

c: Lord President

1. MR POWELL
2. PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND - YOUR JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE

You have already received a great deal of briefing and I do not wish to duplicate. This minute is simply to bring you up-to-date on the mood of the media ahead of the appointed day.

First, the agreement has been so comprehensively leaked that, as usual, the central core of the event will be an anti-climax. Three things will take the story forward:

- the joint press conference, where the media will be striving to open up splits;
- the way ahead, on which the joint communique is helpful;
- any consequences - resignations; Unionist, SDLP and IRA reactions.

No. This requires you all the more to explain the agreement in simple terms and, in Dr Fitzgerald's presence, to get over the point that consultation cannot by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as an infringement of Sovereignty or the thin end of the wedge.

I believe that, in my terms, some resignations might be helpful in the sense that you will be seen to be standing up to the Unionists about whom you are perceived to be wobbly. But you will need to deal firmly in public with those who resign.

This leads me on to what I think will be the main point of attack: the agreement is just words and that your heart

isn't in it; you have little determination to see it through. The media will be looking like hawks for signs of a lack of resolve, especially in view of your known sympathy with Unionism and as you are synonymous with resolution. Alternatively, there will be those who will probe you on sell-out to the Republicans.

The next point of attack will be on detail, and the subjects on which you are likely to be questioned most are:

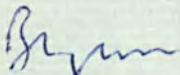
- the extent of the innovation of an Intergovernmental Conference; here the media will try to have it both ways - either it does admit the Republic in to the management of the affairs of Northern Ireland or that it is but a formalisation of what the Republic is able to do now
- your reported reluctance to have a secretariat in Belfast; and the provocation that may result from its being there
- what happens when you don't agree with Republic representatives?
- future of the Northern Ireland Assembly and elections
- are you going to permit the use of Republic flags and emblems? Will the Irish flag fly outside the Secretariat, or when the conference is in session? [This is likely to be pretty tricky.]
- future of RUC and Sir John Hermon; UDR

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- whether you are prepared to have police committees in Northern Ireland (see Article 7) even though you are not prepared to admit local political control over the police on the mainland
- whether you are prepared to go down the route of mixed courts, and if so, why; if not, why not?
- given Article 10 on economic development, are you prepared to reconsider buying supplies of Republic natural gas?
- is this an historic agreement - the first since partition? If not, how would you describe it? And if it doesn't mean much, why spend all the time and energy on getting it?
- what difference does the agreement really make? Or is it just cosmetic?
- are you going to proscribe Sinn Fein?
- is the USA to pour in \$1000m?

As you will see from a separate minute, we are doing everything we can, consistent with security, to help the media cover the issue in the flesh. There is, however, the possibility that tempers will be a little fraught. It is agreed at official level that I should chair the press conference and select questioners. I will do my best to give North, South, East (the British mainland) and West (USA) a fair crack in 30 minutes.



BERNARD INGHAM

14 November 1985

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