

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2010/53/872
Creation Date(s):	24 January 1980
Extent and medium:	6 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Meeting with Taoiseach, 23 January 1980

Present at the above exploratory meeting were the Taoiseach, the Minister, Mr. Dermot Nally, Ambassadors Kennedy and Donlon and Mr. Nelligan.

The Taoiseach commenced by asking Ambassador Kennedy to say how he saw the situation in London. The Ambassador indicated that in British public perceptions if not in the perceptions of Government members or officials there was some uncertainty about the Northern Ireland policy of the new Government. The Ambassador referred to conversations he had recently had with the British Prime Minister and with Lord Carrington from which he could confirm heightened British interest in the problem of Northern Ireland and a desire to move forward in that area. He referred to Mrs. Thatcher's strengthened links with the United States and to greater awareness of United States influence on Northern Ireland developments. The Taoiseach commented that Mrs. Thatcher seemed ready to do everything to please President Carter and Ambassador Kennedy said that this development complemented the deterioration of relations between the British Government and the member-States of the Community. Ambassador Donlon added that it suited Carter at this time to get close to Mrs. Thatcher because the latter had made a great impact in the States as a strong anti-Soviet figure just when Mr. Carter was having to change his former relatively soft stance in that regard.

Ambassador Donlon was then invited to describe the scene as he saw it from Washington. He presented Northern Ireland policy as it was directed towards (a) the U.S. administration and Congress, (b) Irish American organisations and (c) the media. The tactic would be to use American opinion and principally the administration to bring pressure on the British to move forward. The means by which we exerted influence on the President and the administration and also on Congress was the leading group of Irish-American politicians of whom Speaker O'Neill was at present in a peculiarly strong position by reason of his office and the chairmanship of the democratic nomination convention which he would exercise

in the summer. O'Neill and his supporters from time to time asked direct questions about Irish Government policy. It was necessary to keep this highly influential lobby fed. For instance, they contemplated issuing this year, as in previous years, a joint statement on St. Patrick's Day. For this purpose they would require early guidance.

The Taoiseach said it would be desirable not to divide U.S. opinion into "goodies" and baddies". He enquired whether it would be possible to establish some objective that everybody could unite behind. Was it necessary to reject Biaggi's help? Was he not a member of Carter's re-election committee? Ambassador Donlon described Biaggi's political position. He was a minor opportunist with a discreditable past. He embraced Ó Bradaigh. His importance to Carter was not great but in so far as it existed it was because he alone in New York had declared for Carter at an early stage. In this matter Biaggi's objective was to improve his position in New York by throwing in his lot with the administration upon which the city depended financially for survival. All this had nothing to do with the Irish question. Biaggi's ad hoc committee ostensibly had 132 members, but only about 6 were active. Biaggi had been a speaker at the Noraid testimonial dinner held in New York on 18 January.

The Taoiseach asked about Senator Kennedy. Ambassador Donlon replied that relations with Kennedy hardly posed a problem during the election campaign. Mr. Nally recalled that the previous Taoiseach had not been able to meet Kennedy in November.

Mr. Nally mentioned that as a matter of principle the national aim was eventual unity. However did we want an interim devolved executive in Northern Ireland and if we did should it be one with legislative powers or not? The Taoiseach said that in his view the conference at Stormont was a stalking horse for the British and an irrelevancy. We must put our aims on the table. First of all he thought we should get the British Government to declare their interest in the eventual unity of Ireland. He thought as an alternative formulation that we might say to the United Kingdom that it should withdraw. The Minister intervened to say he

thought the second formulation too crude. The Taoiseach said he considered that the first formula subsumed the second. He asked should we work to persuade the British to accept the principle of eventual unity. Ambassador Kennedy said that might be tried but the British would say that they would be guided by the wishes of the majority in Northern Ireland.

The Taoiseach said that that was the known British stance but the objective of our policy should be to push them to a new position. Ambassador Kennedy observed that the British said they were working towards a peaceful settlement and towards a situation where opinions would evolve within Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach said we should declare the espousal by Britain of a new position on eventual Irish unity to be our principal objective. The Irish Government must have a positive objective which seems to offer some hope, otherwise there would be no peace. He thought that a "non-policy" on our part exacerbated the situation.

Ambassador Kennedy referred to the attitude of the loyalists. Perhaps we should not spoil progress along the road towards a better deal for the Northern Ireland minority, for example through a partnership administration. The Taoiseach doubted if any such progress was being made and said that the loyalists would revel in inaction for ever. No new dawn was going to come bringing enlightenment to the loyalists. The Minister intervened to refer to the distinction between a short-term interim aim and our long-term objective. The Taoiseach said a British declaration of interest in Irish unity was required and he rejected the policy approach suggested by Ambassador Kennedy. He asked the undersigned to express his view.

