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Reference Code: 2005/7/633

Title: Letter from [PJG Keating] in the Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs to Dermot Nally, Assistant Secretary in the Department of the Taoiseach, concerning recent comments made by Merlyn Rees, British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the current stances on Northern Ireland of the wider Labour Party and the Conservative Party, and the need for a Security Conference.

Creation Date(s): 15 August, 1974

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 2 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

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 BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
 DUBLIN 2

Confidential 15 August, 1974

Dear Nally

I send you enclosed a teleprinter from the Ambassador in London which gives the text of Mr. Rees's reply to his démarche about the situation in the North. This is satisfactory inasmuch as the Secretary of State appears to have recognised his mistake in hinting about disengagement and has now taken steps to clarify his attitude. It is, however, completely unsatisfactory with regard to his statement about the Third Force. It appears that far from discouraging Loyalist attempts to set up a force of this nature he is, in fact, encouraging them to think of the role they can play in the British Third Force and to prepare for it in advance.

It does not appear that our representations to him at this time when so many more important politicians are on leave can have any immediate success. We must, however, prepare our line with regard to talks with more senior politicians in the hope of setting them up at the earliest opportune moment in advance of a possible British General Election.

This is certainly my Minister's view and I have discussed Mr. Rees's reply with him. He is concerned by the reply, by the ever more evident weakness Mr. Rees is showing in his handling of the Northern situation and by the effect this is having on the Catholic population as instanced by recent SDLP statements and, in particular, by Paddy Devlin's article in today's "Irish Times". It appears that Labour Party policy, as enunciated and as directed by Mr. Rees, is now completely weak and dangerous.

The Minister is also concerned at the apparent split that is developing in the Tory Party on Northern questions where Ian Gilmour seems to be diverging from, if not opposing, the Heath-Whitelaw line in regard to relations with Loyalist groups. He therefore thinks it useful for us to consider at this stage meetings between the Taoiseach and Mr. Wilson and Mr. Heath early in September. He realises that there



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are some problems in setting up such a meeting so soon before the General Election. On the other hand, the fact that there is to be a General Election makes such a meeting even more timely, since it can provide the opportunity for us to endeavour to ensure, and be seen to do so, that neither of the main political Parties in Britain will during the course of the election campaign adopt attitudes which are out of line with proper co-operation between the British Government and our Government on the solution of the Northern question. The danger arises that if British Parties and potential British Governments continue to misjudge the situation in the North we may have to reconsider our policy.

You will also note what Mr. Rees says about the need for a Security Conference as soon as possible. We have not yet replied to the British on this point which they have raised with us frequently in recent weeks and, while Donal O'Sullivan has indicated that the dates of 5th and 6th September would in his view be very difficult for us, perhaps we should consider making this point more explicit. The fact that we wished to hold the other meetings would, of course, provide an excuse for postponing the Rees talks.

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Although the Taoiseach is now on leave, do you think you could put these points to him as a matter of urgency so that should we consider it desirable to do so steps could now be taken to seek such meetings early in September?

Yours sincerely

Dermot Nally, Esq.
Assistant Secretary
Department of the Taoiseach