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**Title:** Report by S Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs of his meeting with Social Democratic and Labour Party members John Hume and Paddy Devlin in Belfast on 17 October 1973, discussing the ongoing inter-party talks in Northern Ireland, the proposed executive and the forthcoming tripartite conference.

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1. I had a three hour session with John Hume and Paddy Devlin in Belfast on the evening of 17 October, 1973. Our discussion centred mainly on the inter-party talks on the formation of an NI Executive, the arrangements for a tripartite conference and the recent meetings of the Assembly. Mr. Hume also gave me, for transmission to the Taoiseach as arranged at the meeting between the SDLP and the Taoiseach and Ministers on 12 October 1973, a document (Annex I) outlining the SDLP's proposals on the Council of Ireland's role in the area of policing and related matters. The SDLP would like an early response on the Government's attitude to these proposals.

2. Law and order and policing is the only subject which has been considered in any detail at this week's inter-party meetings and a confidential document by the NI Office (Annex II) was given to the parties at a meeting on 16 October "to facilitate discussion". The discussion was described by Hume as tough and to the point though with all sides making desperate but successful efforts to keep the temperature as low as possible. As far as the SDLP is concerned, the significant point in the discussion was a statement by Bradford, to which Faulkner subsequently assented, that "what we want is a mechanism to formalise co-operation on policing between the North and the South" (Both Devlin and Hume had taken a full note of the words used). This together with paragraph 7 of the NI Office document has considerably raised SDLP hopes that some compromise will be possible on the police question provided that Dublin is prepared to support the proposal that a Council of Ireland should have some role in relation to policing North and South. Further inter-party discussions on policing are to take place on 18 and 19 October and Whitelaw has indicated that he would like to be able to issue a statement on 19 October to which all the parties could indicate agreement. The SDLP expect to be given the text of this statement on 19 October a.m. and Hume will telephone it to me to enable us to have a quick look at it before the SDLP commit themselves to it.

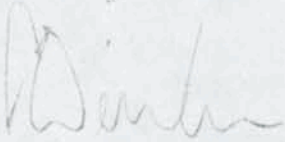
3. Despite the references to the subject in the public statements, there has so far this week been virtually no discussion on a Council of Ireland.
4. The SDLP's proposals on policing (Annex I) were drafted in my presence by Hume and agreed to without a murmur by Devlin. The subject had been discussed at a full party meeting that morning at which 16 of the 19 Assembly men were present (the absentees were Fitt, Gillespie and Currie) and the general line of the document had been approved there. One of the main influences on the party's discussion was the attached document (Annex III) which I know to have been prepared by Mr. Charles Hill, B.L., although this was not told to me by Hume or Devlin. (Mr. Hill is well known both in Foreign Affairs and to Mr. Quigley of the Attorney General's Office and he has been of assistance in the context of the Strasbourg case).
5. The SDLP are generally pleased with the Assembly proceedings to date, mainly because of the obvious dissension between the various shades of unionism. They do not expect, however, that Faulkner will be able to persuade his followers to vote against either the prayer for the Queen or the controversial symbols of the mace, sergeant-at-arms and speaker's wig and at the moment they expect to have to swallow complete defeat on these issues. Because of Faulkner's apparent willingness to concede on more fundamental questions, they are prepared to accept this defeat, particularly as they think it will help him win the crucial vote of confidence at the Unionist Party meeting on 23 October. Hume rates Faulkner's chances of winning that vote at 60/40. He is, however, now somewhat worried about Bradford who is going round bemoaning the fact that even if the Assembly and Executive get going, they will in reality have very little power and Hume detects that Bradford may now be making a bid for the support of the Taylor and other more-power-for-Ulster UDI types in his efforts to oust Faulkner from the leadership position. Hume does not think he will succeed but that he might do sufficient damage to

weaken Faulkner's position even more.

6. I availed of the opportunity of the meeting to get informal, preliminary reactions from Hume and Devlin on some aspects of the proposed tripartite conference. They have no strong views on where it should be held and from a practical point of view feel there would be no objection to a British venue. They would like, however, that the conference be jointly hosted by the two sovereign governments and they are adamant that it should not be chaired by a British person. If agreement on an "eminent international figure, preferably a statesman" cannot be reached, then the question of rotation should be considered. They would probably have a delegation of three negotiators and some advisers and hope that someone, preferably Dublin, would help them out with secretarial services. They would participate as a party and not as part of a prospective NI Executive. They would like a verbatim text of the proceedings or nothing - their experience of summary reports has, they said, been disastrous. In regard to the agenda, they see no way in which policing could be avoided since it is an integral part of the action against terrorism which para. 112(c) of the White Paper envisages as a subject for discussion at the conference.

7. Despite the fact that there had been a major army lifting operation in Belfast from 4.00 a.m. that morning and most of the seventeen persons lifted were from the west Belfast area which was where I spent most of my visit, the general atmosphere was calm. There seemed to be no panic activity either at Paddy Devlin's house or at the CCDC or ALJ offices and indeed Paddy Devlin expressed himself as being delighted with the army operation. They had, he said, gone for the known "troublemakers" who while they were not active themselves were the very people who were sending youngsters out to take pot shots at the soldiers. To some extent at least this feeling must have been shared by the community at large which seemed to be going

about its business with a greater degree of normality than I have seen in Andersonstown and the Falls since 1971. The street lights are now on everywhere, shops and garages are open in the evening and the cabaret at the Dunowen Restaurant on the Glen Road in Andersonstown seemed to draw a full house.



Seán Donlon.

18 October, 1973.