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MEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH AND THE LEADER OF
THE OPPOSITION, MRS. THATCHER, IN LONDON ON FRIDAY,
5TH MARCH, 1976.

1. The Taoiseach, accompanied by the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs met Mrs. Thatcher, who was accompanied by Mr. Airey Neave in the Embassy in London at 4.30 p.m. The Ambassador and Mr. Nally (Taoiseach's Department) were present.
2. The meeting opened with some general discussion of the possibility of Mrs. Thatcher visiting Ireland. It then went on to discuss the situation created by the collapse of the Convention and the possibility that the vacuum in Northern Ireland would be filled by para-military groups. The Taoiseach said that in the area, most politicians were professionals, who relied on their occupation, for an income. Mrs. Thatcher agreed and said that it was not easy for many of them to get another job.
3. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that there was a strong possibility that the situation would leave the field open completely to Mr. Paisley. He had now got rid of his rivals. Three of the seven parties in Northern Ireland are not now represented in Westminster. A large part of the population of Northern Ireland was not represented either. The SDLP, for example, had only one member out of the twelve Westminster MP's elected for the area.
4. Mrs. Thatcher enquired as to whether there had been any discussion of what the next step might be. The Taoiseach said that a period of direct rule was obviously in prospect. Mrs. Thatcher said that there was an obvious difference between a period of direct rule when nothing happened, and a period where there might be something in prospect. The second alternative might not leave this field quite so open to the paramilitaries. Mr. Neave said that they had already got a good deal of control already. The Minister for Foreign Affairs emphasised the necessity for giving elected representatives access to the British Government. The Taoiseach said that the present situation might bring them down to earth. The end of political life, by their action, might leave a vacuum for the paramilitaries but this had been brought about by the action of politicians in Northern Ireland. Mrs. Thatcher said that if they really did want devolved government in Belfast there might be all sorts of groups getting together to seek it. The Minister for Foreign Affairs referred to the power to revive the Convention, in certain circumstances, in six months.
5. Mrs. Thatcher then went on to enquire as to whether the security situation was difficult. The Taoiseach said that on both sides, this seemed to have gone reasonably well. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that it might be an indication of our success that most of the explosives being used now were old stuff. There seemed to be no new material reaching the bombers. The machine

gunning of a restaurant recently might have been indicated of a shortage of material with which to make bombs. Mrs. Thatcher said that the less expert people operating now could produce terrible consequences. She mentioned the two near misses in the underground in London recently.

6. Mr. Neave said that the MPs who had visited Dublin recently had been well pleased with their visit. He received an assurance from the Minister for Foreign Affairs that communications networks on the border were being improved - some of it, with French equipment.
7. Mrs. Thatcher, then, referred to the Taoiseach's recent Dalkey speech which she said had been very significant. She then went on to say that the South had been ~~more~~ much more successful in proving membership of the IRA. The Taoiseach referred to the role of the Special Criminal Court and of the police in obtaining convictions, which the Minister for Foreign Affairs said had reached a rate of 75% of arrests. This was contrasted with what had happened recently with, for example, Martin McGuinness, north of the border.
8. Mrs. Thatcher then enquired as to the possibility of an administrative council in Northern Ireland to provide a forum for political activity. She said that many of the politicians there must now be very short of cash - their livelihood was disappearing. The Taoiseach said that it was likely also that their constituents would turn elsewhere. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that there could be a good case for letting things run as they were for a while. If a council were appointed now there would be difficulties. It was better to leave the question for the moment. The Taoiseach said that they could not have a situation where they were being paid for doing nothing. They had to face the reality that in Northern Ireland political life could be kept alive only by themselves. No outsider could do this for them.
9. Mrs. Thatcher then enquired as to whether the discussions had covered the subject of Europe. The Minister for Foreign Affairs mentioned that the question of direct elections was difficult. The French were proposing a proportionate representation which posed a threat to what we had felt we were guaranteed under the Accession Treaty. This difficulty may not be sorted out at the Heads of Government meeting in April. In reply to a query by Mrs. Thatcher, the Minister said that some time ago he would have said that 1978 was a realistic date but he was not quite so sure now. He also dealt with the possibility of strengthening the powers of Parliament, particularly if it were democratised.
10. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that the Tindemans report also raised a lot of difficult issues. The Taoiseach enquired as to whether the British would be debating this in Parliament before April. Mrs. Thatcher said that there had been an intention to debate the question of direct elections but that this had been put off.

The Tindemans debate would, under present proposals follow this. There was obviously a lot left to negotiate. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that it could be that it would be at the November/December Summit that the conclusions resulting from the report would be reached.

11. There was then some discussion of the question of a common community policy on fisheries. Mrs. Thatcher said that the idea of quotas was difficult to implement. There were also difficulties as to evidence of breaches of fishing boundaries.
12. Mrs. Thatcher said that the Stagg funeral had been handled superlatively by the Government here. She said that it would be highly desirable to hold firmly to paragraph 4 of the joint statement issued after the meeting that day with Mr. Wilson. She said that there was a great anxiety in Britain to see law and order upheld. There was a tremendous desire among people to see the traditional decencies being observed. Unless the security forces operated firmly and were seen to do so terrorists would win - because ordinary people would be afraid to oppose them. She praised the action taken by the Government here in the Stagg case in particular.
13. On the question of a British pull-out from Northern Ireland, Mrs. Thatcher said that "we are in politics to see that sudden emotions don't create policy". Mr. Neave said that in the recent public opinion poll the form of the question had been highly misleading.
14. The Minister for Foreign Affairs agreed as to the importance of building up the police force and referred to some difficulties in relation to the RUC.
15. The meeting then concluded, with a suggestion by the Taoiseach that Mrs. Thatcher might come to Ireland on a visit at some time in the near future. She expressed great interest in this suggestion.

8th March, 1976.

[Copies to Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs.]