



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Meeting between the Taoiseach, Minister for Foreign Affairs  
and members of the Alliance Party in Government Buildings  
at 4.30 pm on 21 February, 1986.

*Mr. McManus  
26.2.86*

*[Handwritten signature]*  
25/12

Present on the Government side:

Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald T.D.  
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Peter Barry, T.D.  
Mr. Dermot Nally, Secretary Department of the Taoiseach  
Mr. Brendan Lyons, Department of Foreign Affairs  
The undersigned.

From the Alliance Party

Mr. John Cushnahan, Leader  
Mr. Addie Morrow, Deputy Leader  
Mr. Basil Glass, Chairman,  
Mr. Sean Neeson, Assembly Member for East Belfast,  
Mr. Will Glendenning, Assembly Member for West Belfast, and  
Eileen Bell, General Secretary.

The Taoiseach welcomed the party to Dublin and opened the meeting by giving a run-down on his recent visit to Britain. While he was in London for one and a half days he said he discovered that it is clear that support in Parliament for the Anglo-Irish Agreement is solid and will remain so. All parliamentary parties are still very steadfast and the mood is so positive that there is no challenge and there is a feeling by so many behind the Agreement. It is important he said to solidify the decision to steer it through at this stage. The Prime Minister is also determined to see it through. He said

nothing very much can be done between now and Tuesday when the Unionists meet the Prime Minister. The Taoiseach said the Minister for Justice will sign the Convention on Terrorism in Strasbourg on Monday: it can be seen on television on Monday night. He told the Alliance Party that he intended to hold the announcement of the decision to sign the Convention until after the meeting with the Prime Minister. However, he decided that it was best to release the news at the Press gallery lunch to get T.V. and other media coverage. He had informed the Prime Minister beforehand however. It was agreed by both sides at the meeting that Northern Ireland media gave full coverage of the report of the Taoiseach's announcement on the Convention, even the Newsletter which carried the full transcript of the Taoiseach's speech to the Press gallery. Discussion on Northern Ireland newspapers ensued. John Cushnahan said the Newsletter was a scurrilous rag and the Belfast Telegraph had amazingly unhelpful editorial sometimes. The Minister for Foreign Affairs in reply said that notwithstanding this the Belfast Telegraph editorials were strong in their stand against UDI and violence.

John Cushnahan thanked the Taoiseach for the invitation to meet with them. He said that while the Alliance Party had reservations about the Agreement especially in the initial stages, they now believed it would work. Another failure would be a disaster for Northern Ireland. It was up to every one to see that the Agreement will work. His party were very appreciative of the Irish Government's decision to sign the Convention on Terrorism and also John Hume's previous day's statement in the House of Commons that his party would have talks with Unionists without preconditions. Unfortunately Protestant opinion was now very hard-headed against the Agreement. He said the Unionists did not like the way the Conference seems to deal in detail rather than in policy. This created for them an impression of joint authority rather than what it is. The Unionists saw "the shadow cabinet" of the SDLP behind the Conference which was insensitive to Unionist

reactions. He had a long talk with John Hume and was pleased at some of his responses especially on devolution. This recent statement on talks without preconditions was welcomed even though comments like that are now falling on deaf ears. It is nevertheless important to get through to the Unionist population. He said it was very important now for the SDLP to make a big gesture to the Unionists. He suggested the best kind of gesture would be a statement from the SDLP to the Catholic population that they should join the RUC. He said this was very important not because of actual recruitment but for perception by the Unionist community. The situation in Northern Ireland was potentially more explosive than ever before. The RUC are in the front line and feel very vulnerable. The Taoiseach said we are well aware of this. John Cushnahan said it is important to support moderate Protestants such as the Church leaders and others who are trying to placate the Unionists. All they see at present from the SDLP is a failure to respond. He argued that devolution is seen to be in the SDLP's self interest. However, a more helpful statement on policing is more important especially for the RUC and the moderate Unionists. The Taoiseach said that since the Agreement we are waiting for (1) a Police Code of Conduct which we were told by the British authorities would emerge rapidly. This Code would serve both traditions. The Code was to be presented at the first or second meeting of the Conference but there has been foot dragging by Britain. The surprising aspect of the matter is that the Irish Government was satisfied with the body of the Code but unhappy with the drafting of the more irrelevant bits. Last Saturday the Chief Constable told the Taoiseach they now have the Code. However, later in the week the British Government still said it was not ready. He wondered who was playing games. The British say we should not blame them. (2) The Stalker Report which had not been sent to the DPP. If it were sent to the DPP they would have decided on what action to take. The Taoiseach said if the Police Code of Conduct and the Stalker Report were complete and dealt with then the SDLP would be able to face the issue of the RUC. John Cushnahan said he would be meeting the

