



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/98/11

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AMBASÁID NA HÉIREANN, LONDAIN



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*copy*

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SEEN BY  
TAOISEACH

Dear Secretary,

**Meeting with Michael Ancram**

I met Michael Ancram in his office in Admiralty Buildings for about an hour this afternoon.

Following are the main points:

**Chairmanship**

Ancram began by talking about his meeting with Mitchell last week. He said that the British Government saw the Senator as having a key role and that Mitchell himself was open to taking on any chairmanship function that the two Governments could agree on. The question was what could we agree on? In the British view Mitchell could play an invaluable role as chairman of Plenary and in relation to decommissioning. But he was blunt about Strand Two saying that Mitchell's chairmanship of the strand would "not wash" with the Unionists, and by implication with the British Government. They did not want to create a situation where the Unionists refused to take part because of the chairmanship issue, and presumed that we also would not want such a development. I said that trust and confidence were a two way thing and we

wanted an arrangement that all parties could live with. I went over the arguments for Mitchell and said that we did not wish to see an arrangement under which Mitchell was specifically excluded from Strand Two. The Irish Government's proposals envisaged two Vice Chairmen and this created the possibility of flexible arrangements for chairing under Mitchell's aegis if, for example, the Senator were unavailable. I referred to the discussion between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister on this point and Ancram said that they would look at our idea.

### **Role of Plenary**

Ancram said that we needed to look at and work up the role of Plenary and its relationship to the three strands. Trimble had spoken of "a holistic approach" and while he (Ancram) did not agree with the implication of Trimble's statement that everything should be in one "big melting pot" he was beginning to see the need for a coordinating mechanism in the process to ensure that the discussions in the three strands did not take place in isolation from one another. He thought that the Plenary session could fulfil this role.

### **Decommissioning**

I said that one of our main fears was the creation of a handover precondition that would effectively block discussion of the important political issues. We did not think that Sinn Fein would take part if this were the likely scenario. Ancram acknowledged our concerns saying that from his discussions with Trimble within the last 24 hours he did not think that the UUP leader was trying to create a blocking mechanism. In fact he thought that Trimble had been careful in his public pronouncements not to stipulate that an actual handover would be required for movement on the political front. What Trimble seemed to want was the application of the terms of the Mitchell Report - parallel progress on the political front and on the decommissioning issue. But an actual handover was not for Trimble a condition for the commencement of negotiations on political issues. What was needed was a formula to meet the concerns of both sides. Despite our collective efforts over the past weeks he did not think that we had yet found such a formula. I said that in these circumstances the best approach was to devise a remit for the committee based on the language of the Mitchell Report.

### Adams's Statement

Ancram said that Adams's statement last night was helpful, but it was important that both Governments stood firm on their joint approach that a restoration of the ceasefire was essential for Sinn Fein's participation in the talks. The Americans agreed with this and Lake had been adamant on the point when he met him last week. There was a tactical element to the Sinn Fein position. They wanted to improve their electoral chances and perhaps use their espousal of the principles to emphasise their separatedness from the IRA. He had no doubt that Adams would turn up at the talks "knocking on the door", demanding that he be allowed on on the basis of his electoral mandate, and castigating the British Government for acting in a blatantly undemocratic manner when he is refused entrance. That said Ancram agreed that it was unlikely that Adams would have said what he did if he ran the risk of internal disagreement.

### Confidence Issues

I said that recent decisions and statements by the British side were welcome instancing the Prime Minister's Irish Times article, his own decision on the Meanscoil, the transfer of prisoners, and the agreement to allow Pat Doherty visit republican prisoners in Full Sutton. I hoped that there could be further such progress in particular on prisoner transfers. Ancram noted this commenting that the Meanscoil decision had not been taken for political reasons, although he did not expect that anyone would believe him.

### Elections

Ancram said that overall he did not expect the outcome of the elections to differ significantly from the usual pattern in Northern Ireland. This was a pity not just because it confirmed old attitudes but because it would prevent the evolution of a new dynamic that could result, if for example, candidates from the Women's Coalition were elected.

### Tomorrow's IGC

Although the formal agenda is a lengthy one Ancram expects that the main forms of discussion will be the issues outlined above. He commented that we

are still quite far apart on the main question and that the discussion will be "tricky enough".

Yours sincerely,

Ted Barrington  
Ambassador