

**Dermot Nally  
Papers**

**UCDA P254/56**

## ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

PERSONAL & SECRETNORTHERN IRELAND

Taoiseach,

Sean O hUiginn and I met Cabinet Secretary Butler, Northern Ireland Secretary Chilcot and Quentin Thomas in the Cabinet Office in London today. The meeting lasted slightly over an hour.

In essence, the British said that their Ministers, following several very agonised discussions, had concluded that they just could not get to the point where "this is seriously on". They concluded that the Hume/Adams effect on Unionist opinion made a joint statement in the text language impossible. The green language was just not a route they could take because the Unionists would not wear it.

At the same time, Butler was at great pains to say that the process was not at an end. They see the desire for peace about and they were working furiously on some other approach - about which they were totally vague. They had just received the "ecclesiastical language" and would obviously be considering it carefully. We said that time was now so short that we would be available, if necessary, on a day's notice or shorter for further elaboration. The 2nd/3rd December was fast approaching.

After I had made an introductory statement, emphasising the importance of the process, and the necessity for a ~~swift~~ decision soon, Butler said that they had just received the ecclesiastical amendments and had not time to consider them fully. They had, however, come to the conclusion, following serious consideration by Ministers that they could not get to the point where the process was "seriously on". This conclusion had been arrived at by Ministers after very agonised discussions. Ministers saw the desire for peace about but they had concluded that the Hume/Adams effect on Unionist opinion made a joint statement in the terms of the text language impossible. The green language was just not a route they could take because the Unionists wouldn't wear it. Unionist violence would take up from where the IRA violence stopped.

They said the Taoiseach had been immensely helpful and his help was appreciated, after the joint statement on the Brussels meeting. The British conclusions had been reached following public statements by the Unionists and private meetings with Molyneaux and Paisley. They had concluded from these that the text just was not on. Anything which appears to stem from Hume/Adams was just anathema. The Unionists were now

## ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

PERSONAL & SECRET

-2-

connecting up Hume/Adams with the Taoiseach - and with this process. They recognised the uniqueness of this moment but they "despaired" of distinguishing the process from what the Unionists see as its provenance. Bulter concluded that they were desperately seeking a way forward. Their instructions, he emphasised, were not to say "forget the process".

He then questioned how much weight should be attached to Archbishop Eames's views or influence. He concluded, by emphasising again, that their position was that John Hume had "blown it". The process had become tainted fatally.

We emphasised very strongly the input from paragraphs 6 on and its source and said that our information was that Molyneux had indicated that, while he would not oppose, he would not support - he would "passively accept" the approach. We said the British should check, themselves, with their source.

After a very full and, at times, heated discussion - when our points could not have been put more strongly unless by shouting - we concluded that the British should get in touch with us as soon as they had fully considered the completed text and had reached a final conclusion on it. We emphasised that this contact could take place in a day - or perhaps even hours - but that it was vitally important that it should be made so that both Governments could seriously consider their position - particularly in view of the imminence of 2nd/3rd December.

Mr. O hUiginn has a fuller note on the whole discussion.

Dermot Nally,  
10 November, 1991.

c.c. Secretary Dorr and Assistant Secretary O'hUiginn,  
Department of Foreign Affairs.  
Secretary to the Government, Mr. Frank Murray.  
Dr. Martin Mansergh.

SECRET

Meeting in the Cabinet Office, London.  
10th November, 1991

British Side

Irish Side

Present were:

Sir Robin Butler  
Mr. John Chilcot  
Mr. Quentin Thomas

Mr. Dermot Nally  
Mr. Sean O hUiginn

1. Butler welcomed the Irish side. He said Quentin Thomas had recently received the text with the more recent amendments. He personally had not had time to study it so that, as far as textual matters went, he would leave the running to Mr. Chilcot and Mr. Thomas.
2. Mr. Nally suggested the meeting might concentrate on the most recent additions. The initial text was not much changed, but the latest additions balanced the original elements.
3. Nally then dealt formally with each of the four points raised at the last Butler-Nally meeting and conveyed the Taoiseach's formal assurances on each of the points involved. He emphasised there was no doubt in the Taoiseach's mind about rejecting either the question of a time limit or qualifications on consent. The Taoiseach had made that clear publicly. He felt, in general, the new additions should not cause problems for the Republican people. Paragraph 4 remained the key.
4. In a general introduction Nally stressed that this was the best chance for a very long time to put an end to the futile absurdity of violence. There would be high expectations vested in the Prime Minister's meeting on the 2/3 December. If that meeting did not produce something adequate to the occasion, there would be a sense of anti-climax and only the

proponents of violence would gain. The notion would go abroad that Hume-Adams had been an opportunity for peace which the Governments had failed to avail of. That would be damaging for both.

