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MINISTER'S MEETING AT THE WASHINGTON POST

1. *The Minister had a forty-five minute meeting on Monday morning with members of the Editorial Board of the Washington Post. Present were Stephen Rosenfeld, Deputy Editor, Patricia Shakow, Assistant Editor and their main editorial writer on Ireland, Virginia Hamill, Deputy Foreign News Editor and Mary McGrory, syndicated columnist.*
2. *Rosenfeld welcomed the Minister and opened the discussion, which was off the record, by remarking that over the last two to three years Irish and British officials seemed to want to focus U.S. media attention on Northern Ireland. He asked if this was a new policy on our part or had he been inattentive in the past. In reply the Minister said that over the years a great deal of U.S. media attention had focussed on Northern Ireland because of the tragedy there and because so many Americans, particularly those of Irish descent, had expressed a deep concern about events there. The Irish Government was anxious to communicate its policy to our friends in the United States - to Irish Americans, to the Congress, to the U.S. Administration and to the American media. The Minister then outlined the present situation in the North, the Government's attitude to the Prior proposals and the prospects for achieving progress through the use of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council.*
3. *Asked specifically about Prior's plan, the Minister said that in order for it to function it depended on the willingness of the political parties in the North to negotiate agreement on the devolution of responsibilities to the proposed Assembly. The public attitude of the political parties have made it clear that no basis for such an agreement exists - the Unionists will not accept power-sharing on an Irish dimension and the SDLP cannot accept a return to majority rule or to participate in an Assembly which does not guarantee power-sharing on an Irish dimension.*

4. In reply to a question from Patricia Shakow, the Minister explained the attitude of the SDLP to the Assembly elections. Mary McGrory wondered if Provisional Sinn Fein candidates would gain many seats in the forthcoming elections. The Minister said that he anticipated, as had happened in the past, that SDLP candidates would form the main representative group of those returned by the Nationalist community.
5. Virginia Hamill enquired about support in the U.S. for the PIRA. In reply, the Minister said that some weapons, which had been used in Northern Ireland, had come from the United States. This had been borne out by a number of U.S. court cases taken as a result of weapons seized in Northern Ireland and traced by the U.S. authorities to sources in the United States. The Minister said that there was excellent cooperation between law enforcement agencies here and in Ireland and both as Minister for Foreign Affairs and previously as Minister for Justice he greatly appreciated this cooperation.
6. Patricia Shakow asked the Minister about Congressman Biaggi's Ad-Hoc Congressional group. The Minister said that the group on Capitol Hill, with which elected representatives in Ireland had developed close contacts is the Friends of Ireland. The Friends had developed out of the activities of the Four Horsemen and now included some sixty members drawn from both the Senate and the House of Representatives and was composed of both Republicans and Democrats. The Government greatly appreciated the interest which the Friends Group took in Irish affairs and the level of understanding which they had to the complexities of the Northern Ireland situation and of their support for the policy of the Irish Government. Indeed he remarked that some of the Group had shown considerable courage in facing up to well organised MORAIID groups in their constituencies. The Biaggi group was one which did not have the center-stage in the Irish-American relationship.

7. Mr Rosenfeld asked the Minister about the Claire Sterling thesis and the suggested relationship between the PIRA and the PLO. The Minister said that the Sterling thesis was a flawed one. The situation in Northern Ireland had existed for sixty years and was not the product of any international conspiracy. There were contacts from time-to-time, of which the Government was aware, but these mainly took the form of good-will messages between these various organisations including the Badar Meinhoff, Basque Nationalists and the Red Army faction.
8. Mrs Shakow asked the Minister if it was the policy of the Government to seek the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland. The Minister replied that what the Government was seeking was a step-by-step process of agreement leading to a situation in which the affairs of the island of Ireland would be managed by the people of Ireland without a British presence. This would, of course, involve at some stage the orderly withdrawal of British security forces and the making of such arrangements as would be required to meet the situation which then arose.
9. Ms Hamill asked the Minister what do the Protestants get from a solution involving a united Ireland. The Minister said that what we all get is peace and stability with the opportunity for social and economic progress. Northern Ireland has not only failed as a political entity but also as an economic entity and sooner or later the business community of Northern Ireland would recognise the necessity of creating a climate which would restore economic confidence and bring a measure of prosperity back to the people of the North. This could only be done through a process of reconciliation and dialogue with the South. There were, of course, many areas in which, on a practical level, this was already happening, e.g. in defending the Common Agricultural Policy within the Community and in North-South cooperation particularly in relation to Kinsale Gas.

10. Mrs Shakow asked if the Minister did not agree that a changed attitude on the question of extradition by the Irish Government could advance the policy of reconciliation. The Minister said that our Constitution, which was a written Constitution, provided that Ireland abide by the generally recognised principles of international law in the conduct of its relations with other states. The courts had considered that one of these principles is the principle of non-extradition for political offences. However, in order to ensure that people did not escape the law by moving from one jurisdiction to another, both Governments had agreed, following the Sunningdale Conference, to examine ways of dealing with fugitive offenders. The Criminal Law Jurisdiction Act, which has been in force since 1976, enables the authorities in whose jurisdiction a suspect is arrested to proceed with a trial in that jurisdiction. There have been a number of successful prosecutions under the provisions of the legislation.

11. The Minister was also asked about the present state of Anglo-Irish relations. In answering, he said that the Falklands War, as suggested by others, had not been the major cause of the present deterioration in relations between the British and Irish Governments. The present state of Anglo-Irish relations is due to the failure of the British Government to consult in any adequate manner with the Irish Government on the Prior proposals despite agreements made to do so. Indeed, the Irish Government had only been informed of the nature of the Prior proposals on the 30th March last on the eve of the publication of the proposals. The failure of the British to consult with the Irish Government had led to the introduction of a plan for devolved government in Northern Ireland which was misconceived and unworkable.

OTHER MEDIA EVENTS:

Because of the situation which had arisen on the domestic front, a number of other media

Mr Godfrey Sperling, Head of Bureau of the Christian Science Monitor, had invited the Minister to an on-the-record breakfast on Wednesday which also had to be cancelled. Some recent newspaper cuttings, which describe the Sperling breakfasts, are being sent separately.

Richard A O'Brien
First Secretary

8 October 1982