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ANGLO-IRISH INTERGOVERNMENTAL COUNCIL

The first meeting of the Council at Ministerial level was held at the Northern Ireland Office, London on 29 January 1982. The following were present:

Irish Side

Senator James Dooge,
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr S Donlon, Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr D Neligan
Department of Foreign Affairs

Ambassador Kennedy .

Mr P Dempsey
Embassy, London

Mr G Corr
Embassy, London

British Side

Mr James Prior,
Secretary of State for Northern
Ireland

Lord Gowrie, Minister of State,
Northern Ireland Office

Sir Philip Woodfield,
Permanent Secretary,
Northern Ireland Office

Sir L Figg,
British Ambassador, Dublin

Mr R Harrington
Northern Ireland Office

Mr P Evers
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr Boyd-Smith
Northern Ireland Office

Secretary of State Prior welcomed the Irish side. He had just met Minister Dooge for a valuable tête-a-tête and they had discussed general political issues. He felt it better if "nuts and bolts" issues concerning the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council were discussed later in the day when the Minister would be meeting Mr Atkins. If the Irish side was agreeable, economic and security issues could be discussed at the present meeting. Minister Dooge stated that there were some matters which could be returned to if there was time; for example, an evaluation of Unionist attitudes and the present position of Provisional Sinn Fein.

Secretary Prior said that the talks concerning a Kinsale gas pipe link to Northern Ireland were making good progress although the question of price appeared the crucial issue. Mr Neligan said that the two relevant Ministers had planned to meet in February. The discussions were still at the technical

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stage although the political will was clearly present to advance the discussions as speedily as possible. Minister Dooge stated that no insurmountable obstacles had appeared so far but no political decision would have been likely at any February meeting since analysis at the technical level was still taking place. Secretary Prior said that it was better to clear the technical issues. Questions of costing and price would be important but he felt the proposal was something tangible and worthwhile. He was anxious to make progress on this project. Minister Dooge noted that the February Ministerial meeting would not now take place because of the Irish election.

Secretary Prior said that both sides were still looking at the question of restoring the North/South Electricity Inter-Connector. The British side were examining how to have better on-the-ground security in Armagh. Minister Dooge stated that both Governments were anxious for progress regarding the Inter-Connector but security was obviously a vital problem. This applied both to the Inter-Connector itself and for maintenance and repair staff. Secretary Prior asked if any pylons had been destroyed on the Irish side. Mr Donlon replied in the negative. Secretary Prior said the Inter-Connector was tied up with the security situation in South Armagh. It would be right to see if the Inter-Connector could be restored once the security situation in the area was better. Minister Dooge asked whether the inter-connector could be run along the gas pipeline. Sir Philip Woodfield said that the engineering view was that there would be great technical difficulties in doing this. Lord Gowrie said that the R.U.C. made the point that Irish Security Forces would have a much longer gas pipe stretch to patrol - 60 miles against twenty in the North. Minister Dooge replied that the Irish Security Forces would foresee no difficulties in this area and, in any event, the Provisional I.R.A. would be more likely to attack on the Northern side. Secretary Prior concluded the discussion on the Inter-Connector. He felt there was not much further the matter could be taken at the present discussion and proposed the issue be noted.

Secretary Prior raised the question of financial assistance for Co-operation North. The British Government was prepared to try to help. He had been very impressed with the organisers although there were perhaps some grandiose ideas being put forward. If the European Community was prepared to help, they would be glad to go along. He had, however, been rather worried by the feasibility

study into a cross border industrial zone produced by the organisers. Minister Dooge said that he had also formed a high opinion of Co-operation North but he felt it best if it distanced itself from both Governments. It has a valuable role in the development area but should be extra-Governmental. The organisers seemed to accept this although they were still putting some ideas forward which would involve semi-Government agencies. The organisation had been supported by the Banks for three years but this was unlikely to continue. The two Heads of Government had looked at the question at their last talks and both sides agreed to examine possible assistance. The Minister for Finance had allocated £50,000 in the Budget for the venture and if Britain provided £40,000 sterling, this should keep the organisation going. Mr Donlon noted that no specific announcement had been made by the Minister for Finance. The proposed assistance was part of a general sum of £120,000 to be used in the general framework of "reconciliation." This included the proposed Encounter organisation, youth exchanges and so on. The Budget had not, of course, been adopted by the Dail but, in any event, the Irish side would not have announced any allocation to Co-operation North until a discussion had taken place with the British Authorities. Secretary Prior said that he would have to take the proposal to the Treasury. There was no real problem with the money although he would not wish to see indefinite funding. A grant could be for one year. Ambassador Figg asked how funding would be channelled and agreed that there should be distance between Co-operation North and Government activities. Sir Philip Woodfield said that there was a British desire to help although a final decision had not yet been made. Financial assistance could be provided for one year. Secretary Prior said that he could agree in principle to financial assistance but grants should be designed so as to also obtain EEC funding. Minister Dooge noted that Co-operation North did receive small amounts from the Community. Mr Nelican said that assistance from the Community could only be given for projects and not administration. Secretary Prior said that Commissioner Tugenhat had unsuccessfully tried to contact him recently and he might have wanted to discuss this question. Mr Donlon stated that Co-operation North had lodged an £8-10,000 application with the Community a few weeks ago. This had been based on a claim to be an organisation of "European value." It was also applying for grants regarding educational training.

