



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Rough notes - not for circulation

Butler/Nally Dinner Iveagh House -

Friday 20 October, 1989

General

Another dinner in the "Butler/Nally" series took place in Iveagh House on Friday evening, 20 October 1989. These dinners take place about three times a year - alternately in Dublin and London. The atmosphere is informal and frank. The aim is, through such frank and informal exchanges between officials several times a year to defuse problems and to contribute to a better Anglo-Irish relationship. From our viewpoint, an important additional purpose is to engage the attention of the Cabinet office and in particular the Cabinet Secretary Sir Robin Butler and the Foreign Office on the Anglo-Irish relationship in order to moderate somewhat the influence of the Northern Ireland Office on day to day issues relating to Northern Ireland.

It had been decided earlier that on the present occasion Ted Barrington of DFA and John Kerr of the Foreign Office who deal with European Community issues respectively in Dublin and London should be invited along and that part of the time should be devoted to a discussion of Community issues and their relevance to the Anglo-Irish relationship. The intention was to extend the discussion to wider aspects of that relationship rather than having it, as in the past, focused narrowly on Northern Ireland issues.

The dinner began about 8.30 and ended at 12.30. Attendance was rather larger than usual - in part because of the EC discussion. Those present were:- Irish side:- Messrs Nally, Mathews, Ó hUiginn, Gallagher, Barrington and Dorr as well as Ambassador O'Rourke; British side:- Messrs Butler, Blelloch, Burns, Miles, Weston (FCO), Appelyard (Cabinet Office), Kerr (FCO) and Ambassador Fenn. The following is a partial account based on occasional notes taken at the meeting (my notes reflect the Irish side's contribution to the discussion only to a limited extent).

EC issues

The discussion began with an hour devoted to EC issues based on opening presentations by Messrs Barrington and Kerr. The Irish side identified a series of issues which face us during our Presidency. Discussion focused particularly on general approaches to the EC; EMU; the Social Dimension (Charter) and "the German question" related as it is to the future direction of the Community and to events in Eastern Europe.

In discussion the British side argued for what they called an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary approach to EMU. They said it would be foolish to follow what had been done in the case of the Werner Report in the 1970s and try to set a framework or structure now for the future when things might be changed. It was better to proceed sensibly step by step. The Irish side argued that it was wrong to suggest that the choice was between an evolutionary and a revolutionary approach. It was rather between an approach which simply proceeded step by step with each step determining the next but without any commitment to an overall future goal on the one hand; and on the other a common commitment to reach an identified future goal by a process which could involve hard bargaining along the way but which would be made easier because members would be more willing to compromise on one issue and hope to gain on another in the context of an overall goal which all had accepted.

Social Charter

*Spanish setting
to appease
their radicals
Germans
trying to
raise wages
& standards
in other
countries to
reduce their
competitiveness;
& equals
trying to
appease the
left wing.*

On the Social Charter the British side chided the Irish side for "sheltering" behind Britain and allowing Britain to make the running and receive the criticism on issues which were equally difficult for us. They characterised the Social Charter as motivated in part by people such as Prime Minister Gonzalez of Spain seeking to appease more radical domestic elements and in part by the unwillingness of German industry to contemplate even a temporary flow of jobs elsewhere because the constraints imposed domestically on German industry do not exist in the same form elsewhere. This they argued was not a very worthy origin; and the Charter in draft form was in any case generally unacceptable.

The Irish side argued that while we have a common perception of many problems with the draft as it stood there is an important difference in the approach of the two countries in that we accept the basic idea that there should be such a charter to counterbalance, in the interests of labour, the removal of constraints on industry through the Single Market. While we felt some sympathy with their objections on specifics, we also felt that they had an objection in principle to the very idea of such a charter of rights at Community level.

General approach to EC

On the general criticism that Ireland often "shelters behind" Britain, we replied that we do indeed at times shelter behind Britain, FRG, France or others just as Britain and other countries on occasion shelter behind others. This is a normal part of the process of continuing negotiation within the Community. We also said that it would be easier for us on occasion to be supportive of the British position where we had similar difficulties to theirs, if we felt that they were not acting also on other motives related to their negative approach in many respects to the Community.

