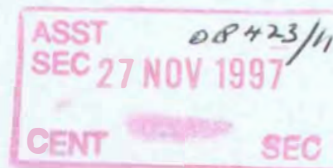


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Mrs Brown

837/97

FROM: JOHN FISHER
ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT
26 November 1997



- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)
PS/Mr Ingram (B&L)
PS/Mr Worthington (DENI, DHSS & L)
PS/Lord Dubs (DOE, DANI & L)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Mr Semple
Mr Thomas
Mr Carvill, DENI
Mr Hill, DENI
Mr Holmes, DENI
Mr Stephens
Mr Watkins
Mr Woods (B&L)
Mr Brooker
Mr Beeton
Mr Hill
Mr Maccabe
Mr Warner
HMA, Dublin
Mr Fergusson, RID

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

DINNER AT MARYFIELD WITH MR CARVILL, PERMANENT SECRETARY DENI

Mr Carvill, accompanied by Mr Hill and Mr Holmes, came to dinner with the Irish side of the Secretariat at Maryfield on 20 November. Mr Donoghue, Mr Magner (Department of Justice) and Mr Hackett were present on the Irish side. Mr Bell and Mr Fisher were present on the British side.

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SUMMARY

2. Friendly, relaxed, and enjoyable evening. Irish side majored on the Irish language (but Springvale project, the Dearing Report and Area Boards also mentioned). Much time spent on Irish side responding to questions put to them in relation to the prospects for a political settlement, and the attitude of Sinn Fein in particular. Worthwhile evening, no points of sharp difference.

Education

3. Substantive business was dealt with early on. **Mr Donoghue** said that in all recent contacts with Sinn Fein two issues were uppermost; viz matters affecting prisoners and treatment of the Irish language. **The Irish side** understood why Sinn Fein should be seeking movement on prisoners (tangible evidence of concessions in return for their involvement in the Talks Process) but the reason for the importance of the latter was less obvious. Sinn Fein took the view that recognition of the Irish language would be seen as validating nationalism. **The Irish side** did not want to denigrate what had already been done in this field (there was even grudging acceptance of this by Sinn Fein) but there was a need for the right 'resonance' to be struck in the Nationalist community. In this connection, Mr O Cuiv (Irish Minister for Irish Culture etc) had asked for a meeting with Mr Worthington to discuss what more might be done to promote Irish language issues. Acknowledging that contacts of this kind were normally arranged through the Irish Department of Education, it was confirmed (by both sides) that there was not a problem on this occasion. The main areas for discussion would be;

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- funding for Meanscoil Dhoire in Londonderry. In discussion, the point was made by **Mr Hill** that only 55 pupils were attending the school. This was significantly below the threshold for funding (which also applied to integrated schools). Proposals that it should be run as a satellite of Meanscoil Feirste did not appear practical, given the distance involved.
- reducing the threshold of pupil attendance to its previous level. It was emphasised, **by Mr Hill**, however, that the present threshold was tied to that which operated in respect of integrated schools and (although no secondary schools might immediately qualify), there were potentially significant resource implications.
- conferring on Irish language medium schools a status comparable to that of integrated schools. **The Irish side** felt that such a concession would be seen in a 'positive' light.
- public funding for Irish language nursery schools. Although these already received funding from Peace and Reconciliation Funds, arrangements needed to be made for longer term funding.
- additional funding (presently £15.0K a year) for the Irish newspaper 'Oiliuint'. Again present funding was provided from Peace Funds; not by Department of Education Grant.

4. In discussion, **Mr Donoghue** pressed for an early Ministerial meeting before Christmas. No commitment was made on the British side. **The Irish side** were asked by

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Mr Carvill to consider that 'streaming' offered a practical way in which to meet demands for Irish language medium education. **The Irish side** doubted whether Sinn Fein would accept this approach; their aim was to achieve separate schooling arrangements, rather than Irish language education forming an adjunct to the present system of schools. Emphasising the resource implications involved in what was proposed by Sinn Fein, the point was made by the Department of Education team that although they hoped that the education budget would benefit as a result of the present comprehensive review, it might in effect, do little more than to enable the Department of Education to continue to meet its existing spending programme. Resources would therefore remain tight.

