

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code: 2005/4/71

Title: Copy letter from Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain D O'Sullivan to HJ McCann, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a meeting with William Deedes MP, discussing domestic British politics and prospects of a settlement in Northern Ireland, and a meeting with Lord Masereene and Ferrard [John Whyte-Melville-Skeffington], mainly regarding Unionist opinion on the proposed Council of Ireland.

Creation Date(s): 6 May, 1974

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 4 pages

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Access Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

7 MAY 1974

17 Grosvenor Place

SW1X 7HR

Personal and Confidential

6th May 1974

10
5

Dear Secretary

My wife and I spent the week-end at the country home in Kent of Lady Kelly.

After dinner there on Saturday evening I was able to have a private chat with Mr William Deedes, M.P. The main points which emerged from our conversation are these:-

- (1) He told me in strict confidence that he will be announcing shortly his decision not to contest the next Election. He is about to acquire some new interests for which he wants to be free to devote more time.

He hinted at dissatisfaction on his own part with Mr Heath's leadership and mentioned that, at constituency level in many parts of the country, there is growing pressure, particularly from the young, for a change. The rumoured early return of Sir Christopher Soames to a safe seat is not unconnected with this. There is no other obvious successor except Sir Keith Joseph "and he is, of course, an Orthodox Jew". Gossip incidentally has it that Mr Deedes is disappointed at not having been included in the recent Honours List.

- (2) While Mr Deedes does not exclude the possibility of a June Election, he thinks the likelihood of this is now diminishing because of the recent muck-raking "of which there is more still to come". The Prime

- 2 -

Minister is undoubtedly under strong pressure to go to the country in June, and the results of the London Borough Elections are hardly likely to reduce that pressure. Labour has held its position reasonably well given the fact that it had a landslide success in 1971.

- (3) A fundamental reappraisal by the Tory Party of its domestic policy is urgently necessary. A considerable overhaul of previous policies, particularly in the fields of education, housing and labour relations, is called for. It will not be easy to get the required changes with Mr Heath as Leader.
- (4) Mr Deedes is pessimistic about Sunningdale. It may not be possible to continue the bipartisan policy here. The Council of Ireland is a stumbling block in the minds of an increasing number of Tories. There could also be deep political divisions on the action to be taken arising out of the Law Enforcement Commission Report. Mr Deedes urged the need for close contact between Ministers on our side and the Tory Northern Ireland group. They had, he said, a most useful meeting recently with the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs. He hoped that our Minister will be free to see them soon and he will be taking steps to invite the Minister.
- (5) There is growing doubt in Tory and in some Labour circles about the effectiveness of Mr Rees as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. There are doubts about him also in the North and these were clearly expressed to Mr Pym during his recent visit there. The Secretary of State is "for one

.../...

- 3 -

thing allowing himself to be too much the instrument of his Civil Servants." By contrast, the Minister of State, Mr Orme, is thought to be doing a good job.

- (6) A change in the leadership of the SDLP may be a good thing. There are signs that Gerry Fitt is increasingly losing the confidence of some of his senior colleagues.
- (7) Harry West is well regarded in Westminster, as he is in the North. Craig is perhaps the most dangerous of the Loyalist politicians there. He is unbalanced, and, in his present frame of mind, would have no hesitation in giving encouragement to violence from his side.

On our way back to London yesterday afternoon we visited Lord Massereene and Ferrard, who was also a guest of Lady Kelly the previous evening. His family seat is or was in County Antrim, and he has always been regarded as a very moderate Unionist. In fact he has, on occasions, been fairly helpful to our point of view in debates in the House of Lords. He consistently refused during the years to join the Orange Order.

He wants Sunningdale to be given every chance even though he is doubtful as to whether it will succeed. He is not enthusiastic about a Council of Ireland as envisaged, but is prepared to support the idea of a Council with limited Executive functions of a non-political character. As an ardent Tory he doubts whether Labour policy on the North will be sufficiently courageous and positive. While he respects the present Secretary of State personally,

.../...

- 4 -

his feeling is that, so far at any rate, Mr Rees is failing to get a grip on the situation.

Lord Massereene claimed to be in close touch with the Unionists at Westminster. He is doing his best to influence them to modify their attitude to the Executive. The sooner they realise that Westminster really wants to be rid of the North the sooner will there be a hope of peace. This is the line he is taking with them.

From my conversations at the week-end with Lord Massereene, with William Deedes and with Mr Montgomery Hyde, whom I also met in Kent, it was clear that Mr McIvor's proposals for integrated education had made a considerable impact on them. They all deplored, in no uncertain terms, the first reaction to these proposals shown by representatives of the Catholic Church.

Yours sincerely

DONAL O'SULLIVAN

Ambassador

Mr Paul Keating
Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs