

**Dermot Nally
Papers**

UCDA P254/1

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Min.
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Uimhir.....

Subject to verification

SECRET AND PERSONAL

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Taoiseach's tete a tete with Prime Minister Major

The Taoiseach met the Prime Minister in a private room in Government Buildings, following the arrival of the British delegation at 10.30 a.m. and photocalls in the main lobby of the Building. At the same time, Ministers met separately in the Taoiseach's Conference room and officials worked on the draft communique in the Sycamore Room.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by his Private Secretary, Mr. Stephen Wall. The undersigned was with the Taoiseach.

These notes are in direct speech but are not verbatim. After initial exchanges, during which the Taoiseach welcomed the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister complimented him on his new offices, the Prime Minister went on to describe his situation in relation to Parliament.

Major:

People may believe that I have flexibility in relation to Parliament. If I went to Maastricht and changed certain positions they had taken and then I came back to Parliament, I wouldn't get my proposals through. There may have been scope, on previous occasions, for some Prime Ministers to have changed their stance at Summits but this time it is different; we have had a formal motion and debate in Parliament.

People will be making a great mistake if they think I can be pushed; and even if I did yield to them then Parliament just would not endorse the change. I want an agreement in Maastricht but I will not negotiate terms "at any price". I have a most turbulent assembly to deal with.

The opt out clause for EMU indicates the difference between us and some of our partners. They can exclude Parliament from their decisions. They can make commitments about what they are going to do six years from now and can exclude Parliament from those decisions. Kohl and Mitterrand - have they every appeared in Parliament to ask for ratification of what they do at European Councils? Their position is completely different.

Wall:

Mitterrand never!

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Major:

I am there at least twice a week. This whole thing has been picked at in Parliament in ways that have no match anywhere else. Kinnock has engaged in Euro surrender. He is like a spaniel on his back with legs in the air, on the subject.

I do really and sincerely hope for agreement in Maastricht, but it would be a serious misjudgment of my situation to believe that we will take agreement at any price. And I would like everybody to know that I certainly cannot conceive of any other Prime Minister who would be more likely to agree on what we are talking about there.....

Taoiseach:

I am listening to what you say. Would you mind if I turned to Northern Ireland for a moment. I wouldn't normally intrude on you with my concerns. I know that the issues in Maastricht are most important and intricate. The mind boggles at qualified majority voting, co-decision, the common foreign and security policy and proposals like that for unanimity on moves to majority voting:

But turning to Northern Ireland - it is now more than 20 years on since the violence started. Both of our countries have put enormous resources into combatting that violence. I think it is fair to say that our intelligence sources, in their assessments, say that the IRA is capable of doing a lot of damage. I think we should both accept as a major object the aim of bringing that violence to an end.

I have the feeling - based on a number of sources - that Gerry Adams is tired and wants to get out. There is a big internal debate going on within the IRA. John Hume and I have been watching these developments. If the two Governments could bring forward a strong statement, based on this situation, it could exercise enormous pressure on the IRA and its cohorts. I do not want anything definite from you on this this morning but simply to put the idea in your mind.

Major:

I know the idea but I am not so sure about the substance. What exactly is it proposed that we should say? What, realistically, would have such an effect as to

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stop the violence? What guarantees are there that it would stop for more than a minimal time? I agree with you that it would be a great prize for us - and for all those who suffer from the violence. The tit-for-tat killings are now becoming a very serious problem. The loyalists are getting better organised. What is it that can be said?

Taoiseach:

What I have in mind is a possible statement which I would like to work on further. Peter Brooke made a very good speech some time ago saying that you have no military or economic or strategic interest in remaining in Northern Ireland and that if the people of Northern Ireland make up their mind in a certain direction that Britain will gladly accept their view. What I have in mind is something along these lines - perhaps a bit further. This would put tremendous pressure on the IRA and others to bring violence to an end.

The Loyalists are getting better organised. They are starting to use cellular organisation like the IRA. If the IRA stop, I think they will stop too. I am suggesting that we should agree to get our people to work on something like what I have suggested.

Major:

What have you in mind? We have commitments we can't break. I am referring to Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We can't break that.

And it is not possible to enter into direct discussion with PIRA. That is absolutely fundamental.

Taoiseach:

I am not too sure myself. But what we need is a very positive statement, without breaking any commitment, saying that if the Irish people and the people within Northern Ireland can evolve some modus vivendi.....

Major:

What would it buy?

Taoiseach:

An end to violence.

