



Department for

Communities

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Release of 1998 files at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland



PRONI

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Using the documents

When using the documents held at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), please ensure that you acknowledge PRONI's custody of the original files and give the full PRONI document reference number.

Please note that in the 1998 file list; any file reference bearing 'A' at the end denotes the open part of a file which has been partially closed.

For example, the file *CENT/1/24/14A* refers to the open part of a file, whereas *CENT/1/24/14* refers to the part of that file withheld under certain exemptions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

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Most public records in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland are subject to Crown Copyright. Crown copyright information previously available for re-use under waiver conditions can now be re-used under the terms of the Open Government Licence. The Open Government Licence was introduced in 2010 as a simpler set of terms and conditions for the re-use of a wide range of information covered by Crown Copyright. For further details of information covered by the licence, please see What the Open Government Licence covers at:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

PRONI ON CAIN

PRONI on CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) is a joint project between the Ulster University and PRONI which has resulted in digitised images of key documents from previous PRONI file releases being made freely available to view online for researchers and students. PRONI on CAIN includes over 3,500 public records comprising 15,500 pages of content on the troubles and political developments from 1968-1994. For further details of the documents available, please visit

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/proni/index.html>



Introduction

The files are being released under the 30/20 Year Rule.

The annual release of selected official files continues against a background of greater public access through the Freedom of Information Act balanced against the need to protect personal information. The FOI Act (2000) created a new access to information regime and all records were reviewed in accordance with the Act, and the Data Protection legislation.

Annually since 1976, official records held by PRONI which were 30 years old have been reviewed with a view to making them publicly available (“the 30 year rule”). In September 2011, the Assembly accepted a Legislative Consent Motion to reduce the time limit for release from 30 years to 20 years (“the 20 year Rule”). This is underpinned by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the amendments made to it by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

The 20 Year Rule is being phased in over 10 years, with two years’ worth of records being reviewed and released each year. This year due to Covid-19 restrictions, the records of NI Departments and the NIO with a terminal date of 1998 are being brought forward for release during December 2021.

This process involves the referral of the files to the Responsible Authority for sensitivity review. This entails a page by page examination to ensure that a record contains nothing sensitive as defined by the FOI Act, and Data Protection legislation.

Records Released

565 files being deemed as suitable for release as “fully open”. A further **132** files are open but subject to blanking out of some content. **31** files remain closed in full.

The main file series being released includes Central Secretariat.

Some of the significant issues covered by the 1998 release include:

- Talks with political parties regarding a devolved political settlement, setting up the NI Assembly and new Executive departments
- Parades/Drumcree
- NI Forum Secretariat
- Anglo-Irish Secretariat
- Devolution powers
- Transition programme for setting up the NI Assembly
- Contingency Planning for Influenza pandemic
- Aftermath of Omagh Bomb
- Education Reform
- Belfast Peacelines
- Upgrade of the M1/Westlink
- Education for Traveller children

Records may be closed either fully or in part only. Blanking out involves the removal of a limited number of papers from the file that have been deemed as exempt from the right to know under FOI. To facilitate the release of as much information as possible, redaction can be used to blank out sensitive data within individual documents that would otherwise prevent release. All information which is withheld in the manner outlined above, however, must be retained in accordance with the exemptions contained within the FOI Act. In the majority of cases, the reason for extended closure was the application of section 40 – the *personal information* exemption – of the FOI Act. This means that personal information is exempt from the right to know if it would breach Data Protection legislation.

The catalogue of files for 1998 is publicly available online on the PRONI website www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni from Wednesday 29th December and the files are available to view at PRONI from Wednesday 29th December.



