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Title: Letter from Donal O’Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain, to HJ McCann, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a meeting with William Whitelaw, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, regarding political developments and violence in Northern Ireland and the proposed plebiscite on the Northern Ireland constitutional position.

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PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

27th October 1972

Dear Secretary

I gave you yesterday afternoon on the telephone a brief outline of the talk I had had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

I saw the Secretary of State at 4 p.m. and was with him for about 45 minutes. Mr Kelvin White of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was present throughout the discussion and seemed to take copious notes. Mr White was in Mr Whitelaw's ante room when I arrived and I inquired if he was coming to keep an eye on me. Insofar as I can recall this was the first occasion in which a Foreign and Commonwealth representative was present at any meeting which I had with the Secretary of State. Mr White told me that Mr Whitelaw is occasionally inclined to go too far in unburdening himself to visitors, and it is important to keep him on the rails. Furthermore, it is essential that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should be aware of the substance of the conversation not only for their own information but also for the information of Ambassador Peck. Indeed, the thought occurred to me that Mr White's presence may not be altogether unconnected with the further developments in Strasbourg.

The Secretary of State received me with his usual warmth. He told me that an advance text of the Green Paper had already gone to the Taoiseach. Nobody else had, so far,

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- 2 -

been given an advance copy and, if it became known that the Taoiseach had received one, a very embarrassing situation could arise for Mr Whitelaw. He asked me to urge that the copy supplied should be strictly regarded as personal to the Taoiseach himself. Mr Whitelaw had little to say about the contents of the Green Paper. Generally, it could be taken that it kept all options open. However, anybody reading the document would have little doubt that UDI and integration are non-starters.

Mr Whitelaw then went on to tell me that he has decided to postpone for six months the local elections in the North. All the information available to him indicates that, in the present inflamed situation on the majority side, it would be impossible to carry out the elections in any orderly or effective way in December. He was personally very sorry to have to make this decision and he hoped we would understand that he had little alternative because of the menacing attitude on the Protestant side. The decision about postponement of the local elections may be made to-day.

Mr Whitelaw then told me that arrangements are well advanced for the setting up of the promised Tribunals. He hopes to have them in operation early in November. His expectation is that, once the Tribunals get into action, it will be possible to release a sizeable batch of internees from Long Kesh very quickly. He then commented at some length on the continued refusal of the SDLP to enter into discussions while internment lasts. This

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- 3 -

is a most unfortunate situation. If he knew in advance that Operation Motorman would have gone off without a hitch he might have been able to empty Long Kesh. However, it is easy to be wise after the event.

The plebiscite will take place as early as possible in the New Year and the necessary legislation for it will be completed before Christmas. Mr Whitelaw said, in reply to some comments by me, that he fully realised how distasteful the plebiscite idea is to us. The pressures on him for the plebiscite are enormous and, if he were to delay it, tempers on the extreme Protestant side would certainly boil over and the consequences could be very tragic indeed. I asked Mr Whitelaw if it has been decided what type of question will be posed in the plebiscite. He said the voting paper will have two questions which will be framed somewhat as follows:

- (1) do you want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom?
- (2) do you want Northern Ireland to join the Republic?

Mr Whitelaw hoped that we could find it possible to encourage the fullest possible co-operation by the minority side in the plebiscite and he added that, if there were, say, a 35%-40% support for reunification, this could have an influence on the type of solution to be subsequently found for the North.

Mr Whitelaw hopes that, as soon as the Green Paper has been studied, reactions to it will pour in rapidly. Comments and suggestions from Dublin will, of course,

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- 4 -

be very warmly welcomed. So far, Mr Whitelaw has not made up his mind on the form of consultation on the Green Paper to be undertaken with the various interests in the North. I remarked that he is no doubt well aware of the Taoiseach's firm belief that the Dublin Government should be involved in consultations. Mr Whitelaw said that this would present difficulties in view of the menacing attitude from the Protestant extremists. When I pressed him further on the point later in our conversation he did say that a decision on this is not one for him, "it is one for the Prime Minister and Alec". He described the Taoiseach's idea of quadripartite talks as somewhat unrealistic and he questioned who would represent the different interests in the North in such talks. Craig would, for obvious reasons, be out, but it is disturbing to find that he has at the moment a larger following than might have been expected. Faulkner's influence has greatly diminished and Paisley has lost a very large part of his grass roots support. Much the same type of question might be raised about the minority side. For example, does Gerry Fitt really represent a bloc of minority opinion in the North, particularly after his highly critical speech last week on the Dublin Government. Who can say where Paddy Devlin stands. One would hope that John Hume and Austin Currie are reasonably representative of ~~the~~ minority opinion in the North.

I then asked Mr Whitelaw if he has yet any precise ideas about the timing of the issue of a White Paper and of the introduction of legislation for a solution.

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- 5 -

He said that his hope is that the White Paper will come as early as possible in the New Year so that draft legislation can be put before the House here as well in advance of the March deadline as possible.

