



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2016/52/55
<b>Creation Dates:</b>	9 July 1986
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	4 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
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9 July 1986

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Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with Andrew McKay, M.P., PPS to Tom King

McKay said they intend to continue to adopt the view that the divorce referendum result is irrelevant to the workings of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He said that behind this, however, they are following keenly any hints of instability within the Government. That said, he thinks the internal ripples within Fine Gael have passed and they were reassured, he went on, by the Taoiseach's stated determination to not call an election before the Autumn of next year. This could mean that the British election could precede the Irish one: current thinking here is that Mrs Thatcher could go to the country as early as May '87 or in October '87; or (less likely) in the Spring of '88.

He said he does not expect Tom King or our Minister to ever decide to spend long holidays together, but he feels they are getting on better than at the beginning. McKay's own feeling is that our Minister's statements from time to time run into King's own brand of impatience, then everything goes bang. On King, McKay said that King sees the necessity to make the Agreement work, that such success would bring him increased stature in Westminster and the probability of a further Cabinet post after the next election. King knows, said McKay, that his star was almost extinguished after his period in Employment. He had no natural instinct for the Northern Ireland job which with its subtleties and nuances does not suit his bluff, ebullient nature. This caused serious problems at the beginning and continues to cause problems but, McKay believes, King is learning well that he must make a go of the Agreement and, in the main, he should become better rather than worse as far as we are concerned.

McKay has been continuing his visits for M.P.s to Northern Ireland. However, he has departed radically from the old style of visit. M.P.s no longer go on night patrol hunched up in armoured personnel carriers, visit barracks and police stations, and get merely subjected to Unionist politicians' lectures and tirades. Rather, he organises dinners at which the Westminster M.P.s are invited to speak their minds freely to the Unionists present and this, he said, has led to severe but healthy shock on the Unionists' part. He is bringing another group of M.P.s in September which includes Tim Yeo and Nicholas Baker, both of whom are our good friends and who will hardly hesitate to bring the truth about the general feeling in Westminster home to the Unionists. On the last visit Henry Bellingham cut up fairly rough with the Unionists and, it seems, told them that Conservative support for the Union is now conditional upon their good behaviour.

The Unionists are, however, he said, making surprising attempts to get their message across in Westminster. Although they will not sit in the Chamber (by and large) they are it seems active in a consistent way around the House. They give briefings, drinks parties in the evenings and, on one occasion at least, a drinks party on the Terrace ("the thing" at this time of the year): all in all, said McKay, a demonstration of unexpected style on their part. He thinks that the Friends of the Union are strongly funded with Cranbourne funds and are out consciously to counter-attack against our own operation in and around Westminster. Their job is, however, made in McKay's view immensely more difficult by Paisley's antics: one minute of Paisley on the TV attacking the RUC is, he said, gaining more for us all than a month's lobbying on our part around Westminster.

He said the Unionists are in negotiation with right wing elements within the Labour Party on a "deal" should Labour need their support after the next election. He agreed, however, that Labour is very unlikely to jettison the Agreement as the price of Unionist support in Government. He said they also hope that the Alliance would do business with them in a hung Parliament situation. This sort of logic, together with the hope that a new administration in Ireland next year might dump the Agreement, is their principle nourishment at present.

One major point which he said he would wish to get across to us is that he can detect among the Unionist professional classes - the sort of people from whom, if from any, we might expect glimmerings of reason - no sign whatever of a softening toward the Agreement. He has, he said, spent considerable time testing the water for signs of movement, and has cast his net widely, but with no response. He was particularly concerned, and so, he said, were others, that this fact may not be understood by Dublin. He said that a very prominent and trustworthy journalist and "a friend of ours" who was on the recent press visit to Dublin (Langdon? Naughtie?) had taken strongly from the Taoiseach the view that behind the hard-line politicians decent, middle-of-the-road Unionists will surely come to see that the Agreement is not what it was alleged to be and could even have some benefits for them. It would, said McKay, be worrying if policy-makers in Dublin used this idea among others. It may prove in due course, he said, that such a softening will emerge, but for the time being they cannot detect it and see little likelihood of it emerging in the foreseeable future. (Note: it is interesting that John Houston recently made very much the same point, having engaged in just such a toe-in-the-water exercise among middle class Unionists for Geoffrey Howe.)

For this reason McKay continues to feel personally pessimistic about "progress", "major breakthroughs" etc. That said, however, he agreed that implementation must go ahead in any event and he said, following a bit of an exposé of our requirements over coming months, that he understands the need for delivery this Autumn.

He said he understands that the recent discovery of arms here has unearthed a group of loyalist paramilitaries and members of the British Forces. The anti-tank and other weapons involved may well, he said, have been destined for loyalist activity against the British Army in Northern Ireland.

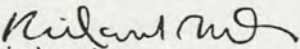
On the Stalker affair, he sincerely hopes that a masonic or other plot within the police to stifle Stalker will not be revealed. If it is, he believes that the implications would be wide-reaching and very serious: certainly involving, he feels, Hermon's resignation. He hopes, rather,

that the matter will be resolved in such a way as to allow the contents of the Report to be finalised and acted on.

It is very likely that there will be an Autumn reshuffle here, probably in September. McKay expects King to stay (no reason to move him and no other obvious job for him) but feels that Rhodes Boyson will almost certainly go. He thinks there must be a big question mark over Nick Scott who has been so long in the job. On the other hand, Scott is now seen to be doing very well indeed and, if not given an "out and up", he could in McKay's view be made Minister of State with the security portfolio: there is, said McKay, no reason why the economic job could not be done at Parl. Under-Sec. level. He believes that there is Unionist pressure to get Scott out and that his removal would be seen by them as a victory. There was a large article about Scott in last Sunday's Times supplement, and McKay read this as Scott staking his claim for a promotion either within Northern Ireland or back in London. McKay sees Mawhinney's appointment as a damp squib: Mrs Thatcher thought the Unionists might like to have one of their own, not realising that they pretty well despise the cadaverous Mawhinney. Although he has now got a job, something he had hungered for so much, it has very little substance and McKay believes Mawhinney is as miserable as ever.

We discussed the question of a visit by McKay to Dublin and are working on the details of this. He is so alert and open to ideas that he provides a useful foil to King: this is well recognised here in Westminster where his immense value to King is unquestioned. It may continue to prove to be of value to us too.

Yours sincerely

  
Richard Ryan  
Counsellor