



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/94/21

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.

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

10 June 1993

Confidential

Mr. Sean O hUiginn
 Assistant Secretary
 Anglo-Irish Division
 Department of Foreign Affairs

*17
6
93*
*[Separate copy to
Mr O hUiginn]*

*cc to 'Diner'
 participants
 151*

Dear Assistant Secretary

Murray/Butler Diner

I enclose draft notes of the Diner discussion at the Cabinet Office in London last night which I prepared on return here today.

Main Points of Interest

I think the main points of Anglo-Irish interest were:

- the British seem to have no idea of where they are going; they are simply hoping we will not rock the boat at a time when their Government is embattled, the Prime Minister's position is shaky and he can, as Robin Butler put it, take no risks;
- they acknowledge that there is no practical possibility of resuming political talks for some time; they have no better idea of filling the present vacuum than by maintaining bilateral contacts with us and with the parties as best they can (the DUP have ruled themselves out) and hoping that it will be productive in, say, 6-8 months;
- they want the message from next Wednesday's Summit to be that the two Governments remain committed to the talks process; we said this would not wash with the public who knew the situation very well; it was now necessary for the two Governments to take the initiative by agreeing between themselves a framework which they would later put to the parties;
- we disputed their deliberately upbeat notion of "convergence" between us, saying their prescription is still a devolution-led, pro-unionist policy which would not work; they reacted to this "gloomy" analysis; at the conclusion of the evening, Butler said the discussion had been "uncomfortable".
- The British were curiously reticent on security. The Deputy Secretary at the NIO, John Ledlie, told me today we should not be surprised if the Prime Minister took some time to describe current problems and ask for our help (on the lines of the proposals already made at official level).

NIO Anxiety

I have the strong impression here that the NIO have the simple aim of getting past the Summit. They are deeply anxious to retain control of the process, recalling what happened in 1983-85 when they were excluded from the formative stages of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. They would be concerned about any prospect of the Taoiseach and Prime Minister deciding on a new tack, perhaps with a greater direct input from the Cabinet Office and Foreign Office. Hence their talking up of "convergence" between the two Governments which flies in the face of exchanges at official level. They have an ally in the Cabinet Secretary, Robin Butler, who has not shown any close personal interest in Northern Ireland and has been content to leave policy to the NIO. His concerns have tended to be almost exclusively centred on Whitehall, Westminster and the Prime Minister's fortunes about which he was slightly emotional last evening. Clearly, he hopes the Taoiseach will not express views as "uncomfortable" as the views he heard at the Diner.

Prospects for the Summit

The political atmosphere in London may be a little easier for the Prime Minister in a week's time, but we have been given a clear signal that we should not expect openness to a change of British policy at this Summit. We could, however, present our own view of the present situation in plain terms and propose a Summit to conduct a serious review of the talks process in the Autumn which would encourage the idea of a hands-on approach by the two-Governments and avoid a sense of drift which would be damaging to any prospect of political progress as well as inviting to the paramilitaries. I think that is attainable.

Suggestions for the Taoiseach's Presentation

In his presentation to the Prime Minister, I would suggest if I may that the Taoiseach consider the following line of approach:

- there is now little or no expectation that the parties are likely to get back into talks, still less agree anything amongst themselves. That is the common view in political circles and in the media North and South;
- We have done everything we can to promote the right atmosphere for talks but it simply has not worked. To maintain the fiction that it is working will simply invite derision in Ireland, quite possibly in Britain too;
- what we can do is by all means to encourage the parties to talk to each other as Molyneaux wants, maintain contacts with them ourselves, but set about agreeing a framework into which we would seek to draw the parties at a later stage; if we look like agreeing something, that will be a powerful inducement to them to get back to serious negotiation;

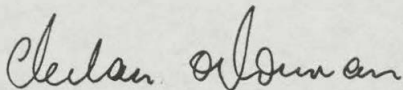
- The UUP is crucial to any possibility of resuming Talks. After his disappointment in the local elections, Jim Molyneux has ruled that out for now. Let's not overlook the fact that he has actually proposed in public statements that the two Governments should seek to resolve both the constitutional issue and the issue of joint sovereignty, as he calls it, before coming back to the parties;
- from our point of view, let me repeat that (1) there must be a balanced accommodation on the constitutional issue, (2) the North/South institutions must have a political impact with the Nationalists; it must be more than a low key, essentially cooperative arrangement; (3) in any internal arrangements we must give full recognition to the principle of parity of esteem for both political traditions; and (4) we need to think out arrangements for a new Conference to deal with the non-devolved powers.
- let's agree therefore to meet in the Autumn, say early October, to mandate the officials to produce a draft framework for a new Agreement in the meantime, and to review the situation as we find it then;
- it is vital that the Anglo-Irish Conference should be seen to be in full operation; let's ensure that it gets on with its programme of work.

Possible Joint Press Line

Both heads of Government might:

- acknowledge to the press the present difficulty of resuming the talks, evident from public statements by party leaders;
- propose to maintain contact with the parties and encourage them back into talks as soon as possible;
- reaffirm the joint commitment to the three-stranded process in the agreed statement of 26 March 1991;
- express joint determination to make progress Government-to-Government on a possible agreed settlement;
- announce that a review at head of Government level has been agreed for the Autumn;
- note that the Anglo-Irish Conference will be getting on with its intensive programme of work in the meantime.

Yours sincerely



Declan O' Donovan
Joint Secretary