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Meeting between the Taoiseach and Archbishop O'Connor

2 May, 1985

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Summary

The meeting which took place at the headquarters of the Archdiocese on 1st Ave, lasted for an hour and thirty-five minutes.

The main points covered were:-

- (1) the Anglo-Irish process
- (2) IRA terrorism
- (3) Role for the U.S.

Anglo-Irish Process

The Taoiseach outlined recent developments. He said that both the Irish and British Governments started from the same premise, i.e. how to accommodate the apparently conflicting aspirations of the two traditions in Northern Ireland in new processes and structures of Government there. The discussions between the two Governments are being conducted in good faith, there was real progress at the Chequers Summit (despite the distractions created by Mrs. Thatcher's Press Conference) but the outlook for success for the present discussions is no better than 50/50. Archbishop O'Connor said that Mrs. Thatcher's Press Conference had had a devastating effect among all shades of opinion in the Irish-American community.

IRA terrorism

This subject arose when Archbishop O'Connor asked the Taoiseach how the American Bishops could best be of assistance. The Taoiseach said that unconditional condemnation of IRA violence and support for it from the U.S. would be most helpful. The Archbishop declined to give such a condemnation insisting that, because of the enormous residual hostility to Great Britain in the Irish-American community, it would be essential in order to preserve balance to include in any such statement denunciation of British oppression in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach expressed shock at this answer and emphasised that terrorism involved life and death issues and cannot be equated with the excesses of the security forces, reprehensible though these are. To seek to balance the two would be disproportionate.

Role for the U.S.

The Taoiseach said for the present, at least, a "Special Envoy" was not seen as necessary. U.S. support for the efforts of the British and Irish Governments is helpful. In the event of a successful outcome to the present talks U.S. financial aid, as well as aid from our European Community partners, may well be forthcoming. The U.S. Government has not excluded this possibility. Archbishop O'Connor said that his own preference was for the U.S. President to appoint a Special Advisor on Ireland to his staff, rather than a Special Envoy. He felt this would underline the importance attached by the Administration to the Irish question.

Meeting between Taoiseach and Archbishop O'Connor, 2 May 1985

The Taoiseach began by congratulating Archbishop O'Connor on his impending elevation to Cardinal.

He said he welcomed the opportunity for this meeting which would enable him to bring the Archbishop up-to-date on N.I. developments since their last meeting in October. The Taoiseach indicated that he would confine his comments to two aspects of the problem (a) the fight against terrorism (b) the negotiations between the Irish and British Governments.

Regarding (a) he explained to Archbishop O'Connor the action which had been taken to freeze suspected IRA funds of 1½m in an Irish bank. The Irish Government is continuing its close relationship with the British authorities in their common effort to deal with terrorism across the border. He adverted to the recent split in the IRA which resulted in the expulsion of certain hardliners. It is clear that the IRA are having problems trying to accommodate both those wishing to pursue a political and those wishing to pursue a military policy.

The Taoiseach said that there has been progress in the talks with the British Government. The agenda for these talks is basically the Forum report. The aim is to achieve peace and stability in Northern Ireland. Discussions are now taking place at various levels, ministerial, official etc. Both sides start from the same premise that they must search for processes and structures of Government for Northern Ireland which will enable the two loyalties there to be accommodated. He listed the main problems from the minority standpoint as follows:

- (1) The need for a political structure which will allow them to express their loyalty to Irish nationalism.
- (2) Alienation from the security forces, including the police.
- (3) A judicial and court system which the minority community cannot support. This has been exacerbated in particular in recent times by extraordinary statements by individual members of the judiciary.

The two Governments want to achieve the same objective. So far as the Irish Government is concerned it remains to be seen whether what the British offer will be adequate. The fact is that the negotiations are being carried out with great goodwill but there is still uncertainty as to whether any agreement will emerge. The likelihood is that in the event of agreement the terrorists would try to do their best to destabilise the situation. This would mean that

initially at least there could well be an increase in terrorism. There is also need to take account of possible Unionist reaction to agreement.

Archbishop O'Connor thanked the Taoiseach for his expose and said that it was very helpful. He felt that while most Irish Americans would accept that the Taoiseach is negotiating with goodwill that is not the perception they have of the British Government. The publicity aspects of the Taoiseach's meeting with Mrs. Thatcher were devastating. Mrs. Thatcher's T.V. performance really shattered many things here. He said that he would have to emphasise and reemphaise how difficult her T.V. appearance have made things. Every shade of opinion from Sinn Fein supporters right to the other end of the spectrum had all been incensed by Mrs. Thatcher's remarks. It is acknowledged that the Irish Government has been trying to do its best but it takes time to pick up the pieces after Mrs. Thatcher's performance.

