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**Title:** Report by Seán Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs, of his meeting with Oliver Napier of the Alliance Party, mainly discussing the implementation of the Sunningdale Agreement and the Law Enforcement Commission report.

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 Visit to Belfast - 24/4 APRIL 1974  
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1. I called on Mr. Oliver Napier at his office at Stormont at noon and following our conversation, he brought me to lunch in the members' restaurant where we were joined by his party colleagues Messrs. Bob Cooper and Basil Glass. Over coffee we were joined by the Unionist Head of the Office of Information, Mr. John Baxter and, later in the afternoon, I had about an hour with Mr. Austin Currie.
  
2. The Alliance Party reading of the current situation is that Faulkner is personally committed to what was agreed at Sunningdale and can probably bring most of his Assembly Party with him in eventually carrying this commitment through. There is no way, however, in which the pro-Assembly Unionists could survive an early ratification as envisaged at Sunningdale. Since December, ratification has taken political and emotional overtones which could not be overcome without major defections from the pro-Assembly Unionists. Neither must the vacuum situation of the December-April period, in which violence thrived, be allowed to continue because it too would inevitably lead to more or less the same degree of defection. The obvious solution therefore is to begin immediately to implement the provisions agreed at Sunningdale but not to proceed with ratification for the moment. The primary objective of formal ratification and consequent lodgement of the agreement with the UN was to satisfy northern unionism on the status question. Thanks to the Taoiseach's statement of 13 March, which Mr. Napier saw as generously going beyond what had been agreed at Sunningdale, this is no longer an issue and the need for ratification is not therefore an urgent one.
  
3. Implementation of Sunningdale could, as Alliance see it, begin with an early north-south inter-ministerial meeting at which agreement would be reached to take immediate executive decision on



action on one or two minor functions e.g. Carlingford Lough and north-west economic planning. This action could be undertaken by a task force comprising civil servants from Belfast and Dublin. The financial element would be relatively small and might be met in the same way as the expenses of the Law Enforcement Commission. The necessary legislation, if any, to transfer executive functions from the respective administrations to a joint body would be passed in the N.I. Assembly without difficulty. None of Faulkner's supporters could vote against a measure authorising joint activity in a specific and politically harmless area and, if necessary, such measures could be passed every few months, each time specifying in detail the area of activity to be covered. Inter-ministerial meetings could be held every second month and at the second or third of these meetings agreement could be reached to have 30 members each from the Dáil and Assembly meet primarily to consider how they might best maintain contact and what subjects might be covered through such contacts. At one of the early inter-ministerial meetings, agreement might be reached and announced on the nomination of members to the Police Authorities north and south. When all the provisions agreed at Sunningdale, including those relating to the phasing out of internment had been launched on the road to implementation, a grand, formal ratification could take place. Napier was reluctant to advance a date for this ceremony but thought it would definitely not be in 1974 and possibly not until well into 1975.

4. Napier and his colleagues were at pains to emphasise throughout our conversations that Alliance did not in any circumstances want to re-negotiate the terms of the Sunningdale Agreement but simply to introduce them gradually and without the blowing of trumpets and waving of flags. Their attitude might be summarised in the phrase "Sunningdale by stealth". They thought that this approach, if adopted quickly, would be acceptable to the pro-Assembly Unionists with the notable exception of Mr. Bradford who was, they said, attempting to lead a palace revolution at the same time as forces outside the palace, mainly in Glengall St.



were working hard to entice from the palace four or five carefully selected backbenchers whose loyalty to Faulkner was not very firm and who were particularly vulnerable to constituency pressures. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Alliance people in general and Napier in particular are being somewhat optimistic. As far as I could gather, Faulkner has not approached them along the lines of his proposals to us and to the S.D.L.P. and their assessment may therefore not be particularly well based.

