

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2008/79/3202
Creation Date(s):	21 February 1978
Extent and medium:	5 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Mr. Harry (or) Tavish
Anglo-Irish Section.

17 Grosvenor Place, 22/2.

SW1X 7HR

9/23

21st February 1978

Dear Seán

Airey Neave had lunch with me yesterday as arranged. He was obviously uncomfortable about his recent statements and was anxious to clarify them to the extent he could. He said that the Conservative Party was anxious to work with the Government here to the fullest extent possible in solving the Northern problem but that when the Government made mistakes it had to call them to account. He felt that Mason had made serious mistakes about security and he should never have made his December statement about the crushing of the Provos. He felt that the security situation was now very serious and had felt so for some months as he had told Mason.

Ulsterisation had not been successful and it was necessary to increase military involvement. In particular he felt it was necessary to have more troops in the border areas. On power-sharing he said that his party no longer felt that a power-sharing executive was a possibility. The attitude of the Ulster Protestants was such that they would not accept it and so he now wished to establish an Ulster Council of elected representatives to implement the MacRory proposals. He was rather vague when I asked him what the powers of this Council would be except to say that it should have the power of questioning Ministers. He was also vague about the election of Chairmen of committees, or the role they would play, or how they would be selected except to indicate that they should include Nationalists as well as Unionists. He said that in conversation Mason had agreed with him that a power-sharing executive was now an impossibility.

He felt that there was a considerable danger at the moment of a Protestant back-lash and that the situation was very delicate. He felt, therefore, that a cooling-off

period was called for and that it was better to talk in terms of short-term objectives rather than long-term objectives.

I replied to this by saying that it would be very wrong in discussing the North to lose sight of the fact that people had very deep feelings about the situation and that in spite of the fact that we had endeavoured to be restrained and cooperative in the best way, we felt that a very damaging drift towards integration had set in. This we did not feel was in the interest of anybody in Britain or Ireland and could give rise to tensions. We had not stressed a point, what was in fact well known, namely that the overwhelming mass of the Irish people had very deep feelings about the eventual reunification of Ireland even if they would only envisage this unity as being reached on a peaceful basis and by consent. It was perhaps necessary now to concentrate principally on short-term constructive proposals but it would be wrong for us to hide our eventual hopes. It would be wrong also to disguise the fact that the Nationalist community in the North had made very many concessions of principle without receiving in turn any reciprocal move by the Unionist population as a whole. The need for participation and partnership in Government continued to be essential and power-sharing as a short-term expression of this had a real meaning for the Nationalists.

There was a very great danger that unwittingly the North would become absorbed and integrated into the United Kingdom. We objected to this not only because it worked against our long term hopes but because we felt that it was a completely unworkable solution which could only tie us into the cycle of violence with which we had lived too long. Here Neave said that he too was strongly opposed to any integration. He felt, however, that it was unrealistic at this stage to talk about a power-sharing executive and the most he could see in the short-term at least was the Council he now proposed and which was his party's policy. I said that the trouble with a Council of this kind was that one would have to overcome the

distrust of so many people. This element of distrust was now a major factor in the situation and nobody will accept a Council of this kind except as a staging post in some further development. They would have to be convinced that such progress would be possible.

I took up with him the statements about the training of the IRA in the South and the smuggling of arms over the border. I said that we had no indications whatever that the arms had been smuggled through our territory. Obviously we must have suspicions that this might have been so and consequently we were as anxious as anyone else to establish fully how they had got to the North. There obviously had been attempts to smuggle arms through Republican ports but we had blocked these recently and as far as we could see there was as much likelihood, if not more, that the arms had come in through Larne which was the biggest container port in the island. We had asked the British authorities if they had any hard evidence to help us and they had not given us any. Similarly if he had any hard evidence we would be most grateful to him if he would pass it on to us in all confidence and we would follow it up. The same applied to his remarks about the training of the IRA in the South.

He waffled in his reply to this and said that the UDR strongly implied that there was a Provo training camp in the Dundalk-Drogheda area. There had to be some kind of training camp to teach people how to use the new machine guns. They now believe that there was between 6 and 12 of these in the North. I again assured him that we were taking every step we could to locate such training camps or smuggling trails if they existed but we had no evidence of their existence. He would appreciate that if such trails existed it would be as easy to find one end of them as the other. He then said that he would talk to Mason about such information ^{that} he was getting from the UDR and other sources. I said that in any event we would be glad to get such hard information as was possible since uncertainties were obviously working on the minds

of Unionists in Belfast strengthening groups such as the UVF.

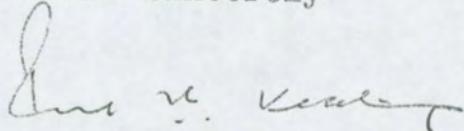
He then said that it would be very useful if the Government could come to some public arrangement about security with the British Government. I said that it was very difficult to see what kind of an arrangement we could come to in this connection. The cooperation was very close and no proposals had been put to us for a public arrangement. There was always a danger that such an arrangement could be counter-productive in the light of lack of progress in the North generally speaking.

He is very hopeful that there will be a General Election in this country in the near future. He does not think that one in May is impossible. He then expects Mrs Thatcher will win with an overall majority. At the moment there is no question of an agreement with the Ulster Unionists and there cannot be one as long as Enoch Powell remains a member of that group. That is not to say that he does not envisage relations with people such as Molyneaux.

Neave was also upset about reactions to his recent statements about the Irish community and made the point that he had never said anything about denying them the vote. He said that he was accused of this by Conor O'Clery who has consistently mis-reported and mis-quoted him. In justice to Neave there is an element of truth in this. He said that he talked about a general long term revision of national and citizenship law to take account of the problems of immigration. This has already been the subject of a Government Green Paper. Such an examination will be long and detailed and inevitably would have to take ^{into} account the position of Irish people. It had nothing however to do with the right to vote which was covered by different legislation. I said that his mis-reported remarks unfortunately disturbed the Irish community here a great deal and I

thought he should know this. There were very many Irish people here for 30 or 40 years or even longer who had loyalties both to this country and to Ireland. They would find it difficult to make a choice and did not want to have to do so.

Yours sincerely



Paul J G Keating
Ambassador

Mr Séan Donlon
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2.