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MR WALL


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*Rune Misk*Meeting with Mr Nally (7 February 1992)
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As arranged, I met Mr Nally in London this morning. He was accompanied by Mr Dorr and Mr O hUiginn, while I had with me Mr Chilcot and Mr Thomas from the Northern Ireland Office.

2. I explained to Mr Nally that the Prime Minister did not believe it possible to make further progress with this initiative, given Mr Haughey's imminent departure as Taoiseach. If the new Taoiseach wished in due course to return to these matters, by raising them personally with the Prime Minister at a meeting in the future, the Prime Minister would of course wish to listen with interest to what he had to say. In practice, I explained, that we did not ourselves anticipate that such a meeting was likely to be possible before the British General Election.

3. Against that background, I made it clear to Mr Nally that we saw little purpose in discussing in any detail the scheme (that is, the idea of a joint statement by the two governments, leading to the establishment by the Irish government of a permanent convention, on the basis that this would enable the Provisional movement to take the constitutional path) or of the text of the draft Joint Declaration. Nonetheless I did feel it right to make the following points clear:

- (i) The scheme itself caused us profound difficulties. We did not believe that the British Government would see it as indicating a useful path forward on its intrinsic merits. The only context in which we could imagine it being given serious consideration was on the basis that there was a clear understanding that, without any

additional elements such as direct negotiation with the Provisional movement before a ceasefire, it would lead to a secure and deliverable renunciation of violence.

(ii) There were a number of reasons why we did not see attractions in the approach on its intrinsic merits. The British Government continued to believe that the best way forward was through substantive talks of the kind launched by the statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland made on 26 March last year: that is talks involving all the key constitutional players, addressing as part of the same process a comprehensive agenda, on the basis that nothing would be agreed until everything was agreed. Though formally the scheme introduced by the Joint Declaration was not incompatible with talks of this kind it was in practice likely to stymie them, because the Unionist community would not be involved in the process and would be deeply suspicious about its purpose and the way it had been negotiated. The British Government's view was that any new accommodation to be a real advance towards peace must attract the consent of the Unionist community.

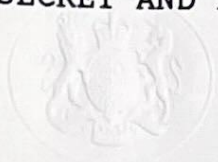
(iii) In the circumstances, we had not addressed the drafting of the document in detail but it would be wrong to leave the impression that we could seriously contemplate accepting it in its present terms.

4. On his side Mr Nally was candid about the fact that he had no political instructions given the interregnum in Dublin. He accepted that no progress could be made at present, though he was grateful for the clear expression of HMG's position. He could not anticipate whether the new Taoiseach would wish to return to these matters - though he noted our indication that a

personal approach at a meeting with the Prime Minister would be required to re-open the issue. He also clearly took the point that the British Government was unlikely to have any serious interest in an approach of this kind save on the basis that it was likely to offer a secure and deliverable peace. He indicated that he expected a new Taoiseach to be briefed on these matters. No doubt Mr Hume would seek to raise the subject with the new Taoiseach at an early opportunity. For their part, the Irish regarded the purpose of the present meeting as "tidying the file" before it was put away unless and until the matter was taken up again.

5. The Irish side were very candid that the attraction of the draft declaration to the Provisional movement lay in the establishment of a Convention in which they could pursue the nationalist cause with the Irish Government and other nationalists by peaceful rather than violent means; and in a more positive statement by the British Government than previously about our attitude to Irish unity (albeit with some form of consent). The Irish side made clear that they had no part in drafting the joint declaration we have seen and had some scepticism about the merits and acceptability of the proposed Convention.

6. We explained that, on our side, we would be saying to Mr Hume that since the Prime Minister did not know the views of the new Taoiseach, and did not expect to be able to have a personal meeting in advance of the British General Election, we did not in practice foresee any further developments in the immediate future. We would also make it clear to Mr Hume, whom both governments know to be capable of glossing his report somewhat, that we saw serious difficulties both in the scheme and in the text of the draft Joint Declaration. We would also say HMG continued to believe (and hoped that the Irish Government would take the same view) that the best way forward continued to be through comprehensive and overt political talks of the kind the



Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had been working towards. On their side, without knowing the views of the new Taoiseach, Mr Nally was unable to give a clear idea of the response Mr Hume might be given.

7. In answer to our questions, Mr Nally confirmed that the idea of the Convention had been in principle acceptable to Mr Haughey personally, but was by no means certain that it would be acceptable to the new Taoiseach, to whom it might well be seen to present some dangers. He also believed that Mr Hume would have been content with it, though he was unable to say how far - without further negotiation on the drafting - the Provisional movement would have found it acceptable.

8. I made it clear to Mr Nally that while it was possible that the Prime Minister might wish to make a speech spelling out the central elements of British Government policy in respect of Northern Ireland before the Election, there were no immediate plans to do so. We also made it clear to the Irish that, if any report of these exchanges appeared in the press, we would say that while we are regularly in touch with the Irish Government as well as Mr Hume and other political leaders, there was no alternative political initiative to Mr Brooke's under discussion and (if asked) no talk with paramilitaries. The Irish themselves attached great importance to this last point.

9. Finally we took the opportunity of stressing to the Irish officials the seriousness of the security situation in Northern Ireland. We hoped that Mr Nally would spare no effort to impress this on the new Taoiseach, and how important in both substantive and confidence building terms would be continued and vigorous support from the Irish side on security co-operation. Apart from the security measures themselves, there was a real need to steady the nerves of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland and the more both governments could be seen to be working together constructively on the full range of security, political



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and economic matters the better it would be. Mr Nally expected the new Taoiseach to adopt a supportive stance very early on, and we noted that his early statements pointed in this direction. Altogether, this was a very frank and friendly meeting, at which we found that the Irish were as cautious as ourselves about the risks and viability of an initiative on the lines proposed and were willing to agree with us that, without appearing to slam the door in Mr Hume's face, the matter should be put on one side unless and until the Prime Minister and the new Taoiseach wished to revive it. There are no plans for further meetings, although we expect to have a further dinner in our regular series in May.

10. I am copying this minute to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Mr Chilcot and Mr Thomas.

R.R.B.

ROBIN BUTLER

7 February 1992