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Galvin Affair - Conversation with British Ambassador

2 August 1984

I spoke at length about the background to Irish Government policy in our dealings with the Irish community in America on the Northern Ireland issue. I said it had been our experience over the years that our approach was never fully understood in London and, accordingly, we regularly sought to explain it both at official and Ministerial levels.

We had two objectives in our approach: firstly, to seek the support for our constitutional approach from the Irish-American community and, of course, also to discourage any support, political or material, for violence. This involved a considerable effort to open and maintain dialogue with all those in the Irish-American community who were not known members of NORAID. This effort, in which we invest a considerable amount of personnel and finance, extends from the grassroots through to the leadership of the Irish-American community at national and regional levels. We believe we have had a considerable impact. Successive Irish Governments have also given a great deal of time and priority (in terms of visits of Taoisigh and Ministers) to this effort. We have also successfully involved highly influential American national leaders, themselves of Irish extraction, in the pursuit of this double objective. All of this activity has had a considerable impact and we are sure has contributed to the saving of life. It has never been correctly appreciated in London and much less has it been acknowledged by the popular British press, who continue, for example, to attack Senator Kennedy for his alleged support for the IRA despite his repeated condemnations of that organisation.

Central to any hope of success we may have with the Irish-American community and with American leaders of Irish extraction is the necessity that the Irish Government be seen to be acting in its own right and not in tandem with or in some sort of subsidiary role to the British Government. In other words, we must make our own case in America and be seen to

do so. Part of our case, of course, is the need for a joint Anglo-Irish approach to the problem. Any British involvement with our effort in America and the citing of Irish Governmental statements by the British seriously undermine our credibility and authority both with the Irish-American community and with American leaders of Irish extraction.

As a matter of curiosity, I asked the Ambassador whether he was aware of this aspect of our policy from contacts in London and Belfast or from his reading of files. He said he was not and that he was sure that it was not remotely understood, particularly in the Northern Ireland Office.

We then came to the case of Galvin. The Ambassador said that the British concern had been to avoid a situation where the British press and elements in the British Tory Party, as well as, of course, the Unionists, could criticise the Irish Government for failing to stop Galvin from using our State as a back-door for entering Northern Ireland or Britain. I explained that Galvin had a legal entitlement to come to this State, as we understood the matter, and that we would ourselves have to make our own case in relation to any difficulties that would arise. Goodison thought our position was reasonable but he expected that there would be difficulties.

I think it is highly important that we should not, in terms of substance, give a pretext to the RUC for example to complain to the Northern Ireland Office that the Garda Siochana had been uncooperative in the matter of Galvin. I would add that today's statement (copy attached) as reported in the Irish Times from a Government spokesman is likely to create the wrong impression both in Northern Ireland and in Britain of our attitude to NORAIID. We have, in the Anglo-Irish Division, drafted a statement in relation to the visit of the NORAIID contingent, and specifically Galvin, which might help to put this matter in a more correct perspective here, in Northern Ireland and in London.

M.J. Lillis
3 August 1984

c.c. ^d Minister, Secretary, PSM/Justice

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