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ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

CONFIDENTIAL

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2
DUBLIN 2

25 January, 1978

Mr. D. Nally
Assistant Secretary
Department of the Taoiseach.

*1 Shown to Taoiseach who directed that
Mr. Bolton & I should see the
ambassador.*

DN

26/1

Dear Dermot

1. The British Ambassador telephoned at 4.30 p.m. on 24 January and asked if he could see me immediately. He arrived at Iveagh House fifteen minutes later and said that he had been instructed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London to seek an early meeting with the Taoiseach or his representative to discuss the general situation, with particular reference to power-sharing in Northern Ireland, in the aftermath of the Taoiseach's RTE interview of 10 January.

The Ambassador said that though the instruction was from the FCO, it had been seen and cleared by the Prime Minister on the afternoon of 23 January. He added that he would be available for the meeting at any time and hoped it might be possible to arrange it for the next day. I noted the request and said we would be in early contact. Following a conversation with the Taoiseach's Private Secretary, I telephoned the Ambassador and told him that the Taoiseach would be out of town at the former Ceann Comhairle's funeral for the next twenty four hours but that the request would be considered as soon as possible.

2. It would obviously be undersirable to refuse the Ambassador's request completely but unless the Taoiseach wishes to add to what he has already said on RTE and in the subsequent statement of 12 January, there seems to be nothing to be gained by his personally seeing the Ambassador. You will recall that following the Ambassador's unsuccessful efforts to see the Taoiseach on 11 January, a Minister of State at the FCO telephoned our Ambassador in London and both the FCO and Northern Ireland Office let it be known publicly immediately afterwards that the purpose of the telephone call was to seek from the Irish authorities an "explanation" of the Taoiseach's remarks. It is reasonable to assume that had the Taoiseach seen the Ambassador, their meeting would have been given the same type of public presentation by the

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by the British side. In the present political climate at Westminster where the Government and Opposition are in competition for the votes of the six Unionist M.P.s, it cannot be excluded that the main purpose of the Ambassador's request is to enable the British Government to show the Unionist M.P.s that they will not stand for any nonsense from Dublin and in this context you will have seen the speech on 21 January by Airey Neave M.P. in which he invited the Foreign Secretary "to inform the Irish Government that we are no longer going to bear these insults with a stiff upper lip". In these circumstances, it is suggested that the Taoiseach should not personally see the Ambassador but he might wish to nominate someone to talk to him on the lines of the conversation between the Ambassador and myself on 13 January. (A note of that conversation was sent to you on 16 January). Possible nominees might be the Minister of State here or, if preferred, officials from the Department of the Taoiseach and/or this Department.

3. I had already arranged to see people in Dungannon and Belfast today and am staying overnight in Belfast. I expect to be back in the office by lunchtime to-morrow.

Yours sincerely

Seán Donlon
Assistant Secretary