

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Secretary

Department of Foreign Affairs



Meeting between Minister for Foreign Affairs and Northern Ireland
Secretary of State in London on 15.5.1975

British side: Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Sir Frank Cooper
Mr. Douglas Janes
Mr. D.J. Trevelyan
Mr. Bill Harding (FCO)
Mr. K. Jordan
Mr. R. Seaman
Mr. M. Cudlipp

Irish side: Minister for Foreign Affairs
Ambassador D. O'Sullivan
Mr. Seán Donlon
Mr. T.P. Corcoran

The Secretary of State opened by saying that there was now a changed security situation. The Provisionals were there but not in full campaign, but there are also IRA/IRSP murders which, while not catastrophic, "do ruffle the water". Then there was the UDA/UVF syndrome which he was at a loss to account for except in terms of racketeering.

The sectarian murders were very disturbing and the police are concentrating on this to the nth degree. It is likely that a very small number of people, perhaps only one or two in the Tyrone/Armagh murder triangle, are involved. The police, he said, are doing very well. They have arrested 126 travelling gunmen since the beginning of the year, 18 of them in the last week, as compared with 56 in all of last year. He added that many more people were being arrested and charged with serious crimes: compared with 75 murder charges last year, there had been 47 already this year. Similarly, this year, 46 people had been charged with attempted murder, 171 with firearms offences and 28 with explosives offences. In all a total of 447 people had been charged since the beginning of the year. In response to a

question from the Minister, Mr. Rees said that those charged were mainly Protestants. The shooting of the policeman last week he found terribly worrying, and he had feared that as a reaction there would be an increase in sectarian murders. With regard to the bomb at Glengormley, he said they had no information as to who was responsible. It was now clear that the RUC rather than the Army were the main targets for the IRA. The police had begun in a very small way to re-establish their presence in some areas.

The Army presence, but not its numbers, had been reduced and it was not proposed to reduce their numbers further at present. In reply to a question by the Minister, he said there were now 13,000 troops in all, but they had reduced the number of support troops, for example, mechanics. The police, not the Army, had been responsible for the security aspects of the Convention election and they had done well. But RUC intelligence in relation to Republican areas was poor and the Army, in consequence of its lower profile, had considerably less street level intelligence than they had had in the past. If the IRA campaign resumed, it would take time to build this up again. The Minister interjected that we too have had some recent security successes in dealing with the IRA and we hoped that this would continue. Co-operation at police level seemed to be working well and Mr. Rees agreed that it was excellent.

Mr. Rees said that there seemed to be no clear-cut IRA policy at present except that it appeared that some day there would be a return to violence. Two hundred and fifty detainees had been released so far, but he said that he would find it difficult to make further releases unless it was clear that there would be no repetition of incidents such as the shooting of the RUC man in Derry. He would soon reach the most dangerous group in those who remained in detention.

The IRA had learned nothing. They still talked as if they were the government of the South and looked forward to confrontation with the Protestant para-military organisations. When the Minister said there

were divided views on this question, Mr. Rees replied that "we all know what to expect" and Sir Frank Cooper interjected that he had no impression that the IRA were trying to advance politically.

The Minister then asked Mr. Rees what time-scale he envisaged with regard to releases of internees. He found it hard to accept that all those now interned should be from the Catholic side and that, although most of the violence was on the Protestant side, there were no Protestants interned. Mr. Rees said that this was a difficult problem. The point was that the Army had a great deal of information with regard to the IRA but did not have similar information with regard to the Protestant para-military organisations. With regard to the sectarian assassinations it was not clear whether there was any control over those involved. Sir Frank Cooper added that they operate in small cells, each time using different weapons usually brought in from other areas. The Minister said that the sectarian murderers were nonetheless members of organisations and could be got at through the leaders of those organisations. When Mr. Rees said that despite this the killings would go on and that he was in a difficult position, the Minister remarked that either to release the remaining detainees or not were both difficult but it was indefensible that there was no internment of Protestants while sectarian murders continued. It was true that internment had been scaled down but the scaling down was not balanced - all Protestant internees had been released and only Catholics remained, and the sectarian murders went on. Mr. Rees suggested that Protestant offenders were arrested and charged in the courts, while Catholics were interned because of lack of evidence against them. The police knew nothing, he said, about what was going on in areas such as the Creggan for example. The Minister said he found the British position on detention utterly unconvincing and very hard to accept and he could not stand over it. He repeated that it was impossible to defend the fact that no Protestants were interned while sectarian murders continued.

With regard to the murder of the policeman last week, Mr. Rees said that the Army might already have some evidence and he hoped that he would know who was responsible by the weekend. He also hoped that the police would soon know the identity of the sectarian murderers. He added that one of the factors he had to bear in mind all the time was that of 253 British soldiers who had been killed in the North, all but 2 of them had been killed by the IRA. In the eyes of the British Army the IRA were the key to the problem. The Minister said he was concerned with the impact on the present political situation of the imbalanced security policy and what he wanted was some reaction to the current wave of murders. Mr. Rees said he would certainly have to act if full scale violence were resumed. What he feared was continuing pressure for the fullest possible release of detainees which would then be followed by a resumption of violence. The Minister said that he had expected, following recent indications to Ambassador O'Sullivan, that more action would be taken in relation to sectarian murders in Belfast and enquired if he was right in believing that this had been said. The Ambassador interjected that Mr. Janes had certainly implied this at their last meeting. Mr. Janes said he had been referring not to Belfast but to murders in the Dungannon triangle. Sir Frank Cooper added there had been continuing police activity and that they were getting near a solution to the problem, but as yet their information was insufficient.

