

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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Visit by Sir Frank Cooper, Secretary of Northern Ireland Office.

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1. Sir Frank Cooper, Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office, Sir Arthur Galsworthy, British Ambassador, and Mr. John Hickman of the British Embassy attended a meeting in the Department of Foreign Affairs on 5th June with Mr. Keating, Secretary of the Department, Mr. Donlon, Assistant Secretary, and Mr. Nally, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach. What follows are notes on the comments made by Sir Frank Cooper either on his own initiative or in response to questioning by the Irish side.

2. Sir Frank Cooper said that he had the impression that the Convention was now going well, largely due to a considerable amount of pressure from the grassroots in Northern Ireland on delegates to make the arrangements work. A great deal of time was being spent on drawing up the rules and on the work of the business committee, which was concerning itself with questions of strategy in the management of the Convention. Despite some of the difficulties which had received a fair amount of publicity, he had the impression that there were signs of a greater degree of willingness by the representatives to meet and talk to each other. This might well lead to some loosening of attitudes though it was certainly too early to predict, with even a fair degree of certainty. It could be that the UUUC had deliberately adopted a policy of "softly softly" so as not to create an unfavourable public impression and that this was all that was happening.
3. Sir Frank went on to say that it was equally difficult to predict when or how the Convention would come to a conclusion. His best guess was that it would go on to about October but, of course, this could be completely wrong. They had decided to take a holiday for most of the month of July, which was a reasonably hopeful sign. There had certainly been no indication that there was any deliberate move on the part of any large body of members to break it up before the end of June or early in July, as had been suggested in some quarters.
4. Sir Frank went on to say that the UUUC were doing their work very well and were obviously well briefed on procedure, drafting etc. The SDLP were not showing up quite as well. They did not seem to be doing their homework. Sir Frank said that they were looking at the question of providing the parties represented in the Convention with some form of financial assistance so that each of them could get whatever form of legal or other advice they might regard as being most helpful. However, they had to tread rather carefully in this field because if as much as one party objected strenuously to this type of proposal then it would obviously not get off the ground. Similarly, they were looking at the question of the staffing of the Convention. They fully accepted the importance of the members being in a position to call on somebody for independent advice, assistance, research, etc. The Northern Ireland Office was deliberately standing away from the Convention and he had the impression that this was a particularly successful policy. Many things were being done and said in the Convention simply (man because they were being done and said by local people. No English (or Northern Ireland Office representative) could have got away with these things!

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5. On the question of the attitude to be taken to the members of the Convention as public representatives, Sir Frank said that this had given rise to a certain amount of difficulty. The Northern Ireland Office were still feeling their way very much on the subject. They thought that some distinction should be made between public representatives elected to Westminster and persons elected to what was really a constitutional Convention. The case was made to him, strongly, that it was necessary that the members elected to the Convention should be seen in their communities as having a certain status in relation to representations etc., so as to strengthen their standing in the community vis-a-vis, for example, the para-military groupings or the men of violence.
6. On the whole, Sir Frank said that, despite the present feeling, which was far more optimistic than it had been even a short time ago, his own view was that the Convention was unlikely to succeed - though he could well be proved wrong and many of the events of the past few weeks had given him more hope than he had initially. However, they had to think of what the position would be if the Convention did, in fact, fail.
7. This led him to discuss, at the meeting, three main possibilities. (After the meeting a fourth possibility - independence - was discussed in some detail). The first of these possibilities was that the Convention would reach a degree of agreement which made some progress possible. This could well involve a referendum to settle points of difference.
8. The second possibility was that there could be points of agreement and disagreement in certain areas which would make it desirable to recall the Convention, possibly after a lapse of time, to get further clarification.
9. The next possibility was that there could be a sharp division - implying an unbridgeable gap between the two sides. This, Sir Frank said, would pose the sixty-four dollar question. This sort of situation would, of course, involve extraneous activities by groups not associated with the Convention. It might be possible that in these circumstances, the UUUC would say that they had a very large majority for whatever policy they wanted to put over and that, despite what anybody said, they were going to follow a course based on this policy. This could lead to all sorts of peculiar things like UDI, provisional governments, etc. Sir Frank said that they were doing some emergency planning to deal with politically motivated strikes and in reply to queries said that they had concluded that there was nothing they could do beat this form of activity, insofar as, for example, the power stations were concerned. They would be largely concerned with security matters and the safety of individuals, if this type of strike broke out again. However, he said that he had the impression that it was less likely than before, primarily because the persons concerned had now formed the view that they were not economically strong enough to sustain a strike of this type and secondly because, at present, at any rate, there did not seem to be any clear issues on which they could mobilise opinion.
10. Sir Frank went on to say that he had the feeling that the loyalists were disappointed about the way in which recruitment to the RUC and UDR had gone. It had been a plank of their policy some time ago that these organisations should be flooded with their followers but, in fact, this had not happened. It was also his view that the UDA had flagged a bit in recent times. They did not know or were unclear as to what precisely their role