Anglo-Irish/Northern Ireland issues

(Partial notes only)

General

The single common theme which emerged from almost all the British interventions in the discussion was that this is a sensitive time psychologically for the British side because of a conjuncture of various issues which have caused some shock in their systems; (i) collusion by the security forces with terrorists; (ii) the terrible shock to public opinion of the Guildford Four case; (iii) the Deal bombing. Related to this was a strong warning that Mr. Brooke came to the Conference briefed to give great weight to developing a good relationship with his Irish colleagues. He had now sat through three very difficult meetings at the Conference where he had been subjected to a lot of direct criticism. The British side suggested that "even someone as patient and politically intelligent as Mr. Brooke" would reach some kind of limit and that we should be aware behind the scenes that it could be seriously damaging to the Anglo-Irish relationship if this continued to be his experience. Underlying this again was an implication, never stated, that much of what was said about Mr. Brooke's limit of patience would apply also, more seriously, to Mrs Thatcher.

The Irish side argued vigorously in response to this to get home a counter-message - that the Agreement had to be more than merely an arid bargain which both sides kept because of their commitment. It was rather a common approach which both sides were committed to implement with determination and imagination. A key aspect of that common commitment was confidence in the security forces. The other side of that was that the security forces should be made such that they would merit the confidence of minority as well as majority. We said that the key question for us is whether the British continue to share that policy commitment - in which case they should be as concerned as we are about the negative affect on confidence on the part of the minority of many of the issues which we have raised.

Birmingham Six

On the Birmingham Six we argued strongly against the British case that we should now show great sensitivity to the shock caused to the British system and British public opinion by the Guildford outcome and should therefore refrain from raising the Birmingham Six case. They argued that we should not try to make any link between the two cases or imply that political pressure rather than judicial action had produced the result in the Guildford Case. We argued for the significance of the fact that out of all the hundreds of "lifers" imprisoned for terrorist offences only the seventeen people involved in the Guildford, Birmingham and Maguire cases had caught public imagination and sympathy.

Particular interventions

The following are some notes on particular interventions which appear to be of some significance (mainly from the British side).

Blelloch said both sides shared the aims of getting rid of the "bad apples" in the UDR and making the security forces accepted by the Community. He had worries on two points however about the last three Conferences:- (a) Irish Ministers had given the impression that the only way was to get rid of the rotten barrel. This is not right in itself; it also made it more difficult for the British Government to do anything of the kind; furthermore the British side were privately worried that what was being said had possibly given some reason to the Loyalist paramilitaries to say that "even if the UDR are not here, we are". He was worried about a possible "physical expression" of this (sic).

His second worry was that Mr. Brooke who is a very decent intelligent man had been briefed strongly to place the highest possible weight on his relationship with his Irish colleagues. Instead he had been subject to sustained "attack" at his first three Conferences on a series of issues. This made his position in Northern Ireland more difficult; he had been accused of "bad faith" on accompaniment; and he must - even (sic) be beginning to wonder if the briefing he had been receiving about maintaining good relations with his Irish colleagues was correct.

He said that he believed that we desperately need now some pause in this kind of meeting so that we could get on with broader business.

Butler echoed this theme with, as he put it, "a view from the centre". He said he was glad that the informal dinner allowed plain-speaking. He asked that we should not underrate the impact of three recent shocks on the British system:- (i) evidence of collusion by the security forces with terrorists; (ii) the terrible shock of the Guildford Four Case on public opinion; (iii) the Deal bombing ("it could happen elsewhere - we are not on to these people at all"). He drew two lessons from this

- (a) this is a moment when British confidence has been greatly shaken. But the British side do sincerely believe in the cause of justice. Any attempt to generalise what has come out of the Guildford cases would be seen as the greatest insult
- (b) it would be a profound and offensive mistake to say that what has now been done in relation to the Guildford Four was due to a political process and the next step in that process is the Birmingham Six. Such an upping of the stakes would be "beyond irritating - very distressing". Any implication that politics has been played in these cases would be deeply resented. He was worried that relations could go astray in this way.

Mr. Gallagher (response to Blelloch - outline summary only) agreed that it was time for a pause on the issues which had dominated the three Conferences. In contrast to Blelloch he said he was more hopeful since he believes that there is now a more honest relationship between us than for some time. In the past our input at meetings of the Conference had not been very much taken into account - for example on accompaniment or on the decision on plastic bullets which we were simply told had been taken. We then together spent three months trying to ensure that they would never be used. In general he believed that what had occurred had cleared the air, established a more honest relationship at the Conference and would in general have a good effect on Anglo-Irish relations.

