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**Title:** Copy letter from Donal O’Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain, to HJ McCann, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a meeting with Stan Orme MP, regarding the proposed plebiscite on the constitutional position in Northern Ireland.

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Personal and Confidential

November 9th, 1972

Dear Secretary

In my report to you of yesterday following my talk with Messrs. Wilson and Rees, I told you that I was arranging to see Mr. Stan Orme M.P. Mr. Orme came to the office for a chat this morning.

I covered fully with him the different points in your briefing note and I gave him, as my personal suggestions, the alternative texts of the two questions in the Border Bill. He described the alternative texts as a vast improvement on the existing questions and said he would study them very carefully. His views on the whole question of the plebiscite are indeed almost identical with our own. While the Labour Party is almost certain to press for changes in the existing questions, Stan Orme is not very hopeful that amendments can be carried. He described the second question as an insult to our Government but, nevertheless, is not hopeful that formal consultations with us will take place.

It now seems that the second reading of the Border Bill is being postponed till Monday week because of the urgency of the debate on the economic situation which will take place on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday next. The Northern Ireland group in the Labour Party hope to get approval of the Party at a meeting this afternoon to put forward a reasoned amendment of the Bill in the course of the second reading. What the content of the reasoned amendment would be

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remains to be decided but Stan Orme and some of his colleagues would like it to include provision for further clarification of what is meant by the Irish Dimension.

Mr. Orme told me that it has now been definitely decided in the Labour Party that they will insist on the release of the White Paper in advance of the plebiscite.

Mr. Whitelaw has already virtually committed himself on this in private <sup>conversation</sup> ~~conference~~ with members of the Opposition.

Stan Orme told me that there is a growing weariness in the Labour Party with the North. If a vote of the Party were to be taken at this stage, there would be substantial support for the early withdrawal of the Army and this in itself is a clear indication as to how public opinion in this country is developing. There is also a growing feeling in the Labour Party in favour of the ending of the bipartisan policy and for greater concentration <sup>by</sup> ~~the~~ members on the economic situation. It was largely due to this increasing weariness about the North that Stan Orme found it necessary to take part yesterday afternoon in the debate on the economic situation.

It appears that Captain John Brooke led a delegation from the Newtownbutler area yesterday for talks with representatives of the political parties. The purpose of the visit was to urge the immediate placing of additional units of the Army or, alternatively, of the U.D.R. in the Newtownbutler area because of the rapidly worsening situation there.

The Northern Ireland Labour group will shortly be having separate meetings in London with Mr. Faulkner, with the SDLP and with the NILP for detailed confrontations on the

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proposals they have put forward.

Stan told me, in the strictest confidence, that the situation in the SDLP is very upsetting. There is serious dissension within the group and an open split is not excluded. Apart from saying that it is not a problem between Gerry Fitt and John Hume, Stan Orme would not go further. He and many of his colleagues regard the SDLP proposals for a solution as disastrous. They are much too nationalist in character and this is a view which Gerry Fitt now shares.

On the whole, the impression I got from Stan Orme was one of considerable gloom about the possibility of reaching a satisfactory solution fairly quickly.

Yours sincerely

DONAL O'SULLIVAN

Ambassador

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