



**An Chartlann Náisiúnta**  
**National Archives**

**Reference Code:** 2021/48/230

**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.

AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

*Ac O'Fáin*

385/2

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,  
SW1X 7HR  
Telephone: 0171-235 2171  
Fax: 0171-245 6961

*cc PSF  
PSS; Hinkley  
M Massey  
K Murray  
T Dalton  
Jout Lee  
Counsellor A*

28 October, 1994.

Mr. Sean O'hUiginn,  
Assistant Secretary,  
Department of Foreign Affairs,  
Dublin 2.

Dear Assistant Secretary,



Reflections on the Conservative Party Conference 10-14 October

Introduction

The Ambassador, Mr Wrafter, Ms Nolan and I were in Bournemouth for all or part of the Conference.

The atmosphere of such an occasion merits a more detailed description than is appropriate here. The number of firms and organisations exhibiting at the Conference Centre was greater than at the Labour Conference in Blackpool, the aura of constant hospitality more pervasive - some eleven thousand persons were accredited by the organisers, and special marquees were erected in the grounds of the Highcliff, the "conference hotel".

The thorough security arrangements characteristic of Conservative Party Conferences were maintained in 1994. To enter the conference area you had to pass through an elaborate screening process in the garages of the building, and over the final two days of the conference a giant orange zepplin, illuminated at night, appeared over Bournemouth, to assist surveillance by the police.

Demonstrators and canvassers of all kinds confronted you on leaving and entering the conference centre. On one day there was an anti-nationalist demonstration mounted by hard-line visitors from Northern Ireland. Placards were waved showing ghoulish pictures of bloodied hands, etc.. One of these carried a picture of Gerry Adams with the caption: "Wanted Dead or Alive". Another had a blood-stained picture of the Taoiseach, John Hume and Gerry Adams. Peter Robinson was rumoured to be in Bournemouth but was not in evidence.

Leaving the conference at the very end, on a bright and cold afternoon, with "land of hope and glory" still in your ears, you met what could only be called a rabble of old-age pensioners clutching one another and pleading for the abolition of VAT on fuel, as though that were something on which the conference might have taken a decision. A lady of 84 smiled when I told her I was Irish (and not a Conservative) and said her two sisters married Irishmen; "but they're all gone now".

#### Overview

The main issue for the Conservatives in Bournemouth was how the Prime Minister and the Party would respond to the centrist policies of "new Labour" under Tony Blair.

The right wing, led by Portillo and Lilley, sought to place "clear blue water" between the Conservatives and Labour by adopting an inflexible line on European integration, re-affirming the Thatcherite economic agenda, with a view to cutting personal income tax, and in general by criticising Labour across a range of issues.

On Europe in particular, a more moderate policy is advocated from within the Cabinet by such figures as Douglas Hurd and Michael Heseltine. The pro-Europe Conservatives tend also to be "one nation Tories", eager to emphasise what economic growth can do for the less fortunate.

It is indicative of where the Conservative Party now stands that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kenneth Clarke, who is a moderate, felt unable, before the Conference audience, to take a clear stand on behalf of Europe and of socially cohesive economic policies.

Major's own speech was regarded by some commentators as the best of his political career. Delivered in a low key conversational style, it drew its loudest applause for a defence of the national health service, unspecific as to policy, which evoked the poverty in which Major's own parents lived in old age. The Prime Minister portrayed Tony Blair's policies as a conversion to Conservative values. While emphasising that the commitment to "ownership and choice" will always distinguish the Conservatives from Labour, there was little in Major's speech of the rhetoric of "clear blue water".

Nevertheless, despite the moderate tone adopted by the Prime Minister, it remains open to the Conservatives to fight an election campaign based on

- the economic recovery in general and tax cuts for the middle class; and
- what might be described as the "British nationalist" agenda as applied both to Europe and to Labour's proposals for constitutional reform, including Scottish devolution.

The accusations against Ministers Smith and Hamilton that they took money to put down Parliamentary Questions in the interests of the House of Fraser surfaced only after the Party Conference. Apart from the haggard appearance on the platform of Lady Thatcher, following the recent accusation that her son benefitted financially from arms transactions in the Middle East, the "sleaze factor" was very much in the background during the week in Bournemouth.

Northern Ireland

As has often been pointed out, John Major's successful handling of the Northern Ireland issue has done a great deal to improve both his personal confidence and his image in the Party and in the country.

