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Do see please
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CONFIDENTIAL

24 November 1993

Mr Seán O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Dear Assistant Secretary

CONVERSATION WITH SIR ROBIN BUTLER

The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Butler, joined me for lunch today and what follows is a report on the most important points emerging from our discussion.

Date for Dublin Summit

Sir Robin said there was still a strong possibility that the proposed date of 3 December would be adhered to. If that date holds it will be necessary to prepare very intensively in the meantime. A meeting in "Diner" format before 3 December was not favoured by Butler at this stage although he did say that it would probably be necessary for officials from the two sides to meet in a different mode. The problem was that the situation was changing on a daily basis. The Prime Minister would be in touch with the Taoiseach within the next 24 hours after completing a round of consultations, although he was not sure whether this would be done by phone or by letter. I suggested that given the nervous, jittery state of Unionist spokesmen it would be unwise to delay the meeting, assuming all the necessary preparations are completed. Butler agreed.

Prospects

Butler said that the document leaked to the Irish Press and the further Hume-Adams meeting over the week-end had created serious problems for the Prime Minister. I made the point that, in regard to the leaked paper, most of its content had already surfaced in the past either in speeches or statements by the Taoiseach and Tánaiste or in the course of the negotiations last year. Sir Robin's comment was that two passages in particular had frightened the Unionists. One was

the use of word "value" in the sentence: "neither would it be possible in respect of the British position which failed to acknowledge the full legitimacy and value of the goal of Irish unity by agreement..." The other was the oversight powers envisaged for the two Governments in relation to new institutions that might be created as part of a settlement package.

Molyneaux's Position

I asked Butler how he viewed the speech of Molyneaux in the House of Commons on 23 November. His reply was that they would have to see whether he was simply guarding his flank against Paisley or had "jumped off the bus" altogether. He agreed that Molyneaux's claim about Dublin's being a conduit for the IRA was utter nonsense. Butler drew attention to earlier remarks by Molyneaux about the bad advice John Major was receiving from his advisers. He concluded that he himself (Butler), John Chilcot and Steve Lyne were the people Molyneaux had in mind in that regard. I said that the remark that the OUP leader had attributed to the Taoiseach on the David Frost show about Articles 2 and 3 only gave half the picture. He had failed to mention the crucial point made by the Taoiseach that in the event of an overall settlement the Irish Government would be prepared to seek changes to the two Articles in a referendum. One could also deduce from Molyneaux's remarks, I said, that he suddenly realises the danger of placing too much emphasis on Articles 2 and 3. Whereas in the past these articles were convenient propaganda weapons for the Unionists, they now seem to realise that the price we are likely to exact for their removal may be too high to pay. Butler felt it would be very difficult to make any progress if the main body of Unionists were not on board. My reply was that any examination of Unionism over the past seventy years showed quite clearly that left to their own devices the Unionists were simply incapable of voluntary movement. A good example of that was evident in the early 1970's when Stormont had to be abolished. The Prime Minister of the day, Ted Heath, took personal charge of the Sunningdale negotiations. It was the British Government that achieved movement by the Unionists at that time. A similar situation may be developing today. Butler agreed that if peace could be achieved the whole atmosphere in Northern Ireland would be transformed, thus creating the right conditions for talks.

Rod?

Taoiseach's Interview with David Frost

I suggested to Butler that John Major should have been pleased by the Taoiseach's generous tribute to him on Sunday. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed this and expressed the view that the Taoiseach had performed superbly. Frost's style can be very deceptive, he said, and can take an interviewee off guard but the Taoiseach was, he said, too wily to fall into that

trap. In-general the Prime Minister had been delighted by the way the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste had been handling matters.

Prime Minister's Consultations

Sir Robin confirmed that the Prime Minister had a meeting on Northern Ireland with some Ministers yesterday. He proved rather evasive, however, when I tried to establish which Ministers were present. I got the impression that it was not the Cabinet sub-Committee on Northern Ireland which rarely meets and that in consulting and briefing on Northern Ireland the Prime Minister likes to include some key senior Ministers, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kenneth Clark, and the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, for the purpose of covering the different wings of the party, as well as the Northern Ireland Foreign and Defence Secretaries. John Major's tactics seemed to be to associate these senior figures, especially Howard on the right wing, with the course of action he was following in case things went badly wrong. Butler confirmed that Major has to tread very carefully as there are some who would be very quick in saying "I told you so", if matters go badly. I suggested to Butler that success would bring enormous rewards not only for John Major personally but also for his party and his Government. Butler did not disagree. He mentioned that with the divisive Maastricht issue behind them, the Cabinet were now working very cohesively. The right wing members, with the possible exception of Redwood, had not been rocking the boat. Peter Lilley, the Secretary for Social Security, had got on well with Kenneth Clark whilst Michael Portillo, the Chief Secretary of the Treasury, had had much success in the recent round of expenditure discussions prior to the budget which is due at the end of November.

Butler confirmed that the Prime Minister had conferred yesterday with Jim Kilfedder and would be meeting Paisley this evening. After completing this round of discussions and consulting again with Ministers, the Prime Minister would be in touch with the Taoiseach.

Need to Compromise

In the course of our discussion on Unionist intransigence and imaginary fears I made the point that both the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste had taken a very generous line, voluntarily and unilaterally and without waiting for resumed negotiations, in a desire to show good faith and as a friendly gesture towards the Unionists. All sides will have to make concessions. It would have been tempting on our side to wait and hold back the concessions we had made, using them as bargaining chips in the course of new talks. Butler readily acknowledged this and was full of praise for what had been done by us. I offered the view that with more enlightened leadership the Unionists would be striking a good deal now while they are still relatively strong, rather than run the risk of negotiating from a

position of weakness in the future. Butler seemed to agree with this.

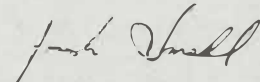
Attitude of Tory Party

When I drew attention to Norman Tebbit's recent negative remarks on Northern Ireland and other rumblings of discontent on the Tory right, Butler gave me to understand that the Prime Minister was rather relaxed about that aspect, being far more worried about the situation within the Unionist party. Norman Lamont's new-found interest in Northern Ireland did not worry him either because Lamont had become very bitter towards John Major personally and was trying to embarrass him at every opportunity. The reality was that Lamont was now a spent, insignificant force since losing his position as Chancellor of the Exchequer. What about the Northern Ireland Back-Bench Committee? Again Butler was quite dismissive and agreed that the pro-Unionist faction of the Tory party lacked leaders of the stature of Enoch Powell, Ian Gow and Airey Neave. We also noted that the rabid Euro-sceptic element of the party that gave Major such a trying time in relation to the Maastricht legislation would not necessarily be impressed by the fact that the nine Official Unionists sided with the Prime Minister in the crucial vote last July.

Arms Shipment

The news of the arms shipment from Poland had broken a few hours before we met and Butler was unaware of the seizure. I raised the matter to make the point that since a shipment of that size would surely have taken many months to organise, the planning of it would have started long before the current efforts of the two Governments to mount a peace initiative had been launched. I thought it advisable to say this in case the British side felt intimidated by any perceived correlation between the two. I naturally emphasised throughout my discussion with Butler the need for courage and statesmanship on both sides in order to achieve peace and a settlement.

Yours sincerely



Joseph Small
Ambassador