

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2015/89/88
Creation Date(s):	1 April 1985
Extent and medium:	11 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Handwritten signature

ANGLO IRISH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT TALKS, 30 MARCH, 1985.

The exchanges took place in the British delegation rooms in the Council building in Brussels and lasted from 9.20 am to 10.00 am.

Mrs. Thatcher was accompanied by Sir Robert Armstrong and Charles Powell. The Taoiseach was accompanied by Dermot Nally and the undersigned.

Mrs. Thatcher spoke from a brief, the Taoiseach from a page of notes.

The Taoiseach began by expressing condemnation and sympathy on the murder of RUC Reserve Constable John Bell by the Provisional IRA the previous day. He added that the death sentences passed on the murderers of Garda Hand would be reprieved and he mentioned the recent murder of an alleged IRA informer in Co. Cork, John Corcoran.

Mrs. Thatcher said this sort of thing seems to be happening everyday. She invited the Taoiseach to set out his views on the present situation.

The Taoiseach said that despite the static which had followed Chequers - and it had been fairly heavy - he felt that the two sides had been making progress. He felt that this created an historic window of opportunity for Mrs. Thatcher and himself to go forward on the basis of the Chequers Communique.

Handwritten mark

Mrs. Thatcher talking about expectations said that the Taoiseach's own speech of the week had created a problem: it was not what the Taoiseach had said but how it had been reacted to. She said that she agreed that the Chequer's Communique is the point of departure. She said that the Mail on Sunday article had "set us back" with the parties in Northern Ireland. "We don't seem to be getting anywhere with the SDLP".

The Taoiseach said that "we have been somewhat worried about the extent of the briefing on your side and indeed about the article in the Mail on Sunday". "We can understand how British Ministers may feel it necessary to do a certain amount of briefing in order to prepare the atmosphere.

Mrs. Thatcher intervened to say that she did not see any need for briefing.

The Taoiseach continuing said that we had talked to the author of the Mail on Sunday article on Saturday and had played down all his expectations to the point where he had said he had no intention to write for the following day's newspaper. He must subsequently have had contact with some senior source on the British side. We cannot think but it could not be excluded that the motive of whoever that was was malicious.

Mrs. Thatcher said that it was indeed very very malicious. She said that Bernard (Ingham) had taken a great deal of trouble the previous Saturday to prevent publication and had spent the entire day seeking to dissuade the author from going ahead. She added (slightly defensively) that we would understand why Hurd had to make the statement he did on the previous Sunday.

The Taoiseach said that he thought it was noteworthy that both John Hume and Nicholas Scott had sought to cool speculation by using the same words to dampen the credibility of the story.

Mrs. Thatcher asked the Taoiseach to set out his view of the situation, aside from the press problems.

The Taoiseach said that he saw that there was "some worry on your side" that the SDLP would not go along with devolution. He said that the SDLP position was firstly: they don't believe that the Unionists will get involved in devolution on a basis which would give the SDLP a role; second, the SDLP are, in fact, willing to get involved in devolution; third, the SDLP wish to see what happens on the Anglo-Irish front first.

Mrs. Thatcher said that we were going ahead fairly well with the Anglo-Irish talks but making no progress with the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland.

The Taoiseach said that it would be unrealistic to expect to have progress with the constitutional parties before 15 May elections.

Mrs. Thatcher said: "I perfectly understand that".

Mrs. Thatcher said that there were difficulties with Paisley. He had sought a written assurance that the talks that were going on with him and the other party leaders were on the basis of an internal solution. She said that "we have answered" that the talks with the Irish Government are on the basis of the Chequers Communiqué. "We are now into a phase that is somewhat sensitive" (Note: referring to press leaks etc). She said that we are possibly looking at a period between mid May and mid June for another meeting if possible. Changing the subject, she said to the Taoiseach "you don't have to answer this if you don't want to", but she had been very puzzled by

Hume's attempt to see the IRA. She wondered what was the motive for that.

The Taoiseach said that the motive had been perfectly clear and that Hume had achieved it, although he himself had felt it necessary to disassociate himself from Hume's initiative. Hume had set out to create circumstances which would ensure that his party would not have to have any association with Sinn Fein by proving that Sinn Fein were no more than the creatures of the IRA. He had achieved this quite skilfully in the Northern Ireland context.

Mrs. Thatcher intervened to say that "that was what I thought".

The Taoiseach said that, notwithstanding the position he had himself taken, his relations with Hume continued to be excellent. He added that neither Mrs. Thatcher nor himself could always lay down absolute rules for how the constitutional politicians in Northern Ireland handled their problems.

