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E. R.

Mr Brennan

① Sir Ewart JEA
② Po - 9/6

(Without enclosure)
cc PS/PUS (B&L)
Sir Ewart Bell ✓
Mr Angel
Mr Boys Smith
Mr Evers (FCO)
Mr Tatham (Embassy)

DUBLIN VISIT

1. Mr McNeill has done a note on our visit to Dublin (copy attached). On my return to the office I am drawing out a few further points.

FORUM

2. The Forum is being given a high profile by the Dublin Government. At some cost to Departmental work the Forum secretariat has been bolstered by secondments of quality administrators, the latest being Mr Kirwan, AS in the Taoiseach's Department. Both Mr Kirwan and Mr Lillis were at pains to explain that despite public appearances all was going well behind the scenes, and they suggested that Mr Haughey had modified his former ideas. Mr Lillis was especially optimistic about the likely outcome and about Mr Hume's leverage within the counsels of the Forum.

3. But contrariwise Mr Mansergh, an adviser to Mr Haughey, told us that the cutting edge in Mr Haughey's speech reflected the philosophy that "the Unionists won't move unless pushed". Hence the injection of Mr Haughey's "4th" option expounded on 30 May - the "Scottish solution" (which supplemented the current possibilities of a Federal, Confederal or Unitary Ireland). Mr Mansergh reminded us that the Haughey speech at the Forum included specific proposals. In elaborating on these Mr Mansergh suggested that within the "Scots" solution propounded by Mr Haughey there was no need for any Assembly, in spite of murmurings even in Scotland for devolution. Within an all Ireland Dail Mr Mansergh thought there might be an interim 5 years period with a Coalition Government of 20-24 members (including perhaps half a dozen northerners of all parties) and some 70-80 Northern TDs. The bilateral contacts with Westminster mentioned by Mr Haughey would continue on the "Human Rights" or "Encounter" pattern, but NOT as executive or defence bodies. This sounds rather unrealistic and it was not clear whether Mr Mansergh was fully in touch with the thinking of his leader.

4. The key issue for NIO seems to be that a Forum Report will create two challenges:

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- (a) to the British Government, which will be asked to negotiate on it and may come under some international pressure to do so;
 - (b) to the Unionists, who will react to its terms and presentation irrespective of any negotiation.

5. We could decide to ignore the Forum and hope that the Report's presentation will not aggravate community relations or stir up a Protestant backlash; and that the Report will then either die or be killed by inaction and lack of national or international interest. But if that happens I think we may also be removing any credible programme from SDLP and risking the demise of Catholic constitutional politics, as well as aggravating relations with Dublin. Such an outcome might lead back to confrontation politics between extremist parties in NI.

6. But Mr Lillis suggested that Dr Fitzgerald would probably be looking for a summit meeting with Mrs Thatcher (sic) before the end of the year. If such a meeting materialised it might provide an opportunity for the British Government to assess the possible presentation, form and content of the Forum's Report and to try to head off anything which seemed to be "dangerous" or likely to create a militant Unionist backlash. But beyond that I wonder whether we should begin now to look at possible ingredients of a response to the Forum?

7. Such a response might involve consideration, inter alia, of ways of strengthening the Assembly by SDLP participation (bonus to the unionists); off-sets for the minority (eg an SDLP member as NIO Minister along with a UUP, DUP or Alliance colleagues?); extradition; and ways of wording references to Irish unity (which left each side with its views and neither admitted the possibility of unity within a set timescale nor excluded it). Most difficult would be the handling of any Anglo/Irish developments eg a Parliamentary Committee. Given a Report to respond to, we ought perhaps to be trying to judge what the different parties might be able to stomach provided they got something in return. There is a possibility that Dr Paisley would withdraw from the Assembly, rather than accept any cross community compromise or anything smacking of an Irish link, but if that proved to be so it could condition the approach to any summit later this year. On the other hand, the Forum Report will provide "extra time" for SDLP to reconsider the Assembly initiative.

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8. Perhaps I should add that in our discussions in Dublin we did point to the strength of feeling in NI about the Assembly (and devolution) and the unionist connection. The conservative manifesto was noted.

SINN FEIN

9. All Government officials in Dublin were deeply concerned at the possible demise of SDLP and the rise of Sinn Fein. The Irish Ambassador to the EC had joined the British Ambassador in seeking a ruling that EC officials etc should not meet Sinn Fein Assemblymen - though the new dimension of a Sinn Fein MP would complicate the problem. Incidentally Mr Lillis did not sound as though he would be surprised if a Sinn Fein MP was admitted into Britain.

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10. Though he mentioned a desire for a Prime Ministerial Meeting towards the end of the year Mr Lillis also suggested that officials might be able to make progress before that on such issues as cross border economic co-operation, gas etc. It may be that these points will be mentioned when the ROI write "soon" about the Encounter idea.

ROI OFFICIALS

11. I hope those we met will feel able to maintain contacts and call on Stormont Castle when they are in Belfast.

AJP

A J MERIFIELD
9 June 1983

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