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CONFIDENTIAL - By Courier Service

31 July 1987

Dear Assistant Secretary

Call on Mr Tom King

1. I had a courtesy call on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Tom King, on Wednesday, 29 July. Sir Robert Andrew and a Private Secretary were also present.
2. After the usual preliminary conversation about my previous posts, arrival in London etc, and an expression of reasonable satisfaction with the way relations between the two countries are progressing, Mr King spoke about the various channels through which discussions take place - the Secretariat, the NIO, the Foreign Office and lately, he said, he had had a talk with the British Ambassador in Dublin. He did not draw any particular conclusion but the impression he gave was that he was not too happy with all these channels. I said something about the need to keep closely in touch and to avoid misunderstandings. You will have seen Richard Ryan's report of 24 July about communications difficulties between the FCO and the NIO.
3. He then raised the point, which he had earlier discussed with Richard Ryan, about concerns he had heard expressed in Conservative circles during the election about the activities of certain Irish associations - he mentioned Brent. I replied on lines similar to those in Ryan's report of 3 July - the responsible and helpful activities of the organised Irish Community in general, the existence of some small non-representative groups and the pressures exerted by them on the Embassy and the Irish Government, sometimes on legitimate concerns, sometimes presented in ways we could not accept. Mr King did not pursue the issue but complained to his Private Secretary that he had not yet seen the Irish Post, which he had asked for.
4. Mr King then went on to talk about security problems in Northern Ireland, the exploitation of the border by the IRA and the danger of weakening of support for the Agreement in Britain if the killings continued. I was able, to a certain extent, to side track this discussion by saying that I was at a disadvantage in that he had recently had a meeting on the subject with Irish Ministers at which I was not present. I added that I had noted recent statements, including his own, expressing satisfaction at intensified cooperation in this field. However, Mr King reverted several times to his concerns in regard to the killing of police officers, many of whom had themselves suffered as a result of their efforts to protect the minority. In connection with

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the Viggers visit to Dublin, for example, he commented (while hoping that useful projects would emerge) that the adverse reaction in Britain to the murder of police and soldiers in Northern Ireland was such that we lost thousands of tourists after each incident.

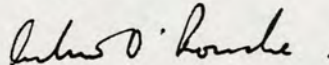
5. Asked for my first impressions of how things are going generally, I said I thought that the minority man in the street in Northern Ireland was likely to be very concerned about jobs and job discrimination and about harassment. I made the point that progress in these areas was important, as is security, for both partners to the Agreement. I referred to the favourable election results in Northern Ireland as evidence of progress, which needed to be maintained.

6. Mr King then took up the question of the measures to be introduced regarding job discrimination and the disincentive effects on employment of the MacBride Principles campaign. He spoke with approval of John Hume's statements (in Boston?) against the MacBride Principles. He hoped that anything like points-scoring could be avoided in statements on this subject. In regard to the election results he made the comment that the SDLP could have done better, particularly in W. Belfast, but said that they had not worked the constituencies as well as Sinn Féin. He had heard the comment that SDLP people were only seen to be active when there was an election.

7. Arising from this question, I mentioned that I knew he had had a message from the Tánaiste regarding the suggestion that measures might be introduced to prevent Sinn Féin standing for election, about which he is very concerned. The Secretary of State said that his concern is that Sinn Féin Councillors are not only supporters of the IRA but are believed to be involved in fingering targets. He had to take account of this and of Unionist fears which had been conveyed to him in this regard. He did not accept the Armalite/Ballot Box approach and was considering what could be done about it. He said that he "may seek views" - from which I understood that he had not yet decided on a consultative paper - but nothing would happen for some time and we would be kept informed.

This concluded the interview, which was for me a useful opportunity to have a first, rather general, talk with the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely



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