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Visit of Inter-party delegation to Washington

31 March - 2 April 1981

1. The delegation was composed of Dr. Martin O'Donoghue, T.D., Dr. Garret Fitzgerald, T.D. and Mr. Frank Cluskey, T.D. accompanied by the undersigned and by Messrs. L. Hourican and F.O'Mahony. The delegation assembled at the Embassy on the evening of 31 March and held a preliminary discussion with the Ambassador and the two Counsellors of the Embassy, Messrs. Burke and Sharkey. The Ambassador circulated confidentially a draft Constitution of the Friends of Ireland which had been informally worked out (Annex 1).

2. In the course of this discussion the main development was the assertion by the two opposition leaders that they would not accept statements by the Friends of Ireland on matters of controversy in Irish domestic politics or statements which might be used by one side or the other in such controversy. They pointed in this connection to the reference made in the U.S. politicians' St. Patrick's Day statement of 1981 (Annex II) to the Anglo-Irish summit meetings of 1981 and their conclusions. They also referred to the Taoiseach's remark, in his speech to the Fianna Fáil National Executive on 26 March, to the effect that friends in America supported his initiative, as an example of what they considered to be abuse of the American connection. Dr. O'Donoghue arranged to meet the two Opposition Deputies for luncheon on 1 April to discuss methods of meeting their concerns on these matters in a way which would not negative the welcome which all three parties were agreed in wishing to extend to the setting up of the new U.S. Group.

Meeting with Speaker O'Neill

3. The delegation called on the Speaker at his office on 1 April. What was intended as a courtesy visit lasted for an hour. The Irish Deputies expressed their appreciation to the Speaker and his associates for what they had done over the years and for their initiative in deciding to set up the Congressional group. The view was expressed that the Friends of Ireland could contribute

much to strengthening American support for an understanding of reconciliation policies in Ireland. Mr. O'Neill spoke warmly about Ireland with many personal reminiscences. He indicated that the Group's constitution was still under active negotiation and discussion and hoped that it might be ready for subscription by or perhaps slightly after Easter at which stage the establishment of the Friends of Ireland would be formally announced. The Speaker enquired about the situation in Northern Ireland and about the economic situation in Ireland. On the latter point the replies of the three Deputies had varying emphases. In general comment on what the Friends of Ireland might accomplish, Mr. O'Neill observed that some second and third generation Irish-Americans "scared the hell out of him" on account of the inherited simplistic anti-Britishness of their attitude which all too easily took the form of committed support for violence in Ireland. It was essential to increase understanding of the reality among such people. Mr. O'Neill expressed confidence about getting a sizeable and influential group of American elected representatives into the Friends of Ireland.

Meeting with Congressman Foley and others

4. In the afternoon of 1 April the delegation met for two hours a group of Senators and Congressmen assembled for the purpose in his office by the Democratic Whip in the House of Representatives, Congressman Thomas Foley. The attendance was not constant as legislative duties called particular representatives from the room from time to time, but the following were present at various stages:-

Senators Joseph Biden and Christopher Dodd,
Congressmen Thomas Foley, Charles Dougherty,
James Shannon, James Howard, Don Edwards,
and Bernard Dwyer.

5. In the course of this meeting Mr. Foley who presided confirmed the bi-cameral, bi-partisan nature of the proposed body. Press reaction had been good and they were working to get together as large and representative a group of elected representatives as possible. They would probably not be in a position to announce the formal setting up of the Group until after Easter assuming that a constitution could

meanwhile be agreed. Replying to Dr. Fitzgerald's presentation of his views on non-involvement in Irish interparty political controversy, he said the Friends of Ireland should avoid "any policy statement going beyond a statement of principles." They would avoid party issues. He clarified to Senator Biden and Congressmen Dougherty that this did not mean that they should avoid supporting positive policies and that they should limit themselves to discountenancing the raising of funds for the I.R.A. Dr. O'Donoghue confirmed that the aim should be to discuss with Irish representatives and agree the direction in which policy should go.