His principal concern in Bournemouth was to retain broad support within the Conservative Party for a process of negotiation based on the Downing Street Declaration. For the debate on Northern Ireland, which was held on the Thursday afternoon immediately after the Law and Order debate, the leadership chose a motion "saluting the Prime Minister's and the Taoiseach's courage in securing the Downing Street Declaration" and calling on the British Government "to leave no stone unturned in the pursuit of peace consistent with the rights of the people of Northern Ireland to determine by democratic means their future".

Some four-fifths of the approximately fifty motions put down had taken a more Unionist line, based on the idea that the British Government should be a "persuader for the Union". Although this was clearly the result of a behind-the-scenes campaign by a minority, the adoption by the conference organisers of the more moderate motion described above represents a determined policy move by the Government. It also reveals a secret of Conservative Party conferences, namely that the "Union of Conservative Associations", which organises the event and is nominally independent both of the Parliamentary Party and of Central Office, in fact takes a lead from the Party Chairman and the Government.

During the early days of the Conference, the Northern Ireland Area Council of the Conservatives lobbied intensively for the "North Down Amendment". This was put down at the last moment and was along the lines of the rejected motions referred to



above. It would have deleted the reference to the Taoiseach from the main motion and added the following phrase: "and actively to persuade all the people of Northern Ireland that their best future lies as full and equal citizens within the United Kingdom".

The North Down Amendment obtained 1,100 signatures. In all, about 11,000 persons were accredited to the Conference, of whom between 3,000 and 4,000 were delegates entitled to vote. The view among experts, including those unsympathetic to the amendment, was that the North Down Amendment was well supported as these things go and posed a genuine problem for the Party leadership. It was also generally understood that the amendment had a Northern Ireland Conservative, as opposed to Ulster Unionist flavour, and that it drew sympathy mainly from the right wing of the Party.

We received assurances from British Government sources, including from Sir Patrick Mayhew at our reception on 12 October, that the amendment would not be accepted.

In the event, the Loyalist ceasefire announced on the morning of the debate on Northern Ireland (13 October) ensured that the Conference debate took place in a favourable atmosphere from the leadership's point of view. Sir Patrick Mayhew's speech, which stuck closely enough to principles agreed between the two Governments, was received politely, with no great enthusiasm but equally without any untoward behaviour on the floor.

The "bottom line" of the Conference - whether judged in terms of Mayhew's and Major's speeches or in terms of the motion overwhelmingly carried by the membership - is that the peace process remains firmly on course. This is not to ignore the disquieting points to which attention is drawn below.

#### Fringe Meetings

- a. On the evening of 10 October, the "Conservative Integration Group", made up of representatives of the Northern Ireland Conservatives, held a meeting attended by about 200 people at which the general theme was that what happens to Northern Ireland today, in terms of weakening links to the Union, will happen to parts of Great Britain tomorrow. David Trimble MP, was in the audience. At this and at other similar events he seemed willing to lend encouragement to opponents of British Government policy without necessarily subscribing fully to what was being said. A leaflet handed out by the Northern Ireland Conservatives at this meeting could only be described as intemperate, referring, for example, to "the mythical concept of two communities in Northern Ireland".
- b. On the morning of 11 October, a study group made up essentially of successful young journalists (e.g., Charles Moore, Editor of the Sunday Telegraph and

Matthew D'Ancona, leader writer on The Times) launched their pamphlet "Ulster after the Ceasefire". This is a densely argued, but also ungenerous text, premised on the idea that Northern Ireland should be fully integrated into the United Kingdom and that the Republic should be content with the usual style of friendly relations between separate sovereign states. As Mr. Wrafter has reported separately, the authors of the pamphlet acknowledge that they made little impact on the Conference as a whole.

- c. At lunchtime on 11 November, Mr. Enoch Powell addressed an audience of perhaps 400 at a fringe meeting organised by "Conservative Way Forward", a right-wing pressure group. To an audience under the sway of indignation, Mr. Powell outlined at some length his thesis that ever since 1920 a devolved government in Northern Ireland has been seen by London as simply a stepping stone towards a united Ireland. When Peter Bottomley MP asked a question that went against the emotional tide at the meeting - namely whether an agreement having the support of the UUP, the SDLP, and Kilfedder's party should be discounted by the Parliament at Westminster - Powell replied "yes" to vast applause. Powell did not, however, agree with a questioner who wondered whether there should be incentives for members of the minority to leave Northern Ireland.

