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(1) Sir E Bell
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NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL REVIEW: 2-15 AUGUST 1982

A: INTRODUCTION

1. While doubts continued to surround the question of SDLP participation in the forthcoming Assembly elections, leaders of the UUP made clear their opposition to the Secretary of State's initiative. In the Republic of Ireland, Fine Gael deputy leader, Peter Barry TD, accused Mr Haughey's Government of behaving "like a spoiled child" over Anglo/Irish relations.

B: NORTHERN IRELAND

2. During the period under review, there were a number of conflicting statements by members of the SDLP about participation in the Assembly elections. Press reports of a meeting of senior party officials in Londonderry in late July, at which a narrow majority had apparently voted to contest the elections, were denied by Seamus Mallon (SDLP deputy leader) but confirmed by the chairman of the Party's constituency representatives, Dr Joe Hendron. On 15 August, Austin Currie reminded party colleagues that the SDLP had been formed to fight elections and said that, if the SDLP boycotted the Assembly, Unionists would try to "turn the clock back to pre-1972". It is expected that a final decision about the elections will be taken at a meeting of the full executive in Dungannon on 25 August.

3. Speaking on the Tyne Tees Television programme "Face the Press" on 15 August the Secretary of State stressed the importance of SDLP participation in the Assembly. He said that progress towards devolved government in Northern Ireland was bound to be slow but without the involvement of the minority there could be no political stability. He emphasised that democracy was not simply a matter of majority rule but depended on the rights which were given to the opposition. He accepted that Unionists were bound to have a commanding position in the Assembly but hoped they would recognise that "minorities have rights too".

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4. On 8 August, William Ross MP urged the UUP to select candidates for the Assembly elections who possessed "the strength, character and purpose" to ensure that "Ulster remains British". In a strongly worded statement he made it clear that the UUP would not allow the SDLP to share power and that his party was only interested in the return of "true Stormont" devolution. On 10 August, following his reselection as UUP Parliamentary candidate for South Down, Enoch Powell MP congratulated the Prime Minister for her handling of the recent disagreement with the Republic of Ireland over consultation on the political initiative. However, he warned that her intervention had done little to reassure Unionists given what he described as the Secretary of State's commitment to the Irish dimension. He claimed that no acceptable form of government could emerge from the current initiative echoing the views expressed by UUP leader, Jim Molyneaux, the previous week. Mr Molyneaux had accused the NIO of "blundering on into an initiative in which nobody believes and on which Northern Ireland Office Ministers are at variance with the rest of the Government".

C: INTERNATIONAL

5. On 8 August, Peter Barry TD (Fine Gael deputy leader) described Fianna Fail's Anglo-Irish policy over recent years as "a betrayal of the Irish people". Referring to HMG's "intransigence" he said that, instead of adopting the "firm hand of diplomacy", Mr Haughey had responded with "the spiteful tantrums of a spoiled child". He went on to accuse the Irish Government of indulging in "Brit-bashing" in order to secure electoral success. On 15 August, the Secretary of State admitted that Anglo-Irish relations were "pretty awful" but argued that it was important to try to maintain good inter-governmental relations despite the real differences that exist. He also said that he was opposed to withdrawing the voting rights of Irish citizens living in Great Britain.

D: MISCELLANEOUS

6. (i) Anniversary of the Introduction of Internment

Speaking at a rally in Belfast on 8 August to mark the 11th Anniversary of the Introduction of Internment, GLC councillor

Steve Bundred claimed that a growing number of people in the Labour Party were of the opinion that violence in Northern Ireland would not stop until the "war ends". He thought that this could be achieved quickly by "withdrawing troops and ending partition". His remarks were condemned by Sir Horace Cutler, the leader of the opposition Conservative group on the Council.

(ii) Northern Ireland Disqualification Act 1975

On 11 August, John Cushnahan (Alliance) pointed out that, as a result of the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act, many people throughout the Province were facing the same dilemma as Senator Seamus Mallon in that they would have to resign from various public bodies (in his case the Northern Ireland Housing Executive) if they wished to contest the Assembly elections. He added that the relevant legislation was not new and that its provisions were similar to those governing eligibility for the House of Commons.

(iii) Speech by Mr Molyneaux

Following the announcement that the Secretary of State had forwarded the text of Mr Molyneaux's controversial Scarva speech (see NIPR (82)14) to the Chief Constable, Ken Maginnis (UUP) accused Mr Prior of trying to undermine Mr Molyneaux's influence and of seeking to manipulate the Chief Constable. He added that he had written to Sir John Hermon urging him to resist "political direction" and suggesting that the speech should have been referred instead to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

(iv) Cross-Border Incidents

On the evening of 8 August, four RUC constables crossed the border to Castleblaney to attend a dance. They were recognised and a hostile crowd attacked them. The constables were rescued by the Garda, who confiscated their weapons - taken across against regulations, and returned them to Northern Ireland. The incident was reported in the Irish media and it was claimed that the constables pointed their firearms at the crowd. On 9 August

HM Ambassador in Dublin called at the DFA and expressed profound regret over the incident. On 15 August in Carlingford Loch, a yacht registered in the Republic of Ireland refused to stop when ordered by a RN patrol. Warning shots were fired across the yacht's bows, and the RN were forcibly prevented from boarding by the owner. Subsequently the DFA mentioned the incident informally to HM Embassy in Dublin.

Northern Ireland Office
25 August 1982