



CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS
 Telephone 071-270 0101 Fax 071-270 0208

From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service
 Sir Robin Butler KCB CVO

Ref. AO91/3283

16 December 1991

Dear John,

Meeting with Dermot Nally

I was very grateful for Quentin Thomas's brief for my meeting with Dermot Nally, which took place over lunch in my office today. No-one else was present.

Dermot Nally said that the Taoiseach hoped that as little as possible would be committed to paper about his suggestion to the Prime Minister for the time being and that the circle knowing about it would be restricted to a minimum. Mr Nally said that the Taoiseach had told him that the source of what he had said to the Prime Minister about the motives and state of mind of PIRA was conversations between John Hume and Gerry Adams. There were no other sources. Dermot Nally acknowledged that we could be forgiven for thinking that this evidence was a bit thin. However, John Hume had suggested that there was just a possibility of an opening which could lead to a cease fire.

John Hume and the Taoiseach had in mind that what was necessary to exploit this opening had two elements. The first was a statement which would build on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's remarks to the effect that Britain had no selfish economic or political interest which required it to hold on to Northern Ireland. The statement might point out that the present troubles had continued for the last 20 years and could continue for the next 20 years since no one's attitude was going to change. It would confirm that the status of Northern Ireland would only change with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. (In response to my question, Mr Nally

/said that he had

J A Chilcot Esq CB
 Northern Ireland Office

said that he had explicitly confirmed this point with the Taoiseach; and Mr Nally added the Taoiseach's assurance that, whatever came of the initiative, continued security cooperation at political level and on the ground was not in question). The statement could go on to say that, at a time of change affecting Europe and indeed the world, the United Kingdom and the Irish Governments had a duty to get together and make the most of these opportunities for all the people of Ireland. This would require both North/South and East/West cooperation. This led on to the second element of the Taoiseach's approach which was the establishment of a new Irish convention in which all parties could work together to make the most of the opportunities for all the people of Ireland. The Taoiseach had in mind that a statement on the lines above should be issued jointly by himself and the Prime Minister, possibly as the outcome of their next bilateral meeting if that could be arranged in time and that the two Governments would be "joint sponsors" of the convention.

I emphasised to Mr Nally that, while we were interested in exploring everything within our principles which could bring an end to the violence, we were sceptical about PIRA's need or inclination for a cease fire and were therefore disinclined to take risks of embarrassing the Government in the lead up to an election, endangering either Mr Brooke's political initiative or belief in our resolution, or giving Sinn Fein any sort of political authenticity before the election. We would not therefore want to launch anything which we could not justify publicly if the need arose, and in particular we would not be willing to have any contact with the provisionals in advance of their renouncing violence. We would also need to be very careful how we pursued our discussions with the Irish Government, lest we were drawn into the sort of premature East/West links which we had previously feared would undermine Mr Brooke's political initiative.

Mr Nally then produced a draft of a joint statement given to Taoiseach by Mr Hume. It was headed "draft two". Mr Nally was willing to show it to me, but not to leave it with me. I cannot therefore reproduce the exact terms. The shape of it was to note in the first paragraph that Northern Ireland continued to be the single most important issue between Britain and Ireland; to point out in the second paragraph that the development of the European Community offered new opportunities for cooperation between all member countries which could be used to the benefit to all the people of Ireland; and in paragraph three to commit the two Governments to maximum agreement and cooperation in the interests of making the most of these opportunities. There then followed a paragraph in the mouth of the Prime Minister on the lines of Mr Brooke's statement that Britain had no selfish economic or political interest in holding on to Northern Ireland and, subject to the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, wanted to work for peace, stability and reconciliation. There followed a paragraph in the mouth of the

/Taoiseach accepting that

one of our own. At our next meeting, therefore, I suggested that Mr Nally should table Mr Hume 's draft, which both sides would work on amending.

- (vi) Mr Nally volunteered that any reference to a change in the status of Northern Ireland depending on the consent of the people of Northern Ireland would raise the question of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution, to which the present draft contained no reference. However, such a reference would make the statement less palatable to the Provisionals.

In conclusion, Mr Nally and I agreed that I would discuss with you the point we had reached and pass any immediate comments to him before Christmas. Subject to that, and subject to the Taoiseach's and the Prime Minister's agreement, we should meet again after my return from Australia on 15 January and should work on Mr Hume's draft. In the meantime, I would ask you to be thinking about what expressions might be acceptable to us within the broad framework of the statement which I have described above.

I hope that all this is clear. When you have had a chance to digest it, perhaps we could have a further word before the end of this week so that I could telephone Mr Nally before Christmas. In the meantime, Mr Nally will let me know, and I will pass on to you, whether Mr Collins will be in the know about the proposal when he meets the Secretary of State at the Anglo-Irish Conference on Wednesday.

I am copying this letter to Quentin Thomas.

Yours ever,

Robin