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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

cc: PSS

cc: *Mr. [unclear]*
Mr. O'Kearney

18th February 1977

Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

For the attention of Mr Gearoid O Broin

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I wish to report that I attended a fringe meeting at the Young Conservatives Annual Conference in Eastbourne on last Saturday, which was organised by the Young Conservative Branch of the Monday Club and at which the principal speaker was John Biggs-Davison, one of the Party's front-bench spokesmen on Northern Ireland.

Biggs-Davison made quite a moderate and sensible speech, in which he gave the impression that the only way he saw to resolve the present political impasse in Northern Ireland was via an emergency coalition Government (this is very much in line with the position he took during our private conversation at the Tory Party Conference in Brighton last October - see page 7 of my report of the 11th October 1976 on the Conference). In reply to questions afterwards, he tried to play down any strains in the relationship between Dublin and London and said that, while there were doubts in London from time to time about the policies and actions of the Dublin Government, Dublin had an equal right to be distrustful of the British Government, in particular given the meetings which had taken place between them and the Provos in the past.

Following the meeting Biggs-Davison invited me to join him for dinner but, as there were two of his constituency colleagues also present, it was not possible to sound him out in very much detail about the recent visit of Airey Neave to Northern Ireland and about Tory policy generally towards the Province at the moment. He did mention, however, that Jim Molyneaux had expressed great ^{disappointment} that his administrative devolution proposals had in recent weeks been considerably watered down and that, because of their fear of it being used for partnership purposes, the Official Unionist Party in Northern Ireland ^{had} altered his "Greater Council Proposal" to one for "Greater Councils". The dinner did provide me with the opportunity, however, to explain again our position on extradition

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in very firm terms to Biggs-Davison and to point out that this position had been accepted in two fora (bilaterally and in the EEC) by the British Government but had been, to our surprise, rejected in the Council of Europe context. He saw considerable merit in this argument and said that, if we could let him have some written background material on it, it would be quite helpful to him in internal party discussion on the question of extradition. He added that there was quite a strong feeling in the party at the moment, which was being mainly stirred up by Bill van Straubenzee, to have pressure put on Dublin to sign the European Convention on Terrorism.

In his speech to the Monday Club Group Biggs-Davison said that it was no bad thing for the Conservative Party to be led by a Conservative. Margaret Thatcher had twice written to the Chairman of the Monday Club to thank him for the Club's past loyalty and present fidelity to Toryism. The revolutionary left was now dominating the Labour Party and, as regards Ireland, The Troops Out Movement enjoyed support on the left of the Party and gave hope and encouragement to the Provisional IRA, in particular as it suggested that the will of the British people was being broken down.

The Official IRA were Moscow Marxists while the Provos wanted power from the barrel of a gun. The Officials now probably realised that insurrection might not achieve a Cuba in these islands. The Provos, on the otherhand, were waging a war against the people of Britain and Ireland and were of more danger perhaps to the Government of the Republic than to the Government of the U.K. Some people still spoke of a campaign to achieve civil rights in Northern Ireland but what was going on had nothing to do with civil rights. The IRA campaign was an elitist conspiracy which denied the most fundamental of human rights - the right to live in liberty under the law. Cardinal Conway had well described it as a campaign which spat in the face of Christ and "we all know that there is no connection between terrorism and any form of christianity". He went on to welcome the inter-denominational report presided over by Bishop Daly and in particular its indication of the prime facie duty of citizens to support the security forces against all paramilitary groups.

The security forces could not succeed unless the Government manifestly had the will to win. Unfortunately in Western Europe at the moment appeasement was fashionable and there was a general assumption that

if men resorted to violence they must have justice on their side. In addition, the dominant myth of our time was that terrorism must win and indeed the guerilla had been elevated to the level of folk hero in many countries. In Ireland, there was an attempt to confuse the old with the new, which was in fact a spurious comparison. However, no guerilla could hope to survive without the support of the people and this he hadn't got in Ireland, where he was alien.

There had been complaints that the security forces in Northern Ireland had to operate with one hand behind their back but when they had asked for specific suggestions they hadn't got very much to go on. Terrorism must be defeated by superior and more skilful forces. No one welcomes more than the terrorist the erosion of democracy by extreme measures, as it enables him to use the police state label to bring international opprobrium on the state. Yet, and here Biggs-Davison welcomed the SAS presence in Northern Ireland, the state must above all win. The beginning of the end would come in Northern Ireland when the terrorists saw no hope of bending the British will. Despite recent statements by the Secretary of State, the statement by the PIRA after the Oxford Street bombings suggested they did not believe that that stage had arrived. This was understandable in the light of the Government's unilateral disarmament policy in the face of the external threat and also ~~of~~ the fact that members of the Labour Party were ~~also~~ involved in TOM. This was understood better in Ireland than over here.

