

Introduction

While doing some research for the Society in the British Public Record Office at Kew in early January 2003 I accidentally came across a document that stunned me. I am not predisposed to conspiracy theories but here was clear evidence of a conspiracy being planned by some powerful people. The kind of people who were in a position to put their plans into effect. The British Ambassador was reporting to Whitehall that Major Thomas McDowell on behalf of *The Irish Times* was arranging to have the paper directed from Downing St. and abusing his then editor, Douglas Gageby, in foul mouthed, racist terms.

I wrote to the then *Irish Times* Editor, Geraldine Kennedy, on January 10th 2003 with a copy of the letter and asked her the following questions and the following is the exchange that took place:

AUBANE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Aubane, Millstreet , Co. Cork.

“He who cannot call on three thousand years is living from hand to mouth.” (Goethe)

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10th. January 2003.

Ms. Geraldine Kennedy
Editor
The Irish Times
Dublin

Dear Ms. Kennedy,

WHO DIRECTS YOUR PAPER?

I enclose a copy of a publication (*Irish Political Review*, January 2003) that contains an extraordinary document* concerning the running of your paper, *The Irish Times*.

As you can see, it is a copy of a report by the British Ambassador in Dublin in which he outlines the arrangements made with the owner of your paper, Major McDowell, to have the paper's content directed from No. 10 Downing St.

Do you accept this is a genuine document? If you do, can you say if these arrangements are still in place and if not when were they rescinded?

I am sure you will understand that readers of your newspaper, as of any newspaper, are entitled to know by whom, and in whose interest, the newspaper is run.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jack Lane
Aubane Historical Society

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SECRET & PERSONAL



BRITISH EMBASSY,
DUBLIN.

2 October, 1969

Dear Kelvin,

Your letter of September 24th - Major McDowell and No. 10 Downing Street.

2. I had McDowell to lunch today. It is all about something he mentioned to me before, but now he is hotter under the collar about it.

3. McDowell is one of the five (Protestant) owners of the Irish Times, and he and his associates are increasingly concerned about the line the paper is taking under its present (Protestant, Belfast-born) Editor, Gageby, whom he described as a very fine journalist, an excellent man, but on Northern questions a renegade or white nigger. And apart from Gageby's editorial influence, there is difficulty lower down, whereby sometimes unauthorised items appear and authorised items are left out.

4. So far (except for last item) nothing new. But McDowell went on to say that he now felt that a certain degree of guidance, in respect of which lines were helpful and which unhelpful, might be acceptable to himself and one or two of his friends on the Board; this was what he had had in mind in telephoning to No.10.

5. Oddly enough I had had McDowell in mind in certain conversations I had in London a fortnight ago. His present approach requires rather careful handling and I shall discuss it in London next week. I am writing this letter merely in case you wish to brief No. 10 and to assure them that we will do what we can to exploit this opening. I am destroying the correspondence.

A.G. Gilchrist
A.G. GILCHRIST

W.K.K. White, Esq.,
Western European Department,
Foreign & Commonwealth Office,
LONDON S.W.1.

SECRET & PERSONAL

THE IRISH TIMES

15th January 2003

Dear Mr. Lane,

I can assure you that no such arrangement is in place for the running of The Irish Times. The ownership of the newspaper is vested in The Irish Times Trust since 1974.

I am unable to confirm the veracity of the letter to which you refer. We published a story that Major McDowell was prepared to act as “a link” to encourage North/South contacts on the release of the British Cabinet papers in January 2000.

Yours sincerely,

Geraldine Kennedy

Editor.

AUBANE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Aubane, Millstreet , Co. Cork.

31st. January 2003

Dear Ms. Kennedy,

Thank you for your letter dated 15th January 2003.

You are not able to tell me when the arrangements made by Major McDowell with No. 10 Downing St. were rescinded so I can hardly accept your assurance that they are no longer in place.

Moreover, your reference to the Irish Times Trust being in charge of the paper would confirm that the arrangements remained in place. It is well known that the Irish Times Trust was a unique institution of its kind in that it was designed and set up to ensure that the Trust, and therefore its paper, was under the control of a single individual, Major McDowell. I understand that he remains President for life of the Trust.

The Trust ensures that his writ runs and as he originated the arrangements with Downing St. it is just not credible that he used his own Trust to undo his own efforts. Au contraire, I would say.

Also, I find it amazing that you cannot confirm the authenticity or otherwise of the document concerned, or even give an opinion on it, although you and your paper were aware of it for over 3 years. You have not taken the trouble to clarify the matter in all that time! This shows an incredible lack of curiosity on your part about the running of your own paper.

