



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/47/27

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

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

Political Developments file

- Mr. O'Donovan
- Mr. Farrell
- Mr. Mellett
- Mr. Bassett
- Mr. O Riordain
- Mr. Feely

CONFIDENTIAL

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SECURE FAX

COVER SHEET

(ONE PER ADDRESSEE)

FAX MESSAGE NUMBER : 635
 DATE : 16-9-93
 TIME :
 PAGES : 18

TO BE INSERTED
 BY COM. GEN.
 LVEAGH HOUSE
 (INCLUDING COVER SHEET)

IMMEDIATE / URGENT (DELETE AS NECESSARY)

TO Secretariat FROM HQ
 FOR Joint Sec FROM O'Donoghue
 REF: YOUR/My _____
 SUBJECT _____

COMMENTS

REPLIES TO THIS FAX MESSAGE TO BE SENT BY SECURE FAX TO HQ
FAX NO. 784936

CONFIDENTIAL

635/2

Confidential

ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE BRITISH-IRISH ASSOCIATION
Cambridge, 10-12 September 1993

SUMMARY

The annual BIA Conference took place in Cambridge last weekend. It attracted, as usual, an attendance of over 100 politicians, officials, academics and others from both sides of the Irish Sea. The Tanaiste was present for the initial stages and addressed the conference on Friday evening. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland addressed the conference on Saturday evening.

This year's gathering showed a decline in the number of politicians from Northern Ireland (no senior SDLP or UUP figures and no DUP representative at all) and from Britain (the absence of a Labour front-bench representative was particularly noted).

The conference, which was as usual organized into plenary and working-group sessions, focussed on the prospects for making political progress over the coming months. Ancillary themes included: a review of last year's talks; the Opsahl Commission recommendations; the implications of an alleged "deal" between the UUP and the British Government; the joint authority controversy sparked off by the leaking of a Labour Party document; the Hume/Adams talks; and the "peace envoy" proposal. The latter discussion benefited from the presence of former Congressman Bruce Morrison, Ambassador Kennedy Smith and other U.S. participants.

635/3

The following is a necessarily selective summary of the main points of interest which arose over the weekend.

(1) - Prospects for fresh political talks

The first major event of the Conference was the Tanaiste's address on Friday evening (text attached). The address, in which the Tanaiste underlined the need for the consent of both communities to any new arrangements and developed the concept of joint "ownership" of new political institutions, was the subject of much favourable comment afterwards.

In the course of the weekend, the importance of getting fresh political dialogue underway at the earliest juncture was underlined on all sides. A number of conclusions about the procedure and substance for new talks were drawn from the 1992 experience.

The Secretary of State commented that, while the odds were probably against success, he saw rational grounds nevertheless for supposing that resumed talks would succeed.

Mary Holland suggested that the UUP's closer relationship with the British Government might make them more confident about entering new talks.

David Fell expressed some optimism about the prospects for new talks. There was a limited "window of opportunity" at present which should be exploited. In a working-group discussion he speculated on an outcome which fell short of joint authority (though this would, of course, be presented differently by Unionist and nationalist politicians to their respective constituencies).

However, John Rogers SC and some other Southern

G35/4

representatives predicted that public opinion in the South would not be ready to make the sacrifices (e.g., the commitment of Irish security forces north of the border) necessary for joint authority.

There was a general view that Strand Three had not been fully explored or exploited last year and that resumed work between the two Governments in that Strand would be very desirable.

It was suggested that the parties would not have faith in either Government unless they knew "where the Governments want to take them" and what the limits of the negotiations would be. Clive Soley (Labour) commented that Unionists would always be resistant to talks, as they could expect to come out of them with some disimprovement vis-a-vis the status quo. It was up to the two Governments, accordingly, to "provide a system" for getting the Unionists to the table. It was wrong of the British Government to simply wait until the parties came of their own accord.

Deputy Des O'Malley commented that participants in renewed talks would have to be ready to give up cherished ideals and to accept that they would leave talks minus much of their "historical baggage".

John Rogers agreed, pointing out that the Programme for Government made clear that the Government "is going to drop baggage". He emphasized the Tanaiste's personal commitment to finding a solution, adding that the Tanaiste had "taken the Northern Ireland portfolio" because he believed that nothing could be done about Ireland until something was done about Northern Ireland. Rogers hoped to see over the next six months a "dramatic and innovative input" by the Irish Government which would involve arrangements for an internal sharing of government in NI and North/South institutions with "something of a constitutional character" (the extent of their

executive role could be debated).

