

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT
MASTER

File



Filed on:

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

26 February 1992

Dear William,

**NORTHERN IRELAND:
TALKS BETWEEN MR REYNOLDS AND THE PRIME MINISTER**

This letter records the discussion which took place over dinner at No.10 this evening. I enclose a list of those who were present.

The Prime Minister invited Mr Brooke to give an account of our approach to the three-stranded talks and how we saw the prospects.

Mr Brooke described the background to the talks. Last summer all those who had participated had said that the conversations had been the best which each could remember ever having with the other. There had been a genuine dialogue among politicians and a problem-solving attitude. People had recognised each other's difficulties and sought to find ways of meeting them. There was a real sense of ownership in the process on the part of all involved. There had been complications about starting up again but he sensed that people were working to get together again because they were emotionally and intellectually engaged. Last week, Mr Mawhinney had given the first of his briefings on government in Northern Ireland. All the parties had turned up and all had asked good questions. There had again been a sense of involvement. Those meetings would continue. We took encouragement from that. As to the next stage, Mr Brooke retained faith in the good intentions of the parties. One striking feature of the process had been that each problem that had come up had been resolved, even though the process was often painfully long. But he had learned that these matters did take time. Quite apart from the obvious reasons for that, things were complicated by the fact that two of those involved were MEPs and were often in other parts of the world. Mr Brooke retained confidence in the capacity of the parties to come to conclusions. He was confident they would come back to the table.

Mr Reynolds said that his government applauded the effort which Mr Brooke had made. He was glad that the Prime Minister and Mr Brooke had called the Northern Ireland political leaders together again recently. He hoped, however, that the two governments could add something to that. History had dealt them a terrible legacy: 22 years of death and destruction. He himself lived 35 miles from the border. He knew people in both

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

communities. There was an excellent work ethic. They were good business-people. The people of Northern Ireland of both traditions had an excellent contribution to make to the island of Ireland if their differences could be accommodated. It was an appalling fact that anyone 22 years old or younger in Northern Ireland had known only the troubles.

Mr Brooke said he agreed with the implication of what Mr Reynolds had said, i.e. that we had to play the hand we had been dealt. We had to deal with reality. He himself had great sympathy with both sides of the constitutional argument. You had to find a resolution in which no side was dramatically the winner and which therefore could accommodate both sides. Mr Reynolds agreed.

The Prime Minister asked Mr Brooke to set out what he saw as the end product of the talks. Mr Brooke said that the nature of the structure we were involved with was that it was designed to lead to a resolution which provided a basis for governing the North, a different relationship between the North and the South which had Unionist endorsement and consequences for the relationship between Dublin and London. The purpose was a settlement with which everyone was content overall. If that was achieved any paramilitary who chose to continue with terrorism would be setting himself up against, not only the logic of the situation, but against a united public opinion.

Mr Andrews said that he and Mr Brooke had gone over much of the ground at their meeting earlier in the evening. At next week's Ministerial meeting under the Anglo-Irish Agreement he would be guided by the wisdom of Mr Brooke. He supported Mr Reynolds in his appreciation of Mr Brooke's work within the Anglo-Irish Conference. Mr Brooke agreed that the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been a remarkable framework within which we had been able to do business.

Mr Flynn said that he and Mr Mawhinney had discussed a lot of issues, including security. Mr Mawhinney had been very supportive of what the Irish Government was doing on the security front. The Irish effort had had an enormous impact on her resources. They accepted that this was necessary. They would not be found wanting in their commitment of resources to security. He hoped that next week's talks would make our security cooperation even more substantive. The Irish Government wanted political and economic efforts to be underpinned by good security.

Mr Mawhinney agreed that it was vital to coordinate and cooperate as much as we could. There were a number of issues they would have to return to. He had offered Mr Flynn a security briefing either in Dublin or Belfast; a fuller briefing could be given in Belfast. The Prime Minister said that when he and Mr Reynolds next met in London they might have a security briefing. "Sure", said Mr Reynolds.

Mr Mawhinney said that the Government had tested the commitment of the Northern Ireland parties to the three-stranded approach. There had been scepticism among the Unionists as to

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

whether the SDLP was prepared to be serious about strand one. The Nationalists had been suspicious about Unionist intentions on strand two. The process would be difficult for both sides but there was a genuine commitment from both. He believed they would move from strand one to strand two.

Mr Reynolds said that, nonetheless, time was not on our side. We had had 22 years of troubles. He tended to get impatient with problems that could not be resolved. The more one dealt with these issues the more difficult it was to see the wood for the trees. There had been 3,000 deaths and 20,000 woundings. Mr Andrews said that the new Irish Government had met the SDLP, had met the British Labour Party and had offered to meet Unionist leaders anywhere, even outside Ireland. He did not know what more they could do to gain their confidence. Mr Brooke said that all his instincts told him that to force the pace was actually to create delay. He was an ardent supporter of the Anglo-Irish Agreement but the fact was that for four years after the Agreement there had been complete political sterility. The Unionists had retreated into a cul-de-sac. If you sent people back into their corner you found yourself wringing your hands in frustration and distress but unable to make progress. Having got the parties out into open country we must keep them there and move forward and not drive them back into cover. It was absolutely right of the Government of the Republic to invite the Unionists to talk but they should not be too distressed at the lack of a response.

