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SECRET

Report of interview with British Ambassador
on 12th October, 1965

Visits of British naval vessels

Sir Geofroy Tory, the British Ambassador, called to see me this morning at his request. He said that the main purpose of his visit was to discuss with me the question of visits of British naval vessels to this country. He was not coming to see me on instructions but it so happened that, arising out of a favourable report made in Whitehall about the recent visit of the Royal yacht "Bloodhound", he had an opportunity of expressing his views to Whitehall on the question of naval visits generally.

The Ambassador pointed out that the exchange of courtesy visits by naval vessels is part of the normal intercourse between friendly countries. A recent survey had been made of the recent pattern of British naval visits to various countries and, while the average number of visits worked out at eight per annum, the visits planned for Ireland during the present year amounted to only two i.e. the visit of the "Brave Borderer" (which was involved in the shooting incident in Waterford) and the proposed visit of the "Lofoten" to Cork which has been cancelled. He was not counting the visit of the Royal yacht "Bloodhound", which is the property of the Royal Family, nor the annual visit in his own craft of the Head of the British Fishery Protection Patrol. This officer comes on an annual visit for liaison with his opposite number here, and his visit could be regarded as coming under the International Convention rather than in the nature of a naval courtesy visit.

The Ambassador went on to say that he realised that the visits of British naval vessels, like the recent visit of Princess Margaret to her relatives, could become the occasion of demonstrations by the IRA. On the other hand, these visits were welcomed by many people here, and, if by yielding to threats from the IRA, they were stopped, they would be missed and their absence would be commented on.

I explained to the Ambassador our general attitude to such visits and, in particular, our feeling that, if such visits led to demonstrations and incidents - which the British press and television were not slow to publicise -, then they could become counterproductive insofar as serving to promote good relations between the two countries, which is our joint desire. Furthermore, insofar as they enabled the IRA elements to secure wide publicity, the visits played into their hands and perhaps might even help them in their recruiting. I expressed the personal view that, since incidents on the Border had ceased, visits of British naval vessels might provide a welcome opportunity to the IRA to engage in public activity. While I had no doubt that the naval visits were welcomed by some sections of the population in the ports they visited, the very fact of the welcome they received from one section of the population tends to spur a reaction from those at the other end of the spectrum. However much this might be regretted, it was a fact of life which the British should, from their own point of view, take account of in considering this matter. There were historical reasons why visits of British naval vessels to Ireland were

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not on the same footing as courtesy calls to, say, the Scandinavian countries. In our joint effort to promote good relations between the two countries, one must move carefully and avoid action which would arouse hostility. While certain people in yachting circles welcomed naval visits from other countries, I thought that, insofar as the population as a whole were concerned, such visits are only noticed when they take place and their absence would not even be observed.

The Ambassador indicated that he was in general agreement with the point of view I had put forward but he wondered what specific advice he should give his Government. He said that he is not always consulted in advance of the visits becoming known to the IRA. In the case of the visit of the Royal yacht "Bloodhound", he was not consulted at all, and he was aware that, in the case of some naval visits, the IRA's intelligence had secured information before the Embassy. I suggested to the Ambassador that he should insist on being consulted in all cases in future and that he should be slow to propose to us the visit of a naval vessel if there was any danger of its being counterproductive because of the likelihood of its leading to hostile incidents or demonstrations. It was much better that a visit should never be proposed than that the British should have to withdraw a proposal as in the case of the "Lofoten" because of reaction from the IRA, as the latter would regard such a course as a victory for them. In view of the incident in the case of the "Brave Borderer" and the cancellation of the "Lofoten", I thought that it would be well if the British did not propose any further such visits in the near future. Even if the annual visit of the Fishery Patrol vessel were due in the near future, it might be better to postpone it until a later date. The Ambassador nodded agreement and commented that, if necessary, the officer concerned could come over in mufti.

