



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2016/52/54
Creation Dates:	16 April 1986
Extent and medium:	12 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.

S20876

*Mr. M. C. ...
mk
28.4.86
28/4*

SECRET AND PERSONAL

*3 copies to
+ 1 copy of
F9-10
PH*

*22567
24404
20876
18865 (P9-10)
24683*

An Runaíocht Angla Eireannach
Beal Feirste

16 April 1986

Mr. E. O Tuathail
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

cc TAOISEACH
TANAISTE
MINISTER
Minister for Justice
Attorney General
Secretary
Mr. Nally
Mr. Ward
Mr. Russell
A-I SECTION
Amb London

Dear Eamonn

Conversation with King

As you know I had breakfast in Stormont this morning at the invitation of the Secretary of State. Also present were Robert Andrew, Mark Elliott and King's Private Secretary. The exchanges were in fact confined almost exclusively to King and the undersigned and went on for an hour and a half. The following is an account of the conversation as it developed.

Release of Mrs. Guinness

King asked that his congratulations be conveyed to the Garda Siochana on the successful Garda operation. He expressed interest in the possible link with the murder of a policeman in Yorkshire in 1984 on the part of one of the persons arrested.

He said he was concerned about reports he had of large sums being paid to the IRA by businessmen as "protection". I said I had no information on this. I said our Government was very concerned about the ransom insurance problem and had raised this with the British Government and in Trevi.

He said he had seen a note in his "box" last night about an indication to No. 10 by a Mail on Sunday reporter to the effect that the IRA were planning a bombing campaign in Dublin (sic) for this summer. He had felt that this probably related to a possible loyalist paramilitary campaign and that he was having it investigated. I said that the Garda Síochána were extremely anxious to have the fullest possible information from the RUC on any possibility of paramilitary action emanating from Northern Ireland aimed at targets in the South.

Possible Molyneaux/Taoiseach Meeting

King made it clear that the object of our conversation so far as he was concerned was to get the fullest possible information on the background to the conversations in London between our Ambassador and Robert Armstrong and on any developments that may be taking place or may be in prospect. He also made it clear (this was reinforced in the corridor afterwards by Robert Andrew) that he was resentful at not being approached himself by Dublin on a matter where he had the direct responsibility and on which the problems he was facing were very serious indeed.

I was somewhat hampered by the fact that I am not fully up to date on developments. I do not know, for example, whether the projected meeting between Molyneaux and the Taoiseach will or will not take place (the last indication I have seen is that it will, but I have heard a suggestion that this may not be the case). Also, apart from a one-sentence resume on the telephone, I do not know anything of the last meeting between Armstrong and Ambassador Dorr on these matters. My ignorance on these matters is entirely due to the coincidence of movements in and out of Maryfield.

King said that the word had been going around in unionist circles for a number of weeks (although reinforced by Robinson's press conference of a week ago) that Dublin was open to being more flexible, in contrast with the Prime Minister and himself who were being represented as being extremely stubborn and

confrontational. He asked whether I was aware of this and if I appreciated the problems it had caused on his side. I said I was generally aware of the rumours but that Dublin had dismissed them as "rubbish". He acknowledged this. I added that, although I had not been in touch with Dublin for a few days, I understood that there were considerable doubts about the wisdom of proceeding with a meeting with Molyneaux precisely because of the fact that Robinson had, within hours of our Ambassador's contact in London on Monday of last week, called a press conference to announce that he had definite information from British Government sources in London and from the NIO that the Irish Government were prepared to be flexible by contrast with the Prime Minister. I said that Dublin was worried about the reliability of its channel of information via Eames to Molyneaux: was it possible that Molyneaux had leaked the information either directly or indirectly to Robinson? I said the Taoiseach was seriously concerned also that an initiative on his part, which was intended to be helpful, had given rise to criticism of the Prime Minister and of the Secretary of State and that this was an additional reason why doubts had emerged about the initiative. King pressed me on the question of whether the Taoiseach intended to meet Molyneaux. I said (perforce) that I did not know.

King said that he saw some merit in the initiative. While "certain people in London" wanted the British Government and the unionists to "get into their trenches" for the summer, he was responsible for the situation in Northern Ireland and he thought confrontation would be a dangerous prospect. He was very anxious indeed to get the unionists to talks. He took it now from what he had heard of our Ambassador's approach in London that the position of our Government was that, while there would be no suspension and no "cancellation", there would be "flexibility" in the event that serious talks got going involving the unionists. He took it that this "flexibility" might involve matters such as location of meetings and timing.