Mr Reynolds said he would rather try and fail than not try at all. Mr Brooke agreed. Every helpful action the Irish Government could take and every olive branch they could offer was welcome. But the fact was that, unless the politicians in Northern Ireland could carry their constituents with them no progress would be made. As the gap narrowed between the political parties in the North he believed that they would look to the two governments to propose bridges to cross the final gaps. Mr Reynolds agreed that the two governments would have to build those bridges. The question was when. In 1970 he had been told by a businessman that in 20 years time the struggle would still be going on. He had not believed it. It was surely not beyond all our efforts to move things forward. Mr Andrews asked what we would do if the Northern Ireland parties were not able to make progress towards bridging the gaps between them. What if the three-stranded talks came to an end? Mr Brooke said that if the talks could not reach agreement then we would have to recognise that fact and try something else but we had not reached that point. The Prime Minister said that the danger of moving too fast was that you would push the participants in the three-stranded talks into a position where they could use our attitude as a pretext for breaking off discussions, i.e. blaming the two governments.

Mr Mawhinney said that for seventy years the Unionists had said that they would not talk to the Irish. Now they were saying that they would. That was an historic shift driven by an increasing change of perception among the ordinary people of Northern Ireland. Mr Reynolds commented that the ordinary people were ahead of the politicians. Mr Mawhinney agreed. One of the

CONFIDENTIAL

unexpected aspects of the 20th anniversary of the arrival of British troops in Northern Ireland had been the determination among many people to ensure that the next twenty years should not be as bad as the last. All the movement that had recently been made post-dated that 20th anniversary.

Mr Reynolds said that when you looked back seventy years the sort of policies people had then had in mind [by implication those set out in the Government of Ireland Act 1920] were the very policies that were now being developed in Europe. We should input the European situation into the Northern Ireland problem. The question was what sort of structures we should build whenever the three-stranded approach came to an end. Mr Brooke said that there were many aspects of the North-South relationship that could be thickened up, not least trade which was very slender. Mr Brooke was strongly in favour of extending the scale of economic integration within the island of Ireland building on those aspects of policy which required a European or a national input. There were lots of things we could do together. Mr Mawhinney cited the new cooperation between the tourist boards in Northern Ireland and the Republic as a good example. Mr Reynolds and Mr Flynn said that tourism had been seriously set back by the violence. Mr Flynn could remember the days when there had been a lot of cross-border tourism. That was no longer the case. Mr Mawhinney said that he agreed there was a long way to go but the new cooperation between North and South was the start of something worthwhile *La fouim*

European Community

Mr Garel-Jones said that one of the centrifugal forces working to bring us together was the European Community. The Prime Minister had spoken of our policy as bringing us to the heart of Europe. We were talking much more than in the past to our partners in the Community. That process nearly always led to finding areas of agreement. The development of Europe post Maastricht would bring us closer together. The issues for our Presidency would be the Delors package, the CAP and enlargement. We also needed to start preparing for the 1996 Maastricht review conference. We needed to ask ourselves where we wanted to be and how we got there. He believed that we and the Republic would find many answers in common. We would probably agree on enlargement. We would probably agree on the mechanisms to implement a common foreign and security policy and cooperation on interior/justice matters. We might not see eye to eye on the Delors package. But he believed that there too there were not insuperable problems. He thought it important that both our countries shared the same Parliamentary traditions. We should encourage the same interest in scrutiny among our partners. The scrutiny of our Parliaments instructed and informed what we did in the Council. He looked forward to discussions with the new Irish European Affairs Minister.

Mr Reynolds asked for the Prime Minister's view on the Delors package. The Prime Minister said that the Commission seemed to have their hands in our pockets more often than we did ourselves. Delors was proposing a massive increase in expenditure but this was doubtless only his opening bid. We

could not contemplate anything of that size. Nor would the Germans. There would be pretty fierce negotiation and the sum would be reduced. The Delors approach had been overdone at a time when there was plenty of headroom within the existing ceiling. The structure of our resources was dynamic and there was room for growth within the ceiling. Mr Reynolds agreed that M. Delors had pitched his demands high. It should be recalled that he had asked for 1.4 per cent in 1987 and had settled for less.

The Prime Minister said that on wider issues there were advantages to us both in parading the areas where we did agree within the European Community. Mr Reynolds agreed.

At the end of the evening the Prime Minister said that he looked forward to further meetings with Mr Reynolds in London or Dublin. "Or Belfast" said Mr Reynolds, picking up a point which the Prime Minister had made at their earlier meeting.

I am copying this letter to Richard Gozney (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Republic of Ireland

UK

Mr. Reynolds
Mr. Andrews (Foreign Minister)
Mr. Flynn (Justice Minister)
Mr. Darr (Parliament Secretary)
Mr. O'Huigin (Foreign Minister)
Mr. Mally (Cabinet Secretary)
Mr. Joe Small (Irish Ambassador)

Prime Minister
Mr. Brooks
Mr. Mawhinney
Mr. Garel-Jones
Sir Robin Butler
Mr. Blatherwick
Wall

*John,
Stephen*

(J.S. WALL)

For the Prime Minister's private talk with the Taoiseach from 1870-1970 only Mr. Mally and I will be present as note-takers.

I am copying this letter to William Fittall (Northern

William Fittall, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

*John,
Stephen*

(J. S. WALL)

Richard Gozney, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.