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AMBASÁID NA HÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

24 AUG 1971
637017 Grosvenor Place
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August 23rd 1971

Dear Secretary

My wife and I spent part of the week-end at the country home in Kent of Lady Kelly. Her guests at dinner on Saturday night included Mr. William Deedes, Conservative M.P. for the area. Mr. Deedes was a junior Minister in the previous Conservative administration. He is reputed to be an influential member of the Party and is being increasingly mentioned as a likely choice for office in the event of early Ministerial changes. Mr. Deedes takes a close interest in the North and is a regular visitor to Belfast. He is an admirer of Mr. Faulkner and claims to have many friends in the Stormont Government, in the Orange Order and even among the minority. During a long private conversation after dinner I was able to talk in considerable detail to Mr. Deedes about the Northern situation. The first point he stressed to me is that Mr. Heath, whom he regards as the makings of a great Prime Minister, tends to look on the Northern problem with a lot of impatience. It amounts to "a serious local irritation" which must be put down with a heavy hand so that the Government here can address itself to more important current problems and the Common Market is Mr. Heath's main preoccupation at the moment. In that context, there is growing worry in Government circles here about the unfavourable publicity which Britain is receiving on the Continent as a result of the Northern troubles.

Even at Cabinet meetings Heath maintains "a cold, indeed almost dictatorial attitude" and he does not easily accept advice from his colleagues. Mr. Deedes said it may

surprise me to hear that Mr. Maudling is one of the very few Ministers who is able to exert influence over the Prime Minister. Maudling is "a man of peace and compromise" and he genuinely feels about the Irish Question and the need for some progress towards an eventual solution of it. Sir Alec Douglas-Home's influence in the Government is now somewhat minimal. Basically, he has a certain sympathy with the attitude of Dublin but he no longer counts for much. The expectation is that he will retire towards the end of the year if a settlement on Rhodesia can be reached by then. Mr. Deedes' assessment is that we cannot count on very much understanding or sympathy from the other members of the Government and his overall conclusion is that not much is likely in the circumstances to emerge from the Taoiseach's meeting in October with the Prime Minister.

I brought up the question of participation by the minority and pointed out that the Parliamentary Opposition in the North will certainly not return to Stormont on the basis of the status quo. Because of this situation and also in view of the separation which now exists between the two communities and the likely continuance of violence, I said that my Government is convinced that an immediate move forward on the political front is the only way of preventing further disaster. Mr. Deedes did not dissent but showed no enthusiasm for a political step which would represent an advance towards an eventual reunification. He admitted that reunification could come but felt that this must be regarded as a very long way off indeed. He told me that Mr. Heath is personally convinced that Westminster must at all costs avoid the responsibility of direct rule and, while this remains his view, he will want to continue maximum support for Mr. Faulkner. I argued that, while Mr. Faulkner is not without some versatility as a politician, he suffers from

the considerable defect of having been at no time trusted by the minority and, indeed, he is now ^{increasingly} mistrusted by the majority. I questioned whether, in the circumstances, he could have much hope of effecting a reconciliation between the two communities. Mr. Deedes readily accepted that this is a real weakness in Mr. Faulkner's position but went on to say that the backlash to which direct rule could give rise would be "too dreadful to contemplate". I said this need not necessarily be so if a determined effort were made in advance to call in even the licensed arms in the hands of the majority and if there were a departure, for which good grounds exist, from the present one-sided policy on internment.

These are the more important points we covered in a long conversation. Mr. Deedes told Lady Kelly before leaving that he was glad to have had a talk with me and that he would report fully on it to the Prime Minister when he will be seeing him this week.

Yours sincerely



Ambassador

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