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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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PERSONAL AND SECRET

AS REVISED BY TAOISEACH

Meeting between the Taoiseach and British Prime
Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, in Milan on Saturday,
29th June, 1985.

The meeting was held in the British delegation room in the Castello Sforzesco. It began at approximately 9.20 and continued for about one hour. It was attended by the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, Mr. Charles Powell and the undersigned.

This note is in the form of direct speech, for ease of reference. It does not, however, purport to be an exact reproduction of what was said.

After a few preliminary comments on the arrangements for the European Council in the Castello, on which the Prime Minister commented adversely, events leading up to the Air India crash off the Irish coast, certain new terrorist devices which had been discovered, and other details, the Taoiseach opened the meeting by referring to the events in Glasgow and elsewhere leading to the round up of IRA suspects.

Prime Minister: It may not be long before they try another.

Taoiseach: One of the men you have caught, we had been looking for for a long time. We noticed that he has turned up with you. We cannot be sure whether or not there are other people with the same capacity.

Prime Minister: The Americans are in some bother also because of the same phenomenon.* The French want to get involved. We in the Council must do as much as we can

*She was referring to the hostages etc. in the Lebanon.

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to help the United States. There is not a lot that Reagan can do. Unless the Israelies act in a certain way, nobody knows what will happen. The trouble there is that they should not have taken hostages across the border, in the way they did. They have released 31 already and got nothing for it. Now, Garret, what have you to say about the subject of to-day's meeting?

Taoiseach: There is a certain amount of progress.....

Prime Minister: There is a lot of progress.

Taoiseach: The document seems to be more or less alright. Some parts remain to be dealt with but there seems to be no reason why this cannot be sorted out. There is a lot to be done, however, on the associated measures. Big issues are involved here. /Our proposals are on the table/. On the question of status, there is the passage in the document to the effect that consent to a change in status does not exist at present. This may seem self-evident, but it could be controversial for us. We are accepting formally that consent does not exist to Irish unity at present. This is new and though the reason may not be clear to you it could be difficult for us.

On the Task Force, this is more difficult than I thought. We have just completed local elections and I have noticed very strong arguments from people everywhere that because of the crime wave in Dublin and elsewhere we should not be keeping so many police on the border. In Dublin alone 800 youths have been arrested for stealing cars. People want Gardai brought back to Dublin and to the other areas where crime has increased. Notwithstanding all this, I recognise that we do have to set up the Task Force and that this could in any event be necessary in case events took a turn for the worse on the border as a result of any agreement we might reach. It is important that we should do what we have proposed, in this context.

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Thirdly, on the Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, recent judgements have made ratification possible for us and we will do what we have said.

But in all this, the minority community in Northern Ireland must also be brought along. The bargain we have been working on so far is just about saleable on our side if it is accompanied by the support of the minority community in Northern Ireland. Without that support the agreement just cannot work. People will say that our Government are taking on responsibility without power. They will ask what does it mean? Is it going to work?

The associated measures we have in mind relate to:-

- (1) the Courts;
- (2) the Ulster Defence Regiment;
- (3) the RUC and
- (4) prison reviews and the IRA.

I would be interested in your reaction to our proposals on these items.

On the IRA, we see some prospect, though I would not like to be too optimistic, of winning over the families. There is a widespread feeling that violence must stop. The families want their own relatives out of prison. The parents want their children out. They want the violence stopped. If we can reach an arrangement under which if there is peace for perhaps 6 months, then, at the end of that period, if all is well, there could be a major review of prison sentences, this might have a real impact. This would be announced simultaneously with the agreement and would help the SDLP and the families in their arguments against the men of violence. It could lead to an erosion of support for the IRA.

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Prime Minister: We both have the same fears. We are both afraid that we may have gone too far. I have to look to the unionists. You have to look to the Irish dimension. Under the arrangements, you would have an institutional right to consultation. To Hume that may not look much. But it will bring out the Paisleyites. If we go on for more on the associated measures, we shall have a very strong reaction. That reaction could put the whole thing in jeopardy. There may be some possibilities if things are done, over time, by way of implementation of the agreement. Lord Chief Justice Lowry is reported to have said a lot of things that we know nothing about.