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was. There was a considerable distance now between most of the politicians and the paramilitary groups on the Loyalist side. Questioned on the recent occasion when the leaders of the Loyalist Groups had appeared at a public dinner with the more prominent of the leaders of the paramilitary groups, Sir Frank said that he thought that with the possible exception of Craig, all the other political leaders had been seriously embarrassed on this occasion.

11. Sir Frank then went on to deal with attitudes on the Provisional IRA side. He said that he had the impression that many of the leaders in the IRA had thought that things would happen more rapidly and that the Convention would be set up and begin to fall apart, perhaps by June, or July at latest. The fact that this had not happened had disturbed them and left them in a bit of a quandary. He had the impression also that there was now some fear among the Provisionals on what the paramilitaries on the Protestant side could do.
  12. Sir Frank then went on to say that he had the feeling that the paramilitaries on the Protestant side would welcome a "reverse Feakle," that is, they would like a meeting with the Catholic Hierarchy, where a number of issues could be hammered out. He also mentioned, in passing, the close connection between Craig and the Protestant paramilitary group.
  13. Dealing with the question of sectarian assassinations, Sir Frank went on to say that they were giving these a great deal of attention now. There seemed to be a pattern that when the Protestant population were frightened there was an outbreak of assassinations. This had happened at the time Stormont fell and about the time of the White Horse ceasefire period. ~~and~~
- After the murder of the two judges, there had been a further serious outbreak of assassinations. All of this seemed to point to the fact that the Loyalists reacted by assassination, when they felt their position to be particularly under threat. The view was also put that assassinations broke out when the Loyalists developed the feeling that "the teigues were getting to big for their boots".
14. The discussion then returned to what would actually happen at the crunch point, if it came to that, on the conclusion of the Convention. Emergency planning must deal with things like power stations, the protection of life, the outbreaks of violence, including sporadic violence, and with what would have to happen in the political sense. Sir Frank said that the most likely option would be direct rule but it would be a different type of direct rule from that now operating. Obviously there must be a great deal more local involvement. What was of utmost importance was that there should not be allowed to develop a vacuum filled by frightened people. This was the crucial issue for their emergency planning.

