



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/103/9

Creator(s): Department of Justice

Accession Conditions: Open

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

TRUSS

IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

SW1X 7HR

cc PST
 PSS
 M. Fuley
 M. Fitzmaurice
 M. P. O'Brien
 Joint Sec
 Counsellor A-1
 etc

CONFIDENTIAL

26 April 1993

Mr Seán O hUiginn
 Assistant Secretary
 Department of Foreign Affairs
 Dublin 2

Discussion with Ms Pauline Neville-Jones

Dear Assistant Secretary

Ms Pauline Neville-Jones, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, came to lunch on Friday last (23rd) and what follows is a report on the main points that arose in our discussion.

Sir Patrick Mayhew's Standing

It was clear from what she said that Mayhew's work in the Northern Ireland post is held in high regard by British Ministers and officials. Given her position, I interpreted this as meaning also that he enjoys a high rating by the Prime Minister who, as you know, owes his first step up the political ladder to Mayhew who appointed John Major his Parliamentary Private Secretary in 1981. Ms Neville-Jones went on to say that the Secretary of State is held in some awe by the Unionists, including James Molyneaux. They realise, she said, that he is a formidable Minister and "not just another Secretary of State for Northern Ireland". I might add in that connection that Mayhew himself told me a few months ago that on one occasion he found it necessary to play Paisley at his own game: he engaged in a shouting match with Paisley who was so taken aback that he (Mayhew) got the better of the argument. Whatever about our own assessment of Mayhew - and I think it would differ substantially from that portrayed by Neville-Jones - the interesting point is that he is perceived in London as doing a very good job. The indications are that he enjoys the full support of the Prime Minister who, as you know, spent two days in Northern Ireland recently. While there he repeated some of Mayhew's own language, including his expression of hope, when addressing Northern Ireland Conservatives, that one day a Secretary of State for the area would come from within their ranks!

Prime Minister Major's Commitment

Ms Neville-Jones emphasised the Prime Minister's strong and firm commitment in relation to Northern Ireland. He wants to do something significant during his stewardship. His preoccupation in recent months with other urgent issues such as the Maastricht Bill and the Bosnian situation should not give the impression, she said, that his interest had waned. He does not want to see a continuation of the present unsatisfactory situation. His recent two-day visit to Northern Ireland was evidence of this. She went on to say that the Cabinet sub-committee on Northern Ireland met recently. Major is very keen to see a resumption of talks as soon as possible. I should mention that I met the Prime Minister very briefly after the Warrington Memorial Service attended by President Robinson on 7 April. He was on his way back from Northern Ireland and he mentioned that while there he threw his weight behind the efforts to get the talks relaunched. I told Neville-Jones that her remarks about the Prime Minister's personal interest and commitment were very welcome. The situation in Northern Ireland demanded this and would require the kind of courage and decisive action exhibited by the Prime Minister's predecessors, Ted Heath and Margaret Thatcher. I reminded her that it was Heath who presided over the abolition of Stormont and the negotiation of the Sunningdale Agreement whilst Margaret Thatcher signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Twenty-four more years of violence were simply unthinkable and the onus was on the two sovereign Governments working closely together to find a solution.

The Major/Molyneaux Meeting

I used the occasion to elicit as much information as possible about Molyneaux's meeting with the Prime Minister on 20 April. Neville-Jones said that although she herself was not present, she had read the transcript of the meeting very carefully. Molyneaux was at pains to express his worries about the Unionist community in Northern Ireland. The feeling of frustration and uncertainty in that community was expressed in the increased resort to violence. Commenting on this point, Ms Neville-Jones said that this is a serious worry for the British authorities: they fear the possibility of an all-out civil war with the British Army attacked by both sides. She observed that if a doomsday situation of that kind emerged there would inevitably be an overspill of violence. Molyneaux outlined his approach (his so-called blueprint) which envisaged talks involving the Northern Ireland political parties, with the two Governments engaged in separate discussions. According to Neville-Jones, the Prime Minister gave him no comfort in regard to that approach. Instead, he emphasised the need to resume talks on the basis of the three strands. Although Major treated him courteously, he nevertheless was firm in emphasising the direction of Government policy. Being mild-mannered, Molyneaux did not engage in any table-banging but did express his doubts about the efficacy of the three-stranded approach. Neville-Jones said there was a feeling on the British side that Molyneaux seemed troubled about the future and even about his own leadership of his party. I asked her if the meeting produced

a particular outcome. Apart from the fact that the Prime Minister had used the occasion to emphasise the Government's adherence to the three-stranded approach, no specific understanding emerged from the discussion, she said. Given the fact that local elections are pending in Northern Ireland, I asked whether Paisley had sought a separate meeting with the Prime Minister. So far no such meeting had been sought but Neville-Jones said the likelihood is that if one is requested Paisley is bound to seek a different format to avoid giving the impression that he is slavishly aping Molyneaux's actions. She agreed that Molyneaux gained some useful publicity and political advantage from his well-publicised blueprint and meeting with the Prime Minister. My personal view is that the British cooperated readily with Molyneaux in that connection. Their assessment of the local elections is that the OUP will gain at the expense of the DUP.

