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Title: Copy letter from Donal O’Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain, to HJ McCann, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting meetings with Sir Andrew Gilchrist, former Ambassador of Great Britain to Ireland, and Alistair Burnett, editor of the *Economist*, relating mainly to the reaction by Northern Ireland Protestants to political developments there.

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Personal and Confidential

Dear Secretary

You have no doubt already seen the article in yesterday's Times by David Wood but I am attaching a copy for convenience of reference. Wood is Lobby Correspondent of The Times, is regarded as a journalist of high standing and is believed to be very much on the inside in relation to Government thinking. My reason for calling attention to his article is that it would not surprise me at all if a kite-flying and sounding-out operation is under way in regard to the type of arrangement to succeed the period of prorogation. I am strengthened in this feeling as a result of two meetings I had yesterday and on which I am now reporting.

The first of these was with Sir Andrew Gilchrist who came to see me by prior arrangement yesterday morning. From his remarks he seems to be in fairly close touch both with Sir Alec and with Lord Carrington about the North. In fact I think he owes his present job to the influence of Sir Alec. The main points which Sir Andrew made were these:-

- (1) The risk of a serious Protestant backlash is now very real. In fact it has already started as is evidenced by recent shootings of Catholics.
- (2) Some gesture will have to be made quickly to the majority, otherwise the position could seriously deteriorate. This gesture must take the form of

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early moves in the direction of finding a reasonably acceptable interim solution.

- (3) Negotiations towards this end will have to involve the elected representatives North and South. There can be no question of bringing the IRA in to talks. I said that a growing number of people here seem to feel that the IRA should at least have channels of communication. Time is running out and the S.D.L.P. should be strongly urged to move from their present obdurate stance.
- (4) Any move towards an interim solution must include acceptance of the need to restore some form of democratic representation in the North. As a minimum it will be necessary to have at Stormont an assembly comprising the elected representatives. The functions of the assembly could be strictly limited. It need have little or no executive power but would be required mainly to reflect public opinion on the way in which the area is being and should be administered. He^g said that if this were in practice to look like integration it would be entirely unacceptable.
- (5) Sir Andrew's final point was that there should be a Council of Ireland with clearly defined functions primarily of an economic character. I told Sir Andrew that I could see merit in this point but I felt that something more than a Council with purely economic functions is now needed. While he professed to support fully the idea of a united Ireland all his information suggests that the Government cannot be persuaded to depart from its present stand "at any rate for some considerable time".

Sir Andrew thinks the idea of periodic plebiscites in the North is a great mistake and Ministers here are now having

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misgivings about it. However, they have pledged themselves on the point and it would probably be difficult for them to drop it now.

Later I was the guest at lunch of Alistair Burnet, Editor of the Economist. To my surprise he had with him his seven senior people and our meeting went on until after 4 p.m. A lot of our conversation was naturally on the North but the discussion did ramble over a wide field. Mr. Burnet had returned earlier in the morning from the North where he had spent a couple of days with his Home Editor (Politics) - Mr. George Ffitch.

Both expressed themselves as extremely depressed at what they had found. In particular they regard the Protestant backlash as already a reality. The Tartan gangs "mean business". If there is a confrontation between them and the Army in which somebody is killed "all hell could be let lose". While an increasing number of the majority, particularly those in the business sector, "are becoming resigned to being part of a united Ireland one day" the extremists and the younger element on the Protestant side have become much more menacing. The threat from Vanguard should not be under-rated because both Craig and Hull, neither of whom is really violent, are loosing their influence.

There must be an early gesture to the hardliners in the form of negotiations which must be seen not to be a sellout. As our conversation developed what struck me forcefully was that the points advanced around the table were, except on matters of detail, identical with those I had heard earlier from Sir Andrew. For example, while the Assembly at Stormont would be intended mainly to reflect public opinion it could be given "a third reading function on legislation affecting the North". A clearly defined framework for ever closer economic cooperation between the North and South would need

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to be established and this should place special emphasis on regional policy in the EEC context. Because of the close community of economic interest between the two parts of the island it might be a helpful step to include Northern officials in some capacity in our delegations for economic talks in Brussels.

Towards the end of our talk when I made an observation on the unreasonable length of my stay with them, Alistair Burnet told me that they recently had the Prime Minister for a similar luncheon. They had a wide range ^{ing} of discussion with him which also lasted until after 4 p.m.

As he was seeing me out Mr. Burnet told me that he had had a private dinner meeting in Belfast on Sunday evening with Mr. Faulkner. He said he didn't want to mention this in the presence of his colleagues. He knows Mr. Faulkner well and they had a long and very frank discussion. Mr. Faulkner realises that nothing would please the Government here more than to phase him out of the political scene. He is, however, determined not to be shifted from his present position. One idea which clearly emerged from his meeting with Mr. Faulkner is that Mr. Faulkner now has definite regrets "that he was not more oncoming with Mr. Lynch in the period following the Chequers meeting". Alistair Burnet is, I think, an admirer of Faulkner, who, he feels, would at this stage like nothing better than the opportunity for a private heart to heart talk with the Taoiseach. I said I had noted the point and added that I had personal doubts as to whether such a talk, however private, would be a judicious move certainly at this time.

Yours sincerely

BONAL O'SULLIVAN

~~Donal O'Sullivan~~

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