In his address on Saturday evening, the Secretary of State took a markedly upbeat view of the prospects for talks. He began by describing the previous day's Conference as the best he had taken part in so far. He derided suggestions that there were poor personal relations between himself and the Tanaiste and said that it would come as no surprise to this gathering if he said that he greatly appreciated having the Tanaiste as his colleague.

He highlighted the "trenchant language" in which the two Governments had reaffirmed the previous day their objective of a comprehensive settlement and he observed that "there is no daylight between us and the Irish Government here". He believed that there was also sufficient "will to try" among the parties. He detected a unanimous view that the status quo was not a viable option; general recognition that the 1992 talks had achieved significant areas of agreement; and much support for bilaterals "primarily with the British Government" to see what was "bankable" and what constituted obstacles.

He "warmly endorsed" the Tanaiste's emphasis on the need for the two communities to give their consent to new arrangements. The participants - "and that includes the Governments" - would need to consider what scope for flexibility they had. The two Governments should aim to draw up over the coming weeks "an overall board for the negotiation stage" so as to permit, when appropriate, the full reconvening of full round-table talks with "a strong chance of swift and positive success".

He also acknowledged "the duty of Government to give focus and direction to the process when that stage is reached" (a reference to the British Government paper first mooted several months ago). This, however, would not be "a blueprint".

63516

The Secretary of State went on to endorse the Tanaiste's quotation of a Molyneaux remark about issues which were for decision by the two Governments. He emphasized the importance of constitutional matters (which, though strictly for Strand Three, "form a bridge between each Strand") and the desirability of the two Governments "getting down to particulars" in order to assist the bilaterals process. Noting coyly the omission of any Strand Three papers from Paul Bew's "otherwise singularly well-documented" presentation on last year's talks, he highlighted the work to be done by the Governments if they were to discern clearly "what kind of overall settlement may prove acceptable to all". He applauded the Tanaiste's acceptance that fresh thinking was required but added that "there now needs to be a product".

(A separate note covers in more detail the Secretary of State's references at the Conference to the work to be done by the two Governments over the coming weeks).

In a plenary session on Sunday, Ronan Fanning contrasted Sir Patrick's upbeat tone with what he considered to be the Tanaiste's "pessimism" about the prospects. The Secretary of State re-emphasized the language of the communique, said that he had not picked up the same impression as Fanning and added that the Tanaiste had, of course, been very tired on Friday evening (four hours sleep the previous night followed by an arduous Conference etc).

He underlined the need to make progress between now and the end of the year in view of the impending European Parliament election campaign. He defended the "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed" formula as "the only basis on which we can proceed". He would not be proposing any change to it - not least because of suspicions that the British Government was interested only in an internal solution. However, there

635/7

was nothing to prevent participants from agreeing a number of "smaller and lesser points" bilaterally if they considered it expedient to do so.

Chris McGimpsey welcomed the latter point. He ruled out joint authority and said he had been heartened by John Rogers' dismissal of it. He emphasized the paucity of powers at local government level in NI ("a 19-year-old with an AK 47 has much more power to change events in the Shankill than I have as a Councillor"). He also wanted to see included on the agenda for talks the need for action to combat deprivation in both communities.

Robin Wilson questioned the continued usefulness of the "nothing is agreed..." formula. He urged that any new talks should proceed instead on the basis of small steps and interim agreements which would progressively build confidence. (John Tusa of the BBC observed that the Israelis and Palestinians seemed to have decided to agree something on the basis that agreement on everything was unlikely).

Wilson also suggested that future talks should not be shrouded in the same secrecy as last year's.

John Chilcot observed that process was no less important than substance for any new talks. At a number of key points in the earlier rounds, progress had been visible only when some procedural change had been made. The substantial difficulties of a round-table, plenary format were recognized. More innovation would be required in future talks in order to create opportunities for progress.

The Secretary of State commented that all participants recognized that to begin again in a round-table format would be "a disaster" (as it would lead to mere reiteration of known positions). The unanimous preference was for discrete and

635/8

private discussions for the purpose of drawing up a "board for consideration", followed by round-table discussions. He also stressed the desirability of mobility between the three Strands (as in the informal bilateral phase last year, which some had dubbed "Strand Four", a term he considered "nonsense").

Taking up his earlier reference to a British Government document which would give "focus and direction" to the talks, the Secretary of State suggested that "we may now have moved away from that thinking" and that there might be more advantage in the two Governments considering together what offered the best prospect of an accommodation - "so that the parties themselves know what the Governments are proposing, in particular on constitutional matters".