Secretary of State Prior said that he would appreciate a brief outline of how the Irish Government viewed the present economic situation. As regards

Northern Ireland, the recession had made a severe impact on industries such as ship-building and there had been a running down of general manufacturing capacity. The Government would be injecting a considerable amount of money in 1982/83 although the level of public expenditure was already proportionately far higher in Northern Ireland than on the mainland. The increase in assistance would be of help but it was not going to solve the North's difficulties. His impression was that the South was also suffering considerable economic strain. Minister Dooge replied that the recession now appeared to be "bottoming out," particularly in the agricultural area. There had been a 50 per cent farm income drop in 3 years despite the normal price increases under the Common Agricultural Policy due to a high inflation rate and rising interest levels. The crisis in Irish agriculture was levelling off but it was doing so as a disastrous level and a climb back to even the position of 3 years ago would not be easy. Secretary of State Prior said that last year had been generally poor for Northern Ireland agriculture and he did not think this year was likely to be much better. £60 million in increased aid had been provided above the mainland level but there was still a disparity in farmers incomes as compared to the mainland although the situation was improving. The Secretary of State for Agriculture would be pressing again for low increases in the CAP even though from the Northern Ireland viewpoint, it would be better to have larger levels of increases. Minister Dooge stated that there was more common interest between North and South in agriculture than between the North and Britain. He was reminded of a recent Foreign Ministers' Council meeting in Brussels on a decision regarding the importation of new potatoes from Cyprus. He knew that Mr Paisley had made the same points as he was making to the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture. This illustrated that agriculture could be an early candidate for devolution in order to give it a life of its own. More control of agricultural matters by the local politicians could well have great advantages for Northern Ireland agriculture - one matter that could be tackled, for example, was reducing the sheep price differential across the Border. Secretary of State Prior said that sheep prices in Northern Ireland were considerably higher than in the U.K. There was here clear linkage with the South since there was a large sheep market across the Border. Lord Gowrie said that both sides were worried about loss of revenue from cross Border "fiddling," particularly perhaps in the sheep area. This was something that might be tackled. He wondered if the difference between the two currencies was compounding the problem. Minister Dooge agreed that this might be an element. On being invited by the Secretary of State to

comment on the currency situation since the announcement of the election, the Minister said that the Punt level was likely to be generally maintained due to intervention by the Central Bank though one worrying feature had been the run on gilts in the immediate aftermath of the announcement. Secretary of State Prior said that the employment situation is undoubtedly the most severe economic problem Northern Ireland faces.

Minister Dooge stated that unemployment in the South was still rising. This was very much intertwined with the general question of competitiveness in world economic markets. Lord Gowrie said that the financial press was giving the South a generally clear bill of health as compared to Northern Ireland. The problem in the North was perceived as being more structural whereas in the South it was, perhaps, more a matter of the borrowing level and Budget issues. He would be anxious that pressure be maintained on local politicians in the North to make political progress since the economic forecast was poor and it was clearly in the North's interests to have as much cross Border co-operation as possible. Mr Donlon said that the nature of the economic problem, in terms of North and South, was different. The South has continued to maintain economic growth and the single greatest difference was the rate of investment. Unlike the South, Northern Ireland had not attracted much local investment. Lord Gowrie replied that this was so and envious glances had often been cast from Belfast at the level of investment attracted by the South, both local and from outside Ireland. The security situation in the North had not helped matters over the past decade. He felt that the South has a strong economic interest in maintaining cross Border security. Minister Dooge suggested it might be valuable to establish a Work Group on agriculture to examine, for example, the question of anomalies, evasions and so on. Lord Gowrie said that his initial reaction was positive. This was a sensible proposal and one building on tradition. He felt that it might be best to await internal political activity in the North and to take it from there since there might be problems if both sides were to press bilaterally at the present moment. Ambassador Figg said that a lot of good work was being done by experts in terms of agriculture. This applied both to the Border and to general Anglo-Irish matters. He wondered if a committee could, perhaps, monitor what the "experts" were doing. Secretary of State Prior said that the matter could be pursued but it might be best to leave it until the internal political situation becomes clearer in the near future. Minister Dooge proposed that it would be worthwhile to ask for a report on co-operation from