Butler (responding to other points made on the Guildford Four) acknowledged that the Irish Government reaction to the freeing of the Guildford Four had been very generous. He also agreed that political pressures did play a part in the decision of the Home Secretary to refer the case to the Court of Appeal but not in the action then taken by the Court. He argued again that there is no connection between this case and the Birmingham Six and said that the suggestion that the thread that leads from to the other is "very damaging".

Mr. Gallagher in response made a strong presentation of the similarities between Guildford, Maguire and Birmingham Six cases and a distinction between these seventeen cases which had attracted alot of sympathetic attention over the years and the many hundreds of other cases which had not.

Blelloch picked up a reference by the Irish side too. The concern of the Conference with "policy", he said this is not correct. The Conference was a forum where the Irish side expressed views but where the British side had to take the decisions. He argued also that PBRs are not simply a riot control weapon but "a way of keeping one group of people away from the other". The Irish side had always found it difficult to understand that in the British system Ministers "stand off from" the operational responsibility of the Army and the Police.

Mr. Gallagher challenged this and said that this was precisely what had gone wrong in the Thain and Hastie cases.

Blelloch returned to the warning that while good relations had been established between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Brooke, the Irish side's sustained criticisms at the Conference had reached a dangerous limit. He and Burns also criticised the Minister's speech to the Diplomatic Corps Dinner in Dublin the previous evening because of what they saw as the omission of the crucial words "as rapidly as possible" negotiated with difficulty in the AIIGC Communique, from the speech's references to accompaniment. Fenn on the other hand had seen the speech in a positive light and had thought the emphasis on dialogue etc. had been an attempt to mend fences.

Burns repeated the warning about the dangers of a continuation of the tone and issues of the last three Conferences. He said that the Conferences "reduce to a state of fragility". The new Northern Ireland Secretary's (Mr. Brooke's) experience is of "a mobile torture chamber where he is beset by a man with a grievance who does not seem to have been listening to what he has been saying". The Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Collins seems to have been adopting a much higher profile, either on his own initiative or on instructions, in regard to the UDR issue than the facts on the ground warrant (though he admitted that the facts were in some respects worrying to the British side also). His concern is that the new Northern Ireland Secretary can hardly see Anglo-Irish relations as "anything other than a punitive experience".

Burns said that he thought Irish Ministers had been "careless of the relationship between the two Governments" in several respects

- the September Conference had been preceded by the Irish Government dictating in public what the agenda for the Conference should be. In practice it had been accepted readily enough that this should be the agenda but it was not helpful to have the Irish Government unilaterally announcing this beforehand
- at the next Conference had sought to dictate to the British side who should attend or not attend on their side (i.e. the GOC)
- then there had been the Taoiseach's speech at Bodinstown
- then there had been the Taoiseach's visit to Eglinton (i.e. the Aer Lingus inaugural flight to Derry). Irish Ministers appeared to have issued some kind of instruction that "no British Ministers were to be invited".

All of this did not amount to a conspiracy but it seemed to him to be a "carelessness about the relationship". Accordingly he believed that there are now some fences to mend including the relationship with Brooke.

Butler repeated the ideas expressed by Burns in a slightly more palatable way. He said that compared with the situation of two years ago when indeed there had been "a litany of horrors" (Stalker/Sampson etc.), the strain between the two Governments at present did not seem to them to be justified by the facts. His final message which he wished to leave with us was that there is some evidence that "your Ministers have done things that show that they are a bit happy-go-lucky about the relationship". The issues at stake are too important for this; and this had caused the British side to be worried and depressed. He hoped therefore that if there were anything that we could do as officials on both sides to moderate and alleviate the situation, we would do so.

Mr. Nally, concluding, suggested that what is happening is that the real contradictions in the agreement are coming to the fore. They derive from the oddity of an external Government being entitled to put forward views and proposals in a situation where the implementation of the decisions is for the British side. The dilemma then was that if the Irish side put forward views and proposals it becomes more difficult for the British side to implement them. If on the other hand the Irish side does not go to the Conference and make demands then the Irish Government will, understandably, be in political difficulties.

(Note: The foregoing is based on notes taken intermittently during a fairly intensive discussion over dinner. It does not cover several rather lengthy presentations by Messrs Gallagher, Ó hUiginn, Nally and the undersigned.)

The dinner discussion closed amicably. It was agreed in principle to try to find a date in February, in London, for the next dinner in the series.



N.D.
2 November, 1989