



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Mr. J. Murphy
Re P.P.
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To see please 27.1.89
23/2

cc P.P.
Mr. Nether / P.P.
Mr. M. H. H. / P.P.
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OK.

Confidential

21 February 1989

Mr Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with Des McCartan, Belfast Telegraph

The following points of interest arose over lunch with Des McCartan, London correspondent for the Belfast Telegraph.

British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body

- In a conversation last week, Jim Molyneux told McCartan that he accepts the validity of the argument that the proposed new Body owes its origin not to the Anglo-Irish Agreement but to the Joint Studies Report of November 1981.
- His attitude towards the Body continues to be one of indifference rather than hostility. He indicated to McCartan that he has no objection to a forum in which members of both Parliaments discuss matters of mutual interest. If, however, the Body were to assume powers and prerogatives which properly belong only to Parliament (e.g. the right to summon and interrogate Ministers), he would object strongly.
- McCartan does not expect any formal decision by the Unionists to boycott the Body once it is established. They will, however, keep a careful eye on it and protest if they feel that it is developing in an undesirable direction. Martin Smyth, for example, wasted no time in bringing to John Wakeham's attention (in Business Questions last Thursday) certain media reports which suggested that the new Body would have powers similar to those of the Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees. (Wakeham replied that such speculation was wide of the mark).

Douglas Hogg controversy

- Following the Taoiseach's statement on the Finucane murder, McCartan checked with the Home Office and with "senior people in No. 10" on the likelihood of a retraction of Hogg's remarks. He was given a fairly clear indication that there will be no retraction and no public censure of Hogg.
- While (like his father) Hogg wins few marks for political judgement and sensitivity, he is reckoned to be "safe" in this instance because he acted on official advice. He prefaced his remarks to the Select Committee on 17 January with an indication to this effect. Afterwards he told McCartan privately that he had carefully repeated his claim in the same terms several times in order to indicate that this was not a spontaneous outburst on his part but reflected, rather, a precise official briefing. Indeed, he told McCartan that he had contemplated "naming names" (which had been provided to him) but had decided not to do so as this would be an abuse of Parliamentary privilege.
- The advice in question, McCartan believes, came from the RUC via the NIO and the Home Office. There is reportedly a list which names three nationalist solicitors (Pat Finucane, Oliver Kelly and Paddy McGrory) and two solicitors with Loyalist sympathies (Jonathan Taylor, believed to have UDA connections, and one other). In relation to Finucane, it is rumoured that the principal allegation made is that he was involved in an incident a couple of years ago in which the smuggling of a pistol into Crumlin Road courthouse enabled an IRA prisoner to escape.
- Hogg indicated to McCartan on 17 January that he had to intervene as he did in order to dispose of an amendment sought by Labour (and also Bill Cash) which aimed to protect the confidential relationship between solicitor and client. As McCartan sees it, however, Hogg had been under fire from Seamus Mallon and Labour on earlier matters (notably house searches) and, being naturally combative, had been looking out for an issue on which he could "fight back".

Duisburg

- McCartan was heavily critical of the BBC for its treatment of the Duisburg story. He specifically rejected the reasons which it gave for breaking the story on the day in question. First, his colleague, David Watson, had no details of the meeting (as his piece in the Belfast Telegraph that afternoon clearly showed) and therefore the fears that the Belfast Telegraph might trump the other media were without foundation. Second, it was perfectly clear that the subject of the Taoiseach's remarks in the Dail was his own dialogue with Unionism and nothing else.

- Correct*
- As regards the BBC's source, McCartan blames Gordon Mawhinney of Alliance, though parts of the story may have been corroborated by Unionist sources. He believes that neither the NIO nor the SDLP played any part in the disclosure.
 - McCartan has picked up a suggestion that Hume is unhappy with the publicity given by Austin Currie (since the disclosure of the talks) to the proposal which Currie made in relation to the timing of Conference meetings. This was a personal initiative on Currie's part and has not been discussed within the party, let alone approved, yet it risks being seen as an official SDLP position. The problem is that it is at odds with the SDLP's long-standing public position of making no concessions on the Agreement or its operation.
 - In McCartan's view, there are no prospects of agreement on devolution under the present Unionist leadership. It is "tragic" that Harold McCusker's serious illness rules him out as a possible successor to Molyneaux. Though temperamental and unpredictable, he is an imaginative and "gutsy" politician. Whatever he might say about McCusker in public, Seamus Mallon admits privately that he has more respect for McCusker than for most other Unionists.
 - Mallon commented to McCartan, in the wake of Duisburg, that he disapproves in principle of secret talks. He favours "up-front" discussions with the Unionists as he wishes to see "all the cards on the table".
 - Jim Molyneaux made a similar comment to McCartan some time ago in relation to the prospective dialogue with Dublin. He would like to have "face-to-face" talks with the Taoiseach and is not happy with the use of intermediaries.

Yours sincerely

David Donoghue

David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer