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BÉAL FEIRSTE

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RECEIVED
ANGLO-IRISH SECTION
Time 10.00 Date 20/2

18 February, 1987

Mr. Eamonn O Tuathail
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr. H. C. (Artly)
hr
23.2.87

cc Taisceach
Tairiste
Secretary
Mr. Nally
A-I Section
Amb. London

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PH.

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Dear Assistant Secretary,

The junior Minister at the Northern Ireland Office responsible for education and sport, Brian Mawhinney MP, who also has responsibilities for the presentation of the Agreement in Northern Ireland, invited Michael Lillis, Noel Ryan and the undersigned to dinner last night in Stormont. Mawhinney was accompanied by Mark Elliott and John McConnell.

We had a long conversation about what might happen following the next British general election. At first he was not prepared to say when the election might take place but eventually, looking at his diary, said if he were a betting man, he would plump for 18 June or 8 October. As of now he thought the most likely outcome would be a Conservative Government but with a reduced majority. He thought that he would hold his own seat, which traditionally is a Tory marginal. The reason for this is that he has visited his constituency every week since he was elected except when he is on holidays. The unionists maintain the hope that there will be a hung parliament and that they will benefit through a deal with one of the British parties. He did not see any of the British parties making arrangements with the unionists but said it could never be ruled out. He expressed particular worry about the Labour Party which he believes would contain a much larger number of very left wing MPs following the next election. This, he thought, could have consequences for their policy towards Ireland. Peter Archer, the Labour Party Spokesman on Northern Ireland had, by hook or by crook, succeeded in aborting the changes in policy which were sought by Short, McNamara and Flannery but Mawhinney clearly had doubts as to whether Archer could hold that line indefinitely.

The Embassy in London has reported speculation that there might be a change of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in a Tory Government put together after the next general election. Mawhinney seemed to endorse that view and said that it could not be stated with any certainty that any one of the present Northern Ireland ministerial team would return to Northern Ireland after the next election. [We have heard elsewhere that

Mawhinney himself has some hopes that he may be the next Secretary of State.]

Mawhinney argued that the antipathy of unionists to the Anglo-Irish Agreement remains. They do not like it and would wish to be rid of it. However, the unionist protest against the Agreement has, to some extent, abated and what is left is a "sullen lump", unhappy with their circumstances but not involved in rebellion or revolt. He said that there were three reasons why the unionist opposition has, to some extent, calmed down.

Firstly, there is the fundamental loyalty of unionists. Though Ulstermen, they are also British and they have a loyalty to the crown. That loyalty acts as a ~~break~~^{check} on their revolt. They have expressed their opposition to the Agreement in massive marches and in petitions and elections. But their fundamental loyalty to the crown remains. Secondly, many unionists now realise, following 15 months of the Agreement, that the world around them has not changed completely out of recognition. They were told by their supporters that all sorts of unpalatable things would happen to them and in the event this is not what has occurred. Thirdly, there is the growing realisation that the protest is not achieving very much. It has not succeeded in overturning the Agreement and in some instances it is only the unionists themselves who are being hurt.

For all of these reasons some of the steam is going out of the unionist protest. This is not to say that the "sullen lump" could not be suddenly and seriously activated. The assassination by the IRA of a prominent unionist politician or a renewed and serious bombing campaign would ignite the underlying deep opposition to the Agreement.

Personally Mawhinney finds himself being treated by unionists in a somewhat better way now than heretofore. He endeavours to get out into the community as much as he can and he finds that people are now more at their ease in talking to him and, with the exception of the occasional few flag waving protesters, are not being as difficult as they were.

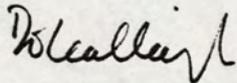
He spoke at length about the loss of democracy in Northern Ireland, saying that the Northern Ireland people are being governed, in effect, without their consent. There is the danger that at some stage democracy will become non-recoverable. A particular problem which has arisen in recent days is the withdrawal from the Belfast Education and Library Board of 10 of the 14 unionist councillors and he believes it possible that a further 2 would resign. If this were to happen on a widespread scale throughout Northern Ireland it would have very damaging consequences. The Government could certainly run the Boards, and both make and implement decisions but to do so, without the benefit of the votes of the local population, would be another blow to democracy.

To counter-balance this drift towards a loss of democracy the British Government should provide and is trying to provide what

Mawhinney calls good government. By this he means that they respond to the needs of the community in areas such as health, education, social welfare, etc. and by their actions indicate clearly to the population that decisions are being taken which are designed to assist them. A further consequence has been that in carrying through the changes brought about as a result of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and in putting forward new policies the British have tried to move one step at a time. Their belief is that they can best implement change by introducing one issue at a time and when that has found acceptance can then move on to the next issue.

It was clear both from what Mawhinney said and from the implications of what he said that he believes that the achievement of devolution must be the primary aim of the British Government following the next British general election. He is fearful that the continued absence of consent from the unionist population in Northern Ireland will eventually lead to such erosion as to make the establishment of future democratic institutions well nigh impossible.

Yours sincerely,



D. O'Ceallaigh