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Visit by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mrs. O'Kennedy
to Northern Ireland, 17/18 May 1978

1. The first appointment was at the Europa Hotel where the Minister and Mrs. O'Kennedy hosted a lunch for representatives of the Northern Ireland media, the British media and the Northern editors of the Dublin media. A full list of those who attended is attached. The Minister availed of the opportunity to brief those present on a number of issues including the Government's basic policy towards the Northern Ireland situation, security co-operation, economic co-operation and the current state of Anglo-Irish relations. He also answered a wide range of questions and the general tone of the lunch is reflected in the attached press clippings of the event.

2. The next appointment was with a delegation from the Churches Central Committee for Community Work. The Committee was set up by the four main churches at the beginning of the current troubles and is active in seeking to establish and maintain contacts between both sections of the community. The meeting took place in the house of Professor D.W. Harkness and, in addition to the host, those present were Mr. Brian McGuigan, Mrs. A. O'Boyle, Fr. P. Scott and Mr. Gordon Kennedy. The meeting was not particularly satisfactory in that the discussion was dominated by Mr. McGuigan whose obsessions not only with Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution but with parts of the preamble and of Article 1 made a reasonable exchange of views rather difficult. The Minister was asked and did have an opportunity to clarify what the Government meant by Irish unity and had some opportunity to talk about his interpretation of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. Among the points mentioned by Mr. McGuigan was a statement which he alleged the Minister for Industry, Commerce and Energy had made in Tokyo recently in which he was alleged to have claimed that Fianna Fáil "invented power-sharing". It should, of course, be obvious to all that it was Mr. McGuigan and others in the New Ulster Movement who invented power-sharing. The main message from the delegation as a whole was that Government policy, particularly as reflected in the Taoiseach's

This Week' interview last January while paying lip service to the principles of consent and agreement, was not in reality based on consent. The references, for example, to phasing out of the British subsidy and to removing the negative guarantee were not compatible with seeking unity by consent. They smacked of unity by coercion.

3. At about 6.00 p.m. the Minister met an Alliance Party delegation at their headquarters on University Avenue. Those present were Mr. Oliver Napier, Leader, Mr. Basil Glass, Deputy Leader and Mr. John Cushnahan, General Secretary. The atmosphere during the 45 minute meeting was very friendly and Mr. Napier started the discussion by saying that he had recently had an assurance from Mr. Mason that he and all his colleagues in the British Government were satisfied that security co-operation between North and South and between Britain and Ireland was now operating effectively and efficiently. Mr. Napier added that through his own contacts with senior RUC officers he could say that they too were warm in their expressions of appreciation. About half of the meeting was spent discussing extradition. Mr. Napier explained that his letter to the Taoiseach had not been intended to create political embarrassment and indeed had been written before the matter was raised in the British House of Commons during the debate there on the Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. He fully understood that the Taoiseach's speech of 27 April answered the points made in his letter and he accepted that the legal difficulties were as outlined by the Taoiseach. He himself did not believe that the absence of extradition arrangements constituted a security problem but they did, however, reinforce the political suspicion in Northern Ireland towards the Government in Dublin. He thought it would be helpful if we were to publicise more in Northern Ireland the sort of thing the Taoiseach had said in his speech and that we should in particular make it clear, when extradition applications failed, that these offences related to the period before the introduction of the extra-territorial arrangements. Another point made by the Alliance delegation was that the distrust between the northern Protestant community and the Republic had in recent months reached an all time low. This, however, did not reflect a permanent hostility to Fianna Fáil in Government. Mr. Glass recalled that there had been

considerable confidence in the Fianna Fáil Government in 1972/73 and he had no doubt that it would be possible to work back towards that position. Statements about Irish unity, however, tended to raise the temperature. Northern Protestants read only the headlines and not the detail of what was being said and every time such a speech was made it became more difficult for moderate unionists to hold their own in the constant struggle against the Paisleyites.

