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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

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11 June 1992

Mr. Seán Ó hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish DivisionConversation with Sir Ninian Stephen

Dear Assistant Secretary

Sir Ninian and Lady Stephen came to Dinner at the Embassy last night. My wife and I had known them in Australia when he was Governor General, in which capacity he hosted a farewell lunch for us in Canberra before our departure in 1987. Our discussion was fairly general for the most part for, although he has clearly tried hard to brief himself on Irish history in general and on the Northern Ireland situation in particular, he was keen to fill in as many gaps as possible in his knowledge. The main points of interest emerging in our discussion are summarised below.

Name plate

One of the questions causing him some worry is the name-plate to describe the Irish Government delegation. He realises that "Ireland" is the name of the State in international organisations and that the British refer to us as the "Republic of Ireland". When he mentioned "Eire" I explained that this term is only used when the Irish language is involved. His fear is that a name-plate bearing the inscription "Government of Ireland" might upset the Unionists and give them an excuse for walking out. By the same token he makes a special point of avoiding the use of "Ulster". When he slipped up once or twice in the course of the evening he recovered quickly and corrected himself.

SDLP proposals

While realising that as yet there was no certainty that the transition to Strand Two would take place, Sir Ninian said he

understood that the SDLP had trimmed their proposals in such a way as to increase the prospects of a move to the second phase. I explained to him how the SDLP had tried to be imaginative and innovative in their approach and how important it was to cater for the nationalists' identity when any new political structures for Northern Ireland are being considered. He was fully aware of the minimalist approach of the Unionists and their desire to achieve an internal settlement only, at the lowest possible political cost.

Confidentiality

Sir Ninian felt it would be quite helpful if Strand Two talks could be conducted on the basis of confidentiality. He feels that this approach has worked well in Strand One, despite the damage done by the unauthorised leak of the SDLP proposals. He wondered whether the two Governments could live with the constraints imposed by confidentiality, bearing in mind their possible need to answer Parliamentary Questions on the talks.

Paisley and Molyneux

It was clear that Sir Ninian is well briefed on Paisley and Molyneux. He is aware that Paisley is a potential wrecker and that there is a strong religious dimension to his extremism. He understood, and found it incredible, that Paisley's hostility to the EC (and by extension to the notion of a Commissioner nominated by the EC) was partly influenced by the fact that the original EC Treaty was signed in Rome. He had been told that he could be quite charming at the personal level. Sir Patrick Mayhew had told him of Paisley's claim that he (Paisley) would be hanged from the nearest lamppost if he acquiesced in the externality aspects of the SDLP proposals going forward to Strand Two. He accepted my view that this was a far-fetched claim. He was aware, too, of Molyneux's integrationist tendencies and of his love of the Westminster scene. He knows that his leadership qualities are very limited.

Unionists and Reform

I availed myself of the opportunity to get across some points about the nature of Unionism and the inability of the Unionists historically to make concessions voluntarily to the minority. Any reforms achieved since 1969 had been forced on them by the British Government.

Visits to Dublin

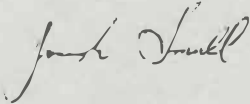
Sir Ninian expressed himself as quite pleased with his recent visits to Dublin. He confirmed something he had told me some years ago - that he had lived in Waterford for a short period when he was a small boy of 8 or 10 years, back in 1931. He

spent about three months in Waterford at that time and in the recent past he revisited the house where he lived.

Meeting with Sir Patrick Mayhew

Sir Ninian said that arrangements have been made for him to have Dinner on Friday evening next (12 June) with Sir Patrick Mayhew who at that stage should have taken the necessary steps, barring last-minute mishaps, to ease the talks into Strand Two. He observed lightheartedly that this engagement will balance his visit to Dinner at the Embassy!

Yours sincerely



Joseph Small
Ambassador