Taoiseach: As you know I met Lord Chief Justice Lowry some time ago and outlined in a very broad way the proposals in relation to the Courts. He said he would resign if anything like this happened and made a great play of his opposition to joint Courts. All this got into the newspapers in Ireland and in London. It appears that the Judges saw what was being said and came together asking what all this was about. In the end, they confronted Lowry. They said that they would do whatever their constitutional duty was. There was no question of their resigning. They have written a letter on this.

Prime Minister: We have no such letter. The only letter we have was one of some time back which said that the proposal for joint Courts would bring the Courts into politics.

Taoiseach: I understand that Lowry has also been saying that there are not enough suitable people to act as Judges.....

Prime Minister: There could be acute difficulties if you tell me about what goes on in my territory about the Court system..... The only possibility is that we can say in the agreement that we would consider the possibility of setting up a joint Court system.

Taoiseach: We must look at it in the light of what is happening. Unless I know in advance that a system of joint Courts will be set up there just is no way I can go ahead with this agreement.

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- Prime Minister: There is no possibility of agreeing in advance to joint Courts. I could not agree to the conclusion of a consideration before it started.
- Taoiseach: If I didn't know that a system of this sort would come into existence under the agreement then I could not go ahead with the agreement.
- Prime Minister: We have looked at these difficulties before and have realised just how serious they are. We just cannot undertake to institute a system of joint Courts before.....
- Taoiseach: This question has to be considered now. People have been saying that I have been led up the garden path. They would say this even more strongly. They would say that we have been fooled by the British again.
- Prime Minister: The unionists will say this is a foot in the door. I must assure you: the consultation will be genuine.
- Taoiseach: This is a very real problem. I have to be able to say, if this whole thing is to be considered, that it can happen. There is no question of technical difficulties. It works with us. Our Special Criminal Court has been operating for about 15 years with 3 Judges, and without Juries. The decisions are announced unanimously, and do not cause controversy.
- Prime Minister: That is a different matter altogether. The Judges would be from different jurisdictions. They would be acting in situations of heightened tension. One of the jurisdictions will always be in the minority on the Court. There could be frequent disputes. The Northern minority might not believe the judgements produced.....
- Taoiseach: This is not how it happens. Anyone conversant with the law knows that it is upheld, in both parts of the Island, scrupulously. We are not criticising the way in which the Northern judicial system works. There are bad obiter dicta and unhappy phrases have been used from time to time which have been deeply offensive to the minority, but, apart from the problem of the supergrass trials, the

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system does seem to try cases fairly. There would not be a 2 to 1 majority on a North/South basis in every instance regardless of the facts, as you seem to fear.

Prime Minister: I will genuinely consider what you have said but cannot say what the result will be. What about the associated measures? Douglas Hurd is one of the best people we have every had in this present post. He believes that if announcements of associated measures are made at the same time as the agreement it would be jeopardised. He would hope to implement them over time. He must think of unionist reactions, with his responsibilities.

Taoiseach: All these measures are necessary to enable the minority to identify with the institutions and systems of Government. Unless we can have them we have been wasting our time.

Prime Minister; We could consider an undertaking. Would it be sufficient to set up arrangements to come into force later?

Taoiseach: Unless the minority support the arrangements from the very first moment, they just will be worthless. There is just no way that they can stand up to the IRA without these measures. There just could be no agreement in those circumstances.

Prime Minister: We are in the same position insofar as the unionists are concerned. They will say that the agreement gives you a foot in the door and that the Republic should never have come into this arrangement: that we are putting the Constitution in danger. They will say that the door has been opened. Under the agreement there will be an institutionalised right to consultation. You will be there. Each side must understand the other if this thing is to work.

Taoiseach: For the last 6 months the Government has been increasingly sceptical about these negotiations. They have been saying that unless these associated measures take place simultaneously then they just cannot back the agreement. I have persuaded them to go

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along with what is happening, but with difficulty. If things break down now it will be very damaging.

Prime Minister: What you want is something on the UDR, on the RUC - perhaps a code of conduct - we can do these things but they must have a low profile: that is the best line.

