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1. Mr Campbell ^{244.}
2. Ambassador

As I have already mentioned I had lunch on Wednesday, 19 April, with Mr Sherrard Cowper-Coles, Desk Officer at the Republic of Ireland Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The following summary of the issues which arose in the course of our conversation may be of interest.

X Cross Border Economic Co-Operation

28/2/79

Cowper-Coles said that there had been surprise in Whitehall at the strength and contents of the views expressed to Sir Brian Cubbon in the course of his visit to Iveagh House on 4 April, 1978, on the subject of cross border co-operation. Cowper-Coles said that there still seemed to be some misunderstanding in Dublin about the contents of Paragraph 5 of the Communique issued after the Taoiseach's meeting with the Prime Minister last September. It was important that we should understand that cross border co-operation was only one aspect of the wider cooperation envisaged in the Communique and which should take place in the Anglo-Irish and not only North/South context. It was vital in the British view that economic co-operation should not be presented as a backdoor to a United Ireland and the strength of the views expressed to Sir Brian had caused some anxiety on this point. These anxieties had to some extent been intensified in the recent article by Giles Merritt in the Financial Times. Cowper-Coles remarks were along lines similar to those of Peter Wallis contained in the note enclosed with the Ambassador's letter to Assistant Secretary Donlon of 20 October, 1977.

X Irish General Election

3/11

X

Cowper-Coles referred to the re-evaluation of the deciding issues in the General Election now being presented by Irish Officials in Dublin. He said that immediately following the General Election the British had been told that Northern Ireland

had not been a significant factor in influencing the outcome of the election. However the view now being expressed in Dublin suggested that the coalition had been defeated because they had abandoned traditional nationalist aspirations in the Republic.

66^x

X European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism

He said that the refusal of the Irish authorities to sign the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism continued to be a source of irritation in the relationship between the two countries. He mentioned that the Minister while in opposition and speaking at a meeting in Trinity had expressed the view that there was no constitutional objection to signing the Convention. He made it clear that in his view extradition still remained the only satisfactory method of dealing with cross border terrorism and the absence of the necessary political will in Dublin to change the Constitution if that were necessary did not assist in the difficulties and problems which were inevitably presented in the absence of an Extradition Agreement. Cowper Coles also referred to Dublin's obvious disappointment at the judgment in the Strasbourg case which he presented as another indication of a lack of commitment in the area of anti-terrorist commitment. I made the point that such expressions of the feeling that the Irish Government had pursued the Strasbourg case in a vindictive or viscious manner only highlighted the considerable difficulties which we inevitably experienced in communicating our position to the British side.

X Northern Ireland situation

X

7/4

Cowper-Coles reiterated that the proposals put forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the course of his last initiative were still on the table. The Secretary of State did not accept that ^{the} initiative had failed and that while the proposals had not been accepted by the Unionists they had not been substantially rejected by them either. The Unionists appeared anxious to have a system of devolved

Government restored to Northern Ireland and at the end of the day he was convinced that the Unionists would accept that proposals for a devolved Government would have to obtain widespread agreement from both communities in the North. He understood that the Prime Minister had told the Taoiseach at the Copenhagen meeting that while both Governments disagreed on the long term objectives regarding the constitutional position of the North it was important that they should agree on short-term objectives i.e. the restoration of a devolved Government to Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach had accepted this both at the Downing Street meeting in September and again in his Radio interview on 8 January. It was important he felt that these elements of Irish policy should be identified and the ground for agreement between both Governments in this area recognised and explored by both Governments. He thought that the Unionists could not disregard the recent Ulster Television Poll which indicated that a substantial majority of the people of Northern Ireland favoured powersharing.

Cowper-Coles recognised that Neave's recent speech to the Unionist Party had appeared to endorse everything except the Convention Report and that this had not been helpful to Government strategy in the North. However he said that there was still fundamental agreement between the Government and the Conservatives on Northern Ireland and that both Mason and Neave had maintained agreement on a bipartisan approach. In this context he referred to the increasing bipartisanship in the Republic and on Dr FitzGerald's departure from the Coalition's policy on the North which he said had been viewed with some cynicism in Whitehall. He said that the revival of the debate on the Constitutional status of the North had undermined an important stabilising factor in the political environment which had been a vital part of the British Government's presentation to the Unionists i.e. that the Government in the South recognised that no change in the constitutional status of the North could take place without the consent of a majority of the population in the North. The British Government's similar commitment at Sunningdale was something which they could not withdraw. I said that I understood that some time ago

the British Ambassador had expressed the view in Dublin that Sunningdale however regretably was a historical phenomenon. I added that I found it strange that elements of an overall negotiated agreement should be isolated and highlighted in this way while other elements (i.e. power-sharing and Council of Ireland) were disregarded, evacuated of content or considered dangerous.

X Mason's visit to Dublin

X
5/2/1/1

He hoped that the confusion which had arisen about Mason's visit to Dublin did not produce further misunderstandings in Anglo-Irish relations. It appeared that John O'Callaghan of RTE had misunderstood the Secretary of State's remarks in the House and had certainly interpreted them in a way which Mason had not intended. Mason had apparently been anxious that the misunderstanding might have arisen because O'Callaghan could have interpreted his remarks in the House in the context of an altercation which Mason had immediately following his remarks with Gerry Fitt in the Strangers Bar of the Commons.

