

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES****IRELAND**

**Reference Code:** 2005/4/90

**Title:** Letter from Richard O'Brien, Embassy of Ireland to Great Britain, to John Swift, Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a meeting with Martin Cowley, acting London editor of the *Irish Times*, mainly regarding a meeting between a delegation from the Social Democratic and Labour Party and members of the British government .

**Creation Date(s):** 21 August, 1974

**Level of description:** Item

**Extent and medium:** 2 pages

**Creator(s):** Department of Foreign Affairs

**Access Conditions:** Open

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

AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

*Mr O'Farrell  
for PAPL.*

*McC  
2/10/74*

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,

S.W.1.X 7HR

TELEPHONE: 01-235 2171

*DA P. O'Brien*

21st August, 1974

Secretary  
Department of Foreign Affairs

For the Attention of Mr. John Swift

Yesterday I had lunch with Mr. Martin Cowley of the Irish Times, who is acting London Editor in the absence of Renagh Holohan who is on holidays.

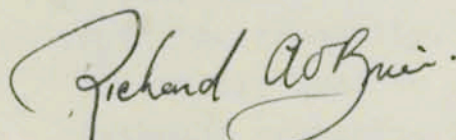
Cowley told me that prior to the visit of the SDLP on Monday, he had telephoned several Conservative M.Ps. to gauge their reaction to some of the issues which, he thought, the SDLP might raise during their visit to London. He said that he was surprised that all of those he had contacted were most forthcoming in their support for the recent expressions of concern by some members of the SDLP on the handling of Northern Ireland affairs by Mr. Rees, and specifically on the question of the Third Force.

He said that he was not surprised that Wilson had not met the SDLP delegation as he speculated that the Prime Minister would not wish to put himself in the position of being requested by the delegation to replace Rees at the Northern Ireland Office. The public criticisms by the SDLP of the present Secretary of State and Rees' own "private" criticisms of the SDLP have led to a serious deterioration in the relationship between Rees and the SDLP. This is highlighted by what Cowley regards as the growing significance in the relationship between Rees and the U.W.C. and the fact that there is no similar relationship with the elected representatives of the Catholic community. This down-grading of the SDLP must inevitably lead to a down-grading of the role of the Catholic community in the search for political initiatives. Cowley doubts very much that there is now any genuine search on the part of the present Government to seek any new political initiatives in Northern Ireland. He

- 2 -

thinks that it suits the present Prime Minister very well to have somebody like Rees at the Northern Ireland Office. Undoubtedly, in Cowley's view, the Prime Minister wants to withdraw from Northern Ireland and he feels that Rees could not have survived in the Northern Ireland Office, given his record there to date, but for the fact that he is, perhaps, realising ultimate British policy. Cowley thought that the bankruptcy of present British policy had been indicated, however inadvertently, by the <sup>This Week</sup> ~~Midweek~~ programme of the 12th August, which portrayed the Northern Ireland scene as one of confrontation between the British Army and the IRA, made no mention of the Loyalist sectarian killings, and gave very little time, vis-a-vis the time given to both wings of the IRA, to the SDLP.

Cowley thought that the most critical question now facing the SDLP was whether they would participate in the elections for the Constitutional Convention or, if they did, whether they would subsequently be forced to withdraw their consent after the election given the possibility that Loyalists might gain an overall majority in the Convention. In the context of the elections, he mentioned that Paddy Devlin had told him that the Loyalist para-military organisations want to see the elections taking place sooner rather than later and this indicates the strong possibility of a pact between the para-military organisations and the Loyalist politicians. He thought that the fact that Kenneth Gibson of the U.V.F. will stand at the Westminster elections for the West Belfast constituency should increase the possibility of Gerry Fitt's re-election. He doubted very much that Gibson would be the only Loyalist who would contest the seat.



Richard O'Brien