Chief Constable next week and will ask him about the Code of Conduct. Dermot Nally said it was important that the Code of Conduct would be seen not to be coming from the Conference. The only role the Conference had in this matter was to say we have seen the Code and we think it is O.K. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that we do not wish to give needless provocation to the Unionists. John Cushnahan said he agreed with this. He went on to say that at this time when everyone is taking risks the SDLP should be taking some too. He hoped they could help in relation to policing. He said problems will come unless something can come out of the Unionist meeting with the Prime Minister on 25 February. The Taoiseach asked what will happen assuming that the meeting will achieve nothing. John Cushnahan replied that this time the paramilitaries might play a role. He said that Peter Robinson is very aggressive and very much related to the paramilitaries. Paisley and Molyneaux are at present being dragged along. All the more important, he said, that the SDLP from a position of strength should now try to do something which would relieve the situation. The Taoiseach asked what the Government should say to the SDLP. John Cushnahan replied that the SDLP should say now that we believe Catholics should join the RUC. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said the SDLP would find this very hard so long as there is no Code of Conduct. John Cushnahan said that he could understand this but this was a time for taking risks. Will Glendinning reiterating what his leader had said, said it was now time that the SDLP should make a statement supporting the RUC. Such moves he said would be a positive indicator to moderate Unionists and would help them. At the end of the day if the Agreement was defeated the SDLP would be the ultimate losers and would lose all their votes back to Sinn Fein. He suggested that the SDLP could first of all ask Catholics who live in quiet areas to join the RUC. He could see no problem for them in doing this.

The Taoiseach said that the way forward is covered in the Agreement but that there has been a lot of foot dragging by the British side. He said that the SDLP have been unable to react because they are still awaiting the Code of Conduct and

the Stalker Report. John Cushnahan said as the structures are agreed through the Anglo-Irish Agreement they should proceed without waiting further. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said the SDLP are reluctant to move before the finalisation of the Code of Conduct. John Cushnahan referred to talk of rumours of strike next Monday and also of the march on Easter Monday. These he said were indicators of what was going to come and he hoped that the Unionist population would see them for what they were.

The Taoiseach said that his Government were concerned about these matters and especially the march on Easter Monday in Portadown which he hoped would be confined, the same as it was on July the 12th last year and that there would be no violence.

Sean Neeson going back to an earlier theme suggested that the Conference only seemed to be dealing with the courts and the UDR. He said he hoped that economic elements be introduced as well. He said the Unionists could see nothing accruing to them from the Conference; nothing seemed to be to their satisfaction.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that our Minister for the Environment was working on schemes which would in fact be of benefit to both communities in the North. He said that our Minister for the Environment is meeting his counterpart on the British side to discuss the construction of roads and other related matters. However, we are disappointed to date with response from the British side. He mentioned however, that cross-border security is working well.

Sean Neeson said that he hoped that in the near future something which would be seen as positive on the Unionist side would come about. John Cushnahan agreed but the Taoiseach said we were concerned to show results on the social and economic side of the Agreement. However, he felt the security was an area which should have most support from the Unionists.

John Cushnahan said that on the social and economic side things were more tangible and would be seen that way by the Unionists. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said he was very keen to push these items and indeed the Conference would be doing so shortly. Will Glendinning said the Fund has to be tangible - people he said should be able to look and say "that was built with the Fund".

The Taoiseach said that Northern Ireland civil servants are at present looking at something which in fact can be done on the Environment side. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that Northern Ireland civil servants were in Brussels at the moment negotiating something on construction. The Taoiseach said that if money comes to us from the US it would be necessary to start something immediately. We know that funds will come this year and they should be in the region of \$50 - \$70m per year for about 5 years. Will Glendinning pointing out that present EEC spending is very considerable but not very obvious, said that in order to have proper import the project from the Fund would have to be obvious. The project should be big and brash and unlike EEC projects which were very beneficial but widespread and not obvious to the ordinary person.

