



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2021/93/49
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
<b>Accession Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.



(28)

*mk me*  
*See - Hails*  
*2/9*

*Received*  
*16/8/91*  
*gm*

AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN

*my 4/8/91*  
*mk*  
*3 9 91*

AMBASSADE D'IRLANDE

EMBASSY OF IRELAND

Copenhagen, 14 August 1991

*my 16/8/91*  
*semp*  
*1. my 16/8/91*  
*To rec. hl*  
*2. Secretary to the*  
*Government*  
*(on return)*  
*16 8 91*

Dear David,

I would be grateful if you would arrange the usual confidential circulation for these two notes (PSS, PSM, PST, Mr. Nally, Mr. Brosnan). Please keep one copy for me.

Best wishes,

*Sean*

Sean O'Huiginn

Mr. David Donoghue  
Anglo-Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
Dublin

CONFIDENTIALMEETING WITH SIR NINIAN STEPHEN

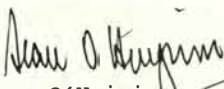
1. Sir Ninian Stephen, who was in London en route to a month-long environmental conference in Geneva, indicated he would welcome an update on Northern Ireland developments. Mr. Chilcot of the NIO and I met him in London on August 9th.

2. Chilcot supplied the background, as he saw it, to the statement by Paisley earlier that week that Sir Ninian was no longer acceptable as chairman for talks. Paisley had returned home, probably from South Carolina, and found "no doubt among accumulated bills" a letter from Brooke sending him, as he had been promised, a copy of briefing material given to Sir Ninian. At the same time he had received a phone call from the Belfast Telegraph asking if he was included in political get-togethers being organised by the NIO. (I understand from another source that Dr. Mawhinney has been organising dinner parties for the second echelon politicians in Northern Ireland). Paisley had become annoyed, gave his negative reaction to the Belfast Telegraph and confirmed it with calls to other papers.

3. Sir Ninian wondered whether it would be helpful to seek contact with Paisley to reassure him on the point of Sinn Féin involvement in the talks. He had been asked by a journalist about this in the early stages and had replied, as circumspectly as he could, that that was a matter for the participants. We advised against contacting Paisley. Either it was purely tactical posturing on Paisley's part, in which case Chilcot felt Brooke could persuade him quietly away from it, or it was a settled position, in which case a contact from Sir Ninian might well just provoke personal attack. Sir Ninian said he had received numerous requests for comment on the Paisley statement, but had refrained from giving any. We encouraged him to maintain that position. He then went on to say that if his involvement was for

any reason an obstacle to the talks he would understand completely if the the two Governments were to look for an alternative. We thanked him for his very helpful attitude, but indicated that the two Governments appreciated very deeply both his acceptance of the task and the way he had discharged it so far and would be dismayed at the thought of having to seek a replacement. He showed us a courteous letter of thanks he had received from Molyneux and asked whether there would be any objections to a proposed line of reply. We assured him there would not.

4. Chilcot then outlined, in general and cautious terms, the prospects as he saw them. Brooke had made clear his intention to resume soundings. In reply to a query from Sir Ninian, he said a November election was now most unlikely. There was therefore some time available, although the prospect of an election inevitably cast some shadow backwards even now. There were positive elements - public support for the talks, an evergrowing sense of the futility of violence - but the current difficulties with Paisley showed that one could not assume these could be translated readily into political progress. (I understood from him earlier that he is also worried that Molyneux is about to go public with a negative position on the resumption of the talks). The rest of the meeting was taken up with questions from Sir Ninian on Northern Ireland, reflecting no doubt his background reading, e.g. on the role of Alliance party, internal rivalries between the OUP and the DUP, and the quirks of the DUP and its leader.

  
Sean O'Huighinn

10 August 1991

CONFIDENTIALDISCUSSION WITH JOHN CHILCOT

1. While in London for a joint meeting with Sir Ninian Stephen I had a long conversation with John Chilcot. It was essentially personal and introductory on both sides, but touched on a number of points of interest:

2. I developed at some length the point that the Irish side had been concerned at the tenor of the last Nally-Butler meeting and this concern was now deeply reflected at the political level. Our worries related to a number of points: The British side had shown a surprising optimism about the prospects for the talks, which, as a matter of analysis, we found it hard to share. Based apparently on this highly sanguine prognosis, there seemed to be a willingness on their side to contemplate additional concessions to the unionists as a price for their participation, and we sensed a reticence about what these new concessions might be or their possible implications for the Agreement. Thirdly, there seemed a concerted effort to lower the horizons of the forthcoming summit in a way that certainly did not reflect the Taoiseach's position as expressed to Mr. Major in their June meeting. A major determining factor in Northern Ireland politics was where the British struck their own position between the conflicting aspirations of unionism and nationalism. Unionists and nationalists both understood the Agreement in the same way, as a British move away from the long-standing unionist veto on the search for a more constructive balance between the two traditions. The sense that the British had taken this step in the right direction was an enabling condition for movement on the unionist side and for much future progress. The unionists still clung to the hope of reversing this, perhaps with the aid of a hung Parliament. Concessions which raised their hopes of recovering their veto would at once guarantee immobility on their part, and undo all the gains which might be hoped for on the

nationalist side. The lesson of Northern Ireland, well illustrated by the Agreement and its aftermath, was that the two Governments had to supply the impetus for change. How this could best be done would be the most fruitful area for discussion at the summit.