David Trimble said that the Unionists would be watching developments closely and hoped that sufficient progress would be made to enable them to move forward from the bilateral stage.

Asked by John Bowman if he favoured an all-Ireland plebiscite on the same day on the outcome of new talks, the Secretary of State said that it would be for the participants to decide how the envisaged consultation would be carried out. However, he personally favoured the idea.

(2) 1992 talks

Paul Bew (a QUB academic) presented a tendentious commentary on last year's talks which was based on a reading of what appeared to be a complete set of the Strand One and Strand Two papers. In addition, a hostile article by Garret FitzGerald in Friday's Irish Times about the Irish Government's stance in those talks attracted some attention.

635/9

Bew held that it was disappointment with the results of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, rather than any real desire to achieve devolution, which had motivated the British Government to pursue "a new and more widely based agreement".

Bew dismissed suggestions that more liberal social attitudes in the South were bringing about greater openness towards Unionists; "the Anglo-Irish Agreement showed them that they could do things over the heads of Unionists".

On Strand One, he criticised an assumption in the SDLP's proposals that the Irish Government should be equally represented in NI alongside the British Government - with the latter continuing to pay for such an arrangement. He also suggested that a significant shift in the talks came when the DUP indicated that they were ready to support a system that could ~~evolve~~ into power-sharing.

On Strand Two, Bew rehearsed the standard Unionist complaint that the Irish Government did not respond with the expected "generosity" to the UUP's willingness to come to Dublin. He commented also on the "relatively relaxed" attitude which the UUP were demonstrating towards North/South economic cooperation. They seemed ready to agree to large-scale cooperation with limited executive powers and their ideas in this respect were ultimately not much different from the SDLP's. Bew found this quite striking against a background of increasing scepticism (as he saw it) about an "Irish dimension".

His reading of the papers, however, was that a settlement based on power-sharing and an "Irish dimension" would not be enough for the SDLP. In his view, no accommodation could be reached if the SDLP wanted an explicit commitment to Irish unity.

In the subsequent debate, Martin Mansergh described the Garret FitzGerald article as a highly tendentious account of last year's talks. He noted that both Governments had declared that the talks had made considerable progress; indeed, if they had not, it would be difficult to understand why both were working so hard now to get them restarted. The process required patience and persistence. To suggest that a major opportunity had been missed last autumn was a gross oversimplification. Dr Mansergh also suggested that, if the Government's approach was to "go over the heads of the Unionists" (as Bew had claimed), it would be more logical for them to be sticking to the present Agreement rather than exploring alternative possibilities.

Bew noted that, in a letter of 24 October last to Sir Ninian Stephen, Peter Robinson had claimed that the UUP were about to sign up to an embryonic form of Irish unity. He suggested in the light of this remark that the UUP had probably gone very close to the limit of what was electorally sustainable in terms of the flexibility they had demonstrated on North/South institutions.

John Chilcot commented that Bew's analysis had gone to the heart of a number of the issues which had arisen in last year's talks.

John Alderdice highlighted the absence of any reference to Strand Three papers in Bew's presentation and, in private conversation afterwards, was critical of the two Governments' failure to agree positions in Strand Three and to communicate these to the parties.

The then Irish Government's position in last year's talks was raised by Anthony Kenny during a plenary session later on Saturday. Martin Mansergh responded by noting that the two Governments had said publicly that progress had been made both

635/11

in the 1991 and 1992 talks. Deputy Des O'Malley commented that a working-group discussion which he had attended had reached a different conclusion.

David Trimble endorsed Garret FitzGerald's contention that the talks had failed largely because of Irish Government intransigence. The UUP had expected that the Irish Government "would do something when we went to Dublin". Trimble was not encouraged by the Tanaiste and the new Dublin administration as there were no indications of a significantly different position.

Alex Attwood responded that the Irish Government were not to blame for the collapse of last year's talks.

In a plenary session on Sunday morning, Deputy O'Malley held that a significant opportunity had been lost last year but he blamed this on the practical arrangements made for the talks. Recalling the difficult conditions of "a very small room, a very large table and 48 people around it", he commented that the only progress made had been in Strand One by a sub-committee comprising one from each delegation. He believed that progress was only possible in that kind of context.

John Rogers commented that the Irish Government last autumn was "coming to the end of the line" and had therefore not been in a position to do much in the negotiations.

