



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2017/10/18
Creation Dates:	18 May 1987
Extent and medium:	5 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.

Meeting between Tánaiste and relatives of Birmingham Six,
Guildford Four and Maguire Seven
(Iveagh House, 18 May 1987)

copy of
PH
20574
226
18805

818805

The delegation consisted of the following:

Mr. Patrick McIlkenny (brother of Richard McIlkenny)
Mr. William Hunter (brother of Robert Hunter)
Mrs. J. McKernan (daughter of Guiseppe Conlon and sister of
Gerard Conlon)
Mrs. Armstrong (mother of Patrick Armstrong)
Mr. Hugh McCaffrey (brother-in-law of Annie Maguire)
Ms Nuala Kelly (Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas)

1. Mr. McIlkenny and Mr. Hunter had an initial meeting with the Tánaiste to discuss the case of the Birmingham Six. They said that they had formed a Relatives Action Group in Belfast linking all three cases and that Nuala Kelly of the ICPO was acting as their spokesperson. They were concerned that the Appeal hearing was not to take place until 2 November. It was essential that no further postponement should occur. The prisoners would have already waited two years by that stage from the start of the present investigation and it would be intolerable if further delays were to be imposed. Mr. McIlkenny asked that a representative of the Irish Government should be in attendance during the Appeal and said that representatives from the US Congress, the Vatican and several Members of Parliament had already committed themselves to be present. He said also that the Extradition Act should be used to put pressure on the British.
2. In response, the Tánaiste expressed his confidence that the Appeal would be successful and promised that he would have

a top-ranking official in attendance. He said it was important to bring maximum focus on the Appeal hearing and he would help to ensure that it attracted world-wide attention. He felt that this would also be of assistance to the Guildford Four and the Maguires who would be seen as coming within the same context. Mr. O Tuathail said that it was necessary to concentrate on the issue of British justice and that support should be sought from British public opinion. In the meantime approaches would continue to be made by the Tánaiste to the British Home Secretary.

3. Mr. Hunter said that all six prisoners were in good spirits but that they were anxious that the Hearing should not be delayed beyond 2 November. He said that three of them had now been transferred from Long Lartin to prisons in London which were more convenient for visits from their families. He asked that financial assistance should be provided by the Irish Government for family relatives travelling to visit the prisoners and to attend the Appeal hearing. The Tánaiste replied that this was a matter for the Department of Social Welfare but thought that the Dion Committee which was located in London should be able to provide some funds for this purpose.

4. Mr. McIlkenny said that the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste should put political pressure on the British - for instance by delaying the implementation of the Extradition Act - to ensure that justice was done and that no further delays occurred. The Tánaiste replied that while the Extradition Act would, of course, be in the background there could be no direct linkage with the case.

5. Mr. Hunter said that he was concerned that the judge who convicted the Guildford Four and the Maguires (Sir John Donaldson) was now Master of the Rolls and was thereby

involved in the appointment of judges to the Court of Appeal. He feared consequently that the judges hearing the appeal of the Birmingham Six might be prejudiced and he was aware that 9 out of 10 appeal hearings were rejected in the normal course of events.

6. A separate meeting was then held with the three relatives representing the Guildford Four and the Maguire family. The Tánaiste said that these cases could not just be swept under the carpet but should be put on the same basis as that of the Birmingham Six and should be referred to the Court of Appeal. He had already written to the British Home Secretary to make this point. He felt that if the Birmingham Six were proved to be innocent, there would be a knock-on effect for the other two cases. The British authorities could not be selective between the cases.

7. Mr. McCaffrey said that although the Maguires had now been released on completion of their sentence, they were still in prison mentally and were as anxious as ever to have their names cleared. He was appreciative of the stance taken by the Irish Government and felt that RTE had done a very good job last year in exposing the case. The Maguires had been convicted solely on forensic evidence and the law had since been changed to ensure that convictions could not be made without corroborating evidence. It was clear therefore that - by present standards - the Maguires had been wrongfully convicted. In any event, the TLC tests showing traces of explosives had been performed by a young technician (although supposedly under supervision); there were no photos of the tests and in effect they provided insufficient proof.

8. Mrs. McKernan handed over letters to the Tánaiste from her mother and from Gerard Conlon in Long Lartin prison

requesting the Government to take action and to "go public" on the case. Mr. Holohan said that in this case the most important action to be taken in the short term was that a legally certified copy of the statement of evidence by Mrs. Yvonne Fox should be sent to the Home Office for consideration; he understood that this had not yet been done.

9. A final session was held involving all the relatives as well as Ms. Nuala Kelly of the ICPO. Ms. Kelly said that Bishop Casey or one of the other bishops from the Episcopal Commission on Emigrants would like to meet the Tánaiste in the near future to discuss aid in general for prisoners' relatives. She also said that Fr. Spring was due to meet the Dion Committee in London with regard to his request for financial assistance in connection with his welfare work for prisoners. With regard to the Birmingham Six and other cases, she said that the ICPO had been very pleased with statements which the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste had made in the past (e.g. at the Mansion House meeting) before forming the present Government. She wanted to know whether the Extradition Act or some other issue could not now be used to pressurise the British Government to resolve the cases in question.

10. The Tánaiste said that the Extradition Act and the prisoners' cases were separate issues although politically he knew what she meant. For public comments, however, he would have to keep the two matters separate. He promised that he would continue to press the British to admit that grievous wrongs had occurred and would ask them to ensure adherence to the 2 November date for the Birmingham Six Appeal hearing. He said that when the British public understood that a gross miscarriage of justice had taken place, the British courts would not wish to see the truth suppressed. For this reason it was most important to convince British public opinion.

11. Ms. Kelly also raised the question of financial assistance for visiting relatives. She understood that the matter was being looked at but the present cases were of a very special nature and should be dealt with separately. Mr. O Tuathail suggested that it would be better to wait until after Fr. Spring had had his meeting with the Dion Committee and see what arrangements could be made through that channel. Ms. Kelly noted that Fr. Spring's term of duty in London would soon come to an end but that he would be replaced.

MA

N. Holohan,
Anglo-Irish Section,
20 May, 1987.

c.c. PSM
PSS
Charge, London
A-I Section

2335P