



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/94/8

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.

M P O Sullivan

mk

19-2-93

CONFIDENTIAL.

Meeting with SDLP Delegation, Government
Buildings, Dublin, 17th February, 1993.

The Taoiseach, the Tanaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Justice met an SDLP delegation comprising MPs John Hume, Seamus Mallon, Eddie McGrady and Joe Hendron in Government Buildings on Wednesday, 17th February, 1993 at 4 p.m. Also present were Mr. Sean O Huiginn, and Mr. Walter Kirwan, Assistant Secretaries in the Departments of Foreign Affairs and of the Taoiseach, respectively. The following report of the exchanges is put in the form of direct speech but does not purport to be exactly verbatim or necessarily exhaustive.

Taoiseach:

Very glad to meet you again after an interval since the last round of Talks came to a close. Would like to get your views on a number of questions:

How do you assess the last Talks and the lessons of the experience?

How can the process of dialogue be relaunched and what are the prospects?

What general goal can and should be aim for in new Talks?

What should our line be vis-a-vis the high profile campaign being mounted by the unionists in regard to Articles 2 and 3?

Hume:

How hard are the British pushing you on those Articles?

Taoiseach:

You see it yourself, in the media reports of comments by Mayhew in speeches, in remarks in the House of Commons etc.

Tánaiste:

It is raised by the British in all the meetings with them.

McGrady:

Is the attention still focused on the distinction between "could" and "would"?

Taoiseach:

It goes beyond that now. They would see a move on the Articles as being an essential part of a settlement that would be acceptable to unionists.

Tánaiste:

But Mayhew has said privately that he understands fully that the Irish Government could not be expected to move on the Articles in isolation.

Taoiseach:

We'd like to have your views on the questions I raised.

Hume:

The unionists approached the talks on the basis of getting power back into their hands. The SDLP approach was to find a solution of the problem, a durable overall settlement that would bring an end to the violence.

The unionist approach was based on an Assembly. But if you look at how unionists have behaved in local government in the North e.g. in Belfast City Council, you would have no confidence in an enlarged version of that. For a month, everybody would applaud any agreement reached on such a basis but it would all break down in confusion within a month.

The SDLP approach was based on the separation of powers as in the U.S., with a Commission including 3 elected people. This Commission would appoint the Government in the North, and could draw the Ministers from anywhere.

The other main element in their proposals was for a very clear link with the South, very closely modelled on the European Community model, with a Council of Ministers, a secretariat analogous to the Commission and a Parliamentary body. Decisions would be by agreement. This would provide the necessary reassurance for unionists. The SDLP aim was that working together on common problems would break down the barriers of distrust and lead ultimately to a new Ireland.

A very important aspect of their approach was that all aspects of a settlement would be put to a vote of the people, North and South. In this way, on the basis that the people of all Ireland had spoken, one could hope that the IRA would end their campaign, having had their claim to legitimacy cut from under them.

I am not so sure that the unionists had a strategy. For example, on the day before the talks ended, Ken Maginness tabled his "great offer" in a paper which, if read carefully, represented a pull-back from the not particularly advanced positions the Official Unionists had indicated at earlier stages of the Talks. Essentially, the proposition was: if the South scraps the Anglo-Irish Agreement and Articles 2 and 3, we might consider a cross border consultative body on a temporary basis.

Behind the scenes, however, the overall mood among the public in the North, especially among business people, is that they want a resumption of Talks, leading to a settlement that will bring an end to violence. Yesterday, I talked, at their invitation - the first ever extended to an SDLP figure - to the Chambers of Commerce in Northern Ireland. They were pressing strongly for a resumption of the Talks.

The two Government's should take ³change of the process and be seen to do so, rather than, as with the last time, having all participants around the

table on an equal basis, so that Paisley was equal in importance to a sovereign Government; and so that, when he walked out, he could bring the process to a halt.

The Governments should have different ways of talking to the parties in The North - singly, and collectively.

It is very desirable that we in the SDLP and the Government in the South have strong co-ordination of our positions.

Taoiseach:

Are you - since you did not mention it - moving away from the idea of three externally appointed Commissioners?

Hume (strongly):

No. we adhere to that proposal. It flows from our whole analysis of the problem, which is that of the Forum Report.

Our proposal has been misunderstood and misrepresented. When I have explained it to unionists privately and pointed out how they would retain so much in the way of status and symbols - with the North still in the U.K., with all the continuing links to Britain - as against a single Irish - appointed Commissioner, they have been less resistant to the approach.

