

Dermot Nally Papers

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SECRETMeeting in the Taoiseach's Office26 November, 1993Present: Irish Side

The Taoiseach

Dr. Martin Mansergh

Mr. Sean O hUiginn

British Side

Sir Robin Butler

Mr. David Blatherwick

1. The Taoiseach welcomed the British delegation. He asked jokingly if it was to be a repeat performance of previous visits. Sir Robin Butler said it would be better than that. He handed over a letter from the British Prime Minister. The Taoiseach looked briefly over the letter and invited Sir Robin Butler to set out the position for him.
2. Sir Robin Butler said the British Prime Minister had worked hard, in what had been a tough week for him and his colleagues. He had spent more time on this issue than on the budget. The British greatly appreciated the helpful brokerage role the Taoiseach had played in relation to Eames and Molyneaux. That had opened doors. The upshot was that the Joint Declaration was a "bogey". However there was a positive element, in that there was a prospect that the Prime Minister would do his best on a statement which said many of the same things as the Declaration, but looked different. They had brought a draft with them.
3. The most positive development was that the Secretary of State had had lunch with Molyneaux the previous day and had showed him the draft which they were now about to hand over. The situation in Northern Ireland was so fluid it was difficult to make firm predictions, but Molyneaux's present mood was that he would stay silent, "would not expostulate" if the draft were used. He would, in short, treat it in the

same way as he had treated the Guildhall statement. That would be very significant.

4. However there was also a bad development to report. Last February the British side had got a message through an intermediary, which they knew to be authentic, from the Provisional Army Council. The message was that they wanted to pack in the campaign and they enquired about the modalities. The British had sent a response, very similar to that taken by the Prime Minister in public (i.e. a place at the table in return for an end of violence). The bombs which had been set off in Belfast at the time of the local government elections had brought that contact to an end. They had heard again from the intermediary in October and had sent a similar reply. A journalist had now come to them with part of the message. It was clear to them the PIRA would leak. That would create a storm over the weekend. However British Ministers would say there were no negotiations: They had got the message through an intermediary and had responded in the same way. It preserved their position about no negotiations. There was a reasonable chance the Prime Minister would get support in the British Parliament. It might however get the Unionists onto the street. (In reply to a query, Sir Robin confirmed that the story would be in The Observer newspaper. Bevin had got the story from Eamonn Mallie).
5. The Taoiseach suggested it would be best for everyone to speak frankly. He referred to a press story quoting a Cabinet Minister that Molyneaux had now absolute control of British policy. Butler said that this was not so, although Molyneaux was an important part of the scene. The Taoiseach referred to possible activities of the British intelligence services. These created serious doubts that the British were bona fides. Butler said he could look the Taoiseach in the eye and say that if the security services were up to

anything untoward in this area, they were not authorised to do so. If the reference was to MI6, he could say they had no part in the process at any stage. They were simply not involved.

6. The Taoiseach said that some of the games being played could put people's lives at risk. If that was the length they were prepared to go to to protect James Molyneaux's position, he for one was not interested. His interest was in peace, not a charade. Butler said the Prime Minister's only concern with Molyneaux related to Molyneaux's role as Unionist leader. The Prime Minister's own position was not an issue. If Molyneaux condemned the issue, there would be Unionist protests on the street.
7. The Taoiseach pointed out that not all of those people on the streets demonstrating in favour of peace were Catholics. The British were greatly misreading the response on the ground in Northern Ireland. Butler said the British side felt they were getting closer to getting Molyneaux back on board. The Taoiseach indicated he was not happy with the use which had been made of the Brussels Summit.
8. At this point the Taoiseach asked to see the paper. He said that if it was "too much off side", or too unbalanced in one direction or another, it would not work. A balanced approach was necessary. The Irish side read through the paper. Dr. Mansergh said he felt there was no hope of the Provisionals accepting that as a basis for a cessation. It was pointed out that the main elements of paragraph 4 were missing. The strident emphasis on the separate role of Northern Ireland at each point was also underlined.
9. The Taoiseach asked where was the basis for peace in the document: The Convention was not there. The British had to decide whether or not they wanted peace. If they could not

do so, then it was better to be clear about that from the start. The British side said what marred the Convention was the document leaked the previous week.

