



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2016/52/96
Creation Dates:	5 June 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.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

RECEIVED
IRISH SECTION

SECRET

Special by 6/6/86

5 June 1986

RECEIVED
ANGLO-IRISH SECTION

Time 15.30 Date 6/6

DISCUSSION WITH SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG - 5 JUNE 1986

Dear Assistant Secretary,

I had ten to fifteen minutes private discussion with Robert Armstrong tonight at a dinner at which we were both guests. I had the impression that he had been a bit glum recently about the situation in Northern Ireland. But he is now more inclined to look on the bright side and I could perhaps describe his mood as cautiously hopeful. The following are some points of interest which emerged from our discussion.

THE ASSEMBLY

The Cabinet Sub-Committee met today, after the regular Thursday Cabinet meeting and discussed the policy to be adopted in relation to the Northern Ireland Assembly. A final decision was not taken - that will probably come from the full Cabinet next week - but Armstrong was not in doubt that the decision will be to bring it to an end. I asked if the decision depended on something happening or not happening over the next week or so - for example a change in attitude of the Unionist parties? He said that this is not the case - they are heading definitely towards closure and, I understood, it is rather a matter of how it would be presented. For his part, he would like to see the announcement coupled with something to show that the door is not closed against some other future arrangement where people would be able to talk. He did not elaborate on this and I did not press him. He seemed to have in mind the idea, not of any kind of specific proposal, but rather that the Government might include something rather general on these lines in whatever statement is eventually to be made.

INTEGRATION ?

He said that one thing had been very clear to him at today's discussion between Ministers. That was that the Prime Minister has set her mind absolutely firmly against integration as an option. He saw this as very positive. Once it has begun to be more widely understood that integration is out he sees some (longer-term)

*cc: Taggart
Tanner
Minister
Minister for
Justice
Attorney General
Minister of State
Secretary
Mr Dally
Mr Ward
Mr Russell
A-I Section
A-I Secretariat
the Amb. Washington*

* (Armstrong actually said "Minister" but I took this to mean the Sub. Committee)

possibility that minds in Northern Ireland will begin to turn more seriously towards devolution. This need not be incompatible with some better arrangements or channels for the Unionists. I asked if he thought this might include the idea of establishing a "Grand Committee" at Westminster on the lines of the Scottish Grand Committee, but he thought the Government would not want to go that far.

I said that I had been in the Gallery of the House of Commons this afternoon for Northern Ireland Questions and I had noted that Tom King, in one of his answers had said something rather similar - something which seemed in effect to rule out integration while expressing some (limited) willingness to make improved arrangements for Northern Ireland matters at Westminster. (King's reply attached)

(Note: You may recall that I reported recently, that Tony Kenny, the Master of Balliol in briefing me on what emerged at the dinner arranged at Balliol for Millar and Smyth of the OUP, said that the two Unionists thought it would be very helpful to the "devolution group" within the OUP if Mrs. Thatcher were to make a clear statement ruling out integration once and for all. Jim Prior, who was present, was to report this to view to the Prime Minister. It seems to me likely - though Armstrong did not say this explicitly - that King's reply in the House today was, in effect, the answer to the suggestion that had been relayed to Mrs. Thatcher; and that the line King took in his reply was probably agreed between Ministers at the Cabinet Sub-Committee after the Cabinet meeting this morning)

PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION ?

I mentioned to Armstrong, knowing that he will see reports in any case, the disappointment about the results achieved so far under the Agreement which had been expressed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs yesterday in the Dail. He accepted that it might well be the view from our side that there is a slowness about "delivery" under the Agreement, while noting that of course, in face of Unionist opposition, things look rather different from their side. I said (echoing a point for which Michael Lillis told me he had found ready acceptance in a discussion this afternoon with Robert Andrew) that it would be important to "deliver" some things precisely in order to make it clear to the Unionists who are attacking the Agreement that delivery is not going to be held hostage to their continuing opposition. Armstrong fully agreed with this - as Andrew had to Michael Lillis.

THREE JUDGE COURTS

I did not wish to open up a detailed discussion on specific issues where "delivery" is needed but I asked him at this point about the three-judge Court question, which has assumed considerable

r

importance now for us in. What in his view is the real basis for British opposition to the idea - is it a fundamental objection of principle to the whole concept on the part of Hailsham in particular; or is it that they see our pressure for this as the thin end of the wedge in our effort to get mixed courts? Armstrong did not think the objection was really based on a matter of fundamental principle; and, although there was something in my second point (fear of the thin end of the wedge), the problem so far as he could see, is that Hailsham dislikes the whole idea simply because he feels that it would require "too many judges". (Note: I am inclined to doubt that this is really the kernel of the British objection, notwithstanding Armstrong's view).

EXTRADITION TREATY/FUND

I touched on the Extradition Treaty/Fund issues. He acknowledged that there is still a certain irritation here (ie on the part of Mrs. Thatcher) about our attitude on the Treaty - but he did not labour the point. I said that, as no doubt he knew, we felt that even our active support for the Treaty would not ensure its endorsement and that it could, on the other hand, seriously jeopardise two other interests which we, and they, think important (ie the contest for the hearts and minds of Irish America and the new Extradition legislation which we will have to introduce in the Autumn). Armstrong knows and acknowledges our position but, as he put it, people here have set their minds on getting the Treaty through. I asked whether he thinks the amendments proposed by Lugar will be enough to make the difference? He commented that President Reagan has certainly come out strongly on the Treaty recently but said that he does not know enough about the amendments, or about the scene in Washington, to say much about the prospect of getting the new version through.

I said that there seemed to me to be a potential for irritation on both sides at present - if they felt strongly about the Treaty, we felt equally that they have shown a great lack of interest in the Fund and have allowed the impression to grow in Washington that we are more or less on our own in asking for the Fund. He acknowledged this, with regret. I think that he feels that we have been rather let down on the Fund and left to press it ourselves in Washington and that - personally at least - he might be open to the idea of a further joint approach. I did not press this point however.

GENERAL

Towards the close of our discussion, Armstrong again said that he now has a slightly more buoyant attitude to the future prospects for the Agreement. He was aware of the position just taken by the Presbyterian Church (and thought it helpful that they are to have a new Moderator). This led him to feel that there is a "slow turning around" - these are just the kind of people whom we had hoped would come around eventually. In reminiscing a bit about the negotiation, he repeated a point he has made often before - that he has always believed that progress towards a solution of the problem will come

r

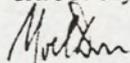
- 4 -

ot through well-known formulae but through a willingness, on our part and on theirs, to evolve approaches which may not have any precedents elsewhere.

HIS OWN FUTURE ?

Finally I might add, on a more personal - and confidential - note, that in talking about his own future - he reaches retirement age next year - Armstrong told me, when I regretted the prospect of his departure, that no date has yet been set. It would probably depend on political developments. (I understood this to mean that Mrs. Thatcher may want him to remain on until the next General Election). He said he feels torn between the fascination of his present post and an understandable wish to get on with other things which lie ahead (he is of course likely to take up some prominent business appointments in due course as his predecessor did)

Yours sincerely,



Noel Dorr (Ambassador)

Eamonn O Tuathail,
Assistant Secretary,
Department of Foreign Affairs.