Taoiseach:

Where do you see security in that strategy?

Hume:

Security is a major, fundamental issue. Policing in Northern Ireland is not policing. The support for the police among the nationalist community is generous, considering all the circumstances of the case.

We would like you to go into depth with us on the security problem. It looks as if there is now a deliberate attempt to escalate the threat to nationalists. Seamus (Mallon) has received a number of threats in the past week and there have been petrol - bomb attacks on the houses of two SDLP councillors in Belfast.

Taoiseach:

How do you assess the recent evolution of the relationship between the unionist parties? How do you assess the influence of the fact that local government elections are to be held in May?

Hume:

It looks like there is a strong split emerging between the OUP and the DUP. The Alliance Party have also been getting very troublesome and appearing more unionist than the unionists themselves. A recent statement from them on the reasons for loyalist violence was half-way towards an encouragement on such violence.

Mallon:

The local government elections are irrelevant to relations between the unionist parties across most of Northern Ireland. Only in Belfast, parts of North Down, extending also out to parts of South and East Antrim, is there a contest between OUP and DUP candidates and is the election a factor. On a lot of councils, the DUP is not a force. In any case, outside the areas mentioned, the two unionist parties support each other.

If I can come back to the Talks generally, in the last Talks we were a single Nationalist party from the North of Ireland, in with three unionist parties and the British Government [a reference to Strand 1, presumably].

My advice is: don't get back into talks unless we are all serious about solving this problem. I believe we need to solve it. Those of us here from the SDLP have now been in politics for almost 25 years but yet the same things are happening to the same people in the same places. It is incumbent upon us, as the people really aiming for a settlement, to draw up in detail the new Ireland we see. We have to take the hard issues and deal with them head on.

It is incredible to me that, in, now, over three years of talks, we never discussed the fact that there is a war on in the North and there was no serious discussion of how to get to grips with it.

I live in the unionist heartland and I have never heard the people there talking about Articles 2 and 3. Rather, their concerns are to get peace, to be able to make a decent living, to be able to recover some self-respect.

Peace and security are central to the problem. We should start with that aspect. Maybe the ways we might find of dealing with it might suggest to us structures for dealing with the broader question.

There has been a lot of talk about the escalation of Loyalist violence but such violence is still less than what it was in the 1970s. There are, however, two main differences, which have been instrumental in the highlighting of recent violence

- they have more arms, from the South African shipment
- they have developed the cellular structures.

There is also a political change. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a very close relationship between loyalist paramilitaries and unionist politicians,

exemplified by Jim Molyneaux and Harold McCusker carrying the coffin at the funeral of John McMichael. If we in the SDLP had done anything like that..... Peter Robinson and others have now lost that close relationship - that is the significance of the warnings he was issuing over the past year.

The demographic changes have had an enormous effect on the unionists. Over more than half the landmass of Northern Ireland there is a Catholic majority and in Belfast, it is possible to foresee such a majority before too long, as Protestants continue to move out of the city. These trends are a constant source of worry to the unionists.

I would like to see us also discussing Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution: they are crucial. The Tánaiste put it well recently when he spoke of "constitutional change". Articles 2 and 3 form one part of such change. But there can be no long-term settlement unless there is also constitutional change on the other side. Nationalists will not wear change as to Articles 2 and 3 unless there is a big, wide, deep settlement that meets their concerns. There is a grave danger that if it were done, other than in that kind of context, it would let loose all the worst forces on this island that would wreak havoc.

We should be looking at all these factors.

I am not ignoring structures - because John Hume dealt with those. But we should deal with the problem, as our focus, and work back to the structures required.

I would like to see a fundamental examination of what to do about policing. It is tied in with the constitutional and political issues, with problems of government, all the big issues. We need to tie up this whole problem, so that never again does this country have to live with the horrors we've seen over the past 25 years.

Taoiseach:

You will find no disagreement here with that analysis. Is the line set out by John Hume on structures also your line in regard to policing? Is that the answer to the policing problem?

Mallon:

Nobody knows the answer to that problem. Three main questions arise. The first is the actual policing structure to have: is it the R.U.C., revamped? Or is it a new type of policy service? Or a number of police services? The second question is: under what authority does it operate? Do you hand it over to a Northern Ireland Policy Authority? There may be a link with structures here. You would need to be able to bring people along and thus the structure of authority would need to have a North/South character. There is no prospect, at present, of getting Catholics in South Armagh to join the police; or even for policemen or women to be able to live in the community. There is a massive gap between police and people and without the necessary mutual confidence, the police don't get worthwhile intelligence.

