



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Anglo-Irish Relations

Meeting of officials in London on 9 June, 1989

The meeting took place in the Cabinet Secretary's Office in Whitehall. It was headed, on the British side, by Sir Robin Butler, Cabinet Secretary, John Weston, Cabinet Office, Sir John Blelloch, Secretary, and Mr Ian Burns, Deputy Secretary, Northern Ireland Office, Mr John Boyd, Foreign Office and Oliver Miles, Joint Secretary, Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. On the Irish side were Secretary Dorr, and Dermot Gallagher, Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, Secretary Matthews, Department of Justice, Mr Sean O hUiginn, Joint Secretary, Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the undersigned. The meeting began at approximately 6.30 p.m., took place partly over dinner and finished near midnight.

The subjects covered included:

- (1) the political situation in Ireland, and Northern Ireland;
- (2) security questions, including extradition;
- (3) Fair employment legislation and the McBride principles; and
- (4) miscellaneous other matters.

In the course of the discussions, the British side showed considerable interest in the policies which would be followed after the General Election here in relation to Northern Ireland. They were interested in the poll finding that Northern Ireland was rated as an issue by only 4% of the electorate - compared with, say, 17% interested in the road licence dispute.

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On Northern Ireland the British appear to be continuing with their policy of trying actively and positively to attain some form of devolved government in Northern Ireland. They maintain that their previous efforts to do this have failed, perhaps, because the solution was being handed down from above. They are now trying to encourage movement from below. If there is a sign of consensus, which they can assist or develop, then they will do so; but they, themselves, do not seem to be particularly energetic in pursuing a devised solution.

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On security, they expressed satisfaction with the degree of co-operation between the two police forces. They were disturbed that a large quantity of weapons smuggled into the island, in earlier years, had, so far, escaped discovery - though many recent finds were particularly encouraging. They feel that there could be considerable danger about the Anniversary date of 20 August, when the the men of violence might try to mount a "spectacular".

On extradition, the British appeared to be reasonably satisfied with what was happening. It was, however, appreciated, on both sides that this was a particularly sensitive area. The British enquired as to the progress of the examination of their proposals for changes in the law; and also enquired as to the likely publication time of the report required under the most recent legislation. The Irish side emphasised the way in which the courts were making - and generally improving - law, in this particular area.

There was some general discussion on the fair employment legislation to which the British side attached particular importance. They said that not only had the Departmental Ministers put their name to the legislation, but that it had been, most unusually, sponsored also by the Prime Minister who had also put her name to the text. They mentioned that a number of the points made by the Irish side had been taken on board and that the legislation now was most likely to pass through Westminster without an opposing vote, on the principles. They asked that particular consideration be given to a "welcome" by the Irish side to the Bill, in view of the general consensus. They see the Bill as being the answer to the McBride principles in the United States.

There was some discussion on contacts generally in Anglo-Irish affairs, including the Parliamentary Body, Ministerial contacts, etc. The point was made that these contacts, if frequent and extensive enough could produce progress in that they would be seen as normal contacts between two neighbouring States and, in this way, bring a solution to the Northern Ireland problem closer. There was general agreement that the contacts should be organised, as far as practicable, through the Conference and should be encouraged.

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There was general agreement as to the value of meetings of the present sort. A further meeting is suggested for 20 October, in Dublin. The British side suggested that they might bring with them, as a guest speaker, Mr John Kerr who is in charge of their Policy Unit on the EC in view particularly of the forthcoming Irish Presidency. The Irish side mentioned that they would probably be nominating Mr Ted Barrington, Department of Foreign Affairs, who held the corresponding post here.

Dermot Nally

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13 June 1989