Taoiseach: We have been saying for 6 months we can't get the minority to back this agreement unless there are simultaneous changes in the UDR and the RUC. We can't get the minority support without these. They just cannot sell an agreement without these changes, to their own people. What have we got? By the time the measures you mention, are put in force, in the way you are speaking, the whole effect of the agreement will have evaporated. I have put my personal authority on the line here. This whole negotiation has been viewed by very many people in the South with the deepest scepticism.

Prime Minister: You talk about these associated measures. But you are getting an agreement which institutionalises consultation in the North.

Taoiseach: You should understand that I am not seeking these things for the benefit of our people or our State. In fact, our people, the people in the South, don't want to be involved in the North. We have just had a local election in the South. Time and again people have come to us and said: "Stop talking about Northern Ireland. Stop talking about peace and stability there. We want taxation down in our State: we want unemployment cured in our State. We do not want to be involved in Northern Ireland".

Let me go back to the beginning and tell you how I see this whole question. This whole business would never have started, if the right thing had been done at the right time. In 1969, when the trouble started, all the minority community wanted was a right to be represented in Parliament as a constitutional opposition, on a basis of equal rights. There was fierce opposition even to that minimal change - from unionists in Northern Ireland and they were backed by British Governments. In 1973 and 1974

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a British Government - not yours - walked away from agreements they had made in Sunningdale and things which could well have worked just collapsed - again in the face of unionist opposition. Even as late as 1982, if the ideas Jim Prior had canvassed and then dropped, and which are now under consideration in relation to power-sharing, had been gone ahead with, things might have worked out. We have always been faced with these solutions and half solutions - too little and too late.

Our people just do not want to be involved in Northern Ireland. I am taking a very great risk in all this. The Irish people are not really interested in the North - they are switched off that subject, for the moment. but the consequences of doing nothing now will be to force people - people like the SDLP - into the arms of Sinn Fein. I have used all the moral authority I have to campaign for a settlement which will stop this from happening. There is a deliberate campaign being waged in Northern Ireland to create instability. Ghaddafi is deeply involved and is willing to put millions of pounds into a similar effort North and South. He is backing the IRA politically and trying to manipulate the Irish State in that way. For over 800 years, British real-politik has taken it as a fundamental tenet of policy that Ireland must not be allowed to become a base for attacking her. Now you could be allowing that very thing to happen. You could be doing just what British policy over 800 years has spent every effort to prevent.

There is a certain current flowing now. I am ready to take the opportunity and run with it. This is a historic opportunity. I do not know what history will say if we miss it. It is something you and I can do together no one else, now or for an indefinite future.

We are not saying "abolish the UDR". We recognise the dangers of such a move just as much as you. We are saying that it should be used in support of the police. We hope that we can get away with changes in the structures which we have suggested. But we do not know this. We are just as interested in security in Northern Ireland as you are.

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The changes we have suggested in the RUC are the absolute minimum.

We have exactly the same interest as you in avoiding a unionist reaction which is uncontrollable. Our best assessment is that the things we have suggested can be done. We know what the minimum is to make things work. We have our contacts with the unionists. We have some feeling for what they will acquiesce in. We have been in touch with them.

Prime Minister: I see, you want something visible - we cannot call them "associated measures" but rather "implementing part of the agreement". I know just how hostile the atmosphere to this agreement can be. Both parts of Ireland could be in danger. There could be civil war.

Taoiseach: The two of us together can do it. This is an opportunity which may not recur.

Prime Minister: The implementation of parts of the agreement from day one could be possible - not associated measures. Either there is an office you can go to and the other things happen.....

Taoiseach: What we are talking of is only the minimum. that is all we are looking for.

Prime Minister: We are acutely conscious of difficulties in relation to the police at a time like that of which I am speaking. There can be no question of changing the oath of allegiance.....

Taoiseach: I know that. Nobody is asking that they should change their oath of allegiance. But many years ago, in 1976, Merlyn Rees and Frank Cooper - who was then Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office - said that there were only about 20 police left in the force of those who had misbehaved in the 1968/69 period and that these would be gone within a year. We have looked recently at the Scarman Report. An incident there involved a machinegun attack on Divis Flats in which a child was killed. There was a second incident in which whole streets of Catholics were burnt out and a third of a similar nature in all of which a particular police officer was involved. These incidents

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are mentioned in the Scarman Report. The officer is not named but he has recently been promoted to one of the highest offices in the Northern Ireland Police. What kind of sensitivity is that? Do you think that a minority community can support a police force where that sort of thing happens?

