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CONFIDENTIALReport of Discussion about the North of Ireland at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 27/4'70

Present - Irish Side: Ambassador O'Sullivan and Mr Rush
British Side: Sir Edward Peck, Deputy Under-Secretary
F & C.O.
Mr R A Burroughs, Whitehall's representative
in Belfast
Mr A Langdon, Home Office
Mr W K K White, First Secretary F & C.O.

Sir Edward Peck opening the discussion, said it was a month since they had met and in the meantime they (the British) had been proved right about Easter -

The Ambassador demurred but -

Sir Edward Peck continued by saying, "fairly right", as regards Easter, in the sense that the Ballymurphy affair was exceptional and quite spontaneous, not caused by subversive forces. Perhaps Mr Burroughs could discuss that.

Mr Burroughs agreed that the first night of the Ballymurphy trouble was spontaneous. "It just blew up - no one knows why - not even the Cardinal, with whom we have discussed it". On the second night, he said, the PD had taken advantage of the trouble to foment more trouble, but the first night had come "out of the blue". However, the military had learnt valuable lessons from that experience. Perhaps it would have been better, as they now realised, if the military had not taken it "so quietly" at the beginning. Next time they would react faster and make more arrests sooner. Their new policy would be to nip trouble in the bud without any delay. They had also been studying the lay-out of the narrow sidestreets in Ballymurphy, and the troops were being trained now to encircle entire blocks of streets on such occasions in the future.

Sir Edward Peck inquired how the future looked.

Mr Burroughs replied that a lot depended on the recent by-elections, or rather, on one's interpretation of them. Undoubtedly, the Unionist Party was moving to the Right more obviously now. That might cause them some trouble, but if they handled it well some good might still come out of it. It was clear that the Unionist Party must press ahead with the reforms. There could be no question about that. The Stormont Government must control the Party machinery. They must deal with the Right-wing rebels. At the Party meeting on Friday

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(24/4/'70), arrangements had been made - though they were not well publicised - for ousting the rebels from the Party. The Stormont Government must use the new arrangements "during the next few months" to bring the Party under their control.

On a fresh tack, he continued by saying that community relations had improved, especially between the Government and the Minority, for example, Hume and Currie, with whom he had been in touch, were now saying in effect "these chaps are doing their best - let's try to help them". The Catholic Hierarchy was displaying a similar attitude.

The Ambassador intervened to inquire whether - despite the events of Easter and the results of the by-elections - they were still reasonably optimistic.

Mr Burroughs replied that they were, although he would emphasise the word "reasonably" - if they kept a tight grip -

The Ambassador interjected that he could not agree. With two by-elections lost by the Government, and two such dangerous individuals now taking their seats in Stormont, he must disagree sharply.

Mr Burroughs interjected that one must make a distinction between the two by-elections. Paisley was certainly a big problem, but in the South Antrim By-Election the Moderates had split the vote - and without necessarily realising it in advance perhaps - had been instrumental in electing Beattie.

The Ambassador pointed out that the Unionist candidate, Morgan, had been a very bad choice. He had been instrumental in bringing down the former Premier, Captain O'Neill, and was even worse than Craig. He added that he considered Morgan a very dim man.

Mr Burroughs tried to suggest that Morgan was not "Orange" enough and that the adverse margin had been only 2% at the South Antrim by-election.

The Ambassador, however, insisted that the Unionist Party must learn to be more careful.

Sir Edward Peck intervened to support Mr Burroughs by saying that the Unionist Party had not had much experience of fighting by-elections.

The Ambassador remonstrated that surely that Party had decades of experience behind it.

Mr Langdon intervened to suggest that the Constituency Associations should be blamed.

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The Ambassador repeated that the Unionist Party could not evade responsibility.

Mr Burroughs suggested that the Unionist Party had become over-confident as regards the South Antrim By-Election.

The Ambassador retorted that they just did not know their business. He added that Chichester-Clark might mean well, but he was not able for his job.

Mr Burroughs reverted to the point about the Constituency Association being responsible, but went on to suggest that reforms in the Unionist Party's procedures were under way, and would solve that problem.

The Ambassador remarked that the hearts of the Unionist Party generally were not in the right place.

