



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2018/28/2248
Creation Dates:	15 March 1988
Extent and medium:	2 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

16 March 1988

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Assistant Secretary

Mr. John Murray, the new Permanent Secretary of the Department of the Environment came to dinner in the Secretariat last night. This Department is an influential one in the Stormont system, being responsible for a wide and diverse range of matters including most aspects of local Government, housing, conservation, planning and the archaeological heritage. Prior to his appointment, Mr. Murray was under secretary in the Department of Agriculture. He earlier worked in the Housing Executive and had close contacts at the time with Mr. Charles Brett, the current Chairman of the International Fund. He is a Protestant from Derry. He mentioned that his father had been a shipyard worker in Harland & Wolf.

We availed of his presence to chat about a few points of interest to us: He confirmed that they were now having second thoughts about the proposal that local Government candidates should be required to subscribe to a prior declaration eschewing support for illegal organisations. He accepted that it was unlikely to hamper Sinn Fein, and might well be exploited by them. The thinking behind it had been to make a gesture to the unionists, who felt deeply about the Sinn Fein presence in local councils. There were now doubts about the balance of advantage involved in such a move. Action had been postponed but it was too early to say that the proposal was definitely shelved.

He considered that the most useful political step now would be to seek progress towards devolution. Matters within Northern Ireland were best handled by Northern Ireland people. (He had earlier spoken amusingly of the exotic array of British Ministers who had been involved in Northern Ireland since direct rule.) He felt there could eventually be a basis for agreement on a devolved administration internally with matters relating to the outside world (e.g. U.S. attitudes) handled on a cooperative basis between the British and Irish Governments.

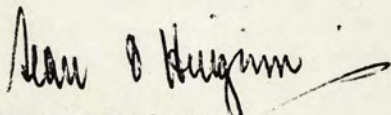
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

He was very despondent about the long term future of the Belfast shipyards. They had tried for the tanker market but were hopelessly uncompetitive compared to the Asian yards. There was now a possibility of an order for a cruise ship but, even if secured, it would do little more than postpone the crisis. Many of the traditional shipyard skills were being lost. It might ultimately be more economical to pay each worker £14,000 a year to do nothing than to try to maintain the yard.

We raised the question of Eamain Macha (Navan Fort) where, although quarrying has been suspended, processing of rock is still continuing immediately beside the Fort. Mr. Murray was very forthcoming on this issue, saying that it was inconceivable how the original quarry could have been permitted in this area. The problem now was that the quarry owner, angling for compensation, was trying to be as difficult as possible. He gave us the impression that the Department would do its best to remove the plant defacing this historic site.

Overall Mr. Murray impressed us as a straightforward and open-minded individual who would be well disposed rather than otherwise to cross-border cooperation in any area he thought likely to be of practical benefit.

Yours sincerely,



Sean O hUiginn
Joint Secretary

3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10