1998 Highlighted Files

Central Secretariat

CENT/1/26/6A 1997

NIFS – Talks papers (Vol 3) September 1997 – December 1997

Minutes and papers recording talks between the political parties around the time when the UUP were persuaded to re-join the multi-party talks. A note for the record which was drawn up following the talks held on 15 September 1997, when An Phoblacht had recently published an interview with an IRA spokesman stating that the IRA would have problems with sections of the Mitchell principles. Gerry Adams is noted as saying that Sinn Fein and the IRA were not inextricably linked, and “there followed a rather torturous discussion between Mr Adams and Lord Alderdice which culminated in Mr McGuinness stating that Sinn Fein could not guarantee that the IRA would support whatever was agreed in the talks”. It includes note of the proceedings on 23 September 1997 (albeit described as “something of a damp squib”) when the Ulster Unionists shared the same conference room as Sinn Fein for the first time; and continues with notes for the record relating to the multi-party talks to 16 December 1997.

CENT/1/26/51A 1997 – 1998

Cross Border Economic Co-operation (Vol 6)

File consists of the role of the Central Secretariat in developing North/South co-operation. It contains background notes on the current state of cross-border co-operation and the issues being raised by the Irish government at the time. Included is a minute of a meeting between Adam Ingram, NIO Minister and the Irish Head of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat David Donoghue in which Drumcree was discussed, with Donoghue raising “speculation around that the Army was “measuring the Garvaghy Road” in order to determine where the “bollards” should be placed”. The file also contains discussion around the provision of maternity services in Belfast; Irish medium education; the Springvale Campus project; cultural traditions; employment equality review; Targeting Social Need; and Department of Health and Social Services public appointments.

CENT/1/26/55A 1997

TPU – Post-election period – the New Administration Vol 2.

Initial reactions to the speech made by Tony Blair on 16 May 1997 in which he set out the government's commitment to the Framework Document, the Mitchell Report on decommissioning and the ground rules for entry into All-party talks. The file sets out the steps taken to establish the talks process and decommissioning. A briefing note prepared in advance of a meeting with the political parties on 28 May 1997 summarises their positions: that the DUP "May wish to see progress in talks...complete agreement with them will always be unlikely ... their approval will rarely be forthcoming; the degree to which they take hard lines that embarrass the UUP back into the lager may be more susceptible to influence"; the UUP were "directionless in talks...in the short term the UUP will probably give vent to a number of irritations; they were indignant over the decision to meet Sinn Fein on local government election day...and at the apparent suggestion by the Secretary of State on "Newsnight" that the settlement train might leave without Unionists aboard"; the SDLP "did not come out of the elections as badly as they might have feared ...It would be helpful to work hard to ensure that the "land fit for nationalists" message and other Government acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the nationalist aspiration is got over".

CENT/1/27/3A 1997 – 1998

NIFS – Talks papers Vol 4 (from January 1998)

The role and remit of the North/South Council; policing; and the operation of what later became the Northern Ireland Assembly. A summary record of the plenary session held at Dublin Castle on 18 February 1998 includes the discussions around proposed indictment of Sinn Fein [which ultimately led to the party being expelled from the talks], and Sinn Fein's response to the threat of indictment. A later summary records proceeding on 24 March 1998, after Sinn Fein had re-entered the talks. This session focussed on decommissioning and the role of the North/South Council, and a detailed note of a meeting between the Secretary of State,

Dr Mo Mowlam, and the UUP, who felt that the government was not taking a strong enough stance on decommissioning.

CENT/1/27/11A 1998

Civic Forum Correspondence

Proposals for the composition and role played by the Civic Forum, including a synopsis of submissions by Assembly parties and the Voluntary/Community Sectors giving their views on the role and composition of such a body. The DUP were not in favour of this proposed body, seeing it as a quango which wouldn't have much to contribute to good government; Sinn Fein held the opposite viewpoint and were supportive of the forum as a complement to the Assembly.

CENT/1/27/22A 1997 – 1998

PPCU Miscellaneous files Volume 1

Scenario planning document setting out the strengths and weaknesses of the existing civil service structure in advance of planning devolved structures; political tensions regarding the perceived weaknesses of the RUC in investigating murders of Catholics by loyalists, with reference to conversations between the PM and Taoiseach on the subject; cross-border co-operation on European Structural funds and promoting cross-border economic development; 'Chronology of Events' Paper produced by International and Planning division which sets out very detailed talks and significant meeting between 1989 – 1998; reference to the "flags" issue, with the observation: "So why give this fitfully somnolent dog a flying kick now?... Leave it to the Assembly".