both sides. It would then be clear as to what was happening in this area. Secretary of State Prior agreed with this proposal.

Secretary of State Prior proposed that the meeting consider the recent work of the Attorneys General. He was rather worried about the lack of progress since, in view of the Unionists' sensitivities, this was a matter of supreme importance. Minister Dooge said that the Attorneys General had examined purely legal aspects although this inevitably overflowed into political decision matters. A memorandum was ready for Government on this area and the Government would be looking at issues arising from the meetings of the two Attorneys General. Secretary of State Prior stated that he was grateful for the additional levels of Border security in the South during last November. It was extremely difficult to persuade the Unionists that security progress could be made other than through extradition. He had been delighted to see the recent convictions in Dublin under the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Act. Minister Dooge replied that Dublin was anxious to assist regarding security co-operation on the Border. He was grateful for the Secretary of State's kind words. One problem in this area was that it appeared people were crossing the Border again after initially escaping into the South and were thus disappearing from Irish jurisdiction although the image persisted, for example in terms of the Unionists, that they were wandering freely in the South. Secretary of State Prior said that the heart of the matter was in many ways psychological. People in Britain were delighted to see as much Anglo-Irish co-operation as possible. There were, however, a few people - some Conservative back benchers among them - who wondered what the advantages were of close co-operation if security did not improve. These people had been encouraged by Unionists claiming that co-operation was meaningless if there was no progress in security. If security was good, it made it easier in terms of persuading them to move forward in other areas. Minister Dooge agreed that the problem was in many ways one of perception since the reality was extremely close security co-operation. Irish jails were already overcrowded and regulations had been broken on staff recruitment. This was in a large part due to the security situation. Secretary of State Prior said that he was trying to have the Unionists take a more robust attitude on Anglo-Irish talks. He was telling them that they would be swallowed up by Paisley if they simply agreed with his more extreme attitudes. The Unionist response was that it was politically very difficult to detach themselves from Paisley's

view in this area. He felt that if the perception on cross Border security among Unionists could be changed, this would be the biggest factor in terms of political progress. Minister Dooge referred to a recent television programme on cross Border security. The programme had showed the extraordinary level of co-operation across the Border and he felt this must have done some good. It might be that more could be done in the media in tackling the area of perception. Lord Gowrie said that there would be no problems from politicians on the Minority side regarding cross Border co-operation and they had supported the Government's line. Secretary of State Prior asked what the present state of play was in regard to the talks between the Attorneys General and Sir Philip Woodfield replied that the Irish Attorney General had said no action would be possible until the Cabinet had made its decisions. Minister Dooge said that this was the case and no decisions would now be made until after the general election.

Minister Dooge said that there had recently been a diminution of Provisional I.R.A. violence in the North. Was this due to successes by the Security Forces or were there other reasons as well? Secretary of State Prior replied that it was due to a combination of circumstances. The information provided by the Black arrest had shaken the Provisionals. They had taken action against some of their own people as a consequence. Enhanced Army presence on the ground, in addition to the cold weather, had made December the best month for ten years. His information was that the Provisionals, however, still remain a powerful threat and they have shown an ability over the years to regroup and recover, at least to some extent. The Catholic Church is very helpful and was playing a vital role in "weaning" away Minority Community support for the Provisionals. He would, to return to an earlier point, be grateful if, in terms of the media, as much appreciation as possible could be shown by the Irish side following the meeting regarding Unionist sensitivities. Minister Dooge agreed to this request. Lord Gowrie stated that Mr Paisley's "Third Force" appeared to have lost ^{some} direction. He and the Secretary of State had spent the night of its "inauguration" at police headquarters and it was quite clear many people were being marched around in circles. There was now guarded optimism regarding the threat posed by the Force. Mr Donlon said that Irish officials frequently had private discussions with Unionists. Problems in the security field had been explained to them and they were told that Dublin wanted to be as effective as possible. Many privately expressed understanding

although perhaps not publicly. The Irish Authorities would continue trying to reduce tensions by explaining our role and any difficulties that arise. Secretary of State Prior expressed appreciation for this. Minister Dooge stated that he had planned a recent trip to the North but had postponed it by a few weeks at the request of the Secretary of State. He would be as constructive as possible in discussions with the Unionists. The Minister asked about the situation in the H Block. Lord Gowrie replied that there was a "trickle back" among protesting prisoners and so far the position is peaceable. There had been greater problems with Loyalist prisoners on remand in Belfast. Generally, the position was good.

