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ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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11 December 1972

*Recd S.S.
given to P.S. to Sec, & Fin
at 5.10 (at Sec's request)
D. 1/12*

Dear Stokes

As arranged, I enclose briefing material on the political aspects of the Northern Ireland Assembly Fund supplementary estimate.

Yours sincerely

R. Stokes, Esq.
Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Dublin 2.

Received from Foreign Affairs on 11/12/72

Notes in Connection with Grant-in-Aid to Assembly N.I. Fund

1. On 5th October, 1971 the non-Unionist public representatives in Northern Ireland announced their intention of establishing an alternative assembly to Stormont from which they had withdrawn three months earlier. In that connection they published the Constitution of the "Assembly of the Northern Irish People", of which Article 16 read as follows:

"The Assembly is authorised to receive donations and to raise funds by such means as it may deem appropriate".

The Taoiseach's comments on the establishment of the new Assembly are contained in Annex 1.

2. In the course of his broadcast to the nation on 31st January, 1972 (i.e. after the incidents of "Bloody Sunday" in Derry) the Taoiseach said:

"Subject to the approval of Dáil Éireann, the Government have also decided to provide out of public moneys finance through suitable channels for political and peaceful action by the minority in Northern Ireland, designed to obtain their freedom from Unionist misgovernment"

Speaking next day (1st February) in Dáil Éireann the Taoiseach repeated this promise when he said:

"As I said in my broadcast statement last night, subject to the approval of the House, the Government have also decided to provide out of public moneys finance through suitable channels for political and peaceful action by the minority in Northern Ireland, designed to obtain their freedom from Unionist misgovernment".

3. On 21st February, 1972 the Assembly of the Northern Irish People made the following announcement:

"We ask from you the means to give this Assembly such a voice as shall be heard. We ask the means to lessen the burden of distress laid upon helpless people by a power which extorts, through fear and mistrust, that which it cannot ask in justice. We ask the means to give people some measure of hope, comfort and direction

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at a time when the law has weighted its scales to set Irishmen against Irishmen.

Towards these ends the Assembly of the Northern Irish People has instituted the Assembly NI Fund to assist those deprived of human and civil rights in Northern Ireland, and has appointed the under-signed to be the two trustees of the Fund.

John Hume
President of the Executive Council
Assembly of the Northern Ireland People

Roderick O'Connor"

4. The Statements by the Taoiseach quoted at paragraph 2 above led to a number of Dáil Questions about financial assistance for the minority in Northern Ireland. These Questions and replies thereto are contained in Annex 2.

5. The texts of a Parliamentary Question and Answer in the British House of Commons on 9th March, 1972 on this subject are contained in Annex 3.

6. It will be noted that whereas the Taoiseach's statements on 31st January and 1st February, 1972 referred to the provision of official funds "for political and peaceful action by the minority in Northern Ireland designed to obtain their freedom from Unionist misgovernment" there was a change from political to humanitarian emphasis in subsequent references to financial assistance, even before direct rule. For example, on 15th March, 1972 the Taoiseach said, in the course of a reply to a Dáil Question that "the aims of this fund are humanitarian and a contribution to it would not warrant representations from the British Government and none have been received." (As will be evident from Annex 3, a P.Q. was tabled in the British House of Commons six days previously asking the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs "if he will make a protest to the Republic of Ireland Government about their intention to provide funds for political operations inside a part of the United Kingdom").

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A point to be kept in mind in regard to the proposed Grant-in-Aid is the reply given at Westminster to the P.Q. referred to in the preceding paragraph. Part of that reply reads as follows:

"We are given to understand that the donation may be used for charitable purposes for individuals in need in Northern Ireland. No decision on formal representations will be taken until the exact purposes for which the money is to be used, and the channels through which it is to be given, have been made clear".

8. The Taoiseach said in the Dáil on 3rd May, 1972 in answer to a Dáil Question that private benevolence was coping well with personal financial hardships arising from the situation in the North; that the Irish Red Cross Society was contributing a considerable amount in cash and kind; and that in those circumstances Exchequer assistance was not envisaged. If the current argument for a Government contribution is humanitarian (and this appears to be the best approach to the problem) the Government could possibly be open to the charge that it is being inconsistent, especially since the situation would be expected to improve rather than deteriorate because of direct rule.

9. If a Ministerial statement has to be made in the Dáil in connection with the Grant-in-Aid it might be as brief as possible, merely stating that the Grant-in-Aid is the fulfilment of a promise made in the Dáil earlier this year; that it is for humanitarian purposes and that the most suitable channel is the Assembly NI Fund.

Annex 15th October, 1971

Statement issued by the Government Information Bureau
on behalf of the Taoiseach.

Asked to comment on the setting up of the Assembly of
the Northern Irish People the Taoiseach said today:-

This Assembly, with able, responsible and moderate
leadership, and whose members are dedicated to the
achievement of their aims by non-violent means, can
provide a focal point for all non-unionists in Northern
Ireland who seek to make real and lasting political,
economic and social progress.

I hope that initiatives will now be taken to create
conditions which will enable discussions to take place
involving these men, who have established their political
leadership, while they are still in a position to influence
the situation.

DAILY QUESTIONSNorthern Financial Assistance.15 Feb.

Q. 1. Dr. O'Connell asked the Taoiseach if he is yet in a position to elaborate on his statement that the Government intend to provide financial assistance for political aid to the minority in Northern Ireland.

A. The Taoiseach: This matter is under active consideration at present and I hope to discuss it with Deputy Cosgrave and Deputy Corish very soon. A suitable statement will be made in the House in due course.

