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ANBASÁD NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

Copied to Mr. Marshall - 22/12

17 Grosvenor Place

SWIX 7HR

Mr Cribben
Mr O'Sullivan
hr
18-12-92

PSS
+ all parts in B/N meeting
Amellon A1
18/12

CONFIDENTIAL

16 December 1992

Mr Seán Ó hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Dublin 2

Discussion with FCO Officials

Dear Assistant Secretary

I gave a lunch today for Martin Williams, Robert Alston's replacement, who takes up duty in Belfast on 4 January. Graham Archer and Joe Hayes were also present and, although he will not be attending the meeting in Dublin on 18 December, Archer had several comments to make which may be of interest in preparing for Friday's discussion. Williams was agreeable and pleasant company but understandably had little to contribute to our discussion on Northern Ireland. He has been serving in the South Asia Section of the FCO since 1990. A copy of the biographical note on Williams in the 1992 Diplomatic Service list is enclosed.

Mayhew's speech in Coleraine

Archer handed over a copy of Mayhew's speech earlier today to the centre for the study of conflict in Coleraine. In style and substance he compared it to Brooke's Whitbread speech of November 1990, remarking that it was addressed primarily to the nationalist community in Northern Ireland. It reiterated the point Mayhew sought to underline in his speech to the BIA in September to the effect that the British Government would place no obstacle in the way of nationalist aspirations to a united Ireland. He also directed attention to the specific proposal to allow for the use of Irish street names in Northern Ireland. He told us that there had been a favourable reaction to the speech from Dublin. (We were at something of a disadvantage on this since we had not seen either Mayhew's text or the response from our side.)

no formal comment was made

The new Government

According to Archer, the British side will suggest at Friday's meeting that the new Government consider, as a matter of high

priority, the issuing of a public statement addressing, in generous terms, the constitutional question. Such a statement need not specifically address the detailed issue of "could" as opposed to "would" but should include the right signals on this, and other matters, designed to evoke a reasonable reply from the Unionist parties calculated to get a new round of talks started.

NI Local Elections

The British side will also be making the point that it is desirable to get the process moving again as early as possible, preferably in January, so that there could be three or four months of talks between then and the Northern Ireland local elections in May. This would necessitate the calling of an early IGC to agree the necessary gap. In this regard Archer confirmed in familiar terms that there could be no question of the resumption of the old process but a fresh start.

Strand Four

Archer envisages a discussion on Friday of the modus operandi for the new process touching in particular on the role of the plenary as against the bilateral format which had demonstrated its usefulness especially in the closing stages in terms of the contacts between ourselves and the OUP. We remarked on the abuse of the plenary format by the DUP who had continually sought to use it as a convenient platform for obstructive grandstanding and abuse. (Throughout our conversation Archer remarked on their wish to keep the DUP on-side, hinting implicitly that the incoming Government should tailor their initial public statements on the talks to take account of this. Keeping the DUP engaged in the process would make life easier for the OUP).

N/B

Archer confirmed that the statement of 26 March 1991 remained the basic document setting out the guiding principle of a three-stranded approach. He intimated, however, that the question of an additional layer, a strand four, was an idea that they were interested in exploring further with us. This could be a convenient device which might usefully provide for the wider involvement of the Chairman, allowing him the freedom to traverse the three Strands with a view to getting general heads of agreement in place. The idea would be to create a situation where the Chair is not boxed into Strand Two exclusively.

He mentioned in passing that the British understanding with regard to George Thompson is that he may still be available if his continuing involvement is requested by both Governments. If he is willing to return, he will probably be released from his duties in the Cabinet Office by the Australian Government.

North/South Institutions

We discussed the nature of the decision-making process with regard to any North/South institution, addressing the degree of parliamentary/assembly control. Archer recalled that the OUP clearly attaches great importance to the fact that any new joint body which is established would be overseen by a Northern Ireland Assembly. This was a matter of fundamental principle for them.

He intimated that, in contrast to the SDLP approach, the British side had got the feeling from us that we might very well share some of the OUP concerns on this, to the extent that we would wish the Oireachtas to have a say also. We said that this was not our position, to the best of our knowledge. We were keen to see a strong, meaningful North/South body with real executive powers of its own whose decisions and actions could not be frustrated by a Unionist-dominated Assembly.

Bill of Rights

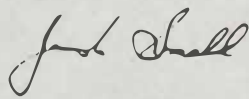
Archer felt that there was an acceptance, for the first time in Northern Ireland, particularly among the legal establishment, that a Bill of Rights could be a useful and beneficial constitutional development. All that had to be overcome now was the familiar reservations in Westminster.

Alliance Party

We had a brief discussion of the NIO's bilateral contacts with the parties. We understand these to be on-going at middle-rank level. We remarked on the role of the Alliance Party, commenting on the fact that its public utterances and its performance at the talks suggested at times that Alliance had abandoned its claim to straddle the political divide and had chosen instead to adopt the mantle of a third Unionist party. We added that Alderdice, in the closing stages had, by his remarks, greatly damaged his party's relationship with the SDLP. Archer surmised that some of the hubris on Alderdice's part may have stemmed from the party's virtual exclusion from the bilateral format. He then said that their recent bilateral contacts indicated that Alliance, aware of the difficulties caused by Alderdice's stance, may be ready to modify their position in any future negotiations.

Briefings

Archer referred to the briefings which the NIO and the NI civil service have been providing for the parties. They were greatly encouraged by the response from the parties to these briefings. There was a great ignorance among the parties, none of whom had any direct experience of office, of the details of Government administration, particularly about financial and budgetary matters. He indicated that these briefings would continue even if the talks process recommenced.



Joseph Small
Ambassador