

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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24 October 1984

Mr. Colm O'Floinn  
Anglo-Irish Division, DFA

Dear Colm, (25.10.84)

I enclose herewith the text of a speech made by Enoch Powell at Uppingham School on 11 October. It was not widely reported at the time and has come to light largely in the context of the article by Powell which appeared in the Times on 15 October in the aftermath of the Brighton bombing.

While the central thesis of the speech, viz. that the British Government under pressure from the United States is prepared to connive at the expulsion of Northern Ireland from the UK in exchange for collaboration by the Dublin Government in defence matters, is not a new one, the detailed mapping out of the various stages in this plot does contain elements of interest. The text includes further supposedly damning extracts from the Clive Abbot interviews and a reference, unnamed, to Alistair Cooke as the author of the section on Northern Ireland in the 1979 campaign guide.

In reply to questioning on this subject I have firmly denied to Owen Hickey and Henry Stanhope (diplomatic correspondent) of the Times that there is any truth in the statement that in the sixties the Republic "privately began to cooperate with Nato in ... the quiet provision of facilities for tracking, surveillance and intelligence gathering". I pointed to the similarity between these claims and those made by Republican terrorist organizations not recently in the context of Mount Gabriel, and said that these had been fully refuted by the competent technical authorities.

Yours sincerely,

P. Hennessy

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(5/2/84)  
25/10/84  
27.10.84

11 October 1984

ULSTER: THE UNITED KINGDOM ON TRIAL

With compliments  
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It has been my experience, in two periods of my lifetime, to be ashamed of my own country. The first period was the Chamberlainite appeasement era of 1937-39, and I recall to this day my sensation of embarrassment on producing a British passport at the German frontier in December 1938. The second period is that in which I have been living since about 1980-81, when the sheer, cold cynicism of the course which the government of my country, official and political, was pursuing towards Northern Ireland came to my knowledge.

What that course has been I will proceed to set out in its chronological and logical sequence, and not piecemeal in the order in which, fact by fact, I became aware of it.

There always has to be a more or less arbitrary starting point, and I will take for my purpose the General Election of December 1918 at the end of the First War, the so-called "Khaki election". At that election, out of the 105 constituencies in the island of Ireland 73 returned Sinn Fein candidates, who were pledged not to come to Parliament. All but three of those seats were in what became in 1922 the Irish Free State. The remaining constituencies, almost all in what was later to be called Northern Ireland, returned candidates of the United Kingdom political parties, Conservative (or, as that party called itself, Conservative and Unionist) and Liberal, signifying the intention of the large majority of electors in those constituencies to continue to be governed as an integral part of the United Kingdom under its Government and Parliament.

The verdict could not have been plainer. The people of the greater part of the island of Ireland had voted to secede from the United Kingdom. It was a decision that could not be gainsaid nor, except in the shortest of short terms, resisted. The appropriate response of the government and parliament of the United Kingdom would have been to recognise them de jure as what de facto they were bound

to be, an independent state. Tragically, that was not the course which was taken. Instead the Lloyd George coalition government took the Government of Ireland Act of 1912, which had conferred far-reaching but subordinate home rule on the whole of Ireland but which had been in suspense for the duration of the War, and replaced it by enacting two identical home rule Irelands - the 26 counties which had opted out of the U.K. and the six which had not. Into this legislation, passed in 1920, they introduced a mechanism which linked the two new home rule provinces and provided for their gradual merger into the single one which the 1912 Act had envisaged.

The immediate result was predictable. The 26 counties refused to have anything to do with the home rule offered them and forthwith broke into rebellion. Following a truce in the middle of 1921, the British government at the end of that year in effect conceded to the 26 counties total independence as the Irish Free State subject to their accepting the nominal sovereignty of the King Emperor in external relations and allowing certain naval bases on the coastline to remain in U.K. hands.