Mr Burroughs replied that it depended on what one meant by "the right place".

The Ambassador insisted, however, that the position had now become very grave - graver, in fact, than it had been at any time since last August.

Mr Burroughs interjected "potentially grave".

The Ambassador replied "no, actually grave".

Mr Burroughs replied to the effect that it could be grave, but it could also be very hopeful.

The Ambassador repeated that the selection of Morgan as a candidate had been a very wrong decision.

Mr Burroughs retorted "by the Constituency Association".

The Ambassador blamed the Government for endorsing Morgan's selection.

Mr Burroughs replied emphatically "Morgan is a better chap than you suppose". The Government had calculated they could win the South Antrim seat, but a swing had occurred, not to the Right, but to the Left. It was the Moderates who had failed to support Morgan.

The Ambassador repeated that that merely proved that the choice of Morgan had been a very bad one.

Mr Burroughs replied that there was not a wealth of talent, after all from which to choose a candidate.

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Sir Edward Peck concurred.

The Ambassador said he would like to be very blunt about this. He did not know Morgan, but he had seen him on TV. Morgan had undermined O'Neill and was (in his opinion) "very dim". In putting him up as a candidate the Government had made a very bad decision.

Mr Burroughs remarked that they were kicking themselves now. He confessed that he, himself, had not foreseen the swing to the Left.

The Ambassador (quoting from his file) referred to the remarks by Mr Burroughs at their previous meeting to the effect that the swing to the Right was among Constituency Association officials rather than among the voters.

Mr Burroughs replied that he still believed that to be true, especially in the rural areas, and, particularly, in the West. Since their last meeting, however, there had been a further swing to the Right.

The Ambassador inquired whether he would now concede that, generally speaking, not just in the two constituencies in which the by-elections had taken place, but throughout the area, there was now a swing to the Right among the voters.

Mr Burroughs replied that he would be inclined to agree. He went on to suggest, however, that the opinion expressed on this subject by the Ambassador at the previous meeting had been "a prediction which turned out right, rather than a statement of facts".

The Ambassador retorted that the fact was that, in general, his information had been better than theirs, all along the line, for example, last August, about Easter, and now about this question of the swing to the Right.

Sir Edward Peck intervened to question the Ambassador's statement as regards Easter, but then went on to confirm that there was a great need to keep up the reform programme.

The Ambassador made a very firm declaration of Dublin's position on this question of pressing ahead with the reform programme in the face of Paisley's double victory.

Mr Burroughs agreed that the Stormont Government must at all costs stick to its reform programme (rather than try to steal Paisley's clothes). He commented that he had reason to hope they would do so. Some recent remarks by Faulkner, for example, would, he hoped, sound encouraging to the Ambassador.

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The Ambassador interjected that he did not trust Faulkner.

Mr Burroughs retorted "that's another wrong label". He went on to refer to "leaks" from Stormont Cabinet meetings which portrayed Faulkner as being always absolutely loyal to Chichester-Clark, and went on to say that the same thing was true of Faulkner's private conversations.

Mr Langdon intervened to express his support for Faulkner, who had, he declared, the most unpopular job in Stormont.

The Ambassador inquired next what effect he (Burroughs) considered the advent of Paisley and Beattie to Stormont would have on the Stormont Government.

Mr Burroughs replied that one would be apprehensive of a tendency to trim sails on the reform programme, but on the other hand, Paisley's victory had had the effect of convincing the Unionist Government of the absolute necessity for purging the Unionist Party of the rebels within it.

The Ambassador then inquired what he thought of the Alliance Party.

Mr Burroughs replied that he considered it "a nuisance". Despite its claims, it had very little real or substantial support, and was, therefore, "politically, a nonsense". The Alliance Party, he continued, emphatically were "making the Chichester-Clarks of this world face in both directions".

The Ambassador then said he must be brutally frank. The fact was that he and they saw things quite differently - perhaps because their information was coming from different sources. His people thought the situation was much more explosive than their people seemed to think. Was there a tendency, he inquired, to keep the situation simmering - rather than have it boil over - because of the General Election?

Mr Burroughs appeared to be trying to evade the point. He agreed the situation was explosive, but inquired "how explosive"?

