

21 October 1992

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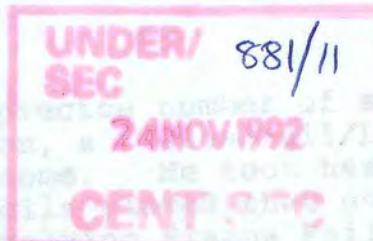
By the Fall
Mr. [unclear]
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ROM:

J W Thorp
British Embassy, Dublin

DATE:

23 November 1992



cc: Mr Thomas-B
Mr Alston-B
Mr Bell-B
Mr D J R Hill-B
Mr Cooke-B
Ms Lodge, SIL-B
Mr Archer, RID-B
Mr Petch, Liaison Staff, NIO-B
PUSD (Cen)-via RID

Mr McKervill
Ms Gallagher
HMA

CONVERSATION WITH MARTIN MANSERGH, SPECIAL ADVISER TO THE TAOISEACH,
ON 20 NOVEMBER

1. I had a quick lunch with Mansergh on 20 November. His overriding concern is the election but he had some points on the prospects for talks in Northern Ireland.

Elections

2. Mansergh is heavily involved in the planning of the campaign. He had just come from a meeting with the Taoiseach. His remarks on the elections can be summarised as follows:-

- (a) There will almost certainly be no overall majority. Fianna Fail's statagists put the minimum of seats the party will hold after the election at 70 (but Mansergh subsequently referred to a nightmare scenario of 68), and the maximum at 80/81 seats. How many Fianna Fail actually got was likely to depend crucially on whether they could persuade the electorate that an alternative FG/PD/Labour coalition was likely to be unstable and expensive, because the Labour Party would demand a high price. Fianna Fail would also point out that anything other than a vote for them increased the risk not just of a period of uncertainty after 25 November while a coalition was being formed, but of a caretaker government which could last for some while, increasing the risk of financial instability.
- (b) Mansergh thought a caretaker administration was a real possibility, though it would obviously have problems in framing the budget for 1993. In other words, a period, which could be prolonged, during which the politicians would seek to put together a coalition, would be followed by a caretaker administration if one could not be agreed.

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- (c) While everything depended on the precise number of seats each party obtained in the election, a Fianna Fail/Labour coalition was the most likely outcome. He took heart from the fact that the last two polls showed that over 50% wanted some sort of government involving Fianna Fail. A lot of those who would give their first preferences to Labour would give their transfers to Fianna Fail.
- (d) Surprisingly for someone in his position, Mansergh said that there were many in Fianna Fail who would not regard a period in opposition as a disaster. Their reasoning was that the economic situation was so difficult that a coalition of the other parties would soon disintegrate, giving Fianna Fail the task of picking up the pieces.
- (e) A lot of Labour support was "soft". Spring had had an easy ride in the election so far; he had been able to take a high moral tone, and capitalise on discontent about unemployment. But when people thought about what Labour would do in government, they might draw back from voting Labour.

Northern Ireland

3. Mansergh said he had given this little thought in the past two weeks, because of the election. But among the points in a rather hurried discussion were the following:-

- (a) He was concerned that, after the IGC, the British side had indicated a preference for dropping the three strand structure from future talks negotiations. The three strands had proved useful in the talks so far, and they reflected the realities. I sought to reassure him on this point; future discussions would have to address the issues raised in each strand, but that did not preclude bilateral negotiation. Moreover the talks had so far shown how difficult it was in practice to disentangle matters in each strand; there was a low crossover point. (Comment: Mansergh, I think, accepted this, but we will need to reassure the Irish that more bilaterals does not mean abandonment of the three strand concept. Otherwise we risk nurturing Irish fears that we are retreating towards a single - ie internal - strand solution.)
- (b) The Irish had detected a general willingness (DUP apart) to start the talks process up again and soon.
- (c) The Taoiseach's view was that the most useful thing to have emerged from the talks was the relationship the Irish have developed with the UUP. This was not perfect, but talking to one another had developed a better understanding of each others position. Mansergh agreed

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When I said that the task in Strand II was essentially for the Irish and the political parties, not the British Government. (Comment: we should probe whether experience of bilaterals is changing the Irish view that Strand II will only be successful if the British put pressure on the Unionists.)

- (d) The Irish sensed that the OUP no longer feared the DUP, who had shot their bolt electorally and were going nowhere. (Comment: this chimes with the view expressed recently to Mr Maccabe by Chris McGimpsey.)
- (e) The key to the negotiations was Strand II. If that could be resolved, Mansergh had little doubt that the others would rapidly fall into place. Hume, according to Mansergh, would be prepared to compromise on his proposal for EC and Irish Commissioners.
- (f) The Government was likely to go for virtually any arrangement for Strand I, provided the SDLP could wear it.
- (g) A Fianna Fail/Labour coalition would be unlikely to take a very different line from the past Fianna Fail administration on Northern Ireland matters. The views of Fianna Fail and Labour rank and file on Northern Ireland were very close. Spring not only had a strong nationalist background, but in 1987 he had held on to his North Kerry seat by only 4 votes. He was unlikely to take risks on Northern Ireland. (Comment: Spring said last night that while there were differences over Articles 2 and 3, there was a broad consensus among Irish political parties on Northern Ireland, and he hoped that talks on political developments would restart soon.)
- (h) If a rainbow coalition came to power, Fine Gael and the SDLP would have to put in a lot of work in order to establish a working relationship. Relations at present were not good; Bruton's and the SDLP's ideas on Articles 2 and 3 were poles apart.
- (i) Articles 2 and 3 would need positive Fianna Fail support if they were to be amended. If Fianna Fail went into opposition, it would almost certainly revert to its roots and oppose amendment.
- (j) The climate in the Republic for amendment of Articles 2 and 3 was probably less propitious than a couple of years ago. Then many people attached little importance to them; but Dr Paisley's insistence on the subject had persuaded them that, if he felt so strongly about them, they must be important.

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