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Title: Letter from Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien, TD, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, to Liam Cosgrave, TD, Taoiseach, enclosing a copy of his letter to Dr Garret FitzGerald, TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs, concerning the IRA [Irish Republican Army] ceasefire, postponement of the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention and the possibility of United Nations intervention in Northern Ireland

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OIFIG AN AIRE POIST AGUS TELEGRAFA

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS

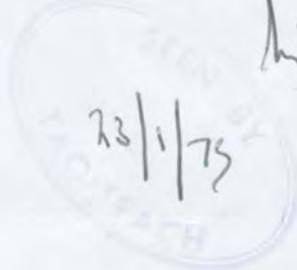
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH I

DUBLIN I

22/1/75

22 January 1975

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Mr Liam Cosgrave TD
Taoiseach

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F.A. cosgrave
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Dear Taoiseach

I enclose for your information copy of a letter which I have sent to the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Yours sincerely

Conor Cruise O'Brien

The 'gist' is at 'f' on p. 2



22 January 1975

OIFIG AN AIRE POIST AGUS TELEGRAFA

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS

BAILE ATHA CLIATH I

DUBLIN I

Dr. Garret FitzGerald, TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Dear Garret

In the current on / off situation regarding the IRA "ceasefire" there is a tendency to lose sight of the potentially more momentous matter of the coming Convention and its possible consequences.

The SDLP have made an excellent case for the postponement of the Convention and we of course have in the past urged its postponement and no doubt continue to do so.

It seems unlikely however that it will in fact be postponed for any long period. John Hume thought postponement unlikely even in the pre-ceasefire period and the subsequent publicity on "negotiations between the British Government and the IRA" would in my opinion make it even more unlikely. Any postponement following these discussions would be likely to be presented as 'surrendering to the IRA' and would raise Loyalist feelings to a dangerous pitch.

It seems prudent therefore to re-examine as a matter of urgency what the convention is likely to do, how the British are likely to respond to what they do, and how we ourselves should respond, in a variety of possible situations. These matters are considered in your memorandum of 19th November, but as more than two months have elapsed since then it would seem wise to have some more up-to-date assessments prepared for early consideration by the Government between this and the Convention.

In the meantime may I raise some questions in particular about the section C (page 8 paragraph 17 to 21) in the memorandum: "developments leading to a peaceful solution outside the UK". I gather from some obiter dicta of yours recently that you are leaning rather strongly towards this possibility.

The questions which I would like to raise, and see answers to before the Government reconsiders this, are the following:

(a) You state in paragraph 20 that "studies are at present in hand on possible forms which the UN trusteeship arrangement (for Northern Ireland) might take". Are the results of these studies now available? If so, I should like to see them.

(b) Have the studies referred to in the last sentence of the same paragraph been undertaken, and are there results available?

(c) Has any assessment been attempted as to the likely reception by the Loyalist majority in Northern Ireland of such arrangements being attempted? If it has I should like to see it. If it has not may I suggest that this should be done? You state correctly in my opinion (paragraph 18) that "Loyalist attitudes hitherto have not shown much hope of agreement to (an international force) ...". What is the likelihood of a shift in this position?

(d) /...

(d) You say in paragraph 21 that the possibilities of securing international ~~support~~ for a UN presence in Northern Ireland could be considerably greater if the proposals were to provide an internationally agreed presence by agreement involving both communities in Northern Ireland and two sovereign Governments". How does your Department estimate the chances of securing "agreement involving both communities" in favour of a UN presence in Northern Ireland?

(e) If there are strong reasons for believing that such agreement "involving both the communities in Northern Ireland" is highly probable, then it would obviously be prudent even now to begin exploring the possibilities of securing international support for such a presence. If on the other hand it appears unlikely that "agreement involving both communities" will be forthcoming - then may there not be serious dangers in seeking international support for a UN presence in Northern Ireland? Failing advance acceptance of such a presence on both communities it might well appear to Loyalist opinion as an attempt by the Republic to invoke international force in order to crush the Loyalists of Northern Ireland and unite Ireland by force. Would not the consequences of such a belief, if it became widespread in Northern Ireland be likely to have dangerous consequences for the minority?

(f) Is there not a serious danger that our toying with the idea of an international force, which may well prove entirely chimerical, might let Britain off the hook, providing her with an honourable path of retreat from Northern Ireland in circumstances offering only illusory guarantees for the minority? You in fact reject, if I read you right, the idea of UN or other international forces imposing a solution in Northern Ireland against the will of one of the communities but in fact might not the "spectre" - as it might seem to many in Northern Ireland - of international intervention be likely to be seen in Northern Ireland in terms of force, and thus even further inflame the very high temperature which would be likely to exist on a British withdrawal?

I may be given to over-simplification but it appears to me that the only likely outcomes - I will not call them solutions - in Northern Ireland are either (a) continuance of British rule or (b) Protestant rule. If (a) stops we are going to have (b) and since (b) would be nastier from our point of view than (a) it is in our interest to try to hold (a), i.e. to keep the British on the hook rather than let them off the hook, through internationalising schemes of dubious validity, especially when these internationalising schemes might well have the effect of ensuring that the shift from British to Protestant rule occurs in the most hysterical and destructive forms possible.

Obviously I may be quite wrong and there may be much more substance to the internationalisation idea than now appears to me. If that is so, the answers to the questions posed above should bring that out to the satisfaction of the Government. I would however very strongly urge that pending further exploration of these questions and thorough discussion of them by the Government no further suggestions should be made in any international context of possible internationalisation of Northern Ireland. In a nut-shell we should satisfy ourselves that agreement between the communities of Northern Ireland on this issue can be secured, before we go ahead and find whether the international commitment can be secured. I

would /...

would in fact see very little difficulty in securing international commitment if agreement between the communities on the points existed. But I do not in fact believe that agreement between the communities on this point is either now obtainable or likely to be obtained under any conceivable circumstances.

I am circulating a copy of this to the Sunningdale Ministers as well as to the Minister for Defence since this whole thing has a close bearing on security.

Yours sincerely



Conor Cruise O'Brien