

Mr Evers - Republic of Ireland Department

Brocket Hall: Meeting with Professor Dooge

The Secretary of State saw Professor Dooge for half an hour at 0900 hrs on 6 September.

SDLP

Professor Dooge was worried about the position of the moderate centrist parties in Northern Ireland as the hunger strike progressed. The SDLP was slipping badly and losing activists to the anti-H-block movement. He wondered whether anything could be done to arrest this trend. Could proportional representation be considered in Northern Irish constituencies to the Westminster Parliament*? The Tyrone-Fermanagh by-election had been a disaster for the SDLP who had stood aside, expecting that Carron would lose and not wanting to be accused of splitting the nationalist vote and so causing his defeat. Under proportional representation, they would not have had this worry. Lord Carrington pointed out the problems.

Baton Rounds

Professor Dooge said that baton rounds had caused ten fatalities, where rubber rounds had been abandoned for causing only three. 13000 of them had been fired this year, and given the pressure on the security forces it was inevitable that the rules for their use should sometimes be disregarded. Injuries to children were particularly embarrassing to the Irish Government, as was Mr Whitelaw's statement that baton rounds would not be used in Great Britain. Unless the situation improved, the Irish Government might have to express its concern publicly. He would set the Irish Government's worries out more fully in a note. Lord Carrington said that baton rounds would not be used in Great Britain because policemen and soldiers were not being killed here. The problem was that there was no substitute for baton rounds. But observation of the rules governing their use would be looked at.

H-Block

Professor Dooge said that recent signs that a wedge was being driven between the PIRA and the hunger-strikers' families were welcome. But the trend would not necessarily continue. The PIRA had recently taken a week to decide on

/a replacement

* He pointed out that a precedent existed for this in Northern Ireland elections to the European Parliament.

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a replacement for one of the hunger-strikers. There was no shortage of volunteers; the most likely explanation of the delay was that the PIRA were checking that the family of the man chosen were hard-line Republicans who could be relied on not to weaken. He could see the temptation to the Northern Ireland Office to take a firm line at this stage in the hope that the hunger-strike would crumble. But this might on the contrary be the best moment to try for an agreement, based on the concessions which the British Government had already indicated that it was willing to contemplate. At present, no concessions were being given to those who conformed or who came off a hunger-strike; British insistence that the hunger-strike must end totally before any concessions were given to prisoners discouraged hunger-strikers from breaking ranks, and strengthened the PIRA's hold on them.

Northern Ireland and the United Nations

Professor Dooge said that the non-aligned and the Eastern bloc would press the Irish in New York to go for a Resolution on Northern Ireland. The Irish Government faced a by-election campaign in October and November in the seat vacated by Doherty. It could be embarrassing for the Irish Government to be seen to be blocking a Northern Ireland Resolution in New York at such a time. Lord Carrington said that he need not point out the effects that a Northern Ireland Resolution might have on Anglo-Irish relations.

Impact of the Hunger-Strike

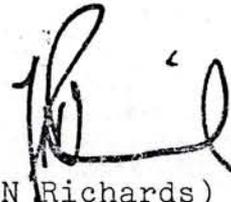
The Secretary of State asked whether Professor Dooge thought that the hunger-strike was still making as much impact on public opinion abroad. Professor Dooge thought that it was. The H-block movement was concentrating its efforts on a few countries, particularly the United States and France. At home the Irish Government was unable to contain support for the PIRA in the border counties. Despite the increasing return from NORAID, the PIRA was short of money. He accepted that it was difficult for the British Government to make a political move against a background of violence. Though violence was at present being held in check, there would certainly be a fresh outbreak to demonstrate PIRA muscle if the hunger-strike ended. He wondered whether the lack of political activity in Ulster was holding things back. Lord Carrington pointed out the problems. Either one returned to the Stormont formula, which had started all the trouble in the first place, or one went for a power-sharing arrangement, on which it had proved impossible for any of the parties to agree.

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Professor Dooge made another half-hearted plea for proportional representation, but admitted that in a recent two-day discussion the Irish Government had been unable to come up with any solutions.



(F N Richards)
Private Secretary

6 September 1981

cc: PS
PS/LPS
PS/PUS
Mr Bullard
Mr Fergusson