



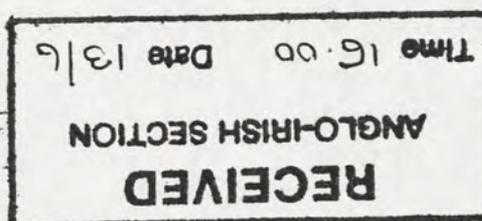
An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2016/22/2186
Creation Dates:	12 June 1986
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.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

cc SECRETARY
A-I SECTION
A-I Secretariat
BOX



CONFIDENTIAL

13 June 1986

SOME COMMENTS ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DISSOLUTION OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Dear Assistant Secretary,

I was in the gallery of the House of Commons yesterday afternoon for the announcement by the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Tom King of the dissolution of the Assembly. The proceedings lasted just 45 minutes. King's short initial statement announcing the dissolution was followed by some twenty or so questions which he answered. Ted Smyth, who was in the Press Gallery (where he could take notes) has faxed to you the text of King's statement and a summary of the questions and answers. The following are some additional comments based on my own impressions.

I thought the whole affair was fairly low-key. There were about 50 or so members present of whom some 15 were on the Opposition side. The Prime Minister was not present. King had Nick Scott and Rhodes Boyson on the bench beside him.

On the Conservative side, the relatively small number of firm opponents of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, who were, many of them, also critics of the original proposal to establish the Assembly, (such people as Nick Budgeon, Julian Amery and Sir John Biggs Davison) were rather well represented - much more so than were the supporters of the Agreement. In consequence many of the questions from that side of the House were supportive, in one way or another, of the concept of integration - with a tendency of course to say "I told you so" about the Assembly. King made it clear enough that a devolved government in Northern Ireland is still his goal. But I thought that he did not really rise to the occasion thus several times provided to him of ruling integration out once and for all in absolutely ringing tones. On several occasions, too, in response to questions or suggestions which it might have given him some trouble to answer direct, King deflected the question by saying that "it must be right" that the Honorable Member concerned had been able to come into the House to make the suggestion - and he said (both explicitly and by implication) that he only wished that the Unionists would do the same.

In fact no Unionist M.P. except Enoch Powell attended. (John Taylor has often accompanied Powell in recent weeks intaking his seat and, apart from the Sunday Trading Bill where they all attended and voted,

there were four Unionists in the House on one other recent occasion) Nor did Ken McGuinness sit, as he sometimes does for Northern Ireland business, in the public gallery.

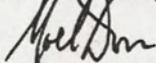
Jim Prior made one of his, now rare, appearances. He spoke well of the Assembly (which he had established while he was Secretary of State); and I thought that he was rather clearer than Tom King had been in ruling out the possibility of integration. Merlyn Rees on the other hand, while acknowledging that he too as Secretary of State had hoped to bring about devolution, said that he now thought that talking about that might be a pipe dream - as was talk of integration. Perhaps the time could come when it would be right to "completely re-assess our policy" in relation to Northern Ireland.

John Hume made a good statement expressing his openness to talks. It was welcomed by King, but King also noted that part of the reason for the failure of the Assembly went back to the SDLP's initial attitude to it.

A COMMENT FROM JOHN BIFFEN

I might add that at the annual dinner for the diplomatic corps given last night by the Foreign Secretary, I touched on the announcement about the Assembly in the course of a short chat which I had with John Biffen, the Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons. He was his usual sceptical self - he said, in a not unkindly way, that long experience had led him to think that it is always well to be sceptical of progress in matters relating to Ireland. He saw no prospect whatever that the Assembly would be revived "this side of a general election (in Britain)". (Incidentally he evinced considerable interest - as many do here - in the outcome of the referendum on 26 June).

Yours sincerely,



Noel Dorr (Ambassador)

Eamonn O Tuathail,
Asst. Sec.