



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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2019

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Misc.  
F. 2.

Uimhir.....

To:

From:

Confidential

Visit by new British Ambassador

At a meeting with Ambassador Blatherwick this morning, the following items came up:

President

I mentioned that the discussion between Ambassador Fenn and the President, during which the Ambassador had mentioned the then forthcoming visits by Princess Anne and Prince Edward, had caused us some problems, the nature of which I explained. Our understanding with the Ambassador, and his office, about the visits was that they were to be kept entirely confidential, except among those who absolutely had to know - for very good security and other reasons. The line of communications with the President was through this Department in view particularly of the constitutional position that, with certain rare exceptions, she can act only on the advice of the Government. The Ambassador noted the position.

He enquired as to the date for her forthcoming visit to Liverpool - which I said was not due for another two months or so.

He also mentioned the question of a discussion with the Prince of Wales about the Prince of Wales Trust which administered funds for youth, inner city, etc. So far as he knew, the Prince of Wales was anxious to have this discussion with the President, who was responsible for Gaisce. I said that, for the moment, our advice remained as it had been - all of these things must be taken most gently.

The Ambassador then went on to say that during the presentation of credentials the President had raised with him the question of a visit to Northern Ireland. The Ambassador had replied that, depending on the political scene, such a visit would be most welcome but that it would, for security and other reasons, have to be well thought out and organised in advance. It was also important that there should be "balance" in the venues and parties visited.

I said that the recent talks process had made any such visit inadvisable at the time and that the whole matter had been put on ice during the process. The issues involved were extremely sensitive. Probably

Taoiseach  
To see  
please.  
You are  
due to  
meet the  
ambassador  
for a courtesy  
call on  
Monday.

19/9

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Uimhir.....

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From: our wish would be that if the President were to meet Northern interests she should, as Head of State, meet them in the Aras rather than in a visit to Northern Ireland - for which, in any event, the formal consent of the Government would be necessary under the Constitution. The Ambassador appreciated the position.

Northern Ireland

On the talks process, the Ambassador said that the Northern Secretary was considering ways of getting talks on Strands I, II and III going again. He would require care and patience. What was particularly important was that the public utterances of the Unionist politicians should not be taken at face value. Whatever happened, the British were not anxious to push things down their throats. The British position on the Anglo-Irish Agreement was as solid as a rock. Both the Prime Minister and Peter Brooke would appreciate any ideas we might have on the discussions or how to get them moving. But he could say that in principle, they were opposed to "new machinery". That was why the contacts had been through the Anglo-Irish Conference or the "Diner" mechanisms, both of which were existing channels.

The Prime Minister, in particular, wished to emphasise how much he valued the cordial relationship he understood himself to have with the Taoiseach, in relation to Northern Ireland and also in an EC context.

The Ambassador then went on to say that before he had come, he had been "taken aside" by Tom King, the Chief of the Defence Staff, the Chief Constable and others concerned with security in Northern Ireland. The strongest message coming from them was the changing scale of Provo attacks. He himself remembered, in the early 1970s, that a group of four Provos together, was unusual. Now, attacks were being mounted by 20-30 people, with fire-power "greater than the Army can return". The British Government acknowledged with gratitude and admiration the contribution of the Irish security forces in maintaining order and he simply wished to say that any more that we could do would be most welcome. He mentioned also that security would probably figure in the forthcoming discussions between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach.

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I said that there were a number of points which we would probably like to make.

First, in any new discussions, it would be essential that the two Governments should be seen as the interlocutors with other parties. They were the signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement - and it was the Anglo-Irish Agreement or something like it that would figure very largely in the talks.

Next, we had noticed the tendency, on the part of the British to move pragmatically - step by step - from where they were now. They seemed to have no vision of where they wanted to go. By following this type of policy, they were playing into the hands of people who would lead them nowhere. Their policy seemed, in fact, to be a recipe for continuing stagnation in Northern Ireland - meaning, perhaps, another 20 years of violence.

We, on the other hand, wanted something other than this "step by step approach". We wanted some type of vision or policy objective which the two Governments could fix on and aim towards. It was in that way that the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been negotiated. It was proof against the factionalism of Northern politics - and it had stood the test of time because the two Governments together stood behind it. Our view would be that the two Governments, together, should again consider initiatives to get out of the current stagnation.

Again, on that subject, we had noticed the tendency in the recent talks for conditions to be attached to parts of Strand I, making progress there difficult or impossible - and certainly holding up moves to Strand II. Any further talks should be possible be devised so that Strand I and II subjects (and if necessary Strand III) could be taken in parallel. Strand II was really the Strand where all interests met; the two Governments, the Northern parties, North and South, etc. The Ambassador seemed to go along with this.

The Ambassador had spoken of the security situation; as things were, it could be dealt with only by the British, only through security measures. This, in itself, was doomed to failure as it had been over the past 20 years. Security, alone, could contain a situation; it could never improve it. And the fact

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that there was no political issue or no political movement was a godsend to the men of violence. They thrive in the political vacuum. This was one reason why the Taoiseach was urging so strongly that the two Governments should, together, take a grip on the situation. I said that I thought the Taoiseach would be pursuing these points with the Prime Minister at the forthcoming meeting. I also mentioned the desirability of other meetings, at official level, to prepare for that Summit.



Dermot Nally

19 September 1991