULD BE THE EXISTENCE OF A NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT OR AUTHORITY WHICH COULD CONDUCT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SOUTH.

7. BOTH MARSHALL AND NEWINGTON MENTIONED TO ME THE DIFFICULTIES THEY ARE HAVING IN PREPARING BRIEFING FOR THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE DETAILS OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S POSITION. THEY APPRECIATE THAT THE TAOISEACH IS ANXIOUS TO SHOW THAT THE IRISH GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO PLAY ITS PART IN MAKING POSSIBLE A THREE-WAY SYSTEM OF CONTACTS AND CONVERSATION FROM WHICH AN ACCEPTABLE AND STABLE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF NORTHERN IRELAND MIGHT EMERGE. OF COURSE, BRITISH MINISTERIAL AND OFFICIAL CIRCLES HAVE GIVEN CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION NOT ONLY TO WHAT THE TAOISEACH HAS SAID PUBLICLY SINCE TAKING OFFICE BUT ALSO TO WHAT HE HAS SAID IN PRIVATE TO BRITISH MPS ON 24TH MARCH AND TO MR ATKINS ON 15TH APRIL. HOWEVER, AT ANY RATE AT THIS STAGE, THEY DO NOT ACCEPT THAT ANY PROPOSALS ABOUT COMMON CITIZENSHIP OR IRISH MEMBERSHIP OF LARGER GROUPINGS WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE POSSIBILITY OF SETTING UP MORE BROADLY BASED DISCUSSIONS. THEIR VIEW REMAINS THAT THE DIFFICULTY IN ALL OF THIS DERIVES FROM THE ATTITUDES OF THE UNIONISTS AND THAT ANY PUBLIC REFERENCE TO AN ENHANCED ROLE FOR THE REPUBLIC WOULD DESTROY THE POSSIBILITY OF PROGRESS IN THE CONFERENCE WITHOUT ADVANCING ANY SUBSTITUTE PROCESS.

8. THIS MAY SEEM AN ALTOGETHER NEGATIVE ATTITUDE. HOWEVER, THERE IS NOW GREATER WILLINGNESS HERE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE COMMON INTERESTS OF BOTH GOVERNMENTS AND OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND IN CLOSER CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO ISLANDS, WITHIN IRELAND AND WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND. IN EFFECT, OFFICIALS ACCEPT AN ANALYSIS BASED ON A QUADRIPARTITE SYSTEM OF INTERESTS AND IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO GET THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT ALSO TO SUBSCRIBE TO SUCH A VIEW. THIS COULD HAVE THE OPERATIONAL COROLLARY THAT THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS IN THIS COMPLEX OF RELATIONSHIPS WOULD HAVE TO BE DEVELOPED, PERHAPS SEPARATELY, PERHAPS TOGETHER BUT CERTAINLY IN BALANCE. HOWEVER, NOTHING THAT I HAVE HEARD HERE IN RECENT WEEKS WOULD INDICATE THAT, ON PRESENT THINKING, THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WOULD BE PREPARED TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO THIS VIEW IN PUBLIC BECAUSE THEY CONSIDER THAT THE CONSEQUENT REACTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND WOULD REMOVE ANY POSSIBILITY OF PROGRESS.

FOOTNOTE

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YOU WILL APPRECIATE THAT THE ABOVE IS BASED EXCLUSIVELY ON WHAT OFFICIALS ARE TELLING ME HERE AND, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE VERY WELL INFORMED, TO ANTICIPATE DEVELOPMENTS IF ANY, IN POLITICAL THINKING. THIS PAPER SHOULD THEREFORE BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE AMBASSADOR'S REPORT OF YESTERDAY ON HUME'S CONVERSATION HERE YESTERDAY.

*they would not wish*

END

HS 14/5/80 TIME: 11.36

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