4. The Minister met an SDLP delegation at the party's headquarters and the meeting lasted for about an hour. Those present on the SDLP side included all the party's representatives on the Belfast City Council and the Chairmen and Officers of the party's branches in the greater Belfast area. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Joe Hendron, the West Belfast constituency representative. The Minister spoke to the delegation about the contacts between the Irish and British Governments since last September and in particular pointed to the joint communiqué issued after his recent meeting with Mr. Mason. He pointed out that paragraph 3 of the communiqué used words taken from an SDLP policy document - "agreed to encourage the political parties in Northern Ireland to come together in a system of devolved government based on the principle of partnership which both sections of the community could support and sustain". In a general discussion the main points raised by the SDLP delegates were the unacceptable methods of interrogation of suspects at Castlereagh RUC station, the continuing unionist domination of the NI Civil Service, the need to continue the pressure on the British Government to remove the negative guarantee, the importance of a greater commitment by Dublin towards cross-border economic co-operation and the dangers inherent in a federal Ireland arrangement in which sectarianism would be institutionalised within the Northern state. The current issue of greatest concern was that involving Castlereagh and a Belfast solicitor, Mr. Paschal O'Hare, and a local GP, Dr. Alistair McDonald, were loudly applauded when they described the situation there as totally unacceptable. Dr. Joe Hendron, a GP on the Falls Road, also emphasised the problem of Castlereagh and asked that we continue to press the British to close it down. Mr. O'Hare told the gathering about the

decision which he and seventeen of his colleagues had taken to opt out of the Court system for two or three weeks in June in protest against the administration and justice. They were critical not only of the Castlereagh set-up but also of bias in conviction and sentences by certain judges and of bias in the operation of the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. It was alleged that 93% of all convictions in the non-jury courts in NI were now based on nothing more than the statements of the accused and this had brought the whole system of the administration of justice into disrepute.

5. At 8.00 p.m. the Minister and Mrs. O'Kennedy hosted a dinner at the Culloden Hotel in Holywood, Co. Down. The guests were the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and Mrs. Patterson, the Rev. Hedley Plunkett, former President of the Methodist Church, Dr. John Oliver (former Permanent Secretary, NI Department of Commerce and recently Joint Secretary of the NI Convention) and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. Joe Hendron (SDLP), Mr. and Mrs. B. Henderson (Managing Director, Ulster Television), Dr. and Mrs. John White (Lecturer in Political Sciences at Queens University, Belfast), and Mr. and Mrs. O'Keefe (Editor, Irish News). The atmosphere at the dinner was very cordial and the guests genuinely welcomed the opportunity to meet the Minister and Mrs. O'Kennedy in an informal and friendly atmosphere. While many points were discussed over the four hour session, the general feeling expressed was that North/South relations had suffered in recent months by the unfortunate coincidence of the Taoiseach's 'This Week' interview, Archbishop O Fiaich's 'Irish Press' interview and the La Mon massacre. There did not, however, seem to be any feeling that this tension would continue and the visit by the Minister was welcomed as an opportunity to begin to reduce the temperature. There seemed to be general acceptance that security co-operation was not a problem and the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church said that he had a few days beforehand been assured by Mr. Mason that everything was now working well in that area. There was a good deal of discussion about the economic problems of Northern Ireland and in particular about the very high rate of unemployment in minority areas. The value of economic co-operation was stressed and on a more general level one of the guests made an emotional plea to Dublin to recognise that Ulstermen were proud of Ulster and its achievements.

In the presence of the Churchmen there was naturally some discussion of co-operation between the Churches and the picture that emerged was that co-operation between the four main Churches - the leaders meet monthly - was working very well at the moment. The remark of the dinner was that of Mr. O'Keefe who quoted the wee woman on Sandy Row as saying that what she feared most about a united Ireland was that Dublin would "have us practising celibacy on the streets". The particular value of the Minister's visit and the importance of personal contact between North and South was repeatedly stressed.

6. On 18 May the Minister and Mrs. O'Kennedy travelled to Derry where the first appointment was a formal call on the Mayor of Derry, Mr. Hugh Doherty (SDLP), his Deputy, Mr. Thomas Craig (Official Unionist Party), and the Chairman of the main Council Committees, Mr. Fergus McAteer (Irish Independence Party) and Mr. Bertie Faulkner (Alliance Party). The meeting took place in the Guildhall and was mainly social in nature although it did provide a useful opportunity for an informal exchange of views, in particular with the Official Unionist Party representative. Indeed the conversation with Mr. Craig was such that he found it possible to accept the Minister's invitation to join him at a lunch immediately afterwards. Before going to lunch the Minister recorded interviews for BBC NI Radio and RTE T.V. and Radio.