Your paper gave a misleading account of the relationship between Major McDowell and Downing St. in January 1971 in only reporting a reference to him as simply wishing to be a ‘link’ between the two governments. You were given an opportunity to rectify this deceit and instead you now repeat it and obviously condone it.

Your paper investigates and reports extensively on a host of issues, many of which are of considerably less significance than what is contained in the Ambassador’s letter (the publications of this tiny local history group, for

example). You are now shown to be very selective indeed in your investigations, reports and in the issues that seize you.

Your predecessor, Mr Gageby, the object of Major McDowell's barrack-room abuse in the document, was clearly kept in ignorance of the paper's direction arranged by its owner but you are clearly determined to be wilfully ignorant of the facts of the matter and their consequences. You are in denial. This must be a unique attitude for the editor of a paper that claims to be national, investigative and a journal of record. You and your paper are no longer credible in respect of any of those attributes.

This is all the more disappointing as it was generally assumed that your appointment as editor was made on the basis of your reputation for good news reporting and it was expected that you would take *The Irish Times* in that direction. This incident shows that you have not done so and the deceit and evasions you have practiced about it makes the high moral tone you adopt editorially on other issues appear very hypocritical indeed as your reporting clearly stops short where your own vested interests are concerned.

Yours etc.,

Jack Lane

PS.

In view of the fact that *The Irish Times* never published the Ambassador's letter, readers can judge for themselves the veracity of the following claim made later by Ms. Kennedy:

“The contents of the letter in question were published in *The Irish Times* on January 27th, 2003, as soon as its existence was drawn to my attention. – Ed., IT.” (Irish Times letters, 23 April 2003)

Some background

It then transpired that the Ambassador's letter had been released three years earlier, in January 2000. Furthermore the Irish Times had reported on January 3rd 2000 (*“McDowell prepared to act as ‘link’”* by Rachel Donnelly) on other letters and documents released at the time involving the same Whitehall official, W. K. K. White, the British Ambassador and Major McDowell. But the Irish Times deliberately ignored the *“renegade....white nigger”* letter even though this letter was clearly available to anyone who perused the file at Kew. Instead the Irish Times painted McDowell as simply being interested in the betterment of relations between the two governments after the outbreak of *‘The troubles’* in 1969. Instead of giving a fair summary of the documents then made available the paper gave a most misleading account and gave the distinct impression to any researcher that there was nothing of any great consequence in them.

The well known investigative skills of the *Irish Times* and its high moral tone had suddenly stopped short when it came to investigating a matter that concerned its own vested interests and the exposure of its carefully cultivated veneer of impartiality.

Ms Kennedy was given an opportunity by me to rectify this earlier cover-up but instead she endorsed the action of her predecessor despite her previous reputation as a particularly fearless investigative journalist.

I sent the document to a number of journalists, newspapers and magazines for their information and comments. Only one, the *Irish Political Review*, saw fit to publish it in full and to discuss the implications of it for Irish democracy (January 2003).

The Sunday Independent briefly reported on it in some editions (26/1/03) but did not consider the full implications and concentrated instead on the sensational aspect of it, the 'white nigger' comment by McDowell about Gageby.

The Irish Times responded in public for the first and last time on the following day with an anonymously written piece by an "Irish Times reporter." It quoted McDowell as claiming he never used this language and simply denied everything the Ambassador had written. This provoked Ronan Fanning to ask the then British Ambassador the likelihood of people in his position telling lies in confidential correspondence with friends and colleagues in Whitehall and he responded with an emphatic 'Nil.' (*Sunday Independent*, 2/2/03)

The Irish Times did not respond again and effectively shut down further discussion on the matter showing the same contempt for its readers, and staff, as the proprietor had for its former editor.

One of the ironies of McDowell's racist remark for me was that I had been denounced as a racist by *The Irish Times* some time previously because I suggested, in an aside, in one of our publications that Elizabeth Bowen was really an English writer and that she had spied here during World War II. I had established this fact by publishing some of her secret reports to Churchill that had survived destruction.

According to other letters released at the same time in 2000 Major McDowell was described as acceptable "...in Whitehall terms through his service in the Judge Advocates Department" which I understand is involved in the overseeing/running of court martials and is a rather sensitive area of the Whitehall world. This appeared to have been (is?) something like his day job for the British establishment.

