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Meeting with British Ambassador and Mr. P. Woodfield,
Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Office

1. The Secretary to the Government and the Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs (accompanied by D. Neligan) met the British Ambassador and Mr. Woodfield at Iveagh House at 11.30 on 21 April. They discussed matters of current interest in connection with Northern Ireland and later had luncheon when Sir Ewart Bell, Mr. Maurice Doyle (Secretary, Department of Finance) and D. Tatham, British Embassy joined the party.
2. Mr. Donlon recalled our position on Mr. Prior's proposals and, referring to the general context of Anglo-Irish relations, indicated that the Taoiseach was focusing on the next meeting with Mrs. Thatcher which we assumed would take place in July.
3. Mr. Woodfield commented on the political balance in Northern Ireland and the possibilities in the event of elections to a Northern Ireland Assembly in which all parties would participate. The following is a summary of the points he made

The SDLP he thought would maintain its current strength and might get about 20% of the vote. He seemed uncertain about the degree of support which might be forthcoming for the smaller nationalist parties. He accepted, when Mr. Donlon made the point, that Provisional Sinn Fein candidates would be more likely to get any support from the traditionally abstentionist element in the electorate rather than from the supporters of the SDLP or other constitutional nationalist groups.

He inclined to the view that the DUP might consolidate its advance on the OUP. He considered that Paisley would take a positive line, that is he would pose as a democrat favouring the establishment of an Assembly. Woodfield argued that the DUP had in fact done not at all badly in South Belfast, and had only been vaguely affected by the Kinçora scandal.

In regard to the OUP he felt that Mr. Molyneaux was doing very badly. He was much under the influence of Enoch Powell but unfortunately sometimes failed to understand what Powell was saying to him with bizarre results. McCusker did not seem to be ambitiously thrusting forward as a replacement leader. The OUP would be vulnerable to Paisley's positive approach to the Assembly precisely because this was the point of division within the OUP between integrationists and devolutionists. On that division Woodfield had no doubt that the current bulk of the Party's membership was devolutionist.

4. Commenting about the progress of the Prior initiative in Parliament Woodfield confirmed that there would be two debates, one on the White Paper and one on the Bill (published on 21 April). In his view it would take the entire Parliamentary session to get the legislation through both Houses. The proposal is a constitutional one so that Committee discussion would have to be in Parliament as a whole (i.e. not in Committee) and given particularly the intention of Mr. Powell and others to try to filibuster, he considered that much Parliamentary time would be required. On the Powell filibuster he said that logically this was all that Powell could do since his position prevented him from contemplating the establishment of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland.

5. In general Woodfield felt the election and the establishment of the Assembly would go ahead and envisaged that representatives when they found themselves in the Assembly would develop a taste for their role and would positively enjoy summoning the Secretary of State and other Ministers for the Purpose of berating him jointly and severely.

6. Mr. Nally repeated in detail the objections we had to the proposal and indicated that we preferred to rely on the Anglo-Irish process and the institutional relationship between Dublin and London to make progress. He mentioned the desirability of the meeting in July - since nothing earlier seem practicable - so as to get ambiguities out of the way and movement on any issues between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister. There were outstanding questions from earlier meetings.

We would not consider that, as recently commented by Mr. Prior, (Guardian interview published on 20 April) relations between North and South should have to await the establishment of an institution in and for Northern Ireland before they could be developed. Taking up this point, Mr. Donlon said that the interview in question had been considered most unhelpful by the Government. (In subsequent conversation the undersigned specified in detail our objections to the British Ambassador and Mr. Nally delivered the same message to Mr. Woodfield).

7. Mr. Woodfield raised the question of future meetings and, indicating that Mr. Prior had found the discussion on 31 March with Mr. Collins very useful, suggested that they might consider a further meeting at that level in the near future. He mentioned late May and mid June as possibilities; Mr. Prior could come to Dublin. Mr. Donlon had to leave the room to speak to the Minister for Foreign Affairs about other matters during the meeting and mentioned this possibility. The Minister expressed the view that he would not wish to get involved in further discussions with Mr. Prior at this stage and felt that the Taoiseach's guidelines to us had been to concentrate attention on the next Summit meeting with Mrs. Thatcher. Mr. Donlon was able to communicate this reaction to Mr. Woodfield before his departure.

8. There was some discussion of the economic position in Northern Ireland which Mr. Woodfield described as gloomy. Mr. Donlon enquired what were the prospects for the survival of the De Lorean Motor works. Mr. Woodfield was not too encouraging but repeated that it was the aim of the receiver and the Government to keep the enterprise going.

Mr. De Lorean himself was a difficult man to deal with and they had recently been speaking about in America. *revised no proof of his being able to raise the money he had*

9. On economic cooperation across the border, the topics of gas and electricity inter-connectors, the visit by semi-State representatives to Belfast next week, and the activities of the East border region Committee were mentioned. On the gas link, both sides noted that negotiations were continuing and that there had recently been contact at the official level. A political level meeting (Ministers for Energy) would be necessary in order to negotiate finally on gas prices.

Mr. Woodfield indicated that they would wish the matter to be resolved fairly soon because of the substantial amount they were now paying to keep the existing gas undertakings going. If negotiations with us for Kinsale gas failed, they would like to know as quickly as possible so as to avoid needless public expenditure by closing down the facilities forthwith. On the other hand, if agreement were reached, it would be to the advantage of both sides to be able to start positive planning accordingly.

10. On the electricity inter-connector, there was a short exchange about the possibilities of its restoration. Woodfield indicated that there was a hope in the N.I.O. that more complete and more normal security patrols in South Armagh might soon become possible. This would affect the level of protection that could be given to a restored electricity link. The authorities had, he said, also been talking to local people about the question.

11. Regarding the meeting between the Taoiseach and Belfast shipyard workers and the resultant visit to Belfast next week by representatives of some semi-State bodies seeking contracts from Belfast firms, Mr. Woodfield expressed interest and appreciation. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

12. The East border regional Committee was mentioned in connection with the possibility that representatives of the two Governments jointly might formally present to the Committee a report on regional development (principally tourism) which had now been completed. It had been intended that the previous Minister for Foreign Affairs and a Minister of State from the N.I.O. should meet the Committee for the purpose last December. The meeting was postponed for good reasons but it could be anticipated that pressure to have a joint Ministerial presence at a forthcoming meeting for the same purpose could arise.

13. "Fair" Rent Tribunals and the problems caused by cattle smuggling on the border and by building workers travelling South and North to work on sites - while at the same time collecting dole in the other jurisdiction - were also mentioned. They are to be discussed in more detail between the Secretaries of the responsible Departments who are meeting simultaneously.

14. There was very little discussion about security. Mr. Donlon and Mr. Nally expressed sympathy at the resurgence of bombing, with particular reference to the deaths of civilians in Magherafelt the previous night. As is usual at meetings with British officials, we left it to them to make the running on this question and in fact Mr. Woodfield did not take it up.

15. The meeting concluded with expressions of satisfaction with this form of contact which it was felt might be taken up from time to time, but no date was fixed for a forthcoming encounter.

D. M. Neligan.

22 April, 1982.

On the previous evening, Mr. Tatham of the British Embassy expressed admiration to Mr. Nally of the speed and cohesiveness of the EEC reaction on the Falklands crisis. Mr. Nally said that while we had doubts as to the effectiveness of sanctions we were going along with the other members in the interests of solidarity. We would like to see some reciprocity on the question of agricultural prices which were a matter of extreme concern to us particularly at this time of the year.