



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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MEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH AND THE CHURCH OF IRELAND,  
17 JANUARY 1986

1. The Taoiseach received on 17 January a delegation from the Church of Ireland which comprised the following:

- Most Rev. Dr. John Armstrong, Primate and Archbishop of Armagh
- Most Rev. Dr. Robert Eames, Bishop of Down and Dromore
- Most Rev. Dr. James Mehaffey, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe
- Most Rev. Donald Caird, Archbishop of Dublin
- Most Rev. Dr. Samuel Poyntz, Bishop of Cork
- Most Rev. Dr. Empey, Bishop of Meath and Kildare
- Mr. Bristow Stevenson, Lay Secretary (Derry)
- Mr. Deane, Lay Secretary (Dublin)

Mr. W. Kirwan, Department of the Taoiseach, and the undersigned were also present.

2. The Taoiseach welcomed the delegation. Archbishop Armstrong began by saying that the Northern bishops were encountering widespread opposition to the Agreement and were quite perturbed. There was no rational approach to the Agreement or readiness to consider it objectively - only destructive opposition. At their meeting with King, they had noted a slight dichotomy between the British and Irish interpretations of the Agreement; they would be grateful for clarification on this score. They would also like to see a more positive approach from the SDLP and wondered whether the Taoiseach could assist in this respect. Eames followed with the observation that the Taoiseach would probably have been disappointed with Northern reaction so far, as conveyed by the media or

through his own advisors. There has been a blind groundswell of opposition which is being manipulated for political purposes. A bandwagon is gathering momentum. No reasonable discussion of the Agreement is possible. Moderate opinion has been totally squeezed out by extremists and by recent events such as the murder of a young UDR member. Eames was concerned about the political leadership being given in the North and by the prospect of a yawning vacuum after the by-elections.

3. Mehaffey was disappointed at the widespread emotional rejection of the Agreement. Very few people have even read the text. In many rural areas, furthermore, the scurrilous "Newsletter" is the only source of information. Some individuals have been dismayed by the element of violence in the protest to date and fear that their politicians are going down the road to UDI or over the top, which the Protestant people <sup>do not</sup> want. Opposition to the Agreement, however, is very solid. People who have been brought up to see the Republic as a foreign state regard Dublin as interfering in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Any insensitive statement by Dublin on, say, the security forces sends temperatures soaring. There has been some irresponsible criticism of the UDR; while some members have certainly brought shame on themselves, the force as a whole is very fine. Selection procedures and training are now good. Both the RUC and the UDR have performed their jobs well under difficult circumstances. Those who call for the disbandment of the UDR or for a major change in its role are touching a raw nerve. In places such as Castlederg (where Mehaffey was due to preside at the funeral service for the murdered UDR member) people will judge the Agreement in terms of whether or not it helps to reduce violence. Stevenson agreed with his Bishop that the reaction to the Agreement had been very unreasoning. Some people, albeit reluctantly, are prepared to give it a chance but their

voices are not being heard. A mechanic in Eglinton, Co. Derry, to whom Stevenson spoke on the previous day before leaving for Dublin, commented, "Let's have power-sharing". Such reactions are encouraging but the vast majority give the Agreement no chance at all. The Irish Government must try to sell it to Unionists, even if they meet initially with "No, No, No". This must be tried if there is to be any hope of progress or of postponing rather awful events that may happen. One is worried about what may happen after the elections. In this connection Stevenson asked for a very careful choice of words by the Irish Government.

4. Archbishop Caird said that on the whole the Agreement is regarded in the Republic as a justified and in some cases welcome initiative. With at least two-thirds of the Church of Ireland's membership living in the North and taking a Unionist view, however, Northern bishops are obviously concerned. Southern Bishops would advise Northerners to give the Agreement a chance, at least for the initial three years of its operation. They would appeal to the British and Irish Governments nonetheless to make amendments or additions which might give Unionists a sense of being involved. The inference could be taken from this Agreement that the SDLP does not feel under any pressure to reach agreement with the Unionists. (The Taoiseach intervened to challenge this inference, saying that it is in the interest of the SDLP and of the Irish Government to achieve devolved government). Archbishop Caird went on to ask whether, if devolved government could be established immediately or very quickly, the Agreement would run its 3 year course and secondly, what the C of I Bishops could do to promote the peace and welfare of the community in relation to the Agreement. He commented also that Unionists would prefer to see the Conference taking early action on the security front rather than in relation to issues such as the Irish language or the Flags and Emblems Act. Deane felt that there is enthusiasm in the

South for any solution to this intractable problem. It is hard to find any substantive opposition here to the Agreement. Hopefully a situation will develop in coming months in which devolved government will be feasible. Deane hoped that, after the elections, the SDLP would make some gesture, whether in regard to support for the security forces or a general indication of readiness to engage in talks. He observed that, if the next day's funeral of the murdered UDR man were to take place in the Republic, the Taoiseach and other politicians would be attending it. In Castlederg, however, it is likely that certain politicians will not be present.

