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AMBASÁD NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

22 June 1993

A\Sec O hUiginn
Anglo Irish Division
HQ

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PSS
Mr. F. Murray
Joh
22/6

President's visit to Northern Ireland

Dear Assistant Secretary,

We have reported separately on media coverage of the above and the following additional comments will supplement Ms Nolan's reports to Press section and provide a brief overall assessment of public reaction here.

Over the week end the President's meeting with Gerry Adams was a significant news story here. It received extensive coverage in the week end print media and remained among the top three items in the TV and radio new bulletins. By Sunday however attention had turned elsewhere and Monday's newspaper carried only one slight - and inaccurate - reference in the Daily Express.

There remains the possibility that some reference will be made to it during this weeks business at Westminster. This week's list for Prime Minister's questions contains no one who, on the face of it, would have an interest in raising such a matter although it cannot be excluded that the Unionists will try and get in on supplementaries. The only unlisted MPs who can be certain of being recognised by the Speaker in such instances are the party leaders - Molyneaux or Paisley - and a lot will depend on how they choose to play it. There are also ample opportunities to raise issues at the less public session of business questions, after PMQs on Thursday. Unfortunately the annual debate on renewal of direct rule - Northern Ireland Act 1974 (Interim Extension) Order - takes place this week, on Thursday afternoon for three hours commencing at 4pm and it is likely that some reference to it will crop up during the course of this catch all debate.

Among MPs to whom we have spoken the reaction is to consider the episode closed. Kevin McNamara gave his comments at the outset, echoing in some measure the Government line that this was a private visit although he came in for some criticism for referring to Gerry Adams as no more than "a resident of West Belfast". There is a sense that in the short term the President's almost universally positive image among the British public may have suffered some damage. This is

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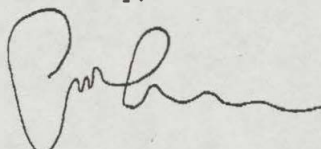
likely to be greatest among that section of conservative opinion for whom Gerry Adams is a little understood demonic figure. Just as her meeting with the Queen was seen as a powerfully symbolic occasion so also now her meeting with Gerry Adams is viewed as an equally potent gesture which cannot be entirely dismissed as a chance encounter in the course of a reception. There is, of course, a flaw in this assessment since the coverage of her call on the Queen in the British media was almost negligible compared to the widespread public reaction to her meeting with Gerry Adams. This inconsistency is particularly noticeable in the case of the coverage by the tabloids. A point has also been made to us that the encounter with Adams could be viewed by the ill intentioned as an indirect signal of where the Government stands and that this aspect, which has not figured in the media commentaries, might well be the type of issue focused on if the encounter with Adams crops up for example in the debate on direct rule.

From our contacts we have got some sense of the line which was being put about by Downing Street and the NIO over the week end. The "on the record" reaction from Number Ten and the NIO was that the visit was a private one and there would accordingly be no comment. No statement was put out although some media coverage makes reference to an NIO statement. Off the record the words used to characterise Government reaction were apparently "anger and disappointment" with the emphasis on the latter. Journalists who pressed for guidance were directed to Nicholas Wood's report in Friday's "Times" where he wrote of the Prime Minister's view that the President's plans were "insensitive" and likely to stir things up at a time when the Secretary of State was trying to re-start the talks. There is we gather some concern in the NIO at suggestions that they had engaged in some sort of dirty tricks campaign against the President, see for example the Irish Press report of 21 June.

Another aspect of the off the record briefing by the NIO, at the London end at least, was an expression of concern at the security aspects of the visit. This related to what was suggested was a lack of awareness for the job which had to be undertaken by the RUC and a lack of adequate notice on our part.

This weeks "Irish Post" will cover the story on the inside pages and will editorialise along lines supportive of the President and critical of the British media reaction. The Post's reading of the affair is that it was a case of "a storm in a teacup" and this has been borne out by the letters and calls which the paper has received. The Embassy has also received a small number of calls - less than ten - commenting on the visit - some supportive of the President and some, including one from a prominent member of the Irish community in Warrington, critical of her meeting with Gerry Adams.

Yours sincerely,



Joe Hayes
Counsellor