

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Meeting in London with British officials
26 November, 1980.

Attendance

1. The meeting took place in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Present on the Irish side were Messrs. Neligan and Kirwan and Mr. P. Dempsey, Minister Plenipotentiary, London Embassy. The British side comprised Mr. M. Moriarty, Assistant Under-Secretary, Northern Ireland Office and Mr. M. Newington, Head of the Republic of Ireland Department in the FCO.

Matters discussed

2. Discussion centred on:

- (1) the agenda and arrangements for and attendance at the planned Heads of Government meeting.
- (2) drafts of a possible communique from that meeting
- (3) the H Blocks hunger strike and protest.

Attendance and press arrangements

3. The British side indicated that it now seemed likely that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be included in their party. They referred to the discussions on arrangements in Dublin the previous day and said that this had been regarded on their side as very satisfactory. The Irish side said that it was the strong view in Dublin that no prior announcement of the meeting be made. Arising from this there was some discussion of arrangements for the media. The British appeared not to have given much thought to this but Newington felt strongly that there should not be a joint press conference. We did not demur and indicated that the Taoiseach envisaged giving a press conference. The British thought that the problem of short notice for British journalists might be overcome by Mrs. Thatcher talking to the media on return to London rather than in Dublin. While we saw the disadvantages of this, we held over comment.

Layout of meeting

4. In running through the timetable and layout of the meeting, it was felt on both sides that some officials might work on the communique over the luncheon period. The British side suggested that the Ministers meeting in parallel with the tête-a-tête might discuss European Community issues, including their bearing on, Northern Ireland and cross-border co-operation, in view of Mr. Atkins attendance. At the plenary session immediately after lunch while awaiting finalisation of drafts for the communique, discussion might given the Prime Minister's strong interest, centre on economic and monetary matters.

We indicated that there was no divergence from our thinking in these ideas.

Agenda for meeting

5. The British side indicated that the Community issues on which they were preparing briefing were:

- the Common Agricultural Policy
- Restructuring of the Community budget
- Fisheries
- EMS.

They were briefing on the following issues of wider international concern:

- the Iran-Iraq war
- Afghanistan
- East-West relations
- the Middle East
- South Africa
- Namibia.

In addition, they envisaged discussion on two items where the positions of the two countries within EPC might not be quite the same:-

- enlargement of the UN Security Council
- structures for European Political Co-operation

Lord Carrington would wish to deal with these matters.

6. As regards bilateral matters other than the political dimension of Northern Ireland, the British side indicated that they were briefing on the question of voting rights. They enquired whether anything could be said about this in the Communique. It was explained that our official examination of this matter had now been completed and that it would shortly be submitted for decisions at political level. We had noted the indication in the Queen's Speech that a new British Nationality Act would be introduced in the House of Commons this session and we appreciated that a public indication of our intentions in advance of the debate on this legislation would be desirable. We would certainly be aiming for this but while it was not totally to be excluded, it was unlikely that matters would have advanced sufficiently to make possible a reference in the Communique. We asked when the new Bill which would give definitions of "British citizen" would be tabled. The British did not know but undertook to make enquiries.

7. We indicated that we saw energy as the main economic topic for discussion in the context of "closer co-operation". It was noted that the Interconnector Working Group had met on 21 November and that the Tánaiste would be meeting Mr. Giles Shaw, the Minister responsible for energy in Northern Ireland on 5 December. We indicated that implementation of the non-quota Regional Fund measures might be raised on our side but that we did not envisage any very direct reference in the Communique.

Drafts for Communique

8. Drafts were exchanged. These are appended to this note. The British drafts B1. and B2. are alternatives. The British side stressed that discussion was without commitment, as they had no political clearance for concepts, much less wording. We responded that while we had a very general "steer", discussion on our side was equally without commitment.
9. The main difference to emerge was on the description of an inter-governmental encounter to discuss Northern Ireland. As will be seen from the appended drafts, the British formulations were minimalist and contrasted sharply with the Irish reference to a conference. They claimed that they had political guidance on this one matter: they would not agree to use the word "conference". We received the impression that they could probably accept "special meeting". The second main point was that even though they had references to "joint studies" in their own draft, they wondered whether one should be quite so specific. One would be questioned about progress with the studies. A greater worry to them was clearly unionist reaction. We referred to the dangers in a clear vacuum period of six months in the absence of such a reference.
10. On detail:
 - (1) They hesitated to refer so directly to "progress made" as in the third last line on page 1 of our draft, since it might be difficult to point to worthwhile concrete progress.
 - (2) Moriarty thought the first two sentences on our page 2 quite acceptable whereas Newington felt that the phrase "unique relationship" had served its purpose and should now be dropped. In discussion, there was some preference for referring to "evolution" rather than "development".
 - (3) As previously mentioned, they could not agree to use the word "conference". There was some suggestion of getting in the idea of making a beginning in a structured process over time, a continuing conference, as it were. We indicated our desire to clearly distinguish the special, fundamental nature of the encounter in question.
 - (4) They did not wish to be as specific as "during the first half of 1981". We indicated we were thinking of May or June but that we might be able to accept a reference to "in 1981".

