



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Reference Code: | 2016/52/26 |
| Creation Dates: | 9 October 1986 |
| Extent and medium: | 4 pages |
| Creator(s): | Department of the Taoiseach |
| Accession Conditions: | Open |
| Copyright: | National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives. |

Secret

S19003

ANGLO-IRISH

Secretary
A-I Section
A-I Secretary

Time 11:30 Date 13/10

BOX -

Discussion with Richard Needham, Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State, NIO, 9 October 1986

1903
2404
19015
24083
19018
24251

I had a long discussion on Thursday evening, 9 October with Richard Needham who was seated beside me at a dinner which we gave at the Conservative Party Conference in Bournemouth. The following are some points of interest which emerged.

General

Needham said he is enjoying his job which he finds very satisfying and he spoke a good deal of wrestling (not his word) with his civil servants. He talked a good deal too about the need to use basic political skills and plan tactics in pushing things through and heading off opposition. This was something that he is doing all the time in dealing with various decisions which come to him and he was impatient with the SDLP and John Hume in particular for not being ready so far to do the same (see below).

The Agreement

Needham seemed buoyant enough about the prospect that the Agreement will remain in place. As he sees it much of the benefit of the Agreement comes - not so much directly in changes which can be immediately attributed to it but rather in the fact that the existence of the Agreement acts as a steady pressure on the Governmental system and the bureaucracy in getting things done - even things which might not seem to be directly attributable to its existence.

His criticism he said was also that of Senator Mary Robinson at the BIA Conference a few weeks ago - that the South and, in particular, the SDLP did not really have to pay a price for what they had achieved. (Senator Robinson had spoken particularly of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution).

The SDLP

Needham was very critical of John Hume as someone who has got his broad strategy right (ie the Agreement etc) but has failed lamentably so far to work out what he wants and how to achieve it within that broad strategic framework. That is to say he has failed on tactics. What is needed is that he begin to play chess and draw people into the game with him - possibly some people such as Ken Magennis on the Unionist side who might be drawn into something if approached in the right way or alternatively it could be done if Hume approached it in the right way by reaching over the heads of politicians to people on the Unionist side who want peace and stability.

First Hume had to stop "flying around"; and the Irish Government has to press him now very hard, with the broad strategic framework which has been established, to play a clever political game in first clarifying for himself what he wants and then building support politically for it. If necessary he should have a tactician to help him. Possibly Austin Currie could do it. Instead, Hume had very bad relations with John Cusnahan of the Alliance Party whom he should have turned into an ally on some things.

In contrast to his criticisms of Hume, Needham said he had the highest regard for Seamus Mallon. He thought it a pity that he was so bitter but he could understand it and might have been equally bitter in Mallon's case. He thought that Mallon would be naturally much better at playing the kind of political/tactical game he talked about than Hume.

What we all had to realise now is that the drift towards more extreme Unionists could be more serious in its way than was the drift to Sinn Fein from the SDLP which had alarmed us a few years ago. It was in everybody's interest to stop it.

The Alliance Party

Needham was extremely worried about the future of the Alliance Party. He had had a meal with Cushnahan within the past few days. He said that Cushnahan is broke and is looking for a job in Hertfordshire. Needham said that he himself and Nick Scott are trying to find money somewhere to give some support to the Alliance Party.

Statements and speeches by the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Needham was very critical of the tone of many of the Minister's speeches and statements. However they may sound west of the Bann they lead too often, he said, to more Catholics being burned or intimidated in places like Lisburn. There are ways of saying the same thing in substance but with a rather different tone which would not have the same exasperating effect on Unionists.

I took this up and talked about the relatively high profile which the Minister had consciously taken over a number of years as the champion of the Northern Ireland minority. He was particularly concerned to ensure that they knew that an Irish Government Minister would speak out for them and that there was no reason for them to look to Sinn Fein or others associated with violence as their defenders. I dwelt somewhat on this point which was quite new to Needham and he listened with interest. He also agreed that it would not be right to fail to speak out simply because the reaction might be an increase in intimidation but he still thought that, without change of substance, a different and less aggravating tone could be used.

