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*Mr. McIvor
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*Ms Denise
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NI.2/5, EC.2/51

18 February 1986

Mr Bernard Davenport
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Bernard

I enclose the text of a speech made by AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Tom Donahue at a dinner of the Irish-American Labor Coalition held in New York on January 24 1986 (Mr Jim Farrell of the Consulate in New York attended). I find the comments relating to the Anglo-Irish Agreement disappointingly equivocal, although an effort has obviously been made to focus on some of the more positive aspects of the Agreement from a trade union viewpoint.

You will be aware of the strong support by American trade unions of the MacBride Principles. In this speech, a link is very firmly made between the U.S. aid package and support for the MacBride Principles "....But if we are to provide governmental help (and I personally support such assistance), we must insure that the affirmative action guidelines provided by the MacBride principles are made the operating criteria for any U.S. aid package."

I shall be seeing Tom Donahue shortly and shall discuss some of these points with him.

Yours sincerely

Anne Anderson

Enclosure
AA/ms

cc: Ms Denise Rogers,
Office of the Minister for Labour.

NEWS AFL-CIO



DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION
202/637-5010

FOR RELEASE: Remarks of AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Thomas R. Donahue to the Irish-American Labor Coalition dinner honoring John Sweeney, president of the Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, New York, New York, January 24, 1986

I am delighted to be here and to bring the greetings of the AFL-CIO, President Kirkland and the Executive Council to all of you as you meet to honor a distinguished member of the Executive Council, a distinguished New Yorker, a distinguished member of the Irish-American Labor Coalition, and a leader of this nation, John Sweeney.

I will leave to others and to your official citation of him the telling of his tale, the chronicling of a proud trade union career, and I will leave the jokes to Hal Roach.

For my part, let me only say of our honoree that I am enormously proud to call him friend, gratified to see him as the president of my own union, and thrilled to see the progress of that union in terms of its growth as well as in its dedicated service to its members.

John Sweeney deserves the tribute we all pay to him tonight.

Maureen, we all thank you for sharing him with us.

It is significant to note, John, that you are being honored by an organization you helped to create to unite the voice of American trade unionists on issues affecting Ireland and the Irish, and to make all Americans more aware of the contributions of the Irish to America, and of the need for America to respect and repay those contributions through a heightened concern for Ireland and its people. (As we must, indeed, as a nation respect and repay through heightened concern the contributions of all of the immigrant strains who built and contributed to building this nation.)

The Irish-American Labor Coalition remains tonight an organization concerned about Ireland and its people and watching with hope and expectation the developments in that island nation. Since we met last year at a time when we all heralded the Report of the New Ireland Forum, there has been the most significant movement of the Irish Republic and of the British government in many decades.

We were not uniformly happy about all of the Forum Report but saw it as a document of hope--a joint expression of all of the parliamentary parties in favor of a unitary state as the preferred solution to the political problems which beset the Republic, the six counties and England.

Since the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed in Hillsborough, Co. Down on last November 15 and ratified by the respective parliaments, we in the Irish-American Labor Coalition have been studying the debate on it among our friends in Ireland and in England.

Our efforts have been made more difficult by the fact that our friends have not been speaking with one voice.

What are we to make of this debate that has accompanied the approval of the Agreement and has continued as it has begun to operate? There are respected leaders of the Irish people ranged on both sides of the question.

The debate appears to revolve around the fact that partition deprives the Irish people of democracy in two distinct ways. Partition deprives the nationalists of Northern Ireland of civil rights. Partition deprives the Irish people as a whole of its political right to unity.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement is highly contradictory in that it commits the British government to limited progress on some of the civil rights issues. But the Agreement itself offers no progress--indeed, it may create new obstacles--to the overcoming of partition. Therefore, the political leaders in nationalist Ireland have lined up on the Agreement according to the weight they give to each of these two considerations.

We are in favor of progress--even piecemeal progress--in alleviating the suffering of people. If there are advantages to be gained for Northern Catholics in this Agreement, they are to be found in the workings of the Intergovernmental Conference.

As trade unionists, it is our special hope that this institution can force the pace of progress in strengthening agencies such as the Fair Employment Agency, and we are pleased to see the recent doubling of the budget of that small agency.