Meanwhile, the six counties in the north east, seeing the only alternative to be automatic imposition of all-Ireland home rule whenever the last of the peace treaties should be signed, agreed to accept and work the home rule that they had never asked for or wanted. Thus the Northern Ireland Parliament and Government, later popularly known as Stormont, came into existence in May 1921. In due course they used their devolved powers to get rid of the Council of Ireland and of the mechanism for re-creating all-Ireland home rule, to which they were totally opposed and which, of course, had become a dead letter in the rest of the island.

The question is: why did Britain tie itself into tragic knots, when it could simply have recognised the 26 counties as independent and left the six counties part of the U.K. exactly as before? The Cabinet minutes and other documents of the time leave no doubt about

the answer. There was a political reason and a strategic reason. Faced with the de facto independence of the old Dominions, Britain was desperate to maintain the Commonwealth principle to bind them together in the Empire; and this would be gravely prejudiced if part of the U.K. itself became independent outside the Commonwealth. On the strategic side, the near success of the German submarine campaign in 1917, underlined by the Casement episode in 1916, seemed to demonstrate the high importance of a benevolent or at worst non-hostile island of Ireland. Neither object, however, was attainable, nor was the American goodwill so highly prized in the Versailles period to be counted upon, unless the new Irish state were given at least the prospect of embracing the whole island. Ulster home rule, and the Council of Ireland which was linked to it, were the minimum price at which even the sham of allegiance to the Crown and the ultimately untenable naval bases could be secured. To purchase those illusions, Britain thought fit to deprive the people of the six counties of their full place in the U.K. and provide a mechanism to move them over into the new Irish state. De Valera put the thing in a classic nutshell when he used to tell the I.R.A. that they would never get 'the North' by force but that it would be won by a combination of Ulster autonomy and "the general play of the English interest". His key fits the lock.

Not surprisingly, the deal backfired. Ulster refused to set its feet on the path into an all-Ireland state, and the Irish Free State remained - to all outward appearance at least - obstinately neutral. Attempts, by Chamberlain immediately before the Second War and by Churchill in its early stages, to do a deal behind Ulster's back to purchase Irish co-operation by offering to trade Ulster <sup>off</sup>/came to nought.

After the Second War the Irish Free State tore up the last shreds of the sham of allegiance and became a republic, though Britain, by virtue of the British Nationality Act 1948, was able to go on pretending.

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ing - but now only to itself - that nothing had really changed. By 1949, however, one of history's grand ironies had decreed that Britain's strategic motivation in its relations with Ireland would attain a potency far greater than ever before. Scarcely had the German menace vanished, when it was replaced in the Atlantic and elsewhere by a Soviet menace, real or imaginary, which a new alliance under the leadership of the United States came into existence to confront.

The advantage of NATO embracing the Irish Republic was self-evident from the start. But the two old obstacles duly presented themselves: the Irish precondition of what was called 're-unification', that is, the absorption of the six counties into an all-Ireland state, and the central position which the principle of neutrality had long occupied in the philosophy and sentiment of the Irish state. Despite Winston Churchill's declaration at Washington in 1952, in a speech which the British Embassy had to deny, that he was "for a united Ireland", nothing much happened until the 1960's, when two crucial changes in the situation occurred.

In the technological race between the United States and Russia, in which Russia had started far behind in the late 1940's, she was now visibly drawing level with the U.S.A., if not threatening to pass it. In the Battle of the Atlantic, which is not wholly distinct technically from the Battle of Space, the United States acquired a greatly enhanced perception of the importance of the Irish littoral, with its direct view not only west across the Atlantic but north through the gap between Iceland and the Faroes and south through the gap between Spain and Madeira.

