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Mr. He... on requested, file 2/12

Please let me see with our Troops out file

in Doyle

HS 2 XII

Handwritten signature

Handwritten initials and date: 25/11

24 November, 1976

Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien T.D.
Minister for Posts and Telegraphs

Dear Conor

Thanks for your letter of 18th October, 1976, about Joan Maynard's invitation.

As my Private Secretary has already mentioned to yours I think that the idea of a general discussion with the "troops out" people - especially as it is their suggestion - is a good one. I have of course no doubt about your ability to deal with any difficulties on the spot!

Yours

Handwritten signature: Janet FitzGerald

Garret FitzGerald



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18 OCT 1976
MINISTER'S OFFICE

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OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH I
DUBLIN I

18 Oct. 1976

Dr. G. Fitzgerald TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs.

cc PSS
for attention
JL
18.10.76

Dear Garret,

I enclose a copy of a letter I wrote to Joan Maynard MP last July together with a copy of a reply I have received from her.

You will note the suggestion in her penultimate paragraph about a possible meeting with a mixed Trade Union, Labour Party and "Peace Movement" group chaired by her or with Labour MPs.

I have of course in the past met with Labour MPs on the subject and expect to do so again. Clearly any such meeting should be set up between the two parties and not through someone like Joan Maynard, so that number one does not arise. The suggestion about a meeting with a wider group is however more interesting. I understand the Irish Trade Unionist that have addressed this group are Michael Mullen and Matty Merrigan. It would seem a pity to deny them an opportunity - since they want it - of hearing a different point of view. Some of them are I assume trouble makers in touch with Official Sinn Fein, but there are also probably people involved in this who are genuinely being taken for a ride, and who could be discouraged as a result of a general discussion of what "Troops Out" mean. I have sent Miss Maynard an interim reply simply stating this request but I would be disposed to take it up for some time in the new year unless you think the objections would outweigh the positive side.

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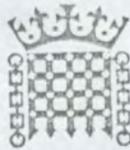
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We have also to bear in mind that a refusal can always be exploited to defend this group against any accusations of one-sidedness : "We asked an Irish Minister and he wouldn't talk to us".

Yours sincerely,



Conor Cruise O'Brien



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

12th October, 1976

Doctor Conor Cruise O'Brien,
Office of the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs,
Dublin,
Ireland.

Dear Doctor O'Brien,

I read with interest your letter of 22nd July, 1976, in which you commented on my having received Tomas MacGiolla at the House of Commons. I cannot, however, agree with your criticisms.

A sizeable proportion of the population in both Britain and Ireland are, as you know, of the opinion that the British presence in Northern Ireland is retarding the possibility of a peaceful settlement of the tragic conflict. It is a regrettable fact that holders of this view are given little chance to express their opinion through the channels of the mass media. It is also regrettably true that proponents of this view in Ireland are frequently associated, directly or indirectly, with "illegal underground armies". Such associations do not, in my opinion, mean that we must not give a hearing to their long-term political perspectives - indeed we silence them at our peril.

It is my firm opinion that there can be no lasting and peaceful solution to the problems of Northern Ireland until there is a widespread and comprehensive debate in both England and Ireland encompassing all possible views on the question. It is in this spirit that I have participated in the campaign for 'Free Speech on Ireland', it was in this spirit that I invited the President of the Republican Movement, Mr. Tomas MacGiolla to the House of Commons.

You may not know that I chair regular meetings in the House of Commons of Trade Union, Labour Party and Peace Movement people who are particularly concerned with the issue of Ireland. So far, two Irish Trade Union representatives have addressed these meetings. I am hoping that a representative of the Women's Peace Movement in Belfast will be able to come to the next meeting in the House of Commons. May I take this opportunity of asking whether you would be able to address such a meeting? I am sure that my colleagues in the House would welcome an opportunity for discussions with you - and that would be possible in a more private, M.Ps only, meeting if you wished.

Please let me know if you would consider a visit to London to meet with fellow Labour M.Ps or with the wider representation of meetings such as I have mentioned above?

Yours sincerely,

Joan Maynard
Joan Maynard.

22 July 1976

Dear Ms Maynard

I have had in mind writing to you during the last few days in connection with your recent sponsorship of a visit to the House of Commons by Mr Tomas MacGiolla, President of Official Sinn Fein. I am writing to you as a member of the Irish Labour Party and therefore a fellow member with yourself of the International Democratic Labour Movement.

The fact that I write to you on the day after the murder here in Dublin of the British Ambassador cannot but affect our feelings at the present time, but has no direct connection with my letter. Official Sinn Fein have publicly condemned that murder and I accept their condemnation as sincere.

At the same time I cannot accept, without the gravest of reservations your own description of the organisation of which Mr MacGiolla is President as being "non-violent". It is because I think you may have been misinformed about this complex and confusing political entity that I write to you.

Up to late 1969 there existed in Ireland one illegal "underground army" the IRA and one political party, Sinn Fein, which was generally regarded as the political expression and propaganda of the IRA. The general view that this had all along been so received experimental confirmation when the split in the IRA which occurred towards the end of that year was followed by a split in Sinn Fein. The IRA split into wings designated as Official and Provisional and Sinn Fein also split into Official and Provisional wings.

Inevitably therefore the body of which Mr MacGiolla is head, Official Sinn Fein is regarded as standing in the same relation to the Official IRA as Provisional Sinn Fein does to the Provisional IRA.

This relationship explains why I cannot accept as full and accurate your description of Mr MacGiolla's organisation as non-violent.

It is true that the Official IRA is not now engaged in any campaign of violence. It has however engaged in such campaigns in the past and its very essence, as an "illegal army" means that in certain conditions it is prepared to do so again. The timing and character of such a resumption would be entirely a matter for the determination of the IRA's Army Council, a military elite body not of course under any democratic control. We may legitimately infer from the whole past history of this movement that if the Official IRA start killing people they will receive the political and propaganda backing of Official Sinn Fein. I do not know whether Mr MacGiolla would remain President of Official Sinn Fein under such circumstances. That however isn't the point. You were receiving Mr MacGiolla - as I understand it - not in a personal capacity but as Head of Sinn Fein, a body whose relation to the IRA is as I have described it.

Let /...

Let me remind you that when Senator Barnhill was murdered in Belfast in 1971, the murder was at first condemned by Official Sinn Fein - Mr MacGiolla - and attributed by them to the SAS. When however the Official IRA in Belfast claimed responsibility for the action in question Official Sinn Fein was silent. What had been described as "brutal murder" as long as it could be ascribed to British forces was silently condoned once it was known to be the work of the military wing of the movement whose political wing had previously condemned it.

In these circumstances I think you will understand why gestures such as the reception in the House of Commons for the Head of Official Sinn Fein are widely regarded here as gestures of encouragement to the Official IRA and in general to the concept of the acceptability of illegal underground armies. The Labour Party here utterly rejects all the underground armies and deplores all aid and comfort given to them.

Yours sincerely

Conor Cruise O'Brien