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**Title:** Memorandum [?by D Nally, Department of the Taoiseach] on a meeting between Irish government officials and Kenneth Bloomfield, Permanent Secretary to the Northern Ireland Executive, mainly discussing unionist opposition to the Sunningdale Agreement and the position of Northern Ireland Chief Executive Brian Faulkner.

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## ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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IMPLEMENTATION OF SUNNINGDALEDiscussions with Permanent Secretary of Northern Ireland Executive

Taoiseach

As arranged, Mr. Bloomfield, Permanent Secretary to the Northern Ireland Executive, called yesterday to discuss the implementation of the Sunningdale Agreement. Mr. Whelan, Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Kirwan and I attended the discussions which lasted from 10.30 a.m. to approximately 6.30 pm. Mr. O'Cofaigh of the Department of Finance and Mr. Russell of the Attorney General's Office attended for part of the discussions. It was stressed to Mr. Bloomfield during the discussions that we had no mandate to negotiate or even suggest changes in the Sunningdale package, but that we would note what he said and that he could be assured that it would be very carefully considered.

Mr. Bloomfield came on the instructions of the Chief Executive, Mr. Faulkner, who had, as you know, outlined the alternatives, as he saw them, in his letter of 3rd April, 1974, as -

- (1) early ratification of Sunningdale, which he regards as being no longer within the realm of practical politics;
- (2) delay the whole Council of Ireland concept for a substantial period, which he finds a pretty unattractive course;
- (3) drop the Executive powers and the second tier of the full Council package; or
- (4) make progress towards the kind of structure envisaged at Sunningdale, by stages, and phased in a way to win public confidence.

A copy of Mr. Faulkner's letter is attached for reference.

Mr. Bloomfield stressed during the discussions that the implementation of Sunningdale, as agreed in December, just was not on at present, so far as the Protestant community in the North were concerned. He said that this situation had been brought about by the deteriorating security situation, the effects of the recent Westminster Election, following hard on the disruption of the former Unionist Party, and the general atmosphere of distrust, harassment in the North. He said that the community were in a "worrying mood" and could not be pushed any further. Their feelings were pent up and were becoming stronger and stronger by the day. They were, they sensed, an "unheeded community." The great danger was that if the 11 representatives they had sent to Westminster - whatever we might think about the quality of these representatives - were unable to achieve anything for the community, they would, as a whole, lose whatever remaining faith they had in the democratic process and turn to violence. At the least, Mr. Bloomfield said there seemed to be a danger of widespread Protestant civil disobedience. So far as he knew, this question was to be discussed at a meeting of Loyalist Assembly members to be held over Easter. These people had the feeling that they had been abandoned by Westminster - and the recent vote in the House of Commons had only served to confirm this feeling. They were now in a corner



## ROINN AN TAOISIGH

(2)

Uimhir.....

and to push them further could produce disastrous results.

Power sharing had been accepted only with reluctance in Northern Ireland. It was still viewed with a certain amount of scepticism, if not open hostility, and still needed time to consolidate itself.

In conclusion, Mr. Bloomfield said that if there were no second Hillsborough or if the functions of a Council of Ireland were voted down, it could mean the end of the Assembly. Similarly, he knew that if a new point of balance was not found within the Sunningdale concept, the Executive was going to break down.

It was pointed out to Mr. Bloomfield that since the Sunningdale communique had been issued, very little selling of its contents had been done in Northern Ireland. In fact, most of the comment there seemed to be on subjects which were outside the spirit of the main agreement. It would be difficult to say whether or not it was or could be a success since it had not come into operation. The question of renegotiation, would be difficult, if not impossible, so far as we were concerned.

Mr. Bloomfield said that Mr. Faulkner was extremely anxious to have the Sunningdale Agreement ratified and had done everything in his power to sell it. The extent of the anti-Sunningdale feeling in the North might well not be appreciated here. He, (Mr. Bloomfield) was aware of a large number of committee meetings of the Assembly Unionist Party where it had only been by the skin of his teeth that Mr. Faulkner had prevented the door from being totally slammed on the whole concept. Mr. Faulkner and the Northern Ireland representatives generally, had been in a very weak position at Sunningdale in being asked to negotiate with representatives of two sovereign Governments. In fact, Mr. Faulkner had exposed himself there in that he had been pushed beyond his election manifesto. This left him in an extremely weak position when he returned. He was as anxious as anybody to see Sunningdale implemented - and was aware, in particular, of the dangers of delay, but in the present atmosphere in Northern Ireland, it just was not possible to see the pact implemented by Mr. Faulkner at present. Mr. Bloomfield said that what could be sold, so far as Mr. Faulkner was concerned, was that the Council of Ireland should be established with the policing and human rights functions as envisaged for it in the Sunningdale communique - and with the function of reviewing progress in relation to a list of functions, which could be based on the officials' report of some time ago, which would be the subject of discussion and co-operation at ministerial level between the Executive and the Government here - but outside the Executive responsibility, for the present, of a Council. The question of a Consultative Assembly could not be pushed for the present.

In reply to a question as to what the basic objection to the Consultative Assembly was - particularly in view of its role in enabling the Council to be sold to elected members North and South - Mr. Bloomfield said that the whole concept of a Council of Ministers, Consultative Assembly and possibly All-Ireland judicial functions, impressed Loyalists in the North with the idea that they were being compelled to accept -

- (1) an embryo Government in the Council of Ministers,
- (2) an embryo Parliament in the Consultative Assembly, and
- (3) an embryo judiciary in an all-Ireland court approach.



## ROINN AN TAOISIGH

(3)

Uimhir.....

This they just could not wear at present.

Mr. Bloomfield was then asked whether any conversations had taken place between Mr. Faulkner and the other parties represented in the Northern Ireland Executive on the question of attaining a new point of balance, in the Sunningdale concept, on the lines he had mentioned. Mr. Bloomfield said that discussions had taken place in corridors and other meeting places but that there had been no formal or even semi-formal contact on the subject. There had been no Party reaction from the SDLP to these suggestions. He wanted to stress that Mr. Faulkner was as keen as anyone to get Sunningdale off the ground soon but that it was essential for him to get a form of compact that could be sold in Northern Ireland. If he tried to sell further what he had got at present, there was a grave danger that he would lose Mr. Bradford and Mr. Kirk from the Executive and Mr. McGee and Mr. McLachlan, with others from his Assembly Party. The end result of this would be that his Assembly Party would not remain together. He was putting forward the idea of getting Sunningdale implemented, not immediately, but gradually. It was particularly important with the present mood as it was among the majority in Northern Ireland - alienated as they were from Westminster - to try to win them to the Sunningdale concept.

In reply to the question of whether the promise of 4 years in office, given recently by the Secretary of State, had not achieved some degree of fire-proofing in the Executive, Mr. Bloomfield said that this just was not so in practice. The members he had mentioned would leave Mr. Faulkner if there were any suggestion of implementing Sunningdale as it now was. Mr. Faulkner's position was such that he had to send him (Mr. Bloomfield) to Dublin to carry out these discussions instead of being in a position of being able to discuss them personally with the Taoiseach at a public meeting. This was a measure of his weakness.

*by announcement*

Mr. Bloomfield was asked what Mr. Faulkner's position would be if his present proposals or anything based on them were rejected. Mr. Bloomfield said that Mr. Faulkner would then resign - and take up farming. He would have no hesitation in "cultivating the daisies". This would be forced on him because he would no longer command support in the Executive or in the Assembly. He had the best will in the world for implementation - but it just was not practicable for him at present.

Mr. Bloomfield was asked if the consequences of non-ratification had been considered in detail by Mr. Faulkner and the Northern majority. Mr. Bloomfield said that he himself and other people were aware of what these consequences would be but that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland just would not accept that these consequences could come about until they had actually happened - until they saw Harland and Wolfe closed and the people walking about in the streets. In this sort of situation what the majority would go for, so far as could be judged at present, would be a Protestant hegemony, with a much reduced standard of living and possibly after a great deal of civil disturbance.

Mr. Bloomfield said that Mr. Faulkner's position was such now that he could not get the Sunningdale Agreement, as reached in December, implemented. The alternative could well be the break up of the Executive. This could be a disaster for Northern Ireland - and it would have its effects in the South as well. Mr. Faulkner felt that if the Executive - and Assembly - were to be preserved, then some modification on the lines he suggested



## ROINN AN TAOISIGH

(4)

Uimhir.....

would be necessary in the Sunningdale Agreement. He felt that ~~the~~ suggestions on these lines could best come from the Southern Government - after agreement on their acceptability had been reached with the parties in the Executive. What is being suggested, therefore, is -

- (1) that a Council of Ireland should be established with only the policing powers, as envisaged in the communique, and, in addition, the human rights proposals;
- (2) that the Executive functions of the Council should be deferred, and instead, that there should be arrangements for co-operation at Governmental level between North and South, with the power for the Council of reviewing progress in these fields, which could be extensive, according to Mr. Bloomfield;
- (3) that the proposals for a Consultative Assembly in the Council should be dropped, at least for the present.

Our difficulties in trying to get this sort of a settlement across here were adumbrated. This part of the meeting then concluded.

You may well wish to discuss the present situation with your colleagues in the Government. It seems to me that the choice may now be between keeping the Executive in Office and having a Council, with executive powers etc. The people to make this choice, in the first instance, are the parties in the Executive. The SDLP have already indicated their views to us. It is not certain whether they have gone in full into the consequences - though it is unlikely that they have not. Our first step should, I think, be to ascertain their reaction to the Faulkner proposals<sup>x</sup> and whether there is anything, in their view, which we can help to do in the present situation.

The other important point to watch is that, with the strong possibility of a total breakdown in the Sunningdale pact, we should not be placed in the position of being the party responsible. This implies a strong reaction to any suggestion that we are delaying the Commission on Law Enforcement, or going slow on Border or other security.

The third point is that if the Executive in the North disappears, the next most likely step, as indicated at the meeting with Mr. Wilson last week, is the reimposition by the British of direct rule, "which will not be of the same sort" as the previous direct rule. The implication of the words in quotation marks, which are similar to those used at the recent meeting, is not clear, but it could be taken to mean that direct rule would be imposed at the same time as an indication of intentions to withdraw. If this happens it would be necessary that our security forces should be in a position to meet the situation likely to emerge [in the North?]. The implication of this is that we should go ahead with the strengthening of these forces as approved as quickly as possible.



9 Aibreán 1974