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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

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27th January 1984

*Mr. Sheehan
Copies of this should
be put on*

Dear Assistant Secretary

I enclose herewith a note of my call on 25th January on Robert Andrew the new Permanent Under Secretary at the NIO.

Yours sincerely

Noel Dorr

Noel Dorr
Ambassador

*9/23 and ~~11/2/1/1~~
(It contains some material
on British attitude to
Forum for your draft note)*

Mr Michael Lillis
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

[Signature]
30.1.84

Encl

Discussion with Mr Robert Andrew, Permanent Under Secretary
at the Northern Ireland Office, on 25th January 1984

I paid a first courtesy call this afternoon on the new Permanent Under Secretary at the NIO, Mr Robert Andrew. I explained that I had been away in Ireland when he took over his post at the beginning of January and that I had returned relatively recently.

I found Mr Andrew pleasant and courteous and, so far as I can judge on first acquaintance, fairly open in his thinking. I feel he may be an interesting choice for the post.

Mr Andrew told me that for the first time in his career in the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence he had been given some time (a month in all) on taking up this new post to "read himself in". He had visited Northern Ireland for various discussions and had also been to Dublin where the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs had hosted a lunch for him. Because of his background, he felt reasonably well informed on the security area and so he had devoted most of his familiarisation period to "boning up" on the other areas - economic affairs etc - which fell within the broad responsibility of the NIO.

Since it was a first courtesy call to get to know him I did not press too hard in our discussion on any particular issue. Mr Andrew's Private Secretary was present and taking notes during our discussion. The following are notes on some of the main points we discussed.

The Forum

It was clear that the Forum and its imminent report were matters of great interest to Mr Andrew and he said as much. At the same time he was, he said, "apprehensive". He feared that the report itself might not live up to the expectations which had been created on all sides.

He acknowledged more or less frankly that Mr Prior is awaiting the report of the Forum to see what ideas of interest it may contain before considering any further steps of importance in relation to the Assembly or otherwise.

Andrew several times spoke in terms which implied that what was important was that the Forum report should contain something that would be attractive to the majority in Northern Ireland (and I took it that his fear that it "might not live up to expectations" focussed on this point). He mentioned for example that he thought it impossible that the Opposition in the South could agree to the inclusion of any proposal to the revision of the Constitution (Articles 2 and 3). I was left with a

general impression that he would still ^{think} see Britain's role as that of "honest broker" rather than as itself an agent of change. He does really hope for a good report from the Forum which will bring movement to the present situation. But he seems to assume that it would have to do so primarily by evoking a favourable response from the Unionists (difficult as this would be to achieve) rather than by eliciting an active response from the British Government itself.

Without labouring the point, I tried to get across the idea that our hope is for a good Forum report which can be made the basis for movement on their side. I tried to suggest that their role was not to be neutral but to try to respond politically to whatever new ideas might emerge.

I also said, that as an outsider who is not privy to the work of the Forum, I thought the Forum now has to decide for itself how far it will restate basic nationalist aspirations as a background to whatever new ideas it may put forward. If its report does this, I hoped that those who read it would be wise enough to see what was new and important in the latter elements and not simply react negatively to the former (ie. I tried to put it to him that the British side should read the report carefully and if necessary read between the lines to see what was new and fresh in its thinking beyond whatever basic positions had been restated).

He took this point well. He thought (the initial British reaction might in any case be to say something on the lines of "the report has to be studied carefully". Andrew said at one point that he hoped the Forum would not come up with proposals on "joint sovereignty or anything like that". He may have been referring rather more to the phrase than to the general concept. However I thought it well not to press on that point or to appear to be promoting such an idea from our side at the present moment.

During our discussion I naturally mentioned the visit to London earlier this week of a delegation from the Forum who had met with backbench MPs of the four main parties in the House of Commons (I knew that Mr Andrew would be well aware of this).

Overall he left me with the general impression that they are taking very seriously the possibility that something new and important will emerge from the Forum report. At the same time he is a bit apprehensive that it will be no more than the highest common factor of the four parties involved and something which the Unionists would quickly reject.

