



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH  
BÉAL FEIRSTE

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ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT  
BELFAST

COPY.

**Confidential**

10 December 1996

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

Ms B. Nolan  
The material  
from bottom page  
2 to the end  
is of interest  
12-12-96

COPY TO:  
PST  
PSS  
MR. P. TEAMON  
MR. S. DONLON  
MR. T. DALTON

Dear Second Secretary

**Christmas Reception**

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As you are aware, we had our annual Christmas reception in the Secretariat last night.

This was the second jointly hosted reception (following the St Patrick's Day party this year). It was a particularly successful event, drawing an attendance of roughly 320 guests (an increase of 100 on last year's reception) who filled our modest premises to capacity.

We were, as usual, subject to the vagaries of Parliamentary timetables. Yesterday's decommissioning debate in the House of Commons prevented the attendance of the Secretary of State, Michael Ancram and the SDLP MPS. However, the British Government were represented by Baroness Denton, Malcolm Moss, Sir David Fell and the full complement of Departmental Secretaries. Official and media attendance were also affected by yesterday's meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister in London.

Despite these complications, however, the reception brought together representatives of a very wide cross-section of interests in Northern Ireland. There was a large turn-out from officialdom, the agencies, the business community, the unions and voluntary groups, the Churches, the judiciary and the legal profession, the political parties, the academic and

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cultural sectors and other walks of life.

Ronnie Flanagan, the new Chief Constable, represented the RUC, along with other senior officers, and a number of senior British Army figures also attended.

The judicial representation included, possibly for the first time, a High Court judge of the Unionist tradition. Sir Anthony Campbell QC, who had been widely tipped to replace the present Lord Chief Justice under a future Labour Government, attended with his wife. Sir Basil Kelly, a former Appeal Court judge, also attended, as did half a dozen County Court judges.

Continuing our outreach into the political domain, we invited representatives of all the parties involved in the multi-party talks. The SDLP, Alliance and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition were well represented but, predictably, the Unionists and the Loyalist parties stayed away.

Unionists with "a small u", however, were present in significant numbers throughout the attendance. The Unionist academics present included Norman Porter, author of the recent "Reinventing Unionism". The business representatives included the Duke of Abercorn, the outgoing Chairman of Laganside Corporation with a Unionist-Conservative background.

The Churches were well represented. Fr Alec Reid and other Catholic clergy attended and a number of Presbyterian and Methodist clergymen also attended.

General De Chastelain and Prime Minister Holkeri attended with their full supporting teams and Martha Pope and the other members of Senator Mitchell's team were also present.

We also extended the media contingent on this occasion and increased the representation from the arts and the cultural world generally.

Political conversation during the evening focussed mainly on the prospects for a ceasefire, notably in the light of yesterday's meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister, and for a resolution of the decommissioning impasse.

Sir David Fell's understanding of yesterday's meeting was that there had been no changes of position on either side and "we agreed to disagree". His personal view was that there was



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not very much between the two Governments: the Irish Government were saying "Set a date, subject to certain conditions being fulfilled" whereas the British Government were saying, in effect, "If certain conditions are fulfilled, we can set a date".

On decommissioning, Fell suggested that Trimble had given indications during his recent Washington visit that he would support the British Government proposal for a judgement to be vested in the Commission. The British Government knew "by feel" that the Unionists would go for agreement on such an approach as the key for entry into three stranded talks. The Commission's judgement, Fell observed, need not be the final judgement on the timing of decommissioning (which would be a matter for all the participants). I responded with our key arguments about the incompatibility of a peremptory approach, or one perceived to have such an effect, with the approach set out in the Mitchell Report.

John Steele, the senior security official in the NIO, speculated privately that there could be an IRA "spectacular" over the next week or so, probably in England. He thought that there might be an undeclared ceasefire over Christmas, that there might be further activity of some kind in early January (to make the point that it was only Christmas-related) and that there might then be a further period of inactivity, with or without a formal ceasefire declaration, to facilitate a Sinn Féin/SDLP pact and maximise the Sinn Féin vote at the election.

You may have noticed an interview given by Steele to the Boston Globe last week (in the course of a visit to Boston) in which Steele asserted that he had seen no intelligence report relating to Martha Pope - though in his present role he would see all intelligence material. While indicating that some eyebrows had been raised within his system about his decision to offer public comment on this matter, he told me that, with eighteen months to go to retirement, he felt entitled to "tell it as I saw it".

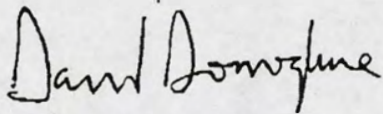
Steele told me his primary motivation had been to make clear to an American audience that the British Government had no interest in undermining Senator Mitchell through his assistant. He wanted to dispose of suggestions that there had been official involvement in the form of intelligence reports implicating Ms Pope in contacts with Sinn Féin either generally or with Gerry Kelly in particular.

A less sanguine perspective on the activities of the security services was provided in a private conversation with Ronnie Flanagan, who expressed some irritation at media speculation over the weekend about an imminent IRA offensive and speculated that this was being fed by

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British intelligence sources in the interest of propping up the position being taken by the British Government on decommissioning and the entry terms for Sinn Féin.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue  
Joint Secretary