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Reference Code:	2017/10/82
Creation Dates:	29 July 1987
Extent and medium:	4 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
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Meeting with Archbishop Eames,
29 July, 1987

I met Archbishop Robin Eames, the Church of Ireland Primate and Archbishop of Armagh, in Dublin yesterday.

He passed the following information to me in the strictest confidence.

Talks about talks

To date there has been only one meeting between the Unionists and the NIO, namely the London meeting on 14 July. However, a further meeting has been scheduled for mid-August. Molyneaux and Paisley (back from his holiday) will attend on the Unionist side but the NIO will be represented by Bloomfield only.

Eames had an hour-long meeting with the Secretary of State last week at which Sir Kenneth Bloomfield was evidently also present. During this conversation, King took an extremely cautious view of the 'talks about talks' and expressed considerable doubts about the Unionist leaders' capacity to deliver. He recalled "bitterly" the volte-face performed by Paisley and Molyneaux after their meeting with Mrs. Thatcher in March 1986 and suggested that not enough had changed on the Unionist side to prevent the same thing happening again. In Eames' view, the March 1986 experience has had a lasting effect on King and his advisers. His strong impression is that they are simply "going through the motions" with the Unionist leaders and, while they would undoubtedly like the talks to succeed, do not really believe that they will. They expect that, at some stage, Molyneaux and Paisley will break off the talks, announcing to Bloomfield that they see no point in continuing them in view of the British Government's refusal to scrap the Agreement (or for some other reason).

Eames' own initiative

Eames' plan for a meeting of the four party leaders in London in mid-August under his own auspices remains on course. Nothing has happened as yet which might call this into question. He discussed his plan with King and Bloomfield last week and the reaction was very favourable. Bloomfield said he was "intrigued" by the idea and wished Eames every success with it.

As far as Hume and Cushnahan are concerned, Eames is assuming, in the light of their previous acceptance in principle which neither has yet withdrawn, that they will attend. He is not aware of any fundamental change in the political circumstances which might cause Hume to rethink his position.

The problem, he admitted frankly, is Molyneaux. He suspects that Enoch Powell, who continues to exert a considerable influence on the OUP leader, is out to "torpedo" his initiative. Eames was particularly critical of Powell, describing him as "one of the most arrogant men I've ever met" and specifying a few incidents in this regard. Powell travelled specially to Armagh last week to ask the Archbishop, in effect, to shelve his plan. A convinced integrationist, he made it clear to Eames that he would be unhappy with any step, however slight, which might be taken in the direction of devolution. He indicated that he was aware of the "political moves" in which Eames was currently engaged. (Eames responded disingenuously that he did not know what Powell was talking about). Powell, Eames told me, has taken to describing the Archbishop to Molyneaux as someone who is "too much in Dublin's pocket" and virtually an "Ambassador for the Irish Republic". The Archbishop made it clear to Powell, however, that he believes in devolution and wants to see the party leaders talking with that end in sight.

Eames is to see Molyneaux tomorrow (Friday). He suspects that Powell will have "gone to work" on him in the meantime and that the OUP leader may well decide to back out of the London meeting. Powell may well argue to Molyneaux that, with the Unionist MPs and Hume back at Westminster together, there will be ample opportunity for informal contacts to be arranged there from time to time. Trading on his own long-standing friendship with Molyneaux, the first point Eames will put to him is: "Are you going to listen to me or to Powell?" He will point to the efforts he himself has been making "for months past" to get talks going between the parties. As a last resort ("a card which I will use if necessary"), he will threaten to go public on the Unionist leaders' refusal to attend his meeting (by discreetly leaking word of it to media contacts).

If Molyneaux pulls out regardless, Eames' fall-back position is that he will wait for a few months until the (more or less inevitable) point is reached when the Unionist leaders break off their dialogue with the NIO. His thinking is that, at that point, his own plan may become attractive to them again because they will need some way of restoring their credibility as politicians. He speculated that, under these circumstances, a meeting "around November" might be a possibility.

Possible call on the Taoiseach

I had earlier in the week conveyed to the Archbishop the Taoiseach's response to his request for a meeting. The Archbishop was very happy with this but made no further reference to the matter yesterday. I sensed that he did not wish to propose a specific date for a meeting with the Taoiseach unless and until he got the definitive go-ahead from Molyneaux and Hume in relation to his London initiative.

Task Force Report

Finally, Eames said that he has heard that the Report has "reached a dead end in Glengall Street" (i.e., that it has not

been discussed further, at least at an official level, within the OUP). He understands that its authors are quite irritated by this. He has in mind establishing contact with Frank Millar again once his London initiative is out of the way (as he does not wish to prejudice the chances of Molyneaux participating by a contact with Millar at this stage).

David Donoghue

David Donoghue,
30 July, 1987.

cc PSM
PSS
Mr O Tuathail
Comptroller
Ambassador London.

Mr Nalley
Mr Lillis.

Dv

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