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Secretary  
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23 July 1986

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Fulker.

The Birmingham Six - discussion with Sir John Farr MP  
18 July 1986

Dear Assistant Secretary

I had a discussion with Sir John Farr MP about this case on Friday last when my wife and I were invited to a dinner dance at his country house near Northampton.

Farr has been an MP since 1959. He is wealthy - an archetypal "Knight of the Shire". He is a wealthy, Harrow-educated landowner and member of Lloyd's. He was Vice-Chairman of the Conservative Northern Ireland Committee from 1974 to 1978 and Chairman of the Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Group from 1978 to 1980. Although he has no particular family connections with Ireland he has owned a house in Sligo (near Ballisodare) for some twenty or thirty years but he is about to sell this in part because of a general sense of "threat" - although he still retains good memories of Ireland.

Farr first began to take an interest in the case of the Birmingham Six when he got to know one of the prisoners, Paddy Hill, who is serving his sentence in Gartree Prison in his constituency. Hill asked him to have some papers photocopied for him and he had this done in the House of Commons. He later got to know Callaghan, a fellow prisoner of Hill's. Farr has been something of a leading figure since then in efforts to have the case reviewed and of course his support is particularly valuable because of his impeccable Tory credentials.

Farr told me, when we talked on Friday last, that he had spoken a few days previously to David Mellor, the Minister of State at the Home Office about the present position. Mellor said that the present examination of the case and the additional material provided by Chris Mullin's book "Error of Judgement" would take some time. Mellor told Farr that the case was being thoroughly looked at - with, as Farr put it "all kinds of scientific tests".

Farr gave me to understand that Douglas Hurd, the Home Secretary and Mellor had wanted to dampen down any undue optimism about the outcome of this study of the case. He (Farr) said that MPs from various parties who were sympathetic to his efforts were coming to him now in the House of Commons and asking what they should do. He said his answer to such enquiries were that they would have to make their analysis and decide for themselves whether to criticise Hurd publicly for the delay or not.

Farr said he had met Gareth Pierce, the solicitor who is acting for some of the Birmingham prisoners and he had a very high admiration for her. She had listed four possible outcomes to the Home Office consideration of the case and, he said, he had written these down carefully. Of the four options a simple release of the prisoners was the last and least favoured - what the prisoners really want is a retrial at which they could be vindicated. Farr told me that he had said to them that they should realise that they had an up-hill struggle. He had told them - and he apologised to me for this way of putting it - that they were "part of the tribe" in the sense that they had been on the fringes of Sinn Fein activity in Birmingham (fund-raising etc); and for this reason, he thought, there had been a lack of sympathy for them on the part of the police and a belief that, even if some corners were cut in the case, their imprisonment would act as a deterrent.

Farr has of course read Mullin's new book and, so far as I know, was the channel through which it was transmitted to the Home Office. He had hoped to attend the press conference given in the House of Commons on 14 July by Mullin to launch his book but to his regret he was unable to do so. I gathered also that he had met some members of the delegation from the Dail and Seanad who were here on 14/15 July while they were in the House of Commons (I had invited him to dinner at the Embassy to meet them but he had been unable to come).

Farr's concern and his efforts will continue but it would, I think, be fair to conclude that he is inclined to counsel against undue optimism in relation to the case.

Yours sincerely

*Noel Dorr*

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