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IRELAND



Reference Code:	2010/19/1657
Creation Date(s):	21 March 1980
Extent and medium:	4 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
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8/4/34

Minister's Visit to the U.S.A.

16-18 March 1980

Northern Ireland Policy Aspects

New York

The Minister attended a reception given by the Consul General on the evening of 16 March where he had an opportunity to meet members of the Irish and leading members of the Irish American communities in New York.

On the morning of 17 March, the Minister met at breakfast Senator Daniel P. Moynihan and Governor Byrne of New Jersey. Governor Carey of New York also appeared at the breakfast and subsequently at Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral. The Mass was presided over by His Eminence Cardinal Cooke and was sung by Our Lady's Choral Society whose tour of the U.S.A. coincided with the celebrations. A colour party and a numerous contingent of the "Fighting 69th" paraded to Mass. Excerpts of Sean Ó Riada's Mass were sung together with traditional hymns, and the huge congregation applauded Our Lady's Choral Society at the end of the service.

The parade on Fifth Avenue was led by a group consisting of Mrs. Rosalyn Carter, the Minister, Senator Moynihan, Mayor Koch and Governor Carey. After spending about an hour and a half at the reviewing stand in front of the Arsenal, the Minister adjourned on foot to the American-Irish Historical Association where he was received by the President of the Association, Dr. Kevin Cahill and met Governor Carey with whom he had about half an hour's conversation.

All the meetings described above took place in a social (not to say convivial) atmosphere and were not the occasion of structured exchanges. The Minister gave each of his contacts an account of our analysis of and approach to the Northern Ireland problem, as outlined in the Taoiseach's speech to the Fianna Fáil Árd-Fheis. He stressed that the problem was the major national issue and that its peaceful solution was our first political priority. He thanked his interlocutors for the statement issued on 14 March to which they had subscribed, observing that it was in line with the Government's objectives. Governor Carey asked for an assessment of the Atkins conference in Stormont and commented on what seemed to be the disastrous economic trend in Northern

Ireland. The Minister repeated our pessimistic view of the conference - while confirming that we were not dismissive of it and awaited any results which it might produce - and gave details of the declining Northern economy. As regards the possible attitudes of the British Government to our demands, the Minister expressed the view, based on his meeting in London on 4 March, that Lord Carrington might have an open approach to the problem and that the Thatcher administration, having shown a certain pragmatism towards the problems confronting it, and in particular that of Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, might be capable of working with us towards a solution of the Northern Ireland problem.

Governor Carey also enquired about the European Monetary System and about Ireland's experience since joining it.

Washington

The Minister and his party left New York in mid-afternoon and arrived in Washington at 5.00 p.m. where the Minister was met by the Deputy Chief of Protocol and was escorted to the Ambassador's residence. At 7.30 p.m. he went to the White House, accompanied by Mrs. Donlon and by Mr. and Mrs. John Burke, to attend a reception given by President and Mrs. Carter, at which the Minister presented shamrock to the President. He also met Speaker O'Neill and his wife.

Later in the evening the Minister was guest of honour at the dinner of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick at the Capital Hilton hotel. The Minister gave the prestigious gathering a witty after dinner speech in which he dwelt on the advantages of investment in Ireland, recalled the major political problem of Northern Ireland and spoke of the contribution of the Irish to America and to the world.

On 18 March the Minister first called on Congressman Foley on Capitol Hill. The Congressman who is Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee and regarded as a probable future Speaker of the House of Representatives, had not signed the St. Patrick's Day statement of 14 March initiated by Speaker O'Neill and Senator Kennedy. He indicated that he had not done so because he considered that the statement did not give sufficient credit to the efforts of the Thatcher Government to start political movement in Northern Ireland during the past year. He also objected to the last-minute inclusion, through Senator Kennedy's initiative, of Mayor Byrne of Chicago in the list of signatories (it appears that Speaker O'Neill was also very angry about this

development). As Congressman Foley put it, this sort of politicking with the statement only made it easier and more plausible for the British to claim, as they were only too prone to do, that U.S. politicians like himself had no real concern for Northern Ireland or interest in solving the problem, but only raised the issue for internal American political reasons. We all had an interest in proving such British allegations to be false and the inclusion of Mayor Byrne's signature/^{did not}help, being clearly related to the Illinois Democratic primary campaign. It was as important to keep the record clear and straight on this issue as it was to avoid the slightest truck with people who had links with violence or with support for it.

