

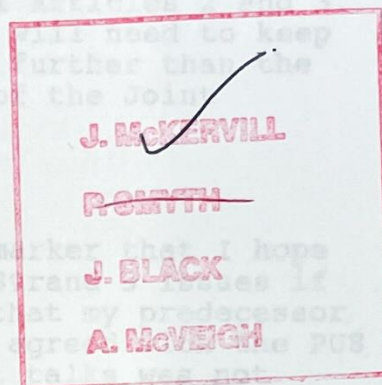


From: V E Sutherland
HM Ambassador
Date: 20 June 1996

Mr Thomas - B

cc: PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Leach (L&B) - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mrs Brown - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Hill (L&B) - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Lavery - B
Ms Checksfield - B
Mr Whysall - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B

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EAST/WEST ISSUES

1. I was on the point of minuting on this subject when Peter Bell's two useful pieces dated 18 June (Constitutional Issues Paper and HMG Negotiating Brief) appeared.

Articles 2 and 3

2. Some of the points Peter makes on Articles 2 and 3 carry conviction. Above all we should never under estimate the widespread Irish attachment to the prospect of a united Ireland. Peter suggests that such attachment is perhaps of a moral or even metaphysical variety. He may well be right. Certainly I never cease to be amazed by the wide variety of educated and intelligent Irish people who profess attachment to the ideal of a united Ireland but who are incapable of rationalising their aspiration. The most recent example came at the lunch I held for members of the Oireachtas Committee on Northern Ireland, all of whom openly subscribed to the ultimate aim of a united Ireland, but without being able to explain precisely why.

3. The emergence of new attitudes in the Republic, and the discarding of deeply held beliefs rooted in history, is a slow and tortuous business (I touched on this in reporting the outcome of the Divorce Referendum last November). The Irish may hope for an early solution to the difficulties of the North but it is not yet clear that they are prepared to pay the price in terms of amending Articles 2 and 3 in a way which effectively removes the territorial claim.

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4. The Taoiseach himself is. As he said at the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation on 5 May last year, his Government was committed to "removing any jurisdictional or territorial claim of legal right over the territory of Northern Ireland contrary to the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland". He has repeated this to me on a number of occasions since. However, if it came to the crunch, the Taoiseach would be constrained by the uncertainty of the outcome of the referendum which has to be held on any alteration of the wording of Articles 2 and 3. If he is to ensure a successful outcome he will need to keep Fianna Fail on-side, and they have gone no further than the more restrictive language in paragraph 21 of the Joint Framework Document.

Mr Whysall (B+L)
Miss Harrison (B+L)

Strand 3 Talks

5. More immediately, could I put down a marker that I hope this Embassy will be involved in talks on Strand 3 issues if events develop to that extent? I believe that my predecessor attended many of the relevant meetings. I agreed with the PUS that our involvement in the current initial talks was not appropriate, but Strand 3 topics are of direct interest to the Embassy. Those mentioned in paragraph 4 of Peter Bell's minute on East/West issues, including the thickening exercise, are of particular concern. (Incidentally, I believe that the latter exercise has rather more life than Peter suggests and I shall be putting forward some further thoughts as follow-up to President Robinson's visit).

6. Perhaps you could let me know what you think in due course.

(Signed)

V E Sutherland
HM AMBASSADOR

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