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Text of report received by telex from the
Ambassador in Washington

US Elections: Implications for Anglo-Irish relations

It might be useful initially to consider separately the likely attitudes of (a) the Reagan administration (b) the Congress and (c) the Irish-American Community following the election results. A broad conclusion is then attempted and some guidelines sought both in general terms and on specific issues that will arise. The conclusions are inevitably tentative given the relatively radical nature of the change which is about to take place both in the administration which comes into office on 20 January 1981 and the Congress which comes into office on 5 January. The transition period will, of course, provide further clues and these will be reported as they arise but it might also be worth considering the possibility of another briefing session on Anglo-Irish relations and the US dimension on the lines of that arranged earlier this year.

2. Reagan's formal position on Ireland throughout the campaign was as follows:

The divisions in Northern Ireland are deep and of long standing. The wounds can be healed only through the good will of reasonable men and women on both sides. Compromises will be needed and these must be arrived at by those involved. It is not for the United States to interfere in this process or prescribe solutions, but rather to urge the parties to come together to work for a solution and to join in condemnation of terrorism by either side.

Peace cannot come from the barrel of a terrorist's gun. Americans should question closely any appeal for funds from groups involved in the conflict to make sure that contributions do not end up in the hands of gun-runners. Further, as terrorists of either side are apprehended and jailed, extradition procedures should not be relaxed on the grounds these are "political" prisoners. Terrorism is just that and must not be allowed to be condoned or excused.

That was drafted by his campaign staff none of whom was expert on Ireland but all of whom are professional foreign policy types who did some basic research and consultation before finalising the position. Our contact with them indicated a substantial pro-British tendency and many of them had close personal and professional contacts with the more conservative Tory

establishment in Britain. Two points which frequently arose in the course of our contact with Reagan advisers were our non-membership of NATO and our alleged softness on terrorism.

An initial Reagan draft position was very pro-unionist and in particular inclined to the view that NI was exclusively an internal UK matter. This line was softened somewhat, especially through the intervention of the brothers Dick and John Moore, the former of whom is very influential in senior Republican circles and the latter of whom was Nixon's Ambassador to Ireland. We were not, however, able to get any reference to Ireland into the Republican Party's platform despite intensive direct and indirect lobbying.

3. I have met Reagan on three occasions during his campaign but conversations were limited and of no substance. He did, however, on each occasion express himself warmly towards Ireland which he referred to once as "my country". It was noticeable however, that he did not publicly identify himself as Irish-American, even during the Saint Patrick's Day primary season. Reagan's autobiography and the various biographies all refer to Reagan's father as typical first generation Irish-American Catholic. Ronald Reagan's older brother in a recent interview described the father as "a typical Irishman. Happy-go-lucky, jolly, very sensitive - too sensitive for his own good - too much of the juice". I mention this because in a conversation with Ronald Reagan's wife some months ago, she referred to an incident which she and many others believe colour the President elect's view of Irish-America and Catholicism. As a young boy in the small town of Tampico, Illinois, Ronald Reagan came home to find his father passed out through drink on

the front porch of their house. With difficulty he dragged him into the house by the overcoat and succeeded in getting him into bed. That incident is said to have influenced Ronald Reagan to drink little and only occasionally all his life. He had been a staunch practising Protestant and in his political life he has, apparently deliberately, avoided an Irish-American identification, even when challenging the very Irish Governor Pat Brown in California. Those who know Reagan, included the Moores and Jack Mulcahy, Waterville, Ashford Castle, etc. Tell me that he is not particularly interested in or informed about Ireland but that he has the classical Irish-American emotional affection for the old country. This is what came across in his first press conference today (6 November) when asked about Northern Ireland and arms for the RUC. He replied "I cannot answer that specifically. I would say (pause) with the name of Reagan (pause) the US cannot interfere or intervene but if there is any way we can be helpful we would be more than eager because I think it is a very tragic situation".

4. There are certainly some potential members of the Reagan/Bush administration who know something about Ireland and who will start well disposed. George Bush is well disposed since his UN days and in a conversation with him last February he showed a grasp of the complexities of Anglo-Irish relations. There will, however, be a definite pro-British tilt in the administration generally reflecting not just some shared ideology with and admiration for the Thatcher administration but many prominent Reaganities have even closer British links than is traditional with US Republicans. Ann Armstrong, former US Ambassador to London, was co-chairman of the campaign, has a similar job on the transition team and will probably get a senior cabinet or White House position, possibly connected with Foreign Affairs.

5. I have been in contact informally with a senior Reagan aide in an effort to identify who in his staff will be dealing with Irish affairs during the transition period. I am informed that it is not Reagan's intention to involve himself in any way in the running of foreign or domestic affairs until he takes office. The transition will be used to allocate the three thousand senior

jobs which will require to be filled on 21 January and also to translate the campaign rhetoric into coherent policies. My contact did not envisage any statement from Reagan on any Foreign policy issue during the transition and today's press conference confirmed that approach. The statements attributed to a Reagan press spokesman in today's Irish Press should not be regarded as representing his views one way or the other. The only people authorised to speak on foreign policy matters for Reagan between now and 21 January are the three members of the Interim Foreign Policy Board, Senators Jackson and Stone and Mr. Edward Bennett Williams, a prominent Washington lawyer.

