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S/2465/88/SW

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ANGLO-IRISH GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD AT STORMONT CASTLE, BELFAST ON 17 JUNE 1988

Present:

BRITISH

Mr King
Mr Stanley

Sir John Blelloch
Sir Kenneth Bloomfield
Mr Stephens
Mr Burns
Mr Fenn

Mr Miles
Mr Masefield
Miss Steele

IRISH

Mr Collins
Mr Burke

Mr Mathews
Mr Gallagher
Mr Brosnan
Mr Corcoran
Mr O'Donovan

Mr O hUiginn
Mr Collins
Mr Ryan

INTRODUCTION

Ministers first had private discussions for an hour, following which they met with the Chief Constable of the RUC and the Garda Commissioner together with Messrs Stephens, Mathews, Ryan and Masefield for a discussion of security matters which lasted for 75 minutes. The plenary session started at 12.10 hours.

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

2. WEST BELFAST: Mr Burke congratulated officials for progressing this initiative and said he would welcome any further details British Ministers could now supply. Mr King confirmed that he hoped soon to make an announcement in Parliament about further measures to improve the performance of the public sector and stimulate the involvement of the private and voluntary sectors in areas of Belfast characterised by exceptionally high unemployment and poor rates of economic activity. Sir Kenneth Bloomfield described the analysis which had been undertaken to determine how bad conditions were in West and North Belfast and if they were uniquely so. He then gave details of the agenda for action being proposed to tackle these problems over a number of years aimed at strengthening the infrastructure, creating employment and training for employment. This would involve environmental improvements, job creation, largely through the ACE scheme, and support for the West Belfast Enterprise Board. The programme would be taken forward by officials in the Belfast Action Teams and co-ordinated by an inter-departmental group of senior officials chaired by Sir Kenneth. Total funding would be determined in the next Public Expenditure Survey, but it was intended to make a start in the present financial year.

3. Mr Burke welcomed this very positive response and the determination of the British Government to address the serious problems of the area. He hoped that by having some advance warning of the Parliamentary announcement the Irish Government would be able to give it a proper welcome. Mr King noted the request and referred to the constraints of Parliamentary privilege. It was agreed that the draft communique would be strengthened to highlight this initiative.

4. FAIR EMPLOYMENT: Mr Burke welcomed the publication of the White Paper and the indication that progress was being made in preparing the legislation. The Irish Government agreed with approximately 85%

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of the proposals but thought that they were weak on goals and timetables and on the Code of Practice for employers. Mr Burke suggested that officials might discuss further the few remaining differences and report back to the next Conference meeting. Mr King stressed that the communique should be clear on the British Government's sovereignty for these matters.

5. INTERNATIONAL FUND: Mr Burke and Mr King welcomed the European Commission's proposal to contribute to the International Fund as a result of the British/Irish approach. Mr Burke stressed that his Government wished to see the Fund being used more effectively on the ground. Mr King said that the influx of EC money might result in changes in the Fund's operation. US views favoured spending the Fund according to tightly drawn economic criteria but the officials of the US Agency for International Development following their recent visit were satisfied with the way in which the Fund has been administered. Mr Gallagher suggested that as the Fund was coming to the end of its first phase its future operation should be examined to see if more assistance could be given to disadvantaged areas such as South Armagh and the Shankill as well as identifying one or two "flagship" projects. While emphasising the independence of the Fund, Mr King nevertheless agreed that a paper should be prepared for the next meeting of the Conference which would enable the Ministers to review the work of the International Fund on an informal basis.

6. EDUCATION AND IRISH LANGUAGE: Mr Burke expressed concern that the proposals in the Education Consultative Paper would result in the downgrading of the Irish Language, although he recognised that this was not the intended result. The Irish Government would wish to see Irish included in the "foundation subjects" or failing that to have a more general subject such as "Irish or Heritage studies" included. It was important that Sinn Fein was not permitted to monopolise this issue. Mr King replied that Dr Mawhinney appreciated the concerns of the Irish Government on this matter and believed that there was room for a constructive approach. He was anxious to encourage respect for the Irish tradition, culture and

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language without creating political difficulties. Mr King then gave examples of this support through increased funding to the Arts Council for the traditional arts; the recent question contained in the Continuous Household Survey to ascertain the percentage of the population with knowledge of Irish; new guidance given to Northern Ireland Departments concerning the use of Irish in official business; the Gazetteer of Irish place names to be ready by the end of July and the research being funded at Queen's University on the history of Irish place names. Street names in Irish was more difficult as some Loyalists were now re-naming streets but generally Mr King said he would consider all sensible suggestions to encourage the use of Irish which did not result in it becoming a political football. Mr Burke expressed his pleasure at these measures and Mr Collins said this was the approach favoured by his government.

7. NAVAN FORT (EMAIN MACHA): Mr Burke expressed concern that some commercial undertaking was still being carried out at this important historical site. Mr King replied that all quarrying had stopped last year, some stone crushing was being carried out at the site but the quarry owner had been refused planning permission for an additional processing plant. The owner had now purchased a new site 6 miles from Navan for quarrying and this had been given planning permission. It was hoped that eventually the entire operation would move to the new site but there were financial implications to be resolved.

CONFIDENCE MEASURES

8. STALKER/SAMPSON: Mr Collins again expressed concern at the delay in Mr Kelly's report and asked about the present position. Mr King confirmed that the Police Authority would be considering very shortly the position of the officers above the rank of Chief Superintendent and that Mr Kelly's report on those of Chief Superintendent rank and below was expected to be completed shortly and submitted to the Chief Constable. Mr King said that he shared the concern of the Irish in reaching a speedy conclusion.