I said that the Taoiseach had made it clear to Bishop Eames that

there would be no suspension of the Agreement or of the work of the Conference or of the Secretariat, but that in the event that there were serious talks between the parties in Northern Ireland on devolution on a power-sharing basis (although not necessarily for cabinet-style government), the Irish Government might be prepared to be accommodating in relation to the timing of meetings. I said there had been no mention of the question of location and I would not think that we could be flexible on that point. (Note: In fact I do not know whether in the event of dialogue we would or would not be flexible on this point). King did not take this very well. He said that he understood that John Hume had been giving thought to formulae involving the use of the word "priority" and that he too was working along these lines. He said that Bloomfield had been to Dublin and had brought back a message that we would be prepared to be quite flexible if necessary.

King went into some detail on the present state of unionism as he saw it. He saw little hope in the DUP, even in Paisley. The problems in the OUP were weakness of leadership, confusion and division. He wondered whether Molyneaux could survive the summer although he did recall (as Eames had mentioned to the Taoiseach) that Molyneaux had been strongly encouraged by the support he got from a meeting of his Party Executive who backed his line after the "Day of Action". King mentioned Martin Smyth, Taylor and McCusker as possible rivals for the succession, none of whom he considered to be "any good". He then said that he considered Magennis, although not "very bright", to an honest and brave man. He said that, while many might not agree with him, he felt that Magennis was the only one who had the qualities which the OUP would need - moral and physical guts - if it was ever to emerge from the shadow of the DUP.

He said that Molyneaux and some of the Westminster OUP MPs were infected with the integrationism of Powell. He made the interesting observation (I thought) that the small clique of Tory MPs who continue to be sympathetic to the unionists are

all, like Powell, integrationists. On the other hand when you came back to the North the non-Westminster OUP was passionately devolutionist and also passionately anti-integrationist.

The OUP were also divided on tactics. Some, led by McCartney, were calling on the Party to "stick it out", assuring their colleagues that the British will would break. Others, like Millar, were more realistic.

He said he wished to let me know that the Prime Minister would later this morning issue a very short letter to Paisley and Molyneaux inviting them to talks. The letter would deliberately not repeat the assertions that the Agreement would stand and there would be no interruption of its works. This was of course the position but it would be conveyed by words such as "you are fully aware of the position". There would be a new element in the letter which would be clarified subsequently by him and that was that the invitation on this occasion was to discuss with unionist leaders the possibility of talks i.e. it was an invitation to "talks about talks". He would also be making it clear that the talks would not necessarily be with the Prime Minister or even with himself. (Note: I subsequently learned from Elliott that the thought here might be that the "talks about talks" could even be with an intermediary such as Bloomfield). King said he would be giving considerable priority to this initiative and would go on television backing it in every way possible. He would be saying that it was incomprehensible that unionists should not avail of this opportunity particularly given the nature of what was proposed.

At this point I reminded King that the Taoiseach would not have gone ahead with his initiative had not Eames told him that Molyneaux was already talking to Thatcher. King waved a hand vaguely and went on to the next point.

The SDLP

King said that the single most difficult person on the nationalist side was Seamus Mallon who was constantly presenting the Agreement in terms which made it impossible for King to persuade unionists that it was not intended to be joint authority or a slippery slope to Irish unity. King also complained about Mallon's lack of generosity about the position of the police at the moment.

He said that while Hume was being much more helpful, Hume's line - asking unionists what harm the Agreement had done to them - was not enough. A more generous and supportive line particularly vis-a-vis the police (he acknowledged that Hume had said some helpful things) was essential.

He said that Wakeham was furious with Hume and Mallon for positively abstaining on the shops Bill. Wakeham had remarked to King that he was annoyed with Hume particularly as he had been trying to be helpful to him. (King said that Hume and Mallon had somewhat ostentatiously remained in the "Kremlin Bar" during the vote.)

RUC

King said that this was the principal problem facing his administration at the moment. He described in detail some of the more harrowing problems facing members of the force, particularly the fears which they have for the safety of their wives and children. He said that policemen were sufficiently well paid to live in fairly good areas for the most part but even there they were encountering deep hostility. He asked that Dublin should be sensitive to the pressures on the police at the moment and take account of his own wish to give priority to this matter over everything else. He was confident that the RUC would maintain their discipline but it was likely that they would face even more difficult problems in the period ahead. He mentioned the visit of Minister of State Bermingham in this

connection. I said that I knew that both the Taoiseach and the Minister were very sensitive to this concern and that the visit of Mr. Bermingham which, in the event did not give rise to problems, had arisen from a longstanding commitment to Cushnahan.

