



British Consulate-General
120 Montgomery Street San Francisco California 94104

Telephone 981 3030

① Sir Ewart Bell
② HCS/21
6/6

MAY 1983

Stephen Wall
First Secretary
British Embassy
Washington



Your reference

Our reference

Date

SB/djm

May 18 1983

- ✓ 1. cc PS/Sir Ewart Bell
- 2. Mr Boys Smith
- 3. Mr Rickard

David Hill
26/5.

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Dear Stephen,

Visits of Sir Ewart Bell/Sean Farren to San Francisco

The visits of Sir Ewart Bell and Sean Farren, chairman of the SDLP, to San Francisco overlapped at a one-day university seminar on Ireland, so it might be easiest to deal with both in the context of this one letter.

Mr Farren spent about a week in the Northern California area under the auspices of the Irish Forum on a program arranged by the Irish Consulate. He did not give a major public speech, but instead addressed two university gatherings, met Irish Forum members in San Francisco and Sacramento and participated in at least one radio program and editorial board meeting. The resulting editorial is attached.

While Mr Farren's main task was to push the All Ireland Forum, his overall line in the instances I heard him was constructive and not unduly critical of HMG. Not surprisingly, he was outspoken in his condemnation of IRA violence and support groups like Noraid. He said PIRA's campaign of violence had made the prospect of unity even more distant. He said it was beyond his comprehension how PIRA could murder and maim members of the Protestant community and then expect them to be more willing to join them in a united Ireland. He said he would rather not have a united Ireland at all than have it on the graves of his fellow Irishmen who are Protestant. Mr Farren also condemned the Short Brothers boycott by the Irish National Caucus. He called it the equivalent of reverse discrimination and an attempt to deprive Protestants of jobs. The constructive thing to do is to attract more jobs for all in Northern Ireland.

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Regarding the All Ireland Forum, Mr Farren called it 'the first time since partition a concerted public attempt has been made by southern political parties (and the SDLP) to work out a broad nationalist negotiating position'. He contended that the absence of this joint approach has 'left the British Government off the hook', as well as the political parties of the Republic who have not faced up to their 'responsibilities'. He said the Forum would examine three areas:

1. Church/state relations.
2. The economic consequences of partition.
3. The future of Anglo-Irish relations.

Mr Farren said the SDLP hoped the report of the Forum would evoke a 'positive response' from the British Government.

In his lecture to an Irish history class at the University of San Francisco, Mr Farren was more critical of HMG than in other settings, but taking, as I have already said, not a terribly critical line. He attributed the current polarisation of the two communities and political alienation of the minority community to unionist intransigence and termed HMG's efforts to find a solution reasonable and sincere. However, every so often, and almost as an afterthought, he would say something like, 'but Britain is not really the neutral referee she claims to be. She is also a protagonist'. Mr Farren must have been briefed to expect more Noraid criticism at this lecture, because his 'Britain is a protagonist' statement allowed him to deflect Noraid's usual line that only IRA violence is condemned while 'state violence' is condoned.

Sir Ewart Bell's one day visit to San Francisco coincided with the end of Mr Farren's stay when they both participated in a conference on Ireland sponsored by San Jose State University (program attached). The previous evening we were able to arrange for four members of the Irish Forum's board of directors to join Sir Ewart for an informal dinner at a local restaurant.

About thirty university faculty and students were present for Sir Ewart's portion of the seminar, in which he outlined current government structures and policy in Northern Ireland, including the Assembly. The panel discussion which followed quickly turned into Sir Ewart and Mr Farren alternating commentaries on subjects posed by the audience. It was perhaps surprising to some present, and not a bad thing, that Mr Farren and Sir Ewart agreed in their answers to the majority of questions asked. At the end of the conference a young man from Belfast approached Sir Ewart and said he was surprised at how 'flexible' he was and enquired whether Sir Ewart would be giving any other talks in Northern California.

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As far as San Jose State University was concerned, the seminar could not have been better and we were fortunate that someone as constructive as Mr Farren also participated. It is one thing for Irish-Americans to hear HMG representatives discuss subjects like PIRA and attracting inward investment, but quite another for them to hear someone from the minority community say the same thing, especially in conjunction with someone representing HMG.

*Sincerely,
Sandy*

Sandy Burke
Information Officer

Enc

Copies:

Mr Alan Huckle	-	BIS New York
Mr David Hill	-	SIL NIO London
Mr Stewart Eldon	-	RID FCO
Mr D Blatherwick	-	NIO Belfast