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*marked extracts from
Ambassador Small's report.*

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Mr F. Murray
Joint Sec
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CONFIDENTIAL

13 July 1993

Mr Seán O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

CONVERSATION WITH SIR EDWARD HEATH

Dear Assistant Secretary

Sir Edward Heath joined me for lunch at the Embassy on 8 July. His participation in the House of Commons debate on Northern Ireland on 8 June prompted me to extend to him an invitation which he readily accepted. He was 77 on the following day (9 July) and, with 43 years membership of the House of Commons, is now the Father of the House. Because of his personality - he has the reputation of being a cold, remote and "crusty" character - I found it necessary to do most of the leading in order to sound him out on a variety of issues. It was clear, however, that he was keen to focus our discussion on Northern Ireland because on the occasions I sought his opinions on the current situation within the Tory party, or that party's policies in relation to Europe, he tended to steer the conversation back to Northern Ireland. What follows is a summary of the main points arising in our discussion, with apologies for overloading the report with views which I expressed in order to elicit Heath's reaction, and which are necessary in providing the context.

SECURITY

Mr Heath repeated much of what he had said in the Commons on 8 June: responsibility for coordinating the fight against terrorism should be put in the hands of one very senior Cabinet Minister. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had no responsibility in that connection for what happened in Britain. He laid particular stress on the need for very good intelligence so that the security forces could swoop before the commission of serious crimes. It was necessary to be a step ahead of the terrorists - to be cleverer than them.

MI5's work during the cold war was not the kind of intelligence background that was suitable for dealing with the security problems in Northern Ireland and Britain. Going back to his own time as Prime Minister, he recalled that there was an exceptionally gifted army officer dealing with intelligence in Northern Ireland but, in accordance with the "Buggin's turn" procedure in the Army, he was transferred. It was intolerable that the situation should be so bad after 25 years. He was clearly concerned about the damage being done to Britain's economic interests by the explosions in the City. Because of its uncoordinated approach to the problem Britain had been far less successful in coping with terrorism than Germany, France or Italy.

I told Mr Heath that North/South cooperation on the security front was never closer and that the British authorities were very appreciative of this. In the past Dublin and Monaghan had experience the horrors of ruthless bombings, as a special TV programme on the previous night had recalled.

IRA/SINN FEIN

Mr Heath said he saw nothing wrong in President Robinson's handshake with Gerry Adams and he felt that the Prime Minister, John Major, was foolish to make an issue of it. He himself had authorised William Whitelaw to talk to the republicans twenty years ago and had no regrets for doing so. I made reference to the ongoing discussions between John Hume and Gerry Adams, noting that some Unionists had gone on record as saying that there could be no resumption of talks while this dialogue continued. It was clear from his reaction that Heath had no sympathy for the Unionist stance on this. In response to a question from the former Prime Minister about the source of IRA recruits, I availed myself of the opportunity to explain that crude and insensitive behaviour on the part of the security forces often drove young men into the arms of the IRA. In that connection I instanced the week-end encirclement of a whole Nationalist area of Belfast in 1970 within two weeks of his becoming Prime Minister. The army had behaved very badly on that occasion, kicking in doors, lifting floorboards and manhandling occupants in its search for arms. Behaviour of that kind was a potent recruiting agent for the IRA, a more recent example being the appalling actions of the Parachute Regiment in Coalisland last year.

THE TALKS

I briefed Mr Heath on the current state of play, explaining that the prospects for a resumption of talks appeared very bleak indeed. He would be aware from personal experience and from history that the Unionists were simply incapable of voluntary movement or compromise. For any progress to be achieved it was necessary for the British Government to take a very determined line with them. It was only through such pressure that the Stormont Government introduced a package of reforms after the events of 1969 and before the introduction

of direct rule in 1972. Those reforms were dictated by the British Government and reluctantly accepted by the ruling Unionist authorities. Mr Heath himself had taken the courageous step in March, 1972 to abolish the Stormont Parliament and Government and instal a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. In 1973 far-reaching proposals were put forward by the British Government, leading to the Sunningdale Agreement. By taking personal charge of the negotiations at Sunningdale, Mr Heath had achieved an agreement within four days.

