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Reference Code:	2002/8/76
Title:	Copy letter from Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain Donal O'Sullivan to Secretary of the Department of External Affairs HJ McCann, reporting a conversation with Lord O'Neill of the Maine [Terence O'Neill], discussing the Northern Ireland political situation and the attitude of Northern Ireland Protestants towards the Republic of Ireland.
Creation Date(s):	14 January, 1971
Level of description:	Item
Extent and medium:	5 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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17 Grosvenor Place

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Confidential

January 14th 1971

Dear Secretary

As I told you on the telephone, an invitation from Lord O'Neill of the Maine to dine with him at his club awaited me on my return to the office on Tuesday. We had dinner alone together last evening, in the course of which we had a frank and very friendly talk on a variety of matters but especially on the Northern situation.

At the outset, he talked at some length about his meetings with Mr. Lemass and his later meetings with the Taoiseach. He recalled a number of quite amusing incidents relating to the arrangements for these contacts. Looking back now on these meetings and on the efforts at reform which he made in his time, he regards it as somewhat of a miracle that he survived so long as Premier. The succession of conspiracies to unseat him really started from the time of his first meeting with Mr. Lemass. His efforts to promote improved relations with us involved him in a lot of trouble but, even if he could have foreseen all the difficulties ahead, this would not have deterred him from the action he had taken.

The people in the North generally are a difficult lot, and we in the South have really not made any serious effort to get to know them and to increase their trust in us. We should be doing far more to "cultivate and show favour to our Northern neighbours" because there exists, even among the most moderate Protestants, quite a deep-rooted prejudice towards us. These reservations about us are not confined

to the Protestants alone, and it might surprise me to know that a sizeable number of the moderate Catholics in the North have no desire to join with us. During his term as Prime Minister, he had been told on many occasions by Catholics in the North that, if they were given the same treatment as the Protestants there, they would want the North to remain part of the United Kingdom. Against this background, "an immense and sustained effort" on our part at reconciliation is called for if unification in some form is to be brought about one day. The change of heart towards us needed in the North is a good deal greater than we seem to realise. It is true that the Common Market will remove most of the economic and social-service differences but these are very much the lesser part of the task ahead.

Ministers and members of the Opposition here had often talked to him about the possibility of our re-entry into the Commonwealth as part of an eventual unification settlement. He had always held the view that such a step by us was entirely out of the question. He went on to say that he believes this to be an even less likely possibility now as the significance of the Commonwealth is bound to diminish with enlargement of the EEC.

Lord O'Neill expressed himself as very pessimistic about developments in the North this year. Some prominent people, like Cardinal Conway, see the situation as improving. Regrettably, he does not share their view. The Extremists on both sides will see to it that "the pot is kept on the boil". On top of this, the MacRory Report could well give rise to political difficulties. His information from reliable sources is that influential elements among the Unionists will do everything possible to ensure that what

comes out in legislation is nothing more than a pale shadow of the Report's recommendations. There could be a Government crisis in the coming months, resulting in the downfall of Major Chichester-Clark. All sorts of intrigue related to the Report is building up behind the scenes. Faulkner is poised to take over. He is not a man of any principle and could be expected to swing very much to the Right. I asked Lord O'Neill if, in the event of Faulkner's advent to power, he could see Craig reinstated in the Cabinet. His reply was that he would bet all he has that this will not happen

It was obvious from Lord O'Neill's remarks that, curiously enough, he has a soft spot for Craig, with whom he remains on friendly terms.

Lord O'Neill was very critical of the Labour Government for the way in which they forced reform on the North. He himself would not have accepted James Callaghan's dictatorial line that "either you do these things or we take you over". While he personally favours all the reforms, it is well to bear in mind that strong resistance to them has been engendered among the majority, even among Moderates in the majority, because of the way in which they were forced on the Government. During a talk recently with John Hume, Lord O'Neill enquired if he was happy with the way the reforms were going, and he was greatly surprised at the reaction he received. It was "they are not like the reforms you introduced because there is no goodwill behind them".

He spoke about his relations with some of the people at Westminster during his term as Prime Minister. He got on very well with Mr. Wilson, who, he said, is far better than his public image. George Brown has been a close friend for

years. He did not have a lot of contact with James Callaghan but what he saw of him he did not particularly like. He greatly admires Mr. Heath as a politician and believes that he will be an outstanding success as Prime Minister. Even though they have met many times, he still does not find him an easy conversationalist.

Lord O'Neill strongly holds that the different Churches in the North could do far more to counter bigotry and promote harmony. He gave the highest praise to the Reverend Eric Gallagher of Belfast for the great work he is doing in this direction. Bishop Philbin has, he said, acted magnificently in recent times but he could have done a lot more earlier on. Lord O'Neill professed to have a warm friendship for the Cardinal but he added, with apologies, that "he is too weak, too cautious and perhaps a little devious".

Lord O'Neill said that he hopes one day to be able to call on the President. Mr. Aiken had mentioned to him in Strasbourg recently that he would like to take him to Arus An Uachtarain. Unfortunately, the present is hardly the time for him to make such a visit. Apart from the fact that it would inflame a lot of people in the North, there is the further important consideration that he no longer has police protection at his home.

Lord O'Neill repeatedly spoke with great warmth of the Taoiseach and asked me to convey best wishes to him. The two of them had, he said, got on so well together from the moment of their first meeting.

The foregoing is an account of the main matters which came up during our talk, which lasted $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours. I told him that I would very much like to have him at the Embassy for a

5

meal in the fairly near future. He said he would be delighted to come and to bring his wife. He asked if I would give him reasonable advance notice so that he could suggest a date when his wife would be on one of her periodic visits to London.

Yours sincerely

DONAL O'SULLIVAN

Ambassador

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