

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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27 March, 1981

(2)

to Mr

Prime Minister

*In all the circumstances I think
Mr Haughey's speech is a pretty
good one.*

PM - 27/3

Michael Alexander, Esq.,
No. 10 Downing Street,
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Dear Michael

... I attach an extract from today's Irish Times which the Prime Minister may be interested to see. It sets out - in full it would seem - Mr. Haughey's speech to his party executive yesterday about the Anglo-Irish talks and his policy towards Northern Ireland. If one reads it all, it is not too unhelpful but no doubt Dr. Paisley will use some of it out of context.

*Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins*

M.W. HOPKINS

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Haughey stresses need for North's consent to change

THE Taoiseach, Mr Haughey, moved to reduce tension in Northern Ireland over the implications of the British Irish studies yesterday when he drew attention to the fact that at the last London summit, he had agreed that changes in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland could only come about with the consent of a majority of the Northern people.

Mr Haughey told the National Executive of Fianna Fail, according to a supplied script.

"I doubt if there has ever been a political initiative or process in this country which has been the subject of so much constant sniping, so many attempts to put false constructions on things, so much effort to misrepresent or misinterpret what has been said. What is the basis of this criticism? On the one hand, it is suggested that we are doing secret deals or that we are abandoning traditional policies. On the other hand, we are accused by the same people or their close associates of following a policy of inferring things that are not in fact happening, of making unjustifiable claims as to the significance or content of the joint studies or otherwise of creating unreal expectations as to the outcome of the process.

ALLEGATIONS

"I have already dealt in the Dáil with the allegations and suspicions about secret deals. In doing so, I drew attention to the credibility gap attaching to the Opposition parties, arising from the basic and unresolved differences between them and indeed within the Fine Gael Party on questions of vital national importance relating to Ireland's place in the world. So far as the other type of accusation is concerned, I defy anyone to point to anything I have said in speeches in the Dáil or in the country, in radio or television interviews or in press conferences that could sustain such a suggestion. For example, in answer to a question at my press conference on December 8th, I said: 'I don't want to go too far ahead. Sufficient for the day is the achievement thereof. The procedures, what was brought forward today is the concept of special studies, joint studies — and I emphasise that they are joint studies — which will be considered specially at a meeting in London. I regard that as very considerable progress, historic progress'.

"Do the Opposition parties wish to quarrel with that? I certainly make no apologies for taking a view which has been very widely shared. Again, in reply to another question, I said that for my part I did not set any limits to what institutional arrangements might be conceived or brought forward as long as they are designed to contribute to the improvement of relationships and to bring about peace and reconciliation throughout this island.

"Again, it is suggested or implied that our motives in maintaining confidentiality in respect of the joint studies were questionable or designed to weave a web of mystery. It is in fact the Opposition parties who seek to create doubt and suspicion. There is every reason that the studies should be confidential at this stage. This is almost invariably the case when two governments seek to study issues of this type. If the officials were not permitted to

work together, to explore all relevant possibilities in an atmosphere of openness, within the framework of a joint agreement to maintain confidentiality, no worthwhile progress would be made. Demands to depart from confidentiality are not, I suggest, seriously thought through.

"It is now stated that there is a hiatus in what is described as a bi-partisan policy on Northern Ireland. I don't know what is meant by this. Both Opposition leaders have over the last fifteen months carried on a sustained campaign of criticism of every aspect of my policies. Since December last, instead of putting forward any constructive suggestions, they have stepped up this campaign.

"The Fine Gael Leader suggests that Northern Ireland should not be an election issue while in the same breath he intensifies his attack on my policies in respect of such matters as the joint studies and defence and foreign policy.

"It is the duty and responsibility of the Government to formulate and implement policy. The Opposition parties have a clear choice — either to support those policies or to oppose them.

"At the next election — whenever it comes — the policies of the Government on Northern Ireland and on every other area will be put before the people. The

attitude to be taken by the Opposition parties is entirely a matter for them. If they choose to support our policy on Northern Ireland we will be gratified. If they disagree with us it is open to them to put forward an alternative, though one must have the gravest doubts about the feasibility of their doing so.

"The policy of the leader of the Labour Party appears still to be determined by the attitude epitomised in the remarks of his erstwhile colleague who held special responsibility for information on the policies of the Coalition Government and who explicitly affirmed that he was not working actively for Irish unity. I fail to see how the Opposition parties could even establish or maintain a bi-partisan approach among themselves.

"For my part, I have no hesitation in reaffirming openly and proudly that I am working actively for Irish unity. I have said before and I repeat now that progress towards the unity of all our people is my top political priority. I will not be deflected from pursuing that noble goal sensibly and patiently.

"In statements on February 10th and 25th last the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland spelt out what the British Government mean by the constitutional status or position of Northern Ireland. He defined it as being that its position within the United Kingdom cannot be changed without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland and of the Westminster Parliament.

"Our position on this should be perfectly clear. As I have already brought out, the studies are part of a process initiated when I met Mrs Thatcher in London on May 21st last year.

PRACTICAL REALITIES

"Reference to the communiqué issued after that meeting will show that I agreed that change in the constitutional status, the present factual state of Northern Ireland, would only come about with the consent of a majority of the Northern people. In my Dáil speech on May 29th last I pointed out that this simply recognised the practical realities of the situation.

"That much being said, there remains a wide field for study and consideration in the five areas set out in the Dublin communiqué, directed to the needs on which we are agreed — peace, reconciliation, stability and in the light of recent statistics I might add economic reconstruction in Northern Ireland, as well as the improvement of relations between the two countries.

"I certainly do not conceal my hope that the process on which we have embarked will help in whatever timescale, whether short or long, to bring all the people of this country together in some new agreed political arrangements that will bring peace and reconciliation.

"The studies do not pose a threat to anybody. On the contrary, they are intended to explore the scope for, and possible lines of, developments that would be of benefit to all concerned, develop-

ments that would promote the security, welfare and prosperity of all the people of the two countries. They do not represent decisions but are work by officials to be submitted for consideration by the British Prime Minister and me at our next meeting. The matters which are the subject of the studies are clearly set out in a paragraph of the Dublin communiqué which I have repeated earlier in this speech. The studies are concerned with these matters. They are not concerned with anything else. They are proceeding satisfactorily.

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE

"Is it too much to hope that unhelpful speculation would now cease and that, instead, the officials can pursue their work in an atmosphere conducive to progress and success?

"Perhaps the critics here at home could look beyond their own narrow confines. If they did so they would see that in their negative attitude to the process that is under way they are isolated among persons and bodies who adopt a responsible and forward-looking approach. This process has received the full support of the SDLP, of the friends of Ireland in the United States, of leading newspapers in Britain, America and elsewhere. It is the subject of considerable satisfaction in the United States Administration and among our partners in Europe. Are all of these people out of step?

"I believe that our policy has the support of a majority of Irish people. I have no doubt that the attempts to sabotage and retard progress towards national interests of the first importance will rebound on those concerned. In any event, we intend to pursue our policy calmly and steadily, firmly convinced of its correctness", Mr Haughey said.