The Taoiseach said that he could vouch for the fact that it took time to pick up the pieces after Mrs. Thatcher's performance. He said he would like to sketch out the background to that meeting for the Archbishop. The fact was that despite the happenings of the press conference the actual meeting and certainly the earlier part of her press conference was very constructive. Mrs. Thatcher had, without any prompting or urging, indicated that changes in regard to the area of security would also involve changes in the prisons and the judiciary.

On the Forum report she appeared to have failed to grasp the essentials and to have concentrated on the 3 options. Also she seemed to have an aversion for the word alienation which she regarded as borrowed from the communist lexicon. This was most unfortunate because the concept of alienation as outlined in the Forum report is central to its analysis of the problem.

Mrs. Thatcher also faced some criticism in her own party over the incident as well as media criticism in Britain and overseas, especially in the U.S. In a way it could be said that the effects of her behaviour had turned out to be useful from the Irish standpoint in that it forced her to study the Forum report more closely and to gain a better understanding of our analysis. Nonetheless the prospects of achieving a successful outcome from the present round of discussions is no better than 50-50.

The Archbishop asked the Taoiseach about his attitude to the Moynihan proposal for a special envoy. He said he personally favoured the appointment by the President to his staff of a Special Advisor on Ireland.

The Taoiseach said that it was a matter of timing. The process going on at the present time involve very serious negotiations indeed which do not see the need for a role for a special envoy. However, if these negotiations were to founder other help might well prove necessary. The most important thing at this stage is that the British Government should take the matter seriously. He recalled that in 1979 Mrs. Thatcher became extremely worried about American concern and interest in the problem. This arose in part because of the prospect of Senator Kennedy emerging as a U.S. presidential candidate for 1980.

The Archbishop enquired whether it would be helpful if there was a general interest and concern on the part of the U.S. Government in the problem. The Taoiseach said that U.S. pressure can be most significant when something is moving. If agreement is reached between the British and Irish Governments it would be important that that agreement be supported by the U.S. Government in the form of reconstruction aid. A financial package perhaps backed by the U.S., EEC and many other governments would be necessary to restore the economy of Northern Ireland. The U.S. Government has not excluded that possibility, nor do the British Government nor other European leaders with whom he has discussed it.

The Archbishop said that he could not recall whether he had shared with the Taoiseach the disappointment felt by him and his fellow bishops when they met with representatives of the Northern Ireland Development Board in Belfast. When they mentioned the blatant discrimination against Catholics in employment the officials made an arrogant denial of its very existence. He and his brother bishops had formed a very unfavourable impression of the officials concerned. They had gone with the intention of offering to attempt to encourage business people in their dioceses to invest in Ireland but were not encouraged to do so by the reception they had received.

The Taoiseach said that our Government is most anxious to encourage investment in Northern Ireland. It is true that there are proportionately fewer Catholics in employment in Northern Ireland. There are conflicting reasons for this. He instanced the Harland and Wolf Shipyard where if jobs were to be advertised for Catholics in the morning there would be no applicants because they know that they would not survive. The situation with regard to new industry looks much better. While the bodies dealing with discrimination may be underfunded and under manned the problem is to get investment in the first instance and then to see to a fair distribution of employment. Irish Governments have in recent times placed orders both with Short Brothers and Harlands because of concern about the deteriorating Northern Ireland economy.

The Archbishop said that he has been asked by the National Conference of Bishops to design a mechanism for better relationships between the Irish and U.S. hierarchies. He asked the Taoiseach for his suggestions as to how they might best assist in the circumstances.

Ambassador O'Sullivan suggested that it would be worthwhile if the bishops could come out in support of the efforts of John Hume and constitutional nationalism.

The Taoiseach said that the 2 bishops Daly, (in Belfast and Derry) have given an unambiguous lead in Ireland in condemning the IRA who have been involved in kidnappings, extortion protection rackets and who have links to Colonel Ghaddafi. With a few exceptions guns for the IRA have come almost exclusively from the U.S. In addition about 1/3 of the money for the IRA comes from the U.S. In the circumstances a clear call from U.S. church leaders against IRA violence would be most welcome.

The Archbishop said that U.S. bishops have denounced violence by all, including IRA violence. Perhaps in time they would, as a body, come out with a statement but they would be unable to say anything so one sided as to denounce only the violence of the IRA. He could not afford to alienate himself from a large body of Irish Americans.

The Taoiseach indicated he was shocked by the Archbishop's remarks. He said he would never, no matter what the consequences, refuse - on the grounds of alienating a body of opinion - to unreservedly denounce IRA terrorism.

The Archbishop said that the Taoiseach had misunderstood him. He wished to be helpful to Ireland but could not be if he were to alienate many people, who believe in the morality of their cause.

The Taoiseach said that there is only one side to terrorism: the murder of ordinary individuals.

Archbishop O'Connor said he felt morally obliged to denounce British oppression also.

The Taoiseach said that the Government is continually raising the excesses of the security forces with the British authorities. But it was wrong to equate what is done by security forces trying to maintain law and order with the violence of the bomb and the bullet. The balance was so disproportionate as to cry out to God for justice. He said, never never can those things be condoned.

