

17 JUN 1981

Mr Jackson

NOTE OF MEETING

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 17 JUN 1981
 MUTAX ROOM
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- cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - 4
- PS/Mr Alison (L&B) - 4
- PS/PUS (L&B) - 4
- Mr Marshall
- Mr Blalock - 4
- Mr Wyatt - 4
- Mr Palmer - 4
- Mr Buxton - 4
- Mr Ranson - 4
- Mr Moriarty
- Mr Blatherwick - 4
- Mr Chesterton
- Mr Harrington

Mr Mackay (2 papers)
To see and return to me, please.
JCTip.G.P.

Private Secretary to the
 Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary

MEETING WITH SIR LEONARD FIGG, AMBASSADOR TO THE IRISH REPUBLIC: 16 JUNE 1981.

Present: Secretary of State Sir Leonard Figg
 Mr Wyatt
 Mr Boys Smith

The Ambassador called on the Secretary of State at 11.45 am. In outlining recent developments in the Republic of Ireland he made the following main points:

- (1) The next significant event would be the choice of a new leader for the Labour Party. Following his election the Labour Party and Fine Gael would be in a position to decide whether and to what extent they would reach agreement. Until then the nature of the future Government would remain uncertain.
- (2) The surprise in the election had been the size of the support for E-block candidates. The vote they had received and their election to the Dail now meant that they were a new element in Irish politics. People were already turning their minds to the by-election which would take place when the first hunger striker died. In a view of the Ambassador an E-block candidate was not likely to win the by-election.
- (3) The new Irish Government would be forced to adopt harsh economic measures. The economy had been the main issue in the election and informed opinion was agreed that firm policies were needed.
- (4) The new Government, whatever its composition, was likely to want to continue with the joint studies at broadly the pace which had been followed so far. The continuation in office of

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a Fianna Fail Government might well be more favourable to the United Kingdom in this respect.

2. In discussion the Ambassador noted the following points:

- (1) People in the Republic were not on the whole pleased at the way in which events in Northern Ireland had come to influence their affairs. Established politicians appreciated that the principles the UK Government had been upholding were relevant to the future of the Republic, and they were ready to resist direct pressure on behalf of the E-block campaign. But they were concerned at the impact of a steady erosion of support amongst those of moderate views. If the middle ground was lost their position would be more vulnerable. Continuing deaths in Northern Ireland prisons would contribute to a growing feeling that the UK Government must be on the wrong course; there were already signs of concern amongst people well disposed to the United Kingdom.
- (2) The Ambassador believed that a review of prisons in Northern Ireland of the kind the Secretary of State was putting to his colleagues in CD Committee would in these circumstances be very helpful. It would make it easier for the United Kingdom to demonstrate its continuing concern and its wish to avoid a deadlock. He believed that it would be useful to include on the enquiry team a person of distinction from outside the United Kingdom; one possibility for consideration might be a member of the European Commission on Human Rights. The inclusion of a non-British dimension would be well received in the Republic. It would encourage the view that the Government, now the ECCHR had been unable to involve itself in the matter, was using its ingenuity to achieve the same objective of international involvement in another way.
- (3) In the Ambassador's view there would be advantage in seeking a further summit meeting in September or October, for which preparation might start in July. To wait until the end of 1981 might well be to leave it too late. It was impossible to judge what the effect on the Anglo-Irish talks might be of a continuing series

of hunger strike deaths through the rest of the Summer, and into the Autumn.

- (4) The Ambassador believed that it would be very helpful if, in association with the announcement of decisions reached at CD Committee, the Prime Minister could give the radio interview which RSE had requested.

S. W. Boys Smith

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