CENT/1/27/30A 1996 – 1998

Parades Issues

Options for the way forward following the North Report and the preparations for the upcoming "Marching Season" Includes proposals for support required by the RUC in the event of widespread disorder occurring, with specific reference to Drumcree. Includes a note of a meeting held between the Secretary of State and the Orange Order about the Talks process and about the upcoming parades during the month of July. The Secretary of State is noted as having

said that the problem with Drumcree was that it had now given Sinn Fein a massive publicity coup and had probably provided a greater recruitment boost to them. That was why she wanted the Orange Order to show generosity, not weakness, for the good of Ulster.

CENT/1/27/49A 1996 – 1998 North Commission – Review of Parades

The appointment of an independent commission to review parades and marches. The file records how the membership of the commission was determined, and the information presented to Dr Peter North when he was appointed to chair the independent review. Includes a briefing note prepared for Dr North on the issues around parades (“Many parades on both sides of the divide are accompanied by marching bands. The majority are flute and drum bands, some of which are particularly belligerent in both the music they play and the manner in which they play it. These are commonly known as “blood and thunder” (or on the Loyalist side “kick the pope” bands”).

CENT/1/27/50A 1996 – 1998 CCRU Application from Orange Order

Includes a note of a meeting held between the officials, the Orange Order, the Prime Minister, and the Secretary of State in which the Orange Order raised their concerns about the Independent Commissioning, decommissioning, the operation of the proposed NI Assembly, the release of prisoners, and the North/South Council. It includes an exchange about how past British Governments had tackled violence, and the Prime Minister’s response that past British Governments had been, quite frankly, hindered by the perception in some minds, not east internationally, that Sinn Fein somehow had a respectable case and that violence somehow had some justification. But once the referendums [sic] were through, violence could have no respectability left anywhere. That was also the US view.

CENT/3/233A 1997 – 1998 PPCU – Miscellaneous Volume 12 3/97 – 5/98

A restricted memo from Tony McCusker dated 25 June 1998 discusses the issue of translation services in the new NI Assembly and what should be recorded in Hansard. “The tricky question is whether

Standing Orders should make any reference to language...and if Irish was permitted to be used what the basis of transcription should be. If Irish is allowed to be used then some members will, rightly, want a translation on the day and an English version in the Hansard.... No doubt Sinn Fein will test the issue quickly, with someone speaking in Irish. The Presiding Officer will, therefore, need guidance on the issue, and also on the question of Ulster Scots.”

CENT/3/236A 1998

PPCU – North/South Implementation bodies

Volume 1

Draft memorandum of understanding between NI Departments and RoI Departments about the North/South Implementation body; involvement of ministers in project teams for implementing the agreement; memo from John Fisher, Anglo-Irish Secretariat, commenting on a meeting held with the ‘Irish side’, noting a lack of engagement between the UUP and SDLP on establishing a Ministerial Council and Implementation bodies; issues with inland fisheries, tourism, cross-border so; social security fraud; possible roles for the N/S implementation bodies in relation the foregoing, and also arts culture and Irish language, strategic transport planning, business development and inward investment.

CENT/3/267A 1998

Setting up The Assembly

A letter dated 21 September 1998 from John Holmes, Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, to Nick Perry NIO discusses the opening of the NI Assembly and the question as to who should open it.

“John McKevitt wrote to me on 15 September about The Queen opening the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Prime Minister agrees that we cannot assume this will remain a sleeping dog. However, he does not believe that it would be appropriate for The Queen to open the Assembly and does not agree that we should ourselves try to avert this possibility.”