Northern Ireland Political Opposition.15 Mar.

Q. 1. Dr. O'Connell asked the Taoiseach if he will indicate whether the Westminster Government have made any official representation to him regarding the Irish Government's intention to provide aid for the Northern Opposition.

A. The Taoiseach: I presume that the Deputy is referring to the "Fund to Assist Those Deprived of Human and Civil Rights in Northern Ireland" recently instituted by the Assembly of the Northern Irish people. The aims of this fund are humanitarian and a contribution to it would not warrant representations from the British Government and none have been received.

Relations with Northern Ireland Opposition23 Mar

Q. 1. Mr. J. O'Leary asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the present position of relations between the Government and the opposition parties in Northern Ireland as clarification is necessary in view of recent statements by the Chief Whip of the SDLP.

A. The Taoiseach: The following is an extract from a statement made by the Social Democratic and Labour Party on the 11th March, 1972:

The party also discussed the question of our relations with the government and parties in the South, with particular reference to recent statements by Mr. Devlin. The party fully accepts that Mr. Devlin made it absolutely clear that his statements on this question were purely personal ones and did not commit his party colleagues.

For the purpose of clarification we would re-state our position in regard to relations with all parties in the South. We believe that on the Northern question we should maintain good relations with both the Government and opposition in the South and will continue to meet the government and opposition leaders in order to produce a more frequent consultations with them all will be necessary in the coming days.

Financial Aid to North25 Apr.

Q. 1. Dr. O'Connell asked the Taoiseach the amount, if any, of Government authorised financial aid which has been made available to Opposition political parties in the North in the period 31st January to 15th April, 1972.

A. The Taoiseach: No official funds have been made available to Opposition political parties in Northern Ireland.

Northern Distress Relief27 Apr.

Q. 7. Mr. Blaney asked the Minister for Finance what assistance has been provided in the past six months by the Exchequer for the relief of distress in the Six Counties; and whether money for any other purpose in the Six Counties has been provided during the same period stating the amount, if any, and to whom it was paid.

A. Minister for Finance (Mr. Colley): No assistance has been provided by the Exchequer for the relief of distress in the Six Counties in the past six months, nor has money been provided for any other purpose in the Six Counties during this period.

Mr. Blaney: Was it not suggested here at some stage that moneys were to be provided? If they are to be provided, will the Dáil have an opportunity of discussing this before the moneys are provided?

Mr. Colley: There was a reference to the provision of this money when the Taoiseach answered a question on this the other day but no such moneys have been provided as yet, at any rate.

Mr. Blaney: Is the Minister not aware that such funds for the relief of distress are more needed now than, perhaps at any other time during the past three years? Perhaps the Minister would consider favourably the suggestion that some assistance should be made available from the Exchequer or that there should be an opportunity given in the House to consider whether it is necessary or not.

Mr. Colley: The Deputy will appreciate that although the question and the reply relate to money from the Exchequer there are other sources, including the Red Cross, making money available. As regards a discussion on this matter, that is a matter in the first instance for the Taoiseach, as Leader of the House, and for the Whips of the parties as to the business to be ordered.

Dr. FitzGerald: Could the Minister say to whom the Red Cross is making money available?

Dr. Cruise-O'Brien: I think the House is left in some confusion as a result of the Taoiseach's statement and the Minister's statement just now. Do the Government intend to provide money for the relief of distress or not, and, if they do not, why does the Taoiseach indicate that they do?

Mr. Colley: I think that is a separate question. The question was: has money been provided.

Dr. FitzGerald: It is relevant.

Mr. L'Estrange: Is it true that after the Taoiseach had made this announcement that money would be provided the British Government

rapped this Government on the knuckles and that that is why it is not being provided?

Mr. Colley: I am certainly not aware of the truth of the allegation made by the Deputy in the first part of his supplementary. As regards the second part, it should be obvious even to Deputy L'Estrange that there have been certain changes in the situation since then.

Northern Relief.

3 May

Q. 3. Mr. Blaney asked the Taoiseach whether, in view of the continuing distress and hardship being experienced by many women and children in the Six Counties as a result of the troubles there, he will make assistance available from the Exchequer; and, if not, why.

A. The Taoiseach: My information is that private benevolence is coping well with the personal financial hardships deriving from the Northern troubles: the Irish Red Cross Society is contributing a considerable amount in cash and kind. In these circumstances Exchequer assistance is not envisaged.

Mr. Blaney: While I do not doubt that the information he may have would indicate what he has expressed, would the Taoiseach be open to conviction that need is very great and, in fact, greater now than it may ever have been due to the fact that the view has got around that there is less need now than there was? This is not true and the money coming from various sources is not now as great as it was when pressures seemed to be higher. The need is greater now than at any time in the last three years. If it is possible to bring that information to the attention of the Taoiseach will he give it consideration?

The Taoiseach: I have had personal and other contacts and discussions with responsibly organised groups who look after these matters. I shall maintain that contact and if at any time they wish to discuss these matters I am available to do so. Candidly, I have not got that message from them that the Deputy suggests, that there is more need now than there was.

Mr. Blaney: There is and I shall try to get that through to the Taoiseach through some of these groups.

Annex 3Question in British House of Commons 9th March 1972.

Mr. Stratton Mills asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a protest to the Republic of Ireland Government about their declared intention to provide funds for political operations inside a part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Anthony Royle: We are in touch with the Irish authorities, who have not as yet made any funds available. We are given to understand that the donation may be used for charitable purposes for individuals in need in Northern Ireland. No decision on formal representations will be taken until the exact purposes for which the money is to be used, and the channels through which it is to be given, have been made clear.