

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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The Northern Ireland Situation and the United States

1. The following information is based on recent reports from the Embassy in Washington and on conversations with Mr. John Hume who has been in the U.S. for the last ten days on EEC business with Commissioner Burke.

2. Following the Taoiseach's interview on 8 January and statement of 10 January the U.S. State Department, in informal conversations with officers of the Embassy, contrasted what the Taoiseach had said with what was contained in the joint communique issued in London on 28 September 1977. The State Department official said that President Carter's initiative last year had been based on the support both of the Irish Government and, albeit somewhat more reluctantly, of the British Government. A U.S. initiative was possible, he said, only if it was taken in the context of agreement between the Irish and British Governments. The U.S. Government could not be expected to come down on one side or the other if Irish Government policy led to confrontation on major issues with the British Government.

3. The State Department official noted that qualified statements of support for the Taoiseach's interview had come from Provisional IRA sources in the United States and he recalled that in recent years the Irish Government's approach had been to enlist the support of the U.S. authorities and of Irish-American politicians to minimize the credibility and standing of the Provisional IRA and its support groups in the U.S. Officers of the Embassy pointed out that British media misinterpretations of what the Taoiseach had said had been exported to the U.S. and that groups like the Irish National Caucus had moved in quickly to take advantage of the confused situation. In fact there was no change of Government policy and the Taoiseach had said nothing that he hadn't said on many occasions before. In particular it remained Government policy that Irish unity could come about only by peaceful means and by consent and that consent would have to include the one million unionists now forming a majority within Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach was asking for the establishment by Britain of a climate where unionists would be encouraged to re-think their position and that climate could not develop as long as Britain's negative guarantees were constantly repeated. The State Department official commented that he found this thinking "somewhat tortuous". Either a majority in Northern Ireland had a right to determine whether they wished to remain in the United Kingdom or they did not.

4. The attitude of officials in the State Department has traditionally been heavily influenced by British thinking and it is not surprising that the attitude expressed on this occasion should follow so closely on that of the Foreign Office. There is, however, no doubt that the reaction by NORAI and the Irish National Caucus has created difficulties for us in the United States. The attached letter from Fr. Seán McManus has been widely publicised in the Irish-American media and Mr. Dan O'Kennedy, a member of the Caucus Executive, has put to maximum use his contacts, while on a recent visit to Ireland,

with the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Groups which have proven links with the Provisional IRA are now identifying themselves with the Government and a major plank in our approach in the U.S. since 1972 - to isolate the-Provisional IRA support groups and to point out that they do not represent any democratically elected group in Ireland - has been badly shaken. Some of our contacts in the United States have, at some risk to their own political positions, been refusing to do anything which might give credibility to the Provisionals and a number of them, notably Speaker O'Neill, Senator Kennedy, Senator Moynihan and Governor Carey, have gone beyond that and pressed for positive and constructive U.S. Presidential interest. They now find that, in the minds of some people, the Caucus and NORAID appear closer to the thinking of the Irish Government than they are and, not unnaturally, some of their resentment is directed against the Taoiseach. The problem is especially acute in the case of Speaker O'Neill who used his office in particular to ensure that, despite the pressure of many of his fellow Congressmen, hearings on Northern Ireland were not held by the Congress at a time when the only pressure for such hearings was coming from Provisional IRA groups.

5. In contacts with officials of the Embassy and with Mr. John Hume Speaker O'Neill has drawn attention to the fact that the Irish National Caucus has, since 8 January, been representing themselves on Capitol Hill as supporting the Government policy. They have obviously stepped up their activities to a considerable extent and Speaker O'Neill has now agreed, following a request from former Speaker John McCormack of Boston, to receive an Irish National Caucus delegation later this week. This will inevitably be seen as a major victory for the Provisionals and no doubt they will exploit it to the full. It must, of course, be borne in mind that this is a half-term congressional election year and many Congressmen and potential Congressmen from American-Irish districts are already coming under pressure from the Caucus. This in turn reflects itself in pressure on the Speaker, particularly on the question of hearings, and while his own position in his Massachusetts constituency is very secure he will not want to create any unnecessary problems this year either for himself or for his Democratic Party colleagues. That background is also relevant in considering his decision to meet with the Caucus.

6. Senator Kennedy's reaction is not as dramatic as Speaker O'Neill's but he has left the Embassy and John Hume in no doubt that recent developments had effectively left him and his colleagues in a rather isolated position in terms of moderate Irish nationalist policy and he felt it unfortunate that this should have happened without people like O'Neill and himself being consulted. Kennedy has also been told that there is no question of a change of policy and the Embassy has tried to put the Taoiseach's interview in the appropriate context. He has, to some extent, been calmed but is suggesting that the Irish Government might consider publicly dissociating itself from NORAID and the Caucus and indicating support for the position of O'Neill and his colleagues in their call for an end to violence in Ireland and an end for American support for violence. Kennedy is also

considering issuing, with his colleagues, a further statement on Ireland on St. Patrick's Day this year but he has made it clear that he would not favour a statement which would involve them in what he sees as the current public dispute on policy between the Irish and British Governments.

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