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AMBASÁID NA HÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

Mr O'Garra,

*Pl. P.S. carefully as
we will need to refer
to again.*

① Prior Init

*② reports from London files
+ as appropriate*

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Mr McNamara

*This is an important report pl. p.a. as
requested by Mr. Hendry (and on behalf
Conservative party file 5/1)*

19-5-82

18 May 1982

Dear Margaret

I wish to report that I had lunch recently at her request with Margaret Van Hattem of the Financial Times. Present also at the lunch was Lord Gowrie, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office. I had a lengthy conversation with Lord Gowrie about Northern Ireland and Anglo-Irish affairs.

He stressed, as has been heard and reported from other sources, that the Prime Minister is an integrationist. What she really would like to see is further integration between Northern Ireland and mainland Britain combined with increased local government powers in Northern Ireland, somewhat on the lines of the 1979 Conservative election manifesto. She sees Northern Ireland as a place which can be compared to Yorkshire or to Birmingham. There were two points made by Lord Gowrie about the Prime Minister which were, to me at least, new. He said that she had serious doubts about the right of Irish citizens to be treated in this country as if they were British citizens. This is, I feel, of some significance as there are a fairly large number of Conservatives who would, if they could, remove the right to vote in British elections from Irish citizens. Were the Prime Minister to indicate that she favoured that view, as Lord Gowrie implies she does, then there could be serious repercussions for Irish citizens resident in this country. Secondly he said that her view is that the man with the soundest views on Ireland is Enoch Powell. I suspect that in making these points Lord Gowrie was trying to paint the grimmest picture possible of what might happen should the Prior initiative collapse. Nonetheless, I also think that he believed what he was saying.

He was aware of the bitterness felt by the SDLP at the policy which was eventually decided upon by the British Government. He was also aware that John Hume in particular felt that he had been misled by Mr Prior. Lord Gowrie said that he thought he himself might have been responsible for the difficulties which had arisen. He had encouraged the SDLP to try to examine ways in which the Irish identity might be given expression either as part of the proposed assembly or in conjunction with it. In the event, while both he and Prior had

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argued strongly for the inclusion of elements which would give expression to the Irish identity, and had in some degree succeeded in regard to the White Paper, they had not "delivered" in terms of the Bill. He had hoped to get more on the Irish identity and had perhaps let the SDLP believe that he could do so. Mr Prior had had to give more to the Unionists than he would have wished.

He said that Mr Prior has had an uphill struggle in getting support for his proposals. He had a number of problems. Firstly, the right wing of the Party, led by George Gardiner, wanted Mr Prior defeated because he was opposed to Mrs Thatcher and because they disliked what he had tried to do when Secretary of State for Employment. Their opposition to the Northern Ireland Bill should be seen in the context of their opposition to Mr Prior. Secondly there are those such as John Biggs-Davison, MP for Epping Forest and Chairman of the Conservative Back Bench Committee on Northern Ireland, who are in favour of integration. Thirdly there are those who are opposing Prior because they feel he is a moderate on the Falklands. Mr Prior's great difficulty in dealing with the Conservative Opposition to his Bill is that his opponents give the impression that Mrs Thatcher agrees with their views and so far at least Mrs Thatcher has not denied this claim nor is she doing anything to halt the opposition.

Lord Gowrie said that it is to Mr Prior's credit that he is fighting for a devolved Government in Northern Ireland, because this is the second time (the first being trade union reform) that he has taken on his own party. He could well have done otherwise and let things lie. Had he done so his chances of becoming Prime Minister eventually would have been considerably improved. Gowrie claimed that he had himself lost preferment as a result of his stand on the Irish identity. He said he would almost certainly have been offered the Presidency of the Board of Trade, and the Cabinet seat which goes with it, which was given to Lord Cockfield, had not he taken his stand on the Irish identity. He mentioned that he supported the Thatcher line on the economy and implied that he had been promised a Cabinet position as soon as one arose for a member of the House of Lords.

Though difficult to be certain it is my impression that Lord Gowrie sincerely holds the view that the only way forward on Northern Ireland is along the lines being followed by the British Government. He thought that if there is to be a united Ireland it can only come about with the consent of the Unionists. They cannot, in his view, be forced into a united Ireland. He does not have a high

opinion of Unionists. They are turned in upon themselves and lack the maturity the South has gained from its international contacts and from the role it has played in the world, both in terms of a nation and in terms of emigration. There are some hopeful signs in his view. He is heartened by the less traditional Unionists, such as Robert McCartney. He was also surprised, and I thought pleased, that the Unionist reaction to the appointment of Mr Seamus Mallon to the Senate had been muted and was not as vociferous as some, e.g. Gerry Fitt, had expected.

He said that one of the purposes of the Government's Bill was to try to bring forward Unionists who would be prepared to deal with the realities of life on the island of Ireland. He was thinking of those who, though Unionists, were prepared to enter into dialogue with Dublin. One name he mentioned was Mr McCartney. I mentioned the recent meeting between the Taoiseach and the Harland and Wolff workers. Lord Gowrie thought this a very positive move though he added that it will take a generation at least before Unionists will talk without fear to persons from the South. In his view what has happened since 1969 has set back rather than helped the process of reconciliation on the island.

In terms of Unionist perceptions Lord Gowrie thought that extradition was very important. I put our policy to him and he accepted that extradition would not have much practical effect. He mentioned the recent references to extradition at the Garda Sergeants Annual Conference and said that the political result, if it were conceded by us, would be great. He thought that whatever opposition existed within the Unionist Community to Seamus Mallon as a result of his acceptance of a seat in the Senate, (and he didn't think it was widespread), could be dispelled were the latter to call in the Senate for some measures to improve security co-operation. Lord Gowrie accepted that this co-operation is very good.

Lord Gowrie was hopeful that the Bill would go through all its parliamentary stages by the summer recess (late July - early August) and that the way would be clear for elections in the Autumn. There are an increasing number of journalists here who begin to doubt this. They point particularly to the time which has been given to debate on the Falkland Islands and which has reduced the time available for other business. He was not very forthcoming on the amendments which might be accepted and implied that decisions had not yet been taken by Ministers.

Though not personally convinced of a need to drop the 70% clause, as is requested by the Labour Party, he claimed he was arguing within the NIO for its acceptance. In practice he thought the SDLP would have a veto in the proposed Assembly (assuming they contested the election).

He said that Mrs Thatcher was "furious" at the decisions taken by the Government to raise the issue of the Falklands at the United Nations and to question the renewal of EEC sanctions against Argentina. If the Anglo-Irish relationship is to mean anything it should mean that in matters of mutual interest one side is aware beforehand of what the other is doing. I mentioned that it was a two way process and that there had been a significant failure to consult us on the Prior initiative. We have an interest in what goes on in Northern Ireland as we are very deeply affected by what happens there. Lord Gowrie said that he understood our concerns but felt that with hindsight it might have been best had phone contact been made at the highest level before the decision had been taken on the Falklands. Anglo-Irish relations would not, in his view, be helped by this decision. A further element was that the Prime Minister, who feels that the Foreign Office holds responsibility for the debacle in the Falklands, was herself only convinced of the benefits of a new Anglo-Irish relationship by the Foreign Office.

Lord Gowrie was pessimistic about the Northern Ireland economy. The British Government is only managing to "hold it together" by injecting very large sums of money into the economy either directly by way of grants or indirectly by way of salaries. He thought that Harland and Wolff was in serious danger of collapsing completely.

Yours sincerely

Daithi

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