The other change which occurred was that the Irish Republic privately began to co-operate with NATO in providing what NATO most required from it - not open adherence and a military contingent on the Continent but the quiet provision of facilities for tracking, surveillance and intelligence-gathering. The move was a skilful one

on the part of the Irish, because, without publicly abandoning neutrality, the Republic acquired a new leverage over the United Kingdom, a new dimension of "the general play of the English interest". The message, addressed to Britain through the United States, was now: "Make progress with moving Ulster into an all-Ireland state, or else -". It was a message which the Republic was able to underline by terrorist violence, thanks to its close links and its identity of political objective with the Provisional I.R.A. and other forms of nationalist terrorism. The British state, which was to crack under a much milder version of essentially the same blackmail when it suddenly banned trade unionism at Government Communications HQ, was nothing loth to comply. The old pattern and the old plan, Ulster autonomy and the English interest, would be resumed.

But something had first to be done about the form of autonomy which had so disappointed the purposes with which it was created in 1919-21. In the remarkable interviews which the Government officially asserts were never given by Mr Clive Abbott, an official of the Northern Ireland Office, in 1981, there is a striking passage, striking even by the high standards of that extraordinary document. It runs as follows:

"The Official Unionists have always homed in on the Foreign Office; luckily we have escaped most of their attentions. They have also failed to pick upon the fact that successive British governments were primarily responsible for the situation that came to a head in 1968, not the Stormont government".

Well, whatever may have lain behind the events of 1968-9, and whether or not the British state had a hand in them in the form of MI6, which, against the wishes of its chief, the late Maurice Oldfield, was being employed in Northern Ireland by the early 1970's, the British state was ready with its plan to take advantage of those events. The Government of Northern Ireland would be converted into, or replaced by, a manipulable form of autonomy. As it turned out, it

was the second alternative, replacement, that had to be selected. When in March 1972 H.M.G. suspended the 1920 constitution of Northern Ireland, it immediately proceeded, to the astonishment of many including (I confess) myself, to an apparently paradoxical step. Instead of accepting that, by the failure of the Northern Ireland government and parliament, responsibility for Northern Ireland, like any other part of the United Kingdom, had reverted to the United Kingdom government and parliament, they set about creating immediately a new Ulster autonomy, but with two crucial innovations designed to conform with what was dubbed "the Irish dimension". The first innovation was to place a veto over the new system in the hands of pro-Republican representatives. The other was to make participation in a Council of Ireland linking Ulster and the Republic the condition for the transfer of devolved authority.

The scheme failed, the Sunningdale-tainted, power-sharing Executive did not survive, and the operation lended back in square one, leaving Northern Ireland under interim "direct rule" from Whitehall and Westminster, renewable on an annual basis. The pressure, however, for what is code-named "political progress" did not let up, though, to the dismay of officials, the Labour Government, when in dire political extremity in 1977, conceded to Northern Ireland its full representation in the House of Commons, a thing always regarded as incompatible with provincial autonomy.

The Bill creating the new Ulster seats became law in 1979 in the same week as the Callaghan government fell and the Opposition Shadow Secretary of State, Airey Neave, was murdered. The election manifesto of the Conservatives held out the promise that at last the succession of attempts to hustle Northern Ireland into autonomy and an all-Ireland framework would be brought to a decisive end. There were to be no more large-scale political initiatives but a period of stability, marked only by the restoration in the province of ordinary elective local government.

That was not what happened. What happened was what had been publicly predicted during the election campaign itself by a Conservative Party official, who wrote: "The next government will come under considerable pressure to launch a new, high-powered initiative in Northern Ireland with the object of establishing another 'power-sharing' government in the province, which could pave the way for a federal constitution linking Ulster to the Irish Republic. The main political parties in Dublin have already drawn up their plans; and so have political representatives of the anti-Unionist minority in Ulster itself". From the moment of the new government coming into office, it was obvious that there had been a reversal of policy. What had occurred I cannot describe better than in the words of the Northern Ireland Office official I have already quoted:

"Before the Conservative Party came to power in 1979 it had promised that local government functions would be returned to local councils. We had to tell them that it was just not on. In terms of the future government of Northern Ireland integration is a non-starter for two main reasons. First, we would automatically lose the co-operation we are getting from Haughey over border security. Secondly, we couldn't break certain undertakings we have given to the Irish government over the constitutional future of Northern Ireland".

