

**Dermot Nally
Papers**

UCDA P254/28

SECRET

Dinner with Mr. John Chilcot

- 1. I had dinner in London with Mr. John Chilcot on 29 July. Although the occasion was a social one, our conversation naturally turned repeatedly to Northern Ireland.

Nally-Butler Discussions

- 2. Chilcot projected a strong message that this particular agenda had not been "estopped", as he put it, by the new Tory/Unionist relationship. It remained of great interest to his principals, including, he stressed, to Sir Patrick Mayhew, with whom he had spent several hours in private conversation the previous evening. (He made a strong "sales pitch" for Sir Patrick generally, recounting his difficult early years as a struggling barrister and hinting that Sir Patrick's Irish sympathies might be stronger than he could avow).
- 3. Chilcot said they saw the Nally-Butler agenda as of greater interest than the Talks in terms of the prize on offer, although perhaps of a lower rating in terms of probability of achievement. Recent developments had not destroyed it, but meant that nothing could be done for the next three months or so. He thought something might be possible in February, and the chances could be improved if the unionists had gained confidence about their position. He said he would endeavour to confirm a meeting on 4th August for a further Nally-Butler meeting to take forward the discussion.
- 4. I again urged the importance of the initiative, and the significance the Taoiseach attached to it. I pointed out the legalistic approach to self-determination, which the

British were perhaps uncomfortable with, could actually be an asset: an ideal theoretical position could be invoked based on early legal precedent, and there could be an agreed qualification that it could not be realised without the necessary condition of majority consent.

The Talks process

5. Chilcot stressed they wished to continue exploring the Talks process. Ancras, had he retained a Scottish seat, would now be Secretary of State for Scotland, and was a first class political talent. He would have the "footings" for a round of Talks about Talks in place by early September. These would aim to retain the key elements of the 26 March statement (three relationships, etc.) but would not be high profile in format (presumably echoes of Molyneaux). He acknowledged the scepticism on the Irish side about the prospects of success. He was however clearly anxious to keep the process in place, suggesting that it might be an enabling condition for the other agenda.

6. I stressed again that the whole political agenda in Northern Ireland hinged on British "tilt" towards either the unionist or nationalist agenda. The implied British expectation of a voluntary unionist movement towards the kind of balance which might be viable overall sounded now even more optimistic than before, if that was possible. I understood from his remarks that the pitfalls of a constitutional referendum in our jurisdiction were now more widely understood in their system.

Select Committee

7. Chilcot warned about the mood in the House of Commons and counselled very strongly against overt opposition to a Select Committee. I inferred between the lines of his

replies to my questions that this may well be announced in the adjournment debate on Northern Ireland set for 22 October. I pointed out that because of allegations and denials of a "deal" this issue had now acquired a symbolic charge which would make it difficult to view it as merely a matter of House of Commons routine.

Meetings at political level

8. Chilcot said he felt the Taoiseach and Mr. Mayhew should have a full discussion, possibly on a one-to-one basis in the meeting envisaged in early September. He also thought that the next Summit might take place in October rather than, say, December. I said that political discussion could only be helpful. The Taoiseach was anxious to maintain his good working relationship with Mr. Major. However the presentational aspects would also have to be considered. The perceived shift in British positions was likely to cause serious political pressures on the Irish Government. This would be reflected in the Taoiseach's position. As regards a Summit, and the Taoiseach would clearly have difficulty if the agenda or outcome of such a meeting seemed to imply he was endorsing a pro-unionist tilt by the British Government.

Seán O hUiginn
30 July, 1993