Politics

5. The other key element of the evening was the Irish perspective of the Talks Process. **Mr Donoghue** felt that the Irish Government/Ulster Unionist axis was the most important at the present time. Sinn Fein had been told repeatedly by the Irish side that they had to accept the principle of consent (it was 'not a question of 'if', but 'when') but felt that although the Sinn Fein leadership might not recommend the eventual package to be put to the electorate, they would eventually sign up to it, taking the view that it represented a transitional arrangement. However, Sinn Fein would accept North/South arrangements (perhaps by another name) and some East/West arrangements and an NI Assembly but would gloss over these as best they could. And, there would be modifications to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. In answer to a question by Mr Bell, **Mr Donoghue** was not entirely confident that the planned referendums North and South would give Sinn Fein honourable grounds to acquiesce in a settlement they could not endorse. This was because

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two separate referenda even on the same day, might be held to violate the theological requirement for Ireland to speak as one. **The Irish side** recognised that the present Sinn Fein leadership had difficulties with militants in their organisation and might not eventually bring all of them with them. Sinn Fein were looking for de-escalatory and other steps to satisfy their supporters (reference made to Francie Molloy's recent reported use of 'colourful language' with South Armagh supporters), but the decision to remove a battalion of the Parachute Regiment had been welcomed.

6. As to the Ulster Unionists, **Mr Donoghue** reported that notwithstanding a difficult first meeting David Trimble had had with Mr Andrews, their subsequent meeting and that between Mr Trimble and the Taoiseach in London had been good, and established a more 'settled relationship'. **The Irish side** saw Mr Trimble as moving closer to them and saw the Ulster Unionists and Sinn Fein as probably able to do a deal along the lines of the Frameworks Document (with consensus), and perhaps with consent to a United Ireland replacing that now providing for NI to remain a part of the UK until etc. **Mr Donoghue** said the Irish side had no alternatives to the Frameworks Document to offer. However, there was criticism that Castle Buildings (with close press proximity) was not a suitable venue or conducive to achieving a political settlement. (Subject to the one caveat above, **Mr Donoghue** was surprisingly bullish about political prospects generally and the Irish - UUP relationship in particular.

7. Of the **Springvale Project**, **Mr Carvill** said that the present proposal was now a more positive one by the University of Ulster and BIFHE but funding of the order of £65m could not be found from within his Department's budget. If the Project were to proceed (an

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economic appraisal was being undertaken) other departments/or and PFI money would be needed. A decision in principle on the project proceeding would be necessary before seeking PFI, it would be a two-stage process. **The Irish side** did not press.

8. **The Dearing Report** was mentioned and that 40% of NI, third level, students were educated outside the Province (mainly in GB). **Mr Holmes** talked about the cyclical movement of more NI students being educated in the South and, at other times vice versa. Some 45% of students in NI were unlikely to need to pay the £1k for further education under the means testing arrangements put forward by Dearing. In discussion there was some uncertainty on the Irish side about availability of student places in NI. **The Irish side**, perhaps understandably, had misunderstood earlier references made by Michael Ancram. The facts of the matter were that a higher proportion of students in NI continued in further education than in GB. There were no particular Irish side objections to the Dearing proposals. If there were any, these were not mentioned.

9. Finally, **Mr Carvill** confirmed that there were no present proposals to reduce the **number of Area Boards**. But, the Irish were told, policy favoured centralisation and co-operatative arrangements between the Boards (Irish Medium language mentioned) with efficiency savings in mind. The Irish side were content.

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10. The evening ended with the Irish side agenda fully covered, and mercifully not too late.

Signed:

J R FISHER
Maryfield (01232) 427532

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