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Irish Embassy

London

Note of discussion at the Foreign Office at
12.00 pm. on Friday, 1st August, 1969

PRESENTOn the Irish Side:

Dr P J Hillery

Minister for External Affairs

Mr H J McCann

Secretary

Department of External Affairs

H.E. J G Molloy

Ambassador

Mr K Rush

Minister Plenipotentiary.

On the British Side:

The Secretary of State for

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt.Hon. Michael Stewart, C.H.M.P.

Sir Edward Peck, K C M G.

Under Secretary

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr R North

Assistant Secretary

Home Office

Mr I McCluney

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Miss M MacGlashan

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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The Minister for External Affairs opened the discussion by expressing his grave concern about the prospects of further violence in Derry. He recalled that Derry is predominantly a Nationalist city. He then referred to the impending parade of the Apprentices on 12th August, 1969 in Derry. In any other year, he said, this might be regarded as a more or less routine annual celebration, but this year it went far beyond that. The scale and importance of the demonstration this year had been deliberately stepped-up. It was expected that the number of bands included in this year's parade would be somewhere in the region of the 70's, as against about 17 bands in previous years. Derry has thus become a veritable powder keg. Something could be started there which might be very difficult to contain. He thought, therefore, that something should be done about the situation. Basically, the parade should be banned. Other parades, and indeed, much less important and less dangerous parades, had already been banned on many occasions. If, however, it was not possible to ban the parade, either because the Government of Northern Ireland feared to do so or otherwise, at least the sponsors of the parade should be required to limit it to the normal scale and size. Otherwise, the holding of this excessively large parade was bound to be provocative, especially as it was being deliberately routed through Catholic areas in Derry. It was sheer madness to do this in present circumstances. The parade should,

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at the very least, be confined to Protestant areas of the city, and should be reduced to the normal scale. This was necessary because the people of Derry have no longer any confidence in the police. In particular, the B Specials - who are partisan - should not be allowed to participate at all in the arrangements for the 12th August in Derry. He thought the British Government should arrange to have impartial observers present in Derry on that date to exercise a restraining influence on events. The reason he was there (in the Foreign Office) was that it is the British Government which carries the ultimate responsibility for what happens in Northern Ireland. His visit (Dr Hillery continued) was a private one up to that moment, and it was not his wish to publicise it lest he might make matters more difficult for the British Government, and for the Government at Stormont. He would say, if he had to, that he had been to the Foreign Office, but would not reveal the subject which had been discussed. However, if nothing were done as a result of his visit, then a different situation might arise.

The Secretary of State cut in at this point to say that, as regards the Press, he would be suggesting a different approach. He went on to say that he was glad to have this opportunity of meeting the Minister for an exchange of views. He recalled that they had met recently "in the Hague". (He was reminded politely that it had been in Brussels, rather than in the Hague, and he corrected himself accordingly). He thought,

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however, that they should tell the Press that they had met, and had discussed this, and other topics. By other topics he meant, in particular, the E.E.C. and Nigeria, regarding which he would have some recent information to pass on to the Minister. First, however, as regards Northern Ireland, he continued, it was not correct to say that the Government at Stormont were afraid to ban the parade on 12th August. Their judgment was that it was better to control it than to ban it. He adverted to the fact that a similar problem had arisen in Bermuda recently, when the decision had been made to control a demonstration rather than ban it, and that the decision had proved, in practice, to be the correct one. He took the point, he continued, that the parade on 12th August would be an extra big one, but, nevertheless, he did not believe that it would be necessary to ban it.

(At this stage the Secretary of State sought confirmation on this point from Mr North).

Mr North expressed the opinion that it was still too early to judge what size the parade might actually be. Perhaps, after all, it would not prove to be so big as had been feared. He mentioned that, in 1967, the parade had been about 10,000 strong, and in 1968 (when 12th August fell on a Saturday) it had been 12,000 strong.

(The Secretary of State then invited Mr North to comment on the different areas within the city of Derry).

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Mr North said there were two alternative routes which were taken by this annual parade on different occasions. They had been informed that, on this occasion, the parade would follow the less provocative of these two routes, and would thus minimise any possible provocation of the residents of Catholic areas in the city.

The Secretary of State went on to say that, despite the ~~threatened~~^{ing} situation in the immediate future, there were certain hopeful signs that the Northern Ireland Government had been taking steps towards reform. He hoped that current events would not have the effect of retarding those reforms.

