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CONFIDENTIALDespatch No. 3SUMMARYFiftieth Anniversary of the Easter Rising

The celebrations are over and Anglo/Irish relations none the worse. In general the Irish responded well to Mr. Lemass's appeal to make the occasion forward rather than backward looking. (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

2. It had been feared that the celebrations might prejudice the new spirit of co-operation between North and South and chill the atmosphere for the beginning of the Free Trade Area. On the latter point fears have proved groundless. On the former, the Northern Ireland Government though very liberal in their general attitude to the celebrations became exasperated at one point but all this will soon be forgotten. (Paragraphs 3 and 4)

3. There were a number of acts of violence but most, including those directed or threatened against this Embassy, now seem to have been the work of hooligans unconnected with any known organisation. (Paragraph 5)

4. The celebrations brought to the surface again the old animosities dating from the Civil War. These to some extent overshadow the current campaign for the Presidential election. (Paragraph 6)

5. The Southern Irish have got their Anniversary safely out of their systems. There has been much sober and balanced re-writing of recent Irish history, but no real upsurge of "constructive patriotism". (Paragraph 7)

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BRITISH EMBASSY,
DUBLIN.

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Despatch No. 3

16th May, 1966.

Sir,

I have the honour to report that the official celebrations of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Easter Rising in Dublin are over and Anglo/Irish relations none the worse. I almost think they are better, because of the credit which the British Government have received for their generosity in returning for the celebrations the flag which flew over the Post Office on the day of the Rising and in authorising Britain's representative to attend the main State functions. The programme is annexed. The fact that the British press, radio and television reported the celebrations fairly and without bias has also been reckoned very much in our favour.

2. Mr. Lemass, in making his original announcement about the anniversary celebrations, had expressed the hope that they would be the occasion for forward looking rather than harking back, and that there would be a re-birth of patriotism which would be directed to building a more prosperous Ireland rather than to the nursing of past wrongs. In general the Irish responded well to this appeal. The celebrations were bound to have an anti-British flavour but there was very little recrimination and the Irish themselves seem surprised to discover how little bitterness now remains.

3. Some of the younger Ministers had admitted privately that they thought the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations a mistake, fearing that they would prejudice the growing spirit of practical co-operation between North and South and would at least chill the atmosphere for the beginning of the new Free Trade Area between Ireland and Britain. So far as Britain is concerned I am sure their fears have been proved groundless. A note of asperity entered for a moment into relations between North and South but this will soon be forgotten.

4. At one time, no Irish statesman could make a speech without a rousing preface on the subject of Partition. President de Valera is probably the only one left who feels this compulsion. Predictably, therefore, in his speech at the end of the Celebrations, he re-stated his Government's policy for the reunification of Ireland, namely, that there should be an all-Ireland Parliament which would embrace the

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North but would leave them with all the regional powers they now possess. Equally inevitably, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland re-established his own position, saying that the Northern Irish would be fools to give up the advantages they now derived from the British connection and that Northern Ireland's place as part of the United Kingdom was not now, and never would be, subject to negotiation. During the celebrations the Northern Ireland Government had shown remarkable liberality in their attitude to nationalist demonstrations North of the Border and Captain O'Neill had been suspected, and even accused, of softening towards the Republicans. This no doubt made it the more necessary for him to make his very clear rejoinder to President de Valera. It also led him, perhaps, to introduce a sharp note, which was regretted in the South, into his references to the Easter Celebrations in general. He called them "offensive demonstrations" and said that for him 1916 was the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme rather than of the Easter Rising. But there is no reason to think that co-operation between North and South has been more than momentarily over-shadowed. Active negotiations for liberalising trade across the Border, reported during the last few days, clearly demonstrate that this is the case.

5. It had been assumed for the last six months that the occasion of the Anniversary would be used by the I.R.A. or its splinter groups for some violent demonstration, and considerable security precautions were taken in both North and South. Threatening letters began to be received in this Embassy and two petrol bomb attacks were made on premises which had British military connections, namely the club premises of the British Legion in Dublin and the private house of my Military Attaché. Nelson's Pillar, the famous landmark in O'Connell Street, was dramatically demolished in a very expert fashion shortly afterwards. There have also been a number of acts of vandalism against Irish Nationalist memorials which seemed at first to suggest a Unionist reaction. After careful investigation the Police believe that none of these incidents was due to extreme Republican agencies or to any organised body at all. The Republican Movement openly claim responsibility for an attack on telephone communications in the Waterford area as a deliberate protest against the imprisonment of some of their members in Limerick gaol, but apart from this it now seems likely that all the threatening letters and telephone calls and acts of violence were due to individuals who were taking advantage of the "patriotic" opportunity offered to them to indulge their hooliganism. One must conclude either that the I.R.A. had no serious plans or that the Police precautions were effective in preventing them from being carried out.

6. Although it is true to say that relations between Ireland and Britain have remained unscarred, the Celebrations /did

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did have the unfortunate effect in Ireland of bringing out the old animosities dating from the Civil War, which still lie too close to the surface. Throughout the Republic preparations for the Celebrations started angry arguments between rival groups over responsibility for organisation, and at the centre Fine Gael, the main Opposition party and the descendants of those who upheld the Treaty during the Civil War, have accused the Government of making political capital out of the Easter Rising, and trying to create the impression that they had a monopoly of patriotism and that Ireland's long struggle for freedom began and ended with de Valera. The fact that, through official incompetence, the leaders of the Opposition parties were not invited to the principal function at the G.P.O. made matters worse. This mood has been reflected in the campaign which Fine Gael are now vigorously conducting in favour of the candidate, Mr. O'Higgins, whom they have fielded to dispute with Mr. de Valera the forthcoming election for the Presidency. This has the effect of continuing to remind the Irish people of matters which, for the good of Ireland, are better forgotten.

7. We can congratulate ourselves on the fact that no harm has been done to our own interests. So far as the Southern Irish are concerned, they have got the Fiftieth Anniversary out of their systems without re-awakening hostility to Britain. On the credit side, the occasion has produced much healthy and balanced research into the history of the period, and the Southern Irish have been given a new and clearer picture of the heroic figures of their recent past. But Mr. Lemass cannot fairly claim that the Celebrations have generated the surge of constructive patriotism for which he had hoped.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient, humble Servant,

George Tony

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