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**Title:** Report by Seán Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs, of his visit to Northern Ireland on 7 November 1973, where he met with members of the Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Alliance Party, mainly discussing the Proposed council of Ireland, the allocation of posts in the proposed new Northern Ireland government, and the forthcoming tripartite conference.

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SECRET

1. The following report is based on conversations in Belfast on 7 November 1973 with Messrs Hume, Devlin and Des Gillespie of the SDLP and Mr Bob Cooper of the Alliance Party. For various reasons, I was not able to meet Mr. Hume personally and spoke to him only by telephone. My conversations with him were, however, sufficient to verify the main SDLP points which were conveyed to me by Messrs. Devlin and Gillespie. than the other session on
2. The session of the inter-party talks on 5 November was concerned almost exclusively with the Council of Ireland. All three parties put documents on the table and explained the thinking behind their main proposals. The SDLP document is the one they have already given us. The Unionist and Alliance documents, both obtained from the SDLP, are attached (appendices 1 and 2). While the SDLP were at pains to point out that they were not prepared to "discuss" their document, they did "clarify" and "explain" some points and answered questions put to them both by Whitelaw and by the other parties. Throughout they emphasised that the subject could not be "discussed" in any forum in which the Dublin Government was not represented. There was apparently considerable relief all round that they were prepared to go even as far as they did and Alliance attribute what they see as a movement from the SDLP's previous "no discussion" position to the fact that Dublin "probably gave them a gentle nudge" following the Alliance Party meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Belfast on 31 October! In any event both the SDLP and Alliance are happy with the outcome of the meeting at the end of which Mr Whitelaw gave each party a copy of a paper (appendix 3 to this report. The parties were asked not to pass it on and it should therefore be treated with particular care) setting out some basic



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questions about a Council to which he would like to have oral answers at the session to be held on 13 November. The SDLP's present attitude is that their document already answers the questions and that there is therefore no point in setting aside a further session to discuss the Council. The Alliance Party is, according to Cooper, inclined to agree with this view and at most they think that there should certainly be no more than one other session on the Council before Dublin is brought in. Cooper also said that, irrespective of what happened on the timing of the tripartite conference, there was no question of Alliance going to it as a component of the third party led by Faulkner. The Alliance Party would have its own positions and would wish to be free to express them particularly on issues such as "the Council of Ireland, policing and extradition".

3. There was some discussion of the social - economic programme at the session on 5 November - a confrontation to test Faulkner's genuineness was how Devlin described it - and finally at the session on 6 November agreement was reached on a programme (appendix 4 to this report) and it was signed by all the participants in the talks i.e. 6 Unionists, 6 SDLP and 3 Alliance. The SDLP is, as they told us last week, insisting that all those supporting their leaders in the inter-party talks should sign the document, their hope being that Faulkner will thereby be exposed as having only eighteen supporters now that Whitten and Stronge have defected. Bob Cooper confirmed that the SDLP are still taking this line but he says that at the session on 6 November they took it



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with less vigour than heretofore since they now seem to realise that the harder they push Faulkner for signatures on a social-economic document, the harder he will push them for signatures on agreed documents dealing with policing or other distasteful issues.

4. The other main topic discussed at the session on 6 November was what was rather cleverly called "the machinery of government". As far as the SDLP and Alliance were concerned, this was round one in the fight for the twelve executive posts. As an "aid to discussion", Whitelaw circulated the attached paper (appendix 5). It appears to be initialled by Ken Bloomfield of the former Stormont Cabinet secretariat though none of my contacts have so far been able to confirm this and some of them suggest that the initials may be those of Harold Black of the same office. Both the SDLP and Alliance report that there was a good deal of shadow boxing but no real coming to grips with the sharing of the posts. Whitelaw asked the parties to consider the paper and let him have reactions next week. The SDLP's present thinking - and Hume and Devlin are confident that the party will adopt it as a final position - is that there should be a full team of twelve appointed from within the Assembly. They see absolutely no reason why any "outsiders" should be brought in, either to provide balance or for any other reason. The twelve posts should be along the following lines:

1. Chief Executive,
2. Deputy Chief Executive,
3. Finance,
4. Education,
5. Agriculture



- 6. Commerce, including Enterprise Ulster,
- 7. Community Relations, but absorbing the present Commission rather than overseeing it.
- 8. \_\_\_\_\_ } Leader of House
- 9. to be selected } Central Service
- 10. by an } Health and Welfare
- 11. amalgamation } Manpower
- 12. of } Social Security
- \_\_\_\_\_ } Environment
- \_\_\_\_\_ } Housing
- \_\_\_\_\_ } Local Government

It is difficult at this sensitive stage to draw any of the SDLP people on the question of jobs beyond the point that "we must have five and we don't care who gets the rest". From my contacts with them in recent months, I feel they will aim for Deputy Chief Executive (Fitt), Finance (Hume), Education (Currie), and a social Department (Devlin). The allocation of the fifth post will probably be between Cooper, O'Hanlon, McGrady and Paddy Duffy and the decision as to which of them gets it will probably be determined largely by the nature of the portfolio. (I did not feel it appropriate to raise the question of the sharing of posts with Bob Cooper and he seemed to go to some lengths to avoid raising it with me!).

