

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

cc PSM Sent 10.2.78.

PSS

17 Grosvenor Place

Mr. Nally (w/Taoiseach)  
SW1X 7HR

9th February 1978

W  
- 10.2.78

- 1. Mrs. Stilleman
- 2. Mr. Swift

W  
- 10/2

Dear Sean

As I told you by telephone I had lunch on 7th February with Philip Mallet in the course of which we ranged informally over recent developments in relations over the North.

Mallet professed to be worried about the worsening of relations in recent weeks and I felt it politic to be equally if ~~not~~ more pessimistic. He was of course inclined to ascribe the present state of affairs to anxiety on the part of the British Government about our Government's policies. On the Taoiseach's radio interview he said that initially the Foreign Office line had been that there was nothing very remarkable in it; however, the reaction to it had created a difficult situation and gave rise to fears. Whether these fears were soundly based or not they were nonetheless a factor ~~for~~ the emerging situation.

I agreed with him that the reaction to the interview was both surprising and discouraging and said that we were at a stage of some difficulty where exaggerated replies to, and misunderstandings of statements on either side could give rise to serious problems and that we could thus drift into a greater degree of disharmony than either side wished or was warranted by the situation. This was particularly illustrated by the off-the-cuff and exaggerated reactions to the Taoiseach's speech.

Last summer the British Government may have regarded the result of the Irish election with a measure of anxiety and have had some mistrust initially for the Taoiseach and his objectives. This sense of anxiety in a new situation is not abnormal even if not justified. It should be balanced by taking into account that the new Government in Ireland for its part had its own anxieties and suspicions and that it would be necessary

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for both sides to get to know each other and to understand each other. We had felt the September meeting was an occasion for this and we had made clear in it our preoccupations and had expressed our understanding for their position with regard to the use of the term "powersharing".

The reaction to the Taoiseach's remarks had surprised us and showed little appreciation of their context. The Irish Government like the British Government had preoccupations other than pre-occupations about the North however large and important this topic was for us. There seems to have been a failure to appreciate this fact or the nature of the broadcast. The intergovernmental picture had been further obscured by the extraordinary reaction of Mr Neave and the unfortunate blurring of what the Taoiseach had said by Dr Ó Fiaich's remarks. In the circumstances it appeared to be very necessary that we remain calm and refrain from unhelpful replies to statements which might have been misunderstood.

I also wished to stress to him the fact that there was serious concern in Dublin that quite unwittingly and through concentration on ~~the~~ aspects of the problem the British Government might be painting itself further and further into an integrationist corner. The Taoiseach had made this clear in September but we were not sure to what extent our anxieties had been taken aboard. We were also worried about moves away from the established recognition of the Irish dimension of the problem.

Mr Mallet then remarked that he thought it was very necessary for us to understand that under no circumstances could a British Government make a statement about withdrawal. The British public would not stand for it and in addition it created the danger of giving new life to Protestant terrorist groups. To this I replied that the problem over the past few years was that nothing had moved the Loyalists in any way towards a measure of accommodation for the Northern minority in spite of concessions on their

part. It did not appear that they would make any move for as long as they had the present measure of guarantee and it appeared also that if they persisted in being obstructive there were no sanctions that would be used against them. Sanction was perhaps an unfortunate word on my part and Mallet seized upon it and said there could be no question of imposing any sanctions to which I replied that by sanctions I meant steps which would cause them to reconsider their position.

Mallet then remarked that as far as he could see they would continue their present attempts to have conversations with the various groups in the North on devolution and that there was no question of substituting a local government arrangement for a devolved government which still remained their policy. However, speaking personally he did not see that any agreement reached could be given effect in the lifetime of the present Government. Consequently he felt that we were now in a position of marking time and recovering lost ground.

