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Title: Report of a visit of Garret FitzGerald, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Belfast, on 25 April 1973, where he met with representatives of numerous communities, with attached observations on security arrangements and publicity for the visit. The report and the observations were both drafted by J Swift, First Secretary in the Anglo-Irish Political Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

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25 April 1973Summary

The Minister left Dublin at 1.50 and arrived in Belfast shortly after 5 o'clock. He was welcomed at the border by Detective Chief Inspector McCone (McComb?) of the RUC who volunteered any help necessary. In Belfast the Minister first met Professor Rodney Green of the School of Irish Studies at Queens University. (5.15 p.m. - 6 p.m.). He was then taken on a quick tour of the troubled areas of Belfast by Mr. Gerry Tully of Corrymeela House; the areas seen included Sandy Row, Donegall Road, Roden Street, Grosvenor Road, Falls Road, Divis Street, Shankill Road, Woodvale, Ardoyne, Ballymurphy and Springfield Road.

The Minister returned to Holycross, Crumlin Road, Ardoyne shortly after 7 p.m. and had a quick dinner with some members of the community. During the following 90 minutes, he met, first of all, a number of residents of the area who had been involved in recent incidents there. These persons included Mrs. Edward Sharpe and Mr. Colum McDowell. He then met representatives of various community organisations, including the local Relief Committee, the Ardoyne People's Assembly, the Farrington Gardens Rebuilding Scheme, etc.

Dr. FitzGerald was then brought to a meeting of representatives of Sandy Row Community groups, organised by a Corrymeela officer, Mr. Gerry Tully and an RUC Community Relations officer, Mr. Albert Matchett. There were about 20 Sandy Row people present, representing, we were told, all shades of opinion, including extreme opinion in the area. All of the representatives were, however, very active in community development work, youth and leadership movements, local welfare groups, etc. The Minister made an introductory statement and spent the balance of

approximately two hours answering questions from the floor. Some questions - on Dublin's tolerance of the IRA, on our aspirations for ultimate unity, etc. - were pressed very strongly but the tone throughout was good humoured and courteous.

This meeting broke up about 11.20. The Minister spent a further three-quarters of an hour at the home of Mr. Tully discussing various aspects of the meeting and of possible future developments, North and South, before leaving again for Dublin shortly after midnight.

J.S. $\frac{26}{4}$
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25 April, 1973OBSERVATIONS(a) Security

As mentioned, the Minister's car was met at the Border by a Detective Chief Inspector of the RUC. Subsequently, when the Minister arrived at Queen's University, an Inspector Taylor and a Detective Sergeant McAuley introduced themselves and mentioned that they had been keeping our car under observation from just south of Hillsborough onwards. They mentioned that if we ^{had} used the Lisburn Road entrance to the city rather than the M1, they would have advised us against it, as two men with rifles had been observed in that area. They also advised against taking the Dublin-registered car to Sandy Row. They then offered further assistance, if required, in the same terms as the Chief Inspector had done earlier. When this was politely declined, they expressed best wishes and left.

There is an indication on the radio news today that the Northern Ireland office in London feel disturbed at the security aspects of such visits, that they are considering the matter and that they may make recommendations that all Irish Ministers travelling in the North should be provided with a bodyguard. For what it is worth, I feel we should set our face against this completely, in relation to both communities. It is not necessary that we do anything about it; on an ad hoc basis, however, we could continue to point out the difficulties involved in particular cases. In the Nationalist areas, appearing with a bodyguard of troops or police, even if in plain clothes, would obviously be ruinous; it is still held against Bishop Philbin that he travelled the Falls Road in 1969 in a British Army vehicle. In Unionist areas

provided the sponsors of the visit are chosen with care and ordinary discretion is used in timing, means of transportation etc., the degree of risk from extreme Unionists is only slightly larger than the risk from IRA elements in the Nationalist areas. Moreover, it is important to show that our approach to both areas is even-handed, insofar as the need for protection is felt; it is worth while making the point publicly by repeated examples that Ministers will travel anywhere in the North, having given advance notice as a matter of courtesy, but without seeking permission or protection.

(b) Publicity

(1) The Minister has made it clear that he plans relatively frequent visits to Northern Ireland. His aim, as I understand it, is that, before long, these will be considered routine and the details of such visits will not hopefully merit more than a short paragraph in ordinary circumstances.

(2) The visit of the 25th April has special features in that it is the first made by the Minister as a Government representative, that the arrangements for one side of the visit were made six or seven weeks ago and that it may not be expected that future visits would take in areas as tense or conflicts as immediate as are now occurring in the Ardoyne.

(3) Even granted these special features, the publicity engendered regarding the visit of the 25th April must be considered as adverse to our interests because -

- (a) the visit to Ardoyne, "cockpit of Northern violence over the past three weeks", received disproportionate emphasis and the Minister's talks with community leaders

from the other community received scarcely any mention.

- (b) Consequently, it is a general impression from radio and newspaper reports that the Minister visited the North specifically and exclusively to collect details of British military brutality and the controversial behaviour of the Parachute Regiment.
 - (c) Where an attempt at rectification was made, the wording used is capable of bearing the interpretation that while the Minister intends keeping in touch with both sides of the community in the North, this visit to one side would be balanced by future visits to the other.
- (4) The reasons for the unbalanced coverage in this instance are:-
- (a) The Ardoyne group have an interest in obtaining publicity regarding the Minister's visit to them; the Sandy Row group have no such interest.
 - (b) At the present time, there is an in-built bias in the newspapers and on the radio to emphasise the "Nationalist" contacts and down-grade the Unionist contacts. While it may be unfair to categorise this bias of emphasis as partitionist, its effects certainly tend towards a strengthening of partitionist feeling. While the depth of detail available on one aspect would necessarily tend to concentrate the attention here, it is difficult to see that this alone explains the emphasis on the Ardoyne to the exclusion of all else, particularly when the Irish Press mentioned in its first paragraph that "Dr. FitzGerald also had talks with political leaders (sic) from both

sections of the Northern community" and that the Irish Times included a reference to the Minister briefly visiting other areas of the city.

(5) While control of adverse publicity on future trips is not absolutely within our control, action along the following lines might help to limit its effects:-

- (a) The diplomatic correspondents of the newspapers, both in Dublin and in Belfast, and of RTE and BBC might be called in, at either official or Ministerial level, and their co-operation might be sought in advance regarding a more balanced presentation of future trips.
- (b) Where it is appropriate, detailed ground-rules regarding publicity might be discussed in advance of future trips with the groups in question, particularly on the Catholic side. We might also consider issuing our own two-line summary, as a matter of course, at the conclusion of all future trips, to balance any one-sided statements likely to be made.

J. Swift
26 April, 1973