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MEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH AND THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER
MRS. THATCHER, FONTAINEBLEAU, JUNE 26, 1984

1. The Prime Minister was accompanied by Sir Robert Armstrong Cabinet Secretary and Mr. Powell her private secretary. The undersigned accompanied the Taoiseach. The meeting began shortly after 9 a.m. and concluded at 9.45 a.m.
2. After some discussion of the nature of the briefing appearing in the media on (the nature of) the "British problem", during which the Taoiseach mentioned his difficulty in understanding how the present formula would work in 1985 and later years, the Prime Minister said that she would accept a figure equivalent to two-thirds of the "proper gap".
3. The Taoiseach then went on to say that he appreciated that the British were still working on the proposals which had been put to them on 11 May and that we would be hearing from them when they had fully considered these matters. He appreciated the reaction which had been conveyed that the Sunningdale formula might perhaps appear inadequate to the unionists and having reflected had conveyed further proposals in relation to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, which we were willing to change if a package of substance emerged. The important thing was to end alienation. The Prime Minister enquired as to whether we would win a referendum on Articles 2 and 3.
4. The Taoiseach said that in his view there was a mood in the country, following the work which had been done in the Forum which meant that a referendum on Article 2 and 3 could be carried if the package is of such substance as to have a real prospect of winning political acceptance by the Northern minority and ending their alienation. This followed in part from the exposure of our public opinion to unionist opinion which had been strongly expressed in public sessions of the Forum. It was significant that when he had said on television that joint authority would not affect sovereignty, there had been no adverse reaction.

There had been a remarkable change from former attitudes in recent times especially following the Forum deliberations.

5. The Prime Minister asked if this change of attitude would hold up after a full campaign. She accepted that what the Taoiseach was saying reflected present views but what would happen during an election campaign? What the Taoiseach was saying might well reflect the underlying feeling but in an atmosphere of scares and smears other things could operate on people's minds.
6. The Taoiseach said that he was fully aware of these dangers, but the public mood now was very different from what it had been. If the solution which emerged from these discussions had the full support of the SDLP, then it would be carried. They held the effective balance of power in the Republic on this issue. They were the voice of sanity in Northern Ireland. Any suggestion could be opposed, but with the SDLP's support he doubted if opposition would be successful. He had noted a new phenomenon in the Fine Gael and Labour parties. There was in them a very deep commitment to a solution. Many of them would welcome the chance to go out and campaign to tackle what he would describe as republican rhetoric. There was a deep resentment amongst many people at the way in which the past had imposed itself on us. They would conduct a campaign with enthusiasm and confidence.
7. The Prime Minister said that any change would have to be something which both communities in Northern Ireland could accept. She enquired as to what the Taoiseach was proposing in respect of Articles 2 and 3. The Taoiseach said that he had not finalised a proposition yet, with precision. What he had in mind was something which would withdraw the territorial claim and express an aspiration, along with an acknowledgement that the existing situation could not be changed unless and until a majority of the people agreed to change. The precise formula would have to be given considerable thought. The Prime Minister said that the trouble was that if we failed both countries would be left with a much worse problem. The Taoiseach said that

the problem would never be solved unless we take risks. Any proposal must be such that it would be seen by the SDLP and their supporters as sufficient to end alienation. We had come on the joint authority solution after much deliberation and with great care. The Prime Minister said that this involved derogation from sovereignty. The Taoiseach said that in his view this was not so. Joint authority was simply the method which the British Government might choose to regulate their affairs in one part of the kingdom. The SDLP had been insistent in the Forum on the inclusion of joint authority. They were not prepared to agree to a report involving only a unitary State or federalism or Confederalism; in their view joint authority must also be included as an option, so that one at least of the alternatives would be a short-term prospect. They had been so strong on this point on occasions, pointing to the unrealism of limiting proposals to ones that involved unionist acceptance of a change of sovereignty leading to a united Ireland in the near future, that he felt many unionists, if present at these private sessions, would have been struck by the way in which their point of view was presented realistically by the SDLP. John Hume in particular had a very strong personal commitment to the inclusion of the concept.

Whatever package was agreed had to be acceptable to the minority. If it were inadequate, its presentation in conjunction with an Articles 2 and 3 referendum could risk destabilization in the South also. He fully appreciated these risks, but in this connection he referred the Prime Minister to the referendum on the extension of voting rights. Fianna Fail had shown their unhappiness with this and had in fact, even campaigned against the change in one area. Despite this opposition there had been a 3 to 1 vote in favour of the extension. This instinctive desire to be fair and reciprocate the rights accorded to Irish residents in the UK had shown itself without any campaign being mounted in its favour and despite quite strong underground opposition. People had voted "Yes" overwhelmingly.

The Prime Minister asked if the Taoiseach had thought about

the timing of a bilateral meeting. Sir Robert Armstrong said that there would be further contacts next month at official level when the Prime Minister and her colleagues had looked further at the problems, and a bilateral meeting perhaps take place around the end of July. The Prime Minister said this could be difficult because of pressures at that time arising from the end of the Parliamentary session. However, the Prime Minister said that it would be useful to have the opportunity to talk further. What was involved was some "very, very fundamental" decisions, if this matter was to be taken further. What sort of description was the Taoiseach thinking of for the present meeting when the press enquired? The Taoiseach said that he would refer to their having a useful discussion but would, as was his custom on these occasions, refuse to go beyond that. The Prime Minister then raised the question of the debate to be held in Westminster on 2nd July. The Taoiseach enquired as to whether there should be further discussions after the debate. The Prime Minister said "Yes but not immediately".

