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Title: Report of a meeting at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, between Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain D O'Sullivan and Irish officials, and Deputy Under Secretary of State Stewart Crawford and other British officials, mainly discussing the Council of Ireland proposed in the British White Paper on Northern Ireland.

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SECRET

Meeting in Foreign and Commonwealth Office on
Monday, 22 January, 1973, at 3 p.m.

Present = British side

Sir Stewart Crawford, Deputy Under-Secretary of State,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr. Philip Woodfield, Deputy Head of Northern Ireland
Office

Mr. D. J. Trevelyan, Under Secretary, Northern Ireland
Office

Mr. Kelvin White, Head of Irish Department of F.C.O.

Mr. A. Thorpe, Second Secretary, F.C.O.

Irish side

Dr. D. O'Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland

Mr. R. McDonagh, Assistant Secretary, Department of
Foreign Affairs

Mr. M. F. Doyle, Deputy Assistant Secretary,
Department of Finance

The discussion lasted for just over 2 hours. As at the first meeting, the British side were very reticent about their eventual intentions in regard to a Council of Ireland. They refused to be drawn beyond the points set out in the paper which they had transmitted to the Irish side on 12 January. The discussion did not follow any strict pattern. The following is an attempt to set out in some kind of logical sequence the significant points that were made.

Sir Stewart Crawford said that the exchange of papers on the Council of Ireland since the first meeting had been helpful. He thought that the meeting might begin by discussing the Irish paper about which his side would have a number of questions to ask. Their general concern was to work out something that could be sold to the parties concerned. As they had indicated at the first meeting, they were conscious of the necessity of bringing majority opinion in the North along with them.

The Ambassador said that the Irish side would be glad to answer any questions about their paper. Of course, the British paper would also need to be discussed. He had to say that its contents had rather confirmed in our minds the feeling of disappointment which we took away from the first meeting. Clearly the two sides were very far apart. The kind of Council envisaged in the British paper seemed to represent a considerable degree of deference to Unionist opinion. We had noted that the "possible subjects of common interest" listed in the paper were only "illustrative" and that it would be for the participants in the Council to consider "which subjects merit joint consideration". This seemed, indeed, to be a recipe for a type of "talking-shop", a weak and ineffectual body which could become an object of derision. The Northern minority and the national majority might regard it as an irrelevance in present circumstances. Even the most moderate of the Northern minority leaders would be disinclined to place confidence in a Council whose evolution was wholly dependent on Unionist goodwill.

Sir Stewart Crawford said that ideas had not yet taken final shape on the British side. They were still working on the framing of recommendations for consideration by Ministers. At this stage "no doors were closed".

Mr. Woodfield said that the British were prepared to engage in a persuasion process with the Northern majority. However, they could not determine the future by fiat. They had three principal objectives in mind: (1) reconciliation of the two communities (2) a means of getting all in Northern Ireland to work together for their mutual benefit and (3) not to put obstacles in the way of unity, but equally, not to take positive steps in its direction. Behind the scenes they could use their influence, especially through the office of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which would obviously continue. Unification or anything else by fiat

would not work. They were dealing with a very uncertain situation. It had been suggested, for example, that elections should be held so that consultations could be held with representatives of current opinion. The difficulty was, however, that they did not know who would be the representatives elected to a new Northern assembly. Mr. Doyle observed that unless the White Paper contained proposals which moderate opinion, majority as well as minority, could endorse and point to as the result of moderation, an election might produce a heavy representation of extremist opinion.

The Ambassador said that a Council would have to be strong if it were to contribute to a solution of the existing political problem. The Irish Government had welcomed the so-called "Irish Dimension" described in the Green Paper because it was an acknowledgment by the British Government of a vital element in the situation. A lasting solution could not be found in a purely Six Counties context. It was necessary to recognise the Irish Dimension and a Council would not do this if it were framed on the lines set out in the British paper. A purely consultative Council whose agenda and operations would be subject to Unionist veto from the outset would not be acceptable to the Irish Government. The establishment of such a Council could not be presented as a step forward of any significance.

Mr. Woodfield said that the British side wished to take account of the "Irish Dimension". It was not for nothing that they had coined the phrase. At the same time they had to bear in mind the inter-community tensions in the North and the North/South antagonisms. Therefore, there was no question of their adopting a policy in favour of reunification. Their attitude was that unity could come by agreement only. They would not place obstacles in the way. At the present time they were in the position that the majority feared that the British Government was about to sell them out! This meant that they had to proceed cautiously. There were, however, many ways of encouraging unity without overtly doing so.

Mr. McDonagh said that apparently the continuing basic assumption on the British side was that Northern Ireland was an area in which normal democratic devices should apply. It was not. (Mr. Trevelyan intervened here to say that it was a system which had simply failed to work.) Neither Dublin nor the Northern minority could accept that the Northern majority could have a veto on future progress. Indeed, the British Government in proroguing Stormont had swept away the most obvious of democratic devices, majority rule, and had done this without the approval of the majority. It now appeared from what was being said on the British side that provision for the Irish Dimension would be left dependent completely on an evolution in Unionist thought. There was little evidence that the vocal leaders of Unionism were moving in the direction of moderation. It was disconcerting to read in that morning's press that the illegal UVF now had formal links with the so-called United Loyalist Council. Acceptance of a Council such as described in the British paper would be described by the Northern minority as a "sell out". The British side should take account of the fact that the Dublin Government had been holding a firm and moderate line in the face of great difficulties. There were people in the South who had no connections with illegal organisations but had strong views about the present Northern situation. Indeed, invidious comparisons would be made between a Council such as was envisaged in the British paper and the much more substantial kind of Council envisaged in the 1920 Act (although, of course, such an analogy would be somewhat misleading).

