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Western European Department,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London S.W.1

22 December, 1969

W 223/528/3

I lunched with Major McDowell of the "Irish Times" on Friday, 12 December. John Peck joined us.

2. McDowell is still anxious to help, though still without any precise ideas. But he did have one thought which I think could well be of use some time in 1970. It is this: he, like so many others, laments the lack of contact between prominent people in the North and in the South. If some form of gathering to bring the two sides together could be contrived, then "the Irish Times" would be happy to help, if need be contributing its name, finance, and administrative assistance". McDowell made it plain that this was not a promotional stunt; the paper would be prepared to keep itself in the background if we thought that better.

3. He had no detailed ideas of what might be done, and over lunch I did not contribute much more either. I suppose a seminar of non-officials on relations between North and South is one thought, but that seems to me an obvious and possibly risky move. On the other hand it should be possible to get a better audience - e.g. some M.P.s and officials, and perhaps even some Ministers - if the seminar or seminars avoided that contentious subject, where differences were bound to be re-started, and instead took themes where inevitably North and South would find it made sense to co-operate. This brings us back to the joint F.J.O.-H.O. paper you are now considering, and to paragraph 15 of the record of Mr. Thomson's conversation with Dr. Hillery on 10 December.

4. At first sight it seems that McDowell might be well-placed to get things moving if both sides prove either reluctant to issue an invitation or too scared of their extremist figures to accept an invitation from the other government. *fringes*

5. We would be interested in any comments that you, or Oliver Wright to whom a copy of this letter goes, have to make.

(W. E. K. White)

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c.c.

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