

SUBJECT
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Filed on:

From the Private Secretary

17 June 1993

*John Jonathan,***PRIME MINISTER'S TETE-A-TETE WITH THE TAOISEACH:
16 JUNE**

Using the brief in your letter of 15 June, the Prime Minister had a private discussion with the Taoiseach for 25 minutes about the Joint Declaration initiative. Sir Robin Butler and Dermot Nally were present.

The Taoiseach said that his government continued to give public support to the Talks process. However, he personally did not think that the process was going anywhere. The time had come to consider what we should do if the Talks did not resume. As the Prime Minister knew, the PIRA had made indirect approaches to him. Over a period of 6-8 months, he had put the hard questions back to them. This had eventually resulted in the "well-crafted paper" which he had given to Sir Robin Butler. The document represented the first ever extension of the consent principle to the "problem people". It incorporated a major shift away from violence.

The Taoiseach described the requests made in the document as "pretty minimal" - essentially repetition of statements which the British Government had made in the past. The document would still allow the Unionists to withhold their consent. It did not lay down specific conditions. It could transform the situation, by opening the way to a long process of discussion, which could last even for a generation.

The Prime Minister acknowledged that it would be difficult to restart the Talks process. However, we had to make a determined attempt at this in order to keep hope alive and to show that we would not let violence succeed. He was grateful for the briefing given to the Cabinet Secretary. It was clearly important that a text had come forward. However, he was bound to ask two questions: whether it would be acceptable to Parliament; and whether it would have the desired effect on the Unionists.

The Prime Minister said that the Irish Text gave us problems, partly because of what was in it; and partly because of what was omitted. There would be no hope of getting it through the House of Commons. Sir Robin Butler had been through the details with Dermot Nally. He did not need to cover the same ground, but he had to emphasise that the proposed Declaration would not be remotely acceptable to the Unionists. The Unionist reaction to it would be many times more severe even than the reaction to the Anglo/Irish Agreement. The Declaration could be expected to provoke an escalation of paramilitary violence. Loyalist violence at present was reactive, but this could make it pro-active. The Declaration could destroy our influence with the Unionists. Even if PIRA kept its word by introducing a ceasefire, it might not be able to sustain this in the face of Loyalist attacks. These were some of the broad reasons why we could not accept the text.

Turning to some of the details, the Prime Minister said that explicit reference to the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland would be a sine qua non. The penultimate sentence of paragraph 4 would be seen as turning the British Government into a "persuader". We did not wish to take on this role. It would be counter-productive, and we would lose our influence with the Unionists. Nor could we compromise our determination to defend the right of the people of Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom for as long as they so wished. We could not accept the proposed time scale. Parts of paragraph 4 appeared to have come from the PAC: there was no way in which the Prime Minister could secure Cabinet agreement for these provisions.

The Prime Minister said that the text therefore would not run as it stood. He did not wish to be entirely negative. Strictly without commitment, he could agree that Sir Robin Butler and John Chilcot could go through the text with Dermot Nally and Sean O'hUiginn. They could explore the sort of principles which we might be able to consider. He was pleased that we had succeeded in keeping these exchanges private.

Summing up, the Prime Minister said that the document represented some progress, but was not acceptable as it stood. We should make clear why it was not acceptable and should keep our lines of communication open. He added that our position was based on very close analysis. He then asked about John Hume's role.

The Taoiseach accepted the proposal for further discussion between the officials mentioned by the Prime Minister. In the document he had tried to keep away from areas known to be sensitive for the Unionists. He had also taken care not to ask HMG to walk back from previous statements of the

Government's position. The Unionists wanted a stable future. He knew that they were concerned about demographic patterns. He was also aware that the Loyalist paramilitaries had said that they would halt their violence if the PIRA did likewise.

The Prime Minister said that it would be best for the PIRA to stop their violence anyway. After a period, this could lead to a different atmosphere. The recent spate of bombings, including Warrington and Bishopsgate, made this the wrong time. If the PIRA halted violence they could put themselves in a strong position vis a vis the Loyalists. The Taoiseach said this was unlikely to happen. It had been very difficult to secure agreement to the document from "the people that matter"; but they had some hopes of the relationship between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister.

At this point the talks expanded into plenary session (which I have recorded separately).

I am sending copies of this letter to John Sawers (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), and to Sir Robin Butler and Sir Rodric Braithwaite.

Yours truly,

Rodric

RODERIC LYNE

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