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9. MARCHING SEASON: Mr Collins expressed his thanks to the Chief Constable and all concerned for the way in which last year's marches had been handled and hoped that this year's would be equally successful, or even better. There were a number of flashpoints that concerned the Irish but they recognised the operational integrity of the Chief Constable for these matters. Mr King thanked Mr Collins for his comments and also his sensitivity on the matter of operational responsibility.

10. GIBRALTAR INQUESTS: Mr Collins expressed concern at the delay in the Gibraltar inquests and the damage being caused by what was perceived to be the British Government's effort to cause the delay. He knew from conversation with the Home Secretary that this perception was false and urged that the inquests should be held as soon as possible. Mr King referred to Lord Glenarthur's reply to a Parliamentary Question on 6 June and confirmed that the British Government was equally concerned to see the inquests being held as quickly as possible. He explained that Britain did not have executive powers in Gibraltar but the government was anxious that the Coroner should hold preliminary hearings and set a date for the inquests as quickly as possible. Mr Collins said everything possible should be done to deny Sinn Fein propaganda opportunities. Mr King noted the point and said that Counsel for the families appeared not to be anxious to expedite proceedings.

11. PRISONS: Mr King referred to the recent transfer of the remaining special category prisoners from the Compounds to the H block, which had been completed successfully. He confirmed that there would be a review in six months of those special category prisoners who were serving life sentences or being held at the Secretary of State's pleasure. By that time prison staff would have had an opportunity to assess these prisoners for review purposes. The question of a review for all SOSP prisoners was still under consideration.

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MCGIMPSEY CASE

12. Mr King inquired how the Irish thought the McGimpsey case was going and Mr Collins confirmed that it was due to end that day; he was unwilling to predict the outcome, but the general impression was that the hearing had not gone well for the plaintiffs. Mr Ryan said that judgement would probably be reserved and given when the Courts sat again in the autumn.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

13. It was agreed that the next meeting would be during the fourth week in July with 27 being a possible date.

COMMUNIQUE

14. The text of a joint statement was agreed for publication following the meeting (see copy attached). Mr King drew attention to the phrase "confidence in the administration of justice" which was often misunderstood as referring to the Courts, instead of the much wider remit being examined by the Confidence Measures Group. It was agreed to re-examine this wording at the next meeting. It was also agreed to include a reference in the communique to the programme of bi-lateral Ministerial visits being considered at present.

15. The Conference ended at 13.00 hours.



① Mr Spence

② Mr McCusker

NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

JOINT STATEMENT FOLLOWING THE ANGLO-IRISH CONFERENCE 17 JUNE

A meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference took place in Belfast on 17 June 1988. The British Government was represented by the Joint Chairman, Mr Tom King MP (Secretary of State for Northern Ireland) accompanied by Mr John Stanley MP (Minister of State Northern Ireland Office). The Irish Government was represented by Mr Gerard Collins TD Minister for Justice (Acting Co-Chairman) and by Mr Ray Burke TD Minister for Energy and Communications. The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Commissioner of the Garda Síochána were present for that part of the Conference which dealt with security co-operation.

2. The Conference discussed the current security situation in Northern Ireland. They expressed their abhorrence of recent outrages and reaffirmed the determination of the two Governments to work together for the defeat of terrorism. They reviewed the programme of work which is being carried out between the two police forces and discussed a number of issues with a view to further enhancing cross-border co-operation on security matters.

3. Ministers discussed the serious difficulties which had arisen in recent extradition cases, and reaffirmed their determination to ensure effective extradition arrangements. Ministers also reviewed a number of issues relating to confidence in the administration of justice and took note of the work in hand. The Secretary of State briefed the Irish side on new arrangements that had been made in relation to special category prisoners which would include a special review of these cases.

4. Noting the publication of the White Paper on Fair Employment, the Conference welcomed the progress being made in the preparation of legislation. They reaffirmed their mutual interest in having legislation which should be as effective as possible in securing fair employment in Northern Ireland and agreed to maintain close contact on this issue.

5. On the social and economic problems of West Belfast, which the Conference had discussed in detail at its two previous meetings, the Secretary of State said he hoped shortly to make a statement about further measures to improve the performance of the public sector, and stimulate the involvement of the private and voluntary sectors, in areas of Belfast characterised by exceptionally high unemployment and poor rates of economic activity. These measures would begin in the current financial year and would involve action to enhance employment opportunities and to improve the conditions of life in these areas. The Irish side welcomed the prospect of specific measures to address this serious problem.

6. The Conference welcomed the European Commission's proposal to contribute to the International Fund for Ireland. The two sides agreed to continue to work together to attract further contributions to the Fund, and to ensure that its operations conferred the greatest possible benefit on the people north and south of the border. They agreed that the next meeting of the Conference would be an opportune time to review the progress of the Fund so far.

7. The Conference noted that, in pursuance of its decision on 21 October 1987, consultants have been appointed to carry out a study to assess the major economic and social problems in the North-West of the island and to identify ways to tackle these problems especially through the creation of new employment.

8. The Conference agreed to consider ways in which bilateral contacts between Ministers on economic and social questions might be reinforced.

9. The Conference discussed also the Consultative Paper outlining proposals for educational reform in Northern Ireland. The Irish side drew attention to concerns which had been expressed in the nationalist community about certain aspects of the proposals.

10. The two sides agreed that further meeting of the Conference would be held shortly.