6. A first aim, it was agreed, should be the putting of Congressional pressure on the U.S. Administration so that it would in turn lean on Britain. The launching of the "Atkins initiative" in November 1979 was attributed by Dr. Fitzgerald to such pressure in the past.
7. There was discussion about the involvement of Northern Ireland politicians in the U.S.-Ireland parliamentary link-up when it came to be established. Foley said it should not be an exclusively U.S.-Ireland (Republic) affair. Fitzgerald queried the phrase "members of an elected body in Northern Ireland" used in the draft constitution (Annex I) and indicated a preference for "elected representatives from Northern Ireland" which could include political representatives who had been members of the dissolved Convention (1975). (Comment: there would be no objection to Dr. Fitzgerald's suggested change. I understand the first formulation to have been drafted by Carey Parker of Senator Kennedy's office after long discussion with John Hume).
8. Dr. O'Donoghue indicated that an appropriate aim of the U.S. group should be to induce the Reagan Administration to repeat and confirm President Carter's statement of August 1977 concerning the encouragement of investment for an economic reconstruction of Northern Ireland after a political solution had been formed. This point is to be explored.

9. In more general exchanges, Congressman Dougherty (Republican, Pennsylvania) described pressures he was subjected to by Noraid and Irish National Caucus groups in his constituency. He enquired whether there was any prospect of getting Mrs. Thatcher to say that Britain supports eventual Irish reunification. If this could not be achieved he foresaw that the Friends of Ireland might be outrun in his area by men who saw the present conflict as a continuance of the 1916-1923 struggle and who openly supported violence. It was resolved that the U.S. Group together with its Irish counterpart must strive to educate people away from such attitudes. Foley warned against talk of "forcing reunification" which simply fed Paisleyism. A suitable formula might be to get the British Government "to use its good offices or to take initiatives to promote the reunification of Ireland". Moderate Unionists should not be discouraged by the Friends' actions.
10. Senator Dodd made the point that many Americans were familiar with the positions of Bernadette Devlin, Paisley and the British Government. What they did not know about was the views of Irish elected representatives. A clear perception of what the Irish parties stood for would enable the U.S. Friends to warn people "away from talk of an immediate, violent solution and towards a process". The aspiration of the Group must be towards reunification however. Congressmen Shannon also mentioned the simple absence of information as a problem for some members of the American public. It was pointed out to these representatives that the message from Dublin was a complex one. Most gatherings addressed by U.S. politicians were of a social nature and avoided political complexities. Many could not in the circumstances take in an account of Irish Government policy.
11. Deputy Cluskey spoke of the misunderstandings about Ireland commonly found amongst Irish-American trade unionists. He recommended that Irish trade unionists should travel regularly to different parts of the United States to try to gain acceptance of a truer picture of the situation. Deputy O'Donoghue suggested that Irish Ministers and other politicians should utilise visits to America however they arose to place their

services at the disposal of the Friends of Ireland and to make speeches about the Northern Ireland problem to appropriate audiences.

12. Senator Dodd then rather surprisingly referred to Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act and to the laws of evidence before the Central Criminal Court, particularly in regard to membership of illegal organisations, as examples of problems raised, sometimes vigorously, by constituents. Appropriate accounts of these matters were given by the three Irish representatives who presented a united front on the issues. Dougherty commented that there is no perception in the U.S.A. that the I.R.A. is hostile to Ireland (Republic). He also mentioned the question of the supply of American guns to the R.U.C. but Foley pointed out that this was not an issue at present.
13. Mr. Shannon mentioned an anticipated campaign against the Friends of Ireland by the Biaggi ad hoc committee, referring to letter writing which had already begun. Mr. Foley said they would avoid direct confrontation. He expected that some representatives would leave the committee to join the Friends, but that others would remain in both. In this context and in general terms he said the all-party recognition the Friends had received that they were expressing principles acceptable to all Irish parties was a very good thing. Similarly they appreciated the attitude of successive Irish Governments to hearings by Congress - that elected Irish representatives should be admitted to testify in preference to men of violence who represented nobody.
14. The questions of collecting evidence and judicial procedure in Northern Ireland having been mentioned by Senator Dodd, Deputy O'Donoghue, supported by both opposition spokesmen, said that they were more concerned about conditions of detention, whether during interrogation, on remand or after sentence and referred to the action before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. He mentioned also the problem of intimidation of witnesses as a major judicial difficulty.

