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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

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Meeting between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major
Rio de Janeiro, 11 June, 1992.

The Taoiseach met the Prime Minister in the Prime Minister's suite in the Copacabana Palace Hotel at 4.30 p.m. The Prime Minister was accompanied by Stephen Wall and the Taoiseach by the undersigned. The meeting lasted just over three quarters of an hour. A statement used for media purposes afterwards is attached. The main points of note in the meeting were -

- (i) the embarrassment caused to the British by the Danish referendum result and the obvious pains they are and will be taking to accommodate Denmark;
- (ii) the Prime Minister's assessment, based on the briefing he is getting, is that John Hume personally is responsible for the SDLP "hard-line" in the Strand I talks;
- (iii) the British view that the crucial element in the whole talks process will be the opening of Strand II talks and the occasion this will provide for the Unionists to talk with Dublin. This in British eyes will be a historic occasion.

These notes are not verbatim.

Prime Min.: How is the referendum going? Those bloody Danes - you needn't quote me - they have really opened a can of worms for the UK.

Taoiseach: I think the "no" vote has peaked: neutrality and abortion are coming up strongly as issues but I think all will be well on the day.

Prime Min.: Abortion is still a very big issue in the US. Then there is the whole question of population control. I was asked my views but I can spot a googlie a mile away.

Taoiseach: While we are on these issues - Foreign Ministers will meet next week. What they will be talking about can be very delicate for us. Would you ask your man to keep it as neutral as he can until we get over the referendum?

Prime Min.: The prospect of my getting legislation without knowing what the Danes are doing will be very difficult. The Danes have really ripped the bandage off.

Taoiseach: Also for me. They have caused us real difficulties.

Prime Min.: When must you hold your election?

Taoiseach: The latest date is June '94.

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Prime Min.: You have lots of time then. What about Northern Ireland? How are we going to deal with it? I would be very alarmed if there was a breakdown. If the talks go down, then we will have lost an opportunity for a very long time. I would be acutely alarmed at a breakdown.

John Hume's proposals for Strand II are very difficult, particularly that for a European Commissioner. Even if that were accepted in the talks, Parliament would never have accepted it. It really won't run. What is John playing at? What's he doing? There is not a hope in hell of getting that proposal through the Northern Unionists. We are lucky that they did not say that it was a wrecking proposal.

Taoiseach: It certainly was not put there to wreck anything.

Prime Min.: How does he think we can progress if that proposal remains?

Taoiseach: This is one more effort to solve the Northern problem. John Hume is not interested in a temporary solution. If it is not properly put together, it will fall apart. He is not pushing for a situation that will not work.

Prime Min.: If he stays where he is, he will kill it. We can't go to Strand II if the Unionists don't go. I am trying to act as a dispassionate judge and I see that they can't accept this proposal.

Taoiseach: What is the last report you have? I hear, within the last hour or so, that they are still talking.

Prime Min.: There is no movement at all from the SDLP. I am told by Mayhew that the Unionists will not move to Strand II on this basis.

Taoiseach: But nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Why will they not move to Strand II on that basis?

Prime Min.: Precisely - why won't John Hume move? If the process stops now, he is going to get egg on his face. The Churches and people I am meeting are saying that the public are getting fed up with all politicians. Since nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, why doesn't John Hume agree to move? To what extent do you control John?

Taoiseach: We don't control him. For example, the paper you are talking about was put in before we had full time to consider it.

Let's look at the problem.

Wall: The Unionists regarded John's submission as a wrecking paper.

Prime Min.: The idea of external Commissioners is just a non-starter.

Taoiseach: The paper is not there for all time.

