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SECRETMEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH AND THE BRITISH PRIME
MINISTER, LUXEMBOURG, FRIDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 1997

The Taoiseach Mr. Bertie Ahern TD met the British Prime Minister Mr. Tony Blair MP en marge of the Special European Council on Employment in Luxembourg. The Taoiseach was accompanied by Mr. Paddy Teahon, Mr. Dermot Gallagher, Mr. Joe Lennon and the undersigned. The Prime Minister was accompanied by his Diplomatic Secretary Mr. John Holmes and his Press Secretary Mr. Alastair Campbell.

The Taoiseach reported on his friendly constructive meeting with the Ulster Unionist Party. He said the chemistry was good, and it had been better than previous meetings. He did not want to overstate the success. But they had agreed to meet and keep in touch. What was not in the public domain was an agreement to establish small groups on each side on constitutional issues, and on the North-South dimension. He was informing the Prime Minister, and also in some form the SDLP.

The Taoiseach said that he had six main points :

- 1) The Unionist refusal to talk to Sinn Féin was seen as unhelpful. If the British could encourage them to engage them in some way or other on a topic bilaterally, so that Sinn Féin could feel that in some way they had engaged, that could be helpful. He of course acknowledged the

difficulties.

2) The prisoners issue consisted of a lot of bits and pieces. He acknowledged the PM had sent some shots into the system. But there needed to be ongoing action. We were amending our legislation (because of the 20/35 year difficulty). The respective AGs had had a private dinner last night. He suggested Paddy Teahon should supervise with someone from the British side (John Holmes). He didn't think there was any great political difficulty.

3) Again, on the North-South, East-West bodies on which work had already started, the relevant people needed to move it on. Paddy Teahon and John Holmes could agree on the modalities of this.

4) He welcomed soldiers being removed. The problem was that in W. Belfast and S. Armagh the situation had not changed visibly. There may have been a reduction overall, but an increase in W. Belfast. If things were quiet, why did they need so many soldiers? The Divis Tower and RUC barracks were being refurbished. He was satisfied the impetus behind this was military not political, and people were trying to do things that they had not been able to do for a long time.

5) Bloody Sunday and the need for an enquiry.

6) He also raised the Roisin McAliskey case, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs spoke of his contacts with Mo Mowlam and the German Foreign Minister Kinkel.

The Prime Minister responded :

1) He would see what could be done on Unionist-Sinn Féin contact.

2) On the talks, we should find out where we needed to end up. If the talks did not start to move on, they would appear to have stalled. Could

we agree on what were the basic issues, a devolved institution, a North-South body, East-West structures ? He wanted to identify the basic elements of agreement in the not too distant future, the bones of where agreement would end up. The East-West dimension was as important as the North-South one for Unionists, so that the latter became less intimidating for them. He intended to devote a lot of time to it over the next couple of weeks. He regarded yesterday's meeting as excellent. If the Unionists and the Irish Government could work out on a private basis some agreement, it was fine by him. Trimble had been upbeat after yesterday's meeting, that some understanding was shown of his problems.

3) Roisin McAliskey. The Prime Minister noted the problem. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said the approach was on humanitarian grounds. There was an approach being made by Gareth Pierce to the Home Secretary Jack Straw to revoke the extradition proceedings. John Holmes intervened to say it was partly in the hands of the Germans, and the Minister replied that he had spoken to the Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel about it.

4) On troop levels, the Prime Minister said he was keen and agitating to make progress. It was a visible sign of progress to folk on the mainland. One of the good things about the last ceasefire was the reduction in security. He was trying to push it on as far as he could. The CIRA was still a security problem. The UUP were not pressing them that the troops must stay. The Taoiseach said neither of them could ignore security advice, otherwise they would be blamed if something went wrong. But there were no CIRA worth speaking of in West Belfast. The Prime Minister said he would have this checked out. He

agreed less troops in Northern Ireland meant savings in public expenditure.

5) The Prime Minister assured the Taoiseach that he would carry on progress with prisoners. He would not make the mistake of his predecessor that, because there isn't violence, Northern Ireland can be taken off the screen.

The Taoiseach said no one was defecting to the Continuity IRA. A few had resigned, but all main players were still intact. When he met Gerry Adams last Friday, he found him under far more pressure. He would be disappointed with some of the comments on his side. He said Bobby Sands' sister, who ran a small business in Dundalk, was not allowing herself to be used. The Prime Minister said the CIRA was a nuisance. The Taoiseach said the Government were working on our own media. O Bradaigh should be kept off the airwaves, instead of being presented as a great saviour. But in the absence of progress, the media would bring him forward.

The discussion finished on the effort to get some headings agreed, inside or outside the talks. The Prime Minister said no one wanted to put their bottom line on the table, for fear that the concessions would be pocketed by others. They needed to get people off that, and starting to debate the detail.

The Taoiseach and the PM agreed they would meet again in a short time, in about three weeks, at the main European Council.

Markus Derry
24 November 1997