The Taoiseach then went on to refer to the possible willingness on the part of some unionist politicians to talk to him. At the same time there was considerable nervousness. There had been contact with a DUP politician in recent months and there seemed to be a willingness to talk privately at a high level in the OUP, with whom there had been tentative contacts.

The Taoiseach then went on to refer to the need for absolute confidentiality in the impending discussion and to the way in which stories on what was being considered on the British side had got out - specifically in the Boston Globe about ten days ago. Sir Robert Armstrong said in reply to a query from the Prime Minister that he had seen these articles and attributed the leak to the NIO. The Taoiseach stressed again the absolute necessity for confidentiality. The Prime Minister said that there was no way the Taoiseach could see anyone in London without the story leaking.

The Prime Minister then referred to discussions against the background of the New Ireland Forum Report. The Taoiseach said that he had also read the Unionist document - The Way Forward - very carefully, and that it contained material that foreshadowed in some quite surprising ways key points in the Forum Report. He gave the Prime Minister a sheet of paper on which eight such points were noted.

Sir Robert Armstrong then referred to Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of the Forum Report. The Prime Minister said there were three things in the report, unitary state, confederation and joint authority which she thought were not practicable. There were many things that they had to look at. The Report, was however, a considerable political achievement. In whatever emerged in the end they must satisfy both unionist as well as nationalist opinion. The proposals in the Report were, she thought, not quite right. They must continue the search for progress. There would be no reference in the Westminster debate to what the Taoiseach and she were considering.

The Taoiseach said that he wanted to stress again that we were not talking about joint sovereignty. The Prime Minister said that joint authority implied joint sovereignty. The Taoiseach said that under the proposals sovereignty would remain with the Crown. It was for the Crown to decide in the exercise of its sovereignty how a particular area would be administered. That was what was involved in the joint authority proposals. The Prime Minister said she understood that what the Taoiseach was talking about was a sovereign decision on a method of administration. The Taoiseach said that it would be a pity if this distinction were lost in a simplistic equation of joint sovereignty and joint authority. He had gone to considerable trouble to make this distinction on TV after the publication of the report and he noted that this had evoked no criticism at home. The Prime Minister said that if the proposition was reversed and the proposal was made that there should be joint security in an area twenty miles south of the border how would we view the matter? The Taoiseach said that while some might say this involved sovereignty, the

main reaction to this would be first that this was not necessary in that particular area and second it would involve two borders instead of one.

He then went on to refer to the British statement on the Forum Report the full text of which he said had never got to the Irish papers. While it contained positive elements that were welcome he had noted that it had suggested that all three models, including joint authority were unacceptable because of their implications for sovereignty. It was important to avoid saying that joint authority and joint sovereignty were the same; the whole thrust of what had been done on our side was to open up a clear distinction between them. The Taoiseach then went on to say that on the question of joint security it was important that there should be a link in some way to the political aspect, and this was opened up by the concept of joint authority not prejudicial to the issue of sovereignty. The Taoiseach then went on to refer to his proposed meeting with British Opposition leaders tomorrow. He said that he would be talking about the realities and the framework as set out in the Forum Report. He would be asking them not to go off at tangents.

The Taoiseach said that he would be stressing the need to indicate an openness to various proposals. The Prime Minister said that she thought the idea of "openness" was very good. It was important not to polarise opinion. The unionists would see almost anything as a step towards the assumptions of the South as to sovereignty.

The Taoiseach said that in any change it was most

important to emphasise the necessity for consent in relation to the issue of sovereignty. It was also important to emphasise durability. Whatever happens must appear to be once and for all, rather than a process that would seem threatening. The unionists must be assured that the proposals would last. They needed durability. For the minority there must be a sense of participation. He then went on to analyse the recent vote in Northern Ireland and the degree of hostility towards Sinn Fein which had been reflected in it. Some unionists had, in fact, voted for John Hume, as had a large part of Alliance supporters, and many others had passed on their preferences to John Hume. The Prime Minister went on to thank the Taoiseach for action to inhibit Sinn Fein tactics, in particular, their attempts at personation. The Taoiseach said that he hoped before the local elections next year something further could be done to prevent widespread personation. In fact he had heard that John Hume had said that he would not stand for election unless some firm measures were taken by requiring people perhaps to identify themselves at polling stations. He went on to say in the South we might have to consider similar measures. In reply to a query from Armstrong as to the extent of personation in the South the Taoiseach said that there had been some in times past but that now it was not a serious problem with us, but could become so again at a General Election when Sinn Fein supporters might cross the border to cast votes in the South. After some discussion on the subject of identity cards, the Taoiseach went on to enquire as to how matters under discussion should be progressed. Would the Prime Minister consider a conference involving all the parties as distinct from an intergovernmental meeting?

The Prime Minister said that we would have to consider at what stage the present consultations would be enlarged. The Taoiseach said that if we could agree on the direction in which we were moving, perhaps a statement of principles

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could be prepared for joint publication. A basis for this statement could be similarities between the unionist document "The Way Forward" and the Forum Report. At this point he handed over the attached summary of similarities. Armstrong said that it was important to get a framework within which to work. The Prime Minister said that whatever happened we must not cause alarm.

9. At this point the meeting broke up with both the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister going for the family photograph session of the European Council.

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cc. Mr. S. Donlon.