Ambassador Donlon intervened to say that Mayor Byrne had visited Ireland during the year and had shown considerable interest in the Northern Ireland problem. Congressman Foley doubted whether that was why her name had been added to the list.

The Minister made a presentation of Government policy on Northern Ireland along the same lines as those he had previously made in New York. The meeting was interrupted twice when Mr. Foley had to leave to participate in Committee votes in the House.

The next engagement was with Speaker O'Neill, who was accompanied by Mr. Kirk O'Donnell, his senior advisor on Northern Ireland. As in the case of the call on Congressman Foley, the Minister had the Ambassador and Mr. Neligan with him. The meeting was extremely friendly and the Minister thanked the Speaker for his consistent help and support to the Government over the years, exemplified in the St. Patrick's Day statement of 14 March. The Speaker in that regard indicated that much of the credit for arranging agreement on the statement should go to his aide Mr. O'Donnell and to Ambassador Donlon, whom he praised warmly. (Owing to their geographical and indeed political dispersion the drafting of the statement by the Four this year was a particularly difficult undertaking). The conversation remained general and was characterised by assurances of continued support for the Government's policies on the part of the Speaker and expressions of gratitude and appreciation by the Minister. A photographer recorded the occasion. (The Speaker and his wife had met the Minister also the previous evening at the White House).

Following a working lunch at the Embassy, the Minister (accompanied by Mr. Dorr, the Ambassador and Mr. Neligan) was received by Secretary of State Vance at the Department of State. Assistant Secretary Paul Nimitz and

Mr. Robert Funseth, Director of the N.W. Europe Division, attended.

After discussion of other topics, the Minister raised the question of Northern Ireland, explaining that we now desired to get together with the British Government to find a solution which would restore, by agreement, peace and stability. The Minister said he had detected that Lord Carrington, to whom he had exposed our preoccupations, was receptive to our approach. As things stood, the sore of violence and division festered in Northern Ireland. The situation did not help in so far as overall security in the region was concerned. Troublemakers were being attracted, and the situation could be of interest to the Russians or the Cubans. A political initiative on which both sovereign Governments could agree was required. With a joint declaration of interest in the eventual unity in peace of the Irish people, the Minister felt that as a first step a partnership administration involving both communities in the Six Counties would emerge. Guarantees by the two sovereign Governments would be required and supervision by them of security and policing. Progress would depend on the reactions of the parties involved in Britain, Ireland and the two parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Vance asked what were the views of the parties in Northern Ireland. The Minister said that there were the SDLP, of which Mr. John Hume was leader, and three Unionist parties. He knew that thinking members of these parties wished to remove the political vacuum which at present existed in the North.

Mr. Vance asked what did Lord Carrington think of the Irish Government's approach.

The Minister said that he had spoken to Lord Carrington on 4 March and had formed the impression that he agreed with the approach. The Minister had congratulated Carrington on what the British had achieved in Zimbabwe.

Mr. Nimitz intervened to ask what role was envisaged for the European Community. Would there be greater involvement from that quarter? The Minister replied that the Community's role would be at the economic and social level only.

In conclusion the Minister observed that violence was encouraged by the political vacuum and the void must be filled by appropriate agreed political structures. Britain should be encouraged to go along with our proposal for joint and fundamental consideration of the problem.

Mr. Vance thanked the Minister for his presentation.