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- Prime Min.: External Commissioners are a non-starter now. We have tried to get the Unionists to move forward. I have even bullied them but the harsh political reality is that John has something on the table which he is not going to get.
- Wall: From what Jeremy Hanley says in a report we have today, the Unionists feel that by going to Strand II, they are making a big concession.
- Prime Min.: They are!
- Taoiseach: What do the Unionists want out of Strand I?
- Wall: They could be held on board if what they are offering as a basis for discussion is an elected Commission.
- Taoiseach: Is that a Commission without other connections? Without London or Dublin? What are their proposals?
- Prime Min.: They won't accept an external Commissioner. Neither will I. Unless I can push the Unionists and you the SDLP, there will be no Strand I and no Strand II. Then the alternatives are - (1) a breakdown or - (2) my Government acting unilaterally.
- Wall: Mayhew has the feeling that John Hume is acting personally in all this.
- Prime Min.: What do you see as the end product?
- Taoiseach: An internal settlement will be no good: it will break down soon. Unless you can find something which both Governments can come in behind, then the process will break down. There is a mood now in Northern Ireland which supports the talks. There is a window of opportunity - but if what results is a patch-up job, if there is not enough in it for both sides, then either side can bring it down. Then, perhaps, the Anglo-Irish Agreement would again be the best basis.
- Prime Min.: I want to do better than that. I want to get the Unionists sitting down and talking to the Dublin Government - that is something we have not seen before! Mayhew is confident and robust but he feels now that there is not so much confidence. The impression we get is that it is John Hume personally who is holding back.
- On both sides, the non-leaders are more prepared to move. Can you move John Hume? In Strand II, how do you see things moving? Would you have any views on a general message from you and me, either separately or jointly?
- Taoiseach: I don't think that either of us should attend.

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Prime Min.: I agree entirely with you. To do that, would be to shift public pressure to us. In Strand II, there could be an opening statement or statements: there would then be a debate on Constitutional questions: then common issues: then Irish proposals and further discussion of Constitutional issues.

We should clear our minds on what end product might be open.

Taoiseach: An internal settlement just won't work. If everything is on the table, then there will be a certain amount of pressure to make it stick.

Prime Min.: We can only have an external arrangement if it will withstand sheer public pressure. Think of the Ulster workers' strike.

The fact is that an explosion will come if there is no settlement now. There is such a demand for peace in the North that people will make it work. That will be the case even if there is an imposed settlement.

There was some discussion at this point of SDLP memories of the Ulster workers' strike which, as then mis-managed by the British Government, led to the collapse of the Sunningdale arrangements.

Prime Min.: We must be concerned with two issues: the fall-out if talks fall apart; and the deliverability of any arrangement agreed.

How are things going internally in Ireland?

Taoiseach - gave a general description of conditions and then asked: Are the Unionists just in this with the purpose of removing the Anglo-Irish Agreement and nothing more?

Prime Min.: Yes - they want to negotiate something "better".

Taoiseach: I would be very very slow to get rid of the Agreement. There would be nothing in it for us if we thought that the only purpose the Unionists had was to get rid of the Agreement.

Prime Min.: I think they are genuinely looking for a way through: there is a new mood in Northern Ireland now. Look at the situation there: they have no local government structure: they have no control over anything - not even potholes.

Taoiseach: If that is their objective - (i.e. getting rid of the Anglo-Irish Agreement) - they won't achieve it.

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Prime Min.: Could we agree that both of us will give them a shove to Strand II? What we are at here is "softee, softee, catch the monkey". Is there anything else we need to cover?

Taoiseach: We need to be careful about softness on the Danes. We are all in trouble if that goes wrong: was the result due to the unpopularity of the Government?

Prime Min.: Yes, that and certain remarks about small nations. They were worried about excessive centralisation, Delors II; and certain anti-market groups plus women's groups are worried about social protection. We must be concerned about how we can help them.

Taoiseach: You are not entitled to think that the Danes will not accept Maastricht at the end of the road.

Prime Min.: The Germans are not too easy, either, on centralisation and EMU. We are thinking of some extended definition of subsidiarity. We want to get away from the idea of imposed centralisation and we are examining this.

When is a re-negotiation not a re-negotiation?

At this point, the meeting was interrupted, by an official who pointed out that the Prime Minister's schedule was already falling seriously behind.



Dermot Nally
16th June, 1992.

c.c. Secretary Dorr & Assistant Secretary O'hUiginn,
Department of Foreign Affairs;
Secretary Brosnan, Department of Justice; and
Dr. Martin Mansergh.