6. The composition of the new congress has been analysed in our C303. The influence which our traditional friends - all of whom are Democrats - might have on the administration will inevitably be reduced. Kennedy's position in the senate is particularly weakened. Moynihan's neo-conservatism will make life more comfortable for him in the Senate though he will hardly be in a position to exert influence on the administration. The house is now the only Democratic national institutional power base and Speaker O'Neill will have a major role not just in re-shaping the Democratic Party but in forming the working relationship between the House and the administration without which the Reagan administration will not be able to advance its legislative programme. Reagan's track record in California suggests that he will try to build a constructive relationship with the House but it will not become clear for a while what the House's attitude will be. Nevertheless, from our point of view, O'Neill will be available as a major channel of contact to and influence with the White House and it is recommended that we continue to work closely with him and with the other prominent Democrats who have survived.

7. Obviously the activities of Congressman Biaggi's ad hoc Committee on Ireland will continue as before and as noted in our C303 the new republican Senator D'amato from New York has

promised to try to form a similar committee in the Senate. It is unlikely that Biaggi will be able to exert any influence in the administration but obviously the Republican members of his Committee (or of D'Amato's if he succeeds in forming one) will have some access in the White House and elsewhere. The only Republican active in the Ad Hoc Committee until now has been Hamilton Fish from New York with whom I am in regular contact. He remains convinced that there can be no progress made in Northern Ireland until all the para-militaries are involved in the peace process. Given Reagan's total opposition to all forms of terrorism - he returned to the theme frequently throughout the campaign - it is unlikely that his administration will knowingly allow itself to show any tolerance whatever of IRA or related activities.

8. The various speeches and other developments since the Taoiseach took office have succeeded in creating a new atmosphere in the Irish-American Community's attitude to Government policy. The positive tone of the Taoiseach's Cork speech and in particular the Minister's visit to New York in September have gone a long way to convincing Irish-Americans who are prepared to listen that we seek and value their support. The Irish Echo's enthusiastic endorsement of the Minister's New York speech has been very influential. The change of climate inevitably, of course, raises expectations both about the extent to which the Government will seek to involve and keep Irish-Americans informed of what is being done in Anglo-Irish relations and there is obviously a need to face up to what we can do to enable well disposed people here to identify with the positive aspects of the Irish-American relationship. If the expectation now created is not fulfilled to some extent, there are potential difficulties ahead.

9. Against the above general US background, it is suggested that consideration should now be given to the overall approach which might be adopted here and you will also no doubt wish to do so in light of the apparent slow death of the Atkins initiative and the general climate prevailing in Anglo-Irish relations. The US interest in Anglo-Irish affairs will remain but will obviously assume a form which cannot yet be predicted with any

accuracy. Much will depend on factors such as the Speaker's relationship with the President, on the nature of the Anglo-American relationship, on the appointments made in key US Foreign Policy Posts and on how campaign rhetoric is translated into policy. It should not, however, be impossible to persuade the US administration to continue the level of pressure exerted on the British Government by the Carter administration and it is suggested that this should remain the objective of our activities here. In pursuit of that objective, it is obviously advisable that early contact should be established with the Interim Foreign Policy Board to brief them generally on our position. (I am reasonably familiar with Bennett Williams through local social activities. He is actively involved in raising money for Roman Catholic charities and tends therefore to be involved with wealthy Irish-Americans. He is also a close friend of our local Legal Adviser Ed McDermott). If you feel that would be useful, general guidance as to the line that might be taken would be helpful. Obviously, the material contained in the Taoiseach's speeches and interviews gives the general line but there may be some specific points you would wish made in light of current or anticipated Anglo-Irish developments.

10. Inevitably some essentially negative questions arise which cannot easily be avoided and on which your directions would be appreciated. Speaker O'Neill in particular will expect us to continue to warn new and re-elected members of the House and Senate that the Ad Hoc Committee on Ireland and the related Irish National Caucus is not a helpful influence in Ireland and there is certainly a possibility that if we were, in the weeks between now and 6 January, to lobby on the hill, the membership of the Ad Hoc Committee could be significantly reduced. It might be even further reduced if we were to provide an alternative such as an American-Irish parliamentary association consisting of members of the Oireachtas and the Congress who would meet in Washington and Dublin from time to time. Congressman Foley has suggested that we consider an Anglo-American-Irish Parliamentary Association but this might not be effective from

our point of view and might also not appeal to many Irish-American members of Congress.

A 11. The question of the resumption of arms sales to the RUC has already arisen - it was put to Reagan at his press conference where he had no trouble in avoiding an answer. We will obviously not be asked formally by the new administration to take a position but it will certainly be raised informally particularly since the British are likely to lobby to have the Carter position reversed. The line we have taken until now is to say formally that the matter is one for the British and US authorities and informally to support the Speaker's view that the RUC does not enjoy the confidence of the minority and that there is continuing evidence of individual misbehaviour within the force. It is suggested that we continue to take that line.

✓ 12. It is possible that H-Block and the hunger strike will arise though human rights questions will obviously have less prominence in the new administration. Members of Congress will, however, continue to be lobbied by the Caucus and by individual Irish-Americans. At present we point both to the Government's public expression of interest and concern from the humanitarian point of view and also to the fact that aspects of the problem are being discussed between Dublin and London. It is assumed that we can continue to take that line.

✓ 13. The question of maintaining good relations with the Irish-American Community arises for consideration and will be addressed separately in due course. You may, however, wish to consider at this stage the pattern of Ministerial visits and possible visit by the Taoiseach in March next year. A suggestion frequently made by Irish-Americans is that the Embassy should circulate on a regular basis a newsletter specifically designed to keep them informed of Anglo-Irish developments and this idea might be actively pursued if you felt there was any possibility of the necessary personnel and finances being made available.

14. It is assumed that the matter of raising funds in the context of the Northern Ireland situation, either privately or from the US Government, is still being considered by the Department of Finance and any guidance you might have on that question would also be useful.