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Conor Cruise O'Brien to Taoiseach Liam
Cosgrave regarding the issue of a proposed bi-
partisan approach to Northern Ireland taken by
Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

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OIFIG AN AIRE POIST AGUS TELEGRAFA
 OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS
 BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH I
 DUBLIN I

6 September 1973

Mr Liam Cosgrave TD
 Taoiseach

Dear Taoiseach

At our meeting the question of whether you should go to Cork to meet Mr Lynch was left open.

I think this decision is one of considerable importance and, as there are different views about it in the Government, I thought it might possibly be helpful to put my own views on paper, constituting the case against.

The case for appears to be mainly that such a move would fortify the bi-partisan foreign policy, and that such a gesture would be widely hailed as magnanimous.

The notion of a bi-partisan foreign policy is one that needs to be rather closely scrutinised. There has been very much talk, editorial and other, about the so-called bi-partisan foreign policy since the Government changed than there was before. What Fianna Fáil understand by the concept was rather clearly indicated by Mr Lynch in his comment on your two major speeches when he said - in effect - that if these were to be understood as meaning the same as what he had said as Taoiseach that he agreed with them. In practice Fianna Fáil will use, or try to use, foreign policy exactly like any other issue in order to put us out and themselves in. The notion of bi-partisanship is one way of playing this game since, if we do anything to which they choose to object we can be attacked for sabotaging bi-partisanship. Therefore this notion, if accepted, would achieve a kind of deadlock over our policies.

There is of course a very broad sense in which the notion of bi-partisanship does have reality. The rejection of violence to secure political objectives is a principle to which we are committed, and with which Mr Lynch has also become identified. The pressures of reality, and also Mr Lynch's realistic leadership, have publicly committed Fianna Fáil also to this policy but we should not be deceived into thinking that because of this we have to cherish and safeguard Mr Lynch as, without him Fianna Fáil would become a riproaring provisional institution and the country would be rent in twain. Whatever may have been the case in the past Fianna Fáil now knows what everyone else knows; that there is no meas^{ure} in the country for the IRA or crypto IRA. This great solid fact, and not Mr Lynch, is the safeguard of what is essential and basic behind the slogan of "bi-partisanship".

It is true that during the critical period of 1970 to 1972 some of us did urge an all-party approach to the North and Anglo-Irish relations. This was then coldly ^{rejected} urged by what Mr Lynch then called 'the party of reunification'. I think we are justified in responding to that: "so be it". We should of course extend to them every courtesy that they extended to us in opposition, and a little bit more, but not extravagantly more.

X mass support of Lynch, but 'mass' is all right too

In my opinion for you to go to Cork to see Mr Lynch, before you meet Mr Heath, would be pushing courtesy to the point of extravagance. It is true that some editorial writers would hail the gesture as magnanimous and chivalrous as well they might. Others would draw different lessons. Fianna Fail's sagging prestige would receive a much needed boost. Those who think of Fianna Fáil, even in opposition, as in some sense the only legitimate Government of the country would be fortified in their opinion. People in Fianna Fáil would propagate the idea that an insecure Coalition Government with a narrow majority has to turn to Fianna Fáil for support in any critical situation.

I fear that these negative reactions and insinuations would be considerably more lasting and significant, than any fleeting praise such a gesture might bring from editorial writers.

I think you should ask Mr Lynch in to see you after you have seen Mr Heath. Before that, if he asks to see you I think you should see him and tell him in broad outline the approach the Government has decided on, without showing him papers. If he does not ask to see you, I respectfully suggest that you should not take any initiative with regard to him until after you meet Heath.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs who I know takes quite a different view. He is a much nicer man than I am and therefore more out of touch with public opinion.

Yours sincerely



Conor Cruise O'Brien