

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

SUBJECT
MASTER

Filed on:

From the Private Secretary

8 May 1997

Den Williams,

CALL BY THE TAOISEACH, 8 MAY

The Taoiseach, accompanied by the Tanaiste, the Irish Ambassador, Paddy Teahon and Sean O'hUiginn, called on the Prime Minister this afternoon for an hour. The Foreign and Northern Ireland Secretaries, Quentin Thomas, Jonathan Powell and I were present on our side.

After some gossip about respective elections, during which Bruton indicated that he still favoured an early date, Bruton said that he was grateful for the opportunity to meet the Prime Minister so soon after the election. He wanted to cover Europe, Northern Ireland and bilateral cooperation.

European Union

Bruton ran through his speaking note quickly. He welcomed the new Government's decisions to sign up to the Social Chapter and make the Bank of England independent. To a large extent, Britain and Ireland had a common view on Schengen. The Irish Government did not wish to opt out of too many aspects of the third pillar, but equally did not want to lose the Common Travel Agreement.

The Foreign Secretary said that he had been discussing this with the Tanaiste. We too would prefer to avoid wide opt outs in this area. We might need to have flexibility for ourselves over border controls, to which we wished to secure a legal right, but we did not wish to see this elsewhere. The Tanaiste agreed and suggested that the two sides should keep in very close touch about this in the run-up to Amsterdam.

Bruton continued that the Irish had worries about the idea of flexibility, as did the new British Government. Other Irish priorities were a new employment chapter, where the new British Government's position was welcome, and drugs,

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

which the Irish believed should be covered in the Treaty in their own right. On the institutional side, Ireland was very insistent that each member state should have the right to a Commissioner.

The Prime Minister said that he would be concerned to maintain the veto in areas like defence and foreign policy, and thought that here and in other areas there could be better cooperation without any question of new EU competence or a Commission role. He would be happy to see a new employment chapter, as long as Europe did not become too prescriptive in this area. He would not want to see too much interventionism. Other priorities were enlargement, including arrangements for it, and CAP reform (where he knew Irish views were different, but enlargement made it more important). On the institutional side, we would want to maintain a fair balance in any changes to the Commission and the voting system. More widely, he wanted Britain to play a clear and constructive role in Europe and begin to shape its future.

Bruton raised EMU. Ireland wanted to see Britain in the single currency and the sooner the better. Ireland would certainly be in the first wave. The Prime Minister said that Britain was unlikely to be in the first wave, but would keep her options open. It was nonetheless important that if it went ahead, it was successful. The changes to the Bank of England were incidentally not related to EMU, but sensible changes in their own right. One advantage his Government had over its predecessor was the absence of internal Party differences. The Foreign Secretary added on EMU that he had found genuine understanding of the British position in Paris and Bonn. He had made clear that Britain would not stand in the way of others, and would facilitate the project. But the British position would remain reserved.

The Prime Minister said that it would be important to work closely together on the key areas of the IGC agenda. Coming back from the IGC with a success would be crucial in turning round British attitudes to Europe. The Government had to demonstrate that a more constructive and engaged attitude could produce results. The IGC was a real test, and if there was a set back there, it would be difficult to repair the damage. Ireland could be a significant help.

Bruton said that the new British Government's plans for internal reform should be helpful in showing that sovereignty and power could be shared. This would hold lessons for Europe. He was keen to see the extension of QMV in the IGC, to prevent the EU becoming bogged down after enlargement. He was also keen to see changes to the way the Commission worked. He agreed too large a Commission was not a good idea, but Santer had little real power at present.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

The Foreign Secretary commented that the warm reception for the new Government from fellow Governments had not been matched by that from the Commission, who had already got in two kicks. Bruton sympathised. The Commission had also been effectively interfering in the Irish election campaign in a very sensitive area.

Bruton went on to talk about Kohl and his historic mission to integrate Germany into Europe in order to bury old German demons. This was a vital project, and he had worried that the previous British Government had not understood it. The Prime Minister agreed. His own view was that European integration was acceptable in principle, as relationships developed naturally. But the problem was the pace and content of moves in this direction. If the pace was too rapid, and the people could not follow, they would worry about losing control of their affairs, and finish up blaming Europe. This could cause political turmoil in many countries. The issues needed to be fundamentally re-thought.