We hope there can be developed a meaningful Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, a demand raised more than a decade ago by the Northern Ireland civil rights campaigns that were to some extent inspired by the American experience. We dare to hope the security forces will be reformed so that they begin to win the confidence of both sections of the community. There is an urgent need for reforms in prison conditions.

Will our hopes and those of all the right-thinking people in Northern Ireland who pray for an end to pointless violence and for a life of democracy be realized?

We don't yet know. The commentaries on the Agreement all are concerned with the words of the document--and as one who has spent years negotiating the language of contracts I understand that. But I also know the importance of the spirit of agreements, of the attitudes of parties, of the climate that they create. And I also know that none of us in the labor movement ever negotiated the perfect agreement. None of us was ever satisfied by anything less than the final achievement of a goal.

I think it is important we see the Agreement in that same light--as an imperfect document ~~initiating~~ a process, not completing one, with its eventual issue depending far more on what people can make of it than on the harshness or flexibility of some of its phrases.

It is not for us in America to lament the presence of one phrase or the absence of another. It is far more important for us to give support to the process it initiates.

The future of civil rights, human rights and of real political rights in the North depends in the short run on the effective functioning of the Intergovernmental Conference, and in the long run on the Interparliamentary Relations which the accord makes possible, and on the arrangements for review at the end of three years (or earlier).

The presence of those clauses makes available an appropriate role for concerned citizens of other nations--the role of observer, analyst, critic, of whatever unfolds, and the role of the outside monitor--available to encourage, comment and assist as appropriate, all the while holding to the view that we have continuously expressed that the eventual creation of a unitary state which fully respects and protects the diversity of its traditions and its people is the goal to be sought.

In terms though of our desire and ability to assist in promoting the process of the establishment and protection of the civil rights of all and the developmental process which will one day lead to a united Ireland, we as a nation ought to be prepared to do what we can to insure the appropriate behavior of American corporations in Northern Ireland and everywhere in the world.

In February 1985, we introduced and passed in the Executive Council a resolution in support of the MacBride principles. These principles call for equal opportunity practices at American firms operating in six counties.

In the past year, New York City and the State of Massachusetts have either administratively or legislatively put the MacBride principles into effect for their pension fund investments. I know campaigns are underway in other cities and states.

It is encouraging to hear that New York City is filing new shareholder resolutions at companies such as General Motors, American Brands, Hughes Tool, VF, Ford Motor Co., Fruehauf and TRW, and that a bill is shortly to be introduced in the New York State Legislature.

We think that to ensure that there is meaningful progress under the new institutions created by the Anglo-Irish Agreement, especially on the issue of sectarian employment discrimination, the campaign for the MacBride principles must continue.

We have been criticized by some for our support for those principles, and I must say I don't think it is well-founded. For many years, we have been called on by trade unionists all around the world to intercede in one way or another with American companies and have tried to assist in every case. The MacBride principles (and the Sullivan principles in South Africa) are merely an extension of that work. We do not seek to diminish investment in Northern Ireland or in South Africa, rather we seek to see it responsibly conducted.

Indeed, if either in South Africa or Northern Ireland these campaigns result in disinvestment action, it can only be because the corporations involved have brought it about by their misconduct. And in that event, the corporations will have failed and the campaign will have failed. Success must be measured not in disinvestment but in conformance to the principles.

On the other hand, the call for American governmental assistance to Northern Ireland is now much talked about and, even in the stringent financial circumstances of this nation, we cannot abandon foreign assistance efforts. But if we are to provide governmental help (and I personally support such assistance), we must insure that the affirmative action guidelines provided by the MacBride principles are made the operating criteria for any U.S. aid package.

Surely, no American wants his or her tax dollars used in any way which perpetuates a discrimination against any group of citizens in any nation. On the contrary, every American wants to insure that all the support we give to help the current process succeed is directed at ending economic discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity.

As the Congress considers this issue, we must do everything possible to insure that these criteria are attached to all aid we extend. Surely that is consistent with the efforts of the representatives of both the Republic and of England in the Intergovernmental Conference as they seek peace and reconciliation with justice and with respect for the rights of all.

I am delighted to join with all of you as we continue in our pursuit of those goals and as we honor tonight one who has stood for those ideals all of his years.

Thank you.

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