

E.R.

CONFIDENTIAL

NH128/5

ME/133/87/JI

MR Spence

1085/13/5
Mr Fell

Mr Hammett 20/5

to see
a return p1

M 20/5

cc PS/Mr Bloomfield
Mr Burns
Mr Chesterton
Mr Spence ✓
Mr Bell
Mr Kirk
Mr S Hewitt

MR LENIHAN'S INTERVIEW IN THE IRISH TIMES, 11 MAY

You mentioned to me in the margin of a meeting yesterday morning (19 May) your concern about the line taken by Mr Lenihan in his interview published in the Irish Times for 11 May, in particular as regards fair employment questions. I took the opportunity of a discussion in the Secretariat this morning to speak again to the Irish side about this interview; we have of course covered it in other exchanges over the past week.

2. The reaction of Irish officials has consistently been that Mr Lenihan is not a man to weigh his words with particular care, and that he is still in the learning stage as regards the nuances of the Agreement's language. On this occasion he had not been accompanied by any officials. Both on devolution (the other main area where his words are open to criticism) and on fair employment Mr Lenihan was still building bridges between Fianna Fail's position before the Irish election and their role in Government. On devolution, the present Irish Government were well aware of their commitment under the Agreement, but could not move too fast in public given the position which they had previously taken on the "failed entity" of Northern Ireland. On fair employment, they were under considerable pressure from Sean MacBride and those who favoured his principles, and were moving as expeditiously as they thought possible towards the line which they had taken with us at the last meeting of the Conference. Mr Lenihan was not of course being briefed to say

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anything which implied that decisions were taken at the Conference, or that British Government action in this field was inspired by the Conference or the Irish Government. However he was not sufficiently familiar with the language to be able to avoid giving this impression.

3. I doubt whether it is worth pressing this much further. The Lenihan interview has not in fact attracted a great deal of attention. Irish officials at least are well aware of our sensitivities. Mr Lenihan is moving towards them; but I think there is a limit to the pace at which he and the Haughey administration in general can be induced to move. If what they say actually causes harm to our interests, we can of course take action to counter this in public. But I do not think that this is such an occasion.

Mark Elliott

M ELLIOTT

20 May 1987

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