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Northern Ireland

Last week San Francisco was visited by Gerard Fitt, Republican Labour M.P. at Westminster for Belfast West. He gave a number of press interviews (see the cutting from the San Francisco CHRONICLE attached of 3 April) and also one or two radio and TV interviews.

2. I had hoped to take him out to lunch, but unfortunately all his time was taken up for which he apologised, and we only managed to have a telephone conversation which was most amicable.

3. He told me that he had put the local Citizens for Irish Justice straight on a number of points where he considered them to be wild and woolly, if not way-out. He knew from talking to Mrs. Moira O'Scannlain, the secretary of the Local C.I.J. that the Committee had been picketing us and were in constant contact with this office on all matters affecting Civil Rights in Northern Ireland. He thought that Mrs. O'Scannlain was a very reasonable person, which indeed she is; but I gather that he did not think much of the other members of the C.I.J. who had the usual anti-British chip on their shoulders. I think that he performed a very valuable function here, as he told me that he had impressed on the C.I.J. that Mr. Harold Wilson was doing all he could in favour of the Civil Rights movement and to impress on the Northern Ireland Government the need to redress the wrongs of the Catholic minority in Ulster. Apparently he also told them that they were rather wasting their time in trying to bring pressure to bear on this office when they already had a good advocate for their cause in the U.K. Prime Minister. He mentioned to me that, as far as Northern Ireland was concerned, he considered that they should stick with the U.K. and that the citizens of Belfast and Londonderry should be treated at all times no differently from the citizens of, say, Birmingham and Newcastle. Mr. Fitt was rather appalled and irritated by the constant harping back to the old sores and wounds inflicted by Britain on the Irish before and during the Easter Rebellion. He wants to see a forward

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and progressive and not a backward-looking Northern Ireland, with freedom and equality for all. He sees, as you will see from the San Francisco CHRONICLE cutting, a bit depressed about the immediate outlook in Ulster unless the necessary social reforms are introduced.

4. In the confrontation with the C.I.J. which took place on 17 March at the University of San Francisco between representatives of the C.I.J. and my Consul (Information), Donald Stokes (see your letter to me of 13 March 18/19/68 enclosing some material on Northern Ireland) Donald Stokes had a fairly rough passage for 2½ hours, although I think that he acquitted himself on the whole pretty well. The write-up in the San Francisco EXAMINER the following day was highly biased and unfair in contrast to the reasoned report in the San Francisco CHRONICLE, but I suppose one has to live with this sort of thing where the Irish are concerned. I enclose a copy of "The Irish Felon", aptly named! - just published which was handed out by C.I.J. pickets outside the Consulate offices yesterday to commemorate the Easter Rebellion. You will see from their varnished and tarnished version what they allege took place at the University of San Francisco between their representatives and Donald Stokes.

5. I think that Gerard Fitt's visit and sound talking to the C.I.J. should bear some fruits: at any rate, I hope so and that from now on we shall be able to use Mr. Fitt as a shield with which to protect ourselves when the Irish bring out their shillelaghs!

6. On the telephone Gerard Fitt presumed that I would be reporting back on his visit, and seemed to be rather at pains to give me the impression that he is a good Labour Party supporter and on the side of our Prime Minister in all this. I don't know how any of the Ulster Unionist M.P.s would fare if they were to come over here, but I surmise that they would get a rough ride from the C.I.J., although there are some Orangemen and Orangewomen around who would doubtless give them their support. Anyway, I thought that Gerard Fitt was the right person to talk to the C.I.J. like an Ulster uncle!

Copied to:
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* ("The Irish Felon"
not enclosed).

J.O. Lloyd

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