5. Poyntz praised the Agreement for reaching an accommodation between two aspirations on the basis of parity. The vast majority of his parishioners favour the Agreement. He made three requests: first, that "blatant, greenish rhetoric" from the South should be avoided; second, that the Government should lean on the SDLP to show greater support for the security forces; and third, that the media here should be persuaded to be less propagandistic and more constructive in covering the Agreement and Northern affairs. Finally, Empey said that he had made inquiries in his diocese and had not found anybody who did not think the Agreement should not be given a fair try. The Church of Ireland, furthermore, should take account of nationalist attitudes, e.g., in relation to the UDR. He mentioned that he had personally had an extremely unpleasant experience at a UDR roadblock some time ago (when the UDR had mistaken him for a Catholic priest and he had allowed this misunderstanding to continue for a few minutes in order to see how they behaved). There was some concern among his people that the same thing as happened after Sunningdale should not happen again. Referring to the provision in Article 11 of the Agreement for review after 3 years "or earlier", he asked if it would be possible for the Government here to see if Unionists could be invited to be involved, even if they were to say "no".

6. In response to these various interventions, the Taoiseach explained that he has been concerned for years to create conditions in which the tensions which exist in Ireland could be dissipated. The defects of Unionist rule and the British Parliament's total abdication of responsibility over fifty years have contributed to these tensions as have the Unionist sense of living in a perpetual state of siege and certain irridentist attitudes in the South. the reality - a reality which he has spent most of his life trying to get people down here to accept - is that there is no way in which Ireland can be united without the consent of the majority in Northern Ireland. Over the past seventeen years, there has, in fact, been a revolution in Irish nationalist thinking which is perhaps not sufficiently realized. An Agreement which formally recognizes the legitimacy of the Unionist position represents such a sweeping reversal of attitudes which characterized the South in the forties and fifties that it has changed the basic Irish equation. It will take time for people in Northern Ireland to recognize the significance of this development - with which we in the

South are removing an obstacle to peace on our side. Another factor - not the principal one - is the way the State here has run its Constitution and laws. This also has to be worked out and will take time. Another obstacle in the way of peace has been the fact that successive British Governments have allowed people in Northern Ireland to believe that they can decide not only to remain a part of the UK but also determine the precise method by which they are to be governed within the UK. The decision by a British Government for the first time this century that it was up to the sovereign Parliament to decide this had a shattering effect on Unionists. We have had no illusions about the likely reaction, although we may have underestimated it a little.

7. The fundamental issue underlying the Agreement is how to get the Northern minority to give sufficient allegiance to the institutions of Northern Ireland to remove the conditions in which IRA violence thrives. This is the whole point of the Agreement; it is vital that we remove these conditions and do nothing which might weaken this aspect of the Agreement. It would be completely wrong to pull back from the Agreement in any way: this would be to lose the benefits, as regards nationalist attitudes, while being left with all the adverse reactions from Unionists. There is no doubt, on the other hand, that there is substantial alienation on the part of the majority. We have to change the attitude of nationalists so that they consent to structures of government and accept judicial and security structures and thus isolate the IRA; this is vital to peace in the North and to the security of this State. The Unionists' reluctance to place their trust in British politicians, furthermore, is striking. Their Britishness is deeper and more cultural than their allegiance to political institutions. The Conference, however, now offers a structure which will allow both communities to play their role.

8. The Taoiseach challenged the persistent suggestion that the Agreement is a substitute for the SDLP becoming involved in devolved government. No political party would be content with a role limited to making approaches to the Irish Government and having the latter take up matters on its behalf. The SDLP has a powerful interest in devolution. Hume made this clear in the Commons and he will return to this theme when the elections are out of the way. There is no point, however, in trying to get this message across when nobody is listening. The SDLP must carefully choose the moment (perhaps shortly after the elections) when it can put its proposals on devolution with greatest effect. It wants a role and is not laying down any precise way. There may be new moulds, new forms, on which we and the SDLP must have open, fresh minds. The Irish Government, for its part, has no interest in staying longer than necessary in areas which could be transferred to a devolved government. There are risks for it in a consultative role of involvement without responsibility. It wants out as much and as soon as possible. Indeed, it was the Irish Government which first proposed to transfer from the Conference any matters which could be devolved (a proposal which the British side initially resisted). Security, judicial and human rights matters, however, would not be devolved; on the first of these, the Taoiseach recalled Ted Heath's opposition at Sunningdale to the restoration of local responsibility for security. Otherwise, the more functions that were devolved, the better so far as we were concerned.
9. There are different views on the UDR. Statistics from an impeccable non-government source in Britain suggest that the serious crime rate for the UDR is a number of times greater than the average for the civilian population (which includes the IRA). The conduct of some UDR members is a very real problem. This has been borne out by senior SDLP figures. Even the regiment's more hostile critics