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Major:

How sure are you of this? Who is providing this information?

Taoiseach:

People I trust, people like John Hume and some of the clergy. I take what they say about Gerry Adams for granted. He will use his influence with the IRA. The basis for action is a statement by the two Governments following which they could say that they were persuaded that violence has failed and should now pursue objectives through constitutional politics. Our people could work on this. The prize is enormous.

Major:

What happens thereafter? And we cannot forget the unbreakable guarantees. The question I take it, is whether we can create a framework in which PIRA give up violence. I agree with you that if they do this, then the Loyalist also will give up. What happens then as the months and the years go by? What is forthcoming?

Taoiseach:

What might be proposed is a Northern Ireland type forum, or a National Convention or a Peace Convention - the possibilities are endless.

Major:

I am thinking aloud. How would a Northern Ireland Forum vary from the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference? Gerry and Peter get on very well in that Forum.

Taoiseach:

All parties North and South coming together - that is what I have in mind.

Major:

It would be necessary to think this through before starting. We would all be subject to questions immediately anything like this comes out. Where is it leading? Where would it end? What would our answers be? If we did not give the right answers, that would be unforgivable and damaging. I am not being unsympathetic but I do have some doubts as to whether the prize is there. The PIRA have given up violence before but then others have come along - new generations. Nothing really was gained from these previous moves.

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Taoiseach:

But we have never put this before. I am only doing it now because I believe we can achieve change by something on the lines of a statement I mentioned - followed by a Constitutional political process.

Major:

Our perception is not of any diminution of violence. The Blues and Royal band was the subject of an abortive attack in which two people blew themselves up. I know what happened in Downing Street earlier this year. These things certainly do not create any impression of a tired or dispirited PIRA winding down. They are still pursuing the path of violence.

Taoiseach:

That is true. It is a psychological matter. If they are going to give up violence they want to go out on a high note to show what they are still capable of. On the political side there is change. They know they can keep doing it; they know you can keep resisting. There is stalemate but on Gerry Adams's side there is a total sea change.

Major:

We could look at it most confidentially - as to whether there is any wording that can be agreed. We will look at it and then decide.

I am doubtful as to whether we can get the confidence of the people of Northern Ireland, but we will look at the matter equitably with the idea that we are trying to persuade them to give up violence. We can look at the wording very carefully in the very smallest of groups.

Taoiseach:

I certainly have no objection to that. We could work through your office and mine. I understand your scepticism but the prize is so great - and the awfulness of what is going on is so appalling.

Major:

Any statement must be clear as to the need for the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

Taoiseach:

I accept that.

Major:

We have an unbreakable commitment there. Is that acceptable to the Provos?

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Taoiseach:

I think it will be. Have you any intelligence to this effect?

Major:

Have we, (turning to Wall) Stephen?

Wall:

Not really. John Hume in the House of Commons the other day may have said something.....?

Major:

Yes I know. He said that he would only come back if there were some practical wording that would succeed. He has not come back since then.

Taoiseach:

There are others also - clerics who have the same view.

Major:

Are they influential?

Taoiseach:

Yes. There is a mood there among what I will call the republican side. I agree completely with you that we would not go public until we have agreement.

Major:

If they think like that why do they make it more difficult to reach an agreement. They have a very macho approach. You know it takes two to tango. If one of them is blown into smithereens there is unlikely to be a dance. I wouldn't like anybody to assume that because we speak softly that we have gone soft.

How do you think that the Intergovernmental Conference is working?

Taoiseach:

It is working alright but it is not really going anywhere. We were thinking of broadening its remit - having other Ministers in. One of our proposals is to have a fundamental review of prospects, taking into account the 1992 proposals.

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Major:

I don't think that there is anything prohibiting that now. It is so close to a General Election, I don't want to go about exciting the Unionists. We ourselves could contemplate meeting regularly with Peter Brooke and Gerry Collins to discuss bilateral Irish matters. I have lots of bilaterals with other EC partners. Maybe we could return to this at the plenary?

Taoiseach:

Yes indeed. Perhaps we could ask Nally and Butler to relate together on the statement I have been talking about.

Major:

Yes I agree with that on the basis that what we are talking about is a possibility rather than a probability; just the two of them; and no commitments on either side. This is something that must be kept totally under wraps.

As the time for the Taoiseach and Prime Minister to join the plenary had now elapsed, the meeting concluded, with some brief words on the agenda for the plenary, on which both men agreed.

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Dermot Nally
5th December, 1991.