Secretary of State Prior referred to the proposed Anglo-Irish Encounter organisation. This, however, was more a matter for the discussion between the Minister and Mr Atkins. Minister Dooge acknowledged receipt of the British Note on the Encounter organisation. There was not a problem here. Lord Gowrie wondered if the organisation should be called "Encounter" since it suggested, to him, a Californian therapy session. Secretary of State Prior said that it was important to attract people to the organisation. He was not aware of when any weekend conference would be organised or details of participants. Mr Donlon said this had been discussed with Sir Robert Armstrong during his recent visit to Dublin and two or three steps had been agreed that would lead to a summer conference, perhaps in July. A further meeting on this issue was being arranged to take place in the next few weeks. It would not be possible to take much action at the Irish end until after the General Election. Lord Gowrie expressed a hope for American involvement. Secretary of State Prior said that there had been a good meeting with Judge Clark although he had rather "blotted his copybook" with about twenty words. He was amused at the endless capacity of people like Paisley and Powell to believe in conspiracies involving just about everyone.

A brief discussion on a Joint Press Statement took place and the Irish draft, attached, was accepted. Secretary of State Prior said that it was important both sides take the same line in background briefings. There was no reason to give Unionists ammunition at this sensitive moment. It might be best concentrate on reference to economic matters.

Minister Dooge stated that there were one or two other matters he would like to raise. He had received representations from relatives of Irish prisoners

in British Jails regarding the problems of making visits. There was a real problem for many relatives from the North in making visits in terms of travel and cost. There had been very real humanitarian representations to him. He was aware of British problems in this area but he wouldn't like to see no exceptions ever being made. Lord Gowrie said that there was not a difficulty regarding the return to Northern prisons of "non terrorist" criminals. There was a real deterrent effect in having people convicted in Britain serving their sentence there since most would prefer serve their sentence in the North. Sir Philip Woodfield said there could be no desire to have a repeat of the situation that had occurred over the Price sisters. Minister Dooge said he was thinking of the problems faced by widows and families in making visits. He was only asking the British side to think about this matter.

Minister Dooge stated that he had received representations concerning the Prevention of Terrorism Act and its operation. Mr Neligan mentioned that a detailed reply had been received on this issue following Embassy representations. Minister Dooge said he appreciated the problems but it seemed to him there was some cause for concern regarding the manner of the Act's operation on occasion in terms of innocent people. Lord Gowrie said that a police call on people in Britain to report lodgers with Irish accents might have caused some problems.

Minister Dooge raised the question of compensation for roads damaged by the British Army in Killyclougher. This matter had gone on for ten years. He had received very strong representations. Secretary of State Prior said the matter would be looked at.

Minister Dooge said that he would discuss the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Council with Mr Atkins. He wondered about representations at the Parliamentary tier level from the North and the establishment of an Assembly. What was the British view on timing here? Secretary of State Prior stated that nothing could be done in this area yet. There were some people in the North who believed the only reason for devolution was to include Northern representatives in the Parliamentary tier. He would have to "stall" on this matter and he felt it was best proceed with devolution possibilities before looking at it. To talk publicly now about this would undermine progress on devolution.

Minister Dooge asked whether he had any time framework in mind. Secretary of State Prior said that Assembly elections would hopefully take place this year. Those elected will take time to settle down. It was best if moves regarding

the parliamentary tier came from within the Assembly rather than be immediately pressed on them. He could not see any progress this year on the parliamentary question. Minister Dooge said it was a matter of concern to have movement in this area as soon as possible. Was the Secretary of State talking of around fifteen months? Secretary of State Prior agreed with this. Minister Dooge said the issue was of great importance in political terms since the question of timing in relation to the parliamentary tier had been a matter of some political controversy in Ireland. Secretary Prior agreed on the need for sensitivity and noted in this context the impending general election in Ireland.

The meeting of the Council began at 10.55 a.m. and concluded at 12.15 p.m.

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