Mr Whitelaw then made a lengthy and rather emotional appeal for help from Dublin to get him off the hook. He has, he said, serious and growing difficulties with his own backbenchers about the North. While he was lucky in being able to handle the situation at the Party Conference, this does not at all mean that the pressures on him to take penal action against us has diminished. In fact, the opposite is the case. Powell received a very disturbing degree of support (but not on the Irish question) at the Conference and it can, as a result, be taken that this will encourage him to be even more difficult as the Government moves towards finding a solution for the North. Even though the pressures from the backbench are great, Mr Whitelaw said he would like to give the most firm assurance to the Taoiseach that the solution which will be proposed will certainly not be one which would make life more difficult for the Dublin Government. Mr Whitelaw spoke with great warmth of the speech made recently in the United States by the Minister for Justice and he intends to make reference to that speech when addressing a Press Group in London to-day. More speeches of this nature by spokesmen of the Dublin Government would greatly ease Mr Whitelaw's burden in the months ahead.

While Mr Whitelaw is convinced that Dublin is doing a lot to curb the activities of the IRA, Westminster

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- 6 -

will probably have to continue to press us to do more about border security. The firing from our side in the past few days of over a 100 rounds in the Crossmaglen area is most disturbing. Mr Whitelaw expressed regret that they may find it necessary to raise this incident in a serious way with us. Mr Whitelaw expressed satisfaction that, despite incidents such as that at Crossmaglen, all the evidence points to the fact that the IRA are being squeezed. I then reiterated our concern about the bombing incidents on our side of the border for which the UDA has claimed responsibility. Mr Whitelaw told me that there have, in fact, been four such incidents and their investigations so far cast serious doubts as to whether they were at all the work of the UDA. There is a possibility that the UDA were responsible for blowing up the fertiliser factory at Carrigans, but it is far from certain that they had anything to do with the other incidents.

Again reverting to the Green Paper, Mr Whitelaw expressed the earnest hope that we would find it possible to give a moderate and constructive reaction to it. It is, he said, only a basis for discussion, and he again repeated that the solution which will be proposed later will, in fact, be helpful to us. I took the opportunity to raise again with him at that point the question of consultation, but he was not prepared to go further than he had done earlier. He mentioned that ad hoc meetings at Ministerial level can be arranged without much difficulty. He himself will be ready at any time to see me, and Ambassador Peck fortunately has

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- 7 -

ready access to the Minister and to the Taoiseach. He continued by saying that "Ken Whitaker has been doing a lot of useful work behind the scenes". There will be no difficulty about arranging visits to Dublin by Bloomfield for detailed talks with Dr Whitaker. Dr Whitaker can also count on the ready availability of Sir William Nield for discussion of the details of any proposals which we may wish to advance.

The foregoing, I think, covers fully the various points which came up during our talk.

Yours sincerely

DONAL O'SULLIVAN

Ambassador

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Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

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NOTE

Ambassador O'Sullivan gave me a brief report on his meeting with Mr. Whitelaw this afternoon. Mr. Whitelaw was accompanied by Mr. Kelvin White of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office whose presence the Ambassador interpreted as being for the purpose of acting as a restraining influence on Mr. Whitelaw.

The following are the main points which emerged from the discussion:-

1. A copy of the Green Paper is en route to the Taoiseach for his personal information.
2. The decision to postpone the Local Elections for six months is about to be announced.
3. The proposed Tribunals are to be set up immediately either next week or the week after.
4. Legislation on the plebiscite is to be completed before Christmas so that the plebiscite could take place early in the New Year. The plebiscite will deal only with the simple issue as to whether the people in the North want to remain part of the UK or not or whether they seek unity with the South.
5. The IRA are being squeezed at present. Mr. Whitelaw referred to the incident at Crossmaglen and there may be representations to us about it.
6. The question of including us formally in the talks following the Green Paper would be difficult. On being pressed about it Mr. Whitelaw said that it was a matter for the Prime Minister and Sir Alec Douglas-Home. They expect that the proposed White Paper and draft legislation will be ready well in advance of the March deadline.

In response to the Ambassador's representations about UDA activities Mr. Whitelaw had serious doubts about their being responsible for some of the incidents which they claimed. There are doubts about the Clones, Co. Monaghan, incident but they may have been involved in that at Carrigans, Co. Donegal.

I commented that Whitehall seems to be giving in to Unionist pressure and I asked ~~are they~~ backing away from what he was told by Sir Stewart Crawford, namely, that our views on the Green Paper would be very welcome. The Ambassador said that any views we would have to offer are still very welcome but he indicated that he was told that there is already the closest contact through Ken Whitaker who is very closely involved in this matter. He said that Whitaker had been in touch with Bill Nield and Bloomfield in the North as a personal emissary of the Taoiseach.

Finally Mr. Whitelaw expressed the hope that there would be understanding of his position and that the Taoiseach would not be too negative in his public reaction to the Green Paper when published on Monday.

- 2 -

Kelvin White commented to the Ambassador on the way out that he had been present lest Mr. Whitelaw, in his generous nature, would have gone further than officials would have wished.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Kelvin White', written in a cursive style.

26 Deireadh Fómhair 1972