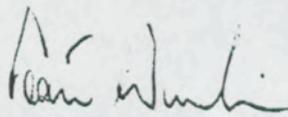
7. At a lunch hosted by the Minister at the Everglades Hotel the guests were Mr. Frank Curran (Editor, Derry Journal), Mr. Sidney Buchanan (Editor, Londonderry Sentinel), Mr. Michael O'Donnell (Local BBC Representative), Mr. John Dinsmore (Belfast Telegraph Representative), Mr. T. Craig (Deputy Mayor), and from the SDLP Messrs. Hume, Logue, Dr. Cosgrove and Mr. James Doherty. Two of the peripheral points that arose over lunch were firstly the possibility of extending the range of STD telephone contact between Derry and the Republic (the present position is that Derry numbers can directly dial to the Dublin numbers only and those present thought that it would be particularly useful to extend the service to include Cork, Shannon, Galway and Sligo) and secondly extending RTE T.V. to include reception within Northern Ireland.

8. In the afternoon, the Minister met a delegation from an informal committee of mothers with sons and daughters in Long Kesh. Those he met were Mrs. Doherty, Mrs. Coyle and Mrs. Nelis, each of whom had at least one son in H Block in Long Kesh. They wished to bring to the Minister's attention the present situation in H Block where 350 Provisional prisoners are involved in protest action. The meeting was cordial throughout and the women gave the Minister a detailed account of the current conditions in Long Kesh.

9. The Minister also met for about 20 minutes with Mr. Fergus McAteer of the Irish Independence Party. (The meeting took place despite strenuous objections by Mr. John Hume who felt that the very fact of the meeting would give a credibility to the IIP and thus contribute towards splitting the minority representation in Northern Ireland). The main point made by Mr. McAteer was that he and his co-chairman, Mr. Frank McManus felt that they should be received by the Taoiseach to enable the Government to have a first hand account of the party's aims and objectives. Mr. McAteer pointed out that they now had 13 district councillors throughout Northern Ireland and had as much a right to be heard in Dublin as the SDLP or anyone else. The Minister undertook to discuss the matter with the Taoiseach and contact Mr. McAteer again in due course.

8. At a dinner hosted at his house in the Bogside that evening by Mr. John Hume the Minister met the Bishop of Derry, Dr. Daly, Mr. Dick Ferris, President of the Londonderry Chamber of Trade, Professor Norman Givson of the New University of Ulster, Mr. Michael Canavan of the SDLP, Dr. Raymond McClean, former Mayor of Derry, and the Rev. Brian Hannon, a prominent local Church of Ireland clergyman. Among the points discussed - some at great length - were the Government's approach to the Northern Ireland problem. Professor Gibson and the Rev. Hannon were strongly of the view that while Government policy was stated to be based on consent it was not so perceived by the Northern majority. Professor Gibson also pressed the point - and was strongly supported by Mr. Ferris who described himself as a lapsed Unionist - that it was now up to Dublin to spell out in detail what exactly was meant by Irish unity. They would be prepared to take a hard look at anything which the South had to offer. Professor Gibson thought that there could be

no progress either within Northern Ireland or indeed from Britain until Dublin had put its cards on the table. There was also some discussion, as indeed there had been at the other meetings, about the attitude of the Catholic Church in the Republic to the problem of mixed marriages and there is no doubt that this is something about which the NI Protestant community feels very deeply. As might be expected in an area of high unemployment, there was a depressing view about the prospects for reducing unemployment and a feeling that there would not be a lasting improvement in the situation until there was devolved government. The Rev. Hannon warned, however, that the Protestant middle-class were very happily moving towards an acceptance of total integration and pointed out that, whatever the current attitude of the unionist politicians might be, most of his friends and parishioners were quite happy with the present constitutional arrangements. In regard to Protestant attitudes towards the South, the Rev. Hannon made the point that any Northern Protestants, especially those of a relatively low level of education, generally regarded people in the South as being inferior both to people in Northern Ireland and to people in Britain. Indeed it was probably true that a significant number of Northern Protestants still could not accept the fact that the South was an independent sovereign state. The value of personal contact and in particular the value of direct talking by politicians in Dublin to politicians and others in Northern Ireland was stressed over and over again.



Seán Donlon

20 May, 1978