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15. [At this point I was called for the meeting and was absent for about ten minutes].
16. It was pointed out to Sir Frank Cooper that if local involvement meant the use of the Local Government system in Northern Ireland that a great deal of care would be required. On our information, nothing had changed in many areas, in so far as appointments, housing etc. were concerned. The worst abuses still remained. At this point, documents were promised to the British side which would indicate the steps which had been taken in the Local Government system here to ensure that appointments in local authorities, the allocation of tenancies etc. were done with the utmost impartiality.
17. The conversation then turned to the question of integration. Sir Frank Cooper said that this was an option which could be ruled out completely, so far as the present Government was concerned. This was because of British domestic considerations but mainly it was because ~~of~~, in the view of the Government it simply would not work.
18. On the question of whether there was any likelihood of a split in the UUUC, or as between the different leaders on the Loyalist side, Sir Frank said that, in the short term, he thought that a split was unlikely. Even though he had indicated that there was now some distance between the Loyalist politicians and the paramilitary groups, he was certain that if a situation of threat developed, that the two would soon come together.
19. He then spoke of the ceasefire and referred to the outbreaks of gangsterism and secretarianism. He said that the Army posture was now very different from what it had been. They had stepped up the number of vehicle check points and had been successful in arresting many travelling gunmen and other ~~vixbles~~. However, they had issued no interim custody orders since 7th February and didn't want to use these anymore. This was not to say that they would not use them if the situation changed dramatically. Speaking of the recent outbreaks of violence in the South Armagh area he said that he had the impression that these were being done by persons who were out of the control of their organisation, such as it was.
20. He said that the question of what to do with the hardcore still remaining in detention was a particularly difficult question. The IRA and the Army seemed to be "at peace" but there was a considerable feeling against the RUC. (In private conversation afterwards, Sir Frank said that this was really a crucial issue as far as they are concerned. They could not run the North equitably if policing was to be carried out in different areas in different ways - in one area by the Army, subject to one set of rules, and in other areas by the RUC, subject to a different set of rules and procedures. There was just no way in which the two types of organisation and procedure could be got together. The differences in treatment as between different areas were bound to give rise to grievances and these grievances were

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often unanswerable - given the situation, as it now was. Sir Frank also mentioned, confidentially, that he welcomed the attitude taken by the Government here that any contacts on security matters must be on a police to police basis - and not from police to Army etc. I got the impression that he would like us, if at all possible, to use whatever influence we have with the SDLP and any other groups, to try to help in getting policing more acceptable in certain areas in the North - and would be amenable to any suggestions we could make, on organisation etc. which would help to achieve this. He spoke of local involvement in policing, as a possibility, in which he seemed to think there might be some hope.)

21. He said that there had been "no macro political discussion" with the Provisional Sinn Fein representatives. He also said that, on their information, members of the IRA were coming down here for training. He had the feeling that, in the North, they were gradually "creeping back to violence". This was being done by groups committed to mayhem somehow. However, there was no support gathering in the minority areas for the IRA. Neither did they seem to be losing what support they had. There seemed to be a position of stalemate, at present. Some possible lines of thinking, which might be behind the ceasefire were then explored. The question of a further meeting on security was raised, at this point and it was indicated by both sides that a meeting before the end of June would be welcomed. The venue is to be settled after discussion.
22. Sir Frank mentioned that they had quite a bit of legislation coming up on Northern Ireland. The Direct Rule Bill would have to be extended and this would be done for one year from 16th July, 1975. There were some amendments necessary to the Emergency Provisions Act. The Criminal Jurisdiction Bill had passed the Lords and would be getting its second reading in the Commons the week after next. It was possible that the Bill would be through by June. The Fair Employment Bill had some relevant provisions. There was a great deal of work being done by the Human Rights Commission (under Lord Feathers) which was of relevance and he had the feeling that the Commission required a good deal of strengthening in its staffing. In reply to enquiries, it was indicated that the Criminal Jurisdiction Bill here had passed the second stage in the Senate and that, when the Committee and other stages were concluded there, the Bill would be sent to the Dail. The extremely heavy legislative programme in the Houses of the Oireachtas was explained in some detail to the British group.
23. At this point the meeting adjourned. However, in casual conversation later, a question of independence for Northern Ireland came up. It was indicated, by the British side, that the question of any substantial subsidies for an independent Northern Ireland would be an extremely difficult one in British domestic politics. It was unlikely, in the reading of the British group, that any such subsidies would be substantial. The difficulty of any state of Northern Ireland subsisting without the £300/400 million paid into

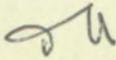
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the economy there at present was stressed. It was indicated that any such state would have great difficulty in gaining access to the European Economic Community - if it could, in practice, gain admittance at all. Outside the Community the future of an independent Northern Ireland would be bleak, if not impossible.

24. In conclusion, the Irish delegation thanked Sir Frank Cooper for his extremely wide ranging and full exposition of Northern problems.



6th June, 1975.