As regards the escalation of loyalist violence, I recall that Robinson said that he had told Mates before Christmas that the loyalist paramilitaries were going to step up violence against so-called "pan-nationalists". This indicates he is in a position at least to hear these things.

McGrady:

I remember Robinson saying that as far back as late 1991.

Most comment is along the lines that the run-up to the local elections will be a 'dead' period, when no political progress can be made. I see circumstances in which this run-up could be a political opportunity. The unionist parties are drifting apart. The group around Robinson in the DUP have lost out to the Paisley/McCrea axis. There has also been regression among the Official Unionists. The Maginness paper at the end of the last Talks was indeed a pull-back from earlier Official Unionist positions.

In South Down, where the composition of the population is almost exactly 50/50, there is a strong and widespread desire that the Talks restart and get down to real business. The unionists only move under pressure, so the run-up to the election may be a good time.

The British have obviously done a deal with the unionists on one of the Maastricht votes. There have been constant references by Mayhew to the return of powers to District Councils. One can see that local unionist councillors on the ground have confidence that something is coming. Our aim must be to prevent them getting enhanced powers: if they get them, the pressure on them to accept agreements on government arrangements at higher levels would be off.

There are twin pillars in this problem: the constitutional issue and security. A resolution of the problem has to be built on both pillars.

Hume:

The behaviour of local government in the North is appalling. A good example was seen recently when Lord Mayor Gay Mitchell went to Belfast. It is worth remembering that not one unionist-controlled District Council is power-sharing. Dungannon, often mentioned, is not an exception to that reality. There, an evenly divided council leaves the unionists with no option but to share or alternate power and office.

Hendron:

One has to remember that the unionist councillors elected Ditty as Lord Mayor of Belfast, even though he is a complete 'head-the-ball' and they make jokes about him privately among themselves.

There was some talk for a while of a partnership approach being on the way in Belfast City Council. That was only electioneering, occasioned by the fact that Fred Cobain faces trouble in his own electoral area.

Population changes are taking place on a considerable scale. Catholics are moving into North Belfast every day. Unionists do feel threatened and the reaction has been the appalling violence we have seen.

There is not a single policeman living in West Belfast, not even in the unionist areas. I have regular meetings with the RUC sub-divisional commander. There is a hatred of the police among nationalists. But, in addition, unionists are also distancing themselves from the police. The RUC are not even trying any more in the area of community relations. Rather they are trying to blackmail joy-riders and such elements, so as to obtain information from them. Christopher Harte, killed the other day by the Provos, was an example, even if he was a bit older than the general run of such pressurised informants.

So, there is urgency about getting the Talks restarted. The Protestant people on the Shankill and in Ballygomartin want talks, want peace and do not mention Articles 2 and 3.

On a different matter, I am very worried about a number of aspects of the Casement Park cases. A number of people have been put in prison for that whom I know to be innocent. There is also the case of the Beechmount Five, accused of acting as look-outs and the like. Four of the five are probably innocent of the charge. There is another case in which 4 Ballymurphy people are charged in regard to incidents involving coffee-jar bombs in August, 1991, but where the trial has yet to take place. This is causing a lot of bitterness.

I personally cannot see the Unionists making any move before the local government elections.

Tánaiste:

The loyalist violence may be less now than in the 1970s but its recent escalation must nevertheless be a cause of concern. Have we an analysis of this? Why is it happening?

Mallon:

It is important to realise that the recent loyalist killings have not been random. They have hit active Provos in mid-Ulster, when they want to. Their intelligence is good. They are also 'taking out' people who are connected with nothing paramilitary or political at all. This is the real way to terrorise the people.

Tánaiste:

We have heard, and there are a lot of indications that middle-class unionists want to get on with living normal lives. Unionist politicians are not reflecting this sentiment. Why? How do you get them back to talking? Is Mayhew's Coleraine speech a factor? He himself may have thought, later, that he went too far on that occasion. Is he now modifying his position a lot?

McGrady:

There were hints in the Coleraine speech about greater local government powers. When I raised with NIO officials whether there was developing thinking on these lines, they responded "nonsense". There are ideas, however, on the mat about readjustment of the areas covered by Education and Library Boards and by Health Boards, that could be used to enhance some local powers. The Coleraine speech was impractical but was politically damaging [did he mean to Mayhew, vis-a-vis unionists?]

