

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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✓ Secretary *[Signature]* 15/4/45  
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With the Compliments

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*[Signature]* Secretary *Mr. Duffin*  
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Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr Mr *[Signature]*  
Can you see where  
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An Rúnaí

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An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha

Visit to Northern Ireland - 9/10 April 1975

1. I visited Belfast, Armagh, Portadown and Newry where I met mainly with Convention candidates and party officials of the SDLP. In Belfast, I also talked to Tom Conaty and CCDC officials and had a meal at St. Joseph's Training College in Andersonstown with, among others, Fr. Dallat (Principal), Seán Nolan (Deputy Principal) and Fr. Brian Brady. I also talked in Belfast to Dr. Raymond McClean of Derry.
2. The British Army profile still appears very low by comparison with the pre-ceasefire situation and there is no obvious increase in security activity in response either to the sectarian assassinations and bombings or the fighting involving the IRA/IRSP and the UDA/UVF. In Belfast there has been a dramatic increase in petty crime and general lawlessness since the beginning of the ceasefire. The Provos. have not made efforts to police any minority area nor have the authorities seriously tried to re-introduce policing in any form. The so-called Provo. incident centres do not seem to have had any great impact and they have not become focal points for community activities or the airing of grievances. It is clear that the Provos. do not have available at local level the sort of people who can give assistance in matters such as housing, welfare cases and the red tape of jail visits and parole. Some SDLP men claim that the Sinn Féin centres are actually sending people to them for help in dealing with urgent problems and the CCDC is still the main Long Kesh welfare organisation in Belfast with buses to and from the camp on visiting days and a food parcel delivery service every day. The prospects for a continuation of the Provo. ceasefire - if it can be called such after major downtown bombings in Belfast, acknowledged shootings at British Army, RUC and UDR in South Armagh and Newry - are widely believed to be poor. The Provo. leaders, notably Ó Brádaigh and Ó Conaill, did a tour of Northern Ireland around Easter addressing public meetings and taking private soundings about support for participation in the Convention elections. Though their public meetings and Easter commemoration parades were well

attended, they are said to have been disappointed both by the absence of support for their prized incident centres and by the general lack of interest on the part of their followers in going political. People I talked to whom I know to be in touch with the Provos. said that the activists, especially in Belfast, South Armagh and Tyrone, want an immediate resumption of offensive activities and were temporarily silenced only by an assurance that the leadership was in the process of negotiating with the British on the terms of a declaration of intent to withdraw. The activists are said to be sceptical about the outcome of these talks and it seems only a matter of time before they force the leadership back to a full campaign. Paddy O'Hanlon thought that the South Armagh Provos. would be the ones most likely to bring about a major incident - it is significant that it is mainly in this area that the security forces have been attacked fairly regularly since the beginning of the ceasefire and also that Sinn Féin have formally closed their Newry incident centre - and he was worried that the departure from the area in the next ten days of the Green Howards and the arrival of a new battalion would facilitate such a development. He had alerted the officer commanding the Green Howards to this possibility and asked him to ensure that his successor was well briefed.

3. Despite the apparent defeat for the "politically inclined" Provo. leaders, Sinn Féin Kevin St. is running a well organised political campaign in relation to the Convention elections. The reasons for boycotting the Convention are being explained in detail through meetings, pamphlets, the Andersonstown News, etc., and in some areas a door-to-door canvass is being done, ostensibly to explain to people how to ensure that their vote is not used by someone else. There is no doubt that this political exercise will be accompanied by widespread intimidation to achieve the maximum boycott of the elections and the SDLP are worried that these factors together with a general feeling that the Convention is doomed to failure will combine to keep the minority vote lower than at any recent election.

As against this they may be inclined to underestimate the efficiency and sophistication of their own organisation which is considerably more impressive at local level, particularly in West Belfast, Armagh, South and North Down, than at any previous election. The challenge of the Republican Clubs, strongest in mid-Ulster and Armagh, is likely to be reduced by the Official IRA/IRSP feud and with the possible exception of Frank McManus in Fermanagh-South Tyrone, if he runs, independent candidates will hardly present a serious threat. Tom Conaty is running in West Belfast but since his decision to do so was a last minute one and he has absolutely no organisation, his record of five years work with the CCDC will hardly be enough to get him a seat in an area where he will be in competition with the two sitting SDLP representatives, two new but well-known SDLP candidates (Dr. Joe Hendron and Pascal O'Hare) and Bob Cooper of the Alliance Party. Conaty's decision to run derives from his conviction that Catholics need a "more Catholic and less nationalist" alternative to the SDLP.

4. The private SDLP view remains that the Convention is most unlikely to reach agreement and they have been very discouraged by recent private contacts, particularly with John Taylor who is taking a very strong no-power-sharing-with-the-SDLP line in his campaign. However, most of them at present envisage a minimum life of six months for the Convention which they expect will meet in formal plenary session in May and appoint committees which will go away and spend the potentially dangerous Summer months working, probably in private, on non-fundamental questions. In September/October, the full Convention might then begin to meet on a regular basis and the crunch could come sometime in the Autumn. Both Paddy Devlin and Paddy O'Hanlon told me separately that this likely programme for the Convention was one which they understood had the support of the UUUC many of whom did not want the Convention to end abruptly and deprive its members of their positions of leadership in communities where the para-militaries were only waiting for a chance to take

Over the leading roles. However, John Hume is being very careful not to commit himself to anything until the election results are in and the possibility of his swinging the SDLP to boycott the Convention in certain situations cannot be ruled out.