3. Chilcot first addressed the issue of their optimism. He acknowledged readily there were many difficulties, but felt unionist hopes of a hung parliament - always a doubtful bet - must be outweighed by their fears that there could be a Labour Government. Labour Party policy on Ireland had remained intact in all the policy shifts of the party in recent years and was therefore to be taken seriously. Unionists might find it a protection in such circumstances to have the talks process already underway. He invoked the widespread public support for dialogue and the strong motivation of many second-tier politicians as an asset to Mr. Brooke. He acknowledged that the NIO strategy was to use the "political DUP" (Robinson and his allies), to lever Paisley on board and thereby make it safe for the OUP to engage in talks without being outflanked on the right. This had produced some results. He was inclined to be optimistic that the destructive side of Paisley's character could be held in check, and that the unionists would in fact be capable of espousing a forward-looking strategy different to the purely immobile and defensive stance of "no surrender" which he accepted had characterised any unionist common platform to date.

4. On meeting unionists preconditions for relaunching the talks Chilcot said that they appeared reticent because they had no firm idea what their approach might be. It seemed clear a new formula would have to be found. He felt our concerns on the Agreement were unfounded and not shared, in his experience, by nationalists in Northern Ireland. The British fully accepted that any dispositions regarding the Agreement could not be open ended. He seemed however to envisage some arrangement where the continuing gap could be made dependent on achieving agreed stages of progress. On the talks generally he stressed the British

maintained their commitment to the three strand approach and that nothing could be agreed until everything was agreed.

5. On the forthcoming summit he said Robin Butler had reflected very precisely, as might be expected, the views of the Prime Minister. Mr. Major was a careful and methodical man, who concentrated his efforts on what he saw as the major issues. Northern Ireland was now among these. Mr. Major had given his approval to the Brooke approach, and he would not change this unless he was convinced that it should be replaced by something different and better. He would feel that any "twin-track" approach would destroy the Brooke initiative, and he would be most wary of doing that. His prudent temperament and strong sense of responsibility would also make him unlikely to contemplate any major new departure in what was the tail end of the Government's mandate, with all the pressures and uncertainties that that implied. I asked what he saw as the likely timetable for Mr. Brooke's soundings, and whether it would not be most unwise to let this very uncertain prospect condemn us to immobility on other and possibly more promising avenues. Chilcot said the position would be clearer in November. He himself saw the aftermath of the election as a particularly important period, given they would have a Government with fresh mandate, and also a more settled position among Northern Ireland politicians.

6. I asked him how he would see the presentation of the summit. He said this area would be a matter for the Cabinet Office but he assumed that both sides would see advantage in having it deal with wider issues as well as Northern Ireland (e.g. common interests and cooperation in Europe). In regard to Northern Ireland he hoped the meeting would project a sense of old animosities being laid to rest. Security would be an important issue, although they had taken on board Mr. Nally's message about the dangers of giving a public profile to this issue. I pressed him a little on what they could see as difficulties in this area. He acknowledged police to police cooperation was close, but said there were areas of detail where cooperation needed a political



impetus, and that political dimension would be Mr. Major's focus. (He recalled again the events surrounding the Garda discovery of the lorry-bomb in Donegal earlier this summer, in a way which suggests that this incident has assumed symbolic value for them). He said there had been a change in the approach of the security forces in Northern Ireland, dating back some nine months. A Bloody Sunday or internment fiasco was unthinkable now and the military were much more sensitive to the political context of their operations (I think his underlying point was that the involvement of the British Army in North/South security cooperation would not have the liabilities it had in the past). I warned in general terms of a strong and justified sense on the Irish side of a major effort being sustained in security cooperation, and the dangers of appearing to dismiss this in pursuit of changes possibly marginal to the real effort, or even counterproductive in terms of public support.

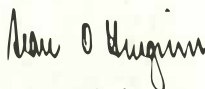
7. We spoke a little about the likely current attitudes in Sinn Féin/IRA circles. He said it was very tempting to believe that some particular formula could be found which could deliver the great prize of an end to violence, but he was inclined to scepticism whether this could be so. On the substance it remained their position that they could not have Sinn Féin in talks while they advocated violence. On a possible statement which might meet the conditions hinted at for an end to violence, my sense of his remarks is that British were not prepared to subscribe to anything which displaced self-determination for Northern Ireland in favour of self-determination for the island as a whole.

8. I asked him about his reference at the Nally-Butler dinner to the importance of "mood music" from Dublin directed at the unionists. He reaffirmed his view that speeches aimed at reassuring the unionists about Dublin's respect and esteem for their traditions would be disproportionately helpful. The British system had a planning process where they set out objectives and planned speeches in areas such as these and if we had a similar one this should be looked at. I said I suspected the unionist



parties had a strong sense that the Taoiseach and Minister were in fact very careful of their susceptibilities, a care often best expressed through silence, even on occasion in the face of unwarranted attack.

9. At the end of our talk Chilcot stressed his view of progress in Northern Ireland as an open-ended process. The British would take measures which were enabling conditions for different outcomes (including implicitly ones we would welcome) but they would not however predetermine these outcomes. I stressed again the strong sense on our side that the challenge posed by the problem required that it be tackled comprehensively and in depth. Almost all internal and partial approaches had been explored in earlier initiatives with little result. The time could now be ripe for a major initiative by both Governments aimed at bringing new possibilities for a solution within our grasp.



Sean O' Huiginn  
10 August 1991

