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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

17 Grosvenor Place
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5 February 1976

cc. PSM

PSS

Rough-hish business

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Seán

Dermot Gallagher and I had dinner earlier this week with Harold McCusker. The following points may be of interest:

- He sees the Convention as no more than a 'tidying-up' operation, rounding off loose ends left at the first stage. Bill Craig's voluntary coalition is not on. The majority position had never ruled out a coalition possibility. But Craig's initiative producing Paisley's reaction had created a new situation of deadlock.
- In his view a voluntary coalition of the Craig type, even if it were a possibility, would not have sufficient Loyalist majority support to make it workable in practice. In that situation the Loyalist paramilitaries could seriously raise their profile. It was quite illusory to imagine any political solution working to which Paisley was opposed - even in 'loyal' opposition.
- He is very pessimistic about the chances of the security forces getting on top of the situation whatever the immediate future developments. In Armagh, UDA influence is negligible - it is UVF territory. UDA strength is essentially confined to E. Ulster.
- The SDLP's cutting down of their trips to Dublin is helpful. He was very interested to know whether Dublin had a part in this and suggested that they should have to show their understanding of Loyalist resentments and suspicions. We replied that the SDLP made their own decisions on whom they wanted to contact. Dublin wanted to maintain contacts as fully as possible across the board.

- He clearly dislikes and distrusts Paisley whose church interests, but of course in a political dimension, he sees as the latter's essential motivation. He recognises the vacuum in Unionist leadership opposition to Paisley but has no illusions about West's inadequacy for this and obviously doesn't see himself in the role. Martin Smyth would in his view lead a challenge to Paisley in such a way as to produce outright confrontation which would be the wrong approach at this time.
- He said Powell is very helpful and a source of much useful advice on Westminster to younger colleagues. His arrogance doesn't show in that kind of relationship. He effectively admitted Powell's overriding influence in the Unionists' voting in the devolution debate last month. Some of them might have seen reason to support the Scots and Welsh Nationalists' amendments to the Government motion at the end of the debate (as Kilfedder did) but Powell's devolution line won the day.
- He was very pleased with Biggs Davison's visit to his constituency a few days ago and seems to like him. (They had crossed the border and McCusker had been recognised by a Garda near Omeath). Neave he finds hard to size up. Neave's lack of local knowledge makes him reluctant to express himself in other than general terms. He has considerable respect for Rees and particular detestation for Whitelaw and Heath. Kilfedder is another bete noire.
- He remarked on his own almost total ignorance of life and attitudes in the South. In his own constituency he is often conscious of the way in which Catholic residents are a closed book to him in comparison with his understanding of Protestants and their attitudes. He was utterly opposed to an independent Ulster. In a situation of that kind he hinted that the idea of a guaranteed Protestant role in a united Ireland might have attractions. We might not realise it,

he said, but this concept had been discussed among Unionists, and even by Paisley, to a greater degree than we might imagine. It was hard to tell how far, in saying this, he was simply "turning the tables" on power-sharing ideas in the Convention context.

- He mentioned with obvious satisfaction his representations to the Foreign Secretary about Malachy Toal's problems in visiting Fortlaoise and subsequent interrogation by Gardaí. He clearly enjoys supporting Toal's rights as a British citizen and is looking forward with interest to the kind of reply he gets.

no representations made to us by the British or anyone else, in this matter.

Yours sincerely

John P. Ryan

Minister Plenipotentiary

Mr Seán Donlon
Assistant Secretary
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CONVENTIONS

representations have been made by British Embassy to the Consular Section who have passed the papers to D. Justice! I have asked that legal-political implications of the case be examined.

JD vic