NIO

Needham, by implication, seemed to have a very negative opinion of "the English civil servants" in the NIO. I took it that he may have had Robert Andrew and David Chesterton particularly in mind although he did not at any stage mention the former. He said that it was "crazy" to have two Permanent Secretaries of NIO (Ken Bloomfield and Robert Andrew). The right approach would be to make a Northern Ireland civil servant - Ken Bloomfield - the Permanent Under Secretary and use Maurice Hayes (the Permanent Under Secretary at the DHSS) in a "political" role (which he did not specify). He said he had the highest regard for Hayes whom he regarded as the best political intelligence around. He seemed to see Bloomfield as solid and useful but less "politically" gifted than Hayes. English civil servants simply do not know or understand the situation.

BIA

This led in to some references to the recent BIA meeting at Oxford when he said he was "fed up" at "all those English civil servants" sitting there watching Ministers perform. I wasn't altogether clear what the substance of this criticism was but he was critical of the intervention by Robert Armstrong and he said also that he was "fed up" of Francis Elliott (an NIO civil servant) doing a 40 page memorandum afterwards saying how useful it all was since it afforded an opportunity for these English civil servants to see Irish politicians, academics etc., whom they would not otherwise meet.

Flags and Emblems Act

He said he is very worried about this issue and the effects whatever they do on it may have. King is also worried.

When at one point I mentioned 3 Judge Courts he said he did not know much about the issue but he said that he would like to see us do a deal in which we traded off the Flags and Emblems Act against 3 Judge Courts. In other words we would undertake not to ask for anything under the former if we got the latter. I responded that in that case we might get neither.

Needham's own responsibilities

Needham spoke very enthusiastically of the Castle Court Development in Belfast and of his battles with civil servants to try to ensure that the people were consulted in some way on matters of planning affecting their own and their childrens' futures. He thought it was ridiculous and purely cosmetic to want to spend money on the Dundalk/Newry road although a Newry by-pass was needed, and he would much prefer to see the money from the International Fund go on such things as the Castle Court Development. He spoke highly of Daithi O Ceallaigh who, as I gathered, had attended a recent meeting with our Minister for the Environment but he had some criticism of the position taken by the latter.

The pulling down of Dwiv flats was something he regards with satisfaction. He seemed to see it as an example of the approach referred to above - the use of political intelligence and tactics to get things through. He had managed to get the Chairman of the Housing Executive to propose that the flat complex be pulled down and it was then possible to go ahead by pointing to this rather than simply seeming to respond to Bishop Daly or others.

The decision to save the Navan Fort also seemed to give him great satisfaction. He said that all the advice to him had been against - that is it had been in favour of letting the development go ahead. In particular this had been the advice of the Head of Planning(?) McGuckian, "a good Catholic from Derry".

Needham said he hoped that they would soon be able to open the pubs on Sunday. Here again the way to approach it in his view was not head on but by coupling it with something else and as it were slipping it through. In this case he would focus on the illegal drinking, the clubs and sheebens. By attacking them he would be able to say in contrast that the pubs were respectable and put through the decision to allow them to open on Sunday.

Comment

I think some of the foregoing may be of interest but I would be inclined to advise against attaching too much weight to all of Needham's opinions. What is perhaps interesting is that he seemed to be revelling in his job and eager to find ways of pushing through improvements or change in some areas for which he has responsibility. He also gave me the impression that he has somewhat more contacts with Unionists than some of his colleagues - in part because of his own pedigree (I gathered that a grandfather or granduncle was a major figure in the establishment of the UVF in 1912 although the family over the past two generations has lost most of its links with Northern Ireland).



Noel Dorr
Ambassador

10 October 1986