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Title: Note written by Hugh J McCann, Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs, regarding his meeting with the British Ambassador to Ireland, Leonard Figg, at which the contents of the Widgery Report into 'Bloody Sunday', 30 January 1972, were discussed, along with North-South cooperation in Carlingford Lough, the attempted assassination of John Taylor MP, possible talks between the British and Irish governments, constitutional arrangements in Northern Ireland, and the issue of a United Ireland.

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The British Ambassador came to see me at 11.30 a.m. this morning at his request. He handed me a copy of the Widgery Report which, he said, would be presented to Parliament at 3.30 p.m. this afternoon. He was giving me a copy of the Report in advance so that the Taoiseach would have it as a matter of courtesy before publication.

I took a rapid glance at the summary of conclusions in the Report and commented that, if this reflected the tenor of the Report as a whole, it would seem to be a rather one-sided interpretation of the events in Derry. I wondered how those in Derry, who were fully familiar with what had happened, would take the report. The Ambassador commented that there was something in the Report for everybody and suggested that when one read the body of the Report one would see that it was a model well-documented Report backed up by evidence. He realised, however, that some people in Derry would criticise it as the product of a British Judge with a British Army background. The Ambassador added that in London's instructions to Missions abroad the guideline was to play down the Report and regard it as relating to the past which had been overtaken by the recent British initiative. I said that I would suspend judgment on the Report until I had had an opportunity of reading it.

The Ambassador then referred to a Memorandum dated the 13th April which Mr. Blatherwick had handed into the Department about Greenore Ferry Services Ltd. and the Carlingford Lough Commissioners. The Ambassador referred in particular to the penultimate paragraph of the Memorandum and said that, while this may represent a rather "mealy mouthed" way of saying it, the final sentence of this paragraph was intended to convey the view of the Foreign Office that perhaps this would provide an opportunity for joint North-South cooperation in a functional area. He thought that this was an approach that should be welcomed and encouraged.

The Ambassador reminded me about the secret document which he had handed me on 5th April asking for certain assistance in connection with weapons which may have been used in the attempted assassination of Mr. John Taylor. He requested an early reply.

The Ambassador then referred to the case of Mr. Elliott of the UDR who was kidnapped north of the Border and brought south across the Border. He sought maximum Garda cooperation in locating this individual. He said that London had picked up a reference in yesterday's Irish Times to the effect that the Gardaí were slow to raid homes and that pending instructions from Dublin there would be no raids. He said that if instructions from the Department of Justice were needed he hoped that these would be forthcoming.

The Ambassador said that he expected in the coming days to be receiving instructions about the reply from Mr. Heath to the Taoiseach's most recent message. He hoped that this might afford him an opportunity of having a more lengthy discussion with the Taoiseach. In the course of our interview I had a fairly wide ranging discussion with the Ambassador about the possibilities of making progress in the Northern situation. I spoke of the importance, in my view, of early contact with Mr. Whitelaw and his officials.

I emphasised the importance of not playing the IRA game by political inaction and leaving the vacuum to be filled by an escalation of military confrontation which would tend to attract local popular support to the IRA again. I referred to the McCann incident and the delay in phasing out internment. The Widgery Report, if it were not accepted as objective, would also be unhelpful in this context. London and Dublin should lose no time in working out together how best to move forward towards Irish unity, the objective which is increasingly being accepted by a wider number of people as the only long-term solution.

The Ambassador commented that Mr. Whitelaw is still feeling his way with the Unionists. He agreed as to the desirability of early contact with Mr. Whitelaw and his officials. He thought that it would be difficult for Mr. Whitelaw to come to Dublin as yet but thought that it should be possible for one of his senior officials to do so. I referred to the importance of contact with Mr. Whitelaw at the political level and to Mr. Whitelaw's own desire for such contacts. The Ambassador accepted that it would be inappropriate for the Taoiseach to go to London to see Mr. Whitelaw and he wondered whether the Minister would be passing through London in the near future when a meeting between him and Mr. Whitelaw might be arranged. I informed the Ambassador that the Minister might be passing through London on his way back from Luxembourg next Monday. The Ambassador thought that it would be better for the Minister to go to London to see Mr. Whitelaw than for Mr. Whitelaw to come to Dublin at the present time. The Ambassador expressed appreciation of the Minister's speech in the Dáil yesterday which he had already telegraphed to London this morning.

As for a meeting between the Taoiseach and Mr. Heath, the Ambassador expressed the opinion that the next meeting at the summit must be well prepared in advance as it would have to deal with "big stuff". This pointed to the necessity for earlier meetings with Mr. Whitelaw and his officials at the appropriate level.

Giving his personal view as to how progress might be made, the Ambassador said that he had already indicated to London that he thought complete integration of the North into the United Kingdom would be quite wrong. He thought that one should work for the abolition of all discrimination in the North and to work towards the creation of a new Stormont which would have full regard to the interests of both communities. He said that while the prorogation of Stormont had been for a year in the first instance there should be no difficulty in having this extended until appropriate arrangements could be made.

I referred again to the growing acceptance of our viewpoint that unity is the solution and warned against believing that a revamped Stormont would be a final answer. This would only lead to periodic eruptions of violence in search of unity. Furthermore, London should now be beginning to recognise that it is in Britain's own interest to find a final solution to the Irish question and they should bring persuasion on Unionist opinion towards this end. Indeed the Unionists themselves should see that their days of special privilege are gone and that they would have a better future and more influence in a united Ireland designed to take care of all their legitimate interests.

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The Ambassador volunteered the information that, if this were our view, it is important that we should out-flank the extreme Unionists by working on moderate Unionist opinion in the North and moderate Conservative opinion in Britain. He said that, following recent events in the British Labour Party, the Conservative Government is likely to be in power in Britain for a considerable time to come. One should not rely on the Conservative Party taking initiatives in this matter. We should be working on moderate Conservative opinion, such as banking and industrial circles. The higher up the economic scale one is, the easier it is to get acceptance of a rational approach to this whole question, but one must not forget that, once the moderates at this level have been convinced, there still remains the problem of persuading the British electorate. I referred to the fact that there was growing evidence of opinion in the "Establishment" in London that a united Ireland was accepted as the answer. Apart from the statements of the two Opposition political parties, one had personalities, such as the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Mountbatten, accepting this view.

The Ambassador volunteered the opinion that we should play the EEC card for all it was worth. Given the complexity of the EEC situation he thought that there was a clear case for a joint committee or council to deal with Border problems and regional policy in the EEC context. This could be sold to British public opinion as being necessary in view of the peculiar problems of the North. In time, this body could be expanded in its functions.

Coming back to his earlier remark favouring a new and restructured Stormont, the Ambassador said that he could not foresee a complete take-over of Stormont by Leinster House. He thought that an easier approach would be to have a new Stormont working in ever-closer cooperation with Dublin with a joint advisory body which, continental style, in time would take on executive functions. After some further discussion I urged the importance of London and Dublin moving forward without further delay in searching for the best approach to the ultimate solution of unity. We promised to keep in touch. The Ambassador himself is going to London on 29th April for a meeting in London in the EEC context.



19 Aibreán 1972