

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

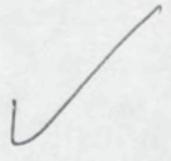
## IRELAND



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cc. Tancian, Tancian, Minister, Minister Justice,  
A.G., Ulster, Hally Dulu, West, Dingley,

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SECRET

Meetings with representatives of Unionist opinion,  
5-6 September 1985

I had meetings with a number of clergymen and academics associated (in all but one instance) with moderate Unionist views. These were:

- Rev. Bertie Dickinson  
Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland  
(a leading member of the Orange Order and the leader of the fundamentalist wing in the Presbyterian Church)
- Rev. Tom Simpson  
Clerk of the Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Rev. John Dunlop  
a North Belfast Presbyterian Minister
- Rev. John Morrow  
a Presbyterian Minister and Director of Corrymeela
- Canon Eric Elliott  
Northern Secretary of Church of Ireland's Role of the Church Committee and member of "Two Traditions" Group
- Prof. Desmond Rea  
Head of Business School at NUU (Jordanstown)  
and a prominent Methodist
- Mr. John Simpson  
Chairman of the Eastern Health Board, QUB academic  
and BBC N.I. commentator

Most of these individuals have no party connections. In the course of my conversations, I endeavoured to test the mood within the Unionist community in relation to the Anglo-Irish process and the current negotiations. The following were the main points which emerged:

- If the present negotiations culminate in an agreement which is interpreted by Unionists as moving Northern Ireland "down the road to a united Ireland", resistance on a wide scale, including armed resistance, must be

expected. This view was advanced by all, though Desmond Rea qualified it by suggesting that the likelihood of violent protest was about "fifty-fifty".

- Most of my interlocutors would not be drawn on the kind of agreement which would be perceived by Unionists in this fashion. However, one (Dunlop, a moderate Presbyterian Minister) spelled it out as an agreement which would give the Dublin Government an institutionalised role in the day-to-day running of Northern Ireland's affairs. Dunlop remarked that, while he and other Unionists could live with the notion of the present Taoiseach having an involvement in the day-to-day affairs of Northern Ireland, they balked at the prospects which a possible change of government presented.
  
- While most of those with whom I talked considered that militant resistance is likely, they were uncertain as to the forms which the protest would take. One source (John Simpson) was sceptical about the chances of a 1974-type strike succeeding. Firstly, there was a more visible target then (the Executive) than there would be in the present situation. Secondly, concern about security of employment (at a time of high unemployment, unlike 1974) is likely to dissuade many Government employees from participating in a strike. Thirdly, there is a tougher Prime Minister in office today who has survived Provisional IRA hunger strikes and can be relied on to take a firmer line than Harold Wilson did in 1974. It is conceivable that Mrs. Thatcher might respond to Loyalist threats by saying that, if any power stations or other important installations are closed down in a strike situation, they will remain closed. The Loyalists controlling a strike would thus have full responsibility for ensuring essential services (e.g., energy supplies to hospitals) - a recipe, in John Simpson's view, for the eventual collapse of the strike

as various interests begin to seek special treatment. Another weapon at Mrs. Thatcher's disposal would be to threaten to withhold social services payments from the UK Exchequer until the strike ends.

- One informant told me that the British Government is believed to have completed recently a feasibility study which indicated that the security forces at their present levels would be able to contain whatever Loyalist backlash may be in the offing. However, another (Dunlop) told me that an RUC friend whom he had questioned about the force's readiness to stand up to Loyalist pressure in the aftermath of an Anglo-Irish agreement had replied: "I don't think that can be guaranteed".
- Dickinson (the current Presbyterian Moderator and a staunch Orangeman) warned that feelings are running very high among Loyalists since Portadown and he castigated the Chief Constable for the decision taken on that occasion.
- Tom Simpson (the more moderate General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church) predicted that, in the event of violent Loyalist protests, "a different kind of Loyalist paramilitant" would be evident: UDA and UVF supporters would be joined on the street by middle class, professional people who have hitherto disowned violence but who feel that "their backs are to the wall". Both Dickinson and Simpson considered that the present situation is more destabilising than anything experienced so far and could, indeed, be compared with the 1912 situation.
- John Simpson, who met Paisley at a social function earlier in the week, had been struck by the DUP leader's militant mood ("a return to the Paisley of old"). When asked by Simpson (in exclusively Unionist company) what

action he would take if the British Government ignored Loyalist wishes concerning the current talks, he replied: "Then we'll have to take on the British Government."

- Canon Elliott (a moderate Church of Ireland clergyman) warned that "it would be a tragic error to underestimate the readiness of the Loyalist paramilitaries to resist an agreement".
  
