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~~c.c. Secretary to the Govt -~~

~~H. Wickham~~

✓ Mr Hurley — to see & file by 14/4

Meeting between the Government and the Alliance Party, 11 April 1983

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1. Attendance

On the Government side the Taoiseach, Dr Garret FitzGerald T.D., the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Peter Barry T.D., the Minister for Health and Social Welfare, Mr Barry Desmond T.D., Mr Dermot Nally, Department of the Taoiseach, Mr Seán Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs, Messrs Kirwan and Murray, Department of the Taoiseach, and Messrs Burke and Ó Ceallaigh, Department of Foreign Affairs, were present. The Alliance Party delegation consisted of Party Leader, Mr Oliver Napier, Mr David Cook, Mr John Cushnahan, Mr Seán Neeson, Mr William Glendinning and Ms Jane Copeland.

Report on meeting
with alliance

2. The meeting, including lunch, lasted for three-and-a-half hours.

3. In welcoming the Alliance Party, the Taoiseach said that he was glad the meeting was taking place. He had hoped to see the Alliance people before Easter but in the event that had not proved possible. Since entering into Government last December his preoccupations had been mainly of a domestic nature. He had had, however, to take decisions in the area of Anglo-Irish relations and the Forum for a New Ireland.

4. On coming into Government it had seemed to him that the prospects of making progress of a concrete kind in Anglo-Irish relations seemed unlikely given the possibility of a British election in June or October of this year. In these circumstances he felt a full bilateral Anglo-Irish summit was not likely to be fruitful. Indeed if one took place at all it might have negative results. He attaches enormous importance to establishing a position of trust and confidence with the British Government. For these reasons, rather than seeking an Anglo-Irish summit he had sought a longer than usual bilateral meeting on the occasion of the European Council in March. He had had a useful chat with Prime Minister Thatcher and had been confirmed in his view that it would have been a mistake to press at this time for a major summit. They had decided not to say anything in public of their meeting because of the damage which had been done in the past by

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conflicting statements or interpretations issued after such meetings. His present policy is to try to establish the ground work in preparation for action which might be taken after the next British election. He wished to assure the Alliance Party that the Government sees the development of Anglo-Irish relations as an absolute priority. The Government has gone as far and as fast as it can in that direction. The Taoiseach referred to the interview with Mr Napier carried in the Irish Times of 29 March in which he criticised the Taoiseach in relation to Anglo-Irish relations. The Taoiseach said that he will do everything he can before the British election to get things moving but that he did not expect any major developments nor did he expect the establishment of a parliamentary tier.

5. Mr Napier said he was grateful for the meeting and for the lunch. Dialogue is useful. There are differences between the Alliance Party and the Government but it is possible for them to talk together in a civilised way. At this stage John Cushnahan said that he wanted to put the position of the Alliance Party on the record. They are not simply a repository for those Catholics who favour the union. They are a non-sectarian party, 60% of whose support is drawn from the Protestant community and 40% from the Catholic. This means that there has to be a compromise within the party, hence their support for the union and their stance on power-sharing. They have fairly constant support from about 10% of the voters. Given this he does not understand why it was ever thought in the South that the Alliance might participate in a forum which is perceived in the North as a forum for nationalists. They have to keep faith with their Protestant supporters and indeed were taking a risk in coming to Dublin at all.

6. Mr Napier said there was no way in which Alliance could participate in the Forum. It is perceived in Northern Ireland as a discussion about the conditions for Irish unity and British withdrawal. This perception has been strengthened by statements made by Messrs Haughey, Mallon and Hume. Nonetheless, Alliance are anxious to maintain close links and contacts with the political parties in the South. In the absence of a local forum for seven years and in the absence of communication between politicians,

Alliance sees the Assembly as a small step forward towards a situation in which politicians can meet and discuss problems of mutual concern. The Assembly has worked better than he thought it would, especially in committee, and there is give and take between politicians on practical matters. The SDLP should not have boycotted it. Nonetheless, Alliance will not support the devolution of any power except on a power-sharing basis. The political representatives of the Nationalist community are entitled as of right to be involved in any devolution of power and Alliance will be intransigent on this.

7. Alliance put high priority on the development of Anglo-Irish relations and specifically on the establishment of a parliamentary tier. At this stage he does not wish to commit his party publicly to supporting the establishment of the parliamentary tier but if and when it is established they will support it. On fugitive offenders he thought the McGlinchey judgement a rather useful legal decision for the future. The Protestant view is that the Republic is a haven for terrorists. This may well be unfair, but it is true that there are people of Northern Ireland origin living in the South against whom there is strong circumstantial evidence, even if such evidence would be insufficient to lead to a prosecution either North or South. He is aware, particularly from RUC sources, that security cooperation is considered very good. It is as good as one could reasonably expect. However, the perception of the South being a haven for fugitive offenders exists, is not helpful to North-South relations and he would like to see it explored.