1916 Anniversary Commemoration in 1966

The Ambassador then brought up the subject of the 1916 Anniversary Commemorations next year. He wondered whether the Diplomatic Corps as such would be involved in any of the functions, as this might pose a problem for him. He told me of the criticism in Britain of his walking behind the coffin on the occasion of the return of the Casement remains and of his attending the Memorial Mass. I had already been informed of this by Sir Saville Garner in London. There had been strong criticism in certain quarters, including a threat to raise the matter in Parliament, but, happily, the latter had been avoided. The Ambassador told me that, although his action in the Casement case had been approved at the time he took it, British Ministers were inclined to run away from it afterwards. In the case of the 1916 celebrations, he would like to be able to consult Ministers well in advance so that he would know what to do. It might be that he would have to be unavoidably absent in London at the time. I commented that this might be a solution for himself personally but it would not necessarily resolve the problem for his Embassy, as presumably there would be a Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

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I explained to the Ambassador that the arrangements for the Commemoration are at present in the course of preparation and, while I could not answer his question definitely at this time, I felt sure that the Diplomatic Corps here would be invited to some of the functions. I promised to enquire into the matter and to give him some more precise information as soon as it is available. The Ambassador asked about the character of the Commemoration and, in particular, whether it would be oriented towards the future or a re-enactment of the past. I referred to the Taoiseach's recent speech on the subject and told the Ambassador that I felt sure that he could take it that the Commemoration would be a forward-looking occasion without any attempt to re-open old wounds.

Anglo-Irish Free-Trade-Area negotiations

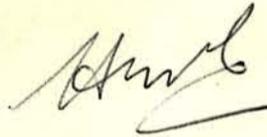
In the context of both of the foregoing items, the Ambassador commented on the improving trend in Anglo-Irish relations. He mentioned the settlement of the Lane Picture dispute, the North-South Talks, the repatriation of the Casement remains, and now the Free-Trade-Area negotiations. While there was this gradual improvement in relations, he remarked that there are still some people in the country who do not relish the change that has taken place. He related an incident at his own dinner table when this trend was being discussed. One guest (not a person holding an official position) commented that Ireland is losing its "soul", the only yardstick being the economic or materialistic one.

I commented to the Ambassador that, in any country, one would inevitably find many shades of opinion and this must necessarily be so in the evolution of Anglo-Irish relations having regard to past history. Because of this, it was, in my view, important that an Anglo-Irish Free-Trade-Area Agreement - if one should emerge - should be readily apparent as of advantage to both countries. If too hard a bargain were driven which might give rise to controversy it would not make the contribution to the improvement in relations which might otherwise be the case. It seemed to me important, therefore, that the British Government should, if anything, be generous and broadminded in their approach to these negotiations rather than that they should haggle unduly on points on which they could afford to be reasonably generous without affecting other interests.

The Ambassador indicated that he was very conscious of this and had, in fact, emphasised to the new Labour Government when it took office the political advantage for Britain in coming to some satisfactory agreement on what had become known as "the Lemass proposals". He intends to make this point again. He thinks that the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Secretary appreciate the point but they have their difficulties with Mr. Peart, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (who has his own difficulties with the British farming lobby, which is sensitive electorally) and with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the President of the Board of Trade. The Ambassador said that he is making the case that, if, on purely economic grounds, the Agreement should appear in the event to be tipped slightly against Britain, then the political factor should tip the scale over in their favour.

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The Ambassador went on to explain that one of his difficulties in this matter is that, because of the pre-occupation of British Ministers with such a multitude of problems, both international and domestic, it is difficult to bring a point to the notice of Ministers personally. The timing of a dispatch is all important. Unless it is so timed as to arrive just at the moment that, because of impending talks or for some specific reason, the Prime Minister or the Commonwealth Secretary are anxious to have a briefing on the point, his dispatch is unlikely to go beyond an Assistant Secretary or, at most, an Under-Secretary. He said he had this difficulty very much in mind in endeavouring to make his point on the Free-Trade-Area negotiations but he proposed doing what he could.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'A. W. G.', written in a cursive style.