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BRITISH EMBASSY,
DUBLIN.

1/6

12th December, 1968.

Sir,

Disturbances in Northern Ireland - A Dublin View.

I have the honour to submit the following observations on Sinn Fein and its activities in Ireland (meaning by Ireland the whole of the island of that name), with particular reference to recent events in Ulster.

2. On Saturday evening last, 7th December, while on a private visit to Northern Ireland, I met Captain O'Neill at dinner and had a talk with him afterwards. One of his themes, which I noted down and reported in my telegram No.178, was as follows:-

"The events of Londonderry had come upon him without warning. The I.R.A., having totally failed on its former line of approach, had now achieved remarkable success through its new strategy of working on "civil rights" through penetration and incitement of student and other left-wing groups..."

3. The next day, Sunday, the 8th, Sinn Fein held their annual meeting in Dublin, and their President, Tomas MacGiolla, echoed Captain O'Neill's words in saying that "October" (by which he meant trouble in Londonderry) had been "a truly historic month that would have a significant effect on the future course of events in both parts of the country. The power and discipline of the Civil Rights Movement had shaken the Unionist Party to its foundations.."

4. Just to make sure that no one should be foolish enough to imagine that such results in Ulster had been achieved by conventional native political talent, Mr. MacGiolla referred to the futility and inactivity of the "inept Nationalist politicians at Stormont".

The Rt. Hon. Michael Stewart, M.P.,
Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs.

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5. He likewise made it clear that the "26-county" Government in Dublin had done equally little for the just rights of Irishmen in the North.

6. Thus in saying that "the Civil Rights campaign was the first effective political weapon which had been forged by the anti-Unionist forces", Mr. MacGiolla was in effect and by plain implication claiming for his organisation the entire credit for the present state of affairs in Ulster; and thus endorsing Captain O'Neill's view. *? what
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7. How far is such a claim justified? There is, of course, no sense in suggesting that the entire Civil Rights proceedings in the North were the mere outcome of a subversive plot; the continued existence in Londonderry and elsewhere of manifest injustices over voting and housing would sufficiently account for spontaneous manifestations. But it would be very wrong to discount a claim by Sinn Fein and its related organisations to an important share in the timing and manipulation of events in the North and in the exploitation of the sympathy inevitably (and rightly) aroused in political and journalistic circles in London by the bringing to light of the said injustices.

8. Sinn Fein is not in the least a liberal party, genuinely interested in the redress of electoral grievances: it is for all practical purposes the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.). As I wrote in my despatch Number 1/2 of 5th July, 1968, about illegal political groups and their activities, "the principal such body calls itself the Irish Republican Army. Organisationally considered, it is the proscribed military arm of the legal political entity known as Sinn Fein. However, it is wrong to regard the I.R.A. as obediently carrying out instructions received from Sinn Fein; on the contrary, the political attitudes struck by Sinn Fein are dictated to it by the I.R.A."

9. For some time, the I.R.A./Sinn Fein has been turning its hand away from sabotage and assassination and towards what I called in my despatch "liaison with international subversive bodies and the exploitation of social and industrial unrest". Thus Sinn Fein's traditional objective (as stated in its constitution) "the complete overthrow of English rule in Ireland", was extended in

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1967 to include also "the establishment of a democratic socialist republic based on the Proclamation of 1916".* As a step towards these objectives, it is doing all it can to provoke Civil Rights militancy in Northern Ireland.

10. The second Sinn Fein objective commands little sympathy in political circles here. The Ireland of 1968 has forgotten most of the inconvenient "socialist" aspects of the Ireland of 1916 to which the activists profess to look back. That is why in more than one section of his speech Mr. MacGiolla makes it clear that he despises the Government in Dublin almost as much as he hates the Government in London:-

" Mr. MacGiolla said it should be made clear that Republicans did not ask the people of the North to come into the existing 26-County State. They would not wish that fate on anyone. They asked the people of the North to join with the people of the 26 Counties in abolishing both states, which served only British imperialism, and in establishing a democratic socialist republic for the whole of the island in which the workers who created wealth would decide how and where it was used."