After some further general discussion on these lines, the conversation turned towards the concept of a Council of Ireland set out in the Irish paper. The Irish side confirmed that they envisaged a Council working to bring North and South together so as to encourage eventual reunification. They also confirmed that they envisaged a Council having some executive functions through, where necessary, the devolution of powers. They said that it was

difficult to see any other way in which the Council could be effective and credible. If it had only consultative powers, the consultation process in practice could come to mean very little. The British side asked in several ways for clarification of our views on the devolution of powers to the Council and the implications of the transfers of sovereignty involved.

Mr. Doyle said that the position simply was the Council would have to have something to do. If it were seen to be leading nowhere it would be of no utility whatsoever. It was hard to see how it could lead anywhere if it were set up with an in-built comprehensive Unionist power of veto. If it were designed as merely a forum for the establishment of goodwill and confidence between North and South by the discussion of mutual problems, it would be unacceptable because it would have no inbuilt momentum for development. Only if it had executive functions to carry out, could it have any hope of development, because only then could it be shown that cooperation in mutual interests was successful and further experiments in its exercise be encouraged. A mere discussion forum could never develop and would most likely wither amidst recriminations.

The British side seemed somewhat surprised that the Irish authorities would be willing to transfer sovereignty to a Council and laid great stress on the difficulties this would create for the British authorities. They indicated that any funding of a Council's operations from the U.K. would have to be accompanied by U.K. financial control, even in an area such as tourism. The Irish side said that they fully recognised the necessity of making provision for this either in the context of the Council or otherwise.

Mr. Woodfield implied that the new Northern Ireland Assembly would have nothing like the same financial freedom of manœuvre as the former Stormont régime; this would make it all the more difficult to transfer such freedom, through the Assembly, to a Council. In general, the British side were not very receptive to the ideas expressed in the Irish paper. They kept reverting to the thesis that they could not impose a Council and that its evolution was best

left to the participants in it.

The Irish side pointed out that the kind of limited work envisaged for a Council in the British paper was such that it could be carried on without any Council. There was no need to set up formal machinery to enable North/South consultations to take place. Such consultations had been held in the past without any Council. A body such as a Council was necessary only if more substantial North/South contacts were to be established - although, of course, it could also be an umbrella for less important activities.

The Irish side repeated that recognition of the Irish Dimension was the important thing. It had to be provided for in some fashion. If agreement could not be reached about a Council, that did not mean that recognition of the Irish Dimension could simply be deferred.

At the suggestion of the British side there was discussion of the possible functions for a Council listed in the Irish paper.

Mr. Doyle explained to the British side the possibilities for effective North/South action in the field of electric power and tourism, and pointed out that joint action at Council level could take different forms in different areas of activity, e.g. co-ordination of existing bodies North and South, establishment of a single new body for the whole island, or direct administration by the Council.

The British side, in their reactions, seemed to imply that giving the decision on the building of a nuclear power station, or even the establishment of a joint tourist authority, to a Council went further, in terms of financial autonomy, than they were prepared to contemplate. They reiterated that any major decision would require the agreement of the UK Government. They did not seem to contemplate the Northern Ireland Assembly as an adequate authority in such matters.

At one point Mr. McDonagh said that the establishment of a strong Council would be a difficult task and that, without goodwill and

hard work, it might prove impossible. Sir Stewart Crawford said immediately that without the cooperation of the Irish Government a Council would of course be impossible, but that it was too early to think in these terms; that stage had not been reached.

Mr. Woodfield referred to the "recognition" question which he had raised at the first meeting, i.e. the question of our giving some form of "recognition" to the new Northern institutions. The Ambassador said that, for practical purposes, we had been prepared to deal with Northern institutions in the past. Also, the Taoiseach had said in the Dáil after the issue of the Green Paper that Dublin would be prepared to "accept and support" a real settlement. Of course, Dublin's precise attitude towards new Northern institutions would have to be decided on the basis of full information as to the form of those institutions.

Mr. Woodfield also raised again the question of handling law and order issues on an all-Ireland basis. Mr. McDonagh said that the Taoiseach had already indicated that Dublin would be prepared to consider this possibility. However, from our viewpoint, this problem covered the vital question of providing adequate acceptable policing arrangements in Northern Ireland. This was an aspect on which we had already laid emphasis and it was one on which we would require to have some satisfaction. In this connection we had been disconcerted to see recent newspaper reports to the effect that Mr. Whitelaw had given certain written guarantees to the R.U.C. about their future.

Finally, the discussion turned to the question of a further meeting and the related question of the timing of the issue of the White Paper. Both sides seemed to feel that there might be merit in having a Taoiseach/Prime Minister meeting at an appropriate stage. The British side thought that such a meeting might best take place in the second half of February, perhaps in the last week of that month. However, it should be preceded

by another meeting at official level about the over-all package settlement. They could not yet suggest a definite date for this official meeting.

In regard to the White Paper, the British side said that it certainly would not be published before or during the week beginning 12 February, which had been the date previously envisaged for the next meeting at official level. It would not be published before that meeting or before the Taoiseach/Prime Minister meeting if one were arranged. They would be in touch with the Irish side as soon as possible about meeting dates.