I spoke briefly to Mr. Powell before the meeting. Once the Irish Embassy was mentioned he asked, not unkindly, "are you part of the game plan?". As I grappled with this cryptic communication, he went on "I am trying to ascertain how senior you are". I replied that I was hoping to have a word about Herodotus and Thucydides because as a student I enjoyed his great work on these authors, especially his "Lexican to Herodotus". Powell, momentarily forgetting the pan-nationalist conspiracy of which I might form a part, steadied his eyes - focused somewhere in the distance - and murmured, "thank you for reminding me".

- d. David Trimble addressed a fringe meeting late on Wednesday afternoon. We were unable to attend because of a clash with the Embassy's reception. Trimble told me, when he arrived at our reception, that on Molyneaux's instructions he had praised John Major in his remarks and that the only newsworthy item in his speech was its praise for Tony Blair.

#### The Debate in Conference

The background to the debate is described above. It was announced at the beginning that there would be no amendments to the main motion. Sir Patrick Mayhew was applauded on taking his place on the platform.

The proposer of the motion, Councillor Mel Shepherd, opened his speech on the line, "this is the Conservative and Unionist Party". The Prime Minister's caution *vis-a-vis* the IRA was justified. "We are not all happy that the peace process has involved a foreign state", but better Dublin than Sinn Féin. There must be no cross-border authority. The claim in the Irish Constitution is unacceptable from a fellow member of the European Union.

Leonard Fee, of the Northern Ireland Conservatives, while not explicitly opposing the motion, referred to the 1,100 signatures collected on behalf of the North Down Amendment and suggested that "the devolutionist slope" could lead to "a nation in tatters". Would England on its own have been allowed to opt out of the Social Chapter?

Mr. Graham Brady, a leading Party activist from East Berkshire, referred to the Prime Minister's place in history. "We are desperate for peace but must proceed with caution." Mr. Brady put down a series of markers: the people of Ulster are British, there must be no amnesty or let-up in prosecutions, America must support the punishment of terrorism in the UK.

Mrs. Dorothy Dunlop, a councillor in North Belfast from 1975 to 1992 and now a member of the Northern Ireland Conservatives, praised John Major as a Prime Minister "who would not have entered into the Anglo-Irish Agreement". Integration, not devolution, is the answer.

Bob Neill, Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party in the London area and a former Parliamentary candidate, spoke next. He had accepted our invitation to dinner with the Ambassador the previous evening and said to us afterwards that his speech had been influenced by the conversation on that occasion.

Mr. Neill referred to his visit to Dublin in January as part of the Conservative Party Foreign Affairs Forum. He said that in Government and Opposition quarters in Dublin, he had found a spirit of openness "worthy of recognition and tribute" against the perspective of history. There had been expressions of regard both for the Prime Minister and for the Secretary of State.

Solutions in Northern Ireland would require statesmanship, restraint, caution, breath of vision, and generosity of spirit - values for which the Conservative Party stands.

One should not "bang the drum of rhetoric" but seek a fair outcome in which the people of both traditions can place their trust. Peace in Northern Ireland would be a Conservative victory and a Major victory.

Myrtle Boal, a Conservative from South Belfast, said that prayers for peace have been answered and that Northern Ireland should be governed in the same way as the rest of the UK.



The floor was then given to Elizabeth Jones, a Conservative Party activist from the Wessex area, who began her speech by announcing that she was born in the "Protestant and Anglo-Irish tradition" in Ireland. We learned that Ms. Jones was prevailed upon to speak by the Party leadership. Apart from Bob Neill, she was the only speaker who appeared to have taken on board the thrust of Major's and Mayhew's policy.

Ms. Jones said that "calm tones are vital for peace". To understand what is happening, a long perspective is needed and a sense of the "deep and tragic struggle" brought about by the plantations. For hundreds of years, in Lady Gregory's words, "hatred answered hatred". One must learn from history. The Downing Street Declaration is a "breakthrough of breathtaking proportions". There is great goodwill in the South of Ireland. Statesmanship requires a cool head and cool words. This is what Mr. Major is providing.

The debate was wound up by Sir Patrick Mayhew, in a speech carefully prepared over a long period. It included a number of elements, mostly favourable from our point of view, which were not in the script as issued but which we learned had been typed up in advance for insertion in the speech in response to points made in the course of the debate.

