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FROM: HM Ambassador
DUBLIN

UNDER/ SEC
66252
-6MAY 1997
CENT SEC

DATE: 6 May 1997

CC: PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Stephens
Mr Bell
Mr Leach
Mr Watkins
Mr Maccabe
Mr Hill
Mr Brooker
Mr Beeton
Mr Lavery
Mr Smyth
Mr Lamont, RID

*M. M. 5
Orange Order
file*

ASST./ SEC
3215 in. Lavery 7.5
-7 MAY 1997
C.C.R.U.

PS/PUS

VISIT TO DUBLIN BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ORANGE ORDER

1. I held a dinner on 2 May to enable the Grand Master of the Orange Order, Robert Saulter to meet Irish politicians and officials. Saulter was accompanied by Denis Watson, the Armagh County Master, Roy Kells, the Fermanagh Deputy County master and the Rev Brian Kennaway from the Order's Educational Committee. On the Irish side, Minister of State at the DFA, Joan Burton, Sean O hUiginn, Liam Kavanagh TD and Senator Paschal Mooney were present. As at the dinner I held for the Order last year, the Rev Trevor Morrow, from the Lucan Youth Centre acted as an informal chairman to the discussion.

2. The discussion was largely good-natured, with O hUiginn on his best behaviour and Mrs Burton doing much to keep in check Senator Mooney's sometimes barely disguised hostility. Her main message - that Sinn Fein would seek to exploit Drumcree and other parades to portray the Orange Order in the worst possible light, and that the Orange Order should do all they could to avoid this, was heard sympathetically.

3. Inevitably, most of the discussion focussed on Drumcree. Watson gave an account of his recent efforts to meet Fr Eamon Stack of the Gavarghy Road Residents' Committee. After two failed attempts (apparently because of Brendon McKenna's insistence on attending), Watson thought that a workable arrangement involving an impartial Chairman had now been reached, although was reluctant to give details until the meeting had been confirmed.

4. O hUiginn went to great lengths to explain that, while he understood the Orange Order's distrust of McKenna, they had to realise that McKenna was genuinely representative of the

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residents of the Garvaghy Road, and was not a Sinn Fein agent provocateur. Watson (and others) looked dubious, but said that a meeting with Stack with McKenna "in the next room" might be a possibility. Probing further, O hUiginn asked whether the presence of a suitable chairman might provide suitable cover for Watson to meet McKenna himself. In reply, Watson said such an arrangement was out of the question.

5. In answer to questions from Watson, O hUiginn was reluctant to be drawn on whether the Irish Government might use its influence on the Garvaghy Road Residents Group to find a way around the impasse. He said that, while the DFA had had a role in brokering the compromise in 1995, the Group had not been in direct contact with them in 1996.

6. Much of the rest of the discussion covered well-trodden ground. The Orange representatives expressed concern at what they considered to be Irish Government interference in decisions relating to parades. They also called on the Irish Government to recognise that, were it not for Sinn Fein, agreement could be reached in virtually all cases between residents Groups and the Orange Order at a local level. Contrary to my expectations, the Irish representatives did not ask about the Orange Order's reaction to the North report, nor about Joel Patton and the Spirit of Drumcree group.

Comment

7. While it would be wrong to attach too much significance to the occasion, my impression was that the Orange representatives thought it worthwhile. Despite their reported distrust of the DFA, they got on well with O hUiginn and Burton both of whom worked hard to convince them that the Irish Government's attitude to the Orange Order was not fundamentally hostile. They will also have taken comfort from the fact that even a politician like Senator Mooney (Green Fianna Fail from Co Leitrim) was prepared to listen, and take on board, their arguments.

(Signed)
V E Sutherland

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