would say the proportion involved is not more than one-third, but the bad behaviour was not security, it was domination and when allowed to go on year after year, it had to be put right. At no stage, however, did the Irish Government seek the force's disbandment which we realised would be provocative and could be dangerous. Rather, it looked for its accompaniment on patrol by the RUC, for a higher level of training and for other improvements. A crucial problem in the security field, the Taoiseach continued, is the acceptability of the RUC. It will be very hard to get things to the point where the minority will join, when one has intimidation and the murder of building contractors who do work for the RUC. Any Catholics who join the RUC run a high risk of being killed. The only way forward is to bring about a situation where the IRA power to intimidate is reduced and some Catholics could begin to join the RUC. Other possibilities such as community policing in places like Derry have been considered by us but the British and the RUC were opposed to them and we were not sure enough of the possible benefits to push the idea. The RUC's loyalty and discipline, on the other hand, are very impressive: despite intimidation of some of those guarding Maryfield, there have been no defections to date. RUC/Garda cooperation, always good at the operational level, has been greatly intensified since the Agreement was signed. Concrete results in the area are very important but can only come where there is evidence - and luck, as in the case of the Amsterdam arrests.

10. The Taoiseach said patience and calm nerves would be required in dealing with the Unionist reaction to the Agreement. Unionist politicians are leading their people down a cul-de-sac. The Irish Government must be sensitive to Unionist concerns - but not in such a way as to diminish nationalist support for the Agreement. When the

elections are over and realities must be faced, many Unionists will hopefully decide that they will not go down the road to UDI in an impoverished, violence-ridden enclave. The Taoiseach noted that the previous day's BBC poll revealed a Unionist majority of 2 : 1 in favour of power-sharing (confirming a trend evident over the past 12 years) - yet Unionist politicians will not act on this. Regarding Unionist criticism of the secrecy in which the Agreement was negotiated, he said the Irish Government believed there had been fuller consultations between the British Government and the Unionists than had, in fact, been the case. Had they known at the time that this was not so, they might have done something about it. If serious violence could be avoided, then, singly and together and with the involvement of the SDLP, the two Governments could give attention to devolution: this, helped by security action, including the proposed accession to the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, should help to turn the tide. He took note of the remarks made about the absence of certain politicians from funerals and about unhelpful "greenish rhetoric" (though, apart from one instance, the Government TD's had abided by instructions to avoid making excessive claims for the Agreement).

11. On the latter point, Poyntz said he had been referring more generally to occasional statements on the RUC and UDR made by people outside the Oireachtas. Referring to Empey's anecdote about the UDR roadblock, Mehaffey said that, in his extensive experience of roadblocks, the security forces could be graded in terms of courtesy in the following ascending order: the Army, the RUC and then the UDR. The Taoiseach commented that many nationalists list these in the reverse order. Questioned by Stevenson about his figure for the serious crime rate in the UDR, he said that a twelve-year period had been covered and that the statistic quoted was possibly weighted in favour of

the earlier period. Asked by Eames about divergences between British and Irish interpretations of the Agreement, he emphasized the very careful joint preparation of how the Agreement should be presented; notwithstanding this, occasional errors in presentation remain possible but basically the Agreement is being seen in the same way and worked in the same way. The role for the Irish Government under the Agreement is neither consultative nor executive; the British Government must ultimately take the decisions, but it obliges itself to make determined efforts to reach agreement with the Irish Government. This is a complex and delicate system which will only work if the Irish side put forward reasonable proposals and if the British respond reasonably. In a sense, both sides are condemned to success (given the appalling consequences of failure). Archbishop Armstrong said that the by-elections were being fought on other issues. Paisley was saying that the Agreement provided for direct interference in the government of Northern Ireland, something very different from putting forward proposals. The Taoiseach responded that a Unionist may well feel that any action to meet nationalist concerns is unacceptable, especially when, because of the rejection of power-sharing, we had to get involved, making proposals to the British with the latter reacting and, in some cases, agreeing. He could see how, to Unionists, this may be distasteful but there was no other way. The difficulty was, in large measure, the lack of Unionist trust in the British Government. For that reason, thought must also be given to ways of giving the Unionists an input. In recent contacts with John Cushnahan, Mrs. Thatcher has evidently tried to meet Alliance's desire to be involved. The British Government will have to choose the best moment for offering the Unionist parties a consultative role in relation to the Conference. We would be all in favour of this. The Taoiseach mentioned that he is unhappy at the fact that the Agreement limits the Irish side to offering

views and proposals on matters affecting the minority community. Stevenson felt the British were wrong to have insisted on this. Finally, Eames expressed appreciation for visits paid to him and other Northern Bishops by Irish civil servants. He said he has personally found these visits very valuable and is very grateful for them.

12. Archbishop Caird and Bishop Poyntz raised concerns of the Church of Ireland about the regionalisation proposals in the Green Paper on Education, for which the deadline for reactions was 28 January. The Taoiseach suggested they make their worries known to the Minister for Education but said the Government would be very ready to have consultations on their concerns in this area.
13. In conclusion, the Taoiseach mentioned proposals currently under discussion for legislation on problems arising from marital breakdown and said he would be in touch with the individual Churches shortly with a view to arranging joint or separate discussions of these matters, as appropriate.

*David Donoghue*

David Donoghue

23 January 1986.

c.c. Taoiseach

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