Mr Heath did not disagree with any of these views or comments and, in relation to Sunningdale, added that the conference was never intended to run into a fourth day. Matters had been complicated for him by the fact that the Italian Prime Minister was on a visit to Britain at that time and he himself was forced to helicopter between Sunningdale and Chequers. Brian Faulkner had told him on the telephone that his delegation was insisting on returning to Northern Ireland on the fourth day for Sunday services. Heath reminded him that they also had churches in Britain and, when he returned to Sunningdale and spoke to members of Faulkner's delegation, he discovered that there was no basis for Faulkner's assertion that they wanted to return to the North for religious services. Faulkner had told him a blatant lie. Heath kept the Unionists in Sunningdale until agreement was reached. (It is clear from his remarks in the Commons on 8 June that Heath is very proud of that achievement. "Sunningdale was the best thing that we have done for Ireland", he said, blaming his successor, Harold Wilson, for failing to break the loyalist strike that brought down the power-sharing Executive).

I contrasted the series of decisive actions taken twenty years ago by Mr Heath's Government compared with the reticence of the current administration. It was imperative that the Northern Ireland problem should become a priority issue for the Government and for the Prime Minister personally. It simply was not acceptable that the Unionists should, once again, effectively veto all progress as they had done so often in the past. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was achieved in the wake of a succession of Unionist vetos on progress after the Sunningdale experiment only when the two Governments got together and showed the necessary determination to succeed. More than two years had passed since the March, 1991 formula was devised for the current round of talks. Not only was there no agreement in sight but there seemed little chance of even resuming the talks. Paisley had not taken the talks seriously and had refused to go to Dublin. His track record over the past thirty years showed clearly that he was a destructive force, incapable of the constructive negotiation and compromise required to achieve an agreement. At this point Heath repeated what he had said a month earlier in the House of Commons: that he had achieved agreement at Sunningdale only because of the deliberate exclusion of Paisley whose only purpose would have been to prevent agreement. Taking up my remarks about the need for the two Governments to come together and take the matter in hand, Heath said that he himself had expressed that view in the House of Commons. (What he said on 8 June in that regard was that "...we must have the best possible and closest

Note

relationship with the Republic of Ireland. I know that that will give offence, but it will have to be accepted. We shall not settle this problem until we have the closest possible relationship with Eire. We are in the same Community; we are both members. We have the same level playing fields in many different spheres. Why, then, can we not get together on this? My impression, from the contacts that I have, is that the possibilities are becoming greater. There are changes coming about in the Eire constitution that we would not have dreamt of 20 years ago. We must use the situation to our advantage and have the closest possible relations with the Republic of Ireland"). I said it was imperative that there should be no political vacuum and that the Governments must not vacate the field to the paramilitaries on both sides to enable them to wreak further havoc. If the Unionists refused to negotiate seriously the two Governments should widen and deepen their cooperation, if necessary through an enhanced Anglo-Irish Agreement. Mr Heath did not dissent from this view.

THE UNIONISTS

Mr Heath agreed with the view that there was a serious lack of leadership on the Unionist side and no prospect of improvement when Molyneux bows out. He said that they were an isolated group at Westminster who kept largely to themselves. Thinking, presumably, of people like Captain O'Neill and Chichester-Clark, he regretted the passing of the titled, landed families in Northern Ireland who traditionally provided the leadership of the Unionist party. Inferentially, they were more amenable to reason and more likely to comply with London's wishes. As for Paisley, it was clear from what he said that he has nothing but contempt for him. He said in the Commons in June that there was no purpose in carrying on talks if Paisley was a participant as there would never be agreement. I said that Mayhew was being far too deferential towards the Unionists and unwilling to apply pressure on them. As regards the paper he had promised to give focus and direction to the talks process, if and when it resumes, I pointed to his nervousness about the nature of the proposed paper. Instead of ensuring that the paper fully reflected the views of the two Governments as co-sponsors of the process itself, Mayhew was insisting on its being a British paper to avoid ruffling Unionist feathers. From his reaction it was clear that Heath was in sympathy with our approach.