- (5) They seemed likely to accept the word "fundamental" rather than their "wide-ranging".
- (6) They would not accept "within Ireland" in the reference to "the totality of relationships....".
- (7) It will be seen that their draft section A contains a sentence referring to the meeting as being the first of those agreed on 21 May. While we had deleted a similar sentence from an earlier Irish draft, we did not comment, on the basis that any difficulty could possibly be overcome by our tabling a draft in Dublin in which this sentence would be dropped.
- (8) Personal doubts about the use of the word "animosities" in the British drafts were expressed. Newington favoured retaining them but seemed to accept that if the word could be seen to apply to Anglo-Irish relations it should be dropped. Moriarty clearly did not favour it.

11. Newington speculated that the Prime Minister might well invite the Taoiseach to make an appropriate reference to the H-Block protest in the Communique. He had prepared, on a purely personal basis, some language which might be useful in this eventuality. He thought it would be prudent to have some language ready. We read this but did not react specifically to the draft. We said that we had adverted to this question but felt that while it was difficult to look forward, an alternative possibility would be to agree that the Communique might be silent on the matter but that both sides might agree on the limits of what either would say in reply to press queries. This procedure had been used for meetings between Messrs. Lenihan and Atkins. This was something that could perhaps be discussed in Luxembourg.

12. Luxembourg meeting

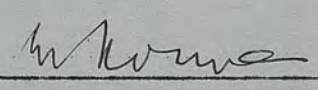
The British side counselled that one should not overestimate what could be covered in any bilateral discussion in Luxembourg. The Prime Minister would have other preoccupations there and her briefing for her meeting with the Taoiseach would not be until after her return. We said that the Taoiseach would also have European preoccupations but attached importance to a bilateral meeting at which it should certainly be possible to talk about H-Blocks on which the Prime Minister was clearly up-to-date.

13. H-Blocks

In opening a substantive discussion on this, Mr. Neligan gave the message received from Dublin ie. that the Taoiseach had "hand" information that the prisoners were not holding out for political status but that the problem could be resolved on the basis of adjustment of the prison rules. They were given a copy of the prepared reply to the previous day's Parliamentary Question on the subject. Newington read this and commented that some would say that if it did not indicate support ~~from~~ for

the prisoners' demand for political status, it was not far from doing so.

- 14 Their ^{reaction} ~~relation~~ to the message was that we were not the only source of messages to this effect. There had been similar messages from others but it was their experience that on investigation the information turned out not be quite so hard as was claimed, insofar as the prisoners' attitude was concerned. They had received such a message the previous day from a cleric prepared to play an intermediary role. This was being followed up. They took note of what we had said.
- 15 They made it clear that their aim was to bring to an end not only the hunger strike but also the dirty protest. They wished to be sure that anything they might do would have this result and they did not wish to have possible adjustments discounted on a piecemeal basis. Moriarty confirmed the view conveyed to us in Belfast that for the Northern Ireland Office the totality of the five demands was equivalent to political status which would not be conceded. The prisoners could not be left to run things themselves without supervision, as in a prisoner-of-war camp. The prison administration must have control. There were aspects of the demands that did not go to the heart of the matter. Prisoners not on the protest could wear their own or civilian working-type clothes for a large proportion of their time. Prisoners who had come off the protest had benefited from the discretion to restore remission lost. If the protests were to be ended the way would be open to explore ways of expanding the concept of work or vocational training. But because these matters did not go to the heart of the matter? Moriarty doubted whether they would lead the prisoners to end the protests.
- 16 We put it to them that they should strongly consider a very early approach of an informative and exploratory nature about matters that did not affect the core of the differences. We referred to the possibility mentioned by Stowe in Belfast viz a suspension of the hunger strike while certain matters were being considered. Reference was also made to the possibility of involving a person with experience and skill in trade union negotiations. We left them with the point that it would clearly be highly desirable and in the interests of all parties that the problem be resolved before the Heads of Government meeting.


W. Kirwan,
28 November, 1980.