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OIFIG AN AIRE POIST AGUS TELEGRAFA
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH I
DUBLIN I

25 February 1975

Mr. L. Cosgrave, TD
Taoiseach

Dear Taoiseach

I lunched with the British Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, on Monday. As you know he is the Minister responsible for broadcasting and I have official contacts with him from time to time (I have also known him for a number of years).

The attached note relates to political matters which arose in the course of our conversation. I received full briefing from the Taoiseach's Department (Mr. Nally) and the Department of Foreign Affairs (Mr. Donlon) before the meeting.

Yours sincerely

Conor Cruise O'Brien

Note of Conversation with Mr. Roy Jenkins - Monday 24th February

When I last met Mr. Jenkins, which was immediately after the passage of the British legislation following the Birmingham bombings, he expected to become as he said "more involved" with Ireland. I enquired whether this prospect had now receded. He said that it had receded to some extent but that he was continuing to interest himself in Northern Ireland and that the possibility remained open that he might be drawn into it more directly. I understood this to mean that if things got seriously worse - (e.g. as a result of developments after the meeting of the Convention) he might be given overall responsibility for the area. In the general discussion which followed I explained to him the reasons for the Government's concern - shared by the SDLP - about the new incident centres and about the early holding of the Convention. He indicated that he too had some reservations on both points. He also indicated reservations about the advice Rees was getting from the Northern Ireland office and a view that people there might be over optimistic about the extent to which both the Convention and the Provisionals might be manipulated by the ingenuity of the Stormont officials.

On the question of possible British withdrawal he was surprised at the amount of public discussion on this. The idea had never even been discussed in Cabinet and he thought that it was well understood that this step would be bound to have disastrous and unacceptable consequences. He agreed that if a majority in the Convention refused to accept power-sharing it should be made clear that the alternative was direct rule. He thought the Government was now too committed on the Convention to postpone it for very long.

He was particularly concerned at the danger that in the EEC referendum there might be a large majority in Northern Ireland against and that this majority could help to provide a narrow overall majority in the United Kingdom.

As regards the referendum itself he thought that with help which he thought would be forthcoming from Wilson on the wording it would produce a majority in favour of remaining in the community. He hoped for a margin of as much as 20% but thought that it might be much less, even to the point of being endangered by the Northern Ireland results. Whatever happened he feared that the Labour Party would inevitably suffer fairly serious damage from the strongly divergent advice which would be offered by its two wings in the course of the campaign.

In relation to our own Government and problems Mr. Jenkins was relaxed and friendly. He did not enquire about the Common Law Enforcement legislation, and of course I did not raise the subject. He was interested in and pleased by the outcome of the hunger strike and put several questions about this. He referred to the useful meeting he had had with our Minister for Justice and said he regretted there seemed to have been some misunderstanding about what had been agreed on the working of exclusion orders and the working of sending the excluded back "whence they came". He thought any misunderstanding followed from the difficulty in deciding just "whence" somebody came if say they lived in Northern Ireland but had a Republic of Ireland passport and the various other "doubtful" situations. He did not seem particularly worried about the matter and I indicated that as far as I knew we were not greatly troubled about it either and I thought any problems would readily work themselves out in practice.

At no time during the conversation did he suggest or imply that there was any feeling that our Government was "not pulling its weight" in the field of security. He went out of his way to emphasise that his Government did not agree with, and disapproved of, the suggestions made in some of the newspapers that our Government's firm attitude to the hunger strike was "endangering cease fire". He said that even had the death of a hunger striker been followed by a resumption of bombing in Britain he would have made it clear that his Government did not attach any blame to our Government for the consequences of the stand taken. He thought that public opinion in general fully understood this and that people in Britain approved our position in this matter.