For the sake of brevity I have indicated the issue and considerations raised by Cowper-Coles. I should however emphasise that they emerged in the context of a rather lengthy conversation in the course of which he showed understanding if not agreement with the various points which I made under each heading. It is perhaps also important to realise that Cowper-Coles is not a very senior Foreign Office official but nevertheless appears to have sight of most, if not all, important documents relating to Northern Ireland and it could also be taken that he reflects the views of others within the Foreign Office and perhaps within the Northern Ireland office with whom he is in close and regular contact. In the course of our conversation I also got the impression that further initiatives on Northern Ireland are being considered at official level and Cowper-Coles mentioned the difficulties of maintaining "present pastures" until after the next election which might not take place until the Autumn of 1979.

The following are the issues which I raised with him in the course of the Lunch.

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X GAA Grounds at Crossmaglen

14/11

I told Cowper-Coles that I recently met Mr Con Murphy, President of the GAA at the Annual Dinner of the London County Board in the course of which we had a brief discussion on both the Northern Ireland Ministry of Education's decision to refer the judges remarks in the Magherafelt case to the Attorney General and the present situation regarding GAA Grounds at Crossmaglen. I told Cowper-Coles that he would be already aware that we shared Mr Murphy's sense of surprise that the Ministry of Education had found it necessary to suspend the subsidies to the GAA and to refer the judges remarks to the Attorney General which could well in turn provoke further difficulties for those involved who are anxious to promote and sustain good relations.

I told him that Mr Murphy had however referred specifically to recent developments at Crossmaglen. Mr Murphy had expressed particular concern about a recent Army decision to close the present entrance to their helicopter pad which adjoins the GAA grounds and about the local concern which had resulted because of the fear that they would now use the GAA's own entrance to the grounds which would inevitably seriously and further disrupt access by local people to GAA activities. I said that Mr Murphy had also told me of a recent incident in which an Army helicopter had flown over the players at an unacceptable low level and had unnecessarily and in the view of those present provocatively disrupted the game. On a separate recent occasion I was told that a group of Army personnel had gone into the grounds and had systematically taken sections of the spectators aside for questioning in the middle of a game. Mr Murphy was concerned that these apparently deliberate and provocative actions would intensify anger and resentment among GAA supporters towards the Army and the security forces in the area. I recalled that when we had initially raised the question of the GAA grounds at Crossmaglen with the Foreign Office we had mentioned, in the context of it having been pointed out to us, that alternative sitings

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Visit of TDs

In the course of our conversation about the visit of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to Dublin, Cowper-Coles mentioned that it had now been some time since there was an exchange of visits of Parliamentarians between the two countries. I said that on the last occasion Members of the House of Commons had visited Dublin and that consideration might be given to a group of Members of the Dail visiting London. Cowper-Coles said that the Republic of Ireland/^{Department} attached considerable importances to such exchanges and that further understanding was always developed in the course of such visits. I should emphasise that this point was not discussed at length by either of us.

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were available to the Army for their security and helicopter installations. We had been told the reply that these areas had been designated for industrial and housing development. I now understood that after this substantial lapse in time no industrial or housing development appeared to have taken place on these sites. I remarked that this does little to heighten our confidence in the information which we received for onward communication to the GAA as part of the reasoned explanation for Army activities adjoining their grounds.

Cowper-Coles said that he had noted that the London County Board had proposed amendments at the recent GAA Conference which would have permitted British Army participation in Gaelic games. The resolution from London had received only 3 or 4 votes in support and this did little to reassure those in official circles who were anxious to be helpful to the GAA authorities in Northern Ireland. I said that from past experience it would appear that the GAA as a body might be prepared to move on such issues when there was a clear indication of strong support for these resolutions from the Northern delegates as had been the case in the removal of the "Ban". One could hardly expect enthusiasm from the Northern delegates for the London County Board's resolutions in circumstances when it might appear that they had supported these resolutions under threat of losing their grants from the British authorities.

I told Cowper-Coles that Con Murphy was a close friend of the Taoiseach and that I felt that these were matters which might be brought to the Taoiseach's personal notice. Cowper-Coles said that while he had seen the Downing Street report of the Copenhagen Meeting no reference was made to these matters in the course of the conversation between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister. X

X 46/9

Report from the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration

Cowper-Coles mentioned that he had recently received some correspondence from the Home Office regarding the Report of the Select Committee and its recommendation that discussion be pursued with the Government of Ireland about means of controlling immigration into the United Kingdom of people coming from outside the common travel area and the provision of information to the British authorities about them. It was not clear from my conversation with Cowper-Coles whether the Home Office intend to pursue such discussions with us. Indeed I got the impression that the Home Office is anxious to make a very general and inconclusive reply to the Select Committee on their recommendations. It might, however, be necessary to monitor developments in this area since discussions on the Common Travel Area seem in the past to have taken place directly between the Home Office and the Department of Justice with little consultation or involvement with the Embassy or the Department.

X

X The Liberal Party and the Prevention of Terrorism Act

I mentioned to Cowper-Coles that I understood that the Liberal Party had conveyed their views to Lord Shackleton on the implementation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and that they had made a number of criticisms on the Act. Cowper-Coles was not aware of the Liberal Party's submission to Lord Shackleton. I received on 20 April a copy of the submission which is interesting and is attached herewith.

65/2/4

+ attachment

Richard A O'Brien
First Secretary

24th April 1978

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