

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



HOME OFFICE

WHITEHALL, S.W.1

25th October 1968

Dear *Robert*

In your letter of 21st October to Barrington you asked for material for the Prime Minister's brief for his meeting with the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic on Wednesday, 30th October.

The attached material has been prepared by our officials, but the Home Secretary has not yet had an opportunity to see it. I understand, however, that you must have this for the week-end.

I am sending a copy of this to Barrington at the Foreign Office.

Yours sincerely,

Geoffrey de Seney

Roger Dawe, Esq.

L.R.

Visit of the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic

1. It is understood that the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic has sought a meeting with the Prime Minister on the occasion of his visit to London on 30th October to call on the Foreign Secretary. On 23rd October Mr. Lynch informed the Dail that he intended to repeat to the Prime Minister his views about the root cause of the civil rights demonstrations in Northern Ireland: these views Mr. Lynch had already expressed in two public speeches and are to the effect that the partition of Ireland is the root of the troubles which would be ended by linking Northern Ireland with the Republic.

The Londonderry demonstrations

2. The Prime Minister has discussed with the Home Secretary the demonstration in Londonderry on 5th October, which led to scuffles with the police, and has a factual report on these happenings. The demonstrations were designed to call attention to discriminatory practices alleged to be followed by the Northern Ireland Government against the Roman Catholic minority. The grievances of the minority were primarily expressed as being (i) the local government franchise which is limited by a property qualification and which allows plural voting rights to businesses, (ii) discrimination in the allocation of houses by local authorities, and (iii) local electoral gerrymandering. Introduced in subsequent public discussion were (iv) the Special Powers legislation designed to arm the Government against subversive elements intent on using violence to gain their ends (both the I.R.A. and the extreme protestant Ulster Volunteer Force are proscribed) and (v) complaints that the Northern Ireland Government starved the North-Western part of Ulster of economic resources aimed at attracting new industry to the area.

E.R.

3. A full brief is being prepared for the Prime Minister for his meeting with Captain O'Neill: for the present it will perhaps suffice to point out that all these matters are within the competence of the Northern Ireland Parliament and Government and, in the last resort, by virtue of S.75 of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, which preserves the supremacy of Westminster, of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Intervention by the Republic is unnecessary and unjustified. Immediately after the occurrences of the week-end 5th-6th October the Government stated the constitutional position and announced that the Prime Minister had invited the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland to visit him for the purpose of discussions.

(Hansard House of Lords 7th October Col. 811.) This meeting has been arranged for 4th November; this has not yet been made public.

Motives of the Civil Rights Association

4. On the surface the Civil Rights Association was concerned only to demonstrate in the cause of civil liberties, but in Unionist circles there was a strong feeling that the hidden motive was to aid the nationalist and republican cause, which tends to be identified with the Catholic minority. Whatever the truth of this the Unionist suspicions were strengthened (i) by the support given to what was an illegal demonstration by Nationalist and Republican Members at Stormont and Westminster, (ii) by two of these M.P's proceeding immediately afterwards to Dublin, and (iii) by the Taoiseach's speeches. The ^{last} ~~latter~~ in particular have done great harm. Captain O'Neill's efforts over the past five years have led to improvement in community relations: moderate Unionist opinion in the country had begun to swing in his support. There are signs, however, that because Unionists feel that their fundamental faith of attachment to the United Kingdom is once more in danger, feeling amongst this section is beginning to harden against liberalising policies.

E.R.

5. It is noteworthy that extremist leaders of the Civil Rights Association have abandoned it and that the newly-led Association staged last Sunday a demonstration which was a model of its kind. This, naturally, received less notice in publicity media than its predecessor.

Partition

6. The partition of Ireland followed an agreement between the United Kingdom Government and the Irish leaders in 1920; the establishment of a Parliament in Belfast was not sought by the Unionists who accepted, under protest, this degree of divorce from Westminster in the interests of the wider Irish settlement. Nor has it ever been accepted by the Free State or Republican Government; the constitution of the Republic claims still to extend to Northern Ireland. In consequence Northern Ireland has been an embattled state for the whole of its existence. The I.R.A. has for all that time threatened Northern Ireland with violence, and, save for the last six years, has carried out its threats. Moreover, until some six years ago the Republic had not sought to curb its activities and even though the I.R.A. is now an illegal organisation in the South, the Irish people continually demonstrate their sentimental attachment to it.

7. When in 1949 the Irish Free State left the Commonwealth the Ireland Act of that year, regularising its position towards the United Kingdom, declared that "Northern Ireland remains part of His Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom and.....affirmed that in no event will Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be part of His Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland". This pledge was re-affirmed by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on 6th May, 1965 (Hansard 6.5.65 Col. 1560).

E.R.

8. Little of a political character that happens in Ireland can be divorced from its history, but it is only in this respect that "partition" can be blamed for the present troubles. It would be truer to attribute them to the continuing activities of the nationalist minority which, aided by Republican sentiments and statements, seeks to destroy Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom and therefore provokes counter measures on the part of the majority. Probably the true root cause of the sectarian bitterness lies in the segregation of children in schools: this is not by choice of the Unionist administration, which opens its educational institutions to all, but by the orders of the Catholic hierarchy.

Conclusion

9. Amongst other things, Captain O'Neill has constantly sought a rapprochement with the Republic; both the previous Taoiseach, Mr. Lemass, and Mr. Lynch have responded to Captain O'Neill's initiative and much practical co-operation has flowed from their meetings. In this improved climate it had been hoped that Republican politicians would have ceased their propaganda for the ending of partition and would have taken active steps to foster the creation of good feelings between the two countries. In an atmosphere from which the threat of takeover had been removed, community relations would automatically improve and would open the way for the effective removal of the grievances felt by the Catholics. It is hoped that the Prime Minister will feel able to emphasise this aspect of our relations and at the same time make the Taoiseach realise the very real harm he is doing by his present attitude.

E.R.

It is no exaggeration to fear armed conflict if any move were taken to propose a united Ireland parted from the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom has given solid proof of its anxiety to establish relations on the most friendly footing (the Ireland Act itself and more recently the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Area Agreement are instances) but the progress made must be endangered by ~~continual~~ provocation offered to a part of the United Kingdom by the Republic.