

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



**Reference Code:** 2005/151/697

**Title:** Addendum by Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien, TD, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs to report by Irish Ambassador to the United Kingdom of meeting with Merlyn Rees, MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

**Creation Date(s):** 13 May 1975

**Level of description:** Item

**Extent and medium:** 2 pages

**Creator(s):** Department of the Taoiseach

**Access Conditions:** Open

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

Circulated to Lord 13/5/77

Meeting of the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs with Mr. Rees  
- Addendum by the Minister to the Report of the Ambassador.

The Ambassador's report, which accompanies this, is a very comprehensive one and all I would like to add to it is my own interpretation of what Rees had to say.

It seemed clear to me that Rees was preoccupied principally with the problem of the internees and the dilemma in which he personally finds himself about that. He indicated that, while he was annoyed by the indiscretion of General King's statement - that IRA violence would resume as soon as the hard-core internees had been released - he did not at all disagree with the substance of this. But of course it is also clear that the IRA are likely to resume the campaign if the hard-core detainees are not released. Therefore, resumption of IRA violence appears extremely probable, whatever decision is taken by the Secretary of State. The Army position presumably is, that since the IRA will start again anyway, it would be better if they started without the increased effectiveness which the released internees would give them. Politically however the Secretary of State would not want it to be credibly alleged that the cease-fire had broken down because of a breach of faith on his part. Either way, the resumption of IRA violence would - as Rees made clear - be certainly followed by massive planned reprisals by the Loyalist para-military organisations. These reprisals would present the Secretary of State with a further series of agonising dilemmas. Therefore the role of the Secretary of State in the coming months is not likely to be an enviable one. It is of course generally, and I think correctly, believed that Rees will soon be transferred elsewhere and someone else - perhaps Roy Hattersley - will take over. In the circumstances it would be understandable if Rees at the moment is thinking along the lines of Louis XV: "After me the deluge". Specifically I think he wants to keep the pace of internee release just sufficient not to provoke a resumption of the cease-fire before he goes. Rees may be under pressure from within his own Party to end internment o.c.s and for all

and may be anxious that that pressure should not be increased by any pressure from Dublin.

Rees referred several times to the thinning out of the Army in the area and emphasised strongly that this was in no way a prelude to a pull-out. He also emphasised the IRA's fear of the strength of the Protestant para-military organisations. I had the impression that the thinning of the forces was conceived as a means of keeping the IRA quiet through reminding them of what they would be up against if the Army were not there. This seems a clever enough strategy, but the drawback is that if it does not work and the cease-fire does break down, the initial response of the troops to the Loyalist back-lash is likely to be sluggish.

I think on the whole the sooner Rees is relieved of his present duties the better. He is at present clearly pre-occupied with his own political future to a dangerous degree, in view of the nature of the responsibilities he holds. Several times when I asked him what the effects of such and such a development would be, he replied in terms of effects in Westminster, on the Labour Party, on public opinion in Britain and even directly on his own future. Whereas, of course, what I was asking about was the likely effect in Northern Ireland.

While Rees' remarks about the actual present situation - statistics of violence, policing and so on - were apparently reassuring, I would not feel that the implications of his remarks as regards the future gave much grounds for optimism. Our interview took place, of course, before the murder of the Policeman in Derry with its disquieting revelation of how Provisionals in fact interpret the cease-fire. Mr. Rees had been optimistic about, among other things, the growing acceptability of the RUC. It now seems that the acceptability is conditional on not questioning Provisionals.