



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Pgs 3-4 for
Flags + Emblems, Irish Language.

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Mr Lillis,

1. Martin Burke and myself had lunch today with Roy Reeve of the NIO and Robert Stimson of the British Embassy, at the latter's request. Reeve as you know is a Foreign Office Official on secondment to the NIO and is a political adviser to Ministers on Northern Ireland affairs.
2. Mr. Reeve was deeply dejected after the recent Summit and felt that his side had made obvious mistakes in their public handling of the post summit situation. He was quite critical of the comments of both Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Hurd which he felt were most unhelpful. The impact of these comments on nationalists in Northern Ireland had been devastating and he felt that even the most moderate nationalists had been seriously "turned off". He had travelled around the North and held extensive consultations with nationalists during the past two weeks all of which served to confirm this view. In effect Reeves confirmed from his discussions in Northern Ireland the views which this Department has also been obtaining independently.
3. Both Martin Burke and myself indicated the Governments concern at the unfortunate effect of the post summit comments by Mrs. Thatcher and Mr Hurd which we stated had been most inopportune. Mrs. Thatcher's remarks at her press conference after the European Council had been welcome as had Hurd's statement to the Assembly. Reeve appreciated this and said that it had not been easy for him to insert the more positive sounding words in the Hurd speech to the Assembly. However, after some difficulty he felt he had been reasonably successful. He further mentioned that Hurd had taken much more time to read himself into the Northern Ireland situation than had been expected and that Hurd had also been a bit slow to appreciate the impact of certain words in the highly

sensitive Northern Ireland situation. He now appeared to be more confident and also the triumphalism of the unionist in the period since the Anglo-Irish Summit had taught him a useful lesson - he now knew what he was up against in his dealings with the unionists. Reeve further stated that Hurd does not like nor feel comfortable at large meetings and prefers where possible to deal with small groups of people.

4. With regard to recent speeches given by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Barry, Reeve said that these had created some problems for his authorities in Northern Ireland. He himself fully appreciated the reasons why these speeches had to be made (we stressed that after the reassurances given by the British Prime Minister and Mr. Hurd to the unionists, somebody had to look after the nationalists as well). He felt that the tone might have gone a bit "overboard". He personally would not quarrel with the substance of what the Minister had to say but felt that the tone of such overtly nationalist statements served to confirm unionists in their attitudes to the Republic. In particular he quoted the example of Molyneux on this point whom he said pointed to these speeches as confirming unionist fears about the position of the Government in the South. Reeve also said that some moderate nationalists in particular SDLP Councillors whom he had met felt that the tone of the speeches was also a bit too sharp. He added however, that such councillors would not represent SDLP mainstream opinion. In effect Reeve was saying that while he did not object to the substance of the speeches he felt that the particular words used in some cases e.g., nightmare situation, were a bit too harsh and would not encourage attempts at reconciliation in Northern Ireland.
5. On other matters Reeve stated that there would be a meeting in London next week of NIO officials to discuss "bread and butter" steps which they are considering in relation to Northern Ireland. These included lifting the

* disqualification on Mallon, action on the flags and emblems act and also the question of the use of Irish in street names etc. I understood in relation to the latter that they were considering extending the Welsh legislation on placenames etc to Northern Ireland. In a discussion on the NIO, Reeve took some trouble to distinguish between the attitude of NIO officials in Belfast whom he claimed were sympathetic of our point of view and those of NIO officials in London. He said that the NIO officials in Belfast were fully aware of the situation on the ground in Northern Ireland and their appreciation was quite close to ours, but when this was put to London it either did not reach Ministers or was not accepted in all its implications.

6. In a discussion about the local elections in Northern Ireland in May, 1985, Reeve stated that he did not yet know what attitude Sinn Fein would ultimately take in relation to those elections. At a minimum however, he expected them to win 50 to 60 seats - he personally swayed in the direction of 60 - and this would be enough to "screw up" local Government in Northern Ireland. This he felt would be the minimum Sinn Fein strength but if they decided to go all out in the elections they could win perhaps up to 100 seats. However, he did not want to stress this latter point. He did feel that victories in the election for Sinn Fein would place the SDLP in an impossible position and that he personally was taking a bet that the first Sinn Fein chairman of a Council would be in Omagh as a result of Sinn Fein/SDLP cooperation. His view was that the SDLP would be unable to resist the pressures for alliances with Sinn Fein in certain areas. With regard to official British attitudes to Sinn Fein he confirmed that Ministers and Officials do not see Sinn Fein representatives although they do answer official correspondence where this is justified. In so far as the situation after the May local elections will be concerned he felt that Sinn Fein victories will put the British authorities in a very difficult position. The legislation

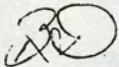
that stands prohibits the authorities from discriminating among political representatives. This legislation was introduced in 1972 to protect the minority but he now feels that it will bind their hands in terms of treating Sinn Fein. If they must they will abide by existing legislation and this means they will have to treat with elected Sinn Fein representatives. If Sinn Fein gain a substantial number of seats and this creates an impossible situation with relation to local government in Northern Ireland it is possible that The British Government might then be forced to disband local Government in the province at least as a temporary measure.

7. Reeve also is worried about the possibility that nationalists in particular the SDLP in the post summit situation may withdraw from all representative bodies in Northern Ireland and in effect set up a separate nationalist assembly. He would not wish to predict this confidently but certainly he claimed that he had heard echoes predicting such a move in his recent consultations in Northern Ireland.

8. With regard to the course of future negotiations between the British and Irish Government, Reeve felt that this was an open question. The unionist veto on constitutional change remains but at the same time the British Government will not meet any unionist demand for devolved Government unless there is broad cross community support for this - which does not seem to be forthcoming. This leaves a status quo which the British in his view are unwilling to support indefinitely. The courses of action open to them therefore are to proceed in those areas where the unionists do not have a veto. (this I take it to mean would involve flags and emblems etc and other local issues) and also to continue negotiations with the Irish Government with a view to seeing what can be achieved.

We stressed to him that as we saw it mere consultation was considerably short of what an Irish Government would want and furthermore pointed out to him that Hurd's references to this had been most unhelpful and had been contrary to what Mrs. Thatcher herself had agreed. In Reeve's view negotiations between the two Governments would have to continue in the hope that some form of acceptable solution could be arrived at. He personally felt that this might not be possible until June, 1985.

9. We also mentioned to Reeve that sometimes different signals appeared at times to issue from different people in London and this could be very confusing. It was important to keep in mind that the Taoiseach was dealing with Mrs. Thatcher and that the signals should come from her.



Bernard Davenport

7 December, 1984.