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AMBASAID NA HEIREANN, LONDAIN.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

CONFIDENTIAL

2 February 1984

Dear Bernard

During a recent conversation over lunch with Joe Haines, leader writer with the Daily Mirror, he made some comments of interest on the current Northern Ireland situation arising out of his time with Harold Wilson during the latter's periods as Prime Minister.

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In the course of a discussion about the likely shape of proposals which might emerge in the Anglo-Irish context in the aftermath of the Forum Report he enquired whether we as part of any North-South settlement would be inclined to insist on the dismantling of Nato-related military installations in the North. He said that he raised this point because he recalled very clearly from his time in No. 10 during the 1974 Labour Government the strong objections of both the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Defence to any proposal for new political arrangements which would have required the running down of those facilities. He referred to a particular occasion when the then Secretary to the Cabinet Sir John Hunt effectively vetoed a Wilson idea of conferring dominion status on the North because it could have made possible such a development at some future date.

Haines also referred to the Wilson "spongers" speech. He said that it was drafted by a senior NIO official named Trevelyan (Who's Who entry for D.J. Trevelyan attached), and that he had only become aware of it at a late stage when called back from leave by his concerned deputy. He said that the NIO strongly resisted his efforts to have that passage deleted for what he suspected were sinister motives, viz. they wished to bring to the boil a situation which they regarded as dangerously unstable and, in effect, scuttle what was seen as an unrescuable Executive. Wilson by contrast, according to Haines, was more mindful of the likely gut reaction of British working class voters who would warm to any politician who put the quarrelsome Irish in their place.

As regards the present situation Haines was pessimistic about the likely Government reaction to the Forum. He criticised Prior for refusing to get rid of Nicholas Scott following the strong party reaction to the Hennessy Report. While understandable in human terms the effect was to weaken still further Prior's capacity to launch a worthwhile Anglo-Irish initiative. In any event he forewaw the greatest difficulty in motivating Mrs Thatcher in a direction which went against all her instincts. While Haines himself readily accepted the alienation argument, and the consequent need to provide substantive recognition of the political identity of the minority, he was obviously preoccupied by the apparent impossibility of securing unionist acquisence in such arrangements. Interestingly our conversation did, however, convey a definite sense that Haines himself may not be absolutely wedded to the papers position over recent years of support for early withdrawal. At the very least he has no great confidence that it will produce a stable society; he merely doubts the viability of any less radical alternative. He nevertheless undertook to study the Forum material which I provided and we agreed to keep in regular contact over the coming months.

Yours sincerely

P. Hennessy

Patrick P. Hennessy Press and Information Officer

Mr. Bernard Davenport Anglo-Irish Section Department of Foreign Affairs.

C.C. Sean whelan.