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AMBASÁD NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN

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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

1 April 1993

Mr Seán O hUiginn  
Assistant Secretary  
Anglo Irish Division,  
Department of Foreign Affairs,  
Dublin.

THE AFTERMATH OF WARRINGTON

Dear Assistant Secretary,

To supplement the Embassy's daily press summaries we felt it might be useful to try to draw together some of the main points emerging in the public reaction here to the bombing at Warrington since they provide an insight into the climate of public opinion in Britain.

Special Factors

In terms of fatalities and numbers injured, Warrington does not figure highly on the IRA's list of atrocities in Britain. Inevitably, however, the killing of the two children touched a sensitive nerve and sparked off an intense public reaction. There was an additional factor which added to this. The Warrington bombing took place within weeks of the abduction and murder in nearby Liverpool of a three-year-old, Jamie Bulger, by two young boys aged ten and eleven. This particular tragedy caused immense public outrage and led to a serious debate about the moral decline of Britain. Reaction to the Warrington bombing was coloured by the Bulger murder and both events became inextricably linked in the public mind, adding to the sense of insecurity and concern here about the apparent collapse of public order and morality.

The Killings in Northern Ireland

The bombing issue arose at Prime Minister's questions on 22 March. In reply to Peter Bottomley the Prime Minister spoke of the IRA plumbng the depths, of an evil act made more evil by messages deliberately designed to confuse the police and of the Government's determination to hound the perpetrators until the end of their days. On 25 March, prompted by news of the death of Tim Parry, Paddy Ashdown returned to the matter. Ashdown made reference to the peace initiative of Susan McHugh and asked that if the people of Dublin could put the past behind them in their search for peace should not "the politicians of the whole of Ireland be able to do the same". Major replied that as "we condemn terrorism we must bear in mind that there are many people in Dublin and elsewhere in the Republic of Ireland, elsewhere in Northern Ireland and Irish

citizens in this country who condemn and detest the terrorists as much as do honourable Members."

The Prime Minister's response to Paddy Ashdown is revealing since it underlines one well known fact - when measured against the reaction to terrorist killings in Britain, deaths in Northern Ireland do not count for much. Despite the fact that they had taken place earlier that day, no reference was made to the multiple killings at Castlerock. This omission was reflected in the popular press. Throughout the week, for example, the tabloids had given front page coverage to Warrington, backed up by emotive editorial comment but they carried only passing reference in news reports to the killings in Northern Ireland. In a week dominated by images from Warrington there was simply no room for coverage of, or editorial indignation at, the horrific killings in Northern Ireland.

#### The Law and Order Response

Terrorist crime in Britain comes under the brief of the Home Secretary and his reaction came on 22 March when he met with the two local MPs in the Warrington area, Doug Hoyle and Mike Hall, and the chief executive of Warrington borough council. The focus of this meeting was heavily on security and this was reflected in the statement issued after the meeting.

Calls for a stepped up security response were repeated throughout the week. On 25 March The Sun demanded that the IRA be "put up against a wall and shot". In such instances we cannot simply dismiss this excess as another piece of unpleasant over-reactive tabloid journalism. In the Financial Times of 27 March, for example, Dominic Lawson reminded his readers that the success of The Sun is based on that paper's consistent ability to express what most British people feel.

Conor Cruise O'Brien used his article in The Independent (London) of 26 March to call for the reintroduction of internment. This is of course a predictable reaction from him and each atrocity is used by him to repeat this view. O'Brien's standing here is such that what he has to say is accorded respect, especially in Conservative circles. His endorsement of internment lent considerable weight to those who argued for it as an option and it surfaced in a succession of TV and radio debates throughout the week although it was met with a commendably negative response from those representing the official viewpoint. The former Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, was one of those who expressed opposition to the internment option.

In the short term, at least, Warrington will have strengthened the hand of the right wing law and order lobby. Fortunately the debate on renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act was out of the way before the Warrington atrocity. Were it to take place now it would have provided an ideal opportunity for calls for internment, a beefing up of the PTA and the usual assortment of reactive security measures. In any case, reaction to Warrington will colour the climate of political opinion in a manner which is likely to add to the pressure on us to expedite amendment of the Extradition Act.