The Taoiseach agreed with the idea that projects connected with the Fund should be obvious and said that we would certainly follow up. Addie Morrow said the next week will be crucial. He said that both in Britain and in Dublin, he felt that there is now a proper feeling of Protestant anxieties on the ground. He said that people in the North on the Unionist side were not willing to be committed to anything until they learned more. He said that they saw the SDLP as triumphalist. He said that what we would have to do is get across to the Protestant working class community. He said that the police were now regarded as being on the other side and they were being used as pawns in the game at present. They are frightened and are under very severe pressure in their own neighbourhoods where the community are very much against them. He said something must be done for them.

John Cushnahan agreeing with this said that a great deal of abuse was being meted out to the RUC at present. The Taoiseach said that we realise the difficult position that the RUC find themselves in and indeed will find themselves in the immediate future. He said that the Portadown march at Easter will be a time of trial for them. However, he said both Governments realised their problem and hoped we could do something to relieve it.

John Cushnahan talked about the control that Powell had over Molyneaux and he said that Harold McCusker's comments were articulating UDI. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that he did not feel that the Official Unionist Party had that point of view. John Cushnahan said that Harold McCusker and Peter Robinson were up to their necks with the UDA and the paramilitaries. He said that it was important that at present we should be making concessions to the Unionists even as a tactical ploy. He said that if the politicians turned down reasonable statements they will lose support in their own communities. He said that the agenda could be given by the Northern Ireland Secretary to the parties before Conferences for any input they wished to make. This would help to assuage opinion in the Unionist communities. The exclusion from any process frustrates them. This was something which he had hoped the Prime Minister would offer. The Minister for Foreign Affairs asked did the Prime Minister ever offer this before to the Alliance Party. John Cushnahan said no. He also said that <sup>the</sup> ~~his~~ letter sent to him by the Prime Minister after the Agreement offered nothing.

The Taoiseach was surprised and said that he thought that she would be following up with some kind of an offer of consultation with the other parties. The Taoiseach said that he thought that this would help to restore some balance to the other community. He assumed that the British would take this action.

John Cushnahan said that it would be wise to publish the agenda. However, the Minister for Foreign Affairs thought that this might be provocative. John Cushnahan said that the

Unionist community now believe that the Conference was doing nasty squalid deals behind their backs. He said that this was an area where something could and should be published.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that a secret agenda may be wrong. John Cushnahan said that what he would propose was that before a meeting it would be made known to the public that the following items will be discussed during the Conference. The Taoiseach said that he could see <sup>whether this could be</sup> where publication of Conference Agenda items in a general way such as reference to say 7(c) of the Agreement.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that it would require a lot of thinking. It was a very sensitive area. John Cushnahan said when a communique is issued after the meeting saying what has happened then the situation is worse. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that he could understand that point.

John Cushnahan said that the Unionists regard items on the agenda which are secret as being directed against them. He said that you should demonstrate that this is not a trojan horse. If they refuse to talk about the agenda then its on their own head.

Sean Neeson said that more attempts should be made to try and involve them. If they do not accept then it is their hard luck. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said most Unionists do not know what is in the Agreement. He had thought about sending a copy of the Agreement to each household.

The Taoiseach said that he had suggested to the British to do this but that <sup>they</sup> had decided against it. Basil Glass said we should try and create conditions of balance within the communities in the North, that is, to create conditions where the Agreement will become acceptable to the majority. He said that it was important for people in the streets to understand and to see the benefits of the Agreement. This is what the

Alliance Party is trying to do at present. At the moment the Unionists only know what Paisley wants to tell them so publishing the agenda to the Agreement is positive.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs said he is doing a programme on 'Spotlight' during the coming week. He will try to use the occasion to get across the human face of the Irish Government and also he will try to assure the Unionist population that the Agreement means them no harm.

John Cushnahan said that it was important to reflect on the structures of the Agreement. He said it is important to let people know that the Agreement has something for them. He feels that not enough effort has been made to sell the Agreement; one should be talking to the Unionist community. The Taoiseach said that it was difficult to address one or other parts of the community and when one was making a statement one had to assure one side and reassure the other.