I said that something which would have to be weighed in taking the new policy step as proposed would be the effect on the level of violence and the security situation. This might sharply disimprove as a consequence of unionist reaction. The Taoiseach said that violence was there anyway and enquired whether it could get much worse. Turning to Ambassador Donlon he repeated that we should have a single nationalist objective, such as the one he had

outlined. Could we put this idea to Tip O'Neill? We must hammer out a policy on the whole issue here at home. The Ambassador should meanwhile try to get everybody (in the Irish-American community) under some common umbrella.

Ambassador Donlon explained the split between O'Neill and the Caucus (determination on O'Neill's part not to muddy channel of communication to the White House by dealing with unclean politicians or organisations). He explained O'Neill's antagonism to Biaggi and his determination to ignore the latter's ad hoc committee. The Speaker was also reluctant to formalise a new organisation firstly because of his formally neutral position in the House and partly because he could in any case command the support of a large majority of Congress without great difficulty. The Taoiseach asked whether a loose informal group might have some advantages. How did the Israelis manage their pressure? Ambassador Donlon explained how the Israelis through a vast and expensive operation harnessed all the Jews in America. We had adopted a different tactic by going right to the top to use our influence. The Israelis approached all Congress members but they had no committee in the House. Mr. Nally confirmed that O'Neill could produce anybody in American politics to meet previous Taoiseachs when in America.

Returning to the question of an Irish group, the Taoiseach asked whether an informal group would raise the temperature with the existing organisations. There was too much reliance on the Speaker, providing only a slender basis for our influence. He seemed to have muscle, power and authority. Might not the Speaker nominate someone else to establish an appropriate body? Ambassador Donlon said that if the intention were to crush the Caucus that this would be comparable to talking of crushing the Provos in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach asked could we not prevent the Caucus from out-flanking us. Donlon asked in what way did the Caucus out-flank us. He made the point that the Caucus had a higher profile in the Irish media than it did on the ground in the States. We were not out-flanked in respect of access to the administration.

● may have lost ground to the Caucus in regard to Irish-American organisations such as the GAA and the AOH, but the mass of Irish-Americans still continued to be in general well-disposed to the Government and to the State and were a major support to us in the promotion of tourism and investment.

The Taoiseach asked how the Ambassador would go about getting a resolution on Ireland through Congress. Ambassador Donlon said he would seek the Speaker's advice and would then approach appropriate members of the European Sub-Committees of the Senate and House Committees on International Relations. The Taoiseach asked the same question of Ambassador Kennedy who described the Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Group and the informal groupings of Conservative and Labour M.P.s interested in Ireland. The Taoiseach enquired whether these groups would be used if a motion were to be put to the Labour Party. Kennedy replied that in that case he would go to the Party direct.

I intervened to suggest that in projecting policy on Northern Ireland we should not abstain from addressing ourselves to the loyalist community. Obviously we had a message for the British Government but we should have something to say to the unionists as well. The Taoiseach commented that there seemed little hope that the unionists would respond to appeals from Dublin. I indicated that I was in complete agreement, unionists would react with fear and suspicion even to the most give-away type of statement but what I was suggesting was that they should be spoken to. Communication should not be exclusively to London. We hoped after all to have to live with the unionists in the future. The Taoiseach said that he knew the loyalist mind very well and remarked that he had been brought up with unionists.

Concluding the Taoiseach stated that policy on Northern Ireland must be right as we see it and we must work to establish such a policy. The policy must also be saleable and this aspect would have to be considered. The Minister mentioned the Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheis and the Taoiseach indicated that policy must be

established by that time. He emphasised that the present discussion was of an exploratory nature and that he wished to return to the subject with the same participants as soon as possible. (Both Ambassadors declared their readiness to return at any time for that purpose.)

The Taoiseach referred to Seamus Mallon's position as SDLP liaison man with the British Government and asked Ambassador Kennedy to facilitate him in London.

Finally there was some conversation about the luncheon meeting which the Taoiseach and Minister (and other Ministers) had had with Sir Ian Gilmour of the British Foreign Office on 21 January. The Taoiseach had been struck by remarks Gilmour had made about British inability to "deliver" the unionists whereas Dublin could in most circumstances "deliver" the SDLP. He also mentioned that Gilmour had commented on Gerry Adams's statement at the Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis to the effect that the Provisional IRA should recognise, as the British Army had done, that there was no military solution to the Northern Ireland problem.

D.M. Neligan

24 January 1980