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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To: Mr. W. Kirwan, Assistant Secretary

From: F. Murray.

Re Request for a meeting with the Taoiseach by Mr. Fergus McAteer,
Chairman, Irish Independence Party.

Please see Mr. Hare's submission underneath on the request received from Mr. Fergus McAteer, Chairman of the Irish Independence Party, for a meeting with the Taoiseach to discuss a document drawn up by the Central Executive of that Party in response to the Prior initiative.

I agree with the recommendation that the Taoiseach should not accede to Mr. McAteer's request largely on the grounds set out at 1 and 2 of the letter I received from Mr. Martin Burke of the Department of Foreign Affairs in November last. Even if there were no other complications involved, the IIP are not of sufficient significance to warrant their being received by the Taoiseach for a discussion on the Prior initiative. To accede to their request would be to put them on a par with the S.D.L.P. and this of course would be very damaging so far as relations with that party are concerned. The Department of Foreign Affairs are of this view also.

When this matter last arose our recommendation was that any meeting with the IIP should be at official level and should preferably be conducted by Department of Foreign Affairs officials in the course of contacts in Northern Ireland. While that recommendation stands, the Taoiseach might wish to consider whether, in the light of all of the factors involved, the IIP should be seen at political level. In this regard I wish to draw attention to the fact that Deputy Blaney wrote to the former Taoiseach on the 29th of October last asking that he receive a small deputation from the IIP "for a short discussion on recent developments in the Northern Ireland situation". The former Taoiseach, who did not, in the event, take any decision on the original request he received from the IIP for a meeting, did not respond to Deputy Blaney's request in this instance.

While we do not have to report contacts to the SDLP it is important just at present to bolster their role as many representatives of Northern nationalists - given narrowest concentration on their 20% or less proportion of the vote in NI.

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To:

-2-

From:

If the Taoiseach considers that the IIP should be met at Ministerial level, a possible solution would be for the Minister of State at this Department to meet a deputation from the Party at Leinster House in the course of normal Dail business. The Minister of State might be accompanied by an official from this Department and an official from the Department of Foreign Affairs for any such meeting. However, at official level, our recommendation remains as before - that the IIP should be met at official level only by Department of Foreign Affairs personnel.

Please see also Sunday Journal item dated 28 March which has come to hand since this note was dictated (copy attached).

A. Hurley

26th March, 1982.

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ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

6 November 1981
~~October~~

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2
DUBLIN 2

Mr. Frank Murray
Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Upper Merrion Street
Dublin 2.

Note
The then Taoiseach
did not respond
to the request from
Mr. McAteer
18.5.81

Dear Frank,

I refer to your letter of 12 October, 1981 asking for the Department's views on the request from Mr. Fergus McAteer of the Irish Independence Party (IIP) for a meeting with the Taoiseach to discuss the Party's thinking on the question of Northern Ireland. Mr. McAteer has since of course been replaced as leader of the IIP by Mr. Patrick Fahy.

I am enclosing herewith briefing material in relation to the IIP as follows:-

- (i) General briefing note;
- (ii) The IIP policy document entitled "Irish dialogue - The First Step";
- (iii) IIP performance in Westminster elections 1979;
- (iv) The IIP performance in the 1981 Local Government elections in Northern Ireland.

It would be this Department's view that the Taoiseach should not accede to the request for a meeting with him by the IIP for the following reasons:-

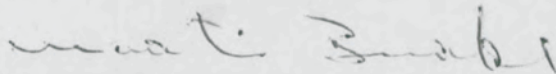
(1) While the IIP in their correspondence claim that they are the second largest anti-Unionist party in Northern Ireland this is of little significance. They secured less than 4% of the first preference vote and won only 21 out of the 526 seats in the May 1981 local elections. Given the background in which this election was fought, this performance hardly puts the IIP in the category of serious contenders for the minority vote in Northern Ireland or shows that their policies command widespread acceptability, despite the strained political climate of the time, in the minority community. In their election manifesto for the local elections it should also be noted that they gave 'unequivocal and unapologetic support' for the prisoners' five demands and their general activity seems to have been designed to embarrass and outflank the SDLP and seek to establish themselves as a credible minority voice. With such a small percentage of the first preference vote it is highly doubtful that they achieved this objective. It would be our view that the Taoiseach should not see the representatives of such a small political group. The Taoiseach has, of course, recently

met the Alliance Party which is a relatively small party having received only 8.7% of the first preference vote in the May 1981 election. However, the Alliance Party has a record of achieving a much wider degree of support (14.24% in 1977) but has suffered recently from the increasing level of polarisation between the two communities in Northern Ireland. It is also a moderate party seeking support from both sections of the community and the same objections do not apply to meetings between the Alliance Party and the Taoiseach as in relation to the IIP.

