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British Embassy, Dublin

DATE: 10 November 1993

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Mr Thomas - B
Mr Williams - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr Brooker - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Rickard - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
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Mr Archer, RID - B
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John Dew
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HMA
Mr McKervill

NORTHERN IRELAND: THE VIEW FROM DUBLIN

1. I had a lengthy conversation with Jim Downey, freelance journalist (mainly Irish Independent) on 9 November. Exceptionally well informed, he has close contacts in Labour (and Fianna Fail). He was in a gloomy mood.

Muddle and uncertainty within the Government

2. The Irish Government was getting adrift on Northern Ireland. The fourth Spring principle, recognising Unionist freedom to withhold consent apparently even after they ceased to be a majority in Northern Ireland was a typical example. It was being explained away as a "drafting error", but had been expressly written as it stood by Spring himself, against DFA advice. Reynolds had had to distance himself from it, and so subsequently had Spring. There was poor coordination between Reynolds and Spring (and their respective advisers) on Northern Ireland. It was not an issue on which the coalition's famous network of special advisers could easily iron out differences, as it was doing so successfully on domestic questions.

Public and party opinion

3. Here again the Government was also now well and truly

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rift. There was a widespread perception that Hume had been crudely and brusquely rebuffed. The government had not heeded warning signals eg the massive, and quite unusual, demonstration of support for Hume at the SDLP dinner dance. The Taoiseach's speech at the Ard Fheis had made many important points that Fianna Fail needed to take in, and shown some leadership. But it had offered the grass-roots nothing. Party and public opinion were conspicuously unhappy. Reynolds would scarcely take further steps forward with any confidence - he was badly exposed already. He would try and back all options, including reviving Hume/Adams, in the hope that something would turn up.

4. Considerable offence had been taken here (by "everybody" - he would not elaborate) at the Prime Minister's language in the House of Commons after the Brussels meeting with the Taoiseach. The general perception had been that Albert had been given nothing: this inevitably raised doubts about whether he had made his case properly, doubts that were now directed at his likely performance at the 3(?) December summit. Leader writers on the Irish Times and Irish Independent were privately questioning how much longer they could credibly carry on sounding positive.

Perceptions of darkening shadows in the North

5. And the situation in the North was getting menacing. Nationalists in the North felt strongly that the Government in the South had humiliated Hume, and constitutional nationalism along with him. There was now a real risk of driving moderate nationalists away from the SDLP into support for Sinn Fein, or at least that was how it now appeared to many in Dublin. For a long time Northern nationalists had been buoyed up by a belief that peace was in prospect: now that hope appeared dashed - by the South as much as the British. A hardening of attitudes, greater sense of isolation and abandonment, and correspondingly increased guilt in the South, would ensue. Whereas a few weeks ago the PIRA prison population had been supporting Adams, they were now reported to be taking a much harder line, suspecting a sell out and putting pressure on the leadership outside to toughen up its act.

HMG and the Unionists

6. There was a strong perception that HMG were not seriously enough committed to finding a solution, at least in terms of the (prevailing) analysis that no satisfactory framework could be devised that would be immediately acceptable to even moderate Unionists. Unionists were still talking in terms of a very limited internal settlement - as Molyneaux had done on 6 November, in a speech which had attracted little attention here, thankfully. To make a workable framework stick, HMG would have to put pressure of some sort on Unionists, and he

and most others in Dublin) believed HMG either could not afford to do so, or had so far failed to appreciate that it would have to - or both.

7. He believed that Fergus Finlay's efforts to get through to Unionists (which he appeared to have heard about from Finlay) would fail. Even the moderates in the UUP had yet to show that they could or would engage seriously. He agreed that these efforts were worth making, and he would not belittle them in his articles. A positive response from Molyneaux, with a clear promise of willingness to do business on the basis of the six principles would do a power of good, if it ever came.

8. In short he had small hope of either Government having the leadership or courage to make a successful impact at the forthcoming Summit, and saw the situation getting significantly worse as a result.

Comment

9. We argued at length about all these points. What he said about the way things were seen in Dublin tallies with what I have heard from a number of people over the past few days.

(SIGNED)

J A Dew

NORTHERN IRELAND: THE VIEW FROM DUBLIN

1. Mr Fergus Morris MP spoke to me on the telephone this morning to let me know that he had seen the Taoiseach and the Taoiseach in Dublin yesterday. He had gone for a meeting with Mr Dermot Ahern the co-chairman of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, and had not expected to see Ministers.

2. Mr Spring had talked rather glowingly about the weekend Fianna Fail Ard Fheis. The difficulties confronting the Government had been compounded by the wood on the floor. The hatchets had already been out. He was himself being roundly criticised for the Irish treatment of John Hume and for the reference to Unionists in the six principles. He was not retreating on what he stood for but the groundswell of grass roots concern could not be ignored. He had tried to say something to reassure critics in a constituency speech.

3. The Taoiseach by contrast had seemed surprisingly optimistic. He had repeated much of what he has said in public. There was a need for peace and a political opening which would not be there for long. He could not afford to wait while the Unionists were going round in circles about sitting down at a table. He was complimentary about John Hume but had said that it was now for the two Governments to take matters forward. The Irish would not succeed alone. He had the greatest confidence that John Major would respond appropriately.

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