

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code: 2002/8/484

Title: Note by H McCann, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting discussions with Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home and Thomas Brimelow of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, concerning the effects of the policies pursued by the British government and its Northern Ireland counterpart on the deteriorating situation in Northern Ireland.

Creation Date(s): 9 November, 1971

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 2 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Access Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

NOTE

After President Saragat's dinner in the Quirinale for the Foreign Ministers of the Ten I spoke to Sir Alec Douglas-Home about the North. I know Sir Alec personally since my London days and I asked him when was he going to do something about the Northern situation. He replied "Come, let's talk about it" and he drew me aside to a quiet corner of the room.

I spoke of the deteriorating situation in the North and the effect it was having in the South. I emphasised the urgent need for a constructive political initiative before the situation deteriorates further. I pointed to the folly of attempting to achieve a military solution without parallel progress on the political front. I pointed to the manner in which British policy had led to an increase in the strength of the IRA in the North, the consequences of the one-sided internment and I emphasised the extent to which sympathy was gaining for the extremists at the expense of the moderates. The minority community had begun to lose any hope of a fair deal from Stormont with the result that their elected representatives had opted out. I referred to the fact that Mr. Heath had spoken of a guaranteed role for the minority but Mr. Faulkner had made it clear that he would have no one in his Government who had any aspirations to Irish unity. There had been no positive political initiative since the Chequers talks and, as a result, opinion in the South was also hardening.

Sir Alec did not dissent from any of what I had said but stressed the difficulty of his Government in doing anything which would not topple Mr. Faulkner. He made no secret of the fact that direct rule is something which they would like to avoid if at all possible.

I agreed with Sir Alec that the decisions facing his Government were difficult ones to take. It is clear, however, that new political initiatives in relation to the North are necessary. I urged that this being so they should not avoid taking these initiatives for fear of grasping the nettle. I apologised to Sir Alec for speaking so plainly to him but I felt urged to do so because of my growing concern about the deteriorating situation in the North, the spill-over effect it was having in the South and the effect it could have on Anglo-Irish relations. Sir Alec said that he was glad that I had spoken to him so frankly. He realised that I appreciated the problems of all the parties involved including the British difficulties.

I subsequently had a conversation along similar lines with Sir Thomas Brimelow, Deputy Under-Secretary in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office when I was seated beside him at luncheon given by Foreign Minister Moro for the other Foreign Ministers. Brimelow reflected the same fear on the part of the British of toppling Faulkner and having direct rule.

- 2 -

I spoke a little more plainly to Brimelow than I had to his political chief. I told him that it seemed to me that the Right-wing of the Unionist Party were calling the tune for Mr. Faulkner and that Mr. Faulkner was doing this for Mr. Heath. I wondered what constructive political thinking the Foreign Office were doing especially in the context of both our countries going into the EEC. I referred to the earlier position where the Home Office regarded themselves as custodians of the Constitution of Northern Ireland and I said that recent British action in relation to the North suggested that there was little change in this situation except, perhaps, that the Home Office was being joined by the Department of Defence, in seeking a military solution. Brimelow, somewhat to my surprise, admitted that the situation had not changed much and agreed that the Home Office, rather than the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, were leading in policy. I asked what about his colleague, Sir Stewart Crawford, who seemed to be deeply involved. He replied that Sir Stewart Crawford is mainly concerned with security matters and liaison with the Department of Defence.

I expressed great disappointment that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was not taking a constructive political role in this matter and urged that it was about time they began to do so. I told Brimelow of the growing concern I had heard expressed by some of our future partners in Europe about the situation in the North and I said that I was hearing increasing reference to it as a Vietnam situation. Brimelow admitted that he was worried about the North in the European context. He said that he personally has the unenviable task periodically of writing to the Secretary-General of WEU assuring that body that the withdrawal of troops from Europe for the North does not mean that they will not be available for Europe in an emergency. As time goes on this assurance progressively becomes less credible.

After some further discussion I put it to Brimelow that he agreed that political initiatives were necessary in relation to the North because of what was wrong there but that London was finding it difficult to summon up enough courage to grasp the nettle and do what was right. Brimelow did not dissent. At this point, Sir Con O'Neill interjected laughingly from some distance across the table that he hoped that I was not brainwashing Brimelow in relation to the North. I replied that I had hopes that he would have done this for us but, apparently, he had not completed the task.

Brimelow seemed to have come round somewhat in the course of our discussion and perhaps, therefore, it was worthwhile.



9 Samhain 1971