I also said that there was a considerable silver lining in the situation in that it was very clear that the image of the RUC in the nationalist community in Northern Ireland and in the South had been transformed for the better, both by their being put in the position of having to stand up to loyalist thuggery and by their doing so. I suggested that this must have considerable benefits in terms of the long-term relationship between the nationalist community and the RUC and even for the atmosphere within which security co-operation is conducted.

Security Co-operation

Jocularly King said he had half wished that the person discovered overnight by the Garda Siochana had been Evelyn Glenhones rather than Jennifer Guinness. He said he hoped that Miss Glenhones would be found soon by the Garda Siochana. I said I was sure they were making every effort.

King said that Hermon had given him an enthusiastic report about progress in the Garda/RUC exchanges. Hermon, despite the considerable difficulties he was facing, continued to back the Agreement.

King said that he saw difficulties in demonstrating in a clear way the advantages of the Agreement from the unionist point of view arising from the improvements that these talks would create in security co-operation and he suggested that it might be necessary to be a bit "inventive" in this regard. (I do not think he was suggesting such stratagems as the artificial "discovery" of weapons, but rather the need to bring out some information about technical co-operation, for example, of a character which might be less important in terms of substance

but which could have some useful impact in terms of presentation.)

King said that of course the most useful public evidence which would help in this regard would be acts rather than words, evidence such as a "good extradition warrant" and/or substantial arms finds in the Republic.

Unionist attitudes to the Agreement

We discussed the problem of getting across to unionists the reality of the Agreement and the fact that much of the propaganda they were getting was misinformed. King said that he felt there was a need on his own side for much better PR about the Agreement by which he meant more "good news" for unionists. He felt it would be very difficult to break down the unionist wilful ignorance or distortion of the Agreement itself for a number of reasons. First, there was, particularly as a result of the IRA campaign in border areas, a bitter feeling among many unionists towards the South. He accepted that this was founded on emotion rather than fact. There was a fear among unionists that the involvement of the South, a foreign and for them somewhat hostile State, in their affairs placed them in an impossible position. Aside from that they wondered why nationalists could not stand up for themselves and not have to rely on the Government of another State. Second, it had been a mistake not to involve the unionists in any consultation before the Agreement was concluded. Third, the Agreement was itself full of ambiguities and difficulties. The use of the phrase "Co-Chairmen" in respect of his own position and the Minister's position in the Conference was seen by unionists as implying joint authority and there are many other examples of this. He had read Peter Smyth's booklet "Why Unionists Say NO" and had found it impressive. (Note: He turned to Andrew and asked him had he read it; Andrew answered "No"). I remarked that I considered Smyth's arguments to be consciously dishonest on several points and that it was important that false unionist propaganda should not be allowed

to make the work of the Conference more difficult. The fourth reason, King believes, why unionists are opposed to the Agreement is that, even though some of them intermittently suspect that there isn't very much substance to the Agreement, they believe that going along with it constitutes a first step towards Irish unity which would in due course be followed by a second and larger step; if they do not resist and reverse this first step they will not be able to stop the process later.

He nevertheless felt that it would be helpful if Ministers on our side made it clear that the Agreement did not constitute a number of things which unionists are suggesting (Joint Authority and "a slippery slope" in particular). He felt that our Ministers in saying this would have considerably more credibility than British Ministers whose denials in this regard were rejected by unionists who in turn were all too eager to believe the claims of Seamus Mallon.