The text of Mayhew's speech is annexed below. It presents the IRA statement as a response to the fortitude of the people of Northern Ireland and to the Downing Street Declaration, seen as representing a "common front against violence". Speaking eight days before Mr. Major's second Belfast visit, Mayhew was cautious regarding the British response to the ceasefire, but the speech looks forward to a political settlement "based on really wide support":

"Just as some Unionists fear that a united Ireland will be imposed, so some Nationalists suspect the reimposition of an unreformed Stormont with one side permanently dominant and the other permanently subordinate. Each fear is equally groundless.

For no settlement could stick, and it must stick, unless it extends across all strands of political relationships and equitably serves both sides of the community.

It has to embrace those relationships within the community in Northern Ireland. Those relationships which Northern Ireland has across the border, with its neighbour. And those between the two governments within these islands."

Mayhew's office drew our attention to the paragraph on page nine of the speech on unemployment among Catholics. The assertion that Catholics have a much stronger chance of being unemployed is a rebuke to academics of Unionist sympathies who have tried to avoid drawing this conclusion from the statistics.



Another passage of the speech expresses the hope that more Catholics will join the RUC and criticises those "whether from near or far" who pronounce the RUC unacceptable. This could be taken as a jibe in our own direction, although Kevin McNamara remarked to me that it refers to a speech made by him in Belfast on 30 September.

Some of the additions to the script also deserve to be reported.

At the outset, Mayhew added the remark that "we are persuaders for an agreement to be determined freely by the people of Northern Ireland". This is significant in the light of the campaign on the fringes of the Conference to have the Conservative Party declare itself "a persuader for the Union". In the same context, the Secretary of State said that "after two ceasefires, we must not depart from the Downing Street Declaration".

In the section of the speech on the framework document (page ten), Mayhew said that the aim is to promote an agreement to be reached "by the parties and by the two governments where appropriate" - which seemed to be an echo of our own point of view.

On the other hand, in response to one of the speeches from the floor, Mayhew referred to Articles 2 and 3 as a "stumbling block".

There was an unscripted reference to the need to "bring to book" the perpetrators of violent crimes. It can be said, however, that in the Party Conference context, there was a spirit of leadership in Mayhew's decision to approach the topic of violence via a vivid description of Loyalist crimes in Greysteel and Loughinisland.

Mayhew's speech, which concluded on the theme of "bridges not ramparts", received a standing ovation, following which the motion was approved overwhelmingly by a show of hands.

#### Balloted Motion on the Union

There is a practice that on the last day of the Party Conference, a motion is selected at random for a special debate. On this occasion, the following motion was chosen: "This Conference agrees with the Prime Minister's view that devolution will lead to the break-up of the Union. It therefore calls upon the Government to continue following its present policies."

An effort was made by Northern Ireland "integrationists", disappointed at the rejection of the North Down amendment, to provoke a reaction in their own favour at the devolution debate. We learned that there was contact between Mayhew's office and Ian Lang MP, the Secretary of State for Scotland on the night of 13 October to ensure that Lang's reply to the debate would clearly distinguish the case of Northern Ireland

from the strongly Unionist position which he would be taking on Scotland and Wales.

This was done. The first paragraph of Lang's speech stated, "we had a good debate on Northern Ireland's special circumstances yesterday. And one of the strengths of our United Kingdom is the diversity of its peoples and the way in which our constitutional arrangements can accommodate them".

Mr Lang threatened to filibuster any Bill introduced by Labour to set up a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly. This vigorous policy was matched by some of the rhetoric used, in particular the phrase "shortsighted nationalists and socialists" which in a paragraph which also referred to Dunkirk and Alamein had rather extreme connotations.

Some other aspects of Lang's speech deserve comment.

First, some of the rhetoric about the "Northern Irish" constituting one of four great nations was jarring: "fighting to uphold freedom and democracy ... Englishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen and Ulstermen have stood shoulder to shoulder".

Secondly, Mr. Lang's attacks on nationalism in a UK context as a "pernicious, sterile and malignant force in political life" had a strange ring at a conference in which so many of the major speakers went out of their way to express opposition to European integration.

#### The Prime Minister's speech

The Prime Minister's speech was preceded by a video film for which the lights were dimmed in the hall and which showed in turn material on overseas investment in Britain, the Downing Street Declaration, the Prime Minister's visit to South Africa, and Boris Yeltsin at Chequers. It was noticeable that the film-makers had no use either for Continental Europe or the United States.

