

Prime Minister

Ref. A091/3377

MR. WALL

OK. We proceed. if necessary -
 but only if - we can extend
 the group. / 28/12

The Taoiseach's Northern Ireland Initiative

The Prime Minister may like a report on my discussion with Mr Nally and on how, after consultation with NIO, I propose to proceed.

- 2. Mr Nally came over on Monday. I attach a copy of my record of the discussion. The following is a summary of the points which emerged.
3. Mr Nally said that the only basis of the Taoiseach's initiative is advice from John Hume, based on discussions which Hume had had with Gerry Adams. Hume and the Taoiseach are envisaging a joint statement by the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister, which might, for example, follow their next bilateral. Mr Nally showed me a draft, presumably prepared by Mr Hume, which he let me read but was not authorised to leave with me.
4. At first sight, the draft did not appear too bad, from our point of view. It referred to the growing unity of Europe and the opportunity and obligation for closer cooperation to make the most of the opportunities for all the people of Ireland. It put in the mouth of the Prime Minister words on the lines of those already used by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to the effect that, subject to the principle of self determination for the people of Northern Ireland, Britain had no selfish economic or political interest which required it to insist on



Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom. It put into the mouth of the Taoiseach acceptance that change in the status of Northern Ireland would only happen as a result of a decision by the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. It then proposed - which might well be the most difficult aspect although it may be possible to present it as a proposal to institutionalise and make permanent the 3-stranded talks process - the establishment of a new Irish Convention which would involve all the parties in the North and South working together for the good of all the people of Ireland.

5. I made clear to Mr Nally that we were sceptical about PIRA's need or inclination for a ceasefire. While we were prepared to look at any proposals consistent with our principles for ending the violence I did not believe that Ministers would be prepared to do anything which would damage the prospects for Mr Brooke's initiative, weaken confidence in the resolution of the British Government, or risk embarrassing Ministers or giving authenticity to Sinn Fein in the lead up to the General Election. In short, we were not prepared to take any risks for this initiative and we would not want to do anything which, if this exercise leaked, could not be publicly justified. In particular, we were not willing to have any contacts with PIRA either directly or through nominees of the British Government in advance of their renouncing violence.

6. In the light of this, we envisaged proceeding as follows:-

- i. Subject to reporting back, we should meet again after Christmas to look in detail at Mr Hume's draft. That would require bringing in experts on each side - on our side Mr Chilcot and Mr Thomas of the Northern Ireland Office and on the Irish side Mr Dorr and Mr O'Huigin.
- ii. We should not seek to establish any channel back to the provisionals. When we could see whether anything



acceptable could be made of Mr Hume's joint statement, the Taoiseach might give it back to him, in the knowledge that he would presumably show it to Gerry Adams and relay back his reactions, of which we would be under no obligation to take any account. At the same time, we might want to prepare the ground with the Unionists before any joint statement was agreed.

- iii. In the meantime, our line, if there were any leaks, would be that Mr Hume had made a proposal to the Irish Government which they had passed on to us and we were discussing with them, but there was no more to it than that.

I am copying this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

R.F.B.

ROBIN BUTLER

23 December 1991