11. As I have said, such a political approach is not one to commend itself to the staid, bourgeois Government in Dublin. The last kind of united Ireland they wish to see is a "democratic socialist republic".

12. And not merely do the more intelligent members of the Dublin Government regard Sinn Fein's ultimate political aim with revulsion, they are becoming more and more apprehensive over what may happen to Ireland in the course of current attempts to achieve that aim. They are beginning to see the point which has already been grasped by Mr. McAteer, the leader of the Nationalist Party in Ulster, that if disorder continues to increase in Northern Ireland, "then Westminster will do on Stormont what Stormont has

* I think we may assume that "democratic socialist republic" is a term of art, more closely related to Eastern Europe than to the Ireland of 1916.

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already done on Derry Corporation". What Mr. McAteer means, of course, is that we would suspend elective government and rule by commission, on the theory that if British armed force is required to be used in aid of the civil power, then that civil power will have to be British too.

13. Such an expedient as Mr. McAteer suggests - should Her Majesty's Government be compelled to adopt it - would be a very serious matter for the Government of the Republic and a very great success for Sinn Fein and the I.R.A.

14. The reason why the I.R.A. have failed in recent years to make any impact on Northern Ireland, and have in fact desisted from "direct action" is because the South has grown used to the North. The Government in Stormont is not in the eyes of Dublin a good government, but at least it is a perceptibly Irish one. The Customs Officers on the Northern side of the border, it is generally felt, are decent people and ought not to be shot or blown to pieces with dynamite. The Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Garda Siochana are after all brothers in arms against crime, and it is right and proper that they should play Rugby against each other. And so on, through a wide spectrum of established and familiar relations.

15. Another feature of the Northern scene which Southern Ireland has grown used to is the personality of Captain Terence O'Neill. His name and appearance are as well known in the Republic as those of any local Cabinet Minister; he enjoys a quite remarkable popularity among the general public.

16. This entire picture would change overnight if Her Majesty's Government were compelled to suspend the constitution of Northern Ireland and to introduce some form of direct rule from London. If direct British rule is once more openly established upon the sacred soil of Ireland, if the law is "enforced by British bayonets", then the I.R.A. will joyfully resume its full degree of murderous activity. Its targets will be the British and the tools of the British (among whom would of course be included the Royal Ulster Constabulary); and it could easily come to attract, by a combination of skilful propaganda and occasional martyrdom, an appreciable degree of public support in this country. Instead of arguing politely with Whitehall over the price of cheese, Irish Ministers would lie awake at night - as their predecessors from de Valera downwards have often done -

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vainly trying to wriggle out of the need to stand by their signature on a fellow-countryman's death warrant.

17. Such a prospect is one from which every Irish politician recoils in horror. That is why the whole trend of political and public opinion in the Republic at the moment is so urgently hopeful for Captain O'Neill's survival, and so strongly in favour of a pause in the Civil Rights programme of pressure and demonstrations. The trouble is that pressure and demonstrations and disorder are not the monopoly of the Civil Rights group, and Sinn Fein would be delighted to see the Paisleyites take up the running in the streets.

18. It will be best to avoid any predictions about the outcome. My main object in this despatch has been to endorse from Dublin the very serious view of developments in Northern Ireland expressed in his broadcast by Captain O'Neill, and to relate these developments to what I know and believe of the situation in the South.

19. One important side-result in Dublin political circles of events in the North has been to bring about a much more realistic appraisal of the possibilities which exist for a united Ireland. Here is an extract from yesterday's "Irish Times": "Prominent Fianna Fail and Labour people now think in terms of a permanent Northern Ireland as a separate state, or part of a federal state. The North's present powers would be extended. It would have its own laws on sex, divorce, birth control, censorship, education, internal economic development..."

20. Such a solution, however interesting from our point of view, would be anathema to the Sinn Fein/I.R.A. leadership and we may rely on them to do their best to prevent it.

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

Affiliated

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