

SECRET AND PERSONAL



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

19 November 1993

From the Private Secretary

Dear Jonathan,

NORTHERN IRELAND:
CONVERSATION WITH MARTIN MANSERGH

I had a further telephone conversation with Mansergh on 19 November. I called him principally in order to urge caution when the Taoiseach appeared on the Frost Programme on Sunday morning. (Gus O'Donnell has passed a similar tip to his opposite number in Dublin).

Mansergh said that the Taoiseach had had a good conversation with your Secretary of State in Londonderry today. The Taoiseach's morning had been spoiled by the Irish Press revelations, which had made him angrier than Mansergh had ever seen. But the day had improved thereafter.

Mansergh said the Taoiseach had formed the impression that we did not want to take a final decision on the Joint Declaration until we were assured that the text would be accepted. He immediately went on to refer to the Taoiseach's consultations today with John Hume. Hume had offered to try to overcome some of the outstanding difficulties in the text. Hume had requested (and I think been given) a copy of the most up to date version.

I said that this worried me considerably. I was concerned that Hume would think he was back in the game. I explained that we could not allow ourselves to be drawn into the position of negotiating by proxy or through intermediaries - least of all intermediaries who would want to claim credit for themselves. As far as we were concerned, we were only discussing the text with the Irish Government. It would be for the two Governments to form their own judgement of what was an acceptable and reasonable position. We did not expect to have a guarantee of success. Mansergh said rather lamely that, if someone offered to be helpful, we should not turn the offer away, especially when we were trying to secure peace.

Reverting to the leaked document, I said that it was not only the Taoiseach who had been angry. The leak had again placed us in a difficult position. It had again unsettled the Unionists. This was particularly

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Immediate
pl. return to (38)
Mr Stephens
(personal) (1)
cc 18/POS
Mr Thomas
Mr Dewell
Mr Richard (5)
Mr Cooke (6)
Mr Beeton (7)
Mr May (8)

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unfortunate, when there were some reasonably promising indications from that side of the ship. This was why it was all the more important that the Taoiseach should not be lured by David Frost on Sunday into creating fresh headlines. I said that we had managed to get our bilateral relations back on track over the last week, but our main problem now was raised expectations. I hoped that the interview would not raise them any higher. Frost's technique was deceptive. Mansergh said that he would have a word with the Taoiseach.

Mansergh appeared to have heard of Unionist objections to the last part of the Joint Declaration. He volunteered a defence of the Irish Convention. The Convention should pose no difficulties for HMG as it would have not involve us directly. It was a sort of "decontamination chamber" for the IRA. It would be a device to get them into a political process very quickly - i.e. within a couple of months - without having to wait until the Unionists were prepared to sit around a table with them. However, the Irish Government were not wedded to this idea. They could live without it. If we could think of a better way of achieving the objective, we should feel free to suggest it. He warned that he had had "vibes from the other side" which indicated that it might be a mistake to accede to Unionist pressure to drop the Convention. I suggested that, if there was a chance of securing benign acquiescence from the Unionists, we should take it. The Convention might not be of genuine practical significance. Nevertheless, it raised all kinds of spectres for Unionists.

Comment

More evidence in the same direction as was indicated by my conversation with Mansergh yesterday.

Do we have an opening in Mansergh's invitation to us to suggest a better path for Sinn Fein into the political arena than the Convention? Would a mechanism starting with exploratory or procedural talks after a few weeks serve the same purpose?

I am sending copies of this letter to John Sawers (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Melanie Leech (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,
Roderic*

RODERIC LYNE

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Northern Ireland Office

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