



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2017/4/135
<b>Creation Dates:</b>	2 April 1987
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	4 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
<b>Accession Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

3/1

SECRETPSS  
A1 Section  
Box

2 April 1987

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

Dear Eamonn

I had lunch today with Ken Bloomfield, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Bloomfield is the Second Permanent Secretary of the NIO and is the institutional interface between the NIO structure and the Northern Ireland Departments. He has a position in Whitehall, where he attends meetings of Permanent Secretaries, and in Stormont, where he chairs weekly meetings of the Permanent Secretaries of the Northern Ireland Departments. Our meeting was part of a regular series and on this occasion was at his invitation.

The Political situation

Bloomfield is very much a "political official" and maintains close contacts with several prominent official unionists. He does not conceal his own unionist background or his concern for the unionist community.

He is worried at the confusion in unionist thinking and particularly at the absence of any potential leader who might take a positive view if a "window of opportunity" were to open e.g. later this year in the aftermath of a British election, when unionists would have to face the then proven reality that they could no longer hope for a lucky conjuncture of British political circumstances to rescue them from the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He thinks that Molyneaux's position is very weak; he feels that Martin Smyth would replace him if he loses the leadership: that would be "even worse" than the present situation. He thinks that McCartney, for whom he had had some hopes, has become "deranged" in his pursuit of integration. He has some hopes for Frank Millar and Peter Smith, both "sound men" but not well placed.

He wondered what the attitude of the new administration in Dublin would be to devolution and emphasised that both Governments were committed to it under Article 4(a) of the Agreement.

He thinks that unionists could be brought back into the system only if some move were made in their direction which their leaders could represent as a "concession". He thinks that this could take the form of getting the leadership of the minority in Northern Ireland to represent the concerns of their people on the widest possible range of devolved powers, rather than have those views on internal Northern Ireland matters put forward by the Irish Government.

He mentioned a number of technical problems about devolution on a wide basis e.g. the impossibility of devolving powers in relation to the armed forces (including the UDR) as well as the fact that the Government's functions in relation to the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights were "exempted" to Westminster permanently under the 1973 Constitution Act.

In what I thought was intended to be a "message", he argued that it might suit the present Irish Government to see developments which would reduce the role of the Conference to North/South matters, while at the same time diminishing the political "presence" of the British through the replacement for all practical purposes of direct rule by devolution and through arrangements for the conduct of North/South co-operation to be pursued directly between "Irishmen" viz. members of a Northern executive and the Irish Government. (He said that he had himself drafted the provisions in the Annexes to the 1973 Act which provided for a Northern Ireland Executive to deal with the Republic almost as a "sovereign power" on all devolved matters.)

I said that our Ministers had not yet had an opportunity to focus on many immediate matters in the Conference, let alone these longer-term concerns: they had been in office a very short time indeed and had been almost exclusively preoccupied with an extremely difficult budget.

I got the impression that Bloomfield did not really believe that it was likely that devolution would be a realistic option in the near future, largely because of his own dismay at the absence of any prospect of realistic leadership on the unionist side. He made the point repeatedly, however, that the present situation of politics in the North, with unionist MPs not attending Westminster and local councils not meeting, was "so miserable" that no Government could contemplate its continuing indefinitely.

On the nationalist side, Bloomfield said that Ministers hoped that Sinn Fein would give ground to the SDLP in the forthcoming British election but that they regarded Hendron as a weak candidate. I said Stormont should act to help Hendron by giving him and us early and useful decisions in the economic development of West Belfast. He said he understood and noted this; he said that the main development in Belfast would be in

the relatively "neutral" City centre area and that Hendron should welcome that as providing job opportunities for his constituents. Bloomfield said that he hoped that the Alliance would not stand in West Belfast although they would be tempted to do so. (Note: I got the impression that he had done something about this.)

In this context Bloomfield raised the issue of discrimination in employment and specifically the McBride Principles. He said it would be very difficult if the new Government went in a direction opposite to the British Government "and John Hume" in the U.S. I said the outgoing Government had always said that there was no objection in principle to the Principles and, while I did not know what the new Government would decide, it was already clear that the area of discrimination was a vital concern. Bloomfield said that he was extremely worried; if the decision by Ford were followed up it could lead to a collapse of existing U.S. investment in Northern Ireland; it would be very serious were the Irish Government to be associated with this. I said the Government would be very interested in real economic decisions which would quickly benefit unemployed Catholics on the ground. He took this point.

#### Minority Appointments to the Senior Civil Service

I said to him that there would be some concern about the fact that, on the retirement of Morris Hayes, the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services in July, there would be no Catholic Permanent Secretary in the Northern Ireland Departments. I said I had no instructions in this matter but that I assumed he would be concerned about the public impact of this. He said that he would be very frank on a personal and confidential basis with me on this matter. Along with the six Permanent Secretaries in the Northern Ireland Departments he chaired a panel to interview all officials for appointment as Assistant Secretary (Principal in our system), Under Secretary (Assistant Secretary in our system) and Departmental Secretary. While he would never appoint anyone on the basis of his religious beliefs, he was extremely anxious to see members of the minority filling senior positions in the Civil Service. He said he was very encouraged at the rate of recruitment to the administrative career structure of the Service through the rank of administrative trainee (honours graduates). The position of Catholics had shown solid progress and was now well represented at the level of Principal. There were several promising young Catholics at the level of Assistant Secretary and there were two at the level of Under Secretary who he now believed would be serious candidates for consideration for promotion to Departmental Secretary to the other three vacancies that would arise over the next 4 years (the Departments of Environment, Agriculture and Education). He himself would continue in his position until 1991 and hoped that there would be at least one, if not two, Catholic Permanent Secretaries by then. Bloomfield remarked that Dr. McKenna, the Chief Medical Officer in the

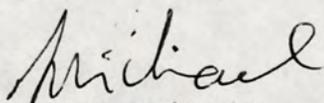
Department of Health and Social Services, who would continue in his position for sometime, and held the rank and pay of a Permanent Secretary, was a Catholic.

On the role of the Civil Service generally, Bloomfield said that the position was very unusual under direct rule. He and "my" six Permanent Secretaries met every week to discuss all major issues in the Administration. This lent an unusual coherence to policy-making. He said that he would bet that no such arrangement existed in Dublin as it did not in London. (Note: it has been our general experience in Belfast that the Civil Service is powerfully influential in decision-making.)

#### Travellers Duty Free Allowances

Bloomfield raised this matter with me informally and said that it was at odds with the impression officials had formed i.e. that the promotion of North/South economic co-operation would be a priority with our new administration. I said that I understood that such cooperation would be a priority and that the budgetary decision was in response only to an intolerable situation which had arisen against an extremely difficult economic background. He said that he understood the reasons for the decision and was merely drawing attention to what might be seen as a contradiction.

Yours sincerely



M.J. Lillis  
Joint Secretary