10. Dr. Mansergh set out in detail the background to the work which had been done on the earlier text. It had taken some account of the psychological realities of the Provisional movement and had been designed to bring them across the bridge into the political process. To achieve that it was necessary to make some gesture of support towards our agenda. Not only did the present British text not do that. It was extraordinarily heavy-footed in the opposite direction. If the present text was presented to the Provos, they would be inclined, to coin a phrase, to "kick it over the rooftops".
11. The Taoiseach recalled that an enormous amount of work had been put into the previous document. It was an Irish Government document. They were ready to go through it line by line to show that it did not compromise the basis principles of either Government or of either community. In spite of all this effort, at the eleventh hour before the Summit, they got an alternative document. Why was this so?
12. Butler explained that the association with Adams had created great difficulties. The text could not be separated from the Hume-Adams process. The Taoiseach protested strongly that it was an Irish Government document which had been drafted in his Department. He strongly resented it being dismissed because it had Hume-Adams labels. Ambassador Blatherwick said that was the public view.
13. The Taoiseach said that it was for politicians to give the lead in educating their public away from such misconceptions. He wondered if the British side truly understood the mood in Northern Ireland. The result of the

European elections, would show them what that mood was.

14. Blatherwick said they recognised the opportunity and wanted to do what the Taoiseach wanted to do. They wanted to seize the opportunity but they could not take such a risk that they fell off at the other end. It was possible that the divide was not bridgeable. He asked however that the Irish side should look through the document.
15. The Taoiseach again pointed to the obvious implications of a new text being produced a mere five days before a Summit, when a perfectly serviceable text which would achieve peace, had been in existence for such a long time. Butler recalled that a date for the Summit had not been fixed. However they would rather not change the date proposed.
16. The Taoiseach said he would present the text to his Cabinet colleagues. The British side knew from his comments what his recommendations would be. He would tell his colleagues that he could not sign-on to any Declaration which consigned more people to death and destruction for another generation. He was amazed, having taken every amendment which could render the text a balanced one, that he should have got the response he did. However he would present it to the Government and let them decide.
17. Butler protested that they wanted to remain close to the position of the Irish Government, to end violence, and to secure progress. It was not only a matter of words on paper. They understood the Provisionals were not war-weary, but they realised violence was not getting anywhere. The Taoiseach said they should remember what was said when the next bomb went off. He had as promised sent out a request that space should be made for progress. There had been a de-escalation. That could now change.

18. Dr. Mansergh said that they were passing up the best opportunity in twenty years to secure peace without infringing principles. The Irish side would not put to the British something they knew to be unacceptable. It took a very long time to get the Provisionals to that stage. They were very slow to give their agreement. It was a question of finesse and an accurate balance. The document which was now produced was clearly designed to bring Molyneaux on board, but not the Provos.
19. The Taoiseach recalled how he had progressively led the Provos away from their emphasis on self-determination for the whole island and from a time limit. Anyone who said the present document was a Provo document had no understanding of the real situation of the Provos or of Ireland as a whole. He recalled also that Sir Patrick Mayhew had conspicuously failed to take a position in favour of the peace process. Sir Robin Butler had thought he had done so at Coleraine. Blatherwick said Mayhew was leaving it to the Prime Minister to deal with.
20. The Taoiseach said the British had made mistakes in the past, and by all accounts they were going to go on making them. They were being offered an opportunity to safeguard the essence of the Unionist position, and their own position as stated in international agreements, and still get peace. Dr. Mansergh said not only was there no regard to the basic Provisional demand of nationalist self-determination in the document, but there was a strong emphasis on a separate right of self-determination for Northern Ireland.
21. The Taoiseach felt that all that could be said about the draft had been said. He said he would go formally to the Government on Tuesday with the British document. However it was better to be honest. He would have preferred to know six months previously if the British were not able to

proceed with this peace initiative. He failed again to understand why his draft was not accepted and a new text had been put in which the Provos could not possibly accept. Even the Irish Government would have serious difficulty with some aspects. A new text which was good in substance would be very difficult to renegotiate at this point, but there was no hope whatever of reaching them with the present text.