Mallon:

On the Tánaiste's question of: why an escalation now? I think there is no single, unique reason but that it flows from a cumulation of things that have affected the unionist psyche. Up to 1968, they had virtual carte blanche to do as they wished. As a result of the civil rights campaign and all that followed, that changed fundamentally. Then, they see that after 20 years, even with the deployment of major security forces, the Provos can continue their campaign and the security forces are unable to bring it to an end. This is frightening them, and not only physically.

Over this period, you have had a major transformation of nationalist politics. Twenty-five years ago, election candidates were still being selected by parish priests at the back of parochial halls. That has now changed utterly and the SDLP were subject to direction or ties from nowhere, whereas the unionist parties were still bound by complex relationships with the Orange Order, the Masons, the Royal Black Perceptory etc.

Then the Anglo-Irish Agreement was reached. Three days before it was signed, Jim Molyneux was saying it wouldn't happen. At that point, the unionists got the message, loud and clear, that the British did not want them. They then tried to bring down the Agreement but failed. Then in the lead-up to the recent Talks, they said "we'll get rid of Articles 2 and 3" but again, that has not happened.

So, they see their options running out. There was the Coleraine speech by Mahew and, earlier, the speech by former Secretary of State Brooke. This whole chain has led up to the recent loyalist violence.

Taoiseach:

What result do those who are doing it expect to flow from it?

SDLP delegation:

It is aimed at blackmailing the British.

Hendron:

People I meet in community groups on the Shankill, some themselves former paramilitaries, tell me that the paramilitary organisations are now dominated by young, much more ruthless people and that the former links with the local community have gone, so that they are subject to no social control. It does not appear that there is a specific organised conspiracy but speeches by people like Taylor and Robinson have much to answer for.

McGrady:

It is worth remembering that Trimble and the Rev. Martin Smyth briefed the UDA on the talks. Also, on the day that Sir Ninian Stephen, was approved in his role, the interval sought by Paisley was used by him and Robinson to clear this acceptance with the loyalist paramilitaries.

Tánaiste:

The Government will give the northern problem and its resolution all the time and attention it requires. I come back to my question: how do we get the unionist politicians to go back into Talks?

Hume:

One problem is that the Protestant business class have pulled back from politics. The SDLP approach was to get across the message - this will only end when there is a basic settlement that addressed the essentials of the problem; we are not interested in defeating you; it is, rather, a question of getting an agreement that serves all our interests.

Taoiseach:

This is the impression I am hearing from people on the ground, through the contacts I have [that people on the ground are ready and eager for a settlement].

Mallon:

I'm not so sure. People in the north know subliminally the limits of what is politically possible. They therefore tell us, in general terms, what they think we'd like to hear but when it gets down to specific issues or changes[they may be less forthcoming.]

There are four broad tracks events could follow. The first would be an all-embracing agreement, meeting the various key needs, that, on a benign view, would allow a substantial section of the Provos to quit. Another

track was where this would not happen and where one would be left with two hard rumps, so that you'd need strong structures to withstand the pressures that would come on, while still, simultaneously, retaining your electoral mandate. A third track was where all the parties in the North throw up their hands and say its over to the two Governments, a situation where you would have a continuation of direct rule and where the erosion of everything would continue.

Tánaiste:

I notice some changes now, as compared with when I was directly involved in Government before, at the time of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Then, people I knew well, among the unionist middle-class in the North were telephoning me abusively. Such people have now changed.

Mallon:

I think that, from their own standpoint, the unionists have been very foolish. They have blown up Articles 2 and 3 to such an extent that they have put the constitutional question centre stage. As a result, we have to ask what can we do, in regard to progress on the nationalist constitutional position, in order to give as breathing space as to Articles 2 and 3.

Plus, we have to consider what to do on security to withstand the attacks from both sides on any possible agreement. Once you start talking on these lines, you get into deep waters. You have to have a police service, take stringent measures.....

Taoiseach:

I presume you are talking about (movement on) the two constitutional positions, in parallel. Have we tried to bounce this ball on reasonable unionists?

Mallon:

We did so in the Talks. The unionists refused to listen.

McGrady:

On the question of how to get them to the table, I again say the present is an appropriate time to phrase invitations, at a time when, in the run-up to the local elections, it is hard for them to evade the issue.

Taoiseach:

Have you any plan to invite the unionists, in the public domain, to talks?

Hume:

I again said yesterday that we are ready to talk to any of the parties, without preconditions.

