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Title: Letter from Dermot Gallagher, Press and Information Counsellor in the Embassy of Ireland, London, to John Swift, Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting on his meetings with Richard Rose, author of *Governing Without Consensus*, Maurice Hayes, an Assistant Secretary to the Northern Ireland Executive, Muiris MacConghail, Assistant Secretary in the Department of the Taoiseach, and Bob [Robert] Fisk, journalist, at which fluid state of British policy and the current tactics of the IRA [Irish Republican Army] and Loyalist paramilitaries were discussed.

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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

14 June 1974

Secretary
Department of Foreign AffairsFor the attention of Mr John Swift

I wish to report that I had dinner on Wednesday evening with Richard Rose, author of Governing without Consensus, Maurice Hayes, an Assistant Secretary to the Northern Ireland Executive, and Muiris Mac Conghail.

The evening's conversation confirmed the generally held view that British policy towards Northern Ireland is now in a very fluid state and that no one is prepared to make other than a very tentative forecast of the future development of this policy. Both Rose and Hayes took the view - indeed one which as you will be aware from past reports the Embassy agrees with - that little if any progress could be made before Assembly elections are held. Depending on the timing of U.K. elections (and our view is that these are now likely in the second half of September or possibly October), these could take place in September next but, if the U.K. election were to be held at that time, Assembly elections might well be postponed until December or January next.

Following new Assembly elections, Hayes envisaged the British calling together a Constitutional Conference of elected representatives, possibly under the chairmanship of Lord Goodman and restricted exclusively to Northern Ireland representatives. Such a Conference would probably include up to three Republicans of various persuasions and would be likely to have a majority of Loyalists. Hayes thought it probable that the Republicans and some of the Loyalists would walk out of the Conference at an early date but he also envisaged those who stayed on, who would constitute a majority, reaching agreement on some form of power-sharing. If such talks failed to reach agreement on power-sharing, however, he was very afraid of a ^{steady} drift to civil war in the province.

Hayes also spoke at some length about points we have reported on already including (a) the complete inability of Merlyn Rees to come to terms with the problems posed by the barricades and the strike and, in particular, his inherent incapability of acting decisively in a crisis, (b) the co-operation between the civil service, in particular in the Ministries of Health and Agriculture, and the strikers and (c) the urgent need for the SDLP to obtain some concession on internment if they were to retain Catholic support.

Hayes has a very balanced, positive and informed outlook on the Northern situation, with apparently close contacts in most camps, and he would strike me as a most useful source.

I should like to report also on the following points which Bob Fisk mentioned earlier this week, when he called in for a briefing (the Ambassador and Mr Gaynor also saw Mr Fisk).

- (a) He had felt very uneasy during the Ballina funeral and had in fact left the graveyard by a short cut (which resulted in some cuts from briars), after being told by some people there to "get back to England". Subsequently, he had to leave a hotel in Ballina while phoning his copy to London, when some Derry Provos kept pushing him and showing him revolvers which they had "under their coats". Later on, his car was "hemmed in" outside the hotel and he was also refused a meal in a Ballina restaurant because of his English accent.
- (b) In Ballina, he had a conversation with Seamus Loughran of the Belfast Provos who told him, obviously according to Fisk aware that he would pass this on, that the Provos were very interested in establishing contact, and entering into talks, with Loyalist para-military and other groups. In this connection, Fisk mentioned that such contacts up to now have been very tentative and of no real consequence.
- (c) As reported some time ago, Fisk is of the firm view that the Loyalist tactic is to ensure that the

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Catholic vote is split between the SDLP and the several factions of Republicanism, so as to ensure that the Catholic voice is effectively weakened in the post-election discussions on power-sharing.

- (d) Fisk, who is not liked by the Army press office in Northern Ireland, but has many close personal friends at middle-rank Army level, feels that the Army has no longer any strategic or other interest in remaining in the province. Many of its middle-rank officer corps are concerned at the brutalisation of their troops, particularly those who have spent a number of tours of duty in the North. All ranks had been sustained for the first three years by the belief that they were keeping the two sides apart but this unfortunately was now no longer of any concern to them.
- (e) He was unwilling to forecast what the long-term result of present and future policy reappraisal and discussions would be but I got the impression that he suspects the British will ultimately have to opt for an independent Ulster with some parts being hived off to the South. He thought that, if the extent of the area relinquished was limited to the most difficult places, such as South Armagh, the Loyalists would be prepared to accept the scheme. He saw all the problems associated with repartition, however, and asked me to accept that he was "just thinking out loud at this stage".
- (f) He also said that he was very unhappy at the basis and extent of "evidence" on which internment orders were still being issued.

Dermot Gallagher

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