The Minister remarked that there was a certain lack of credibility about the promise of reforms made by the Government in Stormont. Could not that Government do something now as an earnest of the sincerity of their intentions regarding reforms? At the present juncture such a development would be particularly valuable.

The Secretary of State, by way of reply, recapitulated the points he had already made. He said the Northern Ireland Government was keeping in close touch with the British Government, as they had been doing all along. He repeated that it was a question of judgment for the Northern Ireland Government, which was primarily

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responsible for the area in question. He then added, very deliberately

"you accept, of course, that responsibility for this area rests with the Stormont and London Governments, and not with your Government".

The Minister replied that he accepted that the control of the situation was now in their hands, but if things were to go wrong seriously, he would have reactions in his country, with which it would be necessary to deal, possibly very serious repercussions. He continued by expressing his concern about the impartiality of the police, especially of the B Specials, and referred to reports of B Specials using weapons which had been issued to them officially for "private purposes".

The Secretary of State retorted that it was only officers who were permitted to bear arms normally in the ^{B. Special} R.U.C. He invited Mr North to confirm this fact.

Mr North agreed that it was so, and went on to say that when employed on Crowd Control work, the R.U.C. were not armed. He added that the B Specials had not been used in dealing with Crowd Control work (except at Dungiven on the 12th July, when it had become imperative to use them because of the very many demands on the regular police on that particular date, in connection with parades, processions etc.)

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The Minister again returned to the question of the sending of observers to Derry on 12th August.

The Secretary of State retorted that the situation in Derry was the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Government. The more London interfered with the exercise of that responsibility, the less effective the results might be.

The Minister then inquired whether Stormont should not be pressed to push ahead faster with the proposed reforms.

The Secretary of State replied that they were keeping in close touch with Stormont on the whole question, and that they must be the judges of what was best in the circumstances.

The Secretary of Department External Affairs intervened to say there had been good reasons for the concern which existed about Northern Ireland.

The Minister took up and developed this point, and again inquired whether the reforms which had been promised could not now be expedited.

The Secretary of State, however, merely repeated what he had already said on that point.

The Minister then said to the Secretary of State "you expect the situation will not get out of hand".

The Secretary of State immediately replied very firmly "yes"

The Secretary, D.E.A. then pointed out that there were gaps even in the reforms which had been promised, including some aspects of the discrimination in the allocation of housing and employment.

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Mr North replied by referring to the legislation which had been introduced at Stormont for the creation of an Ombudsman at central government level, and went on to refer to the announced intention of the N.I. Government to introduce the Ombudsman² system at local government level also.

The Minister for External Affairs then said to the Secretary of State

"you want to handle this yourselves. Is the position then that we cannot discuss it further?"

The Secretary of State replied "yes".

The Minister for E.A. then said

"you realise our concern".

The Secretary of State replied "yes" and then added:

"I must say to you that there is a limit to the extent to which we can discuss with outsiders - even our nearest neighbours, this internal matter".

The Minister for E.A. immediately replied that, if the situation were to "spill over" into violence, as was feared, he felt the Secretary of State must know that he (the Minister) would come under increasing pressure to act. He went on to refer to the fact that his predecessor in office had gone to the United Nations at the time of a previous outbreak of trouble in Derry, although he did not raise the problem formally before any of the bodies of the U.N. The Minister added that, if, however, violence should occur in Derry, it might

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well spill over into his country, and he (the Minister) would then have to deal with the situation, and it might have to be raised.

The Secretary of State retorted quickly that in such an eventuality, he was afraid they would have to take the line that it is strictly an internal matter.

The Minister, after a brief pause, raised the Doyle case, the case of the citizen of the Republic who had been refused bail a few days previously by a court in Enniskillen. He mentioned that a Westminister M.P., Miss Bernadette Devlin, had made representations to the effect that this Mr Doyle had been refused bail on a discriminatory basis, simply because he was a citizen of the Republic.

The Secretary of State made a disparaging remark about Miss Devlin to the effect that she had been notable recently at Westminster by her absence, rather than by her performance of her duties as M.P. He undertook, however, to take a note of the Doyle case.

The Secretary B.E.A. intervened to say that the kind of discrimination displayed in this recent incident at Enniskillen was typical of what went on in Northern Ireland where, in general, the activities of one side were banned, but not those of the other side.