15. A difference of assessment appeared between Foley and Dodd in regard to the New Group's prospects and immediate course. Dodd was of the view that people in the constituencies might try to see the Friends of Ireland as "pro-British". The Group must take up all legitimate anti-British issues. A single failure could bring disaster as Biaggi would try to disrail them. They should also avoid directly tangling with Biaggi. Foley took less account of Biaggi's influence, saying that all Biaggi had done was to arm Paisley and to give him the impression that all Americans were bomb throwers. They should avoid competing with Paisley. They should follow the path of the four R-hou~~s~~emen who had avoided getting into that mire. They should not try too hard to win over Biaggi either, they had to consider the views of moderate Northern Protestants. It would be too bad if Paisley were able to say to them, after they had welcomed the Friends of Ireland as Bishop Eames had done, "Fools; it is just Biaggi again;" Senator Dodd signified agreement and said that a broad umbrella of membership would make it hardest to attack the new Group. Mr. Foley concurred, stating however that membership should not smother each Congressmen or Senator who should be free to speak as an individual.
16. All three Irish Deputies indicated that they could accept without reservation the draft constitution as it stood on that date.
17. Congressman Foley confirmed at the beginning and again at the end of the meeting that the new Group had been announced but not yet set up. They would prefer that there should be no announcement of an Irish Group before the formal constitution of the Friends of Ireland. Probably that task could be completed and announced after Easter and at that stage they might say that they looked forward to the setting up of a corresponding Irish Parliamentary group. The Irish representatives said they had no objection to that.

Meeting with Senators Pell and Percy

18. A discussion took place in the ante room of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with Senator Pell on 2 April. Senators Percy, Sarbanes and Lugar joined the group. Questions which

arose were those of British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, the rejection of violence, the need for reunification by agreement, the involvement of both traditions in a settlement and the failure in 1974 of the British Government to deal with the loyalist political strike which brought down the post-Sunningdale power-sharing executive. After about ten minutes Senator Percy, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, called it into session and invited the Irish delegation to attend. At the outset of the session (which dealt with the confirmation of the appointment of a State Department official called Malone) the Chairman welcomed and named the Irish Parliamentarians indicating the purpose of their visit to Washington. The minutes of the Committee will include this information and it was felt that the "Friends of Ireland" would receive some publicity amongst Senators in consequence.

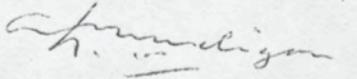
Conversation with Senator Edward Kennedy

19. A brief meeting with Senator Kennedy took place in the early afternoon of 2 April in the Senate. The Senator informed himself about the attitude of the inter-Party group to the Friends of Ireland and expressed confidence that the initiative, especially if it developed an Irish Chapter, could prove constructive and helpful. He said the Friends were determined to get as strong and influential a group together as possible and he mentioned particular "targets" they had in mind in both Houses. His aide Carey Parker had been present during the discussion in Congressman Foley's office the previous day and they were all greatly encouraged by the interest and support of the Irish parties. There was a great deal to do and they could do it best together.

Conclusions

2. The visit gave a valuable insight into the likely composition, policy line and effectiveness of the Friends of Ireland. There seems every likelihood that the strong centre of gravity formed by Speaker O'Neill, Senator Kennedy and Senator Moynihan will succeed in attracting, in addition to persons whose interest is known, numbers of American representatives who have no need - from the constituency point of view - to concern themselves with Ireland. This development would compliment a tendency which we should encourage to place the Northern Ireland issue in the category of a persistent problem of instability in a location within the area of the Western alliance about which the U.S.A. as a whole ought to be concerned. President Reagan spoke of the problem in such terms in his St. Patrick's Day message.
21. The policy line of the Group will broadly be that of keeping up pressure in regard to appropriate questions on the British Government through the U.S. Administration - a continuation of efforts in this direction which Congressman O'Neill and his friends have successfully made in the past. However, those at the centre of the Friends of Ireland initiative seem determined to ensure that they themselves and as many people in America as they can influence have as complete an understanding of all the complexities as possible. They wish to have systematic liaison with the Government, with all Parties here and with the S.D.L.P. They are also aware of and anxious to respect the susceptibilities of moderate Unionists. (In this respect the highest praise was given to Bishop Eames and his group whose visit to Washington in part coincided with that of the Parliamentary delegation). It seems probable that these ambitions on the part of the Group, which we should actively abet, will increase the precision and effectiveness of their approaches to the Administration and through them to the British.
22. They should also strengthen the Group in its other task of turning Irish-American opinion into the constructive path of supporting Government policy. As discussed in Washington, this is a task in which Ministers, Deputies on the Government side and perhaps even opposition T.D.'s and trade unionists can all directly assist.

23 The Senators and Congressmen whom we met clearly appreciated and welcomed the contacts they had with our delegation. These enabled them to get at first hand a positive and supportive reaction from an All-Party group at a time when their own internal planning and debate is not yet complete. They also got helpful views and advice on particular aspects of the Northern problem - the discussion in Congressman Foley's office had in part the character of a political clinic. Lastly they evidently valued the Irish visit because they will be able to use it to publicise the Friends of Ireland amongst American public representatives in the current recruiting phase.



D.M. Neligan

10 April 1981.