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2. M. Murray

*Taoiseach seen by Taoiseach
to see please. 3:11
on 16/1*

14.1.78

1. The British Ambassador came to see me on 13 January at 3.30 p.m. He was accompanied by Mr. Goulden of his Embassy and made it clear on arrival that he was not in any sense making representations about the Taoiseach's RTE interview on 8 January. He had been asked to discuss informally "what had happened, why it had happened and how it might be avoided in the future". I made it clear that the Taoiseach's interview and statement of 10 January spoke for themselves and that it would not be appropriate for me to interpret explain or add to what was on record. We went on to discuss the present situation generally for about an hour and the following are the main points that arose.

2. The Ambassador said that his authorities had understood that last September's meeting between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Callaghan had established a clear understanding of each other's position and part of their understanding was that the Taoiseach would not be pressing for a British declaration of intention to withdraw from Northern Ireland. In an interview with Shane Kenny of RTE immediately after the Downing Street meeting, the Taoiseach seemed to confirm this impression by saying that the time was not then right to press the matter. In the interview on 8 January, the Taoiseach had, however, replied positively when asked if he thought that the time had come for the British Government to make that long-awaited declaration of intent. What had happened between the end of last September and 8 January to change the situation? I referred the Ambassador to the lengthy reply which had been given on 8 January to the question about the declaration of intent and suggested that it did not represent the dramatic policy shift which he seemed to be attributing to it. Indeed a reply in similar terms had been given by the Taoiseach to the same question on a number of occasions in recent years. I also referred back to the Downing Street meeting and questioned the British interpretation of the clear understanding which had been established. The meeting had certainly been useful in helping each side understand the other side's position but nothing that was said at the meeting suggested that either side had moved or would move from their well-known positions. In particular, there was nothing in the record of the meeting which

might lead anyone to believe that the Irish Government would not be pursuing its Northern Ireland policy in the most effective possible way. It would be a serious misunderstanding of the Irish position if any British politician were to suggest, as Secretary of State Mason seemed to be saying in his speech (extract attached) on 11 January to the American Chamber of Commerce, that the Taoiseach and members of his Government should not speak about Northern Ireland. I referred the Ambassador to the exchanges between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Heath in August/September 1971 but he immediately intervened to say that there was no suggestion from their side that the Taoiseach should not speak about Northern Ireland. What they wished to convey - and Mr. Mason had already said it publicly - was that the Taoiseach's interview was unfortunate mainly in its timing but also in its content and that they hoped that future statements would not have the effect of delaying a return to normality in Northern Ireland. I replied that the Taoiseach was aware in considerable detail of development in Northern Ireland and would continue to take all relevant factor into account whenever he spoke on the subject. There was, however nothing to be gained by papering over the cracks and attempting to ignore the real differences that existed.

3. Our discussion then moved to use of the phrase "power-sharing" which the Ambassador pointed out had not been used in the joint communique issued after the September meeting. As far as the British were concerned, "power-sharing" had a specific meaning and was relevant only in the context of the 1973 Constitution Act which was the basis for the short-lived 1974 Northern Ireland Executive. This is a point not advanced before Mr. Mason used it at Westminster on 12 January and the Ambassador did not pursue it when I referred him to occasions, other than in the 1973/74 situation, when "power-sharing" was in common use. The Ambassador emphasised that his Government remained committed to power-sharing for any devolved government in Northern Ireland but they would, because of the emotions it aroused, avoid using the phrase and would instead use "partnership and participation".

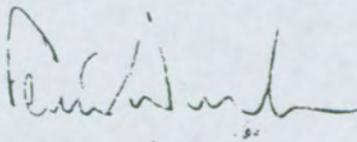
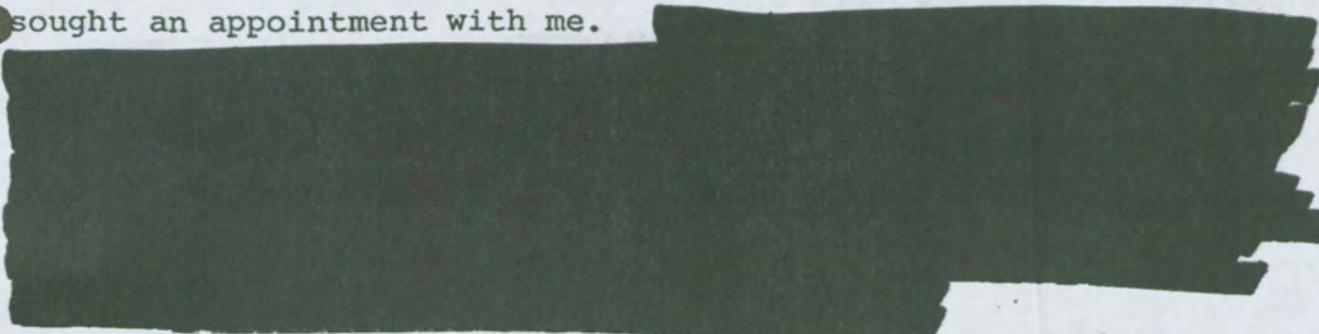
Extract
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16/1

4. In reply to my question, the Ambassador confirmed that the SDLP had informed the Northern Ireland Office, some time before the Taoiseach's interview, that they saw no point in continuing with the talks on interim arrangements. The Ambassador also confirmed that Mr. Harry West had not communicated with the NIO since the interview and as far as Mr. Mason was concerned the talks were "as alive as they had ever been". A number of times during our conversation, the Ambassador asked if we "supported the talks" and I replied that this was not a matter on which we had been specifically consulted. The Prime Minister had informed the Taoiseach that the talks would be taking place and NIO officials had briefed us from time to time about the progress being made but it was obviously an exercise involving only the British Government and the Northern Ireland parties. We had not, however, placed any obstacles in the way and the Taoiseach had more than once expressed the view that he hoped to see a devolved, power-sharing government in Northern Ireland.

5. Another question which the Ambassador returned to a number of times was which statement by the Taoiseach should the British Government regard as the definitive statement of Irish Government policy. I referred him to the manifesto and related documents, the transcript of the Taoiseach's press conference at the Irish Embassy following the Downing Street meeting, transcript of other interviews and speeches, the Minister's speech in October to the UN General Assembly, etc. I also drew attention to the 1972 Foreign Affairs article - neither the Ambassador nor Goulden had ever heard of it - and the 1971 Garden of Remembrance speech. The Ambassador wished to know if the Taoiseach was now pressing for a British declaration of intent or would be pressing it in his contacts with the British Prime Minister in the near future. I referred him to the text of what the Taoiseach had said.

6. The mood of the meeting was very friendly throughout. No reference was made either to the Ambassador's efforts to see the Taoiseach and Minister earlier in the week or to his failure to take up the suggestion to come and see the Secretary of the Department. Unlike his predecessors, Sir Arthur Galsworthy and Sir John Peck, Ambassador Haydon does not maintain regular contact with the Anglo-Irish Division of the Department and this was the first time since the change of government last year that he had

sought an appointment with me.



Seán Donlon

14 January, 1978

c.c. PSM

PSS

Ambassador Keating (~~via secret telegram~~)

Mr. Nally (D/Taoiseach). /