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30-MAY 1983.

Mr Frank Cluskey T.D.
Minister for Trade, Commerce and Tourism
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Dear Frank,

During my visit to the United States for the St. Patrick's Day period this year I met with Mr Lane Kirkland, President of the AFL-CIO, and in the course of our conversation the question of Irish trade union participation at this year's AFL-CIO Convention came up. The convention will be held from 3-7 October next in Hollywood, Florida.

As you know, through the influence of Irish-Americans, the American Labour movement has over the years been interested in the problem of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately fringe groups opposed to the Government's approach on Northern Ireland such as NORAID and the Irish National Caucus have been able to exploit the simplistic attitude adopted by some in unions such as the International Longshoremen's Association, and those representing construction workers. There is evidence that a fair proportion of Caucus funds comes from union sources. We have sought to extend our contacts in the leadership of the AFL-CIO in order to counter this extremist influence. The clear support of the American Labour movement for the Government's approach to reconciliation in Ireland would, of course, be a significant boost to our objectives in the US and I personally attach importance to our developing links with key figures in the AFL-CIO organisation.

The Embassy in Washington and the Consulate in New York have in recent months been active in promoting contacts with the AFL-CIO. There have been a number of encouraging developments. The President of the International Longshoremen's Association, Mr Teddy Gleason, in a letter dated 24 January 1983 to the Ambassador in Washington opposed violence and expressed support for the Government's policy on Northern Ireland. Although Mr Gleason will probably continue to maintain the good relations he has had with NORAID-type elements he may be now amenable to some influence from the Government. Gleason is also chairman of a new body called the Irish-American Labour Coalition which concerns itself with Northern Ireland and international human rights issues. While this latter body has some extreme elements within it, it nonetheless has many members who are well disposed to the Government and who ought to be encouraged.

My own meeting with Mr Lane Kirkland was a useful opportunity to emphasise the desirability of closer bonds between the Labour movements in Ireland and the US. I stressed to him the vigour and independence of the trade unions here and suggested that representatives should be invited to attend this year's AFL-CIO convention. Mr Kirkland said that an invitation would be forthcoming. Any Irish representative would have the status of observer and would have a very useful opportunity to brief the American delegates at the various social functions to be held in conjunction with the convention. The Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO, Mr Tom Donahue (a possible future President), has been delegated by Kirkland to take charge of Irish-American affairs and relations with the Irish Government and Labour movement.

You will be aware that the late Michael Mullen had a close individual relationship with American Labour figures including Gleason. There is now, I believe, a desire on the part of the trade union leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to develop a more broadly-based relationship than has existed hitherto in terms of the whole spectrum of trade union organisation. The development of a good working relationship between trade union leaders in both countries is, of course, in our national interest particularly, as I have indicated, as regards our Northern Ireland policy.

I would ask you to use your influence to ensure an Irish trade union presence at the AFL-CIO convention in October. I would be glad to discuss this matter further with you and, of course, my Department will assist any Irish representative in every way possible.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Barry T.D.
Minister for Foreign Affairs