



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/98/28

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.

AMBASÁID NA HÉIREANN. LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,
SW1X 7HR

Telephone: 0171-235 2171

Direct Line: 0171-201 2

Fax: 0171-245 6961

17 July 1996

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

Dear Second Secretary

Andrew Hunter's visit to Dublin, 18 July

I met Andrew Hunter on the terrace of the House of Commons yesterday afternoon in preparation for his visit to Dublin. Hunter was in a sombre frame of mind. He had clearly been thinking deeply on recent events. His tone was very much what I had been led to expect by Canon Nicholas Frayling, who told me, as you know, that Hunter is a man of Christian faith.

Unionists

Hunter said that David Trimble is very much aware of the "genie that has been let out of the bottle" by Drumcree. By implication dialogue with Martin Smyth has been more difficult. Hunter said that Smyth was not open to suggestions made to him about Orange marches.

IRA

Hunter sought to tease out the likelihood or otherwise of an IRA ceasefire. His view is not optimistic. Whatever the political advantages to be gained by Sinn Fein from entering the peace process at this point, feeling among IRA sympathisers is probably running too high for a ceasefire to be contemplated.

2

Hunter, who receives intelligence briefings in his capacity as Chairman of the Backbench Committee, spoke of three pieces of evidence concerning the Enniskillen bomb: the use of a car stolen in the South, the fact that the code word used was authentic but out of date and the seeming lack of local knowledge on the part of the perpetrators (the couple getting married were Catholics) combine to suggest that a breakaway republican faction based in the South may have been responsible.

Mayhew's role

Hunter said that mistakes have been made by the British Government on parades. In the course of conversation, it emerged that his main criticism is of the Government's relative inactivity in the months leading up to Drumcree. Hunter's view is that rumblings against Mayhew in the Conservative Party are not sufficiently serious to cause him to stand down as Secretary of State.

Hunter's visits to Ireland

As I have reported, Hunter is in Belfast and Derry today. At the suggestion of Nicholas Frayling, he is seeing Dr. McClean, the Derry GP, now in frail health, who wrote a standard work on Bloody Sunday. In Belfast, Hunter will meet the PUP and UDP at the request of the Northern Ireland Office. Hunter made it clear that his purpose in coming to Dublin is to "understand the Irish point of view".

Pressure on SDLP

Hunter was very conscious of the pressure on the SDLP. He remarked that both Hume and Mallon are showing signs of strain. He wondered aloud if Sinn Fein might overtake the SDLP if an election were to be held today.

Re visiting the Anglo-Irish Agreement

The most valuable part of our conversation concerned the move by certain Conservative MPs to persuade the Government to "go back to first principles", meaning in practice to resile from the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Hunter said that two things are happening: the ordinary Conservative MP is engaging in speculative conversation about the direction of Government policy

and secondly, a small number of MPS is actively looking for a change of policy.

As to the composition of this group, Hunter said that he would reckon that 36 MPs would be ready to sign an Early Day Motion critical of the Government. This group would be led by about six extremists - among whom Hunter seemed to count Olga Maitland and David Wilshire. At Ministerial level, Sir John Wheeler would be supportive of the dissident group. Their main opponents, among Conservative MPS with a high profile on Northern Ireland, would be Peter Temple-Morris, Peter Bottomley, Tom King and Michael Mates. Hunter agreed with me that many of the 36 would be natural supporters of John Redwood for the Conservative leadership but he seemed convinced that Redwood himself is ^{not} involved.
^

As to the thinking of this group, Hunter said that their main idea is that the Hume-Adams initiative has worsened the overall situation and that "certainty" needs to be restored to the situation by setting limits to Anglo-Irish cooperation. Hunter readily agreed with me that there are valid distinctions to be made between the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which was the target of Norman Lamont's remarks in the Commons, and Hume-Adams. He further agreed that on one possible reading, the Anglo-Irish Agreement and subsequent Anglo-Irish documents have opened the way towards achieving exactly the stability sought by Norman Lamont by the emphasis they have placed on the principle of majority consent to a change in the status of Northern Ireland.

Hunter remarked ruefully that in his four years as Chairman of the Backbench Committee, he has been challenged twice by the Temple-Morris-Bottomley wing of the Party. When his post comes up for election again this November, he expects to be opposed from the right, on the grounds that he is too supportive of the Government position. He is hopeful, however, of resisting any challenge.

Comment

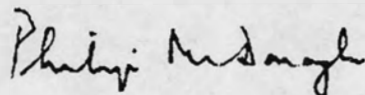
Hunter's list of Conservative MPS who support the Anglo-Irish Agreement is interesting for its inclusion of Tom King and implicitly of himself, but is surely incomplete. It omits, for example, Hugh Dykes and Nicholas Scott, both of whom defied a rolling three-line whip to attend a drinks reception at our home on Monday evening as well as many other obvious names including the Chancellor Kenneth Clarke.

4

We have had indications from elsewhere that the Redwood camp is more consciously and deliberately involved in questioning Government policy than Hunter is inclined to accept. The moderate MP Richard Spring, with whom I have had a number of conversations in recent days, suggests that the "Redwoodite" involvement, while ominous in its way, also suggests that the threat to Major and Mayhew can be contained, in that the number of MPS is small and that their interest in Northern Ireland is clearly motivated by a general desire to embarrass the Government across a range of issues.

I have commented on a number of previous occasions on Hunter's general attitude. He sees himself as a Unionist, but a fair-minded one. Undoubtedly he is capable of listening. His eagerness to travel to Dublin speaks for itself.

Yours sincerely



Philip McDonagh
Counsellor