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Six Counties: SituationSECRETMeeting with Mr. Ivan Cooper M.P.

Mr. Ivan Cooper, M.P. for Mid-Derry, called to the Department this afternoon to apply for an Irish passport. He had not held a passport previously. He is going on a week's lecture tour to the United States, mainly to universities, which has been arranged through an agent. He will clear £250 on the tour. I was informed that he was here and asked that he be brought up to see me while the passport was being written up.

When he came up to my room Mr. Cooper mentioned that it was a pity that we did not have a Passport Office in Belfast as this might induce more Protestants to apply for Irish passports. I said that was an interesting idea but that there might be constitutional difficulties involved and pointed out that under our law practically everyone in the Six Counties was an Irish citizen and could, as frequently happened, apply to the Passport Office here for passports.

After some other preliminary exchanges, I asked him how the situation was in the North. He said he was fearful of serious trouble there this year and was worried about the growing strength of the Ulster Volunteer Force. He said he was the expert among the Opposition on the UVF and rural areas. Because of this background he still had much contact with Protestant opinion. He expected trouble around Easter when traditional Republican parades and manifestations would take place. In his opinion there was a substantial growth in Republicanism in the North, by which I think he meant extremist tendencies. I mentioned that I had read that some AOH parades usually held on St. Patrick's Day had been called off this year. He said that these were not important and that the AOH were not of much account. The real crunch would come at Maghera where the Co. Derry Orange parade was scheduled to take place on the Twelfth of July this year. This was the border between the Prime Minister's constituency (mainly Orange) and his own (mainly Republican). I asked him if he expected trouble when the Local Government Review Body's proposals were published in May or June but he thought that the Twelfth of July would be a greater danger.

As regards the UVF he said that they were training extensively and he knew of training places in his constituency. It was a delicate matter for him to deal with the police about such things because of danger of retaliation to himself and because of his deep distrust of the police. Catholic policemen could not trust their superiors who often tampered with their mail. He had on one occasion told the police about a UVF training place and was asked by the police to accompany them to the spot alone which he was not prepared to do. He said that Paisley's Ulster Constitutional Defence Committee was the recruiting body for the UVF. He agreed with my suggestion that the minority fears of violence, especially in rural areas, during this year, were well founded. When I suggested to him that a realistic assessment of another outbreak might be 70:30 against he said that in his opinion he would put the possibility much closer to even money than that. He maintained that the British troops might be able to contain situations in Belfast and Derry but he did not think that they could possibly control the rural areas. I said that my opinion was that the British could have sufficient troops anywhere in the Six Counties within twenty-four hours. He said that would be no good as all the damage could be done in the first six hours. The problem was how many lives would be lost before the troops could arrive in a rural area.

Mr. Cooper was of the view that a Right Wing take-over in the North was more than a possibility. It was significant that Mr. Craig was addressing meetings all over the area. Unionist M.P.s were now in great fear of their own supporters. He did not expect that Major Chichester-Clark would last very long as Prime Minister. Mr. Faulkner had lost his chances and was now unacceptable to his own Right Wing. He thought possible successors might be Senator William Morgan, who is a candidate in the by-election for South Antrim, or Capt. John Brooke.

He mentioned to me that efforts were being made to form a new Opposition Party but that they needed eight or nine M.P.s. I indicated that I was aware of this development. He said one of the main difficulties was Mr. Gerry Fitt, M.P. for Dock Belfast, who wished to maintain an affiliation with the Labour Party here. Mr. Cooper was of the view that members of the Northern Opposition should not be affiliated with any political parties in the South. The question of leadership would arise if the new party were formed and while Mr. John Hume, M.P. for Foyle, thought he was heading for this, Mr. Cooper was of the view that the leader would be a compromise candidate. I did not like to press him on who that might be.

I told Mr. Cooper in confidence that our contacts with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were improving and asked him his opinion, as opportunities for these contacts arose, as to what points we might reasonably mention to our contacts. In his opinion the main points to make at the moment were:

- (1) The increasing activist role of the UVF and the extent of their training exercises.
- (2) The seriousness of Right Wing take-over efforts.
- (3) To promote the idea of introducing proportional representation in Northern elections.

Mr. Cooper was critical of the "Voice of the North" which emanates from Dungannon and which he described as a bad newspaper the content of which was not helpful in present circumstances. He thought that a Mr. Gallagher of Sligo was providing its main finance. He was also critical of a statement made by Senator B. McGlinchey in the Senate recently. He added that he follows the Dail and Senate Debates here rather closely.

I drew Mr. Cooper's attention to Stephen Preston's article in the Daily Telegraph of 5th March, 1970, entitled "Ulster Moving to the Right" and expressed surprise at some of the statements therein, that all Civil Rights demands have been either met or are on their way and the argument made for bringing Mr. William Craig back to Ministerial office. Mr. Cooper expressed surprise too as he knew Mr. Preston and considered him a moderate. He would find an opportunity to mention the article to Mr. Preston.

Finally, Mr. Cooper emphasised that the Government here should be prepared to cooperate closely with the Opposition in the North.

Commentary:

Mr. Cooper has made an issue of UVF training in several speeches, including interventions at Stormont. While not disputing the facts - indeed we would take for granted a certain amount of this kind of activity on both sides - it is necessary to realise that the political and security situations are greatly changed since the overt British take-over in the North in August last. Our assessment of a 70-30 chance of a reasonably peaceful evolution takes this factor into account but we have the impression that people in the North give it lesser weight than seems to us reasonable.

agree (and mentioned in a recent report) that Mr. Morgan might in due course be a candidate to succeed Major Chichester-Clark, although we gather that Mr. Roy Bradford might also fancy his chances. Capt. Brooke seems to us a most unlikely choice.

We have reported before on the question of a new Opposition Party. It is much too optimistic to foresee 8 or 9 members in the initial stages as the four remaining Nationalists are party-bound not to join, V. Sampson will not join, Paddy Kennedy is too closely connected with the Dungannon group ("The Voice of the North" Seamus Brady etc.) and Gerry Fitt is playing hard to get. The leadership problem is certainly one of ^{the} stumbling blocks.

The points 1, 2 and 3 mentioned above have been conveyed to our London contacts on two or three occasions.



6 March, 1970

SGR