The Archbishop appealed to the Taoiseach to listen to him. He said that he has condemned things more definitively than anybody else. He accepts that he must make his own judgment as to how he can help. In meetings he had with Irish

Americans in New York he had discouraged them from doing things the Taoiseach didn't know anything about. In the area for which he has responsibility he must be free to make his own decisions. He must judge what will give him credibility with the people. He wants to be helpful but he does not appreciate the Irish Government telling him what to do. He has the best interests of Ireland at heart, the fact is that there is a great feeling of resentment against the British among Irish Americans. Consequently there is no way in integrity or in prudence that he can indict violence by the IRA or Noraid, while ignoring the discrimination that is going on in Northern Ireland. The feedback from the community to his St. Patrick's Day comments has been very positive and supportive. He cannot give out one-sided condemnations. If that is regarded as political or pragmatic so be it. He wishes the Taoiseach to know that he took exception to his comments and his moral judgement.

The Taoiseach said that he had been asked to offer a view by the Archbishop and he had given it, when asked for it. Now exception was being taken at the fact that it had been given.

The Archbishop said I cannot one sidedly indict the IRA.

The Taoiseach said that what we want is unambiguous condemnation of terrorism. The IRA's aim is to establish a totalitarian state. They murder people. In recent days they murdered a man in Cork because they alleged he was a police informer. Police and soldiers have been gunned down. This is why IRA violence must be isolated from other things.

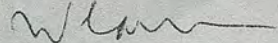
Archbishop O'Connor said that before he made his St. Patrick's Day statement he had given the matter very serious and prayerful consideration. He had consulted with innumerable people. He had been pilloried in the British press for allegedly equating British oppression with IRA violence. He never did that. The British Consul General subsequently came to him to apologise for what had appeared in the British press. Ultimately he wanted to do what was in the best interests of Ireland. He did not have the impression that this was appreciated because of the requests he received from Irish representatives not to review the Parade.

The Consul General said that with great respect he would have to disagree with the Archbishop's comment. In his contacts with the Archbishop prior to the Parade he had been very careful to make it clear that he was placing certain facts before the Archbishop but was not making any recommendation and certainly not any request as to how the Archbishop would proceed with regard to the Parade. It was his understanding that the approach by the Ambassador, with whom he had maintained constant contact in this matter, was in identical terms.

Archbishop O'Connor said that it was true that no request had been made and that very diplomatic language had been used by both the Ambassador and the Consul General in their contacts but that he had no doubt in his own mind that, at a time when he was facing a very difficult decision, he was subjected to extraordinary pressure which made that decision even more difficult. He referred back to the time immediately preceding the visit by the American Bishops to Ireland when he had been approached at the last minute by telephone by the Ambassador appealing to him not to see the IRA while in Ireland. This approach, which had been made to him despite the fact that he was not the leader of the delegation, had caused him some embarrassment. Nonetheless he did act on that appeal and as it transpired the group did not see the IRA. For an Archbishop of New York this is a very delicate and volatile situation. One must speak out against evil but one does so in a way best suited to bringing about good. He had spoken out against abortion and homosexuality, both evils. He recognised that he cannot be the instrument of any Government. But he is anxious to assist Ireland in any way possible; justice demands it. But he has to take the needs of the Archdiocese into account. Not even the Holy See has the same authority or relationship because of the substantial number of Irish Americans in the New York Archdiocese and after all there are over 40m Irish Americans. Of course he will denounce violence etc. but simultaneously he will not be naive about the role Great Britain has played in the troubles in Northern Ireland and he cannot ignore the enormous residual hostility to Great Britain here. He has to adopt a morally prudent approach.

The Taoiseach said that the Government had condemned the excesses of the security forces in Northern Ireland. This has probably been done more frequently during the past 2 years than ever before. This has been done in particular by Minister Barry who has received substantial support from the nationalist community in Northern Ireland for his efforts on their behalf. The situation with regard to the North of Ireland is one of proportion and identifying the primary source of violence. The IRA is involved in a genocidal campaign which does not equate with the excesses of the security forces in Northern Ireland however deplorable the latter may be. To equate the two would be a moral aberration.

To conclude the Taoiseach indicated that there was a substantial measure of agreement as to the objective they both wished to achieve. There were differences of language and approach. The Consul General offered to follow up on the exchanges as soon as possible so that the differences referred to could be teased out further.


Consul General New York
May 7, 1985.

P.S.

Subsequently the Taoiseach and Archbishop met the Irish press. The Taoiseach indicated that he had briefed the Archbishop on the work of the British and Irish Governments in their efforts to make progress and find a way forward in Northern Ireland. The Archbishop said that the Taoiseach had given an excellent insight into the continuing negotiation, which he hopes and prays will succeed. He said that he told the Taoiseach that the American Bishops condemn violence in all its forms and seek peace with justice through political and spiritual but not military means.