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1 October 1986

Mr Richard O'Brien
Counsellor
Press Section
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copy F4/1

Mr P. Dunne
RI 17/10
She may be of
use at some stage
RI 17/10

Dear Dick

US CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL FUND

Following the signature last week of the tripartite Agreement providing for a \$50 million U.S. contribution to the International Fund in the current financial year, it seems an appropriate time to reflect on some aspects of the media coverage here of the U.S. contribution.

The first point to be made is that nationwide there has not been extensive coverage of or comment on the aid contribution as such. The details of the US aid budget are closely followed only in a few quality newspapers and \$50m (from an overall economic and military aid budget which totalled \$14.5 bn in FY '86) is not a significant enough amount in U.S. terms to generate widespread media interest. The media attitude towards the Anglo-Irish Agreement remains generally very favourable and this establishes a positive context in which the U.S. contribution to the Fund is viewed. As I mentioned in the report of my press trip to Chicago and other cities last July, the general attitude I encountered among editorial staff was that a U.S. gesture in support of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is worthwhile and that the scale of the contribution proposed is not excessive.

However the fact remains that there has been critical comment in some quarters, particularly in the Washington Post and to a lesser extent in the Christian Science Monitor and on the op-ed page of the Wall Street Journal.

While this minute focuses in particular on the Washington Post, it is worth remarking that the Boston-based Christian Science Monitor was the first to offer criticism of the US contribution, in a column by John Hughes on 2 June entitled "The Irish Lobby". The column referred to the "very special treatment of Irish concerns" and said that "some eyebrows have been raised at the disbursing of foreign aid, essentially meant for underdeveloped countries, to an industrialised area that is part of the United Kingdom". The CSM column obviously struck a chord at the Washington Post and an extract from the CSM piece was subsequently used in the 'for the record' section on the editorial page of the Post.

The most recent criticism of the US contribution to the Fund appeared in a rather bizarre piece published by the Wall Street Journal in its op-ed section on 2 September entitled "Irish Unification could create a new NATO Member". The author, William Kennedy, commented, inter alia, that "the British, the Dublin Irish government and the Roman Catholic hierarchy have managed to establish Northern Ireland as the latest international welfare client of the U.S., inveigling Congress into a direct grant of \$250 million as a sort of retirement present to House Speaker Thomas P O'Neill, who kindly acted on behalf of the beneficiaries without incurring the sort of legal burdens former White House aide Michael Deaver has acquired". However the piece as a whole was so idiosyncratic that it is unlikely to have been taken seriously in many quarters and indeed it was effectively replied to in the 'letters' section of the Wall Street Journal.

WASHINGTON POST

The strongest and most sustained criticism of the aid appeared in the Washington Post. Two editorials which caused us concern were published on 16 June and 30 June respectively and were of course forwarded to you at the time of publication (copies attached for ease of reference). You will note that the tone has considerably sharpened between the 16 June editorial "The Ulster Package" and the piece which appeared two weeks later "Foreign Aid for Ireland?"

The first of these editorials was written by Pat Shakow, who as you know is the regular editorialist on Ireland. You will recall from your own time here that the Embassy has a long-standing and generally satisfactory relationship with Ms Shakow. At the time the first editorial appeared, Pat told me that she had come under considerable pressure at editorial board meetings to write a piece criticising the proposed aid for Ireland. It was, she said, the strong view in the Editorial Board that in circumstances where the U.S. aid budget was under enormous pressure and aid to the world's neediest countries was being cut back, an aid package for Ireland could not be justified and was being considered only because of the strong Irish lobby in Congress. Pat had her own misgivings about the aid but she did not share the downright hostility of the Editorial Board. She said that the 16 June editorial was in her view the minimum criticism acceptable to the Editorial Board. (It must be said that Pat Shakow's own misgivings about the aid were contributed to in part by what she regarded as a rather cavalier approach to the issue adopted by John Hume at a press lunch we organised in Washington last April. John Hume's view was that since the proposed contribution was an unsolicited gesture of goodwill on the part of the U.S., there was no obligation on anyone in Ireland to make a case justifying the aid. He added that if the U.S. contribution were to come with strings attached - such as the MacBride Principles - it would be preferable not to have it at all).

I was of course in touch with Pat Shakow immediately on reading the 30 June editorial. She expressed regret and embarrassment over the tone of the editorial which she said she "would not have written". Apparently while Pat was on a brief trip to New York, editorialist John Anderson (who normally writes on economic issues) had availed of the opportunity to write this editorial which expressed his personal irritation at the aid to Ireland and was also in line with the general view in the Editorial Board. It seems that Anderson holds no particular grudge against Ireland but has spent some time in Haiti and is very aware of Haiti's desperate need for aid and its uphill battle in trying to get any substantial U.S. aid contribution. He considers that Haiti would have been much more deserving of the \$50m that was allocated to the Fund.

