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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

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Mr B McCarthy  
10/2/87

*cc* Taoiseach  
Tánaiste  
Secretary  
Mr. Nally  
A-I Section  
A-I Secretariat

CONFIDENTIAL

6 February 1987

A CALL ON LORD WHITELAW, LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL, 6 FEBRUARY 1987

Dear Eamon,

I paid a farewell call this morning on Lord Whitelaw and spent about half an hour with him. The following, in haste, is a summary of some points we discussed.

Whitelaw of course, professed his support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement. However he said that he is at present in one of his more pessimistic moods about Northern Ireland. From past discussion with the Taoiseach he knew that the Taoiseach was always hopeful that some more moderate Unionists ("like himself" \*sic ) would come forward. And yet, as he himself had told the Taoiseach in the past, there seem to be very few of these. Or at least, very few willing to come forward and speak out at present.

I responded to this in various ways and said, in particular that Unionists at the moment are focussed on the possibility of change, or of a new situation which could be to their advantage, after elections on either side of the Irish Sea. He said that he did not see how things could really change to their benefit. I said that I had been referring particularly to their present state of mind rather than to what might actually emerge in the event after an election.

We spoke about the PR system. He implied clearly enough that he favours it for Northern Ireland at least but then said that for Westminster elections, one couldn't really have a different system of election in one part of the UK from that which obtained elsewhere. As it is, with the straight vote, he does not think that there will be any real change in the number of Unionist seats. The SDLP are unlikely to gain an extra seat and might have difficulty in holding what they have.

*Handwritten notes:*  
Is Whitelaw qualified to judge this new? In what way have we seen an MTD assessment? Ink 10/2/87

I also mentioned the recent UDA document as very interesting and perhaps a reason for less pessimism. The content was remarkable in some ways - what remained in question perhaps was the bona fides of the source of this new thinking - the UDA. He agreed but commented that since 1974, the UDA and their like had been rather fed up with Paisley and Robinson and other such

\* (ie the Taoiseach)

politicians.


We talked about the lack of leadership on the Unionist side - Molyneux in particular. He spoke of Powell's policy on "integration" as utterly unrealistic. It would alienate the South and increase the problem of violence on the minority side; and it would find little favour in Britain.

As to the long term, he said he had always thought that if one could get power-sharing really going in the North, the importance of the Border would fade away over fifty years or so. Then unity would be a real possibility. But Paisley had opposed power-sharing ~~on~~; and the SDLP could, on the other hand, not be expected to join in devolution in Northern Ireland without some Irish Dimension.

Whitelaw seemed quite interested in our election campaign and in the likely result. In discussion of the differences between our system (with its long interval between the election and the formation of a new government) and the situation here, he mentioned that it was quite likely that the Alliance would get as many as forty seats; and he thought that they might be obliged in a new three-party world, to move closer to our practice (which would allow time for discussions, if necessary, between parties after an election)

The foregoing is a general account of our discussion and of the opinions he expressed. I would not be sure, however, that our discussion plumbed very deeply into whatever pools may lie behind the large and friendly Whitelaw eyes.

Yours sincerely,



Noel Dorr (Ambassador)

Eamon O Tuathail,  
A/Sec  
DFA