A long-term scheme had been drawn up by British, Irish and American officials, whereby a series of summit meetings between the British and Irish premiers would lead stage by stage to the establishment of an Anglo-Irish constitutional framework, while simultaneously the province would be provided with an autonomous representative body capable of being manipulated. The scheme was duly implemented in successive summit meetings of Mrs Thatcher with premiers Lynch, Haughey and Fitzgerald in 1979-81, and the creation in 1982, after a number of false starts and strenuous opposition in the House of Commons, of a Northern Ireland Assembly, which officials promptly dubbed a "Parliamentary Assembly".

Everything is now ready for "the general play of the English" to be brought into combination with Ulster autonomy at a further conference between the two prime ministers. At that meeting, as at every stage along the road which has led up to it, the honour of Britain will be in the balance. For it is to the question of honour that we are brought by the record I have laid before you of Britain's dealings, across sixty years and more, with a portion of itself, of its own territory and its own people, an integral part of the United Kingdom represented like the rest in the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

The indictment lies at two levels, at the level of governments and ministers, and at the level of the nation as a whole.

At the level of governments and ministers, the story poses a painful dilemma. Were ministers (including prime ministers) informed by officials of what was being done? Did they know? If they did know, they were guilty of concealing from Parliament and the public the objects at which they were aiming and the methods which they were using, and of giving to the people most affected, the people of Ulster, insincere and deceptive assurances. Moreover, whenever direct questions were answered by them, they must have been guilty of barefaced falsehood. That would be a grievous conclusion to which to be forced, though it is a conclusion that the public is nowadays learning to find easier and easier to reach.

The only alternative conclusion is no less distasteful, namely, that ministers did not know and that officials deliberately kept them in ignorance. In that case ministers would have allowed themselves to be handled as dupes by their officials and advisers, which in turn would bring into question the intelligence and perspicacity of ministers no less than the standards of conduct considered to be acceptable by the Civil Service.

I have naturally pondered those alternatives deeply. My judgment is that both are true. As often in human affairs, it was sometimes

one way, sometimes the other way. Some ministers were dupes, others were liars; but the decision which of those two roles any particular minister was destined to play was made by officials, who 'sized them up' and handled them accordingly.

A nation cannot, however, shrug its shoulders and wash its hands of responsibility for what officials or ministers do while the public is kept in the dark or actively deceived. There is a prior question of political morality. Can we imagine that any government would openly say to the nation: "There are such and such defence facilities, vital to Britain's safety in a future conflict, which we can only obtain or retain at the price of excluding from this United Kingdom a part of its territory and people, which has belonged to it for nearly two hundred years and which persistently signifies, by majorities larger than have ever sustained any British administration, that their will is to remain as they are. Accordingly, we intend to do just that"? The answer is surely that no government would dare to make such an announcement, but that if, against all likelihood, it did so, a storm of public indignation and reprobation would force it to recant.

"Well and good", it may be urged, "but the public has in fact never been told by the Government what the Government is doing. Therefore the nation, which has been cheated and hoodwinked, does not share the dis honour inherent in a policy which the authors of it dare not avow".

I do not myself think the case is so simple. It is a common proposition that every nation gets the sort of government it deserves; and if that is so, it must share the moral responsibility for what is done in its name and by its permission. The plea of ignorance provides no adequate defence. In this case of Ulster it was not necessary for the public to be aware of the intrigues and plans so sedulously concealed from it. The sense of common justice and the instinct of self-respect should have been sufficient for the public to be outraged by the sight of its own fellow citizens conspicuously denied the same

treatment, the same status and the same rights as itself. From the moment in 1972 when the Government and Parliament of the United Kingdom became solely and directly responsible for Northern Ireland along with the other provinces and parts of the Kingdom, it was to Britain itself that the test of morality and righteousness was applied. It is a test that the United Kingdom has so far failed to pass.

J. Molony