



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
F.2.

Uimhir.....

To:

Subject to Verification

From:

Secret and Personal

Meeting between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major

London, 21 June 1991

1. The meeting took place in Downing Street. It began with a tete-a-tete between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister commencing at approximately 7.30 and ending at 8.15 p.m. This was followed by a slight intermission before dinner, which began at about 8.30 and ended at about 10.30 p.m. The Taoiseach was accompanied at the dinner by Minister Collins, Secretary Dorr and Assistant Secretary Gallagher and the undersigned. The British side consisted of the Prime Minister, Northern Secretary Brooke, Minister of State Garel-Jones, Cabinet Secretary Robin Butler and Private Secretary Stephen Wall. The tone of the tete-a-tete and the dinner meeting was businesslike and very amicable.

2. This note covers the tete-a-tete. It is in direct speech but is not verbatim. Major action or strategy points are underlined.

3. After the usual preliminaries, the Taoiseach thanked the Prime Minister for his hospitality and said that he understood they would be discussing the Luxembourg Council and Northern Ireland.

## Major

Luxembourg and the Community are causing a real fuss over here now.

## Taoiseach

I see two former Prime Ministers (Thatcher and Heath) are getting themselves involved with the media.

## Major

Yes. They are making a real meal of it. There are certain key words which inflame passions here. One of them is "federal union". This is in the text now but it won't be in the Maastricht text. What does it mean, anyway? Federal union means different things to different people. To some, in Britain, it means a centralisation of power; to others it means decentralisation.

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
P. 2.

Uimhir.....

To:

- 2 -

From:

## Taoiseach

Defence and a common foreign and security policy could be a bit of a problem for us. However, it looks as if they will not arise until we are down the road a bit. I'd like to hear your views on the subject.

## Major

They won't come up for a long time, so far as London is concerned. And then it seems likely that the common foreign and security policy and defence will be divorced in the debate. They are different matters. We would not have any great difficulty in agreeing on a treaty on the common foreign and security policy. However defence is different; we would want it to be divorced. Some believe it should be built up in WEU. We believe that the primacy of defence of the West should be built up through NATO. There will be a general debate on this in Luxembourg. All this will require some very delicate drafting. There are three points. First, defence coming under the European Community - that is for the very distant future. Secondly, the Germans and us - we have a clear and distinct commitment to NATO. Thirdly, words will have to be found to deal with your problem. I imagine all this will be worked out in Maastricht. Some of the problems are transitory but there are some real issues involved. Do you see it all in the same way?

## Taoiseach

Yes. Absolutely.

## Major

Frankly, we were surprised at what Luxembourg has in their text. They will try to pin down what they see is in agreement. But people won't buy this until they see the lot. Some splendid groundwork has been done by Luxembourg for the two treaties but if they try to push it too far they will have a lot of squabbling on their hands. What do you feel, Stephen? You were speaking to Morel (French Political Director) recently?

## Wall

France feels that if things are not nailed down now, the whole thing will unravel.

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
F. 1.

Uimhir.....

To:

From:

- 3 -

## Major

They are thinking of the temple, not the tree!  
(referring to the two concepts of European  
integration).

## Taoiseach

Mitterrand will certainly push for a mention of  
defence.

## Major

This may be really a drafters problem. We can't be  
certain for all time that Europe won't need common  
defence.

## Taoiseach

Let us see how it all goes. Have you any thoughts on  
Northern Ireland? Our general approach is that there  
is an opportunity now which won't come up again for a  
long time. We have got to aim at something  
substantial and positive. My feeling is that if we  
leave it to talking(?) by political parties in  
Northern Ireland we will get nowhere. The two  
Governments must really take control and try to steer  
it in some particular direction. If we don't do this  
there will be great disappointment all round. I do  
not mean that the two Governments should necessarily  
take charge publicly but a window of opportunity has  
opened up. We must really think of what is at stake.  
If things work out right we could get a lasting  
settlement.

Look at the prospects: for us, there would be  
tremendous benefits. I have heard a calculation  
recently that the cumulative cost of extra security to  
us arising from the Northern problem is equivalent to  
almost 10% of our national debt (I clarified this  
subsequently with Stephen Wall).

