

Draft

From: PS/Secretary of State
1 February 1991

cc PS/SofS (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Pilling - B
Mr Ledlie - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Deverell - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr D Hill, CPL - B

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH: 31 JANUARY 1991


The Secretary of State met with the Taoiseach in his new offices in Dublin on 31 January 1991. Mr Collins was also present. The meeting lasted some forty-five minutes and there was a cordial and co-operative spirit throughout.

2. The Taoiseach started by discussing the apparent debate within the Provisional movement, and particularly Sinn Fein, on a possible change in policy. Discussion of this topic took up the majority of the meeting. The Taoiseach thought that the current position taken by HMG and the Irish Government was sound and currently easy to maintain. However, if the Provisionals showed that they were serious about moving towards a change of strategy, the current stance would be difficult to sustain. Both the British and Irish Governments needed to act in concert, otherwise they would be played off against each other and, since there were clearly risks involved, it would be wrong for only one side to take risks.

3. Responding, the Secretary of State said that the current situation within the Provisional movement had been building over the past two years. HMG's policies towards countering terrorism: a tight security policy, pressure on terrorists' finances, economic development, social policies, and - in particular - the political development process, were having their effect, acting in concert. The situation had been reached where the political process should be put to the test; there was still life in it.

4. Mr Collins, who was perfectly affable but negative towards the political development process, questioned the attitudes and motives of some of the parties involved, notably the Unionists. The Taoiseach asked a number of questions about the latter.

5. The Taoiseach accepted that the political development process had put pressure on Sinn Fein. The Secretary of State said that the activities of journalists and others did not help what was inevitably a somewhat fragile potential policy change by the Provisionals. Events would take time to develop; it was important not to hurry unnecessarily. The Taoiseach neither accepted nor contradicted this view.

6. On channels of communication, the Taoiseach sought to test the nature of our sources of information. 

7. Towards the end of the meeting the Taoiseach acknowledged that the two developments were not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that it would be worth continuing with the political development process, as it contributed to the rethink within the Provisional movement through the political pressure it exercised.

8. The Taoiseach also recognised that the Prime Minister was fully occupied at present (with the implication that the Taoiseach was not pressing to see him, and hence that immediate action was unlikely).

A J D PAWSON
Private Secretary