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1 Mr. O'Brien
2 Mr. King
3 PA

CONFIDENTIAL

The British Ambassador, Sir Leonard Figg called to see me to-day at his request. He is about to head off for a 3 week holiday in the West Indies where he has a house and he wanted, as he said, to touch base before he left. He emphasised that he was not calling on instructions and indeed said that he had had no instructions from London or Belfast arising out of the recent statements by the Taoiseach.

The Ambassador referred to yesterday's meeting between the Government and the SDLP and said that he felt sure that the Northern Ireland Secretary of State in particular would be disappointed by the outcome. Prior had, he said, worked very hard to defend the Northern Ireland minority interest and had put a good deal of effort into persuading Mrs. Thatcher to allow him to go as far as he did. To some extent the lukewarm acceptance or even rejection of his proposals by the unionists parties was expected, but Prior had hoped for better things both from the SDLP and in particular from the Irish Government. No doubt he would now be very disappointed but the Ambassador had no information to suggest that the initiative would be dropped. The Ambassador thought that it might be helpful to have an early meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Northern Ireland Secretary of State though he again said that he had no specific instructions in the matter. He asked about the possibility of a meeting between the Taoiseach and Mrs. Thatcher on the margin of next week's European Council. I said that I had no instruction in the matter but that no doubt the necessary arrangements could be made through the usual channels if either side thought a meeting would be useful.

The Ambassador then said that Lord Gowrie had planned a visit to Dublin in mid-April to address a student society at Trinity College Dublin. On security advice the visit had been cancelled but Lord Gowrie had insisted that another more secure platform be found for him and steps were now being taken to arrange that the Economic and Social Research Institute of Ireland invite him to speak at a meeting in mid-May. If this worked out the Ambassador hoped that the Minister might find it possible to receive Lord Gowrie.

The Ambassador asked about the Taoiseach's visit to the United States and I gave him copies of the various public statements including a transcript of the Blair House Conference.

On the way out the Ambassador again referred to Mr. Prior's reaction to the various statements by the Taoiseach in recent days. Prior had, he said, been a great defender of the minority interest in Northern Ireland and had against all the odds convinced Mrs. Thatcher to support him in his initiative. Equally importantly he had persuaded the Conservative backbenchers not to stand in the way of an initiative and he would no doubt be very disappointed that at this stage the roadblocks were coming from the Irish Government and from the SDLP.

Seán Donlon

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23 March 1982

cc. Mr. A. Nally, Sec. to the Minister for Foreign Affairs
Ambassador, London