5. Nally stressed that what was needed from the present meeting was a firm indication that the proposal was "on" in principle. Once that was established the drafting could then be properly addressed. He recalled that in his experience even routine Summits had required a lot of preparation. The next Summit was a mere three weeks away. It was momentous in its potential for progress or damage. For that reason full preparation was necessary and a firm indication was needed of the British attitude to the present proposal.
  
6. Nally added that the Taoiseach had a strong sense from his wide range of contacts in Northern Ireland, including from normal political sources on both sides of the divide, that there had never been such a feeling for peace as now. His contacts in the majority community had included a senior ecclesiastical figure who viewed the proposal very positively and would be making that known.
  
7. Nally added that it would be a mistake to view the IRA as being on its knees. It was an abhorrent organisation, but it could not be said that its resources had been exhausted. He stressed that time was not on our side. He took issue with Mayhew's notion that the December meeting was not a deadline and that there could be three months for the discussion.
  
8. As a final point he said that he understood the British need to distance themselves from the Hume-Adams label. They should be careful however not to distance themselves from Hume. It was very important to keep Hume "on side" so that

his great influence for good could be used in the right way.

9. Butler, picking up the Hume-Adams reference, said the British side could not get to the point where this initiative was "seriously on". British Ministers had had several very agonised discussions. They saw the desire for peace as a tremendous opportunity but had concluded that the effects of the "Hume-Adams Initiative" on unionist opinion was very negative. They had concluded that a joint statement which contained elements of "green language", even if acceptable in substance, was not a route they could take. The unionists would not wear it and the unionist men of violence would react. Their recent experience had confirmed this.
  
10. Butler said the Taoiseach had been immensely helpful about the joint statement in Brussels. However the experience they had subsequently of the public statements of the unionists, and the private contacts which they had with them, had not dispelled their reservations. Anything to do with Hume-Adams was anathema to the Unionists. They had now connected up the activities of the Taoiseach with Hume-Adams.
  
11. Butler said the British were now in the position of wanting to realise the opportunity that was there, but despairing of dissociating it from what the unionists saw as its provenance. Developments of recent days had not countered, but rather intensified, that conclusion of Ministers. Butler stressed the British instinct was not to say "forget this". They were looking at all possibilities. They questioned also how much one could rely on Eames as a guide to unionist opinion. In summary it was misleading to think that this was the most likely route to progress. The position was the same as when he himself had travelled to Dublin. Hume had blown it.

12. Quiginn sought formal confirmation that the basic message to be conveyed to the Irish Government was that the Brussels Summit had not changed in any way the message which had earlier been conveyed by Butler to Dublin. Butler confirmed this.
  
13. Quiginn said that the ideas involved in the Hume-Adams initiative were simply too big to go away. The climate of discussion had been changed. The issue had to be resolved into success or failure. The Taoiseach and the Irish Government had worked very hard for success and we had hoped to have British cooperation. If there was failure there would be serious recrimination. There was a unique opportunity now, related to the experience of a particular generation in the Republican movement. If the opportunity was missed there would be a new cycle of violence which would last another generation. If it was missed it was certain that there would be leaks. Serious questions would be raised why an opportunity for peace, which was supported by the Irish Government, by Hume, by leading ecclesiastics of both denominations in Ireland, by significant figures in the United States, and other influential people, had not been pursued.
  
14. Butler said their position was not based on the assumption that the IRA were war weary. They had much independent evidence that the Provisional movement was thinking seriously about peace. They knew there was an upsurge for peace in the community. The question in the Prime Minister's mind was not about rejecting that, but rather how to exploit it with the best prospects of success. If a way could be found of exploiting it that was not provocative, that would be better. Unionists had got themselves "in a stew" on Hume-Adams. If there was no other route, Ministers would judge whether they should take that risk. The

Unionists were however deeply suspicious. The British were thinking in terms of stopping the violence. The question was what route would do this.

15. Chilcot and Thomas underlined statements made by Irish spokespersons that the initiative was not in competition with the Talks but rather was complementary. The Irish side agreed that this was so. If a cessation of violence were achieved, it would simply be the beginning: All the issues in the Three Stranded Talks would remain, but as the Taoiseach had stressed, they could then be addressed with infinitely greater prospect of success. Given basic nationalist positions, the success of the Talks would require some move in any case very similar to that contemplated in the Declaration. If that was so, it made sense to cast that in a form which secured a cessation from the outset. The Taoiseach had put a major effort into this initiative. His efforts should be built on to secure the effect he intended.
  
16. Chilcot objected that the particular need and emphasis of the Declaration might mean peace on one side rather than the other. He recalled that there was violence on both sides. Mally enquired whether Molyneux had seen the Declaration in any form. (Butler was evasive on this, possibly because of the confidentiality of any Privy-Council briefing).
  
17. Mally urged the meeting again to focus on the problem of the Summit. Texts would probably be published and people would be left with the impression that a significant opportunity for peace had been missed.
  
