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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,

SWIX 7HR

TELEPHONE: 01-235 2171

TELEX: 916104

21st May, 1976

Mr. Jackson,

to see Mr. Farrell letter  
to discuss x on p.3 when you have  
Paul. *John* 25/5/76.

Dear John

I had a long conversation on last Wednesday night with Harold McCusker, the U.U.U.C. M.P. for Armagh and the following points arising out of this may be of interest:

- (a) McCusker was personally - and he emphasised that he was speaking in strict confidence in saying this - quite happy that the Convention was now at an end and that direct rule appeared likely to last for a considerable number of years. This had switched the focus onto, and considerably increased the importance and influence of, the Unionist M.P.s at Westminster and had correspondingly resulted in a certain loss of standing and importance for local politicians in Northern Ireland. It had also helped to deprive Ian Paisley of a very useful platform in the North and had, to a certain extent, restricted him to Westminster where he was not a substantial figure and where, additionally, he was fairly easily out-flanked and out-maneuvred by Enoch Powell;
- (b) The main problem in coming out openly and trying to convince people of the benefits of direct rule, along the lines of the recent statements by Enoch Powell, sprang from the continuing difficult security situation in the North. If the security situation continued to deteriorate, they would be under considerable pressure, particularly during the marching season in July, to come out openly against direct rule. He had been asked to speak at one of the ceremonies on the 12th but hoped, if at all possible, to avoid this;
- (c) They would be helped enormously in reducing the above pressure if the Government would agree to two of their demands - to put a battalion of the U.D.R. on full-time duty and to set up a speakers'

conference to look into the question of increased representation for Northern Ireland. If the Government were to meet these demands, then the U.U.U.C. would be happy to ensure that they stayed in power for the next 2½ years. In particular, the establishment of a full-time U.D.R. battalion, consisting perhaps of about 1,500 men, would be viewed in Northern Ireland as a great success for the Westminster group of M.P.s. It must, in addition, McCusker believes, be a considerable temptation for the Government as, in the U.U.U.C. view, 1,500 U.D.R. men could do the job at present being done by 5,000 troops and could therefore enable the present Army strength to be reduced to less than 10,000;

- (d) He believed that there was absolutely no prospect of winning any concession from the Government on the reform and strengthening of local government in Northern Ireland;
- (e) As regards the position of Harry West as leader of the Unionist Party, he felt that West would have to stay on for another two to three years as there was, at the moment, no obvious successor. In theory, John Taylor should have been the natural candidate for the job, but he would no longer be acceptable to most of the rank and file;
- (f) On the S.A.S., he took the view that their presence in South Armagh had been psychologically very important and, because of a certain fear of the unknown, it had resulted in a considerable lessening of Provo violence there;
- (g) He was working very closely with the Labour Whips at the moment and was finding their attitude and, perhaps, but of course not only because of a certain pressure from them, he also found the attitude of the Northern Ireland Office to be very friendly at the moment. In this regard, he cited in particular the attitude of Roland Moyle over the open University question in the House on last Tuesday (Hansard, Volume 910, number 109, Col. 1379 - 1386).

Moyle's very friendly reaction on that occasion had in fact rather surprised him;

- X
- (h) Finally, McCusker said he was rather worried about the build-up in numbers and equipment of the Irish Army and said that this was causing some considerable concern in Northern Ireland. He had been under some pressure to make a speech on the question but had so far successfully resisted it. In particular, people were pointing out to him that the type of equipment at present being purchased by the Army was unnecessary for a purely internal security role. He also asked if I could let him have the figures for the increase in strength of the Army and of the defence budget in the period between 1966 and 1976.

Perhaps you would let me know in due course how you would wish me to respond to this request.

Yours sincerely

Dermot Gallagher

Mr. John McColgan  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
Dublin 2

c.c. Mr. Gearoid O Broin