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Reference Code: 2003/16/465

Title: Copy letter from Donal O’Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain, to R McDonagh, Assistant Secretary at the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a meeting with Merlyn Rees MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, mainly relating to perceptions in Britain of the Northern Ireland situation.

Creation Date(s): 28 July, 1972

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 5 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

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CONFIDENTIAL

28th July 1972

Dear Assistant Secretary

I had Merlyn Rees M.P. to lunch yesterday. The following are the main points which emerged from our conversation:-

- (1) The visit to Dublin by the Labour group was regarded as highly successful. The group has taken very strong exception to the article on the visit which appeared in the Sunday Press. The writer of the article is believed to have been Proinsias Mac Aonghusa. It was a mischievous article and largely without foundation.
- (2) Harold Wilson's talk with the Provisionals was a complete failure. Both Wilson and Rees formed the impression that the suggestion of a split between the Northern and Southern Command is greatly exaggerated. Most of the talking was done by Joe Cahill and "by a person who appeared to be their Legal Adviser". Neither Mac Stiofáin nor O'Connell was present.
- (3) Since the tragic events of Bloody Friday, a very much harder line has emerged on the Tory backbenches. The same is true on the Labour side and most strongly among the Scottish M.Ps. In Labour circles there are unfortunately signs of resentment towards the Irish backbench group because of their Irish connections and, additionally, because many of them are Catholics. The Labour Party is traditionally non-conformist.

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- (4) There is now intensified pressure from both sides of the House on Mr Whitelaw to take a firmer stand against the Provisionals and the indications are that he may find it difficult to resist this pressure.
- (5) It is essential that parallel with the intensified security operation there should be rapid progress in the direction of a political solution. Both Mr Whitelaw and Mr Rees are now coming around to the idea that a G.L.C. arrangement would not be suitable. A more favoured solution now is the setting up of an Assembly in the North based on P.R. There is, in fact, to be a long P.R. debate in the House on Monday.
- (6) It is on the cards that a short Bill providing for the creation of an Assembly may be introduced in the next session. Mr Rees would see merit in giving the Assembly arrangement a life span of 10 years, as he believes this would help to condition minds in the direction of reunification.
- (7) I asked Mr Rees if he would envisage provision being made for some form of Council of Ireland, as I thought this very necessary. He fully agrees with the idea of such a Council, but doubts if it would be appropriate to provide for it in the Bill.
- (8) If the Assembly idea goes ahead, the Labour Party will have to give very serious thought to the scope and functions which should be assigned to it.
- (9) One effect of Bloody Friday seems to be that it has given a new boost to Mr Faulkner. Mr Rees

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met him on his visit to London this week and got the distinct impression that Mr Faulkner would welcome the opportunity of an early private chat with the Taoiseach. I said I would personally have doubts about the wisdom of a meeting between them, certainly at this stage, and Mr Rees rather pointedly mentioned that Mr Faulkner intends to make a visit to Dublin for the Horse Show.

- (10) I stressed to Mr Rees the absolute need to bring the Dublin Government into talks on the North. He said he favours this himself and he, in fact, took the matter up with Mr Whitelaw in a conversation in the past few days. Mr Whitelaw was non-committal.

Later yesterday I received at the Embassy four of the M.Ps who had been to Dublin (Messrs. Orme, Foley, Stallard and McNamara). They, too, expressed satisfaction with their talks in Dublin and their strong resentment about the Sunday Press article.

Stan Orme and Kevin McNamara had spent some time with Mr Whitelaw before they came to see me. They gave him an account of their visit to Dublin and strongly urged on him the need to bring, not only the Dublin Government but the political parties there, into close consultation on the finding of a solution for the North. They urged that a solution which does not have the goodwill and support of Dublin cannot be expected to succeed. Mr Whitelaw "had taken their suggestion on board",

One of the main worries of the four M.Ps is that, because of the changed atmosphere following the events of Bloody

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Friday, Mr Whitelaw may now be pressed into going too far in dealing with the Provisionals. Stan Orme and Kevin McNamara found him "in very sombre mood". He seemed depressed about the enormity of the task of dealing effectively with the Provisionals and not at all confident that the threat from the U.D.A. has in any way lessened. In anticipation of the debate on Monday, I urged on them the need to emphasise two points:-

- (a) insistence that the Dublin Government must be brought into the discussions, and
- (b) a serious note of caution about the need in the intensified security operation to avoid, as far as possible, alienating the minority community, all the more so in view of the fact that the S.D.L.P. have now agreed to come into talks.

Stan Orme will be closing the debate on the Labour side, and he said he would do his best to deal with these points.

The visiting M.Ps also told me that, in their view, it is now practically certain that the plebiscite can be regarded as indefinitely postponed.

I also had an exchange of views with them on the idea which appears to be developing in favour of creating an Assembly in the North based on P.R. Their feeling is that this is very likely to be the approach towards a political solution. Generally, they see merit in the idea, but they would want to ensure that the functions assigned to the Assembly

*font note in
Heath's statement
on "Panorama"
Monday 31/7/72.
that it is well
"on".*

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would be of a limited character. They would favour the establishment of a Council of Ireland to be concerned in the first instance mainly with economic matters of interest to the two parts of the island.

Yours sincerely

RONAL O'SULLIVAN

Ambassador

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