



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2021/45/3
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.



CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS Telephone 071-270 0101

From the Secretary of the Cabinet and

Head of the Home Civil Service

Sir Robin Butler KCB CVO

29 July 1991

Dear Dermot,

It was good to see you on Friday. I thought that the atmosphere of the dinner was excellent. Thank you so much for coming and for the part you played.

I attach Sonia's note of our talk. Don't hesitate to let me know if you're brave enough to amend it!

Yours ever, Robin

Ref. A091/1910

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Sir Robin Butler had a meeting with Mr Dermot Nally on Friday 26 July. Sir Robin and Mr Nally agreed at the outset that, while they would not want a full note prepared of the discussions at the Diner itself, it would be useful if a note was taken of their bilateral discussion for their own personal use.

2. Sir Robin said that the Prime Minister welcomed and valued his growing relationship with the Taoiseach. He shared the Taoiseach's aspiration for a long term and lasting settlement of the problem of Northern Ireland, and the achievement of normality in bilateral arrangements. He took the view - which the Taoiseach had also expressed - that the Brook talks were and are an historic opportunity for progress. The United Kingdom believed that the process was not finished; it remained their belief and intention to find a way to get the talks going again. The Prime Minister would wish to take up and take further the ideas he started discussing with the Taoiseach in the Autumn. The United Kingdom do not yet wish to set a date for the Autumn meeting; this would need to be reviewed in the light of progress on the talks. Sir Robin said that he would welcome any light Mr Nally could throw on the considerations underlying the Taoiseach's approach and his ideas on constitutional, political or legal changes to the present arrangements and how these might fit in with the framework of the current talks and agreement.

3. Mr Nally said that the Irish Government fully supported the talks process and had done and would continue to do everything to support it. Once the talks were complete, or in the event of their complete breakdown, however they did not wish to be left with no other channels for making progress. They therefore saw a case for a process in parallel to the talks. Progress had previously been made as a result of agreement directly between the two Governments. It was important not to allow any party a complete veto on progress in the Northern Ireland situation. He therefore wondered about the possibility of looking, in parallel with any resumption of the talks in the Autumn, at other possibilities mentioned by the Prime Minister, such as an enhanced Anglo-Irish Agreement. Mr Nally suggested a couple of personal ideas as to how this might work: expanding the Inter-Governmental Conference to cover additional issues, perhaps European issues where the Republic and Northern Ireland had a common interest in Brussels, or closer cooperation on agriculture. He also noted that some local authority cooperation (he instanced Coleraine and Mayo) had made a promising start and might provide a blueprint for further developments.

4. Sir Robin said that, as the Prime Minister had emphasised to the Taoiseach, the United Kingdom was committed to looking for new areas for improved North/South cooperation. The UK was quite clear, however, that on both North/South cooperation and other issues, progress should be made within the framework of the existing talks rather than outside it. To start a parallel process risked accusations of bad faith if it became known which could bring the talks to an end. That was why the Prime Minister had asked for the Taoiseach's ideas to be taken forward in the context of the Diner; this was an established mechanism which had been running for many years.

5. Mr Nally said that the Irish were keen to see progress on the points made by the Prime Minister: institutional change,

reconciliation, anti-discrimination policies, "Council of Ireland" proposals, North/South cooperation and cooperation in the European context. They were concerned that all of these important topics would in effect be subject to veto by any of the parties to the talks.

6. Sir Robin said that the major failure of Sunningdale, and a disappointment of the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been their failure to carry the Unionists. The present process was difficult, but carried the prospect of the commitment of all parties. The important thing was to ensure that all parties had an interest in widening the scope of the talks and considering broader issues. Both those suggested by Mr Nally and many of the issues raised by the Prime Minister were of interest to all those concerned, and the United Kingdom would be keen to see them brought within the talks process, although the Council of Ireland should be seen as one possible form of North/South co-operation rather than as a concrete proposal by the Prime Minister.

7. Turning to preparation for the Autumn meeting, Sir Robin said that the United Kingdom envisaged a further meeting of the Diner in the Autumn before the summit. Given the likely coverage of the summit, including, in particular, European issues, it might be necessary slightly to adjust the Diner attendance. But one of the strengths of the Diner format was that it allowed for flexible attendance. It would be possible to consider at that meeting an agenda for the talks and any advance preparation carried out by either side towards the talks. Given the coverage of the Diner process, and normal bilateral relationships between the two Governments, Sir Robin did not see a case for additional "Sherpa" arrangements, perhaps involving a couple of Diner participants, in advance of the Diner. The timing of the talks, given the Party Conference season in the Autumn, was likely to be November, with a Diner a week to ten days beforehand. Issues for discussion at the summit might include, on the European side: the

"Social Charter", cohesion, energy, institutional reforms; plus international issues and security cooperation.

8. On the Mulroney message, Mr Nally said that the Irish were under no illusion that PIRA was on the ropes. There were, however, certain elements who wanted to get PIRA into the political process. Sir Robin noted that the Prime Minister had already made it clear what the pre-conditions for that would be. He also emphasised that there was no talk or thought here of removing troops from Northern Ireland. Mr Nally said that if the Taoiseach had a message for the Prime Minister he would convey it direct, not via a third party.

9. Sir Robin and Mr Nally concluded by agreeing the areas for discussion at the Diner.

Louisa Phippard

MISS S C PHIPPARD

29 July 1991