The situation in Northern Ireland is a constant  
irritant in relations between the two Governments.  
Nearly everywhere I go on the international scene, I  
am asked "When are you going to solve the problem of  
Northern Ireland?" There are questions of  
international prestige at stake. There are great  
benefits for both of us in the world from a clearing  
of the decks. Both countries could then settle down

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
F. 2.

Uimhir.....

To:

- 4 -

From: to some sort of normal relations. I hope in all this I am not teaching my grandmother to suck eggs.

Major

Indeed you are not.

Taoiseach

Just think of the interruption of normal political life. There have been two attempts on the lives of Ministers in the British Cabinet. My thesis is that we must get all this off our backs. If we want to achieve something, we, the two Governments, must take the whole situation by the scruff of the neck.

When we talked before you said that we should have a good in-depth meeting and I agree totally with this. I would suggest that in the Autumn we might have a review of the whole Anglo-Irish/British relationship and see if, within that, we cannot come up with something. If that idea appeals to you, then between now and then the Nally/Butler group perhaps with a few others could prepare the ground. I mean they should work quietly and confidentially on an in-depth analysis of where we might go.

Major

The more I learn of the problem the more anxious I am to make progress. I would favour a step by step approach - a slow approach. We have to carry a Unionist and Nationalist consensus along. Both must feel secure. We can't be sure that the Unionists will go along with us. We will know how things are going, as the talks develop. As we get into Strand Two we will see a little more clearly how things are going to be. Both countries have a large common interest in developments. I am entirely happy to talk privately - you and I together, but I am a touch worried about a group working in the background in the way you suggest. We could be accused of bypassing the SDLP and the Unionist parties and this could break up the Strand Two talks.

Taoiseach

I agree that if the idea surfaced it would not be great but the Nally/Butler group are meeting anyway. These meetings are going on all the time.



# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
F. 2.

Uimhir.....

To:

- 5 -

From:

Major

What would the group examine?

Taoiseach

Perhaps they could look at any way in which Sinn Fein could be brought into the process. I am constantly being approached by people who say that we should get Sinn Fein into the process. There is a mood and feeling even among the military people that if the political people could attempt to achieve goals through political means they would cease their violence. There must be some way out. We could have the experts look at any feasible way in which Sinn Fein could be worked in with a view to ending the violence.

Major

Violence seems to be accelerating at the moment. There are a lot of Active Service Units about.

Taoiseach

They are a force in the land. They say "We can keep going forever". We must end that violence (and its causes).

Then the group could look at all possible models and strategies for the future. I am not convinced that anything serious is going to emerge from the talks. The papers submitted are very depressing. Nothing is going to develop out of the process itself. We could be foolish to rely on something coming out of the talks process alone.

Major

What you are talking about is options about steering them along?

Taoiseach

You will recall the Forum Report. It raised the option of a unitary state, joint sovereignty and a federal/confederal North/South solution. I would like to see these options studied in more detail - even if we had to look far down the road. We would be very on-coming with the Northern communities. And then there is the whole question of the European context.

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
F. 2.

Uimhir. ....

To:

- 6 -

From:

Major

There seems to be some pick up of this (the European context) by the SDLP and the Unionists - perhaps subliminally.

Taoiseach

We'll be in on Strand Two and will be discussing the situation.

Major

The whole subject is very difficult and very complex in view of the position of the Unionists - and of Northern Ireland generally.

Taoiseach

You don't know your own strength in this. I must ask where do the Unionists have to go? If you say "The British Government have decided on a certain course of action" where do they go? If they push, things go back and the Anglo-Irish Agreement is fully in place and will be so for another 20 years. Don't attribute too much sophistication and understanding to the Unionists. If the British Government says "This is the way we must go, they have no alternative". You remember you put a formula recently. You put it: they accepted. Once the British Government come in authoritatively they must accept.

Major

Whatever is proposed must be broadly accepted by the Unionists and also by Parliament. I have been giving the whole matter some thought over the last few days. We would not have problems with the following scenario

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- (1) some type of new institution or institutions in Northern Ireland;
- (2) measures to bring about greater reconciliation between the two traditions;
- (3) something to make sure there is an end to discrimination;

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
P. 1.

