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16 June 1987



*Mr. Nally  
Secretary of A  
Mr. Mathews  
Counsellors A-1.  
Box  
A/S O Tuathail.*

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

Dear Eamon

A word on the post-election situation as seen from the "Bunker".

Scott/Stanley

Scott's departure is bad news from a nationalist point of view. He was committed to the Agreement, unperturbed by unionist opposition and genuinely sympathetic to constitutional nationalism. He was highly accessible and a regular dinner guest in this building. On several occasions he moved policy concerns at our instigation within Stormont, with Tom King and, more importantly, in public. He was also vital in Tom King's first year in office in calming down the Secretary of State and in keeping him committed to implementing "our side" of the Agreement.

Stanley will not arrive here for another week but the assessment of him in the British press (see in particular clip from today's Guardian attached) is worrying. I have little doubt that (a) the removal of Scott and (b) his replacement by Stanley were each intended to be seen by unionists as "confidence building measures". He was not King's choice: King has returned to London today, partly to meet Stanley whom he scarcely knows.

Aside from King himself, the other surviving Ministers do not add up to a very positive force from our point of view on their

performance so far. Lord Lyell (Agriculture) and Viggers (Industry) have hitherto stayed away from the "politics" of Northern Ireland. We have developed a good relationship here with both Needham (Environment) and Mawhinney (Education and spokesman for the NIO). Both have immediate local unionist backgrounds.

Needham is a genuinely clever man, although often felt to be too much in love with his own undoubted gifts for mimicry and wit: his relations with Scott were those of rivals and it was partly in consequence that he took a unionist stance; nevertheless he eventually responded to sustained pressure on issues like Navan Fort and Divis Flats and he can, I believe, be got to move on other matters such as bilingual street names; his current enthusiasm is for the redevelopment of Belfast and this takes on increased importance in view of the undiminished voter support for Sinn Fein in West Belfast in the recent election.

Mawhinney is ambitious and deeply interested in playing a political role in breaking the current logjam. He claims to have drafted Prior's "rolling devolution" legislation of 1981/82 and nourishes a vein of resentment towards the SDLP (Hume in particular) for their failure to go along with that unfortunate initiative. He retains informal links with the unionist politicians despite the current boycott and will undoubtedly be an active agent in working to end this in the weeks ahead. Paradoxically, Mawhinney has, under the pressure of sustained public abuse from loyalists and because of his responsibilities as a spokesman, come to see merit in the Agreement. Like Stanley, he is deeply religious but, unlike Stanley, he takes an occasional glass of wine.

On a somewhat more optimistic note, I would argue that the reappointment of King outweighs in itself the disadvantages which the surviving team and the so far unappetising Stanley may involve. King began here appallingly badly and had difficulty in containing a sense of outrage at the "betrayal" of unionists. He has moved a considerable distance, particularly

in the last six months, and has also become something of his own man vis-a-vis the Stormont machine, the police and the Army. In Cabinet (where I sense that his voice is heard with only perfunctory respect) he argued, with Howe and Hurd, for 3-judge courts. He is well disposed to the Irish Government and particularly to his Co-Chairman. Again, partly under the impress of loyalist carry-on, he has come to reassess fundamentally his earlier assumptions about unionist grievances. In my own experience he is, by contrast with the more complicated Hurd and Prior, a fairly straightforward, "decent" man.

My own net assessment would be, therefore, that we should not take Scott's departure too tragically.

#### Unionist return to Westminster

The degree of support that the Agreement has in Britain is of course fundamentally based on the continuing commitment of the Prime Minister and the support of the Opposition. This was also in the past 18 months reinforced by a number of negative factors which are probably just about to disappear. First, there was a strong sense of resentment at the nature of violent unionist opposition to the Agreement, as portrayed regularly on television (attacks on the police, on British Ministers, on Maryfield and on the Catholic community) and, second, there was a deep sense of resentment at the departure of loyalist politicians (of all people) from the House of Commons.

It is now probable that these negative factors will be replaced by new and "positive" perceptions of unionists in Britain and especially at Westminster. The nature of loyalist protests is likely to be less fierce on the streets (although this cannot be guaranteed over the coming months, especially given Paisley's opposition to the new Public Order legislation). I imagine that the actual return of unionist M.P.s to the chamber of the House of Commons will be greeted by a warm surge of British sentimental effusiveness and possibly something like a standing

ovation. This will incline Westminster, and particularly many Tories, to look quite benignly on any "positive alternative" to the Agreement which might emerge from the unionist Task Force.

I am trying to bring out the fact that we now face into a new situation and one where the pro-union (if not pro-unionist) sympathies of the British Prime Minister and many senior Tories will be easier to engage than was the case when loyalists were burning the police out of their houses and unionist M.P.s were refusing to attend the House of Commons.

#### Immediate British response

I believe that there will in the next week or two be efforts made here by Ministers, civil servants and a number of intermediaries (notably Eames) to find formulae which would offer serious hope to the unionist camp. It goes without saying that such formulae would, if they were to succeed with unionists, tend to upset nationalists.

Under the Agreement we have a right to be involved in any moves that would affect the interests of nationalists in this area and I have been reminding people here of this in recent days:

"The Conference shall be a framework within which the Irish Government may put forward views and proposals on the modalities of bringing about devolution in Northern Ireland, in so far as they relate to the interests of the minority community". (Article 5(c))

I have asked that we be kept fully informed about any feelers that are put out by the Government and any ideas that they may have which would be intended to start a public dialogue with the unionists, leading to dialogue between the parties here.

So far, I have been told that the intention is, in the first instance, to create conditions for dialogue between British Ministers (including the Prime Minister) and the unionists as

soon as possible. King is sensitive here to the possible effects on the atmosphere in the North of a possible meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister. He does not expect anything substantial to happen between the Government and the unionist leadership for about two weeks.

It is likely that Stormont will work for some sort of joint statement with Paisley and Molyneux as was attempted earlier. I have little doubt that any such statement would raise hopes for some sort of "devolution" to develop. I have been told that nothing has yet been drafted in Stormont and I have been assured by my opposite number, speaking specifically on King's instructions, that we will be consulted.

The second stage that is hoped for is some sort of dialogue between the political parties. Full-scale devolution is not seen as a likely "starter" in the short-term, but I have been told that Bloomfield's idea of a consultative assembly is receiving serious consideration.

#### Comment

For what it is worth, my own view is and has been that efforts in the direction of devolution at this stage are a waste of time and could, moreover, be damaging to the Northern nationalist interest. Should it be decided that a form of devolution would be a useful development, I feel that, even to secure that objective, it would be wise to defer serious efforts until unionists have come much further towards accepting the need for a change of heart on their side.

Meanwhile, I am concerned that our Ministers should take on board the fact that British Ministers see a new situation and a new opportunity emerging. I personally feel that in such a new situation with its own fresh agenda, our Ministers might wish to consider whether we would wish to influence that agenda in any way or even to seek to take an initiative ourselves. I say this because I would be concerned that, if we held back

completely from the new situation, refraining from using the mechanisms provided by the Agreement for having our own say, the situation could possibly begin to drift away from control or influence by nationalists.

I recognise of course that the SDLP are unlikely to be inactive, particularly with their new strength at Westminster. Even so I would be concerned lest the emotional response to the return of unionists to the House of Commons with a suspected positive alternative agenda of their own, might outweigh the SDLP's influence, especially if there were a "wait and see" silence in public and in private from the Irish Government.

Yours sincerely

*Michael Lillis*  
M.J. Lillis  
Joint Secretary