McGrady:

We need a commonality of approach and a set strategy, between us and yourselves, before invitations issue.

Mallon:

It is vital to convince Mayhew that the British Government should go beyond the neutral line. I had a recent meeting with him while John was away and one statement he made was noteworthy - that while the British Government support the union, they do not have a unionist agenda.

Tánaiste:

I think Mayhew has an agenda. He asked to be given his post. Likewise, the Government and the SDLP want to get to grips with the problem. But how do we get the other group to dance?

Should we make a distinction between the Ulster Unionists and the DUP?

Perhaps, if the DUP have a bad result in the local government elections, this might help open up possibilities.

Mallon:

Mayhew thinks on these lines. He went so far as to say that perhaps none of us can do any business with Paisley.

Taoiseach:

John Major was not so far away from that view at my two most recent meetings with him.

Mallon:

What is your assessment of the Provos?

Taoiseach:

They are not so active now. But there is always the fear that they will feel the need to strike back, in retaliation for the loyalist violence.

McGrady:

I confirm what Seamus said that the loyalist paramilitaries are able to hit at known Provos, even at a distance from their home areas. The man, Rice by name, from Castlewellan, they shot at Boucher Road, Belfast, in the last few days is an example of that, with a very big family connection with the Provos.

Mallon:

That phenomenon raises the question: how much further did the whole Nelson affair go than we know? There is no doubt that arms were let in - but was it really through a cock-up? There are always suspicions as to the role

and agenda of bodies such as MI5. If they did play a role, what is the point of it? Is it to use killings of people in the Catholic community by loyalists as a point of pressure on the Provos?

Taoiseach:

And you have to wonder about bad apples in the security forces and system.....

McGrady:

I want to emphasise again that the local government elections afford an opportunity to put pressure on the unionists. In the 1989 local government campaign, the unionist parties started off on a very negative note but were forced to switch around to a more positive presentation, because of the adverse reactions they were getting on the doorsteps.

Hume:

We should also press forward with North-South economic co-operation, especially in border areas. There is going to be a new INTERREG Community Initiative under the Structural Funds. We should set up Development Commissions in each border region. This would help to draw unionists, at local level, into such co-operation and involvement.

Hendron:

It is noteworthy that unionists now seem to have no problems about seeking - and taking - grants from the International Fund for Ireland. John Taylor was one of the first to do so, a long time ago, but many other bodies and individuals have now followed.

McGrady:

We have a near-colonial administration now in the North. Public expenditure is again being taken away from nationalist areas. In public appointments, the 'old boys network' is rampant again.

Tánaiste:

We have raised this latter question in the Conference and will continue to give it close attention.

Mallon:

The ministerial team in the North now, below Mayhew, is the worst for a long time. Atkins is a queer fish, Arran is of no consequence, Jeremy Hanley is pleasant but and as to Mates.... Needham and Mawhinney, whatever their faults, were hands-on ministers but now power has slipped back to officials.

Taoiseach:

In regard to structures what was Seamus Mallon talking about?

Hume:

We have spelled out our position in the papers submitted during the last Talks.

Taoiseach:

You got some agreement in Strand 1.

Mallon:

We didn't in fact. Our proposal for three Commissioners was well short of what Sunningdale provided for.

Tánaiste:

Will the unionists accept the idea of three elected and three appointed Commissioners, including one appointed by the E.C.?

Taoiseach:

John Major said to me that it was not saleable in the House of Commons, especially with all the Euroscepticism.

McGrady:

Would he run with 5 Commissioners [excluding the E.C. - nominated one, no doubt]?

Hume:

Government of Northern Ireland, based on control by an Assembly would not help to solve the problem. We could suggest a review of the arrangements we propose after 10 years, as a way of meeting the fears of those who see it as a way of dominating them.

Mallon:

There was an inherent element of instability in the structure provided for by Sunningdale [i.e. the unionist parties, by pulling out, could drag it down]. The North-South Ministerial body will be the flagship for the SDLP and the Dublin Government.

I think Maginness and McGimpsey will come down to Dublin again.

Tánaiste:

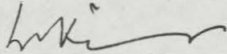
Are they speaking for Molyneux?

Mallon:

That is an enigma. The Official Unionists have the strangest party structure anywhere, with each constituency independent.

The two papers presented by the Irish Government in the last Talks round are the benchmarks for a solution.

The meeting came to an end at this point, about 5.30 p.m.



W. Kirwan,
Assistant Secretary,
Department of the Taoiseach.
19 February, 1993.