



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2016/52/36
Creation Dates:	19 March 1986
Extent and medium:	3 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.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

Secret

19 March 1986

17 Grosvenor Place

SW1X 7HR

*24604
1962-4*

S19629

*PSM
PSS
LHM:S
A-I Section
Box*

Discussion with Tom King, Northern Ireland Secretary of State

Dear Eamon

You will be aware from newspaper reports and otherwise of the speech delivered by Tom King on Monday night at the Annual St Patrick's Dinner of the Irish Club in which he referred to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution; and you will also know that the Minister of State, George Birmingham, who spoke immediately after King in reply to the toast of "the two islands" elaborated on the spot on his text to reply to King. He said that no Articles of the Constitution were written in tablets of stone and referred to the All-Party Committee proposal of 1967; and he spoke of the symbolic importance of the Articles to the nationalist minority in the North (this is reported on the front page of Tuesday's Irish Press by Aiden Henningan who, along with Conor O Clery of the Irish Times, was present at the dinner and phoned in his story at a late stage).

You will know also I think that in the course of the luncheon at the Embassy on St Patrick's Day (at which you yourself were also present) the Minister of State was told by Nicholas Scott, who was sitting beside him, that King proposed to make a speech on these lines and that he (Scott) was trying to dissuade him from doing so. Scott and Robert Andrew, who was also at our lunch, left afterwards for the NIO to discuss the speech which was still being worked on and which in the event was not ready until a few hours before the dinner. BBC Newsnight heard about the speech in the late afternoon and set up cameras to cover King while he was speaking at the dinner but in the event they did not use anything of what he said on Newsnight that night.

I would add that I was seated beside King at the dinner and had some chance for discussion with him. In the course of this he made some very strong and scathing references to the fact that the Taoiseach had used some sentences in Irish in his speech on the occasion of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement at Hillsborough on 15 November. King said that he had thought this outrageous and that Mrs Thatcher had been "livid".

In telling me this King was on his high horse - in that lecturing tone which makes it rather difficult to get through to him with argument or replies to what he is saying. It appeared that his outrage was due to the fact that the Taoiseach had suddenly, and without warning, switched in the middle of his statement in English to saying something in a language which the Prime Minister and the British side did not understand. He also said that what the Taoiseach had done on that occasion in speaking

Irish, had made "many people in the province" very bitter and this was something which he heard over and over again when people complain to him about the Agreement.

King said that he knew perfectly well why we had not given advance notice that the Taoiseach would switch for a few sentences to Irish - "you didn't give us notice because you thought we would object to it". He said he darkly that knew well what the source of the advice to the Taoiseach had been. In all of this, as I have said, King was both expressing his own outrage (and, he claimed, that of the Prime Minister) at the fact that the Taoiseach had spoken unexpectedly in a strange language - "he could have been saying anything as we sat there" - and also, according to himself, echoing the sense of anger which he still gets from many unionists about the matter (which was why he had raised the matter with me at all).

I managed to interrupt King in his flow to the extent of asking if he would have raised an objection in advance if he had been told beforehand? King reflected and then said he could not answer that - he did not know. He certainly would not say that he would not have raised objection. I also put it to him that if, as he said, "people in the province" had taken exception to the Taoiseach's use of Irish on the occasion there were others for whom it would have been an important symbol. He listened but I would doubt very much if I really got through to him on the point.

In our discussion King also tried to bring home to me the perception of the unionist community in Northern Ireland that "bombs and weapons come through the South"; and that the IRA are "supplied from the Southern side of the border". While he began by attributing this perception to the unionists he seemed to go a long way towards making it his own; and he adduced the recent arms finds in the South as evidence that most of the IRA supplies came from our side of the border - there is "little if any" which comes through such places as Larne or Belfast port.

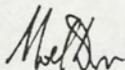
I remonstrated about this. King listened to obvious points which I made about the situation in nationalist areas on the Northern side of the border and about our right to complain about the spill-over of the effects of violence to the South but even then he tried to argue that no bank robberies in the South had been attributable to people from Northern Ireland.

During the meal the Hilton Hotel had wheeled out a large moulded harp made completely of ice on which they shone a green spotlight and this, until it began to melt, sat as a green harp on a table in the centre of the room. King was very much taken by this and kept referring me to it as the cap badge of the RUC - a point which he also made in his speech. He was only momentarily put out when ~~someone~~ made the point to him ~~in my hearing~~ that in that case it was perhaps symbolic that the ice of the "cap badge" was beginning to melt and lose its shape.

/...

All in all I found my own exchanges with King and his behaviour over the speech to be rather depressing further evidence of his bluff, simplistic and politically insensitive approach; and this in turn rather discouraged me from trying to probe him as to his attitude on some other points which might have been of interest.

Yours sincerely



Noel Dorr
Ambassador

Mr Eamon O Tuathail
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2