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**Reference Code:** 2004/7/2695

**Title:** Confidential memorandum written by a member of staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs concerning a meeting with the British Ambassador to Ireland, in which the issue of releases of internees was discussed.

**Creation Date(s):** 31 December, 1973

**Level of description:** Item

**Extent and medium:** 2 pages

**Creator(s):** Department of Foreign Affairs

**Access Conditions:** Open

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ConfidentialReleases from detention

I saw the British Ambassador on 24 December and, in the course of the interview, I referred to disappointment caused by the relatively low figure of releases. The Minister had asked me to say that we were not happy about the number in view of the fact that a figure of 150 had been envisaged as a result of representations made by the SDLP at Sunningdale. Our information was that the SDLP had in fact been seeking a figure of about 300.

The Ambassador said that no promise had been given that any particular number of detainees would be released. I said that no figure had been mentioned in the Communique but we believed that there was an informal understanding that some 150 would be released. The Ambassador denied this and went on to give the actual figures involved in the releases prior to Christmas as follows:-

65 released by the Secretary of State in exercise of his statutory powers

23 released by the Commissioners under their regular review.

Total: 88 released.

As of that date, 24th December, the following numbers remained in custody:-

367 held under detention orders

209 held under interim custody orders

Total: 576

I remarked upon the relatively large number of persons held under interim custody orders and the Ambassador said that it was hoped to have these cases reviewed as soon as possible. He said that the SDLP complaints could be summed up under three headings: (a) the number released was not large enough; (b) the releases were not "geographically helpful"; and (c) the wrong people ("bad hats") had been released.

The Secretary of State, according to the Ambassador, had done as much as possible, taking into account the security situation and the sensitivity of public opinion. The security risks were very high and, in view of the continuation of violence and its extension to Britain, opinion in the Protestant Community and public opinion in Britain were factors which

could not be disregarded.

The Ambassador referred to the statement from the Secretary of State, Mr. Pym, on 20th December, which, while emphasising that the phasing out of detention depended upon the reduction of violence, had also referred to the importance of paving the way for the normal political process to operate. This was a new departure in so far as it stressed an "evolutionary approach" towards the question. The men of violence must be shown that the normal political process can work. In this context it was the intention of the Secretary of State to bring about a situation in which offenders of all kinds could be brought before the courts. In working towards this end, he hoped to introduce good behaviour parole arrangements as part of a continuing phasing out process.

As regards the Ambassador referring to SDLP complaints about the wrong people having been released, this has been confirmed by Paddy Devlin who has informed me that the release list was not the one agreed with the security forces, who are very concerned at some of those released, including Seamus Loughran, who is very close to Seamus Twomey and was one of those involved in the Benadcoor incident in 1972. Devlin says he has reason to believe that the list was drawn up with a view to some deal with the Provisionals on a cease-fire.

Apart from these remarks on the list of those released, Devlin expressed no strong views on the fulfilment of any pledge or promise as to the number to be released. His main concern was not about the number but the individuals involved.

31st December 1973