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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

9 May 1979

Dear Bryan,

Visit by the Taoiseach: 10 May

Thank you for your letter of 6 May. The Embassy in Dublin have now confirmed that 3.30 pm on 10 May is convenient for Mr Lynch.

I attach a short brief, together with a personality note on Mr Lynch, and recent relevant telegrams from Dublin. The Northern Ireland Office are sending separately suggestions as to the line which the Prime Minister might take on Northern Ireland.

Mr Lynch is likely to be accompanied by Mr Dermot Nally, Deputy Secretary in the Taoiseach's office.

There has already been speculation in Dublin that the Taoiseach would be seeing the Prime Minister during his visit to London. It has been agreed that the Irish will now confirm this to the press, emphasising that his visit is private and was arranged long before the British General Election; and that his call on the Prime Minister will be a courtesy one and not an occasion for substantive talks.

I am copying this to Joe Pilling (NIO) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours etc

Paul

P Lever
Private Secretary

Bryan Cartledge Esq
10 Downing Street

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COURTESY CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER BY THE TAOISEACH
1530 PM., THURSDAY, 10 MAY

BRIEF BY THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Line to Take

Northern Ireland

A separate brief is being provided by the Northern Ireland Office.

See minute /
If the recent speech by Mr. Tip O'Neill, Speaker of the US House of Representatives, is raised, the Prime Minister might say that she fully recognises the contribution Mr. O'Neill has made in combatting Provisional IRA propaganda in the US, even if his choice of words left something to be desired.

Anglo/Irish Relations

Britain and the Irish Republic have a special relationship which goes beyond our common concerns over Northern Ireland. It is appropriate therefore that Mr. Lynch is the first head of government to call at No 10 since the General Election. We look forward to continued close cooperation in economic matters, including cooperation between the Republic and Northern Ireland.

European Community

The Government is determined to work constructively on the problems of the Community and to find means to

develop it. Britain and the Irish Republic have many common interests in the Community, and we hope we can continue to work closely together.

Currency Problems

We hope that the ending of parity between the Pound Sterling and the Irish Pound (Punt) is not causing serious problems in the border areas between the Republic and Northern Ireland

BACKGROUND NOTES

Irish Internal Political Scene

Mr. Lynch's Fianna Fáil has the largest majority in the Republic's history and he need not go to the country until June 1982. His personal authority is unchallenged, though his government faces serious economic problems: unemployment of 10 per cent or higher, inflation rates similar to the UK, industrial relations as bad as any in Europe. A Post Office strike is entering its eleventh week. A proposed "national understanding" between government, employers and trade unions seems likely to come unstuck. Nevertheless the Republic achieved $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent growth last year.

Anglo/Irish Relations

Good, though dominated by the Northern Ireland problem, and by a "big-brother complex" on the Irish side. Irish Ministers, including Mr. Lynch himself, find it hard to resist criticising the British from time to time. For example, on 6 May Mr. Lynch called for a more positive British attitude to the European Community and contrasted British complaints over our alleged disproportionate contribution to Community funds (£600 million in 1980) with the cost of the British presence in Northern Ireland (£1,000 million).

Northern Ireland

The Irish Government will certainly be looking for a new political initiative by HMG, but they have not so

far produced any clear ideas as to what this might be. They would like to see a devolved government in Northern Ireland with some form of power sharing or participation by the minority. On Irish unity Mr. Lynch's latest formulation was "it is the wish of the great majority of all the people on our island that we all will ultimately come together, by consent, under agreed structures freely negotiated and in harmonious relationship with Britain". The Irish have lately been showing some interest in "wooing" the unionists in Northern Ireland.

Terrorism

The Irish authorities cooperate closely with HMG in combatting the Provisional IRA (PIRA). But the resources of the Irish police are limited.

Currency Problems

At the start of the European Monetary System the Irish declared their intention to maintain parity with Sterling. Sterling's recent rise led to a break and the Irish punt now stands at a few pence discount. The Irish have imposed exchange controls against the UK. As yet there has been no need for the UK to impose exchange controls against the Republic. Trade seems not to have been seriously affected. There is some awkwardness in the border areas between Northern Ireland and the Republic: but insofar as anyone is blamed for this it is the Irish Government not HMG.

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Taoiseach.

Born Cork 1917. Educated at Christian Brothers School, Cork; University College Cork; and King's Inns, Dublin. Civil Servant 1936-45; barrister 1945; Deputy for Cork City since 1948; Parliamentary Secretary (with Gaeltacht responsibilities) 1951-4; Minister for the Gaeltacht 1957; for Education 1957-9; for Industry and Commerce 1959-65; for Finance 1965-6; Taoiseach 1966-73 and from 1977.

Mr Lynch comes from an apolitical family. He was asked by the Cork Fianna Fail organisation to stand in the 1948 General Election and entered politics with no real convictions. He resumed his law practice in opposition, from 1965-7, with some success.

Mr Lynch gave no great evidence of promise until he became Taoiseach in 1966 as the compromise candidate in a contest between Mr Colley and Mr Haughey. As Taoiseach, he was initially liked rather for his lack of vices than for his virtues. He gained a reputation for honesty (he is still known as "Honest Jack") and for getting things done by affability and persuasion rather than by noisy argument. He came under criticism for weakness in handling his ambitious subordinates - especially Mr Blaney (qv). However, the arms smuggling conspiracy of 1970 and the Northern troubles revealed a surprising degree of ruthlessness and political acumen in crushing his critics and rivals. At the same time, he was much criticised for his delay in bringing the scandal into the open and for his retention of the discredited Mr Gibbons (qv) in his Government.

On Northern Ireland, Mr Lynch has declared his aim to be peaceful reunification by gradual stages over a long timescale. He speaks of the need to "reconcile the two traditions" in Ireland under a constitution devoid of religious slant. In opposition, however, he was forced to accept a policy statement in October 1975 calling for a British declaration of intent to withdraw from Northern Ireland. The Party's 1977 landslide election victory was a personal triumph for Mr Lynch. He led the campaign "from the front" and his personal vote in his Cork constituency was the highest ever recorded. He was thus able to appoint his own men to positions of influence and has retained for himself the conduct of Northern Ireland policy. His commitment to eventual unity remains, but he has drawn back some way from the 1975 policy statement. He is a lack-lustre speaker but makes up for this with the electorate by a remarkable popular touch.

Mr Lynch is a good Irish speaker though not a fanatic. He was one of the all-time stars of hurling and Gaelic football and his sporting reputation has been a great political asset.

He is easy and pleasant to meet and has always been friendly towards the Embassy.

Married in 1946 Mairin O'Connor, a vivacious and attractive personality, who has worked conspicuously to help her husband in his career. She is said to have lost enthusiasm for politics and would happily see her husband retire from the leadership gracefully. They have no children, a matter of regret to both.