(3) Alleged "deal" between UUP and British Government

The view generally taken (and endorsed by British Government and UUP participants) was that no formal deal had been concluded. (Brian Feeney characterised the situation as "no deal - just chronic ad hockery"). However, many participants highlighted the difficulties posed for a resumption of talks by perceptions of a deal. The implications of a British

635/1E

Government abandoning its professed neutrality for reasons of domestic expediency and lending explicit support to Unionist interests were analyzed. Some suggested that movement by the Irish Government on Articles 2 and 3 had now been made more difficult.

In addition, the relative pros and cons of a Select Committee and an end to Orders in Council were debated. A number of Southern participants felt that, as a Select Committee would enhance parliamentary scrutiny of NI legislation, it could not be opposed with any credibility. While accepting that it would have an integrationist effect, they did not see any incongruity between this and the British Government's stated commitment to devolution.

Clive Soley and others felt that a Select Committee could be lived with but that we had to guard in general against "creeping integrationism". In a working-group discussion, the undersigned suggested that the signals sent out by a decision to establish a Select Committee would be at variance with the British Government's commitments both under the Agreement and in the talks process. What was needed above all was a joint approach between both Governments which would facilitate balanced movement towards a settlement of the problem. Martin Mansergh asked whether anyone could demonstrate how a Select Committee, or other measures of that kind would get us anywhere near peace in Northern Ireland.

Chris McGimpsey claimed that there was no conflict between integrationists and devolutionists within the UUP. Though he was himself in the latter category, he had no difficulty with a Select Committee, as he saw it simply as a means of remedying a democratic deficit in the House of Commons (given that the NIO was the only Department not to have such a Committee).

635/13

In support of his argument that neither a Select Committee nor an end to Orders in Council would be integrationist moves, David Trimble quoted John Chilcot as saying that the latter would effectively mean less integration as it would introduce a distinctive (and possibly disruptive) parliamentary layer to the process. (Chilcot corrected this quotation by adding that where he and Trimble differed was on the practicality of introducing an additional statute book at Westminster).

(4)—British Labour Party document

The Labour Party document advocating joint authority which was leaked last June featured in many discussions over the weekend.

Prof. Desmond Rea suggested that the SDLP's Strand One proposal had provided the essential thrust for the document. He echoed Bew in asking whether Labour had raised with Dublin one of the document's key arguments, i.e., that the Irish Government should share the financial burden of joint authority with the British Government. He wondered whether the Hume/Adams talks were aimed at producing a common objective of joint authority on the basis outlined in the Labour paper.

Clive Soley said that the document was not a policy paper nor would it become one at the forthcoming Labour Conference. It would, however, be discussed seriously over the next year or two and could ultimately become party policy. It was not a blueprint for Irish unity; in fact, Soley had criticised it on those very grounds.

Soley criticised the British Government for not indicating clearly its intentions in relation to Northern Ireland and for allowing paramilitaries to set the agenda for too long. Democratic politicians had a duty to discuss all the options

G35/14

which existed.

David Goodall warned that a British Government declaration which clearly disavowed Northern Ireland would not only not correspond to the real situation but would feed Unionist fears and make the problem more difficult to solve.

Robin Wilson noted that a difference between the SDLP proposals and the Labour document was that the latter took the view (which he shared) that unity by consent was not achievable. He noted also that Gerry Adams had expressed interest in joint authority as a stepping stone to Irish unity.

(5) Hume/Adams talks

Unionist participants criticised the initiative for adding to the Unionist community's sense of insecurity and alienation.

Chris McGimpsey said he was still not clear what the British Government's view of it was. As John Hume was, on the face of it, not in a position to deliver anything to Sinn Fein, Unionists were worried that he might be acting as an envoy for "other people". McGimpsey also warned that the Provos would demand "a very high price" in exchange for a permanent cessation of violence.

SDLP participants defended the talks, claiming that a significant exchange in Republican thinking had become perceptible in recent years, that a degree of war weariness was setting in and that there was a growing desire for political involvement which had to be encouraged.

Alex Attwood suggested in this regard that there was a "window of opportunity" of three to four months which should be exploited. He believed that the IRA were ready to

635/15

contemplate a complete cessation of violence. In a broader sense, he argued that the task of "engaging with" Sinn Fein should not be left to Hume, a few churchmen and the Morrison group but should be an important challenge for "all of us" over the next three to four years. Imaginative thinking about what the outcome of such contacts might be was called for. In particular, Unionists should start thinking about how they might take part in that process.

The Secretary of State confined himself to the comment that John Hume was the best judge of who he should speak to. He reiterated that the British Government were not, and would never be, interested in a ceasefire. They required a final end to the violence which would be proclaimed as such. The British Government would never negotiate with people who either justified or perpetrated violence. The Tanaiste had said exactly the same thing, most recently in his Mansion House speech.