He then said that as he understood it there were two balls in the air about an exchange of ministerial visits. There was the question of Mr Judd going to Dublin and the invitation to our Minister and the Minister for Justice to go to Belfast. I said that I was not aware of the Judd visit and he said that this had been discussed by Mr Judd with our Minister at a European meeting two or three weeks ago and was envisaged in the context of the Anglo-Irish economic cooperation talks. With regard to the Belfast meeting I said that I understood Forde in Belfast had raised this matter with you last week when discussing the suggestion we had made earlier to the British Ambassador that Mason should come to Dublin, thus I saw it as an initial reaction to our invitation. On this I had no instructions since our Minister was away and would have to consider the matter but that I felt that it had been our hope that Mr Mason would come to Dublin since he had not been there for some time and since our Taoiseach and other Ministers had been to London in the interim. Speaking as an official and without instructions I felt it might be useful to have

security cooperation advertised in such a meeting since we were worried by certain suggestions that there had been deficiencies but that we would certainly hope to have a much wider agenda. Mallet accepted that we wished to have a wider agenda but the trend of his conversation indicated that what the British really want is a meeting on security with the Minister for Justice at which they accepted the inevitability of our Minister's presence.

Since the question of security arose, I said that I would like to mention two matters connected with this heading which were causing some anxiety in Dublin. These were briefings about the provenance of the new machine-guns acquired by the Provisionals and the recent border shooting incident. I said that I did not have full details on these matters and was not making any case about them but that they were two pieces of grit which could cause irritation in our relationships and they were a kind of matter it would be well for us to solve as smoothly as possible.

In the course of our conversation, Mallet enquired why we were opposed to the development of a local government system in the North. He said that he could not understand why we and the SDLP seem to regard this as a move towards integration. I replied that it was not a question of the organisation of the system of local government that worried us in itself but it was the problem that it was being discussed in the context of devolved government and while we were anxious to work towards a satisfactory system of devolved government we saw danger for this exercise if it were confused with discussions of a new local administration system. He would appreciate that if we eventually ended up merely with new local government arrangements, expanded representation in Westminster and no devolved government we would in fact have a situation of virtual integration. He also mentioned again their difficulties with the use of the term "powersharing". I said that we had fully appreciated this and so had agreed to the September communiqué omitting the words. We felt, however, that recent events had shown a weakening of the concept. He himself should understand that whereas they have their internal difficulties with public opinion, we too have ours

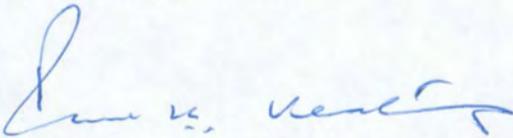
and it was emerging more and more clearly that public opinion felt strongly about apparent erosion of our position.

Mallet always diffuses an air of some depression, he seemed more depressed than usual on this occasion. He said that he thought relations had gone back to the stage of two or three years ago. To this I replied that it was necessary whatever stage they were at now to work towards making them better and this could perhaps best be done in the knowledge of the other party's point of view and with the desire to be constructive. It would, however, be idle to pretend that we were not facing a situation where misunderstandings could produce difficulties.

There are I think some conclusions to be drawn from the talk. Firstly, it is, I think, becoming plainer to us that whatever results conversations in the North may have Mallet was right in saying that the Government here will not act on them before the election. Secondly, there is the veiled threat in his remarks about renewed Protestant violence. This was echoed in a newspaper article on 8th February. It may be a genuine British evaluation of the likely development of events or it may be a bit of sabre rattling. It is however something we shall have to consider. Thirdly, it is possible that reaction to the Taoiseach and the battle for the Unionist votes in Westminster taken together with Mason's inflexibility may push the administration here to a more difficult line as far as we are concerned. Fourthly, we are in danger at the moment of reaching a situation of growing mis-understandings. While, therefore, it is desirable for us to keep in contact with British politicians it is possible that they will not make themselves readily available to us. I fear that we may find that Mason, who has never been anxious to talk to us, will either have the Ministerial meeting now envisaged on his terms or on no other. While I see considerable problems in the type of meeting now suggested I think we should think hard before definitely refusing it. We can of course modify the venue ~~for~~<sup>at</sup> the participants

but at least keep options open. Indeed in these circumstances I wonder if we should not be trying for a meeting between Prime Ministers; preferably I would think a meeting in a very restricted context where they can speak plainly to each other and off-the-record. This might in fact be a case for the type of telephone call mentioned by Mr Callaghan in September with a view to setting up a quiet talk during the course of the European Council meeting in April or under cover of it.

Yours sincerely



Paul J G Keating  
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