

**Dermot Nally  
Papers**

**UCDA P254/33**

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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British-Irish Association Conference, Cambridge,  
10-12 September 1993.

Private Meetings with Mayhew and Chilcot

I had two substantial discussions with the Northern Secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew and John Chilcot.

I met Chilcot first, following a conversation with an FCO official, where in the most general terms I had stressed the priority that the Taoiseach gave to peace. Chilcot went over, for my benefit, some of the ground discussed at the Conference and at the Butler/Nally meeting. He made it clear that their position was not based on either a lack of interest or a determination to pursue some alternative policy. But they did have reservations as to whether, given the text of the joint declaration would inevitably have to be changed, the PIRA/SF were in fact ready to make a decision move to peace.

The working method they were proposing was to have the Liaison Group in Strand III meet to discuss a framework and in particular the scope for constitutional change. The language developed there could then be incorporated into the draft declaration and at that point they would be able to work with the declaration, or at least assist us actively to redraft it. What he was also effectively saying was that they needed the cover of Strand III to be engaged in this process at all. He envisaged that the work could be carried out over a 4-6 week period at which point we might be able to go back to our interlocutors (i.e. the priests).

Sir Patrick Mayhew made clear his strong interest in the peace initiative, which he referred to as "an enormous prize". (He pointedly refused to comment on or condemn the Hume/Adams talks, even when pressed to do so in the public sessions). He also discussed his difficulties with it. He was clearly jolted by the Taoiseach's letter and claimed it had caused "some dismay". They do not want to do anything that can be construed as getting into negotiations with the PIRA. But he said he needed to know where we stood on constitutional change, and then they would be able to see what they could do on their side that might assist the PIRA to decide to settle for peace. I made it clear that what we were looking for was as positive as possible a statement of their fundamental position as it has existed since 1920. He of course pointed out his responsibility for lives in Northern Ireland and the dangers of a loyalist backlash. He complained to me the following morning about a degree of procrastination since April on our side. I filled him in on the domestic political background (and indeed the use in the early part of the year within Fianna Fáil of Articles 2 and 3 as a means of creating

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trouble, which had promptly stopped after the 1 April statement in the Dáil, where the Taoiseach had adopted a tough tone, but without altering our underlying position).

Mayhew accepts that PIRA/SF are essentially one organisation, and that their leadership does not want, if an acceptable way out can be found, to continue fighting a war for 10-15 years. He also accepted my point that in common with the old IRA they were a basically disciplined organisation, despite some obvious counter-examples. He repeated that continued bombings were not facilitating a hearing for them. I said that their warnings on this had been passed on to the Taoiseach's instructions, but he noted ruefully they had only been headed up to a point.

He was concerned that inevitably the question of prisoners would be raised, as there were severe limits on what he could do in the case of those convicted of serious terrorist offences. I said to him that this had not been raised with us (except in a very general way the question of prisoners in the South). He seemed to think that the position of prisoners would be a key question.

Apart from political topics, I discussed (particularly when others were present) his mother's family background in West Cork (a Roche, who lived in Castletownshend, and was a cousin of Edith Somerville). He described her family as "strongly Irish, even Republican", by which I presume he probably meant had some sympathy with Irish Nationalism.

## Public Statements

Mayhew was upbeat about the prospect of resumed talks, albeit with a much greater element of bilateral diplomacy. He assumed the DUP would not be involved initially, but might be later, when they saw things beginning to happen without them. He defended the 'nothing is agreed, until everything is agreed' approach as still the best way to achieve results, though not excluding more limited or step-by-step agreements, should that be what the parties want.

## Unionists

Rev. John Dunlop, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and other Unionist Spokesmen, expressed fears about the Hume/Adams talks culminating either in a secret agreement or an agreed political strategy on joint authority. John Rodgers, former Attorney General, dismissed joint authority, and also claimed the Joint Programme committed the Government to changing Articles 2 and 3. I also spoke to Chris McGimpsey about continued bilateral contacts.

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A British Conservative MEP Stevens argued that there was no deal with the Unionists, because the Government did not win both Maastricht votes, and therefore the conditions for the implementation of a deal were not fulfilled. Also, the position of the British Labour Party on Northern Ireland made it unnecessary to make specific promises to the Unionists.

*Walter Harcourt*

13 September, 1993.