The Ambassador, however, persisted, pointing out that Mr Burroughs had not answered the question he had asked him. He then repeated the question.

Mr Burroughs "you mean in London?"

The Ambassador "Yes"

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Mr Burroughs "because of the General Election?"

He then said that everyone must try all the harder, because of the General Election, to study this problem objectively, and get the facts right. He went on to say that he would reveal some secrets which, perhaps, he should not mention. He had, in fact, he continued, gone to see Sir Burke-Trend, and with the latter's consent, had then approached the Conservative Party Whip who had assured him there was a bipartisan policy on this whole question of the North of Ireland. Both parties are convinced that the reform programme must be pushed forward, irrespective of the General Election.

The Ambassador reverted to the point that his information had proved to be better than theirs.

Mr Burroughs inquired rather defensively what more, in that case, the Ambassador would suggest that the British Government could do at this stage.

The Ambassador replied that they had all the facts at their disposal, they were experienced and on top of the problem, so that it was up to them to see for themselves what must be done next.

Sir Edward Peck interjected "but you have just said that your information is better than ours".

Mr Langdon made a remark to the same effect.

Mr Burroughs however intervened to say there was going to be trouble about the Central Housing Authority -

The Ambassador interjected that he would be coming to that point and would have some other suggestions to make. First, however, he wished to make the point that there was every reason to fear the reform programme was slowing down and was no longer being pressed.

Mr Burroughs sought to rebut this suggestion by referring to the many recent statements by Stormont and British spokesmen insisting that the reforms must go on. He then added that many reforms were already on the Statute Book for all to see.

The Ambassador retorted that having reforms on the Statute Book was not enough. Putting them into operation was much more important.

Mr Burroughs replied "when people say this to me, I always ask them to tell me which of the reforms are not being implemented".

The Ambassador (reading from his file) mentioned:

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the Special Powers Acts (which were to have been repealed) the legislation which was to have been introduced to prohibit religious incitement -

Mr Burroughs intervened to say that the Special Powers Acts had their uses sometimes (in a favourable sense). He added that they were not yet clear as to what could be put in their place.

The Ambassador retorted "but would you have Special Powers Acts in your island"?

Mr Burroughs, ignoring that question, went on to say that they had discovered that they might need to rely on the Special Powers at times to protect the Minority against possible attacks by the Right.

Mr Langdon intervened to explain that the Army had, in fact, occasionally had to rely on the Special Powers Acts.

Sir Edward Peck then intervened to say that since the Army had come in (the Ambassador would surely agree) the SP Acts had not been used as they had been previously.

The Ambassador "Surely in terms of human rights - in terms of world opinion -"

Mr Burroughs "I hope you won't press this further just now -"

The Ambassador "Why not?"

Mr Burroughs "For the reasons I mentioned"

The Ambassador "What reasons"

Mr Burroughs "We may have to use them against the Right"

Mr Langdon intervened at this stage to say he wished to make the point - and not just as a debating point - that the Republic must surely have experience of occasions when it was necessary to intern people without trial, for reasons known to them all.

The Ambassador indicated that he took the point, but went on to inquire what precisely Mr Burroughs meant.

Mr Burroughs said that the question of repealing the Special Powers Acts was actively under review. Indeed, some Stormont Ministers had been pressing him to get on with it, since it was London, not Belfast, which had been holding this thing up.

The Ambassador "London"?

Mr Burroughs "Yes".

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The Ambassador reverted to the point that the time-factor was critical and the situation was explosive, more explosive, perhaps, than those in that room realised.

Sir Edward Peck intervened to inquire whether the Ambassador could tell them how they could proceed.

The Ambassador said that his Minister might want to come over to London soon to pursue the matter with Mr Thomson. Reverting to the Human Rights aspect, however, he said he must be blunt and must point out -

Mr Burroughs "we take your point. We plead Bureaucratic Delay".

The Ambassador, on a new tack, pointed out that the Home Secretary had undertaken to introduce legislation to prohibit religious incitement, but suggested that there had been "backsliding" on this question.

Mr Langdon intervened to say that the October communiqué had contained a reference to this subject, and Stormont had undertaken to review legislation on this topic.

The Ambassador said that his briefing suggested that a Bill had been drafted.

Mr Langdon intervened to deny that he had ever seen such a Bill.