Prime Minister: (Visibly moved) I am sure that Douglas Hurd would never.....

Taoiseach: That is the very point. Someone is not telling him. We have the fullest confidence in the Cabinet Office and in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office but I have serious doubts about what is getting to the Secretary of State from the Northern Ireland Office. I am not suggesting a witch hunt. I am suggesting that if we were involved in these things, that sort of insensitivity would be far less likely.

Prime Minister; Are there any other similar incidents of which you can tell me.....

Taoiseach: I am using this instance as an illustration. I do not want to get into details. We are not engaging in a witch hunt.

Prime Minister: What you are talking about is a code of conduct.

Taoiseach: Not just a code of conduct - a declaration of commitment to uphold the rights of both communities. If some people did not like it and decided to go, then we could use the opportunity to fit in people from both sections of the community. What we are speaking about is a declaration by the UDR and police that in their activities they would be fair to both communities.

Prime Minister: Go on: I want to hear all about this.

(There had been some side comment that the UDR was, in fact, officered by British officers.)

Taoiseach: What you need is competent and professional military officers down to company level, as well as adequate numbers of experienced NCOs. You need to disband the part-time membership of the UDR and ensure better control of the UDR operations.

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Prime Minister: I admire their courage. They are a minority in a community, members of which, at the least, dislike them. Many of them are shot. I admire their courage. Can you imagine living in a territory such as theirs, where their neighbours may inform on them and next day they are shot. They are a remarkable group of men.

Taoiseach: That is the most appalling thing about the present campaign. But the UDR and the RUC have come to be seen as representing one section of the Community. In some areas, the UDR harrass local Catholic boys - many of them neighbours who grew up with them - this harrassment goes on and on and becomes a problem which in Northern Ireland has the sort of end we all know.

Prime Minister: We must think of the numbers who have been shot.

Taoiseach: But they are seen as a hostile force. There must be visible changes. We are not suggesting anything that will make them less effective. We are making concrete suggestions so that they can act better in support of the police and attract community support.

Incidentally, I think that it is appalling that Molyneaux, a Privy Councillor, should be leading or threatening to lead a mob against the police. Can you do nothing with him?

There then followed some conversation about the timing of the Summit Meeting. The Prime Minister enquired as to the date of the Bloody Sunday Anniversary. She said that she thought it was necessary to get the marching season over before any Summit was held. The Taoiseach agreed.

Taoiseach: It would be important to meet before expectations grow too large. I would suggest the end of August or early September.

Prime Minister: What about mid-October? I have to be around after the agreement is signed and that looks like the only suitable time, at present.

Turning to Mr. Powell.

What are the problems in September?

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Mr. Powell:

September is a diary problem. It is very very difficult.

Taoiseach:

The meeting should, of course, be in Dublin.

Prime Minister:

Not in Dublin, and you would have difficulties about Belfast. I am not objecting to a place in the South, but not in Dublin. That would heighten the profile too much and you would get a very strong reaction from the unionists. Your worry is that the deal will be seen by your people as a deal with something with feet of clay. At the same time, we just cannot have things called "associated measures". We could say that we were "implementing the agreement".

Taoiseach:

Belfast poses no problem for me. It must in any event be in Ireland. I don't mind what the measures are called. But what we must do is attract and sustain the confidence of the minority. The local elections in Northern Ireland had a demoralising effect on the SDLP. A while ago we nearly lost Seamus Mallon.

Prime Minister:

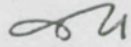
If the SDLP is not going into the agreement then I doubt.....

Taoiseach:

Incidentally, we would need to have as part of the arrangement something on the lines of the last passage in the message delivered to me by the British Ambassador on the police authority, at the same time as the agreement.

The Prime Minister asked to see the text of the message, recognised it and did not appear to demur at the Taoiseach's proposal.

The meeting then concluded with a rush since much business had yet to be done before the coming together of the Prime Ministers in the European Council.


2nd July, 1985.

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