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Reference Code: 2002/8/481

Title: Copy letter from Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain Donal O'Sullivan to Seán Ronan, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a meeting with Stewart Crawford, Deputy Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, discussing Irish government concerns regarding army actions in Derry, allegations of ill-treatment of internees, and British perception of Irish government support for the civil disobedience campaign.

Creation Date(s): 19 August, 1971

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 5 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Access Conditions: Open

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Confidential

August 19th 1971

Dear Assistant Secretary

This will confirm and amplify what I told you on the phone yesterday after my call on Sir Stewart Crawford. When I phoned him for an appointment, he was not enthusiastic about seeing me. He claimed to be fully taken up with meetings and offered to receive me this afternoon. I said this would not do as the matters I wished to raise with him were very urgent. He then agreed to see me for five minutes at 5.15 p.m. between meetings. In the event, we talked for half an hour.

I told Sir Stewart at the outset of our discussion that I had been instructed by the Taoiseach to speak to him urgently on two matters. The Taoiseach had been receiving during the day very upsetting reports from a most reliable eye witness on the grave situation in Derry. There, the Army had moved into the Bogside en masse to remove barricades and it was also engaged in somewhat brutal house to house searches. The Army had, in fact, entered the Bogside with their guns poised for action. It may be symptomatic of the one-sided nature of the Army operation in the North that the Protestant community in Beechwood Creggan had been advised by their clergyman two days beforehand to evacuate. The conclusion would seem to be that he had prior knowledge of the Army descent on the Bogside. I had been instructed by the Taoiseach to urge most strongly that the Army operation in Derry be modified and that, if the clearance of barricades in the Bogside has to go ahead, it should proceed with due regard for humanitarian considerations.

Sir Stewart said I had made our position quite clear. He would report my request to his authorities. The Army is faced with a desperate situation. Its instructions are quite clear. The Army has to be firm in the circumstances but he was not prepared to accept that the Derry operation is unnecessarily harsh.

I then turned to the allegations of ill-treatment of internees. In Belfast alone there are more than thirty witnesses who are in a position to testify that there has been brutal treatment. I said that Sir Stewart no doubt had seen reports of statements by John Hume, M.P., in the past day or so of incidents of brutal treatment which he had personally witnessed. The Taoiseach and the Government are deeply concerned about these allegations and I had been instructed to urge that these acts of brutality should cease forthwith and that there should be a detailed and impartial enquiry into the matter.

While again indicating that he would report what I said, Sir Stewart added that he genuinely did not believe these stories. There is a complaints procedure and it is open to those who are making the allegations to have resort to it. I asked if he was suggesting that people like Cardinal Conway and John Hume are liars. They and others involved in the allegations are highly respected figures not only in Ireland but abroad as well and, quite apart from any question of humanitarianism, one would have expected a deeper concern here about the damage being suffered by Britain's reputation. At this point, I referred obliquely to Ministerial excursions to the U.S.A. and underlined that at home is the first obvious place to tackle the problem. He still persisted in his view that the allegations of ill-treatment are exaggerated and that, in any event, a complaints procedure exists.

Throughout this part of our talk, Sir Stewart was friendly but rather firm and unyielding.

We then went on to a more general discussion during which I laid strong emphasis on two points, namely:-

- (1) the spill over effects on us of the present deplorable situation in the North, and
- (2) the fact that the gap between the majority and the minority has now become so wide that an immediate and meaningful move in the political sphere provides the only hope of longer term reconciliation.

On (1), I said that persistence in the policy of striving for a military solution can only drive the two sides further apart. Worse still, this policy could create a situation which would engulf the whole Island. It could lead to a grave political crisis in the South. He was, I said, no doubt fully informed of the risks involved in this direction by the British Embassy in Dublin. I mentioned that I had just read in the Irish papers of a number of important resignations from the Government Party in the Taoiseach's own county and some of these were perhaps from the Taoiseach's own constituency. This, I added, is just one indication as to how the political atmosphere is evolving.

Sir Stewart gave the impression of being somewhat taken aback by these remarks. He said he shared my view that a military solution is not the answer to the Northern problem. London does not want to make things any more difficult for Dublin but the Taoiseach has made a number of quite unhelpful statements. The British refrained from making any public comment on the Taoiseach's statement of the 12th August "which has seriously reduced ^{the} ~~a~~ possibility of bringing Mr. Faulkner and your Prime Minister to the conference table."

It is now quite clear that the Taoiseach is supporting Civil Disobedience in the North. I strongly denied that there has been any evidence that this is so. Sir Stewart then went on to say that "it is just not true" that the Dublin Government is doing its best to control IRA activity and he quoted from the letter in the London Times of the day from Mr. Anthony Marreco. I said he could feel assured that my Government is doing its best in very difficult circumstances and, anyhow, his criticism showed a serious disregard for the very nature of the Border and the difficulties of fully policing it.

As to (2), he was completely frank. He admitted that it is clear to him personally that some advance on the political front is essential. He hastened to add - obviously with less than the truth - that he had no idea as to what Mr. Heath and Mr. Faulkner would be talking about. He deplored the withdrawal of the Opposition from Stormont, said that Gerry Fitt was against the idea and added that some members of the SDLP probably succumbed to intimidation from the IRA. I said I had no evidence of this nor had my Government any prior knowledge of withdrawal by the Opposition. He could be quite sure of one thing, namely, that, as the situation in the North has now created such a rift between the two sides, there is not the remotest possibility of the Opposition returning to Stormont on the basis of the status quo. Whatever views Gerry Fitt may have expressed about withdrawal, he made most positive assertions to me in recent days that a return on the basis of the status quo is quite out of the question. What the Taoiseach said in his statement of the 12th August was related to the realities of the situation and I hoped that Sir Stewart would not take amiss my saying that no good purpose

could be served by an attitude here which, in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, characterises that statement as unhelpful.

This concluded our discussion. Sir Stewart repeated again that he would bring the points I made to the notice of his authorities.

Yours sincerely

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Ambassador

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