Mrs. Thatcher raised the question of a fund in the United States. She had discussed this with the Mayor of San Francisco. What she had in mind was a charitable fund. She said that "we are not making progress on this".

There was then a brief exchange between Mrs. Thatcher and Armstrong in the course of which it was said that the question of a Reconstruction Fund had been discussed with the US Administration but at a level just below that of President Reagan himself.

The Taoiseach expressed support for the Reconstruction Fund. He added too that Speaker O'Neill had been influential in securing the interest of the Administration in this idea. He added that he thought there was a potential willingness in the US to consider a large sum of money for this purpose.

Mrs. Thatcher, reverting to the charity fund (which she clearly conceives as a separate voluntary fund-raising effort) said that something like that would be a great deal better than NORAID. She wondered whether such a mechanism could be established.

The Taoiseach mentioned the Ireland Fund and went on to say that one of his backbenchers had a particular mechanism in view but that the Government had some doubts about its viability. He felt, however, that something of this sort could be done. He mentioned the Reconstruction Fund and the importance of the role of Speaker O'Neill.

Mrs. Thatcher said "I think it might ease the way considerably".

The Taoiseach said that a matching European effort would be desirable.

Mrs. Thatcher said that she felt that this could possibly come from the Structural Funds. Changing the subject, she asked the Taoiseach "what do we do now?"

The Taoiseach said that the Irish Response to the British Proposal was now on the table and seems to have only one set of square brackets.

Mrs. Thatcher said that "a firm statement by you on the status of Northern Ireland would be important, that is, if you can't change the Constitution, which we would still like," but which may not be possible.

The Taoiseach said that there is a lot to be said for using language for this purpose which we know to be immune from challenge in court. Uncertainty about this had set both sides back by several months in 1974. What he had in mind was incorporating the Irish Statement in the Sunningdale "Agreement" in an international agreement to be registered with the United Nations.

Officials on both sides found they did not have with them a copy of this document - it was supplied at the end of the meeting.

Mrs. Thatcher said the statement on the status of Northern Ireland would have to be something "very, very formal".

The Taoiseach, returning to the question of the central document, said that we now have a draft document with only one set of square brackets, and they related to the question of mixed courts.

Mrs. Thatcher said she had been struck at how passionately Lord Lowry was against that idea.

Armstrong intervened to say that Lowry had so informed the Taoiseach and the Lord Chancellor.

The Taoiseach said that what was involved here, of course, was a reciprocal arrangement which would create problems for us also. Nevertheless, we were prepared to go ahead with it.

Mrs. Thatcher said that she had been struck by the extent of his (Lord Lowry's) opposition.

Armstrong intervened to say that this was possibly because Lowry was not aware of the full context of what was envisaged.

The Taoiseach agreed. He went on to say that he saw some possibilities in the fact that one of our leading criminal lawyers had recently taken silk in Northern Ireland.

There was then a brief discussion on the difficulty which might arise in relation to oaths to be taken by judges.

Armstrong said that from their point of view it seems to be OK if what was involved was a Court of First Instance and not a Court of Appeal.

The Taoiseach said that we have a considerable difficulty here but we are prepared to take steps to get over it, if necessary.

The Taoiseach again reverted to the text and to the fact that it had only one set of square brackets. He said that in addition to the central document, there was the important question of the CBMs notably the UDR and the RUC.

He gave as an example the district of Creggan in Derry where the Post Office had been closed down because the RUC could not protect it. This had given rise to a situation where local people, to cash their social security payments, were obliged to use the very limited bus service or to take taxis which were arranged by the IRA.

Mrs. Thatcher wondered whether pensions could not be sent by post. On the other hand she felt on reflection that the postman might be mugged. She wondered whether bank accounts might not be used.

The Taoiseach said that in such areas bank accounts were not of much use. He said he had mentioned Creggan as an illustration of the problem of policing. Could there not be an unarmed community police force working with the RUC?

Mrs. Thatcher said "you mean like the 'B' Specials. The Taoiseach said: No; that would be entirely the wrong name to call this unarmed force; he recalled to Mrs. Thatcher that we on our side had instituted our own unarmed police force in the middle of a civil war and that, while they had had difficulty in establishing themselves, they had in fact succeeded in doing so. He said that in Northern Ireland there are now 3 "no-go" areas for the RUC: West Belfast, Derry and South Armagh.