8. Turning to economic matters, Mr Napier referred to Harland and Wolff which he said was in the most serious difficulties it has had since the 1930's. He wondered if it would be possible for us to take more than hard economics into account when dealing with Harland and Wolff and also if it would be possible to look at areas other than shipping in which they might get contracts from the South. Turning to the gas pipeline, Mr Seán Neeson said that while there is a need for greater North-South economic cooperation the evidence would seem to point to recent decline. The gas pipeline is an important symbol. In November the British Minister, Butler, had told him that the deal was almost concluded.

There has been undue delay since then for which both sides are to blame. It would be a great tragedy if the deal did not go through. Over 2,000 jobs in the gas industry in Northern Ireland are at stake and he is meeting the Trade Unionists involved this week. The delay has led to people turning to other fuels and the market for gas is now in decline because the future of the industry has not been secured. In terms of cooperation in tourism he thought that we should look at the possibility of providing incentives for Northerners to take their holidays in the South.

9. The Taoiseach in response said that there is considerable understanding and sympathy for Alliance within the Fine Gael party. As a Government they have to deal with all parties in Northern Ireland. He feels it important that the SDLP hold as much as possible of the Catholic vote which does not go to the Alliance Party. (Oliver Napier agreed with this.) The Government wants to work with both the SDLP and Alliance. There are certain areas in which it is possible to make progress with Unionists. He tried in the past to make progress on those problems which are remediable and he will continue to do so.

10. The Taoiseach in referring to the Alliance view of the Forum as a body limited to Irish nationalists, said that he does not see it in quite that way. He wants to put on the record the sequence of events which led up to the acceptance of the wording used in the Government statement of 11 March. In 1969 an Inter-Party Committee on the Constitution was set up. Its purpose was to look at the implications for Irish unity of events. In 1973 a further committee was established to investigate the conditions which would prove conducive to Irish unity. The Government statement of 11 March establishing the Forum for the first time indicated inter-party agreement on a text which made no reference to Irish unity but which instead concentrated on conditions which would bring about lasting peace and stability within the island. This is not to say that the political parties in the South are not in favour of Irish unification but it is worth making the point that the formulation is different from previous formulae.

11. John Cushnahan said that Alliance would wish to help strengthen the SDLP against Provisional Sinn Féin. They accepted how the

Taoiseach sees the Forum but they are in a position where other parties see it differently. Mr Haughey has said that he sees the Forum as a step in the preparation for British withdrawal while the SDLP say that the Government has endorsed the SDLP proposal which was for Nationalists only. He thought it hurtful that Alliance views had not been sought before positions had been taken up.

12. In response, the Taoiseach said he understood Alliance feeling. Indeed, Fine Gael had felt the same way about the SDLP proposal. He is not in a position now to say why the Forum was established in the manner in which it was established. He is anxious to create circumstances in which the maximum feasible input can come from Protestants in Northern Ireland so as to enlighten and educate public opinion here. He hoped that out of this would emerge different concepts and models for the future which would help lessen Alliance and Unionist fears. It might be that the Forum would not be agreeable to them but even if unacceptable it could well help to reduce tension.

13. Mr Glendinning unfavourably compared the present situation with that of a year ago. Consent had at that stage been understood as meaning that the Protestants in Northern Ireland had the right to say no. The Taoiseach is now seen as having moved away from that position. The problem is one of perception, the Forum being linked with SDLP perceptions on Northern Ireland particularly in relation to the guarantee and the veto. In response, the Taoiseach said that Fine Gael had never accepted the SDLP perceptions on the guarantee nor had it accepted the Fianna Fáil position. His view had consistently been that change could only come about with the consent of the majority in Northern Ireland. Mr Cushnahan said that Fine Gael are now seen as being allied with those who are misrepresenting Fine Gael's view in Northern Ireland.

14. The Taoiseach referred to the 1979 Fine Gael document "Ireland - Our Future Together". Both Fine Gael and Labour had looked at models other than ^{which would appear less threatening to unionists.} a unitary state/ They are now trying to get a consensus among Irish nationalists other than Fine Gael and Labour to look at similar models. This had been achieved as can be seen from the agreed terms of reference for the Forum.

This marks considerable progress and because there is no mention of a united Ireland it will make it easier for unionists to come and give an account of their fears. He expects positive results. The idea for the Forum had originated in a speech he gave in Pittsburg and had then been latched onto by the SDLP which had limited it to Nationalists only. The Government have made clear that such limitations are unacceptable.