Minority in Northern Ireland

We talked about the problem of "alienation". He said they fully appreciated the danger that Sinn Fein would overhaul the SDLP in electoral terms and claim to be the spokesmen for the minority. He implied that the NIO are doing their best to find ways to boost the SDLP.

Cardinal O'Fiaich

We touched briefly on this and I said that I thought from reading the transcript of the interview that the Cardinal saw himself as a pastor addressing the question of the subjective moral responsibility of the individual, whereas the Government and others felt they were entitled to expect public moral leadership on the rightness or wrongness of support for Sinn Fein. Andrew had nothing very significant to add on the issue - he had enjoyed the Martin Turner cartoon in the Irish Times.

Sinn Fein

He mentioned as we already know that if the Government in Dublin move to ban Sinn Fein the NIO probably would have to move in that direction also but he agreed that the possibility has now receded somewhat. I thought he himself was not particularly enthusiastic about the idea. He said that they, like us, are studying measures against incitement and so on. He knew however, from his own experience in working on legislation against racial incitement in his Home Office days, that it is extremely difficult to draft specific provisions on this question.

SDLP

Ideally they would like to see the SDLP, perhaps after the Forum report, join the Assembly. He agreed with me however that it is not on to imagine they would do this merely on the basis of a report from the Forum. If it were ever to be envisaged I said, I thought it could only be on the basis of some important new developments sparked off perhaps by the Forum report. However I said this was something completely for the SDLP themselves.

The Assembly

I sounded him out on the future of the Assembly. He said that it would be kept in being for the moment - he implied fairly clearly that this was in expectation of the Forum report. However unless the Unionists and the SDLP reconsider their present positions and take their seats the situation would clearly have to be examined after that and the possibility of proroguing (suspending) or ending the Assembly would have to be considered.

Notwithstanding what I said ^{above} about stress on the need to catch the interest of the Unionists in the Forum report rather than on the possibility of British response, I

had a general impression from our ^{discussion} discussion in regard to the Assembly that Prior is now to ~~some extent~~ ^{at least} focussing his hopes or at least his attention on the Forum report to see what may emerge and that he will hold the Assembly in being at least until then. If nothing of any real interest does emerge he will consider winding up the Assembly, which now carries very little credibility, over the next few months. What lies ahead beyond that so far cannot be foreseen.

Security Cooperation and Dowra

Andrew did not comment very directly on the recent meeting but I had the impression that he thought it reasonably satisfactory. He said that while nothing had been said at the Prior/Noonan meeting about future meetings he hoped that there was an openness towards this.

He mentioned the new arrangements for Police liaison and said he very much hoped that the Dowra affair, which in part perhaps involved a certain clash of personality between the Chief Constable and the Garda Commissioner could now be left aside so that it would no longer be an obstacle to the security cooperation which was necessary and desirable. He felt it was time to "draw a line under the case" and go on from there.

If there is indeed a real problem about meetings between Wren and Harmon then he wondered if it would be possible for the Police Chiefs each to be accompanied by an official (in our case for example by an official of the Department of Justice)? This slightly larger format might make the initial meetings easier.

In general in discussing Dowra he spoke carefully and did not press too strongly. At the same time it was quite clear that he was saying in a gentle way that he found this to be a major issue when he took up his post. He hoped very much it could somehow be left aside - on the basis of agreeing to disagree - so that it would no longer be an obstacle to the cooperation which is of interest to both countries.

Conclusion

In general, as noted earlier, I found Andrew both friendly and interesting. While nothing of major significance emerged from our discussion I was struck by the extent to which he was ready to acknowledge that the British side is now awaiting the Forum report as a possibly important development notwithstanding ~~a~~ ^{some} ~~second~~ worry that it may not live up to the hopes being reposed in it. There was also an obvious wish to open a new chapter in regard to Dowra which echoes the concern we have been picking up in other quarters about the extent to which this issue is casting a shadow over security cooperation.

WJ 25/1/1984