

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Lunch with Mr. David Tatham, British  
Embassy 21 June, 1982

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Mr. McNamara  
R.F.A.  
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24.6.82

I had lunch today with Mr. David Tatham at his request at the University Club. Mr. Tatham was on leave during May. The luncheon was a fairly gruelling affair, as I sought to put across the Government's view on a number of contentious issues.

The Falklands

I explained in some detail the Government's attitude and difficulties and that we had not been the only country to have reservations about the British actions. He claimed to be dismayed by the anti-British tone in the Irish Press particularly and in the letter columns. I said there was nothing to compare with some of the things that had appeared in the British popular press.

On the Prior-Collins exchange he said the Embassy found it very difficult to gauge Irish public opinion, but that a number of Irish businessmen were disturbed about the detriment to their interests. He added however it was not in Britain's interests to disturb trade patterns.

He claimed that Northern Ireland had not been regarded as being of much strategic value, but that if Ireland was going to be neutral on matters concerning the territory of her closest neighbour, and bearing in mind the value of

Short's missiles in the conflict, then perhaps Britain would have to think again. I was sceptical as to whether strategic considerations were likely to determine the future of Northern Ireland.

#### Prior Initiative

I made clear that the British decision to pursue a unilateral political initiative not merely without the cooperation of but in the face of opposition not merely from the Irish Government but from almost every political party in Ireland was bound to sour Anglo-Irish relations, so long as it was persisted in. I said the choice was either for the two Governments to cooperate on Northern Ireland, and in our view the British Government could not dispense with our cooperation, or for each to pursue their separate paths. I considered the second option second best, but unavoidable in the circumstances. Other than to maintain that we had been 'consulted' Mr. Tatham had very little to say on this.

X He did inform me that there had been a sequel to Senator Dooge's letter on the Prior initiative, and that reassurances had been given and accepted, and but for the fact that they were 'gentlemen' the British Embassy would have published the further correspondence.

#### The future of Northern Ireland

Mr. Tatham said that the problem was that our wishes ran up

against the wishes of <sup>/1m.</sup> British citizens in the North, and he took Dr. FitzGerald's view that all we could do was to woo them. He feared that if any other course were adopted, if the British were to withdraw, the result would be an independent Northern Ireland within smaller frontiers. He believed Northern Unionists would make material sacrifices, as Ireland did in the 1920's, to achieve this. I expressed scepticism, and said I believed that material interests would weigh heavily and that there was no visible equivalent of a Sinn Fein economic philosophy. in the North.

He said the British Government had gone as far as it could without provoking the Unionists veto. I said that we did not accept the Unionist veto, and that as long as they received unconditional political, military and economic support, like the Israelis vis-à-vis the Americans, they would not be amenable to control.

I said to him in conclusion that I hoped that he like myself, would not resent plain speaking, but we were anxious that the British should receive the correct signals. He fully accepted and appreciated this point.

Henry Ross  
22/6/82