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17 June 1975

OIFIG AN AIRE POIST AGUS TELEGRAFA
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH I
DUBLIN I

Private Secretary
Minister for Finance

Dear Private Secretary

— Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien, TD, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs
has asked me to forward the enclosed letter for the information
of your Minister.

Yours sincerely

(R Johnson)

Copy to Sec. Df.
12/1/6

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Comment by the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs on the Minister for Foreign Affairs' Memorandum of 11th June on the Northern Ireland situation.

1. While no explicit recommendation is made, the Foreign Affairs Memorandum clearly contemplates preparations for a "fall-out" position in the event of British withdrawal, and the fall-out position contemplated is a form of negotiated independence, (seen as the "least undesirable" development - para 10) in regard to which certain preliminary soundings might be taken now (para 11).
2. I would urge extreme caution about making any such moves for the reasons set out below:
 - (a) The document itself acknowledges (paragraph 4) that "indefinite direct rule does appear to offer better prospects for short-term peace in Northern Ireland than any of the other developments". For this Government to explore at this stage negotiated independence for Northern Ireland as a fall-back position would diminish the prospects of continued direct rule and would tend in effect to let the British "off the hook" by enabling them to withdraw in a favourable international climate.
 - (b) Neither we nor they could guarantee the results of withdrawal. It is in the highest degree unlikely that Loyalist agreement could be obtained either for the placing of Northern Ireland under UN trusteeship or for the positioning of an effective UN force in Northern Ireland (even assuming that such a force were available). Intrinsically - and in my belief inevitably - the dominant force in an independent Northern Ireland would be the Loyalists.

- (c) The Loyalists might be prepared to go to considerable lengths to secure an independent Northern Ireland by agreement, and they might even accept a dual system of guarantees by Britain and ourselves. They might also agree to a Bill of Rights for the minority. They would however (in my opinion) be certain to insist on effective majority control over security in the area.
- (d) The Loyalists might well wish to exercise restraint in an independent Northern Ireland and might at first try to treat the minority with consideration if only so as to retain a subsidy from Britain which would presumably be part of the deal.
- (e) However in the event of renewed IRA activity - which would be virtually certain within a Loyalist dominated independent Northern Ireland - Loyalist controlled security forces would certainly react no less drastically in relation to the minority population than the RUC did in 1969 in response to provocation then involving a much lower level of violence than would be likely now. The overwhelming probability is that, granted the withdrawal of British forces and control, and granted the experience of the last 5 years, the reaction of the Loyalist security forces would be very much more drastic, ruthless and efficient than was then the case, and that it would bear very hard indeed on the minority population.
- (f) In these conditions the British reaction would be unlikely to go further than cutting off the subsidy. The cutting off of the subsidy however might well not

inhibit the Loyalist repression, and might indeed have a quite contrary effect.

(g) In this situation it would be our own Government which would be called on to go to help the minority and it would be called on with all the more insistence, and indeed justice, because it had itself helped to set up, and had guaranteed, the entity which, if events take such a course as is indicated above, would have proved to be a trap.

(h) The Government, with the forces at its disposal, is not in a position to extend effective protection to the minority in the area, and an ineffective attempt on its part at armed intervention would precipitate even greater disasters than would have preceded the intervention. A full scale massacre of Catholics under these conditions is a possibility by no means to be ruled out.

(i) The Government would carry inescapably the responsibility for the sequence of events.

3. It is true that as remarked in paragraph 5 of the Foreign Affairs Memorandum "the IDU study on negotiated independence concludes that on optimistic assumptions, including agreement between both sections of the community, such a development would have beneficial consequences throughout the Island both politically and economically". Unfortunately optimistic assumptions have not had a happy fate in Northern Ireland, especially when they have included "agreement between both sections of the community". I suggest that the Government would

be extremely unwise to allow optimistic assumptions to influence its thinking to any degree in the present conjuncture.

4. It should also be noted that, while the IDU document on negotiated independence (Discussion Paper No 4) does discuss what might happen on certain "optimistic assumptions", it refrains from actually making such assumptions, and indeed strongly tends to discredit them. See in particular paragraph 1.8.2 (page 6) which treats agreement on a UN military presence as "unlikely" and especially paragraph 1.19.3 in the Conclusions (page 15) which finds the whole concept of an acceptable form of negotiated independence "difficult to envisage". Taken by itself, the Foreign Affairs Memorandum may give a somewhat misleading impression of the tendency of the IDU paper.
5. Experience suggests that there is not an indefinite gradation of subtle formulae which can be applied to Northern Ireland. The harsh reality appears to be that the choice lies between British rule and Protestant rule. Protestant rule is what would follow British withdrawal. From our point of view, Protestant rule - in view of the security methods which it would be likely to employ - is far worse than British rule.
6. In these circumstances it is quite clearly in our interest to do everything possible - which may not be very much - to try to ensure that the British stay, and it is certainly not in our interest to take steps which would make it easier for them to go.

7. I fear that the "exploratory discussions" with the SDLP, and especially the "initiative" with the British Government envisaged in paragraph 11 of the Foreign Affairs Memorandum, might have the effect of facilitating a British withdrawal which would not in practice be likely to be accompanied by the kind of effective guarantees, backed by UN forces, which, from the viewpoint of the Foreign Affairs Memorandum but not necessarily from that of the British Government, are essential to the "negotiated independence" package. The consequences of our stimulating negotiations about independence for Northern Ireland and then opposing such independence on terms demanded by the majority, ought to be weighed. These consequences could involve "retaliatory" action against life and property in this State, as well as against the minority in Northern Ireland.
8. If the above reasoning is accepted, it is in our interests to do everything possible to make it harder, not easier, for the British to withdraw. If this is to be our policy, I think we shall have to avow it and defend it publicly, despite the considerations urged in paragraph 4 of the Foreign Affairs Memorandum. We cannot privately urge the British to stay while publicly giving the impression that we would like them to go, or that we have no views on the matter.
9. It is true that they may go anyway. If they do indicate an intent to go - and not before - we should then have to look for fall-back positions, possibly a demand for a UN presence: something which is however by no means likely to offer any kind of effective solution. We should however, even then, resist being placed in a position of offering guarantees which we are not in a position to honour effectively.

10. The consequences inside Northern Ireland of British withdrawal without the fall-back arrangements envisaged by Foreign Affairs would be in my opinion no more and no less drastic than withdrawal with these arrangements. The difference, as far as the Government of the Republic is concerned, is that, in the event of withdrawal against our own advice, these dire consequences would have been something against which we had warned, and which we had tried, though unsuccessfully, to avert. In the case of a broken-down fall-back, which we had helped to construct, we ourselves would be regarded as among the chief architects of the disaster. I suggest that we should refrain very carefully from any move, however small initially, which might tend in that direction.

11. The Foreign Affairs Memorandum, paragraph ¹²4, says that the Government may "wish to give particular consideration to the views noted by the IDU in paragraph ³26 of Discussion Paper No 6". I think the Government should also give particular consideration to paragraph 4 of the same Discussion Paper and the report of the Military Study Group attached to that report as Appendix 5, and especially to Annex H to that Appendix, which contains at Section 8, page 6, certain comment of a domestic political nature.