

FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE
11 NOVEMBER 1993

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Copy no of [9]

cc. Michael Ancram [2]
PS/PUS(L) [3]
Mr Thomas [4]
Mr Deverell [5]
Mr Rickard [6]
~~Mr Beeton~~ [7]
Mr May [8]
File [9]

MR COOKE [1] - *copy destroyed 2/8*

CONVERSATION WITH MR SPRING

The Tanaiste rang the Secretary of State about 6.30pm this evening.

2. Mr Spring said that he had received a report of yesterday's Butler/Nally meeting. He was extremely disappointed that it seemed we felt unable to take the Joint Declaration Initiative any further. The feeling in Dublin was that we were going back on what had been agreed at Brussels.

3. The Secretary of State said that was not the position. At yesterday's meeting we had made clear that the publicity given to the Hume/Adams process had created a very difficult atmosphere in which to pursue any other initiative. Nevertheless, it was to misread our position to think that we had said that any such initiative was dead. To the contrary, we had said that we would look carefully at the text discussed yesterday. It represented a serious and substantive effort to meet unionist concerns: the judgement we needed to reach was whether in fact it would do so. That was consistent with what the Prime Minister had said at Brussels.

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4. Mr Spring said that they had indeed tried to accommodate unionist fears. But the suspicion in Dublin was that the British Government's only concern was winning Parliamentary votes.

5. The Secretary of State said that was an unworthy thought: if it were true, we would not have played around with the Irish over the various texts. The suggestion was no more justified than if we had said that the Irish Government were rowing back from the agreement at Brussels that Hume/Adams could not be pursued. Both Governments had to keep any eye on public opinion: we understood the Irish Government had had to allay feelings that Mr Hume had been abandoned. We also had to watch unionist opinion, which had been reassured by the Brussels' statement.

6. The Secretary of State said that we wanted to carry forward any initiative which had prospects of ending the violence, but there was no point in adopting something which simply shifted the seat of violence from one side to another: that would only lead to more Greysteels. We were prepared to take risks to achieve an end to violence and both the Prime Minister and he had already done so by commending Mr Hume in such warm terms in the House of Commons. But it would be foolish to take risks where it was foreseeable that a loyalist reaction would ensure that peace was not delivered. Mr O hUiggin had suggested yesterday that we should show the latest draft to Mr Molyneaux. Was Mr Spring suggesting the same? Was he also confident that the latest draft would be acceptable to the Provisional IRA? Did he accept that at every discussion of the initiative, we had stressed the importance to us of the constitutional guarantee which still was not stated in explicit terms in the latest text?

7. Mr Spring said he would be happy for the text to be shown to Mr Molyneaux - indeed he would do so himself if he could. As to the Provisional IRA, he naturally did not deal with them himself but he was 90-95% certain they would accept the latest text. He made no comment on the insertion of a reference to the constitutional guarantee, but said that Archbishop Eames had given

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the latest text his clear support. This seemed to reflect a shift in unionist opinion. Eames had never been an ally of Dublin but, from being a staunch, hard-line unionist [Comment: never a recognisable description of Archbishop Eames], he had modified his statements recently.

8. The Secretary of State repeated that the initiative was not at an end from our point of view; we realised the importance of the latest text and the opportunity that might be available; and we wanted to form a fresh judgement on it. The Irish should therefore leave us to consider the text. There had been some talk yesterday by Mr O hUiggin of an apocalyptic scenario if we were unable to proceed with the Joint Declaration Initiative. Without prejudice to our eventual judgement, such an outcome had to be avoided since it would do nothing to help the cause of peace in Ireland. We were worried to read suggestions from Dublin that peace had to come before talks. That was a departure from what the Taoiseach had agreed in Brussels and from what he had said recently about resuming the talks process immediately. We needed a response to the possible framework document handed to the Irish on 24 September: the delay was causing intense frustration.

9. Mr Spring said that the talks process and the peace process were complementary. The worry in Dublin was that the peace process had been brought to a halt because British policy was unionist-led. There was an enormous feeling throughout the island of Ireland and among both traditions that there was an opportunity for peace and both Governments must respond. The Irish response to the British paper on the talks process was on his desk, but he could not put it to his colleagues for clearance unless he was sure that the other process was receiving the highest consideration. The talks process was part of the game but there was a much bigger prize on offer. The feeling among his colleagues was that Michael Ancram's talks alone were simply not credible.

10. The Secretary of State asked how this could be reconciled with the commitments entered into by the Taoiseach at Brussels and with the promises made before by the Irish to give us a response. Was it correct that these were being set aside and the document was to be deliberately withheld because the British Government appeared not to be going along with the Joint Declaration Initiative?

11. Mr Spring repeated that there were two processes and both needed to be pursued. The Irish Government had supported the talks process in public but there was not a lot of progress to show for it. We were on the brink of a disaster for Anglo-Irish relations.

12. The Secretary of State said that we agreed the processes were complementary: we had not closed the door on the Joint Declaration Initiative. We did, however, expect to receive a response to our talks paper within the next few days: the delay was holding up talks. It was very difficult to read in Dublin papers that the British were dragging their feet when in fact we had been waiting for some months for a response from the Irish.

13. Despite the straight talking, there was a friendly tone throughout the conversation and it broke up on amicable terms.

Signed:

J A STEPHENS
PRIVATE SECRETARY
12 NOVEMBER 1993