



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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29 August 1996

***CONFIDENTIAL***

Mr Sean O hUiginn  
Second Secretary  
Anglo-Irish Division  
HQ

Dear Secretary

***Lunch with Michael Gove, Leader Writer, Financial Times  
29 August 1996***

I was Gove's guest for lunch. Still in his 20s he has written a biography of Michael Portillo and his own views would be both pro-Union and pro-Unionist. Notwithstanding his political views we keep in friendly contact. He was one of the British journalists who travelled to Dublin and Adare in April to meet the Taoiseach, the Tanaiste and the Minister for Finance.

Gove spent a day at Drumcree during the standoff in July and he admitted at the end of our lunch that Drumcree was "tragic" because of its negative effects in terms of increasing sectarianism in the North and by implication, impeding the development of a coherent non-sectarian Unionism.

Referring to Billy Wright, Gove said that it was his impression on the basis of his day in Drumcree that Wright was the natural leader and articulated the opinions of many of the Orangemen present.

I asked Gove how he interpreted Michael Ancram's statement on Saturday 19 August in Scotland when he said "what we are discussing in Northern Ireland provides a path to a broadly agreed accommodation which can keep the province firmly and by consent within the United Kingdom". Would this be

the language used by Conservatives in the run-up to the General Election? Gove said that in his view Northern Ireland would not really be an election issue. Northern Ireland is not really a part of the United Kingdom when it comes to the issues that concern the British people. The emphasis would be on the Prime Minister's efforts to achieve peace in the North and insofar as possible the North would be decoupled from the question of Scottish devolution. No doubt an important theme for the Conservatives would be the defence of the "Union" against Scottish devolution on the one hand and European integration on the other.

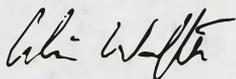
Gove felt that Robert MacCartney had done himself a disservice by associating too closely with Ian Paisley at the Castle Buildings talks. He found MacCartney's objections to George Mitchell particularly hard to understand as they reflected badly on MacCartney's credentials as liberal non-sectarian Unionist.

Gove marked in passing that in many ways public opinion in the Republic is much more open to and willing to try to understand Unionist politicians than is British public opinion.

Gove is of the opinion that Minister Wheeler is prisoner of his officials.

Gove told me that Ambassador Crowe had said (presumably in a briefing) that while the National Security Council in Washington admits that mistakes have been made in the conduct of US policy on the North, there are no regrets about the overall thrust of that policy.

Yours sincerely



Colin Wrafter  
Press and Information Officer

c.c.'d D. Mulhall, Joint Secretary

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