John Cushnahan felt that the important community to address at the moment were the Unionists. He said the problem at the moment was not about the Agreement but the fear of what the Loyalists will do. He said that everybody saw the dawn too many times before. The Agreement for the Unionist community in the short time is very frightening.

The Taoiseach asked was there any way to get Unionists to focus in on the advantage of the Agreement. John Cushnahan said he doesn't understand why they can't see the advantages. He said at present there was no chance of Unionists standing up and doing anything. They are concerned about the other individual and are constantly looking over their shoulders.

Will Glenndinning illustrated this by saying in Belfast Council, Peter Robinson and others were looking down on Unionist Councillors to make sure that they did not strike a rate. He said that no one except John Carson will come out of line and unfortunately he has no say in the Unionist

Community. The Taoiseach said he understood that we could not look for spirit or leadership at present but when the dangers are so great they may change. He was not thinking of danger for individuals but that at a certain point, with or without violence, when there was a threat to the Union, then something might be done. John Cushnahan wondered whether it was mainly about the Union. He felt that it was about Protestant hegemony. He said that a lot of Unionists would have to decide whether they were going to go down the road with Paisley or to cut away from him.

The Taoiseach said that at a certain time some people realise the necessity to branch out and he wondered whether the leadership of Molyneaux can do just that. John Cushnahan said that Molyneaux was very vulnerable. He said that Enoch Powell had Molyneaux's ear. Martin Smyth while he was looking for the leadership would never get it. He said the only people within the Unionist hierarchy at present who were moderate were John Carson and Ray Ferguson but unfortunately they now have no standing in the party. He said the Unionists have no reason to see disaster coming so the pressure is coming from the bottom up rather than from the top down.

Basil Glass said that what Unionists feared was fines or imprisonment resulting in disqualification from holding office. Will Glenndinning said because of that fear they would go to the streets rather than to engage in civil disobedience. He said he believed that they would feel that they can use paramilitaries to deliver. But men in hoods in streets would make the population fearful.

The Taoiseach said the British Government will act if a 1974 situation presents itself. He said he hoped people will be reasonable and react before the situation comes to that. John Cushnahan said that Peter Robinson does not want anything from the Prime Minister's meeting. He said that Robinson and McCusker wanted confrontation. It was what he described a flailing arms strategy. These people he said don't think ahead. He said they are total bigots with a prisoner mentality.

Mr. Cushnahan asked whether there was anyway a gesture could be made on Arts. 2 and 3 of the Constitution. The Minister for Foreign Affairs replied that an attempt now to change the Constitutional position might fail and that this would do more harm than good. The Taoiseach said that the circumstances in which the Constitutional position might be changed did not exist at the moment. If the Unionists were talking reasonably and people here could see a less threatening situation then it might be possible to make some changes. All that he could say at the moment is that he would not exclude it and that it might be contemplated as part of an eventual solution in Northern Ireland.

The Taoiseach said that people will see that power-sharing leads to peace. He said that there could be no going back on the Agreement now. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said any going back would be to play into the hands of the Provos and the Unionists should realise this. The Taoiseach said that the resolution of the problem was the Agreement and power-sharing. He said it wasn't a case of peace or war. He said that the Unionists could not have been asked before the Agreement they would have tried to block the way. He said in that case there could not have been much point, if there was an attempt and there was no response, then it might have been thrown out. It was best not to discuss the matter with them. He talked about the Convention and said it was very complex. It involved other countries besides Britain. He hoped to introduce legislation next autumn so that he could ratify the Convention by the end of the year.

John Cushnahan said no matter what, the Irish Government does now there will be no response from the Unionists at present. He said the divorce issue down here is a pity. It was grist to the Unionist mill.

The Taoiseach said that there was little he could do about the divorce issue and that he couldn't move now because if he were to do so without talking to the Church it might be a disaster.

He said that it will have to wait until after proper discussions with the Churches. The idea now was to try and limit opposition to rational discussion.

John Cushnahan thanked the Taoiseach very much for the meeting and he said that in his talks with the Prime Minister he would emphasise that the Agreement can't be touched. He would ask her to put pressure on talks for devolution. The Taoiseach suggested that he might ask her to take the initiative herself. This might be a way forward. The Taoiseach thanked the Alliance Party for coming to Dublin and looked forward to future exchanges.

*Liam Canniffe*  
Liam Canniffe.

25 February 1986.