5. In regard to the general political situation, the SDLP did not have much to add to what we already knew to be their point of view. Bob Cooper made some interesting remarks which might be summarised as follows:-

- while Faulkner's position in the Unionist Party may be weak, his overall position in NI unionist circles is strong enough even to survive a defeat at the Unionist Council meeting on 21 November. He could lessen his



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chances of such a defeat if he went out himself and actively sold his policies but unfortunately it is not in the man's nature to tie himself too closely to any particular policy and he cannot realistically be expected to change his nature at this stage;

- there is no possibility of Faulkner's gaining support from the unpledged Unionists in the short term. The process of winning them back will take a year or two and will be fruitful then only if the Executive is seen to be working;
- the Dublin Government is bending over backwards for Faulkner and in general is showing considerable knowledge of and sensibilities for his difficulties;
- the tripartite conference should be held as soon as possible and Dublin should do everything it can to impress this point on the British. Alliance is afraid that London's homework (e.g. on the financing of a Council of Ireland; following last week's meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alliance sounded out senior civil servants in the NI Office in Belfast and did not get any impression of advanced thinking on the subject) is not as well done as Dublin's and that this may be more of a stumbling block at the moment than the political factors;
- Alliance has not finally made up its mind about inviting Paisley, West, Taylor, Craig and company to the tripartite conference but are at the moment tending to the view that they should not be invited;
- in regard to the details of a tripartite conference, Alliance know they will have to "row along with the big fellows" but for what it is worth they feel that the



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Chairman should not be British politician. When I gave Cooper an outline of our present thinking, his immediate reactions to the names of Lowry and Catherwood were negative. The latter is "too unionist" and Lowry is so slow-moving that some of his reserved court judgements are now almost ten years outstanding! In regard to the invitation, they think it should be a joint Dublin/London one. They feel there is little alternative to Britain as a venue.

6. The SDLP strongly urge that we should immediately give details of our position on policing and common law enforcement to the British. As recently as 5 November, Frank Cooper was, they claim, still making references in private to the fact that Dublin would not throw anything on policing into the Council. As long as the British were unaware of our position, progress both at the inter-party talks and for the tripartite conference could be unnecessarily impeded.

7. I bumped into Maurice Hayes (formerly of the Community Relations Commission and now in the Ombudsman's Office) in a hotel at lunchtime. He told me in confidence that he has been approached about and would probably accept a position in the old Cabinet Secretariat Office as soon as the Executive was formed. This would appear to be an excellent appointment and though it is possible that some SDLP people think he has been a tame teague in the past, I am in no doubt that this view is not generally held either by the SDLP or by the minority as a whole. Hayes also confirmed that Benn, the retiring Ombudsman, would be replaced by Stephen McGonagle and that there was some surprise that that appointment had not yet been publicly announced. He said that Benn



had asked him to make it known discreetly in Dublin that he i.e. Benn would be available for appointments to any suitable bodies in the south in the education or complaints machinery areas! He had been particularly flattered to be invited to Dublin recently by the Attorney General to discuss procedures for dealing with complaints and the invitation was all the more appreciated because it had come at a time when the British Government which was also considering the same question had not bothered to check on the Northern Ireland experiment.

*Seán Donlon*

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7 November 1973

The inter-party talks on 5 November with the Council of Ireland. All the documents on the table and explained their own proposals. The SNP document already given us. The Unionist and Alliance documents, both obtained from the SNP, are attached (appendices 1 and 2). While the SNP were at pains to point out that they were not prepared to "discuss" their document, they did "clarify" and "explain" some points and answered questions put to them both by Whitelaw and by the other parties. Throughout they emphasized what the subject would not be discussed" in any form or which the public Government was to be prepared to go as far as they did and Alliance attribute what they see as a movement from the SNP's previous "no discussion" position to the fact that Dublin "probably gave them a gentle prod" following the Alliance Party meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Belfast on 31 October! In any event both the SNP and Alliance are happy with the outcome of the meeting at the end of which the SNP gave their party copy of paper appendix to this report. The parties were asked not to raise it on and it recalls that the