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^{of}
Mr. Kelly 24/9
Mr. Murray (on return)

To see these reports received from Foreign Affairs. Of particular interest is x, p. 4 of the note of conversations. Otherwise, little is added to what Mr. Murray and I recorded.

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24.9.80

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PA these papers on

S 19284

15/10/80



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

17 Grosvenor Place
SW1X 7HR

19 September 1980

Dear Assistant Secretary.

I thought the Department might find it useful to have an account of some of the private conversations which various members of the Embassy had with individual participants at the BIA Conference and that is enclosed.

While I recognise that the attendance at the Conference was not representative of all the parties to the Northern Ireland conflict and that we should be cautious in drawing conclusions and basing assessments on fairly random discussions, nonetheless it is, I feel, worth remarking that some degree of consensus was observable among those with whom we spoke privately.

You will note from the conversations we had with a wide range of the political opinion represented at the Conference that there is an expectation (and in the case of Alliance, hope) that the present phase of the Atkins initiative will be succeeded by an effort by the Secretary of State to impose arrangements along the lines hinted at in paragraph 64 of the July discussion paper. The nature of such anticipated arrangements varies from Mawhinney's framework idea to Alliance's pressure for the imposition of powersharing but the balance of opinion both among politicians and in the NIO falls much nearer to a "framework" approach than to the Discussion Paper's first option. Of course, these expressions of opinion do not tell the full story but it is not unlikely that Mr Atkins is considering falling back along these lines.

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British Government Officials repeated strongly in private what the British Government is saying in public to the effect that a return to local government, as desired by the OUP, was not on.

As you will be aware, many participants privately expressed disappointment at the absence of an Irish Government Minister. In some cases this was linked with a wider criticism of what was seen as a general lack of contact with and interest in the North by political figures in the South.

Yours sincerely,

Eamon Kennedy

Eamon Kennedy
Ambassador

Mr David Neligan
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
DUBLIN 2

Private Conversations with Participants at BIA Conference,

Oxford, 12 - 14 September, 1980

William Ross MP

Seemed prepared to talk without inhibition to members of the Embassy. He admitted candidly that for the OUP the essential struggle at present was between themselves and the DUP.

He repeated the OUP position that power sharing, or the first option in the White Paper, was "not on" and that when the Atkins initiative had petered out, the way forward would be to a restructuring of local government in Northern Ireland, as had been proposed in the Conservative Party's Election Manifesto. The present Conservative administration had had five years in which to learn the reality of the situation in Northern Ireland and the current "messing" could not be excused.

Mr. Ross suggested that the SDLP was losing contact with its constituency and was losing the support of its electorate because of a move to the right. He saw the SDLP, to its detriment, becoming more like the old nationalist party. In addition it had, in his view, become less responsive to the day to day concerns of its constituents; the Party's insensitivity on this score was symbolised by the departure of Paddy Devlin and Gerry Fitt. His experience in Derry was that working class Catholics were becoming disillusioned and were looking to the Unionist representatives to look after their interests. He predicted that many such Catholics would vote Unionist in the next elections. He felt, in general, that the Catholic population in Northern Ireland might not yet have found the political party which would give expression to its political attitudes.

In relation to the new local government structures which he foresaw he predicted that abstentionism as a policy would not work for the SDLP. Among other things people still remembered the Rent and Rates Strike and they still resented the action taken by Mr. Austin Curry of the SDLP when he became a member of the Sunningdale Cabinet.

Arnold McCusker MP

Said the OUP would be prepared to accept a devolved government in NI provided it came about at the initiative of the British Government. He thought that the British would go for an "imposed" solution, which would be based on an assembly in Stormont should the present Atkins

talks not result in an agreed solution. At a minimum McCusker thought the OUP would be prepared to participate in elections to a devolved assembly leading to a power-sharing executive. He did not know if the OUP would be prepared to participate in a power-sharing executive but thought it unlikely.

He was very pessimistic about the prospects for the OUP in any forthcoming election. (Local Government elections are scheduled for next May). He thought his own parliamentary seat could be in jeopardy and was much more pessimistic about his own prospects than when I last spoke to him before the recess. The OUP is losing heavily to the DUP.

Peter Robinson was working very hard on behalf of his constituents and McCusker thought the OUP would have no chance of unseating him at the next general election.

avid Trimble

Present OUP leadership very weak. John Taylor is considering moving back to Northern Ireland with a view to trying to oust Molyneaux and become leader of the party in 1981 or 1982.

ugh Rossi MP

Spoke of what he saw as the serious excess capacity on the NI motorway network and said that new routes would have to be constructed to a more realistic standard. He thought, however, there was scope for improving access along the Derry-Omagh-Enniskillen axis. He did not seem to be thoroughly au fait with the need for improvement on the Newry-Dundalk route.

gian Mawhinney MP

Critical of Dublin government, which he said had raised expectations in the context of a new relationship between Britain and Ireland. It was time, he felt, for Dublin to spell out what it means by a new relationship, otherwise it would be thought here that there was really nothing new in the Dublin initiative. These expectations had created difficulties for Atkins in trying to get the Northern parties to agree on the basis for devolved Government. Mawhinney thought that Atkins would, if necessary, "impose" a solution on the North, which would probably be some form of majority rule with safeguards. He thought it essential to have elections first with a gradual devolving of powers as the assembly showed itself to be responsible. It should be left up to the Assembly to determine the scope of its relationship with Dublin and to work out its modus operandi in the North.