Mr Burroughs adopted the same attitude.

The Ambassador repeated that he understood that the Heads of a Bill, at least, had been prepared, and presumably circulated. It appeared to him, however, that London was no longer pressing Stormont to introduce legislation on this subject.

Mr Burroughs denied this suggestion, and went on to say the problem would be to work out appropriate wording which would be enforceable to find the right formula.

Mr Langdon intervened to say that, as far as he knew, it had been agreed in the communiqué that London and Belfast would keep in touch as regards reviewing this matter. There were other matters also which were being kept under joint review, e.g. allegations about discrimination in the granting of Government contracts.

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Mr Burroughs remarked that they had experienced great difficulty in drafting enforceable wording for the racial discrimination legislation in Britain - a problem which was in reality much less difficult and complex than the problem of religious discrimination in the North of Ireland.

Mr Langdon interjected that there were "technical difficulties".

Mr Burroughs added that it was a question of the Parliamentary Draftsman being unable to find the appropriate wording.

The Ambassador "is that really the position".

Mr Burroughs "Yes - in effect" -

The Ambassador suggested that it seemed extraordinary that a Bill of some kind could not be drafted to get the matter moving. Such a Bill could be improved later.

Mr Langdon replied that it would be possible, of course, "to go through the motions of introducing a Bill", but what they wanted was to draft effective legislation.

The Ambassador suggested that surely that was not so difficult.

Sir Edward Peck "Its hard to legislate against Sin".

The Ambassador "No, against Injustice".

Sir Edward Peck changed the subject by reverting to the Ambassador's remark that his Minister might wish to come to London for a further discussion.

The Ambassador confirmed that such was the case, adding that his Minister was very concerned, much more concerned than they appeared to be.

The Ambassador next raised the question of C.S. gas, mentioning that he had been reading over the week-end how much damage it could do to the lungs, liver, eyes, etc.

Mr Burroughs interjected "In the Sunday Times"

The Ambassador insisted that there was an urgent need to publish Part II of the Himsworth Report.

Mr Burroughs said there would be a Parliamentary Question on the following day which would, he thought, furnish some information on that subject.

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The Ambassador said that Dublin's view was that the use of C.S. gas should be stopped until Part II of that report became available (not that they necessarily believed that Part II would prove to have been worth waiting for).

Mr Burroughs suggested that their information was that C.S. gas was not dangerous, except when used in very confined spaces which were lacking in ventilation, and it was unlikely that C.S. gas would be used in such conditions in the North of Ireland.

Sir Edward Peck intervened to suggest that the dangers from the gas had to be balanced against the dangers from shooting.

The Ambassador inquired whether the use of C.S. gas in the North of Ireland had been confined to cases in which its use was absolutely unavoidable.

Mr Burroughs replied by commenting that had the troops used C.S. gas on the first night of the Ballymurphy trouble, trouble might have been avoided on the second and third nights.

The Ambassador inquired whether they had any idea when Part II would be published.

Mr Burroughs indicated that he had not.

The Ambassador then inquired whether its publication was being evaded.

Mr Burroughs replied that he really did not know.

The Ambassador persisted, whereupon -

Mr Burroughs suggested that someone from the Embassy should talk to the Disarmament Department of the F & C.O. since they, themselves, were not the experts on the subject.

The Ambassador then recalled that Mr Burroughs had said at their previous meeting that there were people in Derry who preferred to stay on the dole rather than accept employment offered to them. Dublin, he continued, contested that view very strongly. (He then went on to quote the figures about employment by Dupont which had been furnished by the Department). He went on to inquire whether the alleged difficulties in finding employees had been brought to the attention of the Derry Commission.

Mr Burroughs responded that they had, of course, since employment problems were one of the particular pre-occupations of that Commission. He continued by saying that the problem had been

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experienced, in particular, among the unemployed in the older age groups (but not among the school-leaving age group). If, however, one had been unemployed for years and years -

The Ambassador intervened to inquire whether by "older age groups", people over 55 were meant.

Mr Burroughs replied that, on the contrary, he meant much younger age groups, even those aged 22 and over. This was a very tragic problem. It appeared that in some cases their fathers had never been employed, and now they themselves were unemployed, and always had been.