5. Raymond McClean drew my attention to a written reply by Rees to a PQ on the joint approach to the EEC to finance cross-border studies. (The text is attached.) The Derry City Council had in fact unanimously passed resolutions in September 1973 and February 1975 supporting the proposal and the Town Clerk had been instructed to forward the resolution to the NI Secretary of State. The Council is incensed at Rees' reply and have taken legal advice to find out what action they can now take. They will probably (a) write to Rees and demand an apology and (b) bring the matter to the attention of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

6. Seán Nolan gave me a copy of a report<sup>\*</sup> (attached) he did on the study <sup>Tour</sup> ~~town~~ of the Netherlands by Northern Ireland political representatives, media people and a few others. The main point of the tour was, of course, lost when the UUUC decided not to participate and Nolan reads this as yet another indication of UUUC determination to reject power-sharing at all costs. As someone who has been active in inter-community groups in Belfast in the last five years - most recently he has been chairing the political study weekends at Corrymeela - Nolan's contact with and reading of majority political opinion has been generally very accurate and he is pessimistic in the extreme of any prospects of a power-sharing government for Northern Ireland in the foreseeable future. Though he believes that some politicians, especially in Vanguard, could come to support some sharing of power, the average loyalist is now so deeply suspicious of British administrations with whom he associates the concept of power-sharing that he will not accept it, even if it is accompanied by every possible reassurance and guarantee.

\* not attached to this copy.

7. If anything the general mood of depression, fear and despair on the part of those in the minority community with whom I have been in contact in recent weeks is greater than it has been at any time since the fall of the Executive almost a year ago. It is difficult to explain this mood or the reasons for it but the following factors are mentioned by virtually everyone:

- the Provo. ceasefire from which so much was expected has done little to reduce the level of violence. In the three months since it started the ~~number~~<sup>level</sup> of violent deaths has been roughly the same as it was in 1973 and 1974. The only difference is that now there are no British Army casualties;
- the security forces have once more shown themselves to be unable to deal with sectarian assassinations and bombings, even during a Provo. ceasefire. Every Catholic in greater Belfast and in the Portadown/Dungannon/Pomeroy triangle is, and sees himself, as a possible target for assassination and, as in previous assassination campaigns, there is considerable fear. People leave their homes as little as possible and are extremely reluctant to answer knocks on their doors, especially after dark;
- the release of all loyalist detainees from Long Kesh in the middle of a campaign of loyalist violence has not only added to the fear - we and others have been repeatedly told by the British authorities that the loyalist perpetrators of some of the most brutal assassinations were detained. As Paddy Devlin said, it is not easy to sleep peacefully when you know that the man who stabbed Senator Paddy Wilson over thirty times and mutilated his body is now free again - but has convinced many that there is a return to the pre-1972 situation where internment was for the minority only;
- there appears to be no minority confidence in Rees who is seen as being motivated by an excessive sensitivity to the loyalist view on all matters, major and minor. (The transfer from British to Northern Ireland prisons of four London car-bombers is frequently cited. To eliminate possible loyalist criticism, British jails were searched for loyalist prisoners who might welcome a move to Northern Ireland, even though there had been no demand either from loyalist organisations or the prisoners themselves for such a move);
- Judge McDermott's decision in the McElhone case is seen as giving complete freedom to the British Army to do whatever it likes without regard to the law. Despite the decision, however, the reputation of the judiciary as a whole is still reasonably high and Judge Lowry's recent decision in a murder case that the RUC had used illegal methods to extract statements did much to balance the McDermott decision;
- there are continuing complaints about the lack of British interest in the administration of Northern Ireland. The Ministers at the NIO are not available to delegations, urgently needed decisions are being shelved pending the outcome of the Convention and politically sensitive disputes such as that involving the Fermanagh County Council's appointment of a recreation officer are allowed to drag on indefinitely;
- what is perceived as the Dublin Government's attitude to the Northern Ireland situation is also a factor in the minority's mood of despair. On the one hand Dublin is accused of total

lack of interest in what is happening in Northern Ireland and even those who say they appreciate the political reasons for official silence claim that the occasional public expression of concern or sympathy with the plight of the minority would at least provide consolation and could hardly do political damage. On the other hand there are those who say that Dublin has slowly but surely fallen in with the British line of bending over backwards to cater to loyalist sensitivities at a time when the loyalists are showing insensitivity to everyone else's views and may even, with British tolerance, be about to move back towards a situation of political domination of the minority by the majority;

- if there is one immediate factor more than another which is causing the current gloom on the minority side it is ~~that~~ the feeling that the forthcoming Convention is doomed to fail and that it is impossible to be sanguine about the long-term prospects for peace and stability in any of the possible evolutions of the situation subsequent to a second major political failure within two years.

  
Seán Donlon  
10 April 1975

c.c. PSM, Parliamentary Secretary, PSS,  
Mr. D. Nally (D/Taoiseach),  
Ambassador, London.