Uimhir. ....

To:

- 7 -

From:

- (4) it would not be impossible in this context to consider a council of Ireland;
- (5) measures to improve North/South relations by some people to people arrangement; and
- (6) then, possibly, some form of enhanced Anglo-Irish Agreement.

But if all this became publicly floated, entrenched attitudes would come into play again. You had something further to say?

## Taoiseach

Not necessarily. I disagree with none of the ideas you have mentioned. I think they should be teased out by intelligent men behind the scenes. It would be better if we all knew where we were going in some overall concerted framework.

## Major

But we must create the climate. There is still a lot of PIRA activities: this will continue. Then there is the Orange backlash, with tit for tat murders. There is scope for greater cross-border co-operation particularly intelligence co-operation. We need this sort of thing so that we can build up the confidence of the non-terrorist communities.

## Taoiseach

It is very difficult to see what more we can do. Your people will tell you that co-operation is superb.

## Major

True.

## Taoiseach

In fact, I think you are beginning to speak like Mrs Thatcher. Maybe you have one of her briefs. We have bitten the bullet of extradition and the system is operating, despite some political trauma in the South. People concentrate on feelings and animosities in Northern Ireland but I have my own party to consider on this subject.



# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
F. 1.

Uimhir.....

To:

- 8 -

From:

Major

Perhaps, then, increased cross-border intelligence exchanges.

Taoiseach

This is going on all the time at operational level without any fanfare of trumpets. To publicise what is happening would be completely counter-productive.

Major

For our part, we had to deal with the fall-out from the Birmingham Six. I established a Royal Commission on the criminal law and was criticised for this. I was asked why not just set up an inter-departmental group. I felt however that the subject needed the independence and majesty of a Royal Commission. That was the only way to go to offer confidence - so I do understand your point about extradition.....

Taoiseach

Let me develop that further: three UDR men were killed recently. I referred to this as an outrage. I got a flood of letters. They were saying "Why do you as an Irishman call this an outrage" - that is the sort of background that I have to operate against at times. Certainly insofar as security is concerned if there is anything further that can be done, I will do it - but I would emphasise that I am speaking operationally.

Major

There was not a great outcry about our meeting. We must meet more regularly in the future. I agree we should meet in the Autumn. There is no problem about that.

I would like to reflect on the group you suggest and on your positive ideas. //

Taoiseach

I was very careful to sell this as an EC meeting. I always remember what Lemass said about his meeting with Terence O'Neill. He said that when the day comes that these meetings won't be a major media event, then we will have achieved something.

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
F. 2.

Uimhir.....

To:

From:

- 9 -

There then followed some casual comments, during which the Taoiseach mentioned that they might perhaps have another chat in Luxembourg.

A copy of the communique issued after the full meeting is attached.

Separate notes are available on the discussion over dinner which largely concerned EC issues.



Dermot Nally

24 June 1991



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MEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH AND THE PRIME MINISTER  
DOWNING STREET. 21 JUNE 1991

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach exchanged views on current issues in the European Community including the progress to date in the Inter-Governmental Conferences on Economic and Monetary Union and Political Union and the issues likely to arise at the European Council in Luxembourg next week which they will both be attending.

They also discussed a range of other international issues and the Prime Minister spoke of his expectations for the G7 Summit of the main industrial nations which he will host in London next month.

The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister expressed their satisfaction that the round-table talks process, launched on 26 March, is now under way. They fully support this ambitious endeavour to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands.

The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister are convinced that there is now an historic opportunity to achieve real progress. They believe that the talks have an inherent capacity to achieve a far-reaching outcome agreed by all the participants. They emphasised the commitment of the two Governments to ensure that the full potential of this process is realised.

They condemned the abhorrent and futile violence which has destroyed so many lives in Northern Ireland; they share an absolute conviction that violence can never provide a solution and that the only way forward is through political dialogue.

The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister agreed that they would meet again in the Autumn for a more indepth discussion.