

F.R.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

c.c. PS/Mr. Scott (L&B)
PS/PUS (B)
PS/Sir E. Bell
Mr. Brennan
Mr. Angel
Mr. Merifield
Mr. Gilliland
Mr. Abbott
Mr. Boys Smith
Mr. Reeve

① Sir Ewart
② Puz



21/6

PUS met Mr. Kirk O'Donnell, principal aide to Speaker Tip O'Neill, yesterday afternoon. They had met previously in Washington last month. Mr. O'Donnell was accompanied by Mrs. Ackers from the Central Office of Information and had had discussions earlier with Mr. Scott, Sir Ewart Bell and Mr. Brennan.

2. Mr. O'Donnell opened by saying that he wanted to talk about security, which had a very high profile in the US for a number of reasons. PUS was of the opinion that reporting was out of proportion to the size of the incidents, but that the situation was not entirely satisfactory.

3. Mr. O'Donnell then made the point, to which he returned several times, that while there was great sympathy in the US for anyone trying to combat terrorism, it was not in the Administration's interest to emphasise the decline in violence since a spectacular atrocity would strain its credibility. In any case, he said, the US judged the UK not on security standards but on progress towards a reconiliation of the two parts of Ireland. PUS picked up the last point and mentioned that it might be more profitable to play up the fact that republican terrorists were dedicated to a revolution in society and indeed posed more of a threat to the Irish Republic rather than to the UK. Mr. O'Donnell agreed wholeheartedly and lamented the attitude of the US media.

4. He then went on to stress strongly, however, that the recent election results (with 102,000 people voting for Sinn Fein) made it difficult to say that the majority of people in the Province were against violence. PUS wondered how many of the SF voters positively endorsed violence and explained that it was to some

extent traditional in recent Irish history to turn a blind eye to such unpleasantness. He felt that Sinn Fein had peaked at the expense of a disorganised SDLP. Dr. Hendron, for example, had been no match for Adams in West Belfast.

5. Mr. O'Donnell realised that there would probably always be an indefinite capacity for some violent activity, but said that a Government and police force with a stronger RC element would - from the US point of view - be much less subject to propaganda attacks. In reply to this, PUS explained that while it was broad Government policy to encourage RCs in public positions, the solution to that kind of problem must come from within the NI communities themselves. In answer to a question, he said that the use of PBRs was politically sensible and in view of the lack of alternatives it would be most unwise to give them up. Mr. O'Donnell did not dissent.

6. There then followed a more political discussion, during which PUS emphasised that the unexpected was always liable to happen. He said that it was vital to contain the extreme manifestations of unionism although the increased number of UUP MPs would not cut much ice at Westminster. On the Anglo-Irish front, PUS said that there might be some movement with the existing institutions, and that the Forum might possibly produce something worthwhile.

7. Mr. O'Donnell then talked about the US scene. He said that there was a growth in Congressional interest in Ireland and that the Friends of Ireland were becoming a very sophisticated organisation; he repeated that the recent elections did not help matters. Surprisingly however he felt that there was more pro-IRA feeling in Australia than in New York. He took the opportunity to stress that visits to the US were the most effective way of putting the facts before the public and cited the recent tour of the Lord Mayors of Dublin and Belfast as a shining example. PUS thanked him for his views and said that HMG was very aware of the effects in the US of its policies and statements with respect to NI.

ETR.

8. The atmosphere throughout was most cordial and Mr. O'Donnell struck me as being shrewd and intelligent, as well as basically sympathetic to the Government's aims.

SAM^{us}

S.A. MARSH

PS/PUS

23 June 1983