



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/94/45

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

17 Grosvenor Place

SW1X 7HR

28

Mr. O'Sullivan
Mr. Hayes
(I had this re
had a good visit)
7-12-92

18 November 1992

Mr. Seán Ó hUiginn
 Assistant Secretary
 Anglo-Irish Division
 Department of Foreign Affairs
 Dublin

Conversation with John Chilcot

Dear Assistant Secretary

John Chilcot came to the Embassy for lunch today. Joe Hayes was also present. The following points of interest arose.

The establishment of a Northern Ireland Select Committee

We had an interesting, frank exchange of views on the question of the establishment of a Northern Ireland Select Committee. Chilcot sought to make the point that this was essentially a matter for parliament and that the views of individual members of the Government - he mentioned specifically the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland - could have little impact.

Picking up on recent speculation he situated the issue in the context of the Government's narrow majority where, in the event of a tight voting situation, few MPs on the Government benches would see any difficulty in conceding a select committee to the Unionists. In such a situation we surely could not expect that the finer arguments against the establishment of a select committee would outweigh the question of the Government's survival.

We made the point that it was disingenuous to suggest that such a Committee could be established by parliament in the face of Government opposition. We pointed out that the establishment of such a Committee would inevitably convey the wrong signals especially at a time when both governments and the constitutional parties remained committed to talks on an agreed solution. We reminded him of the importance of this issue on Jim Molyneaux's integrationist agenda and of the strong opposition of the SDLP. Chilcot readily accepted our arguments and professed himself as sharing our misgivings. He expressed the view that Molyneaux no longer harbours hopes of seeing his integrationist policy realised. There was, he felt, nonetheless, a process of education to be undertaken here if we were to persuade people that the establishment of a Select Committee was of such significance that it should not be conceded, especially if it were the price of Unionist support for the Government. We argued that the approach to government of Northern Ireland historically was through devolution and

much effort had been expended over the past 20 years to establish a fair, power-sharing system. That process continues, despite the intermission with the Secretary very keen to harness the political talent in Northern Ireland. The democratic deficit that currently exists in the area constituted an incentive to the Northern Ireland parties to agree new structures. We added that the concession of a Select Committee now to the Unionists would be a seriously retrograde step and would be at variance with what we have been so painstakingly trying to achieve.

There were some contradictory signals in what Chilcot said. On the one hand he stressed that the matter had not arisen as an issue at official level and that he was speaking personally and speculatively. Yet when we drew attention to the categorical assurances of the Secretary of State in the debate on his statement in the Commons on 10 November Chilcot sought to point out that it was a very carefully crafted response to MacNamara which, although promising no change in the situation in Northern Ireland, was deliberately less categorical on change at Westminster.

Local Elections

Chilcot referred more than once to the significance of the Northern Ireland local elections on May 19 next year. In Chilcot's view any substantive developments in a new process should await the outcome of these elections. They will be an important indicator of the respective strengths of the parties, in particular the DUP. Chilcot referred to indications which the British side have of OUP optimism of gains at the expense of the DUP possibly even in Peter Robinson's constituency of East Belfast. He also spoke of possible SDLP gains. The results will be important in defining the approach of the parties to any new talks and he foresaw a good deal of jousting between the two Unionist parties despite the obviously good personal relations that exist between Paisley and Molyneux.

The DUP, the Alliance and the OUP

According to Chilcot, the British, who have as yet to hold their review of the talks, have not made up their minds about the role of the DUP. He spoke of their negative influence and expressed himself as open to a situation where a new process could proceed without the DUP. This was something, however, which the two Governments would need to consult about. Similar considerations applied to the Alliance party. We noted the negative impact created by the remarks of John Alderdice which soured the search for a soft landing and openly identified the Alliance with the Unionists. Chilcot agreed but contended that the Alliance had played a very useful role in providing a measure of cover for the OUP enabling them to move on a number of issues. The Alliance had a definite role to play and an important and significant constituency of opinion to represent. In Chilcot's view, it would be a pity if the SDLP's rift with the Alliance party would lead to the eventual exclusion of the latter from any new process. He accepted that it was difficult to justify their inclusion and, from a

Westminster perspective, continue to exclude Jim Kilfedder who availed himself of every opportunity to remind sympathetic Conservative backbenchers of his exclusion despite his position as a Westminster MP.