CENT/3/273A 1998

PPCU – Drumcree Initiative / Talks Volume 3

The file largely discusses an application for a Parade in December 1998 and the attempts to establish

proximity talks prior to Christmas. A confidential memo dated 4 Dec. 1998, to Jonathan Powell, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, from SJ Leach (NIO). "The draft indicates that we hope to convene the talks on 10 December, although as you know Brendan McCionnaith has expressed reluctance to engage before the New Year. This is very unattractive to the Orange Order, because it would mean there was no chance of the process leading to a march this year.... One option in handling Mac Cionnaith's [sic] reluctance would be to threaten to 'name and shame' whichever side refused to an early resumption of the talks. However this might not be advantageous in the longer term, and the Irish are opposed to anything which might be seen as the Government publicly identifying the residents as the awkward party."

CENT/3/279 1997-1998 Sinn Fein

File includes letter dated 5 June 1997 from Gerry Adams MP to Adam Ingram, NIO Minister in relation to a number of socio-economic issues and concerns of constituents in West Belfast; Note of Mr Murphy's

meeting with Sinn Fein, dated 23 June 1998, in which Gerry Kelly outlined the party's concerns relating to a range of issues affecting the credibility and momentum of the process flowing from the Agreement, such as the Policing Commission, the Shadow Executive, Sentencing Bill, Symbols and Emblems, 'Mr Kelly asked what symbols and emblems would be displayed (or removed –Carson's statue was briefly mentioned...)'.

CENT/3/264 1998 Implementing the Agreement (North/South Workings); Meeting with Mr Murphy and Party Leaders.

The file contains notes of meetings between NIO Ministers and NI parties; Mr Murphy's dinner with the SDLP, 7 January 1998, "Mr Hume accounted for some unhelpful remarks by Ken Maginnis, by

claiming that he held the balance of power in the UUP, 'a divided party'; notes of meetings with the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), dated February 1998; meeting of Mr

Murphy, NIO Minister with John Hume and David Trimble, dated 29 April 1998 about the implementation of the political settlement, and the handling of the referendum campaign; Minister Murphy's meeting with David Trimble, discussing the ongoing referendum campaign and internal opposition within the UUP, dated 13 May 1998; and a note of Minister Murphy's meeting with Lord Alderdice, dated 30 June 1998, focussing on the arrangements for the inaugural Assembly meeting and the role of the Presiding Officer.

CENT/1/27/31A 1998-1998 Political Talks Part 3

The file includes: a note of a meeting between the Secretary of State, Dr Marjorie (Mo) Mowlan and Sinn Fein representatives Martin McGuinness and Aidan McAteer discussing the re-entry of the Ulster

Democratic Party to the All-party talks process, and security assessments, dated 3 February 1998; Talks summary, 10th February 1998; Talks summary 4 March 1998; and a paper titled 'Spreading the Gospel' a briefing about the agreement by an NIO official for Presbyterian and Methodist Church representatives, dated 23 March 1998.

CENT/1/27/36 1998 Confidence Building Measures (Part2)

The file includes a note of a meeting chaired by Mr Holkeri, dated 31 March 1998, with representatives from the two governments and local political party representatives, about the recently published White paper entitled 'Partnership for Equality'.

CENT/3/271A 1998 PPCU – Drumcree Initiative/Talks Vol1

The file includes a letter from Jonathan Powell, 10 Downing Street, dated 12 July 1998 to Ken Lindsay, NIO, informing him that the Prime Minister had spoken to Robbie (Robert) Saulters of the Orange Order, 'The Prime Minister said it was essential for the Orange Order to call on the Portadown District to leave the hill at Drumcree. If that happened we could carry on with dialogue to find a solution...'.
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CENT/3/242

1998

British-Irish Council

The file includes a minutes from Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary to the Prime Minister, titled 'A New British Irish Relationship', dated 23 July 1998, setting out a series of steps as the basis of a new positive East/West relationship.

CENT/3/265

1998

Setting up the Assembly – Departmental

Structures

The file includes: a note of a First Minister/Deputy First Minister consultation meeting with NI Assembly parties about Departmental Structure, dated 29 October 1998 – 'meeting itself was both workmanlike

and amicable with all parties engaging fully...John Taylor and Mitchell McLaughlin...were joking about the massacre of the quangos that would be necessary'; note of a call between Veronica Sutherland, UK Ambassador to Ireland with Martin Mansergh, Special Advisor, Taoiseach's Department, dated 18 November 1998 about frustrations with the current process, mood of David Trimble at various meetings, North/South bodies, etc.



