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Note

Mr. Iain Orr of the British Embassy gave a lunch on 21 May to introduce Mr. Stuart Eldon of the Republic of Ireland section at the FCO. Also present were Mr. Peter Johnstone, British Embassy, Ms. Margaret Hennessy and Mr. Ivan King, DFA. Following are points from the discussion:

Prior initiative

The British representatives made a point of stressing British official dismay at the Irish Government's public rejection of the plan which was seen as most unhelpful. Despite the SDLP and unionist parties' rejection of the proposals there was wide popular support in Northern Ireland for the view that it should be given a chance. Mr. Eldon said that the general view in Northern Ireland was that the SDLP would probably participate in the election but possibly on an abstentionist platform. If this were to happen however it would not necessarily mean the end of the initiative as this would depend on the pattern of Catholic voting e.g. support for Alliance. The British were emphatic that at all events there would be no return to a Stormont-type regime. While pointing to the strength of some arguments advanced for integration by people like Biggs-Davidson, the British recognized that this was an unsatisfactory solution given the position of Northern Ireland and would do nothing for stability and for an end to terrorism.

Security matters

The British were concerned at press reports that Gardai were to be withdrawn from border counties in order to help combat crime in Dublin. A serious view would be taken in London of any such reduction. The DFA representatives undertook to seek further information on these reports, stressing however the Government's continued commitment to border security and cross-border security co-operation.

With reference to the recent refusal by the High Court of an appeal against extradition to Northern Ireland in the case of Dominic McGlinchey, it was suggested that the decision, taken with that of the Supreme Court last October in the case of Maurice Hanlon, might reflect a shift, which was welcome from the British viewpoint, in the attitude of our Courts to the plea of political offence as a barrier to extradition.

Anglo-Irish relations and the Falklands

The British representatives stressed that we "should not underestimate the damage" to Anglo-Irish relations that had been caused by Irish actions over the Falklands crisis. The damage in their view was not merely a short-term problem, on the contrary ^{over} actions would be long remembered in Britain. The Irish initiative at the UN had been untimely in that, in the assessment of the British professionals at the UN, it had "wrecked" the chances of success of the Peruvian peace efforts. At the very least we should have consulted the British before taking such action. Our initial actions in supporting UN Resolution 502 and in agreeing to EEC sanctions had been appreciated by Britain and had indicated that Ireland intended to follow "a correct approach" to the dispute. Our subsequent volte-face, as they saw it, had been totally unexpected. They found it difficult to accept the case which had been put forward on neutrality grounds, particularly since our initial agreement to sanctions had been given in full awareness that the Task Force was on its way, and since we had previously supported sanctions e.g. in the case of Iran and Afghanistan. The DFA representations in reply sought to explain our actions on the lines indicated in the Taoiseach's public statement.

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