

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2007/116/758
Creation Date(s):	24 February 1977
Extent and medium:	4 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS

NOTE:-

The British Ambassador phoned yesterday to enquire if the Taoiseach would receive a special messenger from the Prime Minister who would be conveying personally certain views of the Prime Minister on this issue. I was subsequently informed that what the Prime Minister wished to have discussed was the "serious deterioration" in relations between the two countries. The Taoiseach agreed to see the Prime Minister's emissary.

At 11 a.m. today the Ambassador, accompanied by Sir Richard Sykes came to see the Taoiseach. Mr. Nally also attended the meeting.

Sir Richard Sykes said that his purpose was to convey, from the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's view as to the serious deterioration in relations between the two countries which had occurred in recent times. He said that this seemed to result from a combination of events including the Strasbourg case, the threat of a bombing campaign by the Provisional I.R.A. in the United Kingdom, the Oxford Street bombs, the Balcombe Street trial - and now the imminent S.A.S. trial.

Sir Richard Sykes said that both administrations had problems and the Prime Minister appreciated the problems with which we were faced. He strongly believed in the need to improve relations and to this end that it was important for both sides to exercise restraint. He was particularly worried about provoking a back-lash against the Irish community in Britain.

Next, he felt that the present situation was driving the Loyalists and the S.D.L.P. in Northern Ireland further apart. The British agreement on 18th February to refer the disputes on the continental shelf to an independent tribunal may have helped, in some small way, to improve things but, in general, there were various other ways in which each Government could help towards the common end. These were -

- (1) to encourage the S.D.L.P. to support the police more openly;
- (2) to make public statements on behalf of both Governments to help the two sides in Northern Ireland to get together;
- (3) to strengthen and improve co-operation on the Border so as to achieve better practical results; and
- (4) to see if there will any feasible measures, economic co-operation.

The most important of the immediate issues before the Governments appear to be the trial on 7th March of the S.A.S. men. Both Governments could suffer from the backlash to this. In the end, only the men of violence might well gain. Mr. Callaghan wished to emphasise that if the S.A.S. men found themselves in prison he could not say how strongly this would re-act

on relations. It would probably put off peace for a long time and make rapprochement between the S. D. L. P. and the Unionists much more difficult.

Sir Richard Sykes went on to say that the Prime Minister understood well the division here between the Executive and the Judiciary. There could well be ways, through the exercise of Executive powers, through which the Taoiseach and the Government could help. The Prime Minister was particularly concerned with the personal safety of the men involved. They were prime and tempting targets and obviously the dangers of an attack in Dublin were great. Sir Richard Sykes said that he now understood that talks which had been held in Dublin over the past few days had been most helpful on the security of the men and on this matter, everything seemed to be alright.

He said that the question of remission, if the men were found guilty of a charge involving imprisonment came up. They had hoped that this major charge would be dropped. It would greatly assist the Prime Minister if he could be let know, on a confidential basis, of the Government's contingency plans in the event of the men being sentenced to imprisonment.

They understood the position as to bail and that probably, in the event of a prison sentence, their best course would be to service notice of appeal immediately. Normally, this would mean that bail would at once be granted. He could not stress how serious the event would be if the Court went against the men. Even if bail were granted, pending appeal, they would expect that the sentence would be remitted immediately by the Executive authority.

The Taoiseach thanked Sir Richard for his clear exposition of the Prime Minister's views. He said that a lot of matters had come together, by coincidence, which appeared to make relations between the two countries more difficult. In fact, much of this was manufactured by the media. Personal relations between Mr. Callaghan and himself were good. So far as he knew, relations between Ministers and officials, on both sides, were also good.

He said that he appreciated the Prime Minister's concern but that it was necessary to understand that the position of the Director of Public Prosecutions here was different from that of his opposite number in the U. K. Here, the Attorney General could consult, but not direct, the Director. He would bring the Prime Minister's views to the attention of the Government - particularly on the question of remission.

The Taoiseach said that we shared the anxiety of the British Government as to the safety of the men on trial. He would impress the gravity of the situation on all concerned to make certain that security was water-tight. He understood that discussions on this subject had taken place recently.

~~On the technicalities~~, The Taoiseach said that the impression which the Attorney General had here was that it was extremely unlikely that the men would be found guilty of the major charge. The impression was that they would plead to a lesser charge of possession of arms and that there would be

a fine. Of course, with the division of the Government from the Judiciary it was impossible for anyone to know, in advance, what the eventual outcome would be.

Equally, it was impossible to say how long the trial would continue. His best information was that it would be slightly more than a day. The Council for the accused were in the top flight and there seemed little doubt that they would handle the case well.

On the question of contacts with Northern parties, the Taoiseach said that the Minister for Foreign Affairs had recently been in Northern Ireland and had many discussions. These contacts had been with the minority, as well as with the majority parties. Recently a large number of members from Belfast Corporation had been in Dublin and the meeting with the Corporation here had, on all accounts, been a success.

The Taoiseach said that we were also exploring at our end what is practical in economic areas. This has been done now generally at official level.

Generally, he was most anxious that relations between the two Governments should be good. He would impress this on all concerned. He enquired if there were any specific areas in relation to Border co-operation on which the British would like to see improvements. In a reply, Sir Richard Sykes said that they had nothing specific in this particular area.

Sir Richard Sykes went on to say that, speaking personally, that Mr. Callaghan would endorse the Taoiseach's remarks about personal relations being extremely friendly. He was most grateful for the Taoiseach's remarks on the case which was giving them great worry at present. They would greatly appreciate an indication, as soon as possible, of the Government's views. ~~It might be that~~ the forthcoming meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Dr. Owen of the foreign office next week. Alternatively, they could be conveyed through the Ambassador, who will be available at any time.

This could be

The Taoiseach said that he would raise the matter at Government, probably tomorrow. He felt that the best way out of the Strasbourg difficulties would probably be to leave it to the Attorneys who were on good terms.

Sir Richard Sykes agreed that contact between the Attorneys was the best way in this case. There was, however, a point which he wished to bring especially to the Taoiseach's attention. There had always been the normal press attention to what went on at Strasbourg, but more recently they had noticed the major press interest by eastern European countries with representatives from Tass Pravda, Soviet Television networks etc. They were not there with the intention of helping either the British or the Irish Governments and Sir Richard had no doubt that what was being said and done there would be played back again to both at Belgrade and the other conferences designed to follow up the conference on security and co-operation in Europe.

After some further discussion, the British Delegation left. On the way out in casual conversation Sir Richard Sykes remarked that any act had two

aspects -

- (1) its intrinsic purpose or content and
- (2) what the media made of it.

So far as we were concerned now, the intrinsic worth of particular acts to either or both Governments was being completely out-weighed by the damage being done to inter-Governmental relations by media presentation of those acts - and by the use being made of them by unfriendly elements.

24th February, 1977.