Department of the Environment

ENV/8/1/214A 1993 – 1998 Belfast Peacelines

Examination of social, economic and security implications of the peacelines in Belfast; setting up working group to remove or replace them by alternative means of separation; list of peacelines with description of their physical features and the current tensions within the areas they divided. Includes descriptions of the community perception of the purpose of peacelines: seeing the demolition of a row of houses beside the peaceline as “their first line of defence”, leaving them open to gunfire. The lack of community support for the removing peacelines; current and future policy proposals for urban planners; “Throughout all the peaceline locations it is very apparent that both communities are completely polarised and the vast majority have no desire whatever to mix with the other. They would want if anything higher walls and bigger fences. There is also the “not an inch” syndrome where particularly in loyalist areas the most important aspect of peacelines is territory. (“What we have we hold!”); proposals to bid for Millennium funding to address peace walls and the scathing assessment of the proposals by an official who termed the bid “Operation Nero” because in his opinion the proposals amounted to little more than “Fiddling while Rome burns”.

ENV/20/1/147A 1993 Satellite Dishes

Changes required to planning legislation in response to the installation of satellite dishes and how this should be regulated. The file includes a letter from a private individual expressing detailed concerns about the proliferation of this new technology and its possible adverse impact on the moral and physical health of ratepayers in Northern Ireland (“In effect, our airwaves are being polluted by pornographic propaganda with its implicit incitement to promiscuity...”).



Department of Economic Development

DED/3/666A 1995 – 1998 Meetings with economic spokesmen of the NI political parties

A June 1997 briefing note on Jeffrey Donaldson, MP for Lagan Valley states “Jeffrey Donaldson gained a reputation during the 1992 Talks as being one of the more liberal and moderate members of the UUP

team. Since then, his stance has been less easy to pin down. Some would say that his determination to become an MP led to a fairly astute re-positioning of himself in order to appear more acceptable to the party hierarchy; and certainly, his continued rise in the face of the right wing shift in the UUP’s centre of gravity since Trimble’s accession might be read as a tribute to his skills in that regard. A thoughtful individual and not devoid of personal charm.”



Department of Health and Social Services & Public Safety

DHSSPS/2/3/9 1995 – 1998 Contingency Planning for pandemic Influenza
Preparation of the Northern Ireland contingency arrangements for pandemic influenza, including a rationale for the plan (“Previous pandemics, in 1918, 1957, and 1968 were accompanied by much increased levels of morbidity and mortality, often in age groups normally least affected by influenza, and caused widespread disruption to health and other services.”), and the framework for the development of more local plans by Health and Social Service Boards, Health and Social Services Trusts and fundholding practices. Also includes correspondence with officials in Whitehall departments about the UK’s contingency plan.

DHSSPS/2/3/36 1998 Recovery plans re: aftermath of Omagh Bomb
Impact of the bomb on the injured, the bereaved, and the wider community and the financial costs taken on by the Sperrin Lakeland Trust. Includes a Recovery Plan which was drafted as a direct response to a direct request by Dr Marjorie Mowlam, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

HSS/11/77/7 1998 Response to the Omagh Bomb
The file includes: ‘An interim report of Trusts response to the bombing incident in Omagh on 15 August 1998.’



Department of Education

ED/13/1/3170A 1995 – 1998 Secondary Education for Traveller Children in West Belfast (special education)

Discussions about the best methods for providing education for Traveller Children in Belfast. Includes papers detailing the funding required, and the types of specialist posts which had been identified and would be needed to support the needs of Traveller children who were placed in mainstream secondary education.



Department of Finance and Personnel

DFP/15/2/1

1998

Assembly Parties

The file relates to the establishment of a transition programme for newly elected Members of the Assembly and senior Civil Servants. It includes letters from Paul Murphy, NIO Minister of State, June 1998, setting out details of the proposed programme and notes of meetings with local party representatives to discuss the proposed programme.