The Ambassador inquired whether this problem was experienced in Derry only.

Mr Burroughs replied that it was experienced also in other places, e.g. in Antrim where he personally knew a firm which was obliged to bring in "contract workers" from outside the area, although the firm was surrounded in Antrim by unemployed people. Derry, however, was the worst hit.

The Ambassador inquired about the mobility of labour within the North of Ireland.

Mr Burroughs replied that the unemployed of Derry prefer to emigrate rather than to move to other places in the North of Ireland, e.g., Craigavon, in search of work.

The Ambassador next inquired whether it was, perhaps, a question of the wages which were offered being too low. Or was it a question of new skills being required.

Mr Burroughs replied in the negative, adding that the Derry Commission was now involved fully in trying to introduce new industries to create more employment. Not many industries were responding, however. Furthermore, in one case of which he was aware, in which Derry workers had been treated in a dictatorial way which British workers should not stand for, they had seemed to respond well to such treatment. However, the management of the factory concerned (Donaldson) had taken their profits, closed down the factory and disappeared.

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The Ambassador then broached the question of Proportional Representation. There had never been a greater need, he said, for an electoral system which would reflect the views of the non-extremists. The election of Beattie had emphasised that point. He had reason to think some thought was being given to introducing PR of the Single Transferrable Vote. But Dublin was insistent that it must be PR in the real sense (not the STV System), and it must be given urgent consideration. Perhaps it could be recommended for adoption by the Crowther Commission.

Mr Burroughs mentioned that he had met with Austin Currie on 23/4/'70 and the latter had advocated PR also. He himself found the arguments for it persuasive, and he had, therefore, asked that a thorough study be made of the various forms and their likely effects. He thought it would help to solve the problem of fixing new Local Government boundaries. It should help to prevent gerrymandering. He, himself, thought it should be considered favourably.

The Ambassador inquired what they thought about it themselves. Mr Langdon intervened to say that Lubbock had raised it during a Commons debate on the North of Ireland, and the Home Secretary had indicated that he would not feel inhibited from asking Stormont to consider it, provided he, himself, (the Home Secretary) was persuaded of its advantages. However, as he was not so persuaded, he would not recommend it to Stormont.

Mr Langdon went on to say that it could be argued that the abolition of PR for Stormont elections during the Twenties had made no difference to the results.

Mr Burroughs intervened to say that he could see that it might possibly be very helpful in the Local Government elections if not in the elections for Stormont. He confessed that he had not studied it enough to be able to say much more about it.

The Ambassador insisted it would be very good not only for Local Government elections, but also for Stormont elections. He then went on to review the change for the worst which had been taking place so rapidly in recent weeks, and must be dealt with without delay.

Mr Burroughs interjected that he must challenge the undue emphasis on Beattie's victory in the by-election. He repeated that there had been a swing of only 2% to the Right, and it was the swing to the Left, i.e. towards the Moderates which had defeated Morgan.

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(Sir Edward Peck mentioned at this stage that he had another appointment - at 4.30 p.m. - with Mr George Thomson, his Minister, so that he must ask to be excused soon. This development effectively concluded the discussions, so that it was not possible to raise other points such as, e.g., the question of political prisoners).

The Ambassador, concluding the discussion, expressed his appreciation of their meeting him, and remarked that he hoped that he had not been too blunt.

Mr Burroughs "Not at all. I, myself, am obliged to be much blunter in Belfast for 12 hours every day".

The Ambassador inquired from Mr Burroughs as they moved across the room how firmly Chichester-Clark now was in his seat.

Mr Burroughs replied "not firmly enough. We shall have to work hard to keep him there".

Sir Edward Peck "He is the best man we have got at present".

The Ambassador "I think he is very insecure".

Mr Burroughs "fairly insecure".

The Ambassador, when taking his farewell of Sir Edward Peck, said they would be meeting again in another month or so, presumably, but perhaps sooner.

Sir Edward Peck suggested early in May, in view of the impending holidays.

The Ambassador mentioned he would be seeing his Minister next day in Brussels, and after that might be requesting an appointment for his Minister in London to resume these discussions.

Sir Edward Peck noted this remark.

Kevin Rush

Kevin Rush

April 29, 1970