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Crossmaglen GAA Grounds

On 12 March the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Brian Lenihan, T.D. received in Leinster House at 4.15 p.m. the President of the GAA, Mr. Patrick MacFloinn and the Ard-Stiurthoir, Mr. Liam Mulvihill.

Mr. MacFloinn briefed the Minister on the present situation at the grounds. He confirmed that the fence between the end line and the entrance area had been taken down by the British Army but that the 2ft wall had been left in place. There had been no improvement in the position in the entrance area resulting from the dumping by the British Army of rubble on GAA property and damage to the surface by heavy vehicles. (The club had however laid down hard core in the entrance area.) The entrance gates had again been damaged, apparently in January. Finally, the Group had been served with a further order under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act enabling the British Army to destroy or move any property between the 21ft line and the helicopter pad. The attached copy of the order was left by Mr. MacFloinn with the Minister.

The Minister described in detail the action taken by the Government over the years and specifically what had been done since the GAA raised the matter with Mr. Gene Fitzgerald, T.D., Minister for Labour and Minister for the Public Service, on 1 March. The Department had immediately raised the matter with the British Ambassador and Mr. Lenihan had ~~immediately~~ availed of his meeting in London on 4 March to pursue the matter further with Lord Carrington, the British Foreign Secretary. The Minister had impressed on Lord Carrington the sensitivity of the issue and had asked that the problem of the relationship between the British Army and the local group be considered with proper seriousness at senior level. The Department had, in the meantime, remained in contact with the British Embassy about the matter and the Minister proposed personally to speak to the British Ambassador at an early date. Mr. MacFloinn explained that as he himself lived in Northern Ireland, he had arranged that contact with the Irish Government would be maintained through Mr. Con Murphy.

Mr. MacFloinn said that the question of a member of the local club having been contracted by the British authorities to remove rubble, as had been alleged on a number of occasions, was news to him. He thought it in any event

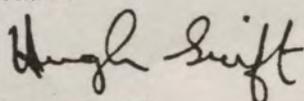
of limited relevance in that local contractors would in general be unwilling to take on British Army contracts in Crossmaglen. He thought that the only practical way to remove the rubble would be to use British Army direct labour.

At the end of this stage of the discussion it appeared that the most likely way of achieving some progress would be to press for the British to complete their works at the base as quickly as possible and to move the helicopter landing pad, as had been promised, further away from the playing area. Friction between club and the Army would be reduced if the Army were to build the wall they had spoken of in 1978. (This raises some issues of principle for the GAA because some of their property would be on the Army side of the wall but there is no reason to anticipate that this property will be returned in the foreseeable future in any event and there would be practical advantages in isolating the two parts from one another.) The Army should also be pressed to clear the rubble from GAA property, restore the surface of the entrance area to its former condition and rebuild adequately secure entrance gates. It would be necessary also for the Army to stick to its early undertakings, in particular, not to land helicopters on the playing field or elsewhere on GAA property and not to use the GAA entrance gates for access to the barracks.

The Minister said that the main element in all of this would be timing. He would ask the British authorities to specify a date by which an arrangement on these lines would come into force.

Mr. MacFloinn said that the club had almost completed its compensation claim and would send a copy to the Minister. Mr. MacFloinn also emphasised the responsible nature of those running the Crossmaglen club. While there might also be an irresponsible element within the club, it was in everyones interest that the club administrators not be undermined by needless provocation. The GAA Annual Congress would be on 29-30 March and the situation at Crossmaglen would almost certainly be discussed by the delegates.

Mr. MacFloinn also referred to a planning permission case in Ballymena in which the local club application had been rejected by the DUP-dominated council on political grounds. An appeal is pending and will be heard at the end of the month. Sean O'Neill in Belfast is the Solicitor acting for the case.



Hugh Swift

14 March 1980