

SECRET AND PERSONAL



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

MR. GOODALL

ANGLO-IRISH AFFAIRS: NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your minute of 31 May reporting on your conversation with the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Prime Minister has noted its contents.

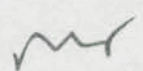
I am copying this minute to Mr. Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Mr. Sandiford (Northern Ireland Office).

A. J. COLES

1 June 1984

PPS/P
Prime Minister.

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*This is an important development,
which may make continued talks
worthwhile.*A.F.C. n/s. 

B.06761

Mr Coles

cc: Private Secretary to the Foreign and Commonwealth
Secretary
Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for
Northern Ireland
Sir Robert Armstrong
Sir Antony Acland
Mr Robert Andrew

Anglo-Irish Affairs: Northern Ireland

I visited Dublin on 30 May for a routine meeting of the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Council's Co-ordinating Committee, of which Mr Michael Lillis and I are joint chairmen. After the meeting I was asked to see the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Peter Barry. Mr Lillis was the only other person present.

2. Mr Barry said that he had much appreciated his conversations last Friday and over the weekend with Mr Prior and Sir Geoffrey Howe. He welcomed the interest which senior British Ministers were taking in Anglo-Irish relations and the search for measures to improve the situation in Northern Ireland. His conversation with Mr Prior illustrated, however, how great the difficulties were. Mr Prior had given him a discouraging account of the Prime Minister's initial reaction to the Irish ideas conveyed by Mr Nally. Mr Prior had, however, explained again that a wide range of measures might be possible in Northern Ireland if the Irish Government could see its way to amending the territorial provisions (Articles 2 and 3) of the Irish Constitution. Irish Ministers had all along recognised the importance of this aspect of the problem from the British and Unionist point of view, but they had also had to face the fact that amendment of the Constitution would be extremely difficult for Dr Fitzgerald's Government to deliver.

3. Mr Barry went on to say that in the light of the exchanges between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr Nally, and of his own subsequent conversations with Mr Prior and Sir Geoffrey Howe, the constitutional aspect of the question had been discussed further between himself and the Taoiseach. They had also

consulted Mr John Hume. In the light of these discussions he now wished us to know that the Taoiseach, with his and Mr Hume's support, would be prepared to seek to amend the territorial provisions of the Irish Constitution as part of a package which would include a substantial political quid pro quo from the British side. Mr Barry did not attempt to specify what this quid pro quo might be and indicated that Irish thinking on this was still fluid. He also said that there could be no certainty that other members of the Irish Government would welcome a move by the Taoiseach in this sense ("if we run our flag up this particular mast, don't expect everyone in the Government to stand to attention and salute it").

4. I said that I was sure that the importance of the Taoiseach's offer would be recognised in London. At the same time there was bound to be some scepticism about the implications of a package approach on the lines being suggested: even if arrangements could be worked out whereby, in return for a formal abandonment by the Republic of its territorial claim on the North, measures would be taken by the British Government which would be seen as a substantial concession to Nationalist concerns, how could we be sure that the Irish side of the bargain would be delivered? British Ministers were bound to see a risk that the referendum to amend the Constitution would fail, leaving the British concessions on the table to be pocketed by the Nationalists. Mr Barry readily acknowledged this difficulty, and said that ways would have to be found of minimising the risk. At the same time he emphasised the critical importance of having secured Mr John Hume's support for the proposed approach: the fact that the SDLP as spokesman for the minority in the North (assuming that they remained so after the impending European elections) was prepared to campaign in support of the hypothetical package (which would be put to the Irish electorate as a whole) would carry great weight in the Republic; and the Taoiseach and he believed that, on this basis, it would be endorsed by the electorate. But he emphasised again that the green element in the package would have to be substantial.

5. I asked Mr Barry whether the Taoiseach and he had given any thought to the public handling of the exchanges between our two

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Governments about a new initiative on Northern Ireland. He said that they were thinking about this and had reached no firm conclusions; but that he was inclined to see attractions in the idea of putting any proposals which might be agreed between the two Governments to a constitutional conference, to which all parties to the Northern Ireland problem would be invited.

6. In thanking Mr Barry for his communication, I undertook to ensure that it was reported to the Prime Minister and the two Secretaries of State and was taken into account in London in formulating the British response to the proposals which Mr Nally had put to Sir Robert Armstrong.

7. I am sending copies of this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; and to Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir Antony Acland and Mr Robert Andrew.

David Goodall

A D S GOODALL

31 May 1984