

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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INTERVIEW WITH MR. PAUL ARTHUR,  
17 FEBRUARY, 1983.

Introduction

Summary Note

1. Following normal courtesies Mr. Arthur explained that he had been engaged in a study of direct rule. It is necessary in this regard to look at Anglo-Irish relations. It was his intention to publish a book on this theme in due course. This note is a summary of the main items discussed.

Relations with Mr. Edward Heath

2. Mr. Arthur enquired whether Mr. Cosgrave knew Mr. Heath prior to coming into Government. Mr. Cosgrave said that Mr. Brendan Corish and he had met Mr. Heath in London at the beginning of March 1973 some days before they had taken office. He had not met Mr. Heath before that. He next met him at an all-day meeting in Baldonnell in July. He regarded that meeting as crucial. There was rapid progress in the development of Anglo-Irish relations from then. Mr. Heath was not accompanied by any other Minister on that occasion and was very well briefed on the Northern Ireland situation. Following that meeting, which he regarded as a very successful occasion, events moved rapidly leading to the Sunningdale Conference in December 1973.

*He spoke almost without stopping, from about 11/24 AM to about 8 PM.  
25/12*

3. Mr. Arthur enquired if relations with Mr. Heath had been good. Mr. Cosgrave said yes. Mr. Heath had become very involved in the problem during his period of office as Prime Minister. In Mr. Cosgrave's view Mr. Heath was "a different man" after their all-day meeting in Baldonnell in July 1973. Only the two of them had been present for the discussions on that occasion. Mr. Arthur enquired if Baldonnell had been a 'good education' for Mr. Heath. Mr. Cosgrave said that this was probably the case. After that meeting Mr. Heath was very interested in finding a settlement to the Northern Ireland problem. Mr. Heath knew his brief very well on that occasion. No other British Prime Minister had taken the same interest in the Northern Ireland

*Not quite true!  
25/12*

*I think W.B. meant that there were no other ministers present.*

problem since then.

Period as Minister for Foreign Affairs (1954-1957)

4. Mr. Arthur asked about previous contacts with Northern Ireland Ministers, in particular Mr. Brian Faulkner. In reply Mr. Cosgrave referred to discussions he had had with Northern Ireland Ministers during the period of the first Inter-Party Government when he was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Mr. Dan Morrissey, in particular, during a lengthy illness which Mr. Morrissey had during the life time of that Government. The subject matter of these contacts were the then proposed Erne Electricity Scheme and proposed co-operation in the running of the Great Northern Railway. These discussions together with the discussions on the Foyle Fisheries Commission were pursued on the foot of a conscious decision that co-operation was the best way of approaching the Northern Ireland problem.

5. Mr. Arthur asked if this was a conscious decision to dish (sic) Fianna Fail. Mr. Cosgrave agreed that this was so. He referred to the anti-partition campaign of that era and also to the Mansion House Committee. He saw these as "propaganda efforts" which were unlikely to achieve positive results. Mr. Arthur referred to a speech which Mr. Cosgrave had made at the UN in 1956 in which he said that partition was not going to be raised in that international forum. He asked whether this too was a conscious decision of the Government at that time. In reply Mr. Cosgrave confirmed that this was the case and that the "sore thumb approach" [to the Northern Ireland problem] was not favoured by the Government of which he was a member.

Mr. Brian Faulkner

6. Mr. Cosgrave said that he first met the late Mr. Faulkner shortly after he had been elected an MP at Stormont - this was at a by-election meeting held in Woodford, Co. Galway in the early 1950s. He did not meet him again until the RDS Horseshow in 1969 - just before the current troubles. He had, of course, met him at Sunningdale and at a conference in Hillsboro, Co. Down (1974) and agreed that he had established a good working relationship with him.

*also in  
Baldonnell  
after  
Sunningdale  
before  
Hillsboro  
→*

Relations with Mr. Jack Lynch

7. Mr. Cosgrave confirmed in response to a question on this theme that his relations with Mr. Lynch were good, both in and out of office.

Power sharing

8. Mr. Arthur then turned to the subject of power sharing which he said had been greatly emphasised throughout the Sunningdale period. He asked if this was evidence of the influence which the Irish Government had on British policy at that time. Mr. Cosgrave said that during that period the British Government took the Dublin view more seriously than before and "gave it more recognition from then".

9. Mr. Arthur referred to the reference in some of Mr. Cosgrave's speeches to a gradual evolution towards unity with emphasis on a "process" rather than a single decisive event [speech of 21 June 1973]. Mr. Cosgrave agreed with this interpretation and also with a further suggestion from Mr. Arthur that prudence was the keynote in the development of policy at that time.

