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SECRETThe present political situation in the North

The North remains like a volcano but one whose eruptions follow no particular pattern. This makes it extremely difficult to make medium term forecasts although very short-term forecasting is possible and the long-term pattern, given certain important calculations, is fairly obvious.

The main assumptions are the following:

- (i) that the British Government will not change its general policy based on the Downing Street Declaration;
- (ii) that Mr. Brian Faulkner, or any other Northern Prime Minister, and his Government will have to implement this policy with some wriggling at the edges of it which will have to be carefully watched;
- (iii) that the Taoiseach's general policy will continue.

These assumptions may seem to mean a consensus of policy but, in fact, the intentions of the three Governments in the long run are not necessarily the same. The Taoiseach's intention, to put it very briefly, is to move towards the creation of an Irish society which will gradually and inexorably remove the obstacles, North and South, which stand in the way of the creation of a united Ireland. Mr. Faulkner's intention is, within the limits of doing what he is told by Westminster, so to reorganise political life in the North as to preserve the union with Britain indefinitely. The British Government's intention seems to be to insulate the problem and keep it out of the main stream of British political life while leaving the options open about where the future of the North is to be - to do this the British Government is virtually compelled to run the North direct behind a Stormont facade and to take increasing responsibility for the affairs of the area.

Assessment of the present situation, therefore, compels an examination of the possibilities of success of these three momentarily concurrent but eventually divergent policies. Herein the situation in the North itself is the best basic guide.

Will Faulkner hold his position at least for a time? Clearly he has persuaded a big majority of the Unionist Parliamentary Party to give him their confidence. He had a relatively easy passage through the Unionist Party Council and a reasonable victory in the Unionist Party Standing Committee over Mr. Craig. If this shows signs that the impression is radiating out among Unionists from the centre through the Parliamentary Party, the Standing Committee and the Council, that there is little choice but to accept the dictates of Westminster - subject, naturally, to constant attempts to widen the area of discretion - then Mr. Faulkner might hope to continue the process and consolidate his position along a fairly wide band of Unionist opinion. He is up against a number of difficulties in doing this, the most important of which are:

- (i) a large body of traditional Unionist opinion, represented by such people as Rev. Martin Smyth (on behalf of the Orange Order), Mr. Desmond Boal, M.P., Mr. William Craig M.P., Rev. Ian Paisley (representing self-styled Protestant Unionism) and more extreme people like Mr. John McKeague, has by no means given up the struggle to force a change of policy and a return to hard-line Unionist control;

- (ii) the structure of the Unionist Party is helpful to these people. Unlike most political parties the Unionist Party is capable of being directly dominated by the constituency associations who have untrammelled authority in relation to nominations. Even a relatively small number of activists, who in this context are usually extremists, can exercise a disproportionate influence through the constituency associations. Undoubtedly Faulkner's main reason for bringing Harry West into his Cabinet is an attempt to stop the rot at the constituency level, especially West of the Bann. It is a near certainty, therefore, that Faulkner must somehow reorganise the Unionist Party itself if he is to maintain his position for any length of time;
- (iii) Faulkner will be required to carry out policies which are totally opposed to Unionist ideas. The most important of these is local government reform. Given its complexity and Faulkner's own abilities he may get away with this. But he will also be required, in my opinion, to do something serious about the holding of legal weapons in the North. This is the kind of emotional issue which will cause him the greatest difficulty during the next few months;
- (iv) Faulkner will require to make decisions about Orange parades between now and the end of August. It is barely conceivable that the Orange Order will cooperate to some extent in relation to minor parades but I should think it is out of the question that they will agree voluntarily to any serious restrictions of their parades on the 12th July. This may result in controversy. The Apprentice Boys parade in Derry on 12th August will cause even more controversy. At most I should think that the security forces will allow a service in the Diamond and a parade through Fountain Street to the Waterside. This will cause dissatisfaction to the Apprentice Boys and strong objection from the Derry majority. The next collection of parades are those of the Black Preceptory at the end of August. These were prohibited last year; I am doubtful, at this stage, that they will be prohibited this year. Certainly there will be an uproar about them and Faulkner's decisions will be difficult ones;
- (v) outside the Unionist Party there is the growing activity of the Alliance Party which is making a major effort to attract moderate Unionists. If they succeed in this - I am not satisfied by current newspaper evidence that they are making any substantial progress as yet - they will weaken Faulkner on the moderate side;
- (vi) more important than this is the calibre of the Opposition in Stormont. The SDLP, with support depending on the issues from the Nationalist Party, are thoroughly determined to limit Faulkner's room for manoeuvre and have plenty of issues on which to exercise pressure including the question of the introduction of PR for local government as well as for Stormont elections and the larger question of the participation of the minority in the affairs of the area. The SDLP is still, in my opinion, weak on organisation but have become aware recently of the need to get on with this before the Alliance Party steals any ground from them;

- (vii) the intentions of the IRA - particularly of the Provisional IRA - are unclear at the moment. The Easter parades were well disciplined (as I mentioned in the previous report the stone-throwing in Derry had no connection with the Republican parades). Two of the most important leaders of the Provisionals, [redacted] are held at present on an explosives charge. Other members have been picked up on minor charges and convicted. This certainly limits their scope. In addition I have the impression that the nature of the Provisionals has changed in recent months and that the political arm, under Ó Bradaigh, probably has greater influence than formerly. Consequently there is a possibility that both wings of the IRA may be less active for the time being unless they resume the quarrel among themselves. Faulkner, no doubt, will make the most, as he has done already, of the claim that new tactics on the part of the security forces in relation to the IRA are showing signs of success;
- (viii) as an addendum to this I should add that I have heard increasing rumours of contact between extremist Unionists and Provisional IRA elements. Apparently Desmond Boal and Paisley have indicated that a Government of the right-wing could and would make more concessions to the minority than the present Government. This is stated in terms of UDI and the argument is made that unification of the country would follow a UDI period as Protestants could then agree to a united Ireland with their heads high. If there is anything to this thesis the plan would be for both extremes to cooperate to bring about the downfall of the Faulkner Government and to cooperate further in an attempt at UDI. I am reporting this merely to complete the picture but I am convinced, at the present time, that, while such an intention may exist in some minds, it is an unlikely eventuality;
- (ix) there are serious difficulties of an economic nature in the North. It is an accepted dogma at Whitehall that economic prosperity would ease the social strain in the North. No doubt this influenced Mr. Bailie's quick acceptance of the Taoiseach's offers of economic cooperation and Mr. Faulkner probably considers that economic cooperation, in addition to its intrinsic values, is a useful means of distracting attention from emotive issues despite some political risks.

To summarise all this, I would say that Mr. Faulkner is in the position of a man propped up by his enemies ranging from extreme Unionists to the Provisional IRA and from moderate Unionists to the political Opposition. His additional strength, so far as moderate Unionists are concerned, is that they have no alternative to the main policy imposed by Westminster on them so that there is no point in their seeking an alternative to Faulkner. For these reasons he stands some chance of surviving. That is as much as one could say at present.

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