The Prime Minister continued that, in the IGC, it was important not to try to run before we could walk in areas like defence and foreign policy. There was a danger of a mismatch between maturity of European institutions, and the respect in which they were held, and the speed of European integration. Changes which were necessary for enlargement should be made, but there should be no rush into integration otherwise. The important thing was to have an agenda which made a difference to people's lives.

Bruton agreed with the last point. Crime was one area where Europe should be more visible, since it was clearly a cross-border issue. On integration more generally, the Commission had slowed down dramatically the rate at which they made new proposals. But it was true that they were still perceived as interfering in everything. It was also true that the European Parliament was not seen as relevant but just a source of lucrative jobs.

Bilateral relations

Bruton said that he was keen to build on the work done with the previous Government, including on a draft joint statement in this field. He had been struck in looking at the Labour Manifesto by the new possibilities for cooperation it opened up. He was particularly keen on cooperation in the education field, notably over plans for a National Grid for learning and a University for Industry. Ireland and the UK after all constituted a single educational market. Other areas of interest were digital TV, and its implications for public service broadcasting; food safety, where both Governments had similar plans; homelessness, which involved many Irish people who would be better off in Ireland; and the

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 4 -

environment, where the new Government's emphasis on international cooperation was welcome, despite the little local difficulty of Sellafield.

Bruton continued that he hoped officials in the various fields could meet soon, to prepare for meetings between appropriate Ministers. It would be good if this could be agreed today in principle. He was partly inspired by the idea that cooperation in these fields under a UK/Irish umbrella made North/South cooperation easier.

The Prime Minister welcomed these suggestions and agreed that they should be taken forward speedily, perhaps with the Cabinet Office acting as coordinator. He agreed particularly that education should be a fruitful field for cooperation. Bruton proposed that the draft joint statement about this be revised and issued relatively soon, perhaps even in the margins of the informal European Council on 23 May or at Amsterdam.

Northern Ireland

Bruton said that a new IRA ceasefire was the most difficult issue, although by no means the only one. The question of a date for Sinn Fein's entry into talks after a ceasefire had been pursued unproductively with the previous Government. Their insistence that the IRA should call a ceasefire first had not produced results because the Republicans did not trust the British Government. The result was that the IRA had been allowed to opt out of their obligation to move away from violence. It was impossible to know whether the IRA would have declared a ceasefire if a date had been offered, because their intentions had never been tested. He did not want to press the new Government too soon on this, but it was an issue which had to be addressed rapidly.

Bruton continued that he had said in media interviews that Sinn Fein could possibly be in the talks on 3 June, but he had stressed the importance of the quality of any ceasefire. He had had to take this line, because it had been his earlier position and the media always asked the same question. In any case he was convinced that the sooner the IRA could be faced with the challenge of a firm date of entry into talks the better it would be. Meanwhile he welcomed what the new Secretary of State had said about parades and the importance of upholding the rule of law. Obviously local agreements were best if they could be achieved. It was important to deal with the Sinn Fein issue before the marching season began in earnest, to keep down sectarian tension. He also strongly supported what Dr Mowlam had said about confidence-building measures. There

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 5 -

Temporarily Retained

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3(4)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

were some prisoner cases which the Irish Government would be pursuing through the normal channels. They would also pursue separately the question of a new inquiry on Bloody Sunday. These were very important issues for nationalists. He recognised that confidence also needed to be built on the Unionist side. In some respects they were even more isolated than nationalists. He would be ready to take risks himself over this, if Britain was moving down a confidence-building road elsewhere.

The Prime Minister said that the new Government was less than a week old, and he was anxious not to block off options unnecessarily. He wanted to move forward, but in the right way. To be blunt, if he appeared to be under pressure to do certain things from the Irish side, it became harder to do them. Unlike his predecessor, he had no parliamentary constraints. But the basic constraint of moving both traditions together remained. So he was taking stock and looking for the best way of giving the peace process fresh impetus.

