

CONFIDENTIAL

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FROM: HM AMBASSADOR
British Embassy, Dublin

DATE: 11 May 1993

CC: PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Williams - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr Maxwell - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Archer, RID - B



Mr Watkins - B

VISITS BY IRISH PRESIDENT AND TAOISEACH TO NORTHERN IRELAND

1. You sent me a copy of your minute of 7 May to Mr Maxwell about the number of visits by President Robinson and the Taoiseach to Northern Ireland and whether we should now try to apply some brakes.
2. I can understand your unease. But it is worth remembering the differences of scale and perception. While visits by the Prime Minister or the Queen to functions in the UK are special and rare events, the Taoiseach and the President regularly turn up at quite modest affairs in the Republic.
3. There is a case for the visits in question. They help break down inhibitions over visiting the North which are shared widely in the Republic. They give us grounds to raise the profile given to visits here by UK (particularly NIO) Ministers and members of the Royal Family. They make Irish reticence over Royal visits to the Republic, now significantly less than it was, even harder to sustain. They convey a sense of normality in our relations. And of course they make Articles 2 and 3 look even emptier than they are. You and PAB are best placed to assess the impact of these visits in Northern Ireland: but ten years ago I never expected to see an Irish President attend a function in Northern Ireland as a guest of the Secretary of State. Dev must be spinning in his grave.
4. If nevertheless we were to conclude that we should try to reduce the number of visits by the President and Taoiseach to Northern Ireland then, as you rightly recognise, we would need to think carefully how best to convey so delicate a message. Could we show that such visits had a detrimental effect in Northern Ireland, President Robinson would probably accept our case. But Irish Ministers, and in particular the DFA, would probably be less understanding.

(Signed)

D E S Blatherwick

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