

CONFIDENTIAL

British Embassy,

Dublin.

9 March, 1966.

Dear Dennis,

The destruction of Nelson's Pillar in the centre of O'Connell Street has provoked a good deal of discussion and speculation and in some ways perhaps provided a stimulating relief to the gloomy prognostications regarding the forthcoming budget. A lot of people are asking where next will these fellows strike. There has been one major incident each week for the past three weeks, the British Legion Club on 24 February, the Military Attaché's house on 1 March, and finally the Pillar on 8 March. The police, in anticipation of further moves, have placed a special guard on the more likely targets, the Wellington Memorial in Phoenix Park, the War Memorial at Island Bridge. We can derive some consolation perhaps from the reflection that to date there appears to have been every intention on the part of the miscreants to avoid causing personal harm. In the case of the British Legion Club the act was done at opening time when nobody was around; at the Military Attaché's house they made sure that the house was empty; finally for Nelson's Pillar the explosion was timed to take place when few people would be about and apparently went off earlier than was expected. Moreover, the bomb was contrived (according to newspaper reports) to throw the blast directly upwards and thus limit the possible area of damage from falling debris.

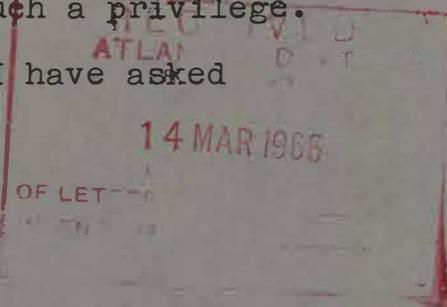
2. Public reaction to this act of destruction has varied. Some, the majority it seems, treat it as a huge joke; others, those who are nationalists, are secretly pleased that it has happened; the more responsible element deplore it. From the third group comes a statement issued by the Minister for Justice, Mr. Lenihan, condemning the blowing up of the Pillar as "a reckless action". A copy of this is attached. From the second group typical is the statement by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Alderman Timmons, who said:

"The destruction of such a landmark as Nelson Pillar evokes both emotional and sentimental reactions, but nevertheless, it seems that there are a considerable number of people happy to see the end of the symbolism it represented.

Speaking for myself, I am not in favour of the illegal action taken, and those who wanted its removal could have observed normal democratic process, and started a nation wide campaign to generate support to procure its removal by the ordinary process. No small group has the right to take away from the public such a privilege.

/I have asked

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I have asked the City Manager to furnish a report to the next City Council meeting."

3. Among the more responsible element, however, there is a general recognition of the effect this action will have on the Irish image. The 'Irish Press' questions whether it will reflect credit on the nation. The 'Irish Independent' states succinctly, "For all that he symbolised an alien domination now past, Nelson did us no harm in the many years he stood upon the Pillar. In his fall he has brought down with him no little part of our self-assurance and our pride". The 'Irish Times' condemns the act of destruction from the aesthetic standpoint, points out that it will do nothing for North-South relations but reinforce the Northern people in their decision not to join forces with the South and points out that it was only by an act of providence that no lives were lost by this outrage.

4. But I am afraid that, as I have said, there are many who regard the incident as rather a joke and a useful way of solving the problem of the future existence of the Nelson Pillar which has been a long standing thorn in the sides of true Irishmen who regard the monument as an insult to national pride. Indeed it is argued that whilst the correct way, if the public wanted its removal, would have been to proceed through the proper constitutional channels, this would have provoked a storm of controversial discussion which would have exacerbated feelings much more than the method taken by the vandals. I think we must accept that the removal of this statue has for many, many years been ardently desired by a large number of Irishmen not necessarily all nationalistically minded. As long ago as 1809 the Dublin journalist Watty Cox, commenting on the disappearance of the Irish Parliament, wrote, "The statue records the glory of a mistress and the transformation of our Senate into a discount office".

5. Nevertheless this event, coming as it does so soon after the incident affecting the Military Attaché's house, bodes ill for the forthcoming Easter celebrations; it has not helped North-South rapprochement and it does not speak well for the political maturity of the Irish people as a whole.

6. As to bringing the perpetrators to justice, you will have seen that six men have been detained for questioning under the Offences Against the State Act. Despite the dissimilarity of methods employed in this incident and the Thicknesse incident, the police feel bound to regard the perpetrators as belonging to the same group. It would have strengthened their hands if one or two innocent bystanders had been killed - indeed it was a miracle that nobody was.

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If the police do succeed in laying their hands on those who actually carried out the destruction of the Pillar, it will be interesting to see how serious a view the State will take of their offence. But since nobody was hurt and having regard to the feelings of so many about the monument the prospects of a severe sentence on any who may be brought to justice are dim indeed. In any event, they face the predicament of either, on the one hand, letting off too lightly persons who have openly and at considerable risk to others' lives and limbs flouted the forces of law and order or, on the other, "martyrising" the wrong-doers by too heavy a punishment (which would be quite contrary to the Government's present policy).

7. I attach an extra copy of this letter with enclosure.

Yours sincerely,

P. A. Carter

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