



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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(Indexed)



AN ROINN GNÓTHAI EACHTRACHA  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2  
DUBLIN 2

29 September, 1987.

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Brian Collinge,  
Department of the Taoiseach,  
Government Buildings,  
Dublin 2.

Dear Brian,

We spoke this morning about the courtesy call which the new Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, Dr. William Fleming, will be paying on the Taoiseach on Thursday next.

While the conversation is likely to be of a general nature, given that the call is a courtesy one, I thought it might be useful to include a note covering current topics such as the Agreement itself, the Extradition question and Border Security. I also took the liberty of suggesting (Para. 4) that the Taoiseach might wish (a) to refer to the possibility of renewing links with Unionist politicians and (b) to say that, through officials, he would wish regular contact to be maintained with Dr. Fleming.

Yours sincerely,

Dermot Gallagher,  
Assistant Secretary.

Courtesy call on the Taoiseach by the new Moderator  
of the Presbyterian Church, Dr. William Fleming

1. A short curriculum vitae and background note on the views held by Dr. Fleming are attached. He was born in Bailieboro, Co. Cavan, but seems to have spent his entire ministry in Northern Ireland.
2. Contacts in Northern Ireland say that, while Dr. Fleming is personally very pleasant, he holds quite hard-line views. He, for instance, seems to be opposed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. At the same time, he believes that the Unionists were unwise to have opted out of local government and he would maintain strongly that their protest against the Agreement should be peaceful and exclusively within the law. He also feels strongly about extradition and, given the timing of his visit, he might well raise this with the Taoiseach. Finally, while being in favour of good personal relations between Protestants and Catholics, he is opposed to the ecumenical movement as he believes it is a source of confusion and of concealment of the truth. When he became Moderator, he indicated that he did not intend to accept invitations to attend Mass.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

3. The Taoiseach might wish to make the point that Unionists should by now have seen that the Agreement was essentially about ending the sense of exclusion of nationalists, and in having their rights and identity fully recognised; it was not directed at undermining the rights and the position of the Unionist community. As such, it was difficult to understand why Unionist politicians seemed determined to continue to oppose the Agreement. Effective politics was

all about being part of the process and not in staying out in the wilderness. At the end of the day, we all had to share this small island and work out a political way forward.

4. The Taoiseach might wish to say that his Government had had valuable contacts with Unionist politicians in the past and, now that they were back in office, they would wish to re-establish these. Unionist politicians could be assured that their views would be listened to with the greatest possible respect and interest. The Taoiseach could add that he would ask some senior officials to stay in touch with Dr. Fleming and, if he had any thoughts or guidance on the above, we would warmly welcome them.

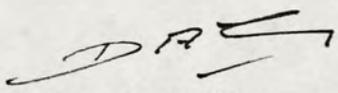
#### Extradition

5. The extradition issue was more symbolic than real as the courts here were already extraditing for what had been in the past considered political offences. In general, the point might be made that we had no difficulty with subversive activities here as could be seen from the close cooperation between the two police forces, from the operation of the Special Criminal Court and indeed, from the fact that we could already try people in the South for offences committed in Northern Ireland. However, extradition in every country was a sensitive issue. The overwhelming majority of European countries, including all the Scandanavian countries, had entered significant reservations to the Convention in question. Indeed, the sensitivity of extradition in Britain was very evident from the recent Heysel extradition case.

6. The reality in our own case was that, both in the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the accompanying Communique, a clear linkage had been made between extradition and reforms in Northern Ireland, in particular in the area of the administration of justice. While the Government had taken no decision on the Act, this was a reality they could not ignore.
  
7. If the Moderator - and it seems unlikely that he will go into much detail at what, after all, is a courtesy call - should argue that the Diplock courts are a fair system, the point could be made that they are not perceived to be so by a substantial minority in Northern Ireland. In a divided society, perception was often of the most crucial importance. There is no doubt that a change in the system would be a considerable confidence boosting measure. At the end of the day, it could be argued also that there was no adequate substitute for the absence of a jury other than the provision of an adequate number of judges in the court of first instance.

#### Border Security

8. If this issue is raised, the Taoiseach might wish to make the point that, while no one can ever afford to be complacent about security matters, the fact was that the increased number of killings in Northern Ireland this year was due to murders and sectarian assassinations in the Belfast area, the INLA feud and the killing of Republican paramilitaries by the security forces. There have in fact been only two members of the security forces killed in the border area (i.e. within a ten mile radius of the border) compared with thirteen for the same period of last year.

  
29 September, 1987.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Reverend William Fleming

Place of Birth: Bailieboro, Co. Cavan

Address: 91 Doagh Road,  
Newtownabbey,  
BT37 9QN.

Education: B.A. Trinity College, Dublin (1949)

Studied for ministry at Assembly's  
College, Belfast.

Appointments: Appointed as minister,  
Aghohill, Co. Antrim, 1956. Moved to  
Newtownabbey near Belfast in 1969 where  
he is still pastor.

Public Involvement: Chairman of the Campaign of Concerted  
Witness to Reformed Truth

Prominent in the successful campaign of  
the withdrawal of the Irish Presbyterian  
Church from the World Council of Churches

Views Held:

Anglo-Irish Agreement and Devolution

Rev. Fleming said that it was desirable that politicians in the North should play an active part in a local government but by doing so it should not be inferred that they no longer opposed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Church's position, he said, was that protest was legitimate but should be peaceful and within the law. He has pointed out that the Presbyterian Church was not really involved in the process of drawing up political structures. His immediate predecessor Dr. John Thompson, a moderate, had during his tenure criticised the unionist Anti-Agreement campaign and said that, while he did not whole heartedly agree with the Agreement, he suggested the best way forward would be a devolved administration which would have enjoyed widespread Community acceptance.

Rev. Fleming during his term of office is expected to bring his community much more into line with unionist leadership thinking.

Catholics in the RUC

Rev. Fleming has stated that, while one would like a police force widely representative, he realised it was not very fair or realistic to urge Catholics to join the RUC if they were going to become open targets for murder.

Extradition

Rev. Fleming has commented that "there seems to be an element of confusion in some quarters that killing someone may be excused if there is a political dimension.... This confusion spills over into other areas also, such as extradition". The bible, he said, makes no difference on the grounds of political motivation and killing is "absolutely forbidden by God".

Ecumenism

At the outset of his tenure as Moderator, Rev. Fleming stated that he does not intend to accept invitations to go to Mass in a Catholic Church, a view in line with his anti-ecumenical associations. The Mass, he believes, "is not a correct observance of the sacrament". His objection to the present ecumenical movement is based on what he perceives to be its attempt "to confuse others or conceal the truth". He does not object to good relations and friendships with Catholics. An example of this was provided by his dedication of the youth centre at Lucan, Co. Dublin, on Saturday (26 September) last. The centre, under the auspices of the Fourth Board of the Presbyterian Church, will be a meeting place for daily and weekend activities of young people North and South, with an ecumenical emphasis. The centre was officially opened by the President, Dr. Patrick Hillery.

His tenure as Moderator

Rev. Fleming has stated that in his first year he would wish to put an emphasis on the revival of religion and biblical standards; "I believe that peace and prosperity in our land are related to our faithfulness to God, and thus God's favour resting on us Righteous living exalts a nation".

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