

From: HM AMBASSADOR, DUBLIN

Date: 15 November 1991

cc (by BLIS):
 PS/PUS (L&B)
 PS/Mr Fell
 Mr Thomas
 Mr Alston
 Mr Dodds
 Mr D J R Hill
 Mr McNeill
 Mr Cooke
 Mr Archer, RID

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 18/11/1991

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Mr Bell - B

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a m [signature]

MR O HUIGINN AND IRISH ASSUMPTIONS

1. Many thanks for sending me a copy of your minute of 14 November to Mr Cooke about your conversation with Sean O hUiginn earlier that week. I have one or two reflections on the comments in your final perceptive paragraph.
2. It is indeed an assumption among the chattering classes in the Republic that "progress" in the North involves the steady advance of Nationalist interests, accompanied by the "education" of Unionists. This assumption stems largely from a view of Irish nationalism which many here absorbed with their mother's milk. Its corollary is a belief that a solution in the North entails boosting the Nationalists' position in order to counter-balance the Unionists'. The Anglo-Irish Agreement is seen here largely in this light.
3. You say how fragile in the Irish mind seem to be the gains they have undoubtedly achieved since 1985. They certainly do hold this view. It is not new. The basis for it, I think, is their perception of British (ie English) politicians and attitudes as fickle and unpredictable. For Irish Governments, Anglo-Irish relations and Northern Ireland loom large. They are only too aware that they rank low in the priorities of most Englishmen. They watch Secretaries of State come and go, applying different policies during steep (and sometimes not so steep) learning curves. They feel neglected, frustrated and insecure. When, as now, a Secretary of State gains their respect and confidence, they are uncomfortably aware of the Westminster electoral cycle and wonder who will be running Stormont in a year's time. This is why they are so intensely suspicious of talk about Grand Committees, and need constant stroking and reassurance. At bottom, whatever we say to them, they fear that a British Government sooner or later will lose patience and without warning switch policies, will go for an internal Northern settlement which takes no account of them, or will even lose interest in the Irish question altogether.

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It is in this context, I think, that a remark made by O hUiginn a few weeks ago (I cannot recall the reference) about calling in the United States in aid should be read: only by enrolling American help, the argument goes, could the Irish hope to force a British Government back onto the straight and narrow.

(Signed)

D E S Blatherwick

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