The Prime Minister continued that the Unionists were nervous about what his Government might do. They had nothing to worry about. Commitment to the consent principle was guaranteed. But any initiative could be misunderstood unless it was carefully undertaken. Meanwhile he would be interested in the Taoiseach's analysis of IRA intentions, and how strong the pressures were on them to bring about a new ceasefire.

Bruton said that the messages the Irish received were ambiguous.

But there were strong signals that they did want a ceasefire, and soon. The same signals had been present last October when there had been discussion about the previous Prime Minister publishing a particular article. It had not been clear at the time what kind of ceasefire the IRA had in mind, a full-hearted one or a repetition of last time. Nevertheless, his fear was that if the IRA were not brought to make a move now, they might never do so. If Sinn Fein were not in the talks process, and the talks went on without them and made progress, they would lose their incentive to join because they would be faced with a fait accompli. Even if it was impossible to be sure that a genuine ceasefire was intended, now was the right time to play the card on an entry date.

The Prime Minister said that the issues were under close focus, and he was in no doubt about the importance of moving soon. But the British Government must be seen to move in its own time and in its own way. As he had already said, pressure from others only made it harder. We also had to try to find ways

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 6 -

of moving forward which would not drive others out of the process. That was why he was taking some care.

The Prime Minister continued that the collapse of the previous ceasefire had appeared to justify the arguments of those who had said the IRA had never meant it, even if the reality was more complex than that. This meant that any new ceasefire needed to be genuine and permanent. But he was well aware that there was a window of opportunity now. It would be helpful if the men of violence could get the message that further violence made movement much harder.

Bruton said that there were channels to get this message across. Irish officials had not met Sinn Fein since the attack on Nigel Dodds, and the Irish position was that they would not resume contact unless it was clear that a new ceasefire was really on offer. But reopening channels was a way of testing the ground.

Bruton added that the whole talks process had been designed in its present cumbersome form precisely in order to bring Sinn Fein in. This illustrated the need to make a new effort to do so. A new Government could take a radical step and get it accepted where a Government several months down the line, tied down by commitments made to all sides, would be unable to move. Spring commented that he was not sure how long the present talks could be kept going. They would have collapsed already if the British election had not intervened.

The Prime Minister repeated that he wanted to keep his options open. He would be very guarded in what he said to the press about this meeting, and would not give interviews. But he was well aware of the time pressures. We were keen to bring in Sinn Fein, but equally did not want to blow apart the talks process. Bruton acknowledged that the Unionists could walk out of the talks but could not understand what they would have to lose by staying in. As far as the IRA was concerned he could not guarantee that they would come up with a satisfactory ceasefire. He did not understand how their minds worked. But his message was that if a new approach was to be tried, it should be tried soon. It was worth making this last effort to keep the talks train on the rails. Dr Mowlam commented that, if it did not prove possible to bring in Sinn Fein, the talks would have to go ahead without them. Bruton said that he fully accepted this.

The Prime Minister asked about security cooperation between the two countries. Spring said that this was now first class, particularly between the

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 7 -

RUC and the Garda. There was a high level of personal trust, and no question marks on either side. The level of arms finds was a good illustration of this.

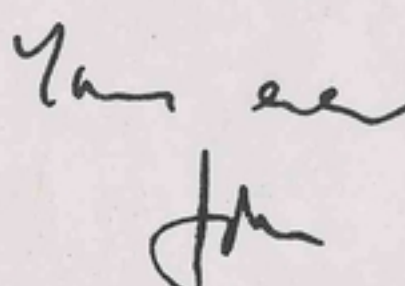
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Bruton said that he hoped we would be able to support Mary Robinson's candidacy. The Prime Minister said that we would.

Comment

This was a friendly meeting, but we had to fight off constant pressure from Bruton's office for the two men to meet the press together, and implicit pressure for us to make a move now and turn the meeting into a full-blown Summit. In the end, the presentation came out reasonably well, with low expectations duly met.

I am copying this to Ken Lindsay (Northern Ireland Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and by fax to Sir John Kerr (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dubln).


JOHN HOLMES

William Ehrman, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Temporarily Retained
THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

CONFIDENTIAL