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Mr Merifield

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cc PS/S of S (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Sir E Bell
Mr Bourn
Mr Brennan
Mr Angel
Mr Carvill
Mr Doyne Ditmas
Mr Abbott
Mr Boys Smith
Mr Edis

CONVERSATION WITH DR M MANSERGH: RESEARCH ASSISTANT TO MR HAUGHEY

1. Together with HM Ambassador we had a short but noteworthy meeting with Dr Mansergh of Fianna Fail in Dublin on 15 November. While not always authoritative on the arrangements in the Forum, Martin Mansergh is well placed to reflect Mr Haughey's thinking. His comments therefore have an important bearing on the shape of any Report we might expect to emerge from the Forum.

2. After hearing optimistic accounts of the Forum from Irish officials and commentators during the early part of our visit, it was salutary to hear the undiluted Fianna Fail line from Mansergh. He made it clear that although Mr Haughey and his colleagues were prepared to participate actively in the Forum's proceedings this should not be seen as an indication that the party were changing their basic policy; repeal of the Constitutional claim to Northern Ireland was rejected, if only because it would leave the defence of the republican tradition to Sinn Frein. Fianna Fail remained firmly committed to the united Ireland solution.

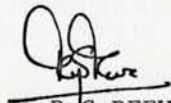
3. Mansergh argued that we should bring the Anglo Irish dimension firmly back to the centre of the stage as had been envisaged in 1981 in Mr Haughey's approach. The British Government should get rid of the existing Assembly. Without detriment to their standing against Sinn Fein, and their honour, Mr Mansergh saw no prospect of the SDLP's going into the Assembly after the Forum, and its continued existence made life impossible for them. The form of Mr Mansergh's ideas on an Anglo Irish dimension were not clear. He talked in general terms about Anglo Irish institutions such as the Parliamentary Tier with or without Northern representatives, but he did not appreciate the problems of membership (not least of SDLP members after any dissolution of the Assembly), and he appeared to discount unionist objections to institutional links with the Republic.

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4. He criticised the Secretary of State's recent remarks about the need to help the "constitutional nationalists" in NI saying that these could expose the SDLP to charges of "collaboration" from Sinn Fein. (The SDLP themselves may have viewed the remarks more as criticism of their strength and activity, though Mr Mansergh's construction is also feasible).

5. Mr Mansergh was invited to consider the possibility of assuaging Unionist fears by a fresh declaration along the lines of the Sunningdale communique, which allowed the parties to retain their aspirations but work within the bounds of practicality. He replied that nationalist demands for a united Ireland "were not aspirations but were a right".

6. In discussing the weekend Sinn Fein Ard Fheis one was left with the uncomfortable feeling that Fianna Fail would find it easier than the other parties to adjust their policies, and call on basic national loyalties, should Sinn Fein emerge strongly on the Republic's political scene.


R S REEVE
PAB

18 November 1983