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Telephone Conversation between the Tanaiste and Mr. King

The conversation occurred between 4.15 and 4.30 pm a bit later than arranged because Mr King had been detained at a meeting with the Prime Minister (we did not know if his remarks had been discussed). By the time the conversation began, it had become clear from NIO briefing to the media that Mr King was drawing back from his remarks and was seeking to limit the damage. The atmosphere was, therefore, friendly enough. The following is based on what the Tanaiste said and on his briefing to myself and Mr. Lillis of Mr. King's side of the conversation.

King's remarks on BBC Radio

The Tanaiste began sympathetically (was Mr. King a bit bruised by the reaction to his remarks?) but went on to say that unfortunately the impression had been given that the Secretariat was in suspension or had been put aside. This had been very damaging politically down here. Mr. King said that he had given an interview to RTE in which he had accepted what the Tanaiste had said in his statement that morning. He had put it right. The Tanaiste said that if Mr. King had cleared it up on RTE, that was fine. Mr. King told the Tanaiste, however, that there were some differences of emphasis between them. (Note: This remark caused the Tanaiste some worry, but as of 5 p.m., no differences were being highlighted by RTE, rather they were saying that Mr. King agreed with the Tanaiste's view. This was also Embassy London's impression from conversation with the RTE interviewer, Mike Burns). In response to a point by Mr. King that his remarks had occurred in the context of a considerable gap having opened up between conferences, the Tanaiste said that the postponement of the conference scheduled for Wednesday had been for practical reasons, because it was not suitable to have a conference when an election was on, but that the whole work of the Agreement was going ahead. He said to Mr King that he would not get unionists around the table until after the British election,

let alone the Irish election. In a friendly way, the Tanaiste asked that for the duration of the election campaign, Mr. King should be careful about what he was saying. He promised to do likewise when the British election campaign occurred!

Incursion incident

A separate note has been done on this part of the conversation.

Code of Conduct

The Tanaiste said he wanted to raise the ever contentious and embarrassing Code of Conduct. He had spoken about it at every regular meeting of the Conference and the Taoiseach had spoken to the Prime Minister. Mr. King referred to the business of the disciplinary charges against Alan Wright of the Police Federation (as a complicating factor?). Mr. King said that he had spoken to the person responsible (Hermon) in recent days and had got him in the right frame of mind (Mr. King appeared to be saying that the Chief Constable had previously been reluctant to proceed). The Code would be dealt with urgently and would be published as soon as possible. No estimate of timing was mentioned.

(Note : We understand that the Code has gone through the consultation process with the police associations and has been submitted formally to the Police Authority. Given Hermon's complete influence over the Authority and the fact that he has already involved some of its members informally in a police study of the Code, there should be little further delay if Mr King has indeed got Hermon in "the right frame of mind".)



Declan O'Donovan

22 January 1987

cc: Taoiseach  
Tanaiste  
Minister for Justice  
Attorney General  
Secretary

Mr Nally  
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