

BRITISH EMBASSY,
DUBLIN.

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4 February 1969

Dear Hugh,

...

I enclose a copy of a note I made after seeing the Secretary of the External Affairs Department on 31 January.

Yours

Andrew Pitt-Rivers

*M: Lysh
to copy ?
submit. We should like to
give Sir A.G. any inside
information about the situation. He also
prospects - Have Home Office and
request from Oslo for guidance.*

H.T. Morgan, Esq., C.M.G.
Western European Department.

Covering CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL.Situation in Northern Ireland.

McCann spoke to me today about the anxiety now prevailing among Ministers in Dublin over the situation in Northern Ireland. There seemed to be a momentum of disorder and a serious risk that O'Neill would be overthrown and succeeded by someone whose attitude would be much less liberal and would therefore provide ground for further demonstrations. No one wanted to see disorder spreading to the Republic; but inevitably there was intense political interest in events in the North, and the Irish Government would shortly be subjected to severe questioning in the Dail. Hitherto the official Irish attitude had been one of moderation and discretion, however unprofitable such an attitude might be in terms of Dublin politics. This attitude, McCann implied, might be much more difficult to maintain if O'Neill were to vanish from the scene; there might well be not merely political pressure in the Dail but public demonstrations in Dublin. What were the prospects in Belfast as I saw them, including the possibility of British intervention?

2. I said that I had noticed a recent tendency in Dublin to view with a more favourable eye the prospect of British intervention. For my part - and I emphasised that I was speaking on a purely personal basis - I could not go along with this. The suppression or suspension of the Northern Ireland Government might increase the very dangers the Southern Irish were worried about. The Government of Northern Ireland might not be an ideal one in Dublin eyes but at least it was an Irish Government of sorts and

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served as a buffer state or a whipping boy or a lightning conductor between London and Dublin; we might be very badly off without it. I accepted the point McCann had made about the moderation shown in official quarters in Dublin, and though some stimulus had been given to the Civil Rights movement in the North by unofficial organisations in Dublin, this was not markedly different from contributions from London. But undeniably there were still extremist organisations in the Republic whose primary target was still the British and their connection with Ireland; and it might well be that such an event as a British assumption of direct rule in Northern Ireland would provide those people with a plausible occasion for the renewal of subversive and/or violent activities. Thus, while a continuation of civil agitation in the North might well have repercussions in the South and cause embarrassment to Irish Ministers, I nevertheless felt that greater dangers to Anglo-Irish relations might emerge from direct British intervention.

3. McCann said he was impressed by this line of thought. In closing, I told him not to give up hope too easily of Captain O'Neill's survival.

British Embassy,
Dublin.

31 January 1969.

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