### The Irish Community

From the point of view of the Irish community in Britain the Tanaiste's article in The Independent on 26 March was a resounding success. It articulated for the community, on the front page of a quality daily, their sense of outrage and the collective grief which they shared with their British neighbours.

The Embassy and other Irish agencies received several abusive phone calls and hate letters and there were minor incidents in Warrington itself including the breaking of windows in the Irish Club there. The overall reaction to the Irish community was very mild, however, and a measure of how far things have improved compared with the 1970's when the anti-Irish backlash was very severe. We have reported separately on the plans for a peace rally in Hyde Park this coming Sunday (4 April) which will provide an opportunity for the community to give further manifestation to its condemnation of terrorist violence and its desire for peace.

### Attitudes Towards the Irish Government

Attitudes toward the Irish government were somewhat more ambivalent. There was a marked increase in sniping at Articles 2 and 3 which were targeted as providing legitimacy for the IRA and their campaign and were advanced as evidence of a certain lack of sincerity behind our expressions of condolences. There was also an undercurrent of criticism at what some continue to perceive as an inadequate security commitment on our part. However, the important point made in the Tanaiste's article in The Independent that the extra cost of security arising from the Northern Ireland situation is four times heavier on the Irish taxpayers than on their British counterparts did not pass unnoticed: it was subsequently alluded to in a Sunday Times editorial.

Unfortunately these attitudes were not helped by this weekend's damaging article in The Sunday Times suggesting that the IRA's campaign in Britain is masterminded from Dublin. This has since been picked up by other papers as evidence of the ambivalent nature of the Irish Government's attitude to the IRA. I met Ivan Fallon, Deputy Editor of The Sunday Times at a function on 30 March and raised this article with him. Fallon is Irish and I explained to him the negative impact of this type of article including the difficulties which it caused at a time such as this. In this instance, however, the damage has been done and allegations of the kind contained in the article are likely to surface in exchanges at Westminster and elsewhere, where it will provide useful fodder for enemies of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

### The Peace Initiative

Mrs McHugh's peace initiative received a wide and uniformly positive welcome. It has prompted a renewed spurt of activity by the British arm of New Consensus and a fresh interest here in the political activities of groups such as the Opsahl commission. For as long as the peace initiative maintains momentum this interest is likely to be sustained and reflected in public comment both in the media and at Westminster. As we



have previously reported, the British wing of New Consensus has a number of shortcomings not least of which is its political naivety. It has sought to play a leading role in a peace rally being organised by the Irish community in Hyde Park next Sunday (4 April), but the organisers have, largely on our advice, sought to avoid identification with any one group.

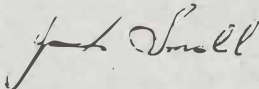
#### Criticism of the US Government

Another aspect of the reaction worth noting is the criticism of US attitudes to Northern Ireland. This surfaced mainly in the Tory press, particularly in The Times which was critical of the lack of any significant coverage of the bombing in the US media, suggesting that this was in part because the pro-IRA lobby had nothing to say. The attacks on the Clinton Presidency are a reminder that Conservative public opinion has yet to make up its mind about the new US administration and a large part of this unease presumably stems from suspicion about the proposed peace envoy which seems to touch a raw nerve.

#### General Observations

Despite the negative aspects already described, there have also been some encouraging editorials and commentaries in the quality press. These show how much more sophisticated an understanding there is now of events in Northern Ireland. Even in the tabloid press there is, for example, some evidence of an increasing acceptance of basic realities. There is no longer an unquestioning belief that increased security measures alone can provide an answer. Another encouraging aspect has been the virtual absence of reaction against the Irish community in Britain, demonstrating that most thinking British people no longer blame their Irish neighbours for the IRA. The situation is less clear-cut when it comes to public attitudes to the Irish Government and the week has shown yet again that there still exist considerable areas of prejudice and misunderstanding about issues such as our stand on Articles 2 and 3, internment, the presence of IRA "godfathers" in our jurisdiction and extradition. The McGee case this week was given much publicity in the British media. The fact that McGee was allowed bail by an Irish court was criticised by the judge and the police and this criticism was given a good deal of prominence in media reports. Coming so soon after Warrington, this surely reinforced the views of many of our prejudiced critics that we are soft on terrorists.

Yours sincerely



Joseph Small  
Ambassador