The Unionist Community

Giving what is presumably a considered British assessment of the Unionist community, Neville-Jones said that they are currently in a terrible dilemma. They simply do not trust London, despite repeated assurances and of course they trust Dublin even less. From a position of dominance, bigotry and self-assurance they are now vulnerable and anxious about the future. They have lost Stormont and, since the Anglo-Irish Agreement, "they want to step off the world", to use Neville-Jones' words. After 1985 they went through the boycott phase which got them nowhere. With all this uncertainty and anxiety they are always seeking reassurances from the British while at the same time realising deep down that the talks process must proceed. The build-up of loyalist violence had to be viewed against that background, she said. I replied that I detected from time to time a feeling in British official circles that somehow the Irish Government and the nationalists in Northern Ireland owed something to the Unionists since the Anglo-Irish Agreement came into operation. That was an unacceptable view based on a seriously flawed assessment of the situation. The imposition of direct rule and the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been necessary to introduce a measure of fair play after fifty years of unsupervised Unionist misrule which had been characterised by blatant discrimination. Although the lot of the minority had improved, there was still a long way to go before equality would be achieved, especially in the field of employment. Neville-Jones made the interesting comment that whereas the Unionists regarded the SDLP and the nationalists generally as enjoying the full support of the Irish Government, the Unionists themselves on the contrary were often uncertain of British Government support. I reminded her that on the central issue of constitutional accommodation the Unionist community was fully catered for whereas the Nationalists were left only with their aspirations.

The Talks

Ms Neville-Jones repeated the British Government's commitment to the resumption of talks. Mayhew remains committed, she said, to the three-stranded approach but feels he will have to

be more prescriptive. I warned that any attempt to concentrate on strand one and an internal settlement was doomed to failure from the start. Likewise, there would have to be full and substantive consultation in advance of any blueprints or proposals. Merely giving us sight of a paper in advance without a proper opportunity for input and discussion would be totally unacceptable. If they had a problem with the Unionists in that regard they would simply have to find a formula in advance for dealing with that aspect of the matter. An approach that did not have the prior blessing of the two sovereign Governments was unlikely to work and it was important to emphasise that point before the talks resumed. We were unhappy with some of the things that Mayhew had been saying in his speeches in recent months. He seemed to be solely concerned with Unionists grievances and to have abandoned a neutral stance. Besides, he had not been even-handed in his criticism of Northern Ireland's political parties. With regard to strand two of the talks, I said it was imperative that any overall agreement should provide for a new durable North/South institution that would be free-standing, have significant authority and be capable of taking on additional functions with the passage of time. It should not be subject to the control (or veto) of a Northern Assembly. Ms Neville-Jones enquired whether we envisaged British Ministers participating in such an institution. I said this was not what we had in mind at all; our aim was to work closely with the Unionists in a North/South institution and gradually build up mutual trust and respect. I added that we would not succeed in a referendum without a very meaningful North/South body as well as acceptable new arrangements that included the involvement of the minority in the government of Northern Ireland. In brief, an internal settlement that paid lip-service only to the wider Irish dimension simply was not on.

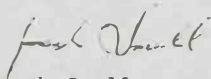
Articles 2 & 3

I told Neville-Jones that Articles 2 & 3 had been on the table with other constitutional issues since the talks began. They were not in the gift of the Taoiseach or the Tanaiste or indeed of the Irish Government as a whole since they could only be changed by the Irish people voting in a referendum. The political reality was that it was only in the context of an acceptable overall package emanating from the talks, that a reformulation of Articles 2 & 3 could be envisaged. It would be very foolish of Mr. Mayhew to seek to exploit imaginary differences on our side in that regard. We were very conscious of his switch from neutral to critical comment over recent months when referring to Articles 2 & 3. The criticism had got progressively stronger and this was duly noted by our side. It was yet another example of palpable pro-unionist tilting and had the effect of encouraging Unionist intransigence. The DUP had already painted itself into a corner by making the abolition of Articles 2 & 3 a precondition for their participation in further talks whilst some OUP statements on occasion followed the same pattern.

The Liverpool Speech

Ms Neville-Jones brought with her a copy of the speech that Mayhew was about to deliver at the Irish Studies Institute in Liverpool and which I had already seen. In order to underline the fact that we did not hold Mayhew in the same awe as the British and the Unionists seemed to do, I repeated some of the criticisms I had already made of Mayhew's approach over recent months. The speech appeared to be addressing Unionists' concerns mainly and was very weak in regard to strand 2. Also, it was unfortunate, I said, that he found it necessary to set limits to the talks by ruling out joint sovereignty in advance. In doing so he appeared to be reacting to DUP criticism of Mr. Hurd's recent speech at Oxford when the word "partner" was used to describe the Irish Government's role.

Yours sincerely


Joseph Small
Ambassador