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P/P

Your reference

Our reference NI 18/28/63

Date 14 December 1983

Dear David,

VISITS TO NORTHERN IRELAND BY MINISTERS OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC

As you know, unannounced visits to Northern Ireland by Ministers of the Irish Republic have been a source of concern to us in the past.

The point, that we should be warned well in advance of any such visits has been registered with the Irish on several occasions. Following the "private" visit in August of this year by Mr Barry and his family - about which we were informed one day in advance - David Tatham recorded (in a letter to you dated 27 September) that the problems created by a lack of liaison in this area had been brought to the attention of Bernard Davenport, the Counsellor responsible for Anglo-Irish relations in the temporary absence of Mr Burke. After putting forward the usual excuses Mr Davenport took the point and promised to try and do better in future.

Against this background it has been brought to our attention that Mr Jim Mitchell, Minister for Posts and Telegrams, visited Belfast on 14 November 1983 without any prior warning having been given to the Northern Ireland Office or any Northern Ireland Department. The attached piece from the Irish News of 15 November 1983 refers. (We also understand that Mr Michael Moynihan recently made an unannounced visit in connection with a Bord Failte promotion and that Mr Paddy Hegarty attended an agricultural conference in Enniskillen again without giving due notice.)

Our records do not show whether or not this issue was raised with the Irish in the margins of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council meeting held on 28 September 1983, as envisaged by David Tatham. In any event this latest "incursion", coming as it does so soon after the issue had been raised with the Irish, has to be viewed with concern.

It seems abundantly clear that our previous reminders have fallen on stony ground and it is necessary to impress the point, perhaps more forcefully, upon the Irish once again. Accordingly, I should be grateful if you could arrange for the Embassy in Dublin to transmit

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to the DFA our firm desire to be informed in advance, in reasonable time, of any proposed visits by their Ministers to Northern Ireland, in a private or public capacity.

I have no confidence that this will prove sufficient to achieve the proper notification of such visits, but I am sure we must make the appropriate motions. Security is an important consideration and one we can deploy with the Irish (particularly after the rough handling which Mr Lenihan got in Londonderry) but we also need to be aware of visits in order to deflect Unionist criticism of them and in case any inflammatory statements are made: if the Secretary of State did not even know a visit was taking place he would be in a rather exposed position.

This letter was in draft when we heard via the RUC and the organisers (please protect) that Mr Sutherland was thinking of attending the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial lecture in Belfast. For the reasons set out above I asked Iain Orr to check with the DFA so that we could at least say (if necessary) that we had known formally about the visit in advance. The DFA claimed that Mr Sutherland had not yet made up his mind to go. It may be that that reminder of our interest will have some effect but you may consider that it should still be reinforced by a more formal reiteration of our general concern.

*yours ever,
David*

D J R HILL
SIL Division

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