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CENTRAL BANK OF IRELAND

To... D Ó Súilleabhain Date... 31/10/75

Rinne mé seo don BBC (Schools) N.I.
B'fheidir gur mhaith leat é chur ar
an troidán cú!

le gach dea-ghnó

[Signature] 31/10

The First Visit to Stormont, 14 January 1965, as recalled by Ken Whitaker.

Mr. Malley
Mr. O'Donnell
Mr. Stokes
Mr. V. Kinnear
Mr. MacArthur
Mr. Mulgrew
Mr. Ryan
Mr. O'Donnell
Mr. Sullivan
Mr. Rode

Terence O'Neill in his Autobiography has described the events leading up to the meeting in Stormont of the two Prime Ministers - Seán Lemass and himself - but, as is only natural, there are a couple of points on which his account needs some slight correction. He supposes that I was surprised when Jim Malley brought me the invitation to pass on to Mr. Lemass. I was, in fact, more delighted than surprised as I had been hoping for such a move for quite some time. Terence O'Neill also supposes that Seán Lemass was surprised when I brought Jim Malley into his office to repeat the invitation in person. He did not know that, as a good public servant, I had made sure to tell Mr. Lemass beforehand and, indeed, to confirm that his answer would be 'yes'. Indeed, he was so quick to welcome the invitation that I ventured to remind him of the desirability of consulting his Government colleagues and he mentioned the matter to the Minister for External Affairs on the 'phone while I was still with him. All this had happened before Jim Malley was introduced.

Apart from the excitement of the visit itself, there was the minor thrill - of a James Bond kind - of making sure that the secrecy desired by the Northern Premier was observed. He wanted the news to break only at 1 o'clock, when Mr. Lemass and I would already have arrived at Stormont. So far as I was concerned I decided that the best way to keep a secret was to tell no one. Even the police weren't let know until the morning of the day itself and they were to provide an escort from Dundalk to the Border.

X Mr. Lemass's driver wasn't told where we were going until we sat into the car. I said nothing at home as I had six children, some at school, some at University, and I was afraid one of them might blurt it out during the morning. I told my wife, of course, the evening before. I had arranged that a police car would call for me at 9.15 a.m., by which time the children should all have left the house for school or college. You can imagine my dismay when there was a knock on the halldoor about a quarter to nine and one of my sons came in breathless to say that there was "a Gárda car at the door and they were looking for Daddy". I went out quickly and told them to park around the block and come back in half an hour. I forget what explanation I gave the children but they seemed relieved that I wasn't being arrested.

When I was alone with Mr. Lemass on the drive to the Border you might expect we would be discussing the historic visit and what might come of it. I don't think we speculated much about this or that we chatted about any frivolous matters, either. Mr. Lemass was not much given to small talk and I also am better at listening. I do recall, however, that we discussed the American system of Government, on which Mr. Lemass had lately read some books.

At the Border, where Jim Malley joined us, we parted with our own escort and an RUC escort took over. We got to Stormont just at 1 o'clock and had lunch with Terence O'Neill and his wife in Stormont House. The other guests were Cecil Bateman, Secretary to the Northern Ireland cabinet, Ken Bloomfield, the Assistant Secretary and Jim Malley. Our hosts thought the occasion worthy of champagne. The atmosphere was most friendly. I imagine Dr. Paisley's worst fears would be confirmed if I were to say that the red wine we drank was Chateauneuf du Pape!

X For the later Lynch visit Dr. Whitaker took the bus to Lough Begs & this variation from his usual habit was noticed that morning (by myself & others) & it was realized that that indicated another trip Northwards!

After lunch we walked up the hill to the Prime Minister's office, running into a barrage of photographers and press men at the door. We sat around the fire in the Prime Minister's office and discussed various possibilities of practical co-operation between North and South. A return visit to Dublin by Captain O'Neill was agreed in principle.

After this talk, which lasted about an hour, the party went back to the Premier's official residence, where Mrs. O'Neill gave us tea and Mr. Lemass was introduced to six or seven members of the Northern Ireland Cabinet including Messrs. Faulkner, Craig, Andrews and Kirk. If they were surprised, or doubtful about the visit, their courtesy did not allow them to show it. There was no further discussion after tea and good-byes were said about 5.00 p.m. We started back on the road to Dublin with new hope in our hearts. We had no presentment of the tragic events of 1969 and the years since.