Some people were critical of the Irish Republic over extradition and over their failure to sign the European Convention on Extradition but they have also their criticisms of us and have been appalled - as has the Tory Party - by the trafficking between Merlyn Rees and the Provos. Compromise is not contained in the vocabulary of fanatics and terrorism does not stop at the Irish sea. Antrim is only fifteen miles from Scotland. If Britain weakens and takes troops out, how long before there is a Scottish Republican Army and a Welsh Republican Army who would say that devolution is only a sop?

In reply to a question about the next election in the Republic, Biggs-Davison said that the last thing he wished to do was express an opinion on who should be Taoiseach or who should be the Party in power in Dublin. While there had been a great improvement in the cooperation of the security forces and in Anglo-Irish relations since Mr Cosgrave took over it was a matter for the Irish electorate ^{to decide} who should form the

Government. Conor Cruise O'Brien had said some remarkable things about Northern Ireland and they in particular welcomed his recent speech on the Irish Constitution. They would much prefer to have seen Articles 2 and 3, rather than Article 44, removed yet they must not forget that in recent times very helpful glosses had been put on these Articles. He added that the present Taoiseach's father had entered into a very famous tripartite agreement in the 20's, when Dublin recognised Northern Ireland, which had been deposited in the League of Nations.

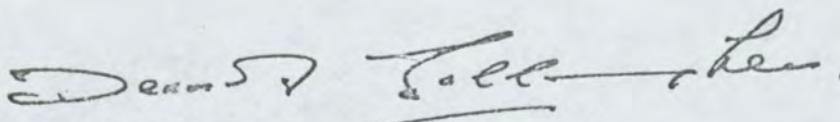
Asked about Tory support for the bipartisan policy, Biggs-Davison said that so far as possible national emergencies should be treated by national unity. The new Secretary of State had shown his willingness to prosecute the security campaign with vigour, and, for instance, when the UDR were under criticism he had gone out on patrol with them. The central question was how to get the godfathers behind bars and, in this regard, it was tempting to ask why shouldn't detention be used. The trouble was however that it had been discredited in the past by its indiscriminate use and at one time there were so many people interned that there was scarcely an R.C. family who didn't know somebody inside.

He then went on to speak about the 1956/62 IRA campaign which, he pointed out, had received very little support from Catholics in Northern Ireland. If Unionists at that moment, in particular Lord Brookeborough, had expressed their gratitude to the steadiness of R.C.s and had admitted that some things had been wrong in the past, then history might have been different.

Asked if a ^{military} solution was the only way forward, he said that progress on the political front would be helpful to a military solution. The present frustration of political leaders in Northern Ireland was very dangerous and the Conservative Party was very worried at the vacuum that existed between local Government in the Province, which had very limited powers, and the representation in the House of Commons. The reality of Government in Northern Ireland today was of a bureaucratic colonial system which would not have been tolerated in any colony overseas. They shouldn't wait therefore ^{for} a military victory before taking a political initiative.

In reply to a question about his own Party's thinking at the moment, Biggs-Davison said that they had been drafting proposals for an interim Council of State which they felt would help fill the vacuum in the Province.

Asked about power-sharing, he said that it existed at the moment in many local authorities. He thought it unwise to pretend that the SDLP didn't come nearest to expressing the political views of R.C.'s. That party was of course a mixed bunch, some being heirs to the old nationalist party and others going across into extreme republican sympathies. Institutionalised power-sharing couldn't be written into a new Northern Ireland Constitution. Yet the onus was on the Unionists, who would be the undisputed majority whatever happened, to make every effort to carry along the valid representatives of the R.C. community and not to drive the whole of this Community into the arms of the Republican Movement. Many in the SDLP had said that they were prepared to take an Oath of Allegiance and to cooperate in the Government of Ulster. One could not say that one would never look at partnership Government in the initial stages and, in this regard, one must distinguish between the SDLP and others on that side of the fence. In emergencies the British system of democracy did allow for coalitions and the unionists would be well advised in moving forward to a new system of devolution to carry with them R.C. representatives who were peaceful and law abiding and not to drive them away. This would not have been necessary if they had been more successful in the past in attracting them into the Unionist Party.



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