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Minister's proposed journey to the U.S.A.

The Minister proposes to visit New York and Washington briefly in the St. Patrick's Day period. His draft programme would involve leaving Ireland on Sunday 16 March and returning on the morning of Wednesday 19 March. The main motive for the Minister's journey would be to meet Speaker O'Neill, Senator Moynihan and Governor Carey (the possibility of a meeting with Senator Kennedy is being explored but there are likely to be practical difficulties). As a Foreign Minister visiting Washington, the Minister would be expected to contact the Secretary of State, and meetings have accordingly been requested with Mr. Vance and also with Mr. Breszinski of the National Security Council. There is, finally, a possibility that President Carter may hold a party at the White House on 17 March for "Irish" friends as one of a series of such entertainments forming part of his re-election campaign which, as is known, is being conducted at the present stage from Washington. If such a party is held, Ambassador Donlon has said he could secure an invitation for the Minister, and has further suggested that the Minister (rather than, as usual, the Ambassador) should make the customary presentation of shamrock to the President upon that occasion.

The purpose of this note is to point to the risk of certain adverse consequences which the fulfilment by the Minister of the intended programme in the U.S.A. could give rise to. The risk arises in the field of Anglo-Irish policy in that of international political issues arising both in the context of U.S.-Irish relations and in Political Cooperation of the Nine, and also in the context of current activities in the European Community.

Anglo-Irish policy

The objective of reaffirming the Government's relationship with the Big Four Irish-American politicians is in itself desirable and important. Speaker O'Neill in particular has a key role in the national and Democratic Party spheres in the pre-election period. But with one of the Big Four himself running for the Democratic

nomination there are obviously sensitive problems involved in a full range of contacts by the Minister. In particular, attendance by the Minister at a campaign function given by President Carter would seem to offend against the normal practice by outsiders of not getting involved in domestic politics. It is evidently not an action that would be appreciated by Senator Kennedy. In so far as normal courtesy towards the Administration is concerned, the Minister's proposed calls on Vance and Breszinski would suffice.

The Government has decided to draw the attention of foreign governments to the Northern Ireland policy objectives set by the Taoiseach in his Ard-Fheis speech of 15 February. Preliminary reaction at official level from the State Department however suggests that the U.S.A. will adhere to their policy of "neutrality" on the issue of Northern Ireland as between Britain and Ireland. There is no chance of that position changing. On the contrary the close rapport between President Carter and Mrs. Thatcher and the value the U.S. Administration has to give to Britain's strong support on Iran, Afghanistan and the Olympic Games (see below) all suggest that any bias in regard to Northern Ireland will be in Britain's favour. The risk nonetheless exists that the home media (amongst whose representatives curiosity about the possibility of the Minister going to America has begun to appear) will create expectations of a positive U.S. attitude towards national policy objectives, including the bringing of American pressure to bear on London. Media publicity for such expectations would be counterproductive.

As regards contacts with the Irish-American community, the main feature at present is the persistent attempt by the Irish National Caucus to represent to everyone who will listen to them (Irish-American organisations, Irish-American and other politicians including O'Neill, members of Congress and the Administration, representatives of the media) that it is they who now act for the Government in the U.S.A., that they have the same policy on Northern Ireland as the new Taoiseach and that Speaker O'Neill and the other three Irish-American political leaders have been left behind by the course of events and replaced in their position of

influence vis-à-vis the Administration by the Caucus. The I.N.C. continues to confront the Government's representatives in the Embassy and Consulates, picking quarrels with them by correspondence and on public occasions (and communicating full details of the disputes thus manufactured to the Taoiseach and Minister). INC representatives will attempt to utilise the Minister's visit to further their campaign. Silence by the Minister on the issue will be taken as proof of a new Government stance and the Minister must be prepared to denounce the Caucus in the customary terms. Failure to do so will alienate him and the Government from the Big Four, and also (because of the pro-IRA records of Father MacManus and Dr. Burns O'Brien and the organisational overlapping of the Caucus and Noraid) from Unionist opinion and from the British Government.

The Minister will accordingly be placing himself in a position where it will be necessary to tread with care and to deal firmly with troublemakers. Yet the journey is not one from which he can expect to emerge with much credit to show on the basic issue of advancing the Government's case on Northern Ireland.

International Political Issues

The assessment given above of the U.S. Administration's reaction to approaches about Northern Ireland depends in small part on the fact that the Administration has little reason to be satisfied with Ireland's line on three important current international political issues. These are East-West relations after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the possible boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games and the Middle East situation.

In regard to the first and second issues, it appears that a list is kept in Washington of countries which have supported the U.S. Administration's calls for retaliatory action against the U.S.S.R. on the one hand, and for a boycott of the Olympic Games on the other. Ireland appears on neither list but is placed amongst the "don't knows". The American Ambassador has objected to the conclusion by us since the invasion of Afghanistan of an air and refuelling agreement with the U.S.S.R. The U.S.A. want us to

suspend that agreement, to stop high technology exports to the U.S.S.R. and to give support to Pakistan and Turkey, but above all they wish us to commit ourselves to joint punitive action with other Western countries against the U.S.S.R. to deter it from further aggression. These requests raise difficulties in that a favourable response would risk damage to our interests (oil supplies from the U.S.S.R. etc.), but they raise above all important issues of principle. It is thus unlikely that we will have got into the Americans' good books on these matters by mid-March, or that the Minister will be able to give satisfaction on them when he is in Washington.

The same is true of the Olympic boycott. There is evidence that Irish public opinion favours normal participation in the Moscow games. Formally we have, along with most other Governments of the Nine, deferred a decision until May when invitations to Moscow have to be replied to.

The Middle East situation constitutes another policy issue where the Irish policy line is divergent from that of the U.S.A. Following the release of a joint communiqué by the Minister and the Bahraini authorities last month which advanced Ireland's position somewhat on the Palestinian homeland and on the P.L.O.'s role, and the sharp reaction of Israel to that development, it can be expected that the Minister will face questioning on the matter from the State Department and perhaps from other political contacts and the media. As events following the recent vote in the U.N. Security Council on Israeli settlements in occupied territory showed, Middle East policy is a very live domestic political issue in the U.S.A.

European Community activities

In the areas examined above it has been necessary to draw attention to problems which the Minister is likely to encounter in America and to circumstances which will militate against the proposed visit proving a success either in terms of substantive achievement or of media image. In regard to the European Community the difficulty is rather that the Minister may be criticised at home and in member State

capitals for absenting himself from the Council (Foreign Ministers) to be held in Brussels on 17/18 March. This is the final Council meeting before the unusually important European Council on 31 March-1 April. If the Minister misses the Council it may reduce Ireland's contribution to preparing the crucial discussions in the European Council, which closely concern our interests (convergence and the British budgetary problem, including related matters such as agriculture, fish, sheepmeat, British North Sea Oil, the E.M.S.). The Minister was not present at the last Council meeting (5 February). It seems certain that a further absence at the present stage will give rise to adverse comment including comment in the public prints. Ireland chaired the last European Council and it might be expected that we would have an unusual interest in following the discussion of the same vital topics at the forthcoming one. We look to the Community as a source of aid in the context of many national policies, including policy on Northern Ireland. It would seem desirable that the Government should maintain our reputation as a committed and active member State of the Community.