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Reference Code: 2021/95/45

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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH
BÉAL FEIRSTE

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT
BELFAST

8 December, 1993

Confidential

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

Dear Assistant Secretary

Christmas Reception

Our Christmas Reception last evening was attended by the Tánaiste and the Secretary of State. The Tánaiste's presence for more than two and a half hours made a very favourable impression. We hope he found his conversations useful.

We expanded the guest list again this year to include more non-official people, notably Churchmen. The following are a few points of interest that arose in conversations with myself and my colleagues. Members of the Department who were present may also have matters to report.

The Secretary of State and Minister Ancram mentioned they had received favourable accounts of the joint drafting work done by officials in London, a view which I think was mirrored on our side. The recent revelations of "contacts" between the British Government and the IRA was a main topic among other guests. We find a continuing reaction of shock and anger which if anything has deepened in the last fortnight. Ian Paisley seems to have increased his standing among those who would not normally support him by his insistence on calling a spade a spade and getting himself expelled from the Commons.

Dr. John Dunlop, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church stressed his message that we should not press the British to go further than neutrality on the constitutional issue and that if they were to go further, there would be a violent backlash on the Loyalist side. (You will be familiar with Dr. Dunlop's views from reports of our previous conversations this year and indeed from your own contact with him. He refers to the view in the Unionist community that there is an inevitable slide towards a united Ireland. The logic of his argument, therefore, is that any further movement towards what we would regard as a fair and balanced accommodation of the two identities and aspirations

would be seen as code for a British decision to expedite that process, whatever the actual wording and however reasonable.)

David Fell, head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, showed dismay of his own. He said he did not know of the contacts with the IRA and was not briefed until news of them began to break on 26 November. He mentioned enigmatically that the omissions and errors made in the original release of documents by the Secretary of State were not the fault of the NIO (as the published exchanges show, the Secretary of State himself is frequently a drafter of his own statements and it may be that he personally wrote or supervised what was released; alternatively, it may mean that the work was done by MI6 or another organisation outside the NIO, perhaps even in Downing Street; you will have seen a NIO source quoted in the Sunday Times of 5 December to the effect that the "sloppy" exercise had been done at the "very highest level").

John Steele, the Undersecretary in charge of Security said there is no let-up in the IRA's efforts to target members of the security forces; even as he was speaking a mortar landed on the roof of the police barracks at Newtownbutler but did not explode. Steele did see a deliberate holding back of attacks on civilian targets, including commercial bombings which have been a major feature of the past year; and he believed that the IRA leadership are withholding supplies of explosives and other material from ASUs.

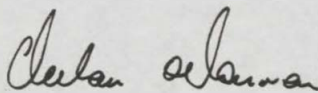
He told another colleague in response to a suggestion that he had "stone-walled" at the recent meeting here on harassment on which we have reported, that his instructions were to do just that! Steele's remarks reflect a deep reluctance at political level to go further on harassment issues. Indeed, you will recall that at the last Conference British Ministers pressed to have harassment deleted from the Communiqué altogether. Their view is that they have taken measures, the position has improved substantially, the Army is now highly sensitive to complaints and they do not wish to push them or the police further. You will recall that we were successful at the harassment meeting in getting agreement that our side would monitor a selected area for a period of two months in January/February and that both sides would meet thereafter, with the appropriate people, to analyse the results. If successful, this could be the first of a number of such exercises which would maintain pressure on the security forces. It is we, however, who will have to make the running.

We had a number of British Army personnel present. They saw no sign of any desire on the part of the IRA to give up and were quite blunt in saying so (with one exception, the officers concerned would not necessarily be informed of current intelligence assessments on this point). They were also keen to stress to one colleague that loyalist violence was proactive rather than reactive, ie, that it was likely to continue whatever the IRA did (no doubt a factor also in their assessment of the IRA's preparedness to give up). Officers of the Parachute

Regiment who occupy Palace Barracks beside us were eager to convince us that relations between their Regiment and the public were improving since the incidents involving fellow members in Coalisland last year. They are well aware of the complaints we have made about them and the questions we have raised about their suitability for service involving contact with civilians (the authorities do not excuse the behaviour in Coalisland but say it was isolated and a product of the fact that the unit concerned was brought in as an emergency measure and without the usual full orientation and briefing).

David Watkins, head of the Central Secretariat, said the shareout of the Northern Ireland budget allocation will be announced next week. He will brief us beforehand. He also mentioned that legislation to permit street names in Irish, a reform promised at the time of the Agreement and recycled in the Secretary of State's Coleraine speech a year ago, is finally going ahead; he said it will be attached to bill in the current session.

Yours sincerely



Declan O'Donovan
Joint Secretary