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Title: Letter from Richard O'Brien, Embassy of Ireland to Great Britain, to John Swift, Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a meeting with Ian Aitken, of the *Guardian*, mainly regarding the recent parliamentary debate on Northern Ireland and the positions taken by pro-unionist MPs .

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6th June 1974

Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

Attention Mr John Swift

On Tuesday night after the conclusion of the Debate on Northern Ireland I met Ian Aitken, Lobby Correspondent of the Guardian. He said that he thought that the two day Debate had been particularly helpful in getting the focus of attention away from the turmoil created by the strike and back in to the political arena. While he thought that most of what the Loyalists (particularly Paisley) had to say during the two days was primarily for domestic consumption, he felt nevertheless that there were some helpful signs also emerging:

- (i) The balanced, if rather straight from the shoulder, Maiden speech on Monday from the new Member for Mid-Ulster.
- (ii) McClusker's intervention during Mr Michael Stewart's speech on the question of power-sharing with the SDLP (Hansard column 1078 of 4th June refers) and his subsequent clarification of his position at the beginning of his own contribution to the Debate (Hansard columns 1106 and 1107 of 4th June refers).
- (ii) Paisley's point at the end of his speech on the question of a "Government of Northern Ireland agreed by all the people of Northern Ireland" being in a position to talk from a position of equality to the Dublin Government (Hansard column 1168 of 4th June refers).

Aitken thought that the best speech of the Debate had been made by the Leader of the Opposition and Andy Sheppard of RTE, who joined us at this stage, mentioned that the SDLP has spent two hours with Heath on the previous evening.

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Sheppard thought that the leeway in the timetable envisaged by Heath for elections in Northern Ireland (Hansard column 1075 of 4th June refers) was of primary significance. Both Sheppard and Aitken referred to the "threat" of economic sanctions in Stanley Orme's speech:

"We shall be having talks with managements, trade unions and shop stewards about economic development in Northern Ireland. It will not be done on the basis of the threat that if this or that is not done the money will be withdrawn. However, it will have to be done on a realistic basis, bearing in mind that Ministers will have to come to this House to justify any expenditure. I am sure that it will be based on whether there is movement in Northern Ireland to justify it. That is the message which has to be taken note of by people in Northern Ireland."

(Hansard column 1181 of 4th June refers).

With regard to the Prime Minister's statement of his commitment to keep the troops in Ulster "as long as Westminster has the constitutional responsibility for the lives of the security of our fellow United Kingdom citizens, as long as the troops have a role to fulfil in protecting those lives and that security, there can be no abdication by the House of that responsibility." (Hansard column 1051 of 4th June refers), Sheppard felt that this must, for the time being at least, halt any further support from within the Labour Party for those Labour Backbenchers who favour withdrawal. Sheppard admitted that he had over-estimated the support among Labour Backbenchers for withdrawal (my report of 4th June refers).

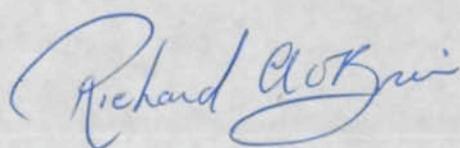
On the question of withdrawal, Aiden Hennigan of the Irish Press said that there had been two meetings of the Liberal Party on the previous day during which there had been a sharp division on the question of withdrawal.

Later in the evening I met Des McCartan of the Belfast Telegraph who was very pessimistic about the future. He thought that the Government's commitment to seek a broader base for power-sharing could not meet with any success. He felt that the Loyalist Coalition was an extremely formidable one and would strengthened its position during the coming months - Paisley

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having the support of the para-military organisation, Craig the support of the industrial workers and West the support of the middle-class Loyalists and the Protestant agricultural community. He said that Craig and West had been taken unawares by the Ulster Workers' Council and the strike but that Paisley had been aware in advance of the plans for the strike.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Richard O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "R".

R. O'Brien