Pat Shakow had not been consulted on the 30 June editorial and was obviously annoyed at the way the matter had been handled. I mentioned to her that we were considering a possible response and she arranged with the appropriate people to have space allotted for a piece of fairly substantial length in the "Free-for-all" section the following week-end. In the event we decided to try to get the British Embassy to agree to a joint response in the names of both Ambassadors, and, after clearance from Dublin, we submitted a text to the British Embassy. Our British colleagues refused to become involved however, on the grounds that the Embassy confined itself to addressing factual errors and did not take issue with editorial opinion with which they disagreed (I would note in passing that the same philosophy did not appear to prevail at the British Embassy in the case of the Extradition Treaty). In the circumstance, Assistant Secretary O'Tuathail decided that we should not unilaterally pursue the idea of an Embassy response to the editorial.

One important point which is I think borne out by the above chain of circumstance is the need to seek to have our viewpoint understood by the editor and deputy editor of the editorial page (Meg Greenfield and Stephen Rosenfeld respectively) at the Post. One or other of these vets all editorials before publication - more usually Rosenfeld than Greenfield, I gather, because of the latter's heavy schedule. While Pat Shakow will continue to be the preferred editorialist on Ireland, circumstances may obviously recur where another member of the editorial team is given the opportunity to write on Irish affairs and one would have to rely largely on Greenfield or Rosenfeld to ensure some balance.

Against this background I have taken some pains in recent months to cultivate a relationship with Rosenfeld. (Meg Greenfield seems rarely available for social encounters so establishment of a relationship with her is a long-term process). Rosenfeld tells me that he has been somewhat out of touch with developments in Ireland in recent years but he seems willing to listen to what we have to say. On the aid issue in particular, I have made the same points that we have consistently made to Pat Shakow and other media people: that the U.S. aid contribution is important not just in improving the economic situation on the ground but also from a political and psychological viewpoint,

that fundamentally it is viewed as a U.S. gesture of support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I have also argued to Rosenfeld that since, rightly or wrongly, there is a political character to U.S. foreign aid, with only a very small portion of the aid budget going to the world's poorest countries, it seems unfair to single out for criticism the tiny percentage of the overall budget which has been earmarked for Ireland. (The U.S. aid budget is of course entirely skewed in favour of Israel and Egypt - one has to make this point very carefully at the Post given the sympathies there towards Israel; however I feel one should not entirely let them off the charge of selectivity).

As you know the Embassy has some good contacts at senior levels in the Post and I consider it a matter of priority to solidify and widen those contacts. Two former London correspondents, Len Downie and Michael Getler, are now Managing Editor and Foreign Editor respectively and the former in particular seems well disposed to us. I have shared with Len our concern about the Post's editorial stance on the U.S. aid contribution; while he does not attend Editorial Board meetings I think that his understanding of the problem will be important for coverage elsewhere in the newspaper. Among the Post columnists, Mary McGrory continues of course to be a stalwart friend of Ireland and Lou Cannon's marriage a few years ago to a woman of Irish background has heightened his interest in Ireland and his readiness to be involved in the social life of the Embassy.

FUTURE COVERAGE

It would be a mistake of course to look at this question solely in terms of personalities; one has to look beyond personalities at the substance of the aid issue and the circumstances which dictate media attitudes. It seems clear that the size of the foreign aid budget and the spending priorities which it reflects will become increasingly controversial over the next few years. The political reality is that with Congress facing the necessity to drastically reduce the deficit, one of the most vulnerable targets for cutbacks is foreign aid, particularly the non-military segment.

A reduction in the aid budget, or a failure to grow in line with increasing demands, involves some painful decisions. Currently for example there is major disagreement on the issue of additional U.S. aid to the Philippines. (Following President Aquino's visit the House voted an additional \$200m for the Philippines and the proposal was only narrowly defeated in the Senate. The intention was that the \$200m would be diverted from existing recipients of U.S. aid, with Israel and Egypt specifically excepted). The Administration is also seeking to give additional aid to the frontline states of Southern Africa as part of its effort to sustain the Presidential veto on sanctions adopted by Congress against South Africa. Again the intention is that this money should be diverted from elsewhere within the aid budget.

With this type of issue under discussion, it can be anticipated that media attention will increasingly focus on the allocation of resources within the U.S. aid budget. Congressman Obey (Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations) has been quoted in the Congressional Quarterly, the Washington Post and on National Public Radio to the effect that in FY '87 everything in the foreign aid budget is up for grabs apart from allocations to Israel, Egypt, Pakistan and Ireland. While of course we are pleased with Congressman Obey's commitment to a sizeable allocation for the Fund in FY '87, it is nevertheless uncomfortable from a presentational viewpoint to find ourselves grouped with these other three countries who receive aid allocations hugely in excess of that envisaged for the Fund and whose aid is largely in the form of military assistance (the House version of the Foreign Aid Bill allocates \$3bn in economic and military aid for Israel, \$2.1bn for Egypt and \$670m for Pakistan). In discussions with the media we have of course sought to differentiate our position from that of the other three countries.

In summary, the point to be borne in mind is that future allocations to the Fund are unlikely to pass without comment and in a situation where US foreign aid priorities are increasingly controversial, the allocation to the Fund may - despite our best efforts - continue to attract media criticism. While such

criticism may have little practical consequence, it is one of the factors to be taken into account in any reckoning of the pluses and minuses attached to the U.S. contribution to the Fund.

Anne Anderson

Anne Anderson

Enclosures

A/ms

cc: Mr Bernard Davenport,
Anglo-Irish Section.