10. As regards the Sunningdale experiment generally Mr. Cosgrave said that, in retrospect, he felt that the arrangements proposed "went too far too fast". In this regard he mentioned the proposed Council of Ireland which he felt was a very important part of the arrangements proposed. However, he recognised now that "it would have been difficult for any Unionist leader to have made a success of the Sunningdale arrangements." Mr. Arthur commented that there was a general perception that the Unionists were the weakest team at the Sunningdale Conference. Mr. Cosgrave agreed and said that "Brian Faulkner was the only real negotiator the Unionists had at Sunningdale". Roy Bradford might also merit some consideration in this context but "to a lesser extent".

#### Violence: Origin and Effects

11. The conversation turned to various aspects of the Northern Ireland situation over the years 1973 to 77. One of the matters touched on was the impact which violence had on the events of that time. Mr. Cosgrave made the point that unlike previous "border campaigns" the origin of violence in the case of the current troubles was in Northern Ireland. The amount of violence in border areas was minimal compared with 1956-61 campaign. It was notable that the majority of persons imprisoned here for crimes of political violence were for the most part natives of the North. The campaign of violence was in itself, of course, a contributory factor in the downfall of the Sunningdale arrangements.

#### Strasbourg Case

12. In response to a question on this matter Mr. Cosgrave said that there had been continual pressure on the Irish Government to drop this case but this pressure had not been ~~ac~~ceeded to. His Government had been determined at all times to pursue the case, which he said had been handled very competently by the Irish side led by the then

Attorney General, Mr. Declan Costello S.C..

Boland Case

13. The implications of this case in relation to the Sunningdale agreement were discussed. Mr. Arthur referred to a speech which Oliver Napier had made at that time attacking the Irish Government's position. Mr. Arthur also stated that his understanding was that notwithstanding the constitutional arguments put forward in Court on behalf of the Government a private assurance in the matter had been given to Mr. Faulkner. Mr. Cosgrave did not dissent from that view. The Irish Government had given "de facto" recognition to the status of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. He had made a statement in the Dail on this matter on 13 March 1974.

The 'O' Brien Factor'

14. Mr. Arthur asked about the influence which Dr. C.C. O'Brien had on the Government at that time. Mr. Cosgrave in reply said that Dr. C.C.O'Brien had more impact on the public than on the Government. "Northern Ireland matters were handled by myself or by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, and Government decisions were taken on all major matters of policy" he said. In his view, Dr. CCO'Brien "did not dominate Government policy on Northern Ireland."

Unity/Reconciliation

✓  
✓  
M 115 | 15. Mr. Arthur referred to a speech which Mr. Cosgrave had made in Dun Laoghaire in 1975(?) in which he had stated that violence was 'destroyin the will to unity. In response Mr. Cosgrave said that it was necessary to look at all his speeches to get full appreciation of the development of Northern Ireland policy during the period in question. He gave Mr. Arthur some material in this regard, in particular copies of pamphlets issued jointly by the Fine Gael and Labour parties in May 1977 on the Taoiseach

and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. These pamphlets referred to the major developments in the Northern Ireland situation during the period of office of the National Coalition Government and elaborate on the policies pursued by the Government in relation to Northern Ireland during its period of office. (Copies are attached).

Republican Rhetoric

16. Mr. Arthur referred to an approach to the Northern Ireland situation suggested at one time by Mr. John Kelly when he had advocated in a speech that there was a need to "pipe down on Northern Ireland". In commenting on this Mr. Cosgrave said that in his view there had been too much talk on Northern Ireland and "not enough of a practical approach to the problem". Mr. Arthur said that he'd understood that in the early days of the National Coalition the SDLP were worried about Mr. Liam Cosgrave's nationalism. He asked for a comment on this suggestion. Mr. Cosgrave, who was somewhat amused at the idea, clearly did not accept that there was any cause for anxiety on this score, so far as he was concerned. He referred in a general way to what he had said about the aspiration to unity in his various speeches. In particular, the address to the joint meeting to the House of Representatives in the Senate of the US on St. Patrick's Day 1976 ["My own father, as an Irish nationalist, worked in his time on these problems. In his generation an independent democratic State came into being and took its place in the modern world. ....Does this mean that we have abandoned the hope that the people of Ireland will wish to live together in peace and unity one day? The answer is no. We have the aspiration of unity in our Island. But we want to see that unity achieved by consent."] As a general comment Mr. Cosgrave, referring to republican rhetoric said that it was good stuff until it was put to the test".

24 February, 1983.