18. Butler said he did not want to "look over the cliff of the Summit". The present position of Ministers was that the joint Declaration was so shocking to Unionists that it would not do the trick. They would report the Irish views to



Ministers, who were continuing to think in an agonised way what the best way forward was. He suggested the meeting might take a look at the text.

19. A brief discussion on the text ensued. Nally pointed out that paragraph 1 distanced the Declaration from the Hume-Adams initiative. Chilcot raised the question whether Eames thought the Declaration would work. Nally stressed again that the Declaration was different from Hume-Adams. There was no question of a time limit. There was new and different language. O hUiginn explained that Dr. Eames had seen the text, had personally suggested a number of paragraphs and felt the entire initiative was worthwhile. That was a very significant development. The British would themselves have an opportunity to check out at first hand what his views on the matter were. The assumption that something of this magnitude could be done without any risk and to universal - including unionist - applause was unrealistic. The prize on offer required political courage.
  
20. Chilcot accepted that the test had to be one rather of "grudging acquiescence" for Unionists. He recalled that when Mayhew had made his Coleraine speech, he had shown it around and got grudging acquiescence, and amber and green lights. When there was an adverse reaction, the people concerned (presumably including Eames ?) had reacted differently.
  
21. O hUiginn reverted to Nally's point on the imminence of the Summit. The Taoiseach had undergone considerable risk to protect the Prime Minister from any political risks while he was travelling towards this goal. If he was not in fact travelling towards the goal, that was a different matter. There was a danger of a major policy difference between the two Governments, such as had not happened since the Anglo-Irish Agreement. If the potential for peace was not

pursued, major questions would be asked. We needed to start preparation now for that difficulty. Given the urgent timeframe, a failure to take a decision on the initiative would have to be interpreted as a negative decision very shortly. The Irish Government would need to know clearly where it stood.

22. There was some further discussion on the text. Nally explained the various changes which had been made. The British side made clear that they would need United Kingdom guarantees enshrined in formal terms in paragraph 4 of the draft and that the United Kingdom should be mentioned as such. On paragraphs 6, 7 and 8, Chilcot thought they were a valuable forward position attributed to the Taoiseach himself. The conversation reverted to whether this was Archbishop Eames best view of what should be said. (There was more than a hint in British comments that Archbishop Eames was somewhat opportunistic and not entirely reliable).
  
23. Nally again said that the most that Unionists could be expected to do was to "passively accept" the idea of the Declaration. The fact that Archbishop Eames and perhaps others were willing to do so was highly significant.
  
24. Since the various comments made on the text seemed to confirm that the British were not seriously contemplating using it, the discussion again reverted to more general issues. The Irish side stressed the danger of a wide gap in the views of the two Governments, the dangers that the paramilitaries could be beneficiaries of that, and the need to consider the presentation at the Summit.
  
25. The British side raised the question of the Talks process. They enquired whether the Irish side would, as indicated, be putting forward a paper. The Irish side said the Government

were supportive of all forms of dialogue. There was no wish to be negative in any way about the conversations Angram was having with political leaders. They had to realise however that these talks had no credibility anywhere in Ireland. The idea that a Summit could credibly get by just by approving these desultory on-going contacts, was simply not realistic. The Irish Government had said the peace process and the Talks process were complementary. That clearly did not envisage a situation where one had disappeared off the screen and only the other was left. The question of a paper would have to be considered afresh by the Irish Government in the light of the conclusions they would draw from the present meeting.

26. Chilcot said that, to address the hypothesis that the Declaration was not used for the Summit, it was worth recalling that when the Prime Minister saw Hume, the latter had not been fixated on any particular date in the calendar. That was an artificial construct, blown up beyond its true significance. That was a fact, but a pity. He thought there was a fundamental difference between the two sides on the Provos. The British had been looking at this. The Provisionals kept coming back. There was of course the danger of generational change and a new ruthless leadership on the IRA side. On the loyalist side that had already happened. That was getting more and more important for the British side, quite irrespective of alliances in the House of Commons (which the Irish side had earlier hinted would be seen as the key factor).
  
27. Chilcot said Hume had not been hooked on the 3rd December. He referred again to British appreciation of the work the Irish Government had done in managing the situation in times of difficulty, including in relation to Hume. If things leaked out "some of the strain of managing Hume would be down to the British side".

28. As Butler had to host a reception (ironically, I think, for new recruits to GCHQ in Cheltenham) the meeting drew to a close. Nally urged a rethink of British position, in the light of the risks of serious divergence between the two Governments in the run up or at the Summit. He stressed that he himself would be available in London until Monday and that a meeting could be organised at the shortest notice. Butler acknowledged that the ball was at their feet in terms of the next contact.

*Bill*

Sean O'Niginn  
10 November, 1993