The overall thrust of the speech is described above.

The central political message on Ireland was that the British Government would follow up on the Downing Street Declaration, but in its own time and in its own way. Some of the material in the speech, including a reference to the murders of Airey Neave and Ian Gow, were designed to demonstrate to a Conservative audience that the Prime Minister is not soft on Sinn Féin.

A Foreign Office source informs us that a favourable reference in the draft speech to the Taoiseach and the Irish Government was removed by Downing Street. It is perhaps less surprising that the Prime Minister, following the example, I believe, of every other speaker at the Conservative Party Conference, found it possible to avoid any mention either of John Hume or the SDLP.

**Embassy Reception**

The Ambassador hosted a reception on the evening of 12 October. There was a high turnout of MPs and Ministers, including Sir Patrick Mayhew who with his wife stayed for perhaps one hour.

The media made use of the reception to conduct a number of interviews with MPs about the expected Loyalist ceasefire.

We had invited David Trimble MP to attend - he was the only Unionist MP attending the Conference - but he said that because of the fringe meeting referred to above he would be unable to accept. In the event he not only came but remained until the end, engaging in vigorous argument with a number of other guests. During the brief period I spent in his company, he said that the Catholic community in Northern Ireland has thrived in comparison to the diminishing minority in the South. James Craig "did not gerrymander Stormont", although local government is another matter. The Anglo-Irish Agreement leaves "unfinished business". Dublin has a foot in the door and "that foot will be stamped on". Despite these stern views, expressed over pints of beer, there was a certain exasperated warmth and humour in Trimble's presentation and we should perhaps not underestimate his gesture in deciding to come along.

The Ambassador hosted a dinner after the reception for prominent members of the Irish community and for a few sympathetic Embassy contacts in the Conservative Party. As stated above, Bob Neill told us that as a result of the dinner - or perhaps in the light of recent controversies one should say the conversation at dinner - he determined to make the intervention described above.

**Looking to the Future**

The positive aspect of the Conference from our point of view is that the British Government is firmly committed to the Downing Street Declaration and to a process of negotiation based on the principles contained in the Declaration, and now has the formal backing of Conference for this approach. The Government line was stated in the Prime Minister's speech, Mayhew's contribution to the main debate, and interventions in various contexts by the Party Chairman, Jeremy Hanley, by Douglas Hurd, and by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Less encouraging is the manner in which this approach is being justified to the Conservative Party. What is being emphasised is the potential triumph for Major and the Conservatives, the safeguarding of the Union, and the isolation of the IRA and Sinn Fein. Apart from limited efforts by Sir Patrick Mayhew, the leadership appears to be making little attempt to educate the Party in the realities of Northern Ireland or on the constructive role played by the Irish Government and the SDLP.



No-one who attended, e.g., the fringe meeting addressed by Enoch Powell, can doubt that there is at least some unease in the ranks of the Conservative Party at the direction of Major's policy. It struck me, however, that this does not translate into support for the integrationist line of the Northern Ireland Conservatives, despite efforts on their part to link their ideas to pro-Union sentiment on Scotland and the anti-europeanism of elements of the Conservative Party. It could also be argued that it is the Parliamentary Party, rather "the Shires", whose opinion ultimately counts, and that the Parliamentary Party is firmly behind the Government.

Conclusion: despite a lack of clarity in grass-roots feeling, a balanced constitutional settlement will pose no political problem for the Prime Minister. This verdict would be less certain if there were to be an open rift between the British Government and the UUP.

A further tentative observation is that the integrationist line tends to come from those whether in Northern Ireland or Britain who see the Republic as a "foreign country", not necessarily friendly. Such people are dismissive of any idea of the Irish people, North and South, in the non-political sense of that term. They tend to have frequent recourse to the term "Ulster".

The corollary of this - in the Conservative if not in the Labour Party - is that most of those who are willing to expend some effort to defend the Irish Government and the Irish dimension in general see Britain and Ireland as having, in the words of one interlocutor, "the closest of relationships except in the formal sense". Our friends within the Conservative Party put considerable emphasis on "the totality of relationships". For the most part they are less willing than their Labour counterparts to think, in post-imperial mode, in terms of the shedding of unwanted commitments.

Yours sincerely

Anne Behan

pp Philip McDonagh  
Counsellor