Articles 2 and 3

I had mentioned to King that the circumstances in which the Taoiseach met Bishop Eames involved his consultation of the hierarchies of various religious groups in Ireland on the question of marital breakdown. King said that he was aware of speculation that there would be an early referendum on the provisions of the Constitution in relation to divorce legislation. He said that nothing would be more helpful from his point of view than that a "second question" should be added in relation to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. What he had in mind was the replacement of the "claim" by a statement of "aspiration", as proposed by Deputy O'Malley. He asked me to pass on this suggestion to the Irish Government. He said that before the conclusion of the Agreement the Irish Government had been afraid that our people would reject it on the basis that it "copper-fastened" Partition. In the event the people had reacted most sensibly and positively, "with 70% approving" He went on to suggest that a similar "sensible" response would follow a suggestion for a change in Articles 2 and 3 along the

lines envisaged by Deputy O'Malley. I sought to assert with emphasis that there was no realistic prospect of this happening (although I did of course undertake to convey his views fully). I said that nothing could be worse for our two Governments than that such a referendum be attempted and fail. I said that the holding of such a referendum would divide our State bitterly and divide the SDLP in such a way that the factors which had created nationalist approval of the Agreement (the support of the SDLP and the reaction of the unionists) could not be counted upon to buttress such an attempt. I said that the Taoiseach was on record as saying that he did not believe that Articles 2 and 3, taken together, constitute a "claim" but that nevertheless he accepted that they were a source of irritation to unionists. I said I had no doubt that if he were confident that such a referendum could be successfully undertaken he would not hesitate to do so, but that I saw no prospect of that in the immediate term.

General

I suggested to King that it would be useful if he had informal contact with the Minister by telephone. In response he said that Sir Geoffrey Howe had told him last night that the Minister had told Howe that he had deliberately refrained from comment for a period. He (King) appreciated this very much and asked me to pass on his regards to the Minister. He said in a genial way that the Minister had a particular difficulty with unionists stemming from his assertive support for nationalists in the earlier part of the present Dublin administration. King thought that it would be difficult to get over this. He also felt that this problem might be related to the fact that the Minister in his role as Co-Chairman may be particularly resented by unionists as representing the most intrusive Dublin role under the Agreement. In making these points, King, far from being critical, was expressing a friendly concern.

King said he thought the relations between Dublin and London and between Belfast and Dublin had greatly improved since the

Agreement. The fact that we were able to weather the Glenholmes storm so well (despite, he said, hostile comments by Havers on the Irish courts) showed how much progress had been made.

King, as on earlier occasions, took a bluff, friendly and informal attitude. At the end of our meeting he said he had found it useful and invited me to come back again within the next week or two. He said that he understood that the Irish officials in Maryfield were having an exceedingly difficult time personally but, he said, smiling, "join the club". (Note: This reference clearly arose from the discussion he had last night with his officials about the Mertoun Hall problem on which he has taken a totally negative attitude for political and police reasons. As we were going out, Robert Andrew mentioned this problem to me and said he would like to discuss it further in London on Tuesday next.)

There has been a tendency on the part of those on our side (including the undersigned) to write King off as being a very limited personality both intellectually and politically. This may be true in some respects but from a couple of encounters and from his public performance in recent weeks, I find I am revising my own opinion of him somewhat. While lacking in subtlety, I think I detect a good deal of political shrewdness, some evidence of learning about Northern Ireland, some evidence of application and a certain amount of courage. He is at the same time a bit "prickly" and I have the impression that his officials are intimidated by him.

Meeting in Secretariat

Following the meeting with King I had a brief meeting with Elliott back in Maryfield. In discussing the message that the Secretary of State wished me to convey to Dublin, Elliott interpreted it as meaning that King was not particularly enthusiastic about the notion of the Taoiseach's meeting with Molyneux in present circumstances; King was "marginally

discouraging", although he did see advantage in the evidence of "flexibility" on our side.

I stressed to Elliott my concern about King's reference to "flexibility" on the location of meetings of the Conference during the period when talks were happening or getting under way.

In accordance with the instruction given to me last night by the Minister, I said that the Minister had in mind that a meeting of the Conference might take place in Belfast in the last week of April or the first week of May. Elliott mentioned two considerations. The first was that the meeting of the Conference would have to take place at the minimum after a short interval following the meeting of the quadripartite group on security co-operation, which itself would have to follow the reports by the police officers involved in security co-operation talks to their chief officers. (Note: I understand that such a quadripartite meeting might be envisaged during the week after next which is in fact the week that straddles the end of April and the beginning of May.) The second consideration that King would have in mind would be the unionist march in Portadown on 5 May about which there was considerable concern already and which would create difficulties for the police. Elliott also felt that King would want to see how this morning's letter from Mrs. Thatcher to Molyneaux and Paisley would go before committing himself to a date. I reminded him that the date I was suggesting was in line with the date he and I had envisaged the last time we had looked at this question. He agreed that this was so.

Yours sincerely

M. J. Lillis

M.J. Lillis
Cónarúnaí