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AMBASÁID NA HÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

29 MAR 1970

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PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

March 6th 1970

Dear Secretary

I made a call yesterday afternoon on the Home Secretary and found him quite friendly.

After a certain amount of general chat, we came around to the North of Ireland question. I mentioned the Minister's recent talk with George Thomson, and said that my impression from it, and from other contacts which I have made here was that a considerable difference exists between the British assessment and our own of the situation at the present time. While the information available to us tends to indicate the possibility of serious outbursts in the North, the British appear to take the view that the risk of this happening is now considerably diminished. Mr Callaghan said that he had seen a note of the Minister's conversation with Mr Thomson, and he, too, was very much struck by the difference in interpretation on both sides. At this point, I remarked that we were right in our view of the position in August last, and he replied, "in my personal opinion, you might be right again."

He went on to say that he has throughout tended to be a good deal more pessimistic than many of his colleagues. However, as a result of the absence of incidents during the two recent marches, he now sees "a gleam of hope", but he would not put it higher than that. The presence in the North in such

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strength of the British Army (even though this may not be palatable to us) is responsible for the ^{relative}~~relevant~~ calm which now exists. At the same time it would be the ultimate in complacency to assume that there will be no further incidents. These will certainly occur, perhaps for a time, even on a growing scale, and with increasingly serious effects.

Mr Callaghan hoped that, if the situation in the North should "temporarily hot-up", we would refrain from making any public declarations likely to add fuel to the fire. At this point, he paid particularly warm tribute to the helpful attitude displayed throughout by the Taoiseach. The moderation shown by the Taoiseach was deeply appreciated in London and, indeed, in Belfast also.

The British Army is doing a fine job in the North, and must be given time, in co-operation with the police force, to isolate effectively the extreme elements on both sides from the great mass of the population. The great majority of the people in the North want to live in peace and harmony, and if the extremists can be really isolated, it will then be easier "to do a job on them". Personally, Mr Callaghan does not see any possibility of an early phasing-out of the Army in the North. The force at present there is badly needed for other purposes, and Denis Healey would be very anxious to get back some of his soldiers urgently, but, unfortunately, this cannot happen.

I then mentioned the deep concern on our side at the build-up of arms in private hands. Mr Callaghan said he fully appreciated our concern. He said he was fully aware that

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the smuggling of arms had been taking place, and he believed there was a sizeable increase in the amount of arms held by extremists on the minority side. I intervened to say that our impression is that the quantities of arms now held by the other side are vastly greater. He said he thought this quite possible, but they have not yet got around to making a detailed check of the arms situation. In his own words "there are probably arms in the rafters of a large number of houses over there, but the truth is that we do not at present know".

He then talked about the Ulster Defence Regiment, and said he was very glad that, of the first one thousand applicants, 25% belonged to the minority. I remarked that this was certainly an interesting development, and inquired whether that proportion from the minority was likely to be recruited to the Force. Mr Callaghan said he could not answer that question. Very close scrutiny of applicants from the minority would be necessary to ensure that members of the IRA or of other extreme elements did not get into the Force. After all, the main purpose of the Ulster Defence Regiment would be to protect the Border from incursions from the south by the IRA. When the British Government was considering the fate of the B Specials, there was strong pressure from a number of his colleagues to do away with the Specials altogether, and to put nothing in their place. He had considerable difficulty in getting agreement to the establishment of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and is convinced that this was a very worthwhile achievement, as otherwise the dislodged Specials would have flooded into the Ulster Volunteer Force.

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We then touched briefly on the constitutional problem, which I introduced with the remark that, sooner or later, it will be necessary to face up seriously to a solution of it. Mr Callaghan said that our immediate purpose must be to get the situation in the North back to normality, as quickly as possible. He could not see that the British Government could do anything practical at this time to help solve the constitutional question. It will be necessary to await a change of heart on the part of the Protestants in the North who, if anything, are now more attached to their link with the Crown than they were in the past. I intervened to say "but are you not financing the maintenance of the Border"? He said this was probably true, but there could be no question of their withdrawing, or even reducing the financial support which they are, at present, giving to the area.

I mentioned to Mr Callaghan that I was concerned about the possibility of incidents here in connection with the celebration of the National Day, and told him of the threats which have been reaching the Embassy. We are, I told him, in touch with Scotland Yard on the security question, and I said I would be grateful for his support in ensuring adequate security, as there would be two Ministers in London at the time. Mr Callaghan asked his Private Secretary to take the matter up immediately with Scotland Yard.

At the end of all this, Mr Callaghan said "now I want to talk to you in my capacity as a politician". He mentioned that there has been, over recent months, very close

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contact between leaders in the Trade Union Movement in the North and Transport House. As a result, a proposal is now being framed for the establishment in the North of a branch of the British Labour Party. This would be based initially on Westminster constituencies in the North. The proposal is now fairly far advanced, and may, in fact, be approved by Transport House in about two months time. If a branch of the British Labour Party is to be established in the North, it will need to be ratified at the Labour Party Conference to be held in the autumn.

Mr Callaghan asked me what I thought the reaction in Dublin to the proposal would be. I said I would, of course, have to consult my authorities on this, but I thought it possible that some, at least, may regard this as a rather unfriendly act on the part of the Labour Party, in that it might be interpreted as giving further recognition to the unnatural division of my country. He said that he, himself, is a little worried in case we might interpret the move in this way. He very much hoped that we would give serious thought to the long-term favourable possibilities of such a development. He, himself, is convinced that, if any progress is to be made in solving the constitutional question, this has to be approached on the basis of co-operation within the North at grass roots level. Mr Lemass had, he said, initiated with Captain O'Neill certain co-operation in the non-political field, but he always regarded this as "a rather superficial exercise".

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There is clear evidence that, if a branch of the Labour Party were established in the North, it would receive strong support at working-class level from both Catholics and Protestants. If they could be got to co-operate at this level one could look forward to the build-up in time of a new atmosphere of harmony within the area. If the proposal is proceeded with, it will have to be on the strict understanding that removal of the Border can be no part of the policy of the North of Ireland branch of the Labour Party, and that the solution of the Border question must continue to remain a matter for decision by the North of Ireland Government.

I asked Mr Callaghan if his support for the proposal in any way derived from considerations affecting the future fortunes of the British Labour Party. He replied in the negative, but said that he would not exclude the possibility of Labour picking up in the North maybe four or five seats in the General Election of 1974 or 1975. I asked him if he would envisage people like Gerry Fitt as being prominently involved in this new development. He said that, at best, Gerry Fitt might be on the fringe, but he, himself, would do everything possible to exclude Fitt who, he said, could not be regarded as an asset to any political party.

This concluded our conversation, which lasted for the best part of an hour. Mr Callaghan told me not to hesitate to come and see him whenever I wanted to do so. He thought it

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very desirable that we should keep in the closest touch.

Yours sincerely



Donal O'Sullivan
Ambassador

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