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Title: Note written by Hugh J McCann, Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs, regarding an alleged proposal by Brian Faulkner, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, to legitimise Protestant vigilantes; the recent Chequers talks; and British searches of vessels off the coast of Northern Ireland.

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NOTE

Following the concern expressed to Mr. Eamonn Gallagher by Mr. John Hume about the proposal he believes Mr. Faulkner is bringing to London to "legitimise" the Protestant vigilantes I sent for the British Ambassador (having first secured the agreement of the Taoiseach) and told him of Mr. Hume's concern as reported by Mr. Gallagher. I emphasised the folly of any step which would give even the slightest cover of legitimacy to the Protestant vigilantes. These people have licensed weapons and historically pogroms have been led by uniformed men either RUC or B Specials. Giving a cover of legality to the vigilantes would entail grave risks of a similar nature and this, in turn, would lead to demands for creating similar forces in the Catholic areas. No political leader, not even a moderate like John Hume, could in the circumstances do other than encourage such a step on the part of the Catholics.

I told the Ambassador that Mr. Hume's concern was fully shared by us and I asked him to bring this concern to the notice of London immediately so that Mr. Heath would be fully informed of the dangers involved in yielding to Mr. Faulkner in any way on this point. The Ambassador undertook to do this immediately. I told the Ambassador we were making representations in a similar sense through our Ambassador in London.

I took advantage of the Ambassador's visit to say to him once again how concerned I was at the lack of positive action following the recent Chequers talks. The public statements of Mr. Faulkner and Lord Carrington had not been helpful. I stressed the importance of constructive action by London without delay if the moderates are not to be swept aside by the extremists.

The Ambassador said that he shared my concern and had, in fact, following an earlier conversation of mine with him, made a special point of bringing to the notice of London how unfortunate it was that Mr. Faulkner should have indicated that he could never have anybody in his Cabinet who was not a committed Unionist.

The Ambassador then mentioned to me that he had received word from London that the British Navy might be undertaking some searches of vessels off the Northern coast shortly as there were two suspects in mind. I immediately expressed the hope that London was not so foolish at this critical time to start resuming searches in Carlingford Lough or anywhere near our waters. The Ambassador assured me that this was not the case and went on to say that the two suspect vessels were not Irish flag vessels.

Amk

7 Deireadh Fómhair 1971