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Reference Code: 2021/48/177

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CONFIDENTIAL

6th December, 1994.

Mr. Seán O hUiginn,
Assistant Secretary,
Anglo-Irish Division,
Department of Foreign Affairs,
St. Stephen's Green,
DUBLIN 2.

Dear Assistant Secretary,

Discussion with Sir Robin Butler

The following report summarises a conversation with Sir Robin Butler, the Cabinet Secretary, who joined me for lunch at the Embassy on Friday (2nd). He did not appear to be well briefed on Northern Ireland, as will be evident from what follows.

Exploratory Talks with Sinn Féin

I said we welcomed the announcement that talks with Sinn Féin would commence on the following week. It was most important to maintain the momentum to show that the political approach was the proper way ahead and to avoid placing an undue strain on the ceasefire. Sir Robin felt that the first meeting would be very formal and procedural and would attract much publicity. He did not know whether a second meeting would take place before Christmas nor would he venture a guess as to the duration of the "exploratory" phase, confining himself to the remark: "that depends on how long it takes to get the weapons removed".

Decommissioning of Arms

Taken aback by Butler's remarks, quoted above, and by his follow-up comment that there can be no question of Sinn Féin's entering substantive talks while the IRA retain their guns, I said it would be a very serious mistake - a mistake that would surely endanger the ceasefire - if a pre-condition of that kind were made. Sinn Féin should not be painted into a corner on that issue and pre-conditions should be avoided. IRA arms could not be dealt with in isolation;

there were huge quantities of guns held by the loyalist paramilitaries also and it would be foolish to think that there will be unilateral disarmament. It was also naive to think that the IRA would surrender its weapons before substantive talks begin and getting some idea of the likely nature of a settlement. I confirmed, of course, that we, too, wanted the weapons removed at an appropriate time during the process but we also wanted the ceasefire and the talks to continue without interruption. Butler said they knew that when it came to the surrender of guns "we obviously won't get the last one dug up".

Belfast Investment Conference

Conscious, no doubt, of the British Government's quick u-turn in the matter, Sir Robin said it was good that the attendance of Sinn Féin Councillors at the conference had now been sorted out. He agreed that the appointment of Senator Mitchell as Special Adviser to the President and Secretary of State for Economic Initiatives in Ireland was a good one.

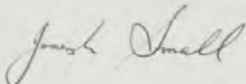
Joint Framework Document

We discussed briefly the main areas of disagreement including, in particular, the European dimension of the proposed North/South body. I placed heavy emphasis on the desirability of giving a significant European role to that body, given the origins of the European Union itself, its powerful symbolism for many in Northern Ireland and the pervasive influence of European policies on the lives of the people, North and South, today. While realising the procedural difficulties involved for both Governments, we were nevertheless disappointed by the British approach to date. Butler referred to their own internal debate on this matter and to the entrenched positions held by some of their people.

Taoiseach and Tánaiste

Sir Robin spoke very warmly about the Taoiseach and his huge contribution to the peace process. He also spoke very positively about the previous Tánaiste noting with satisfaction the press speculation that he may be back shortly in the same position. He saw this and the likelihood that the team of officials on our side would remain intact as very positive as far as the peace process was concerned.

Yours sincerely,



Joseph Small
Ambassador