- Much will depend in the coming weeks on the success of the political resistance brought to bear by Unionist leaders. The document presented by Paisley and Molyneaux to Mrs. Thatcher on 31 August is believed to have been written mainly by Frank Millar (OUP General Secretary) and to have been leaked to the press by the OUP. Paisley told Simpson that he was not unduly disturbed by the revelation of his meeting with Mrs. Thatcher and the document's contents, though he had not planned it. Loyalists, he said, will have to "put a spoke in Mrs. Thatcher's wheel" in relation to the current negotiations. The Paisley/Molyneaux document won the approval of Dickinson, who hailed it as evidence of generosity and good neighbourliness on the part of the two leaders. Others with whom I spoke were more circumspect, interpreting it variously as (i) an attempt to derail, or at least upset, the Anglo-Irish negotiations at a crucial stage (as the Official Unionists' paper "The Way Forward" had tried to do at a similarly late stage in the Forum process); (ii) an attempt to match what Unionists perceive to be the SDLP's 'client' relationship with the Dublin Government (by visibly presenting requests of their own to the UK Government)' (iii) a reflection of recognition on the part of the Unionist leaders that the Anglo-Irish process is here to stay, that Unionists have more to gain in the longer term from getting involved in it than from staying out and that it would be tactically

advantageous to be able to claim that they have made constructive proposals in regard to it.

- In addition to this document, Ken Maginnis (the Official Unionist M.P.) revealed two other possible Unionist ploys to an SDLP contact:

- (i) they will claim that, as the 1982 N.I. Assembly Act indicated that any new arrangement would have to command widespread acceptance in Northern Ireland, the contents of any Anglo-Irish agreement should be tested in a referendum;

- (ii) they will argue that the report of the Assembly's Devolution Committee must also be awaited.

- Rea said that, if an Anglo-Irish agreement emerges along the lines of that forecast by Chris Ryder in the "Sunday Times" (2 September), he personally "would not find it unacceptable". However, one element is missing: the problem of violence in Northern Ireland cannot be solved, in his view, without the establishment of a devolved government in which the SDLP would be fully involved. This is the real meaning of 'joint authority', in Rea's view - the Dublin Government must exert all its authority with the SDLP, while the London Government must similarly use its influence with the Unionists, in order to get a devolved government off the ground in which both would participate. (The same point was made by Morrow). A package without this element would have no hope of winning Unionist acceptance. If violence is to be brought to an end, there must be a devolved government with full security responsibility. Rea suggested that, in such an arrangement, the security brief could be offered to the SDLP. Dunlop argued with equal fervour for SDLP participation in a devolved government. He also candidly expressed the hope that efforts by Hume to get

the SDLP squarely behind an Anglo-Irish agreement would result in a diminution of Mallon's influence within the party.

- Elliott and Morrow hoped that any agreement would not be presented by the Irish Government or the SDLP in terms which suggested that a united Ireland was now imminent. Equally, the British Government would have to impress on the Unionists that a return to simple majority rule was absolutely out. They stressed that they were not looking for actual renunciation of the aspiration to Irish unity, which was entirely legitimate, but merely for a form of presentation which would take account of Unionist sensitivities.
  
- All with whom I spoke held that Articles 2 and 3 of our Constitution constitute the major obstacle to progress in North-South relations. However, most also recognised that it was politically unrealistic to expect that these Articles would be deleted. If some "form of words" could be found which would constitute acceptance by the South of Northern Ireland's territorial integrity and sovereignty, then Unionists (as foreshadowed in the Paisley/Molyneaux document) would be happy to deal with the government of a friendly neighbouring state on a wide range of issues of mutual interest.
  
- The Minister's "Between" speech (25 August), copies of which I circulated, has been very favourably received in liberal Unionist circles. Those with whom I spoke praised it as a step in the right direction and one which, in their view, has been overdue for some time. Dunlop felt that, as often as the Minister made a speech deploring the "alienation" suffered by Northern nationalists or the "nightmare" in which they live (concepts which Unionists reject), he should deliver another speech expressing the same degree of concern for Unionists. Dunlop and others consider that the

"Between" speech would enable them to demonstrate to more extreme Unionists the considerable goodwill which exists on the part of the Dublin Government. Elliott commented that the Minister had expressed his theme in very judicious terms and that the word 'respect' had been well-chosen. Dickinson said he had seen no reports of the speech but, when I drew it to his attention, he admitted that "this is the kind of language we want to see". He added the comment, however, that the Minister's respect for the Unionist identity had to be seen in its correct perspective which was the Dublin Government's continuing interest in persuading Unionists to join a united Ireland.

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