



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

14 January 1987



S20876

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

cc Secretary
A-I Section
A-I Secretariat
Amb. London
Box

24404
20876

Dear Assistant Secretary

I was present last evening at a dinner in Ronnie Spence's house. You will recall that Spence, who is an Under Secretary, is number two to Bloomfield in the Central Secretariat in Belfast. Another present was the Secretary of the Police Authority, Cliff Radcliff, who is also an Under Secretary in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The occasion was largely a social one but a number of general points were made which may be of interest.

All of those present were extremely critical of the unionist leadership. They could see no circumstances in which Paisley would agree to compromise his hardline position. Molyneaux they dismissed as someone in Paisley's pocket. It was stressed that the public perception that unionists had been excluded from the negotiations which led to the Agreement, while Hume had been fully au fait with them, had created a difficult situation. As a consequence there can be no movement on the unionist side until the Agreement is changed in some significant way. While I assured them that some at least of the unionist leadership were not as ignorant of the negotiations as the public might think, they continued to stress that what is important is the public perception in the unionist community that they and their leaders were kept in the dark.

They said that it is now a fairly commonly held view amongst moderate unionists that the Agreement would not have happened had the unionist parties being more generous to constitutional nationalists in the past. This realisation underlies the greater willingness on the part of some unionists to contemplate power sharing and to recognise the legitimacy of the nationalist aspiration. They cannot, however, see this view being reflected in concrete proposals whilst the Agreement remains as it is, while the Government of the Republic has a say in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Nor do they see any possibility of movement on the unionist side until the Irish and British General Elections are over. They dismissed McCartney's campaign for Equal Citizenship, as something which is fading away and will disappear rapidly. In their view the real unionist concern is power in Northern Ireland.

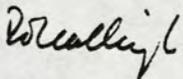
There was some discussion about the unionist campaign at the door step for signatures on the petition to the Queen. I would judge that all of those present were Alliance types. They all expressed some personal worry on this issue. Some said that if asked at their door they would sign the petition, even though they disagree with it, because of a fear of what might happen were they to refuse to sign. A wife said that she intended to tell anybody who called to her door step that she was considering whether she would or would not sign and if she decided to sign she would do so at the town hall next Saturday. Though it remained unstated, what was uppermost in people's minds was the possibility of intimidation if they didn't sign. It was also feared that unionists were making use of the electoral register in their door to door canvass.

Spence said that the visit by Mrs. Thatcher to Northern Ireland before Christmas had been a "disaster". The visit had been organised by the Northern Ireland Office and not by the Central Secretariat, which usually organises important visits, including Royal visits. Interestingly Spence said that this was done because of the greater need for security for the Thatcher

visit. A reception had been put together at Hillsborough for Mrs. Thatcher which consisted mainly of moderate unionists, of people the Government hoped could be brought to support the Agreement. Spence said that Thatcher showed absolute inflexibility and insensitivity with regard to any change in the Agreement when speaking to those people. She said that all she cared about was British soldiers being killed in Northern Ireland and their bodies being returned to Britain. One particular man to whom she said this has two sons in the UDR, one of whom has been wounded, turned on his heels when she finished and walked away. This was given as a typical example of her insensitivity. They speculated that her lack of appreciation for the unionist dilemma may have been partially due to the leaking of her itinerary by Paisley which has done damage not only to the DUP but to the unionist cause in general.

There was great appreciation of the Minister's call for nationalists to join the RUC. The Secretary to the Police Authority said that it had had a very good effect both on the Police Authority and on the police. He said that some were wondering why the Minister had expressed a view in public significantly different to that of Seamus Mallon and of Cardinal O Fiaich. He himself wondered whether the Minister had spoken with Mallon prior to making the statement. He clearly implied that he believed that the policies which we put to Government here are more or less invariably SDLP inspired and I took the opportunity to indicate that the policies of the SDLP and of the Irish Government are not always the same.

Yours sincerely



Daithi O Ceallaigh