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Conversation between Minister Designate Dooce and Lord Carrington

London 14/10/1981

Mr. Carrington
Mr. B. ...
Mr. ...
File

(1) The meeting which was at the Minister's request took place in Lancaster House lasted about 15 minutes.

Lord Carrington was accompanied by Mr. Ew n Fergusson, Assistant Under Secretary and Mr. Peter Thomas of the Republic of Ireland Department

I. IRA Bombing in London

(2) The Minister began by asking Lord Carrington to convey the Taoiseach's sympathy to the Prime Minister in regard to last Saturday's bombing outrage in London. The Minister remarked that a second victim had died. We were shocked by the bombing but, it had to be said, not surprised. Lord Carrington said that they were not surprised either. The Minister said that we had no information as to whether the bombing was the start of a campaign. It was impossible to divine the mentality of the IRA in this regard. He noted that a recently released IRA prisoner had said that IRA morale is very low at present; we have no information as to what course their future tactics would take. Lord Carrington agreed that it was indeed difficult to understand the mentality of the IRA. There was no doubt that the hunger strike had aroused a good deal of sympathy in the United States and on the face of it it would appear that bombing outrages like last Saturday's would tend to diminish the sympathy that had built up. The Minister said that it was possible that the bombing might actually help the situation in Northern Ireland in that the revulsion which it prompted might assist in separating the 5% of the population who actively support violence from the 20% who, as a result of the effects of the hunger strike, had turned towards support for the IRA. One of the bad effects of the hunger strike was to arrest the growing division in the Catholic population between the less than 5% who actively support violence and the 20% who are potential sympathisers. The key to success in dealing with the problem of violence in the North was to deepen this division. Paradoxically it may be that last Saturday's outrage may help in this. As for the hunger strike itself, the key to ending that was driving a wedge between the families of the hunger strikers and the IRA and in the event it was this division which had brought about the end of the hunger strike.

(3) Lord Carrington said that, unfortunately, it was unlikely that last Saturday's bombing would have very much effect in Northern Ireland since people there tended

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to believe that they had borne the brunt of violence to date and that incidents in Britain simply demonstrated to the British public what they, the population of Northern Ireland, had to put up with.

II. Scheduled Meeting between Prime Minister Thatcher and the Taoiseach

(4) The Minister said that the Taoiseach was anxious that there should be a preparatory meeting at Ministerial level to prepare the Prime Ministers' conference. The work at Civil Service level had largely been completed. In this connection the Minister would like to have a meeting with Mr. Jim Prior, either in private or in public and the Minister would be willing to come to London for this purpose. It was unfortunate that to this end he could not avail of his presence in London for the EPC and ASEAN meetings since Mr. Prior is out of London attending the Conservative Annual Conference. Lord Carrington suggested that Mr. Prior was reluctant about a meeting because he has been in Northern Ireland for such a short time. He has not been there long enough to feel confident about such a meeting and has had no experience of anything to do with Northern Ireland up to now. Carrington said Prior was 'nervous' rather like the way in which "Jimmy Carter felt about his meeting with Brezhnev"! The Minister said that Carrington could reassure Prior on that point! There were things that he felt he could indicate to Prior with regard to the Government's approach to the Northern Ireland problem and he felt strongly that a meeting between them would be helpful in this regard. It has been almost a year since the last meeting at Prime Ministerial level and normally, had there not been a change of Government in the meantime, one would have expected a certain amount of progress to have been made. The Irish Government realised that it will be difficult to guarantee a substantive advance at the forthcoming meeting, nonetheless "we wanted it to be more than a mere contact". In preparing for such a meeting, although the work at Civil Service level can accomplish a lot it could not be expected to provide the political ingredient which a meeting at preparatory Ministerial level could supply. Carrington asked what the Irish Government expected from the summit; "what do we feel could be done?" The Minister said that the meeting could do a number of things - first, reaffirm that the process begun by the two previous meetings would continue; secondly, make public in a summary way the content of the Anglo-Irish studies. The secrecy which had surrounded these had benefitted Paisley and if one could agree to

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publish summaries of what the studies were about this would help to dissipate the misapprehension which they had evoked.

(5) Thirdly, the summit could provide an opportunity for the start of a political initiative on the British side. The Taoiseach has already started this on our side by opening up the debate on the constitution. We do not know where this debate will lead as the process has just begun. However, it is not intended, for the present to lead to the drafting of a Bill for a referendum on the constitution. The meeting in London would provide an opportunity to see how the initiative begun by the Taoiseach fits in with British thinking. The Minister said that a major problem was the absence of any representative body in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately each time we have had such a body it broke down and the ensuing power vacuum was increasingly harder to fill. Carrington agreed, but he said, the trouble is to find a suitable body to put in place of those that had failed. The fundamental problem is that the Protestants do not want power sharing while the Catholics will not accept any arrangement that entails Protestant domination. In the circumstances the UK really did not know how to proceed. The absence of an assembly or advisory body also meant that it was impossible for new politicians to emerge (Ewen Fergusson intervened to say that this point had been made by Jim Prior in his speech yesterday); "the field was left" said Carrington "to Paisley and the old guard"; The Northern politicians mainly, "were a dreary lot", "the best of them" was Hume.

The Minister said that one of the tragic effects of the hunger strike was that the position of the SDLP was severely affected. However, their morale has now recovered.

(6) Ewen Fergusson said that with regard to the idea of publishing the contents of the Anglo-Irish studies in summary form that this was being discussed today in Dublin between Robert Armstrong and Dermot Nally. They were actually engaged in tidying up a text with a view to publishing. Carrington said that they did not believe that there was going to be a "big" break-through" at the forthcoming meeting. The Minister agreed and added that it was not intended to make public the date of the meeting. Carrington then went on to say that Prior should not appear to put himself in a position of "total hostility to Ian Paisley".

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He felt that Prior had the status and political clout to do a better job than Humphrey Atkins although in saying this he was not being "unkind to Humphrey". It was important that Prior should not start off by seeming to be hostile to the Protestant side. Ewen Fergusson said that Prior "does not yet know in which direction to move".

(7) With regard to the agenda for the summit meeting the Minister said that it might contain "the usual three points"

- Northern Ireland;
- EEC Community matters;
- Other bilateral questions

Ewen Fergusson said that our Security Council membership is relevant to a large range of issues and therefore other international political issues might be put on the agenda. Lord Carrington said, jokingly, that it was important that the Dublin meeting did not have adverse political fall-out leading to headlines such as "Carrington sells out". The meeting ended with Lord Carrington agreeing to pass on the Minister's message to Mr. Prior indicating that the Minister would be glad of a meeting (without publicity if needs be) which we consider would be very helpful before the summit.

Pádraic MacKernan

P. MacKernan

14 October, 1981