Turning to the Convention elections, Mr. Rees said that the SDLP had done badly because of the lack of transfers to them and also because of the boycott. He understood there were great strains in the UUUC. The Convention "crunch point" was likely to be reached in the autumn. It was absolutely clear, he said, that the Convention must come up with a report which must be acceptable to the community as a whole and the UUUC were quite aware that the British Government would not accept anything else. In reply to questions he said that the report would be a collective one written by Sir Robert Lowry and he expected that when it was received in London it would take some time to have

it considered and consequential decisions announced. The reactions in Britain at the time would be an important influence in arriving at these decisions. He said the "Troops-Out" Movement was insignificant at present and he was more worried about what he called "Gladstonians" in the Labour Party who favoured withdrawal. As far as the British trade unions were concerned they were solidly behind present Labour policy.

On the Conservative side the problem was that the party was in disarray. Airey Neave knew little about Northern Ireland but would learn in time. The most forcible Conservative voice on Northern Ireland recently was Julian Amery, who favoured support for Unionists and no one else, but he (Mr. Rees) felt there would be no trouble here while Mr. Whitelaw and Mr. Heath were still around. Public opinion was quiet at the moment, but any renewed bombings in Britain would gravely influence this. The Minister said he had told Airey Neave of the para-military links of the UUUC and could not see him lining up with these. The fact that the Convention had decided on a month's holiday in the summer seemed to confirm that their report would not appear until after then, and, of course, it would have to be examined by the British Government. This might at least delay the crunch until after the summer.

Sir Frank Cooper said that there were three main points:

- (i) The UUUC were adopting a "softly, softly" approach at present;
- (ii) they were aware that public opinion both in Northern Ireland and Britain would be strongly against them if they gave any appearance of not trying for the success of the Convention; and
- (iii) he was not sure they would delay producing the Convention report until after the Westminster recess, which would not be until late October or November.

The Minister said they seemed not to want to reach the crunch in the summer. The question was how to influence them, not in public statements but privately. He saw two options, firstly to suggest how uncertain the situation will be if they did not reach agreement or secondly to give very clear and definite indications of what would happen in that event. It seemed to him that Mr. Rees favoured the first of these options but he was not sure that this was the best course. Certainty, he suggested, might bring them to their senses. It should be made clear to the UUUC that they would gain power only if they agree to share it. The UUUC did not support a continuation of direct rule at present but he felt that here they were deliberately ambiguous because they were a coalition which could split up in due course.

The UUUC, the Minister said, did not want the question of complete independence to become an issue at the moment and were unnerved by their uncertainty with regard to the British Government's position in the event of a failure of the Convention. The British Government must make it clear that direct rule will continue if the Convention cannot agree. The current uncertainty was demoralising all round and guidance was needed.

Mr. Rees said that two things had definitely been ruled out, viz. integration and majority rule. The Minister said that Mr. Rees must get this across firmly. The UUUC was encouraged not to face reality by the present uncertainty, which was dangerous. Mr. Rees commented that no matter how firmly he told them, they would not believe him. But the law clearly said that the Convention's proposals must be generally acceptable to the whole community. When the Minister repeated that this must be got across, not necessarily publicly but privately, Mr. Rees replied "You can tell them, but not convince them".

Turning to the question of the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Bill, Mr. Rees said that the Senate debate had produced speeches which aroused more than a little interest and comment in Northern Ireland. The Minister

said that the Bill would be voted on soon in the Senate and the vote was likely to be 38 to 23. He hoped the positive vote would arouse as much interest and comment. It will then go to the Dáil and will be passed. Mr. Rees confirmed that their corresponding legislation was proceeding. Mr. Rees also mentioned the talks on explosives and Sir Frank Cooper confirmed that these were progressing satisfactorily.

The Minister then asked if the British Government were prepared to deal with the crisis which might arise in Northern Ireland in the event of a failure of the Convention and possible loyalist refusal to accept the wishes of the British Government. He asked in particular what the British planning was in regard to essential services.

Mr. Rees replied that one of the reasons the Army was in the North was to deal with such crises but all their analyses suggested that only the loyalist fear of being pushed into a united Ireland would trigger a major reaction.

The Minister then said that a worry in such a situation would be the loyalty of the UDR. Sir Frank Cooper replied that there were encouraging signs here. There had been an enormous weeding out process in the UDR and he suggested that some of those who had been weeded out were perhaps involved in sectarian murders. The loyalists, he said, were very disappointed about the lack of UDR support. It was in any event a situation that the British were watching closely. Another encouraging sign was that loyalist extremists had not joined the RUC Reserve.

The Minister then raised the McElhone case and strongly urged Mr. Rees to make an ex-gratia payment to the parents before they died. He added that there had been a total lack of co-operation from the Army in this case. Mr. Janes said that the McElhone family had two solicitors on the job and that their claims were being considered at present. Mr. Rees promised to look into the matter and communicate with the Minister.