ARTICLES 2 AND 3

Mr Heath was not fully conversant with the arguments in relation to Articles 2 and 3. I explained the purpose of their inclusion in our Constitution in the first place, including de Valera's desire to win over the more radical republicans to constitutional politics. He readily accepted that these Articles had not impinged on the Anglo-Irish bilateral relationship and that their removal now would only be feasible in the context of an attractive settlement package. I explained to him how Paisley and others were using these constitutional provisions as an excuse for not resuming

the talks. He enquired about the possibility of changing some of our social legislation that Unionists regard as having a Catholic ethos. In reply I pointed to the removal from our Constitution some years ago of the words that referred to the special position of the Catholic Church; to the fact that like us, Northern Ireland has no legislation on abortion and that, as regards divorce, we are planning another referendum next year. The reality was that Unionist objections and arguments based on these matters were largely spurious. Corrective action by us on these issues usually resulted in a switch by the Unionists to other arguments and excuses.

Heath expressed himself as being in agreement with the provisions of Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in relation to the constitutional position. Action could be taken when a majority in the North, as a result of a referendum, expressed themselves as being in favour of a united Ireland.

DISCRIMINATION

I used the opportunity to speak of the improvements that reforms and direct rule had brought to the nationalists in the North, even though many more years would be required to achieve equality of opportunity in some fields, especially employment. The creation of Stormont had been a real disaster. It was a serious error to establish in Belfast a replica of the Westminster system for a community that was divided on a two to one basis along sectarian lines. There never had been a prospect of alternation of power. Besides, the damage was compounded by the policy in London to allow the Unionists to govern without supervision. Complaints by successive Irish Ambassadors to British Ministers about blatant discrimination in jobs and housing, not to mention the gerrymandering of constituencies, met with the astonishing reply that these were matters within the competence of the Northern Ireland Government and that it would not be appropriate for the British Government to intervene. That was the situation that gave rise to the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. It was the violent reaction of extreme Unionists, the B-Specials and the RUC that led to the return of the IRA which was at that juncture moribund. Heath agreed that at the time of the burning of hundreds of Catholic homes in Belfast in August 1969 the IRA had in reality ceased to exist. I said to him that his decisive action in March 1972 in suspending Stormont and imposing direct rule on Northern Ireland deprived the Unionists of the power to continue their domination of the minority. The process of cleaning out the stables after a half century of misrule was continuing.

USE OF THE TERM "EIRE"

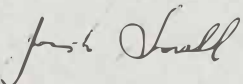
Mr Heath mentioned that after the debate in the Commons on 8 June he received a letter from a Dubliner taking him to task over his use of the term "Eire". He was taken aback by this as he thought he was doing us a favour by using that term. I explained to him the constitutional provision governing the

name of the State, pointing out that "Eire" was used in the Irish language only.

IRELAND AND THE EC

The former Prime Minister, who is of course an ardent European and was Prime Minister at the time of Britain's entry to the EC twenty years ago, remarked that Ireland appears to be deriving considerable benefit from its membership of the Community. He went on to say, seriously, that he had never been thanked for bringing about Ireland's membership. By this he meant, presumably, that by negotiating British accession he effectively created a situation where Ireland could also join, since we could not enter the EC alone because of our dependence on the British market. Sensing that when he spoke of benefit he had in mind the substantial financial transfers from Brussels, I said that in 1972, after a vigorous referendum campaign, our people voted by a massive 84% to join. That was at a time when there were no regional, cohesion or structural funds; we voted enthusiastically for accession because of a genuine European vocation.

Yours sincerely



Joseph Small
Ambassador