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MEMO OF MEETING WITH MARGARET THATCHER, M.P. LEADER OF THE
CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION IN WESTMINSTER.

Meeting took place on Thursday, 8th June, 1978, in the office of the Leader of the Opposition. Present was Mr. Aerie Neave, The Shadow Spokesman on Northern Ireland, Dr. Garret FitzGerald and Paddy Harte.

After the usual introductions the discussion centred mostly around the interrogation methods, or alleged interrogation methods, at Castlereagh Police Barracks, Belfast.

Dr. FitzGerald explained the emotional, psychological effect which the adverse reports had on the minds of Catholic people, and indeed Protestant people, and referred to the meetings which Dr. FitzGerald and myself had with the Presbyterian Church Leaders, with the Alliance Party and with S.D.L.P. during our last visit to Belfast and stressed the information which the Leaders of the Presbyterian Church gave us concerning the Castlereagh interrogation centre.

Mrs. Thatcher was very much of a closed mind and really did not accept what was being said, or at least that was my impression.

The question of the removal of Army Security check points, particularly in Catholic ghetto areas in Northern Ireland was also discussed and we laid stress on the fact that as 95% of the Catholic population were not involved, they were being victimised, or at least that is the way they saw it, because the Army were suppressing the other 5% or less who were active in Republican circles. Mrs. Thatcher did not agree that security should be lessened. She also gave me the impression that because the Garda Siochana had been accused of Bully-boy tactics that it was bad manners on our part to be making these unfair accusations against the ^{N.S.} Police Force. Dr. FitzGerald laid stress on the fact that it was vitally important that the Police Force in Northern Ireland should have the confidence of the Catholic community and this was not possible while a few members, mostly in plain clothes, continued to draw attention to the methods being used to get information from suspected people.

We intended to talk about other matters but the discussion about Castlereagh, monopolised most of the time.

We bade a friendly farewell and were escorted to the front of the House of Commons by Mr. Aerie Neave.

In my judgment ~~it was~~ ~~conscious~~ that the rigid attitudes of Mrs. Thatcher did not entirely meet with his consent. A strange comment but that is the way I viewed it.

We met Roy Mason, I cannot recall the names of the other two people from the Northern Ireland Office, at the Ulster

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Trade Office for lunch and we had, what I would describe as a very useful and beneficial, discussion ranging over a very broad area. Castlereagh was again discussed as indeed was the Amnesty Report and the statement which Mr. Mason proposed to make later on that evening and which he told us

THIS AREA DEALT WITH BUSINESS RELATING TO THE FINE GAEL PARTY.

He briefly referred to his visit to Dublin to meet Michael O'Kennedy and Gerry Collins. He also briefly referred to the forthcoming General Election in Great Britain. The discussion was still in high gear as the time approached 3 o'clock when Dr. FitzGerald and myself had to withdraw to keep a Press briefing appointment at the Irish Club in Eaton Square.

At about 3.15 the Press Conference commenced. Present were the Irish Independent, The Irish Press, the Irish Times, the Belfast Telegraph, I.T.N., The Sunday World, The Irish Post, The Irish News and there were one or two people whose identify I cannot recall. In addition to this some papers had two representatives present. Altogether 14 people from the Press were in attendance.

Dr. FitzGerald gave them a back-ground briefing on the discussions with Mrs. Thatcher and Roy Mason without breaking confidence on certain subject matters discussed and explained that under his leadership that the Fine Gael Party were in the course of studying the implications of Irish unity, namely Federation, Confederation, or some other system.

Dr. Fitzgerald left the Irish Club to keep an appointment with the Financial Times and I had an appointment with Merlyn Reese in the House of Commons at 5.30 p.m. concerning the Gillespie sisters and the up to date development in connection with evidence which is now available to suggest

that Mrs. Gill, who is a sister of a Gilfoyle, one of the people who admitted guilt. The evidence would now suggest would suggest that Mrs. Gill committed perjury and the Home Secretary is having the matter examined.

Dr. FitzGerald and I again linked up in the House of Commons at about 6 o'clock and with Kevin McNamara, Gerry Fitt we met in the Members' Bar where we were later joined by Merlyn Reese, Paddy Duffy and Stanley Orme.

The discussion was most informal and again views were exchanged. We left the House of Commons about 7.15 p.m. to have dinner with Mr. Ian Gow and Mr. Michael Mates, both M.P's of the Conservative Party. The Dinner was in the Cavalry Club.

Again the discussion was most informal but very interesting. The conversation ranged about the relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and Northern Ireland and the Republic and European matters about which both Conservative Members were interested in getting Dr. FitzGerald's views on. I gathered the impression from both Gow and Mates that they were not in line with Margaret Thatcher's thinking. Gow left to get a late train home and Mates gave Dr. FitzGerald and myself a lift back to the Irish Embassy where we met Dr. Enda McDonagh. The conversation there was mostly about Rhodesia and occasionally about Northern Ireland.

I withdrew from the Embassy about 12.30 a.m. with Michael Mates who drove me back to the Irish Club.

My summary about all the meetings has been one of success. All of the people we had spoken with would not differ with us to any major degree on Northern attitudes and new relationships except Mrs. Thatcher and Aerie Neave would fit into that bracket also. He did not express himself that much during the meeting we had with Mrs. Thatcher.

Relationships have been certainly well improved by the visit and I think it is something that should happen at least once a year along similar lines, in addition to the normal contacts that we would make by letter or telephone. I also believe that we will have to do research on who is friendly with Margaret Thatcher at constituency level or personal level and try and get her to up-date herself on northern politics. In my opinion she had a closed mind. She was not listening to our point of view and if she was, she didn't accept them, and I would be afraid that if the Conservatives win the next General Election and she is Prime Minister that the cost of changing her attitudes in the terms of life and property in the North of Ireland could be immense. I don't know how

we will succeed but my judgment is that we would have to try and persuade her to listen and get her to accept the realities of Northern Ireland.

The importance of the visit in retrospect leaves me in no doubt that the most vital lesson is the one dealing with the need to communicate more acceptable political attitudes between Mrs. Thatcher and ourselves.

I doubt if ordinary working class Protestant people in Northern Ireland would easily identify with her approach which I found quite disturbing, the implications of which could be frightening.