15. The Minister for Health and Social Welfare, Mr Desmond T.D., said that the Labour Party would have preferred the SDLP to participate in the Assembly. Their decision not to do so was a serious misjudgement on their part. They had hoped Alliance could participate in the Forum and perhaps in time it would be possible for the SDLP to participate in the Assembly and the Alliance to participate in the Forum. Whatever the interpretation, the terms of reference of the Forum are quite specific. Their party is anxious to maintain relations with the Assembly in certain areas. Since becoming Minister he has insisted on the restoration of North-South contacts in the health and social security areas.

16. In response, Mr Napier said if the Forum were perceived in terms of the wording of the statement of 11 March the Alliance Party might be able to take a political gamble and participate but the statement made by Seamus Mallon following the 11 March statement in which he said that the Forum was one of Nationalists, the purpose of which was to bring about British withdrawal, together with statements made by Messrs Haughey and Hume, make it impossible for them to do so. Mr Cushnahan said that their viewpoints had not been disowned by the Government. Given the interpretations, Alliance would be blasted out of politics if they participated. In response to a plea from the Taoiseach not to close the gate to making a submission to the Forum, Mr Napier summarised his position. They are declining the invitation to participate. They will keep an interested eye on the Forum's deliberations. The area of making a submission to the Forum is being left open pending developments. In response to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who asked if they might be able to put their views to committees, Mr Napier said the Forum cannot be seen in total isolation from the Assembly. The Forum is seen as taking the place of the Assembly. Alliance would be particularly helped if there could be some cross-border

cooperation with the Assembly and if there were some dove-tailing between the Forum and the Assembly.

17. The Taoiseach asked Alliance not to formally review their position for a while but to let the Forum take its course and see how it evolves. If its constructive purpose becomes clear and there is some input from Unionists outlining their fears and perceptions then perhaps Alliance might find it possible to make a submission. Mr Napier said he would not rule that out. The Taoiseach thought it important the Forum should end before the end of the year which would help reduce the tendency to see it as a rival of the Assembly. Until it reports in a hopefully constructive way he does not expect it will do much good and the sooner it reports the better. He would expect a great deal of its work to be done in the period between July and September when the Dáil is not in session and he mentioned that Mr Hume is insistent that it has a fixed term. He could tell Mr Napier privately that the parties have agreed there will be an independent chairman. It is unfortunate that there is a lack of inter-party communication in Northern Ireland. He welcomes the Alliance stand on power-sharing which is of great importance to us all. In confidence he thought it possible that the Encounter group might get off the ground reasonably soon and he thought it would be useful if Alliance could welcome its establishment when it is announced. This Mr Napier promised to do. The McGlinchey case will be followed by others and the State will ensure that the most favourable cases are pursued. Alliance will understand of course that extradition cannot be provided retrospectively.

18. The Taoiseach continued by saying that the question of a contract for Harland and Wolff had been let slip last year and the ESB had gone ahead and almost entered into a contract. He had written to Harland and Wolff explaining the situation and asking if there are possibilities for contracts from other organisations which would be helpful to them. There will be a meeting at the end of this month in this regard. Mr Napier said here that the flexibility of Harland and Wolff is not great and that they see themselves primarily as shipbuilders. Mr Neeson thought that some of the Harland and Wolff workers felt they are being used for political

purposes and in these circumstances felt it important that the Government not try to make too much political capital out of any contacts. The Taoiseach said he would not publicly stress any contacts with Harland and Wolff until such stage as contracts are agreed. On the gas pipeline he said that a change in exchange rates had made the proposition less attractive to the British who now want to change the rates previously agreed and had put us under considerable pressure on this point and on the question of timing when Ministers met recently in London. The problem is on the British side who are trying to renege to their benefit. Mr Burke mentioned that there is still a gap on sharing exchange risks and on a formula for escalating the price over a 20-year period.

19. The Taoiseach said they had hoped that they would try and meet more regularly in future than they had in the past.

20. Summing up, Mr Napier said that relations and understanding are better with Fine Gael and Labour than with others. He welcomed the present meeting, which he found useful and frank. He said he would say this to the press and also why Alliance will not go into the Forum. He is in favour of the development of Anglo-Irish relations and will make clear to the press that he is not criticising the Government in this area. He will say the fugitive offenders question was discussed and that Alliance will wish to see developments in the Supreme Court. He is satisfied with security cooperation and is not critical of the Government in connection with Harland and Wolff. He said that the Alliance Party would not favour a joint statement but had no problems with the attached statement issuing in the name of the Government.

D. Ó Ceallaigh

D. Ó Ceallaigh
Anglo-Irish Section

13 April 1983

cc. P.S. 06

P.S.S.

Mr Burke

Mr Henry

*Mr Murray, D. Ó Ceallaigh
Embassies London and Washington*