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AMBASAD NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

17 Grosvenor Place  
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November 2nd, 1973

Dear Secretary

I saw the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for three-quarters of an hour this morning. He had with him his Private Secretary, Mr. Woodfield, Deputy Head of the Northern Ireland Office, and Mr. Kelvin White of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. At the outset, Mr. Whitelaw said that he was naturally disturbed at what happened at Mountjoy but he asked me to convey to the Taoiseach and to the Minister his personal sympathy and understanding. This incident was no reflection on our security arrangements generally and it was the sort of thing that could just as easily happen in the North. If the matter were not so serious, one could look on the bright side and say this was quite a sporting venture.

The incident has undoubtedly given a boost to the Provisionals. It has also given ammunition to the extreme Protestant side and particularly to people like Paisley and Craig. The Secretary of State said we could feel assured that he will do everything possible to promote confidence not only in our security arrangements but in our determination to put down violence. It would greatly help him in present circumstances, and would indeed be presentationally valuable, if we could hasten the further hearing of the case against [REDACTED] who has been on bail since his appearance in one of our courts in July on explosives charges. [REDACTED] is a most dangerous man and is one of the most active organisers of I.R.A. cells in the North. I said I would pass this information on urgently.

On the Minister's recent visit to Belfast, about which I said I understood there were ruffled feathers here, Mr. Whitelaw admitted that this was true but that his information now is that the visit probably did some good. I said that prior to the visit, the Minister had made contacts in all

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- 2 -

directions in the North and that the assessment of the effectiveness of the visit which he had subsequently received was indeed very favourable. The Minister had received excellent security cover from the R.U.C. during the visit and would be writing to them to express his appreciation. Mr. Whitelaw said he was very glad to hear this. I also gave the Secretary of State details of the Minister's contacts while in Belfast.

Mr. Whitelaw told me that he has no objection at all to these visits but the recent one could, from the point of view of timing, well have been a mistake. It would be a great help if, in the case of future similar visits, he could be personally apprised in good time beforehand. He thought it very important that the Minister's contacts on the Unionist side should be the right ones and, on this, he may be in a position to give advice as he knows the scene so well. There are some who profess to be moderate Unionists but who are only too ready to double-cross. I said I had no details of the Minister's contacts in this area but I happened to know that Peter McLachlan is well known to him. Mr. Whitelaw said that Mr. McLachlan is fully trusted and would be a very useful contact for the Minister.

Mr. Whitelaw then appealed for our continued help in influencing a moderate attitude on the part of the SDLP. The six members of the Party with whom he has been dealing are very moderate but "the Party has its tail". It could equally be said that the Faulkner group has its tail. Mr. Faulkner's elbow room should not be over-estimated. What is certain is that he sincerely wants to see the Constitution work and it is encouraging that the SDLP are now quite prepared to have him as Chief of the Executive.

The talks on the Council of Ireland have gone well so far but the hard bargaining stage in relation to the functions of the Council has not yet been reached. These talks are to be resumed on Monday next. The other great problem is the Faulkner stipulation that he must have a majority of Unionists on the Executive. While Mr. Whitelaw can nominate two members, his impression at this stage is that this may prove to be a remedy of last resort which may have



- 3 -

unpalatable results. I mentioned the point put to me by Stratton Mills a few days ago about the attaching of the Chief Legal Officer to the Executive. Mr. Whitelaw was aware of this idea and thought that it, too, might be open to the same objection. He would, however, have to see how things progressed.

As the possibility of agreement comes nearer, one of his great problems is that the SDLP seem to be devoid of any idea of the practical problems involved in the setting up of a structure for Northern Ireland and in the subsequent running of departments. They are all too ready to talk freely on generalities but when the discussion comes to the stage of practical issues, their tendency is to suggest that "we should leave that over until we have reached general agreement". Any help or guidance which we could give to the SDLP on the need on their part to face practical issues would be greatly welcomed. Mr. Whitelaw is to have discussions with the Parties on Tuesday next on the practicalities of running departments.

While admitting that there are many hurdles yet to be overcome, Mr. Whitelaw is, nevertheless, reasonably optimistic. He believes that agreement in principle on the formation of an Executive can, <sup>given</sup> giving ~~him~~ a measure of goodwill on all sides, be reached but he doubts if this can now be expected to happen before the end of November. If agreement in principle on the Executive were reached by then, this would not necessarily exclude the possibility of having the Tripartite Conference in December. Mr. Whitelaw stressed that Unionist opinion would be greatly helped if thinking on possible machinery between North and South to deal with the question of terrorism could be advanced. The Common Law Enforcement Area idea seems to be a good one and the sooner we could clarify our minds on this the better. I mentioned, at this point, our contacts here on the question of clarification of the statement issued in Belfast by Mr. Whitelaw on the 19th October. If we could have early clarification of that statement, then we would be able to get our ideas on paper quickly. Mr. Whitelaw confined himself to expressing the hope that Dublin and London could make early progress on this.

I then told the Secretary of State about the Minister's



- 4 -

stop-over in London next week and I asked if there would be any possibility of his receiving the Minister either on the afternoon of Wednesday next or on Thursday morning. Neither of these times is a possibility. Mr. Whitelaw will be going direct from Belfast on Wednesday to address a bye-election meeting in Berwick. He will travel on the sleeper train<sup>lv</sup> at night to London to attend the Cabinet meeting on Thursday morning. Mr. Whitelaw will, however, keep Thursday afternoon free for the moment as he would greatly welcome an exchange of views with the Minister. I have telephoned the Department on this point in the hope that it may be possible to set up an appointment.

Yours sincerely

*A. J. Sullivan*

Ambassador

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