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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Mr. G. ...
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D E Tatham Esq
British Embassy
Dublin

7 June 1983

CABINET OFFICE
N 8577
8 JUN 1983
SILVER INSTRUCTIONS
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Dear David,

MICHAEL LILLIS

1. I hope that you will by now have seen records of the meetings Michael Lillis had here and in the NIO and Cabinet Office when he was in London on 20 May. This letter is an attempt to pull together the threads of the visit and to draw some conclusions from what Lillis had to say.
2. I was struck by the way in which Lillis seemed to have come to London to talk rather than to listen. His message was essentially to underline the importance the Irish Government attach to the new Ireland Forum, and their concern both at the position of the SDLP and at reports that the British Government favour Sinn Fein to the detriment of Mr Hume and his colleagues. Lillis' remarks had rather a pre-cooked flavour and at times one could not help feeling that we were being fed a carefully prepared line.
3. That said it was useful to have had this opportunity to see Lillis and I hope that he will have benefited from an exposure to many of the senior people in Whitehall concerned with Anglo-Irish relations. His remarks about the Irish Government's determination that the Forum should do a thorough job were reassuring. We should welcome your comments on the hint he gave to David Goodall that the more of a fair wind the Forum received from London the greater the chance that it might be instrumental in easing the SDLP into the Assembly. There was every sign that Lillis got our message that the problems of the SDLP were not the fault of HMG but a reflection of the sort of party they are and of the decisions they took in respect of the Assembly; and he can have been left in no doubt of the fact that HMG had not favoured Sinn Fein in any way. I cannot help feeling, however, that this message was conveyed so unanimously that the Irish may have assumed it to reflect an agreed line, rather than a reflection of common knowledge of the Irish Government's principal current concern and of the fact that it is nonsense. We shall just have to keep plugging away at this point whenever a suitable opportunity arises.

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4. You will have seen that Lillis confirmed that the Irish Government hoped that fresh momentum could be imparted to Anglo-Irish relations after the general election, but indicated that any major initiatives from Dublin would have to await the findings of the Forum. It was not, however, clear what the Irish are thinking of by way of movement in the meantime, beyond some reactivation of the AIIC and some activity on Encounter. ~~But~~ I find it worrying that they seem to be giving so little thought to using the next six months or so to prepare the ground for taking our relations further when the Forum has reported. I emphasised to Lillis the importance of developing aspects of our relations not connected with Northern Ireland, and of avoiding unprepared new initiatives, and I am reasonably sure that the point went home. But if the same damaging pattern of exaggerated fears and expectations that we saw last year is not to affect relations again, the Irish will need to play things more slowly and sensitively than they have done in the past, and not come out of the blue with new initiatives which, however worthy, are damned by being linked closely to the Forum and through it to the aspiration to Irish unity.

Yours ever,

Patrick

P H C Eyers
Republic of Ireland Department

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