Armstrong, in response to a question from Mrs. Thatcher, confirmed what the Taoiseach had said about Creggan

The Taoiseach said that what he was proposing was that special unarmed local police forces would be established in a "Northern Ireland Police Service", without taking from the RUC.

Mrs. Thatcher said; "You mean vigilantes?"

The Taoiseach said "No, rather, fully trained local police".

Armstrong intervened to say that he understood what the Taoiseach had in mind was some form of "special constables" within a Northern Ireland Police Service which would include the RUC.

The Taoiseach said; yes, but I wouldn't call them "special constables".

Mrs. Thatcher again asked was West Belfast a no-go area for the RUC.

Armstrong said, yes, when they go in they have to go in large numbers with military support.

The Taoiseach said "What you need is a man on the beat in a uniform who would be acceptable to the local people".

Mrs. Thatcher asked "are there people who would join such a force?".

The Taoiseach said that "we are told that there are". He added that the British should not be opposed to a degree of differentiation within the police force for its own sake; there were 46 Police Forces in Brussels alone and there are many separate constabularies in Britain itself. On that point he felt that there should not be concern as long as the local forces are part of the overall service and clearly subject to its discipline.

Mrs. Thatcher asked "how would you know whether potential recruits were IRA people?"

The Taoiseach said that on the ground everyone knows who is and is not in the IRA and that the SDLP and the RUC could between them identify those who should be ruled out.

Mrs Thatcher asked "what will the RUC say?"

Powell said that such people (ie. such a force) would be targets, precisely because they were unarmed.

The Taoiseach said that that would be their strength and would ensure local community support for them. He added that the Provisional IRA get a degree of support because they themselves provide policing in the no-go areas. This is reflected in their campaign against drugs in the Republic which is a difficult problem. "We can see what they are getting at". He described the activities of the IRA viz-a-viz various "Concerned Parents" groups as well as their strong armed tactics in getting rid of drug pushers.

Mrs. Thatcher said "thats very interesting". Changing the focus slightly, she added that she was concerned that her own people were getting major drug hauls because she feared that they might indicate an enormous amount of importation which was going undetected.

The Taoiseach said that when the Provisionals had recently had contact with Ghadaffy they asked for money, not for the purpose of campaigns of violence, but rather to get political progress going in the Republic. They were using the law and order issue, and specifically the drugs problem, as their main focus in their political campaign.

The Taoiseach, changing the subject, wondered whether Mrs. Thatcher and he should not aim at early June, for their next summit meeting. His view was that the meeting should not take place until we have everything worked out in detail.

Mrs. Thatcher said "absolutely". She added that while we could aim at a particular time we must not have a meeting until we are completely clear that everything has been agreed. For her part, she felt she now knew what were the sensitive things to say and not to say.

There followed a brief discussion on the statement for the press. The Irish draft was agreed by both sides.

The Taoiseach said he had had a number of invitations from groups of Tory MP's to come and talk to them on an off the record basis. He mentioned specifically "Nick's Diner".

Mrs. Thatcher was fairly negative on this idea. She felt that it would be impossible to do it without having publicity and that that would "alarm the 'Unionists".

The Taoiseach said that of course he would do it on the basis that there would be no publicity and he was only considering it on the basis that he sensed that there was a good deal of goodwill towards him at the moment.

Mrs. Thatcher said that there was fantastic goodwill towards him but "I'm worried about publicity".

This matter was left for possible further consideration but Mrs. Thatcher's general tone was fairly negative. There then followed a brief discussion on the question of Integrated Mediterranean Programmes.

As the meeting was breaking up, Mrs. Thatcher congratulated The Taoiseach on the Irish Government's handling of the funds in the Bank of Ireland in Navan. The Taoiseach mentioned a few background facts on this.

As the meeting was breaking up, Mr. Nally provided Mrs. Thatcher with a copy of the Sunningdale "agreement".

The Taoiseach pointed out the Irish text in the parallel texts and said that this was what we could agree to in an international agreement to be registered with the UN.

The atmosphere throughout the meeting was extremely relaxed and friendly. Mrs. Thatcher seems to be quite at ease and, on some points (eg. Hume's aborted talks with the IRA) showed a closer awareness than previously of the detail of politics in Northern Ireland.

Note

In an aside Armstrong told me that the Lord Chancellor had not been convinced about the need for mixed courts but that he was not fundamentally opposed to the idea.

M. J. Lillis

1 April 1985

cc: Taoiseach
Tanaiste
Minister
Minister for Justice
Attorney General
Secretary
Mr. Nally
Mr. Ward
Mr. Quigley