Equally, "we have said" that, if a cessation is proclaimed and sufficient time elapses to satisfy suspicious minds, then a new situation is reached. Furthermore, it was not sensible to preclude totally the possibility of talking at some stage in the future to people who "may have done reprehensible things in the past".

Democratic Left participants claimed that the initiative was doomed to failure, as Adams would not be able to sell a permanent cessation of violence to the Army Council and Sinn Fein would in any event ensure that no credit came to the SDLP.

Alliance were also hostile. John Alderdice suggested that to agree to a cessation of violence without a significant quid pro quo would amount to Gerry Adams "signing his own death warrant". He also warned that a SDLP massively weakened by

635/16

"this self-inflicted damage" would have implications for efforts to establish a responsibility-sharing government in Northern Ireland.

Mary Holland suggested that fear that there might possibly be a positive outcome to which people would have to react lay behind much of the disapproval of the initiative.

The Irish Times story suggesting that a temporary lull in Provo activity in recent days was in fact an undeclared ceasefire attracted attention on Saturday morning. The general inclination was to link this to the visit by the Morrison group to NI, rather than to the Hume/Adams talks.

Conor Brady (Editor of the Irish Times) told the undersigned in confidence that the paper had been reliably informed that Sinn Fein had given the Morrison group a written undertaking to the effect that IRA violence would cease in response to the arrival of a peace envoy.

Unionist participants were emphatically opposed to Sinn Fein involvement in political talks. Others, however, felt that different lessons had to be learned from the PLO/Israeli accord.

Deputy Des O'Malley felt that few analogies could be drawn between the two situations. The PLO represented the Palestinian nation and were recognized by over one hundred foreign governments. If constitutional politicians in Northern Ireland were to be treated on equal terms with people who had supported the use of violence for the past twenty years, the consequence would be to legitimize the use of violence both there and elsewhere. Deputy O'Malley noted that the Official IRA had turned themselves into a legitimate political organization. He observed that the same choice was always open to the Provisional IRA and that "those who talk to

G35/17

them should realize that".

John Rogers criticised the issuing of a joint statement by the SDLP and Sinn. Fein leaders and suggested that this had adversely affected perceptions of Hume in the South. It was important that Adams should indicate publicly and soon how far Sinn Fein were prepared to move.

In a working group-discussion, Brian Feeney mentioned that Hume was aiming for an acknowledgment by the British Government (in extension of the Brooke formula of November 1990) that it no longer had a "political interest in remaining in Northern Ireland".

(6) "Peace envoy"

A wide range of views were expressed on this subject. Some, but by no means all, Unionists were hostile. John Dunlop warned that any perceived link to an IRA ceasefire would mean that Unionists would see an envoy as arriving with "a bag full of hidden agendas". Many other participants, however, were well-disposed, subject to the timing being right.

The conference concluded with a presentation by Bruce Morrison of the proposal which was shrewdly judged, soothing many fears which had been expressed by participants without at the same time limiting his room for future manoeuvre.

He stressed that the idea had not been dreamt up "in Boston pubs" nor was it intended as a political card which could be played by contending groups, "including Governments". It was a goodwill initiative with both political and economic dimensions. If an envoy were ever appointed, his or her mission would be prepared by the State Department (who are "highly responsible, professional people"). The idea would be moved forward in a very cautious and benign way.

635/18

He emphasized the desire of the relatively affluent Irish-American business community to be helpful in some way to Ireland, North and South. Given that it was very difficult for participants in the political talks to break out of traditional moulds, it might be that a person with diplomatic or political negotiating skills, with no preconceived ideas and backed by the authority of the President, could make a positive contribution. It would be for "the State Department and the President" to select a person with the requisite skills.

Morrison demurred slightly at suggestions that the envoy should not come unless he or she was invited by both sides. He said all the parties, in recognition, however, that the envoy would probably require the "acquiescence" of the two Governments. He emphasized that the envoy would have no agenda of his/her own (so that he or Ray Flynn, for example, would be "absolutely wrong" for the job) and that his/her arrival would not be linked to "certain things happening". By the same logic, there was no reason why the envoy should not be deployed simultaneously with resumed talks rather than only in the event of the latter failing.

In response to Deputy John Bruton, who warned that "the introduction of a fifth player could slow down the playing of the cards at the game" and who also feared that the envoy might be pressed by Irish-American opinion to go down the joint authority route, Morrison defended the proposal further but said that it would not be pursued if "people here ultimately reject it".

David Donoghue
16 September 1993