



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/96/21

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.

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting with Quentin Thomas. NIO

London. 11 February, 1994

1. I called to see Mr. Quentin Thomas in London on the 11th February, 1994. The purpose of the meeting was to take an informal look at future work in relation to the Talks process.
2. We exchanged notes on recent developments relating to the Declaration. I briefed him in general terms, without showing any papers, on the broad lines of the exchange between the Taoiseach and Adams, which I said in essence repeated the points already made by the Taoiseach in various public statements. Thomas said they were happy enough to be able to say they had not had sight of this correspondence. They could therefore express general support for the Taoiseach's efforts at clarification, while maintaining the reservation that they were not familiar with all the exchanges.
3. We discussed briefly the current mood in the Republican movement. Thomas' analysis contained nothing new. He did not challenge my assumption that Adams was genuinely trying to bring the movement into politics, but the dangers of a split meant this would be a long drawn out process, and might not succeed at all. I said the Government was anxious to avoid deadlines but had indicated that time was not unlimited. We remained cautiously hopeful and felt it was far too soon to reach a negative conclusion on the process.
4. Thomas questioned me closely on our thinking on the proposed Forum. I said this had not developed much beyond the statements made by the Taoiseach and Tanaiste to the Dail in December and January. As to the relationship between the Forum and the proposed Talks, I said the ideal scenario from

our point of view would be an immediate cessation of violence, followed by an early inauguration of the Forum which, ideally, might draw up a report deriving broadly from the lines of the Joint Declaration. This could then be taken as the platform for future deeper and comprehensive talks. Such a scenario would have the added advantage of giving Sinn Fein a sense of involvement in such talks. However I agreed that it was doubtful whether the pace of developments within Sinn Fein would permit this scenario to be achieved.

5. We had a brief exchange on Adams' US visit. Thomas echoed the official view that it was dangerous to give Adams this prominence before he had renounced violence. I said his reception in the US had much more to do with what he was expected to achieve in the future (i.e. to lead a transition into politics) than it had to do with his role in IRA violence. Adams would be fully aware of that himself and, on balance, we felt the visit would be in the nature of an incentive to this end for Adams and his followers rather than the opposite. Thomas mentioned that the phrase objected to by Mallon in the House of Commons had not in fact been delivered by Adams in New York, although it was in the official text of the speech and in the Andersonstown News. I said that while it was disappointing that Adams had not gone further in his speeches in the United States nevertheless it had to be recognised that he had refrained from raising the temperature to audiences which had perhaps hoped and expected he would do so. He had also marked his distance from Noraid in a way that was significant in internal Republican terms.

6. I asked whether Mr. Major would be touching on Irish issues in his forthcoming trip to the United States. Thomas said he would stay away from the Irish issue as far as was

possible. The focus would be on international and bilateral matters.

7. In relation to the forthcoming Twickenham meeting, Thomas enquired why the Taoiseach was so insistent that it be low-key. I confirmed that this was indeed the Taoiseach's view. I assumed he felt it more useful to have an unconstrained exchange of views in this rather fluid phase, rather than taking the hard and fast positions which might be expected from a formal Summit. Thomas wondered whether there would be a Communique. I said I felt the Taoiseach did not envisage any formal statement. There would inevitably be press questions.

8. In reply to Thomas' query as to what line might be most usefully taken at that stage, I suggested that it could be helpful if the Prime Minister endorsed, as best he could, the clarifications given by the Taoiseach in his various public speeches. I added that the statement given by Sir Patrick Mayhew to American press correspondents the previous day had contained a number of very helpful elements which should be retained. It would be important also to avoid any suggestion of a deadline and to repeat the point, made usefully by Sir Patrick, that as far as the Declaration was concerned, the "lock would not be changed". The Taoiseach, for his part, would I felt sure share the view that no group had a veto on political progress.

9. Turning to the Talks process, I repeated the points made in the Tanaiste's letter to Sir Patrick Mayhew, and underlined the procedural and substantive difficulties we had with the British approach. It was precisely because the Tanaiste was concerned that Talks should be meaningful that he was anxious to avoid going down the minimalist road. The flavour of the "checklist" clearly pointed in that direction. No-one would have guessed from the document

submitted to us that the Declaration existed. The Tanaiste was dismayed that in spite of his clear advice conveyed through the Secretariat, the British side had gone ahead without even waiting for his letter. He considered this cast doubt on the value of any discussion in the Liaison Group until the present exercise was completed. The Tanaiste would not want a situation where he was presiding over make-believe discussions between officials while the real action was taking place elsewhere, on terms he did not approve of. Thomas said that the document was intended merely to keep discussions in play. He stressed its description as "stop-gap" in Sir Patrick Mayhew's letter. I said the Tanaiste, as a politician, was keenly aware of the situation in Westminster. He would not exclude the possibility that the document was produced on the basis of undertakings to Mr. Molyneaux, and might well be the real show rather than a stop-gap.

10. Thomas said they were entirely clear that Talks could not proceed without us. They were concerned to have a joint position, as referred to in the last paragraph of Sir Patrick Mayhew's letter. He enquired whether the Liaison Group could meet immediately. I said the Tanaiste's concern was such that I was not in a position to agree to that now. I suggested that this could be discussed at the London meeting. Sir Patrick would need to convince the Tanaiste that there was no discrepancy between discussion in the Liaison Group aimed at a deep approach, and the discussions which the British are insisting on carrying out at present, which seemed to us in the shallow end of the spectrum. He would make a political judgement on the value of official's meetings in the light of what he had heard from Sir Patrick.

11. Thomas recalled also that Sir Patrick is due to speak in Trinity on the 4th March. He enquired whether there might be a bilateral meeting fixed around that time. I said I had notified the Tanaiste's Office of Sir Patrick's intention to

travel, but had not taken the matter further. I would consult the Tanaiste on it.

12. We then had a more general discussion on a possible approach which might be taken in a paper. I said again that we did not expect a "bottom-up" incremental approach would work. Thomas confirmed that Molyneaux had had reservations about the checklist paper presented to him and had asked that it not be presented to his party colleagues. I said that showed how difficult it would be to get movement in that quarter. The entire pattern of developments in Northern Ireland had shown that the best approach was for the Governments to sketch out the broad scenario, agreed goals, etc. and to leave the details which could only be decided by the parties to be filled in by them. I thought that one could envisage a follow-up document to the Joint Declaration which repeated and perhaps amplified the principles on which the two Governments approached the problem (self-determination, consent, equal rights, parity of esteem, power sharing, etc.). The majority of these issues were in fact for decision by the Governments rather than the Northern parties, and the Governments should make their own decisions about them in a Strand Three mode. This could then be sold to the parties. If there was clear agreement as to what the objective was, it was possible we could be somewhat more relaxed about the patterns of bilaterals which the British envisaged.

13. (Note: Hume has agreed to see Mayhew later this week (Thursday, I think) but wishes to be accompanied by party colleagues. He will take a robust attitude to the "checklist" paper and urge strongly the need to build on the Declaration in close cooperation between the two Governments).

Sh

Sean O hUiginn
14 February, 1994