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HM Ambassador
British Embassy, Dublin

DATE: 12 July 1993

cc: PS/SofS(L&B)-B
PS/Mr Fell
PS/Sir J Wheeler-B
PS/Michael Ancram(L&B)-B
Mr Ledlie
Mr Thomas-B
Mr Watkins-B
Mr Williams-B
Mr Cooke-B
Mr Maccabe-B
Mr Brooker-B
Mrs Collins-B
Ms Lodge, SIL-B
Mr Archer, RID-B
Sir T Daunt, FCO (via RID)-B

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Ms Molyneux

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ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS

1. We are clearly going through a bad patch in relations with the Irish. It may help if I sum up how matters probably look when seen through Dublin eyes - informed private as well as official.

2. The immediate squall results from the Tanaiste's Guardian interview published on Thursday, the day of the IGC. The Irish are genuinely surprised at the irritation the interview caused in London. They point out that the Tanaiste had said much the same things at the BIIPB meeting in Cork the week before, and that he had been floating ideas, not making suggestions. They are reluctant to acknowledge the problems the Tanaiste's comments cause for us in managing the Unionists, and his bad manners (or worse) in allowing himself to be quoted in public just before talking to us in private.

3. The Irish have their own complaints. Just as they underestimate the resonances of the Tanaiste's interview in London and Belfast, we tend to underestimate the resonances here arising from the Prime Minister's remarks in the Commons about his support for the Union, and Ministers' action in abruptly ruling out joint sovereignty as a possible outcome of the talks process or other negotiations (it is not that the Irish are pressing joint sovereignty, they do not accept that it should be excluded). Old suspicions about hidden British agendas and HMG's willingness to look at radical solutions have been reinforced. The Irish wonder whether we are preparing the way for an internal settlement once we are brought to acknowledge the inevitable (as they see it), ie that the talks process is going nowhere. They suspect that the Westminster political scene will make HMG increasingly reliant on Unionist votes and that Ministers are preparing to sell out, or at least to trim, to Unionist demands. The public, though not officialdom, will have been unsettled by Mr Molyneux's and Mr Taylor's assertions that the NIO have been in contact with PIRA. Rumours are influential here, and are never entirely discredited.

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4. As I am reporting separately, the Irish also seem to have taken unjustifiable umbrage at our request for reasonable notice of plans for future visits by the President to Northern Ireland. This is partly a defensive reaction at our putting issues plainly before them, and partly irritation at being asked to sort out arrangements which they would much rather fudge or leave unresolved. But their reaction has undoubtedly been exacerbated by their unease as set out in para 3 above.

5. Quite coincidentally, one or two security/justice issues have surfaced. The press here have portrayed the report of the Royal Commission on the Administration of Justice as inadequate as regards matters of concern to Irish people. The John Matthews case, on which many Ministers and Deputies have been lobbied from an early stage, has also received much publicity. Many here believe that the exclusion order served on Matthews was spiteful and unjustified, and our reputation for fair play has received yet another knock. Last week's television programme about the 1974 Dublin bombings, alleging some complicity by agents of HMG, has led to press speculation and comment critical of institutions in the Republic as well as HMG and the RUC. Again, some of the dirt sticks. While these issues are not damaging individually, they inevitably entail domestic pressure on Irish Ministers which has a political cost. Both coalition parties are in considerable domestic trouble, notably over the Aer Lingus shake-up, and they need extra problems like a hole in the head.

6. What do we do about all this? Time will undoubtedly help (as Noel Dorr remarked to me yesterday, we should expect things to calm down over the holiday season). But the problem is deeper. We have no publicly credible policy for political development in which both Governments believe and for which we can work together, and the pressures, and consequent frustration, are fraying things at the edges. I suspect we will have trouble from the Irish until we have an agreed policy which they can publicly defend. This may be too much to hope for: the kind of policy they will settle for may not be acceptable to us, and vice versa. And we could not define such a policy quickly, even if we were prepared now to change horses from or within the talks process. It would however help were we prepared to discuss with the Irish what we might do if/when we drew a line under the present phase of the talks process. But to do this, we need to have ideas (not necessarily conclusions) ourselves. And we shall need to discuss them with the Irish well before the next IGC on 14 September if we are to head off trouble at the IGC.

(Signed)
D E S Blatherwick

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