

202
1. Mr Yeach M
2. Mr Burns M
PS/SofS(L)

538
14 MAR 1988

29/5

RECEIVED

11 MAR 1988

MURFAX ROOM
STORMONT HOUSE ANNEX

12BII/3A b/w
referred to the

Sun's message
is needed in reply

P. V. Vandy
P.BII/3

cc

Mr Joseph J. Doherty
PS/SofS(B) M I have the
PS/NR Stanley(L&B) M b/w
PS/DR Hawkinney(L&B) M You
PS/PUS(L&B) M to handle with
Mr AMR Burns
Mr Chesterton
Mr Niles M
Mr Hewitt M
Mr Jackson M✓
Mr Kirk
Mr Hasfield M
Mr Wood(L&B) M

PA please
at previous
paper.

Q 17/3

HC 1208: THE SUN

The Chief Leader Writer of the Sun writes, unsurprisingly in view of recent editorials, in a tone hostile to the Agreement. He says the Secretary of State's response will be considered 'available for publication' unless the contrary is stipulated; but does not undertake to publish it.

14.3.88

1. Mr Jardine - K see
17/3 2. Miss McGowan SCJ

Should we draft for publication? To do so gives a platform for a defence of our policy, and the paper would probably comment adversely on a refusal. But it means producing a piece to some extent on the Sun's terms. On the assumption that the Secretary of State will want to reply, with a view to publication, I attach a draft. It has been cleared with LOB, the Secretariat and Mr Wood.

It is largely self explanatory, but the response to the point about the Government having direct dealings with the IRA needs some explanation. I attach an extract from DR Fitzgerald's David Davies Memorial Lecture, delivered in London last month. The allegation there appears to be one made in a book by Mr David Beresford on the 1981 hunger strikes. As was public knowledge at the time, senior officials visited the hunger strikers in prison; but Mr Beresford alleges other contacts, outside the prison. How we respond needs careful drafting. Government employees - prison warders - of course speak to members of the IRA every day. Ministers visiting prisons have occasionally done so. Mr Hewitt has provided the formula in the draft.

Sun0903

One final point: responding to Mr Spark's challenge to SDS about the security position may be best avoided: it smacks of descending to the writer's level.

Franklyn

A J WHYSALL

SIL

11 March 1988

Sun0903

DRAFT LETTER TO R Spark Esq for signature by the Secretary of State.

Thank you for your letter of 1 March about the Anglo-Irish Agreement. You are welcome to print this reply, in its entirety.

You quote from Senator Mary Robinson's letter to the Independent. I respect the sincerity of her views, but in reality there is not the difference of outlook between the two Governments that she speaks of.

Both of us regard cooperation on security as vital. Mr Haughey (to whom your letter is unjust) said last month that it was in the interests of both communities in Ireland that security cooperation should be as effective as possible. Only the men of violence, he said, stood to gain from anything less. That is exactly our view. The Irish police have made real progress in the fight against terrorism. In recent weeks, for example, they have unearthed a large quantity of IRA arms and explosives in Co Donegal and Co Dublin. At the end of last year, they conducted a nationwide search for arms, with the cooperation of the security forces in the North. It is regrettably true that there have been more deaths resulting from terrorism over the last two years (though the level is nothing like the worst years of the troubles in the early 1970s). No one has plausibly suggested the increase is due to the Agreement. If we had not had the Agreement, we should have been much worse off. The police, the Army and the Government are all doing their level best, inside and outside the Agreement, to eliminate the evil of terrorism, from wherever it comes.

Senator Robinson says the Agreement is seen in some quarters 'as a stepping stone to a United Ireland'. But the reality is that Article 1 of the Agreement states that 'any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland', and it recognises that the present wish of a majority is for no change. It should be a clear reassurance to the majority.

There is much more to the Agreement than security. It is about ways of bringing a better life to everyone in Northern Ireland. Both governments agree.

Sun0903

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When we signed the Agreement, a British newspaper said:

...the Agreement is a sensible step to getting the two communities in the North to live peacefully together after 700 years of bitterness and bloodshed.

And it should now be easier for the security forces on both sides to work together to isolate the evil men of violence.

I agreed, and still agree. The newspaper, of course, was the Sun.

WST One last point. You mention dealings with the IRA. I should like to assure you that this government will ~~not~~ enter into talks with any representatives of the IRA, while their campaign of violence continues.

Sun0903

anti-partitionism of the first half-century of Irish independence to a clear and explicit recognition that no change can or should come about in the status of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of a majority of its people. Recognition of the need to re-think the intellectual basis of Irish nationalism has also come from Irish politicians.

Moreover it is Irish politicians who over many decades have established firmly the position that no negotiation can or should take place with terrorists until they renounce violence - a concept to which the British political system never seemed to have become conclusively committed, as may be seen by the successive actions of Harold Wilson in Opposition, Willie Whitelaw and Merlyn Rees in Government, and, it has recently been suggested, someone speaking for the present Conservative Government during the 1981 Hunger Strike.

Finally it is from Irish political sources that has emerged the idea that terrorism can be tackled effectively only by a combination of tough security measures and steps to remove the alienation of the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, an alienation that has provided a climate in which it has been possible for terrorism to operate.