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John Cushnahan
General Secretary of
the Alliance Party)

He complained that members of the three main political parties in the South tended to talk only with the SDLP. If nothing else, the Government and the political parties would derive a more balanced appreciation of the situation in Northern Ireland if they talked from time to time with other Northern parties including Alliance. They might not get agreement on their views but they would achieve greater understanding of each other's point of view.

Mr. Bloomfield
Permanent Secretary of
the Northern Department
of the Environment

Said that there was general satisfaction with the results of the MacRory restructuring of local government, notwithstanding the lack of a Provincial Assembly to oversee local government affairs in the province. It was clear that Mr. Bloomfield would regard reinstatement of the urban and county councils as a retrograde step producing significant economic inefficiencies. This would also appear to be the view of the Northern Ireland Office in London. When Mr. John Cushnahan spoke at the last plenary session in opposition to the reform of local government which was being sought by the Official Unionist Party, Mr. Michael Moriarty of the NIO came up to him afterwards and, in the presence of an Embassy official, expressed satisfaction that this point had been made, adding that it was important to get it across to the Unionists that a return to the old system of local government was not on the cards.

Jack Hermon (RUC)

He remarked that he and his wife used to spend their summer holidays in the south and regretted being prevented by the security situation from continuing to do so. In general his attitude was an extremely open and friendly one and his commitment to the fair and disciplined administration of justice in Northern Ireland was evident. He expressed deep appreciation of the co-operation of the Gardai and expressed admiration for their success in tracing guns and explosive caches, especially the recent dramatic finds near the border. Also expressed appreciation of our stepped-up security measures.

Mr. Newington (FCO)

He availed of contacts at the Conference to explore whether the Taoiseach proposes to suggest to Mrs. Thatcher when next they meet that a conference should then be convened or that it should be convened at some future date. He was also keen to be clear whether any proposals made along these lines would be private proposals or whether we would propose to indicate publicly what had been said.

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in Kivner
I drew his
shelt out for
him slowly
what I was
saying at
level*

/...

Mothy Gee
(NIO Belfast)

Said that Thatcher continued to take a close interest in Northern Ireland. Prior to her departure on holidays she had asked the NIO to provide her with "as many background papers as possible" on NI as she wished to study them during her vacation.

Said the administration was not concerning itself with a long term solution. Was more concerned with trying to establish a basis for a long term solution by enunciating the principles which must govern any solution.

In the short term they want to establish a measure of devolution in which the political parties would participate, which would not be static but which could develop within the framework of the underlying principles.

Professor J.C. Beckett

He returned to his theme that unity was available at a price. As a number of Northern Ireland speakers who were not hostile to unity had said from the floor it was also his view that there was a reluctance on the part of successive southern governments since 1922 to pay the price of unity. In fact, he regretted to say, successive southern governments drifted further and further away from the North and progressively alienated any there who might have been sympathetic.

r. Bernard Cullen

Spoke favourably of the increasing acceptability of the RUC in nationalist areas of Belfast. He said that non-terrorist crime was an increasingly important problem in the Turf Lodge and Falls areas. While the Catholic working classes would not wish the British Army to remain a day longer than was necessary they would be very anxious to see the return, on a normal footing, of the RUC. The present relationship between such people and the IRA was one of greater hostility than has been the case since the outbreak of violence. Very few families would not be prepared to mind a gun or harbour a terrorist. When they saw violence being done to one of their neighbours they were prepared to use the confidential telephone. What they were not prepared to do was to denounce the IRA in any kind of public way. This was not a question of a terrorist fish swimming in a sea of society's approval but a much more simple question of pressure being exerted through intimidation.

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Since Hermon had taken over from Newman as Chief Constable, interrogation procedures had improved and the alienation caused by the situation in Castlereagh was being reversed. Cullen thought that Newman had been aware of and had condoned what was going on in Castlereagh. Hermon on the other hand was respected and was a considerable source of confidence. The "sweeps" of areas of Belfast by the British Army were a diminishing problem.

Tom Hadden

A propos of the forthcoming revised edition of "Law and State: The Case of Northern Ireland" said that there was a dispute between Kevin Boyle on the one hand and Hadden and Paddy Hillyard on the other on the subject of the southern view of extradition but that they hoped shortly to agree a text and get the new edition out.

Brendan O'Regan

Seriously considering establishment in this country of a body analogous to Co-operation North. Is enthusiastically promoting the idea that economic co-operation across the border and across the Irish Sea is an essential element in putting the relations between the two islands on a new level.

Lord Longford

Tried to defend his slighting references to the Minister's absence at the dinner on Saturday, 13 September by saying that he was concerned that the present Government in Dublin was not as interested in the B I Association as the previous one. It was explained to him that the Minister's schedule did not make attendance possible and a contrast made between the numbers of Ministers available in the NIO and the FCO and the fact that we have not even one Minister of State.

Lord Longford was left in no doubt about the resentment his remarks had caused.