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BELFAST, 4.

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Mr. White (W.E.D.)
This will require a
reply.

13 November, 1969

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Dear Tom,

As you know, I spent yesterday in Dublin at Andrew Gilchrist's very kind invitation. It was enormously helpful to me to be able to have a good talk with Andrew about North - South relations and to meet at his hospitable table McCann at lunch and Hillery at dinner. This letter merely records my own self-improvement and I know that Andrew will jump in with any corrections that may be necessary.

2. At lunch, hair seemed to be let down and conversation flowed fairly freely. I was left with three main impressions :-

- i) That the Republic was bound publicly to maintain its claims to the North, but recognised that this object of policy was unobtainable in the foreseeable future. I suggested to McCann that the policy could best be described as one of its being better to travel hopefully than to arrive; he denied this as a formulation of policy, but I think it is fairly clear that it is not far off in substance.
- ii) That being so, what the Republic Government would be content with is to be seen to be talking to Her Majesty's Government about Northern Ireland : what the content of the talking would be, is not very clear; but I got the impression that even if it was a mere description on our part of what was happening in Northern Ireland - the process of reform legislation through Stormont and Westminster, the current state of security - this would be enough to enable the Government to satisfy the country that it was abreast of events.
- iii) If, however, public consultation were still not feasible, then, as a minimum, the Dublin Government would be content with an entirely private meeting at ministerial level at which the content of the talks was the same : this, as McCann pointed out, would at least enable Lynch and Hillery to demonstrate virtuous activity to their more lunatic colleagues within the Irish Cabinet.

Sir T. Brimelow K.C.M.G.,
Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

3. After /.....



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3. After dinner, Andrew arranged for me to have half-an-hour's private chat with Hillery. As I expect he has told you, the events of the last few months have made him a changed man. I certainly found him very agreeable to talk to, but very subdued and almost awestruck by the British performance over Northern Ireland, both in Ulster itself and at the United Nations.

4. Hillery had clearly been very impressed, not to say shaken, by his experiences in New York. It was evident that he had been surprised at the respect in which Britain as a nation and the United Kingdom Delegation as a delegation were held at the United Nations. He spoke in the warmest tones of respect and admiration of Lord Caradon and had clearly been much impressed by the Delegation's performance over the Irish complaint. He kept on talking about "fly-weights versus heavy-weights". But he seemed quite without rancour or resentment at his defeat at our hands.

5. Indeed, Hillery's view, the distillation of his experience over the past three months, seemed to be that none of us - Westminster, Dublin or Belfast - had put a foot wrong. Recollected in tranquillity, he even found satisfaction in his interview with Lord Chalfont at the beginning of August : he said that he quite understood that Lord Chalfont was right to refuse to take a more forthcoming line than he did, since this would have made Westminster's relations with Belfast more difficult; he himself had to express his dissatisfaction with the interview, but that in itself was helpful in the context of southern Irish opinion. Indeed the impression he gave was that, after all, all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Everything had happened as it had to happen and the main thing was that we had all come out of the ordeal pretty well intact : the Irish Government had been able to control their own public opinion; the Westminster Government had been able to get their programme of reforms launched and the Northern Ireland Government had survived as the instrument of those reforms. What more could anyone want ?

6. Looking to the future, Hillery reinforced the impression which McCann had given me about the Irish Government's present policy on the unity of Ireland. This policy is clearly conducted at two distinct levels. The public policy is what one might call idealistic and incantatory and has to

look /.....



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look forward, some time round the Greek Kalends, to the unity of Ireland. The private policy is, however, more realistic and less ambitious : not only does it not envisage the possibility of a united Ireland for as far ahead as it is useful to look, but it is really not at all certain whether it actually wants it. That being so, I am sure the Irish Government will be satisfied with very modest conversations on the subject with us.

7. There was one resonance from my talk with John Hume (my letter of 4 November) and that was that, although McCann had brushed aside the idea of the appointment of an Irish Consul to Belfast, Hillery spontaneously said that he was wondering whether he ought not to improve communications with the North and perhaps have his own man there. What did I think ? I replied that I thought the idea was an admirable one provided the timing was right : the idea would not go down well in the North at the moment, but it might do in a few months' time.

8. I took the opportunity of the talks with both McCann and Hillery to brief them in general on the purpose and content of the Westminster and Stormont White Papers implementing Hunt.

9. I told Major Chichester-Clark that I should be going to Dublin, before I went, and I will give him a mild account of what I learned there when I have a suitable opportunity.

10. All this has, I think, only one implication for our future policy. I think it would be in our interest to keep the Irish Government sweet. To do so will be a material factor in reducing the tensions about the border and therefore the tensions in the North. Unless my judgement is hopelessly at fault, I think it would take very little to keep the Irish Government sweet. I think they would settle, at this stage, for purely private talks about the North, without any publicity. I do not think that such talks, if they were held, need cause any serious repercussions in the North and I would naturally hope that HMG would keep Major Chichester-Clark generally in the picture. I would hope therefore that Ministers would be prepared to find an hour or so on a suitable occasion to have talks with Irish Ministers as part of the keeping sweet process. The subject of the talks could, I think, be perfectly anodine : they could simply be a progress report on the reform legislation and a general chat about how we saw things going.

11. But that /...



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11. But that, I recognise, may be a superficial view after only twenty-four hours in Dublin. Andrew Gilchrist will doubtless provide any necessary corrective.

12. All this presupposes continued quiet in Ulster. I agree one hundred per cent with Andrew Gilchrist's view, set out in his despatch of 30 October (para. 32) that "the North acts; the South reacts".

I am sending a copy of this letter to Andrew Gilchrist in Dublin, the Minister of State at New York and Neil Cairncross at the Home Office.

Yours etc,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "O. Wright".

(Oliver Wright)