He gave it as his personal view that some of the second tier of Unionists were unlikely to continue in active politics. He was thinking particularly of Reg Empey and possibly the McGimpseys. They had little incentive to maintain their high level of commitment. We pointed out that the same considerations applied to the SDLP.

He was puzzled by Maginnis's outburst on 10 November, contrasting it with the reasonable tone of Molyneaux. He wondered if Maginnis might be reflecting on the leadership and with the experience of the talks behind him, be laying the ground for the succession. Despite his limitations he could entertain some hope of success, especially when one viewed his chances against the possible competitors.

The Clinton Administration

Chilcot was particularly anxious to probe our views on the Northern Ireland policy of the Clinton administration. His personal view was that a great deal of Clinton's commitments in this regard, as set out in his public letter to Bruce Morrison, were designed purely for the purposes of the actual election. If he was, for example, to put flesh on the idea of a special envoy, Chilcot's opinion was that it was unlikely to amount to more than a once-off fact-finding mission to Dublin, Belfast and London. He felt it might be useful, however, for the two Governments at least to give the appearance of movement early in the New Year while awaiting the outcome of the May local elections in order to stave off unhelpful initiatives by the new US Administration. We suggested that fears of a Clinton initiative might encourage the Unionists to resume negotiations sooner rather than later.

The next steps

Chilcot spoke in very positive terms about the IGC on 16 November. He remarked on the excellent relationship which had been built up over the period of the talks between the NIO team and the Irish Ministers. This was due to the intensity of the process and the degree of contact between the two sides. If there were to be a new governmental team on our side we would have to start from the beginning again.

Chilcot felt that a pause in the New Year would be justified because of the local elections. After all, there had been a break last Spring on the run-up to the British General Election. The same thing was happening in Ireland right now. He said that the two Governments would need to remain in close touch on how best to proceed. He saw an additional stage to

the process following the proposed pre-Christmas meeting between the Governments and the next IGC. He had in mind the need for some bilateral contacts with the parties.

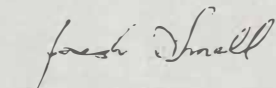
We pressed Chilcot on Mayhew's remarks at his press conference in Dublin after the IGC on 16 November suggesting an apparent departure from the formula as set out in the statement of 26 March 1991. He sought to play this down. There would be no question of any departure from the issues of principle, the totality of relationships and the three stranded formula. What the Secretary of State had in mind related more to procedure, bearing in mind the success of the bilaterals. In that connection he felt that the approach embodied in the words "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed" might be worth looking at again. Explaining this Chilcot felt that the two Governments might usefully consider whether at the next stage there could be occasional agreed incentives to pave the way. What he had in mind, he told us, was publicising those issues particularly in the economic and social arenas such as a Bill of Rights, where agreement had been reached by all parties to the process. This would also have the advantage of giving something to the media and nurturing support and hope among the public for the process itself. We wondered about the dangers of making too much of limited incremental successes which could distract the parties from the wider fundamental issues and tempt the Unionists in particular into the belief that a lesser agenda was on the table and achievable.

Comment

It was clear from Chilcot's remarks that the British are in a quandary at this stage on how to proceed. On the one hand they are tempted to take things easy for some months in order to get the local elections out of the way to enable them to gauge the extent of the DUP's support. They feel that the tide is with the OUP and that Paisley's capacity to rally his troops has been diminished. It would help matters if the political wing of the DUP represented by Robinson would eventually break away and join the OUP, leaving the post-Paisley DUP in the hands of McCrea and his religious die-hards. Between now and the local elections there could be contact between the political parties in Northern Ireland, as envisaged, and between those parties and the two governments. On the other hand the British are clearly worried about the commitment entered into by President-Elect Clinton in the course of his campaign to appoint a special representative for Northern Ireland. I would imagine that what they would dearly like to do is to associate us with their own approach to the White House for the purpose of discouraging such an appointment, on the grounds that the delicate process is still alive despite the intermission and that there is continuing contact between the Governments and the parties with a view to finding a basis for the resumption of talks. The proposed meeting between Prime Minister Major and the Taoiseach in early December before the Edinburgh Council will provide the

British with a ready-made opportunity, if they choose to avail themselves of it, to put that proposition to us and we should, of course, be well prepared for it. Mr Major plans to meet Mr Clinton before he assumes the Presidency and the Prime Minister's hand would be considerably reinforced if he could say to Clinton that the Taoiseach shared his misgivings about the appointment of a special envoy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph Small".

Joseph Small
Ambassador