22. Butler asked if he was saying that the present text was not a basis for discussions. The Taoiseach said he would not put it like that. They had a good text. It had been under discussion for six months. That text was a basis for success, but the British were saying they were not accepting it. Were they saying the text was dead in the water?
23. Butler said yes. However he wanted to make clear that they had not "drawn the Taoiseach along" deliberately. The leaked document, the most recent Hume-Adams meeting, all these factors had complicated things. O hUiginn said that if the British wanted Northern Ireland to settle down peacefully some new balance would have to be reached and that would have to be done explicitly. The various factors the British invoked were problems essentially because they still hoped to be able to achieve a solution either without such a change in balance or without its being explicit. That probably was not possible.
24. Butler said the mood in the Unionist community had changed and they feared a sell-out. The Taoiseach challenged him to say where the sell-out was in the original document. It was carefully and deliberately balanced between the requirements of the two communities. Butler recalled they had worked hard to persuade the Unionists that there was no sell-out in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, but that had failed. The Taoiseach recalled the lengths he had gone to to ensure balance in the text, including consultations with Archbishop

Eames. Surely his approval could be taken as significant in terms of the Unionist community as a whole? Butler suggested that Eames had been less strong on his position after he had talked to Molyneaux than he had been before. Dr. Mansergh disputed that.

25. After some further discussion covering the same points, it was clear that no further progress could be made on the text. The Taoiseach agreed to have it looked at, and to present it to his Cabinet colleagues, while making clear his own clear views on the position and on the text.
26. The discussion then turned to the forthcoming Summit. The Taoiseach recalled it had been intended to serve a particular purpose, and if there was no basis for that work he could not see the need for it. Butler said even if there was no document, it was not in the interest of the two Governments to allow the Provisionals to drive them apart. The Taoiseach thought that might well be the effect of the British position. That was the reality. Butler thought that no useful purpose would be served by postponing the Summit. The Taoiseach asked again what the Summit would do? Butler felt even if there was no document, the question still arose how the two Governments could get through the Summit. They could signal that they were continuing to work. The Taoiseach said such a statement would have to have a basis in reality. What was the basis in this case? O hUiginn said that if the British draft were to be the outcome of the Summit, it would be seen, both North and South, as on balance a Unionist document. If it did not produce peace, what purpose id it serve?
27. The Taoiseach intervened to recall discussions he had with Archbishop Eames, and the point he had made on the Frost programme, about the difficulties of Articles 2 and 3. He was doing his utmost to help the British to solve the

Northern problem. It was not his intention to stir up problems down in this jurisdiction. He had gone further than any previous leader of his Party in bringing people to come to terms with the reality. But there was no point in handing an advantage to the men of violence.

28. Butler thought the subject matter for the Summit might be how the two Governments could go forward from there. The Taoiseach said there had been one purpose for the Summit. A Summit simply to disagree publicly was not a very good idea. If the British wanted a lasting settlement, they had to take in the parameters on both sides. There was a momentum for peace and the idea was too big simply to go away. The Governments would have to react for or against. O hUiginn said that they would certainly face questions at the Summit as to whether the peace process was on course or, if not what they were doing about it. They would have to make the positions clear. Questions would be also asked about the Talks process. Even there there was likely to be a difference between the Governments, since Molyneaux had embraced the Ancram talks as an alternative to the peace process.
29. Dr. Mansergh pointed out that the Talks process was dead. Molyneaux had killed that also in his recent statements. Butler enquired whether the Taoiseach was saying that unless they made the joint Declaration on the terms the Irish side had proposed, there was no other basis for the Summit. The Taoiseach again recalled the hard work which had gone into the Irish draft. They had taken suggestions on board from all sides and discussed it with all kinds. He had accepted that he himself was not the best judge of the Unionist position and thus he had brought Archbishop Eames on board. A text had been worked on which the Archbishop had said was 100% acceptable. It had been tested in the other direction. It was not infringing basic positions on any side. It was

time for decisions. That issue had to be put to the test. The British should not at this stage be asking us to get into a matter on a new basis, and the fact they were doing so seemed to carry its own message.

30. There was some further discussion in which the Taoiseach and the Irish side emphasised the importance of the prize on hand, the need for courage, and the dangers of failure. The British side asked that the text should be looked at. The Taoiseach promised to submit it to his Cabinet colleagues, while making clear that his own views on it would be unfavourable. The British side agreed they would report the position to the Prime Minister.
31. At the conclusion the Taoiseach again alluded to the possibility that British security services were playing a role which was both dangerous to peoples lives and very counter-productive in terms of trust.

Sean O hUiginn
29 November, 1993