5. Alliance have been meeting to consider their reaction to the Law Enforcement Commission Report. Their position is that nothing short of extradition will satisfy them in the long run but thanks largely to the more realistic approach of Bob Cooper, their attitude of the decision is along the expected extraterritoriality line will be accept it as a workable interim solution but to continue to press for extradition. Napier's line, strongly influenced by Liam Mc Collum Q.C. whose ultra-unionist attitudes at Sunningdale on status and policing will be recalled, is that while extradition is not in itself necessary since the numbers of fugitive offenders likely to be involved is low, it is necessary for us to "give" it to satisfy a northern "emotional need". By withholding it, we were manifesting our distrust in the RUC and the NI judiciary and therefore putting in doubt the genuineness of our acceptance of the status of NI institutions. Cooper was less emotional but warned that we could expect a very tough reaction indeed from Faulkner if extradition was not conceded. Bradford, Magee and Lord Brookeborough were already publicly on record as being prepared to settle for nothing less and though it was unlikely that Faulkner would wreck Sunningdale on this issue, he would certainly throw a considerable quantity of dirt at us before he agreed to accept something less than extradition.



6. Currie's basic position is to continue to press for immediate ratification of Sunningdale but to concede under pressure that its implementation might be gradually phased in. He thought his party had almost no room for manoeuvre at the moment because of the fact that they were in such difficulty on the internment issue and were about to run into more difficulty when the collection charges were introduced on rents and rates arrears on 20 May. They needed a "ratification ceremony, document and banquet" as a morale booster and he was very critical of Fitt's public remarks to the contrary. When I asked him about the Faulkner letter of 12 April to Fitt, it transpired that he had not seen it. He made a few 'phone calls and established that no one else in the SDLP - with the exception of Devlin who saw it for the first time when Fitt produced it at the meeting in Dublin this week - had seen it or knew about it either. Neither had Currie been contacted about a further meeting in Dublin but the Assembly Party was meeting that evening to consider the situation in general and he assumed an agreed party position would be worked out there.

I met a few of the SDLP backbenchers on their way to this meeting and there was no doubt about the strength of their feeling to press for immediate and full ratification. (The only thing Currie knew about the meeting in Dublin this week was that Bradford had attempted to raise it at the NI Executive meeting on the 23 April. In Faulkner's absence, Fitt was in the chair and <sup>ruled</sup> ended the query out of order on the grounds that the matter was not on the agenda. Fitt had added, however, that he and Devlin had been to Dublin, had met "a few people" over drinks and in hotels and would be glad to meet Bradford over drinks and fill him in on what was happening in Ireland's capital!).

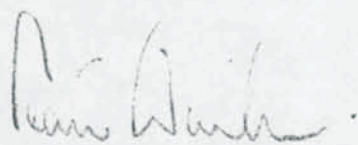
7. My conversation with John Baxter was friendly but for obvious reasons I did not initiate any political discussion. He mentioned two matters of immediate concern viz. the <sup>MASON</sup> liaison speech articulating British views on troop withdrawals and the vote in the NI Assembly on 30 April on Paisley's anti-Sunningdale motion. He saw the Mason speech as another indication of Labour insensitivity to the NI situation but he had just had word from Rees explaining that Mason was speaking with "neither a script nor clearance" and he seemed happy with this assurance. On the other matter, he mentioned that they were having considerable difficulty with the Assembly Speaker about the timing of the vote. Before the recess, no one was in doubt about the fact that it would be taken on 30 April and, naturally as far as the Executive Parties were concerned, that was not a day too soon. Baxter had just come from a meeting with the Speaker who, having had a session with Paisley, now seemed to have doubts about closing the debate on the 30 April and there was considerable discussion between Baxter, Napier and Cooper on the procedural aspects of the whole affair. (We will

*Sean Donlon  
said today  
that when  
he got back  
to Dublin he  
found the  
script of the  
Mason speech  
on his desk*

*DS*  
25/4



obviously have to bear the timing of this vote in mind when considering the publication of the Law Enforcement Commission report).



Seán Donlon  
24 April 1974