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Ireland VS

SUBJECT



10 DOWNING STREET

cc FCO
CO
Matter
Ireland. PE 3. M/yr
with Tairerath

From the Private Secretary

12 February 1981

Ireland. PE 8

Dear Roy,

Call by Lord Moyola and Lord Brookeborough

As you know, Lords Brookeborough and Moyola called on the Prime Minister at the House of Commons this afternoon. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was also present.

Lord Moyola said that he and Lord Brookeborough had requested a meeting with the Prime Minister before Dr. Paisley's latest antics. However, the parade on the hillside and Dr. Paisley's performance in the House of Commons this afternoon had increased the sense of concern which had led them to suggest a meeting. It looked increasingly likely that Dr. Paisley wanted an independent Northern Ireland in which he would be in absolute control. His tactics might be to go for a head-on collision with the British Government and the Army. He might seek this through a general strike in the course of which he would demand devolved government on his own terms. If he did not get what he wanted and if he could engineer clashes in which some of his followers were killed he would probably opt for a UDI. Lord Moyola said that he might be exaggerating a little but not very much. One should not underestimate Dr. Paisley's ambitions.

One reason for Dr. Paisley's present success was that he had succeeded in manufacturing a great deal of fear and suspicion out of the way the hunger strike and the Anglo/Irish talks in Dublin had been handled. In Northern Ireland today every story and every rumour was believed unless it was instantly denied. It was essential that HMG should institute more effective PR arrangements. Rapid reaction to, and rebuttal of, every allegation was necessary. The Government statements issued after the hillside parade last week had been good but too slow. Lord Moyola also thought that it would be extremely useful if someone in authority would be prepared to confront Dr. Paisley on the television. This would of course be a formidable undertaking but ought to be attempted.

On the general political situation in Northern Ireland, Lord Moyola commented that other political figures were not giving the lead they should. The statement issued by Mr. Molyneux yesterday had been useful but had come too late. There was widespread confusion at present. Dr. Paisley's accusations about what had happened in Dublin were taking hold. He was likely to do well in the local government elections in May. The candidates being put forward by the other Parties were of very low calibre and his own followers would not hesitate to indulge in intimidation.

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Lord Brookeborough said that the problem was not only with the talks in Dublin. Although he agreed with Lord Moyola that reassurance about them was required and that it would be, for instance, very useful to spell out what the Working Parties were doing, something else was also required. This was evidence to show the people in Northern Ireland that HMG were actively interested in cementing the unity of the UK. A gesture of this kind would give Dr. Paisley's Protestant opponents something to fight for and with. It would help to limit the number of people who sign his covenant. Neither Lord Brookeborough nor Lord Moyola were very clear about what kind of initiative or gesture was required. They mentioned at various points a Northern Ireland Privy Council; a Council of MPs to advise the Secretary of State; the re-introduction of a Governor or a rephrasing of the formula used by Ministers on the Guarantee. Lord Brookeborough seemed to attach particular importance to the last point. He thought the present language too unenthusiastic and hoped that it would be possible to find a form of words which suggested that HMG actively wanted to keep Northern Ireland within the UK.

The Prime Minister said that any question of a sell-out was, of course, utterly ridiculous. However, she understood the importance of preventing scaremongering from taking hold. The fact was that the more trouble Dr. Paisley created, the less inclined people in the UK would be to continue making the sacrifices which present policy demanded. She wondered whether the people of Northern Ireland would support Dr. Paisley in trying to split Northern Ireland from the UK when they came to realise, eg, the economic consequences of separation. She thought that there would be difficulties about the institutional proposals mentioned by Lord Moyola but would certainly look at the question of the formula used on the Guarantee. The Secretary of State commented that the difficulty about the proposal for a Council of MPs was the absence of any Member from the SDLP in the House of Commons at present. The idea of a Northern Ireland Privy Council was being looked at. On the PR front, he agreed about the need for more voices in Northern Ireland to oppose Dr. Paisley. He wondered whether Lord Moyola and Lord Brookeborough would be prepared to take a hand.

Neither Lord Moyola nor Lord Brookeborough responded to this last point. The meeting ended with both stressing the gravity of the situation in Northern Ireland as they saw it. The next few weeks might offer the last opportunity to cut Dr. Paisley down to size. If it proved possible to do this, he might never regain his support.

I am sending copies of this letter to Francis Richards (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Johns Smirchly

Nicholas Alexander

Roy Harrington, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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