



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2016/52/36
Creation Dates:	17 July 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.

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

819629

17 July 1986

Mr. Eamonn O Tuathail
 Assistant Secretary
 Anglo-Irish Division
 Department of Foreign Affairs

Secretary
 A-I Section
 Amb London
 Box

19629

Dear Eamonn

During the course of a discussion this morning with Mark Elliott he made a few points which may be of interest in relation to recent events. He said the view exists among Ministers in London that our response to recent events including King's interview in the Belfast Telegraph and the Twelfth march in Portadown should be seen in the light of an over-reaction by us which they put down to nervousness on our part following the result of the Divorce Referendum. Commentators in London, and he stressed that this was not the view of Ministers, are beginning to think that the differences which are now being aired publicly between the two Governments are an indication that the Agreement has been damaged. Speaking personally he did not think that the Agreement has been broken by the decision about the Portadown marches and the way in which it was conveyed to us.*

I reminded him of what the Minister had said about the Agreement in his interviews yesterday and of the points made by John Hume in his RTE radio interview on 13 July. What had happened in relation to RUC operational matters is being interpreted by some nationalists as a weakness in the Agreement. It is even more important now to show as soon as possible that the Agreement can deliver on nationalist concerns so as to prevent non constitutional nationalists from gaining any advantage. Elliott said he agreed with this.

I went over the ground of our concern stressing that our problem lay with the decision to allow a loyalist march through a nationalist area in Portadown and with the public comments which had been made by the Secretary of State and in NIO briefing indicating that we had not formally conveyed to the British side our views on such marches. It was this misrepresentation of our position which made it incumbent upon us to make a public statement. We had sought to be restrained but could not maintain silence following the remarks of the Secretary of State. I said that the Anglo-Irish Agreement continues in being and that we fully intend to continue working it.

*I have since writing this read Geoffrey Smith's piece in today's London Times (copy attached) which reflects the views expressed by Elliott.

I reminded him of the proposals we had put to them two days ago offering a meeting between the Minister and the Secretary of State. He said that the Secretary of State will give some thought to this possibly tomorrow or more likely early next week. His own view was that it is important that the two principals get together as soon as possible.

He mentioned that Sir Anthony Acland, the Head of the Foreign Office, will be visiting Northern Ireland on 28/29 July following a visit to Dublin. He proposed to bring him to the Secretariat on the 29th for a short visit with which, of course, I said we would be delighted.

Yours sincerely

Daulty

D. O'Ceallaigh

COMMENTARY



Geoffrey Smith

Mr Peter Barry's outburst against the RUC's handling of the Portadown marches may well signal the end of the Anglo-Irish agreement as an effective instrument of policy in Northern Ireland.

The public response from Mr Tom King, as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, has been restrained, but it would be surprising if the British Government were not privately angry at the Irish Foreign Minister's remarks.

Mr Barry has done what would be regarded as improper for any British minister to do in any part of the United Kingdom. He has subjected the police to political abuse for their operational decisions. It is not even fair criticism. The police exercised their judgement in very trying conditions in a way that at least avoided the danger of much more serious bloodshed.

Has Mr Barry forgotten how recently the RUC and their families were being attacked by Protestant extremists for the manner in which policing was being conducted in the province?

He has done something more damaging than inflict a temporary affront upon the British Government. He has inflamed Protestant opinion, deepened Protestant suspicions over the agreement and exposed some of the inherent weaknesses in that arrangement.

Responsibility without power

If his conduct were inexplicable it would be less serious. There are ministers in every government who occasionally act in unfathomable fashion. Other governments are wise to take such aberrations in their stride, but it is not in fact difficult to understand what Mr Barry has been up to.

The Anglo-Irish agreement confers upon Irish ministers not power without responsibility - in Baldwin's biting phrase, the prerogative of the harlot down the ages - but responsibility without power. Under the terms of the agreement they do not have the right to determine policy in Northern Ireland, but because they have the right to be consulted, because they are therefore expected to exercise influence, they are liable to be held to account for what is decided.

If their influence is too evident the Protestants complain that they are taking over the province; but if they fail to prevent decisions that are displeasing to the Roman Catholics, they are thought to have let down their own side.

A strong government might be able to ride out these pressures, but after the loss of the divorce referendum, Dr Garret Fitzgerald's administration has looked uncomfortably close to a government on the run. It could not afford to look ineffective in Northern Ireland as well as in the republic.

Suspicious encouraged

So Mr Barry felt impelled to demonstrate in the most dramatic possible fashion that he has not acquiesced in the policing strategy over the marches. However in publicizing his criticism he has inevitably outraged the Protestants.

The strength of feeling is shown by the vigorous statement from John Cushnahan, the leader of the Alliance Party in the province, which complains of the "crass stupidity" of Mr Barry's remarks and maintains that they will increase tension there. Mr Cushnahan's language is all the more significant coming from the leader of a party which has up to now taken a pragmatic line on the Anglo-Irish agreement.

Mr Barry must also have appeared to confirm one of the deepest Protestant suspicions about the agreement: that it has given the Irish government the right of joint control over security policy in the north. Why else, it is asked, should the police chiefs from the north and south sit around the conference table with the politicians?

I do not believe that this accusation is correct. Indeed, if it were the Irish Foreign Minister would not have had to resort to such a public protest; but the trouble with the agreement is the extent to which it has encouraged rather than allayed suspicions.

I am not suggesting that it will now formally be wound up, still less that it would be statesmanlike to fan animosity between London and Dublin; but it looks progressively more unlikely that the conditions will exist that would enable the agreement to work.