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Ms Deligan
Ms Burke
Ms Murphy, 27

CONSULATE GENERAL OF IRELAND

SAN FRANCISCO

17 February, 1982

PO 14

The Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

Attention Ms Margaret Hennessy, Anglo-Irish Section

Mr. McNamara
R. P. O.
1. N147/17/2
2. N1/2/5
and 3. Irish Forum SF?

With reference to previous correspondence, you will be aware that DUP representative Peter Robinson addressed the Irish Forum chapters in San Francisco and Sacramento during his visit to the US in January.

24-2-82

The Vice Consul, Ms Anne Webster, attended the San Francisco meeting as a member of the general public, as did the UK Deputy Consul General. A copy of her report is attached. Ms Webster was among those who were briefly and informally introduced to Mr Robinson and he acknowledged the introduction politely.

I understand that Mr Robinson gave a slightly modified version of the San Francisco speech to the luncheon meeting for about 60 in Sacramento the following day. According to my information he was "unrelievedly serious" but handled the situation well. He told my informant that he was impressed by the moderate way in which many of the people he met, notably Bishop Mark Hurley, approached the situation, he was grateful for the courtesy extended to him to express an unpopular point of view and said that he found it much easier to talk about Ireland outside it than at home.

In Sacramento the Forum arranged meetings with a number of representatives, including some Irish-American politicians who "listened politely but said nothing" other than the minimal courtesies. For local political reasons these meetings were not publicised! Probably his most significant meeting was with Assemblyman Walter Ingalls, Chairman of the Assembly Judiciary Committee, who is a witty, pleasant and well-informed man. Ingalls explained to Robinson that he was of mainly English descent but with some Irish "and all of it orange". He asked Robinson a lot of pertinent questions and referred to the Anglo-Irish talks in a very positive way. Robinson had also asked for a meeting with Governor Brown (who naturally refused because he takes little interest in the Irish question) but he was received by one of the Governor's aides, who assured him that he would brief the Governor.

I understand that both during the question and answer period in Sacramento and at his private meetings, Robinson defended the traditional Unionist viewpoint. He was weakest on questions relating to the obvious interest of the minority community in reunification and "got tied up in knots". He referred to the Taoiseach's proposals on the constitutional reform as being long overdue and stressed they were an internal matter for the Republic. My informant said that he seemed however to regard them in a positive light and in this connection Robinson apparently made some ambiguous remark about the door being shut "but the handle is down on the other side".

My informant, who spent some time with Robinson and escorted him and Jim Allister to all their meetings, took the opportunity of telling them both how an informed and educated Irish-American views the Irish situation and how the general public view the activities of Ian Paisley. He drew attention to the Paisley connections with the Bob Jones University in South Carolina, with all its racist overtones and its extreme fundamentalism which has been rejected in the US, and suggested that this did damage to their efforts to communicate their political message. Robinson did not comment but seemed to listen very carefully.

I consider that Mr Robinson's trip here was a useful educational experience for him. He was exposed to both reasonable and emotional argument by nationally-minded Irish-Americans who resent the implication that they are supporting the IRA. He was made aware of the deep concern that is felt about the issues involved and the general interest in seeing a speedy resolution to the problem. He will have made few converts to the Unionist cause but he may have served a useful purpose in educating some of the more emotional Irish-Americans to the fact that the Unionist viewpoint is also strongly held and that it cannot be ignored.

For the Irish Forum the occasion and all its related difficulties was a most maturing experience. The executive feel that they survived the test very well and are encouraged by the increased interest in its activities which the publicity generated. Copies of some of the press coverage is attached.

Helene M. Doan

Consul General

c.c. Ambassador Washington