In his published diary, Cecil King, the former *Daily Mirror* proprietor said, quite matter of factly, that McDowell was in MI5. (See entry for 23/1/1972 on page 172 of his 1970-74 Diary)

So, on the basis of these pieces of evidence gleaned about McDowell we can reasonably assume, unless proven otherwise, that a British Army Major, with links in MI5, with racist attitudes towards Irish people, conspired with a foreign government to run an Irish newspaper; that he was clearly successful as *The Irish Times* went from strength to strength under him and helped see off its main rival, the *Irish Press*. 'Natives' who went 'colonial' in a reverse of the process undergone by Mr. Gageby were eventually found to do the necessary to ensure McDowell's vision triumphed. He would no doubt have a less polite name for them in his private moments and possibly the same contempt as he had for Gageby 'going native.'

But nobody in the media seemed that interested in all, or any, of this - least of all *The Irish Times* despite the unending thirst of this same paper for any allegation and rumour made against others.

And so the matter seemed to rest.

However, along came Senator Martin Mansergh to write regularly for the *Irish Times*. He began his series by praising Major McDowell and his Trust and compared the *Irish Times* with *Le Monde* (20/9/03) - the paper that prides itself on being run by and for its staff and readers with an enshrined right of reply. I wrote to Senator Mansergh and asked him to explain himself but he quickly dropped all reference to *Le Monde* when replying and instead went on at unnecessary length to assert that Elizabeth Bowen was not a spy. He might as well try to assert that black is white.

Recently Senator Mansergh returned to the subject. On April 3rd 2004, he charged, in his *Irish Times* column, that I and others regarded him as a spy and were indulging in conspiracy theories about him - with no evidence whatever provided by him to back this up. (Bearing in mind that he is writing in a paper that was set on its present course by an MI5 agent in conspiracy with Whitehall and given that he refuses, despite all the evidence, to recognise a real spy, Elizabeth Bowen).

Major McDowell was now portrayed by Senator Mansergh as an out of touch remnant of the Protestant Ascendancy pathetically fighting the future as represented by Mr Gageby, but also incongruously being magnanimous in running the *Irish Times* to prevent it being influenced by rich businessmen against the Irish government.

What does Mr Mansergh take his readers for? In writing thus Senator Mansergh cultivates either a delusional or cynical naivety. In effect, he suggests that the fact that a newspaper is being run by its proprietor in the interest of a former colonial power is of no import. In fact the peculiarities of the 'Trust' set up by the Major ensured a continued interest by the Major's MI5 colleagues.

I wrote a short letter to the Irish Times immediately * to reject Senator Mansergh's absurd allegations but no reply was published. I asked Senator Mansergh to help me 'clear' his name by having my letter published. I heard nothing from either. Neither allowed me the opportunity of doing what I could to help Mr. Mansergh's reputation. What a curious situation. Could *you* take either of them seriously any more?

Of course, in the final analysis it is not Senator Mansergh's responsibility to decide what is published in the *Irish Times*. That is the Editor's job (not the proprietor's or MI5's). However, if Senator Mansergh compares *Le Monde* with the *Irish Times* it is presumably with a view to associating them in terms of journalistic ethics. That being the case, he should publicly make known a duty of the *Irish Times* to allow a right of response to an individual such as me criticised by him in his column.

As for the *Irish Times* itself, it has a duty to its employees, and more fundamentally to its readers and to the wider public to re-establish trust by properly and publicly investigating the clear inference that its proprietor conspired and succeeded in undermining its integrity and independence.

It should institute a structure such as that of *Le Monde*. Its much-vaunted espousal of transparency and openness demands no less.

Can the Irish Times afford to disagree and still maintain even a semblance of integrity?

Jack Lane

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AUBANE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Aubane, Millstreet, Co. Cork.

"He who cannot call on three thousand years is living from hand to mouth." (Goethe)

4th April 2004

Madam,

MARTIN MANSERGH NOT A SPY

Mr. Mansergh implied in his article on 3rd April that members of this Society consider him a spy. He provided no evidence for this because there is none. Neither have we had any need whatever to indulge in conspiracy theories when commenting on what he does and says.

Based on what he has written in your paper and in correspondence with us (published and not just 'circulating' as he states) he has consistently misrepresented the Irish Times Trust, Major McDowell and the role of Elizabeth Bowen in Irish affairs and this is what we have sought to point out. The fact that we now find ourselves in their company, as another object of his misrepresentations, is a rare achievement indeed on his part.

À la Adlai Stevenson, we offer to stop telling the truth about him if he stops telling lies about us.

Yours etc.,

Jack Lane

Aubane Historical Society