(2) It remains the view of this Department that it is highly desirable to maintain, in so far as it is possible, a united and cohesive front on the minority side in Northern Ireland. This indeed was one of the points discussed during the recent Anglo-Irish Conference in August. It seems highly desirable not to facilitate in any way the emergence of a second minority party. The IIP is in competition with the SDLP for the minority vote and the Government should not in any way enhance the prospects of their becoming any more of a threat in this respect. A meeting between the IIP and the Government might give it a credibility and status at the expense of the SDLP which is directly contrary to what our intentions are and would occur at a time when the SDLP themselves are attempting to recover from the very serious set back which they have suffered in the last six months.

A meeting at other than the Taoiseach's level, and particularly one at official level, would not raise the same objections.

Yours sincerely,



Martin Burke

The Irish Independence Party

1. The Party was formed in mid-1977 from diverse minor anti-Unionist groupings in the North (remnants of the old Nationalist Party, Independent element and members of the Unity Group centred in Fermanagh). Mr. Eddie McAteer of the Nationalist Party and former Westminster M.P. Mr. Frank McManus were founder members. A copy of the Party's Central Policy Document is filed under.

Aims.

2. The Party lists its aims as follows:-

- (i) To promote a just and lasting peace in Ireland;
- (ii) To convince people that the British presence in Ireland is the root cause of our social and economic ills;
- (iii) To secure a British withdrawal by non-violent means;
- (iv) To ensure a fair share in the wealth of Ireland for all its people;

3. British Withdrawal.

The IIP aims to persuade all parties concerned (the British Government, the Irish Government, Unionists and anti-Unionists, the EEC, the United States) that a British withdrawal is the only means of achieving lasting peace. The manner of British withdrawal which it acknowledges as all important, is envisaged as follows:-

- (i) Declaration of intent to withdraw;
- (ii) Election of a conference to agree new political structures;
- (iii) Establishment by the Irish Government of new body to explore all possibilities of the new situation;
- (iv) Smooth transition of power to newly agreed political structures;

4. The party was understandably identified from the outset as essentially a "Brits Out" party. It was noted however, that in their manifesto the status of N. Ireland in the event of a British withdrawal is left open to negotiation and that the relationship of N. Ireland to the Republic could be established anywhere on a continuum which runs from assimilation to total independence. The party's attempt to harness the anti-British feeling in N. Ireland without at the same time evoking the anti-Republican feeling has been commented on as a novel stance. The party opposed devolution for N. Ireland in any form and most recently supported the H-Block prisoners demands unequivocally.

5. From the outset there was much speculation about what impact the IIP would have on the position of other parties. It strongly criticised the SDLP for not campaigning for British withdrawal, for participating in British Government initiated talks and for not supporting the H-Block prisoners demands. In November, 1977 there was much celebration in the party with the defection from the SDLP of former Convention member and Larne Councillor Mr. J. Turnly. However, there were no more defections from the SDLP of note. In the May, 1981 local elections fought against the background of the H-Blocks protest the IIP picked

up some seats from the SDLP particularly in Fermanagh but in general they appeared to have gained seats which on previous occasions were held by Republican Clubs and former Unity and Derry Nationalist Parties. Discussions in late 1979 between the IIP and Mr. Neil Blaney with a view to the formation of a cross border political party failed when Mr. Blaney withdrew.

6. Attitude to the Unionists

The IIP seeks to persuade the Unionists that they have no wish to isolate them or to compel them by force to join the Republic. At the same time they hold the view that only when Britain declares its intention to withdraw will Unionists respond to the minority in a spirit of dialogue. However in the post-withdrawal period Unionist wishes would be respected.

7. Attitude to the Irish Government

The IIP in its manifesto asks the Irish Government to support its call for British withdrawal. The party also asks that the Irish Constitution be reconsidered and holds that the onus, is on the Irish Government to make a United Ireland an attractive option for the majority in the North. The party responded favourably to the 1979 Fine Gael document 'Ireland - Our Future Together'. The co-chairman of the IIP described it at the time as commendable but cautioned that the policy outlined in it would not succeed unless the Fine Gael Party was prepared to spend time and money visiting N. Ireland and talking to ordinary Unionists.

8. Electoral Record

The first election the IIP contested was the May, 1979 Westminster elections when they fielded candidates in Derry, Mid-Ulster, South Down and North Antrim. The party candidates won no seats but secured 3.3% of the First Preference Votes. Details of the electoral results in the four contested constituencies are attached. In the local elections in May, 1981 the party fielded a relatively large number of candidate (46) particularly in Omagh Newry, and Mourne, Derry and Fermanagh and secured 3.8% of the First Preference Votes and won 21 seats. A separate note on the party's performance in the local elections is also attached.

Department of Foreign Affairs

15 October, 1981.