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**Reference Code:** 2005/7/631

**Title:** Report by Seán Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs, of a meeting with Anne Dickson, Independent Unionist member of the Northern Ireland Assembly for South Armagh, discussing unionist views of the current situation in Northern Ireland.

**Creation Date(s):** 12 June, 1974

**Level of description:** Item

**Extent and medium:** 3 pages

**Creator(s):** Department of the Taoiseach

**Access Conditions:** Open

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1. Secretary 14/6  
2. Taoiseach

To us please

X and Y are hopeful, if they  
are representative statements.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMO

13/6

1. Mrs. Anne Dickson (Independent Unionist member of the NI Assembly for South Antrim) called to the Department on 11 June and in the Minister's absence abroad, I met her for a two-hour discussion. I also arranged that she meet the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs before she returned to Belfast on 12 June.
2. Although she has close southern connections - her son was at St. Columba's and is now at the Shannon Catering School - Mrs. Dickson's visits to the Republic are now rare both because she said it would not be politically very popular in her constituency if she were known as a frequent visitor here and also because she did not feel it very safe to travel by road. She had asked contacts in RUC headquarters in Belfast for their advice and they had confirmed her impression that the main road between Newry and Dundalk on both sides of the border was virtually no man's land. They advised her to travel by rail and to lock herself in the ladies toilet between the border and Dublin!
3. Mrs. Dickson said that the main purpose of her call was to give us a view of the Northern situation other than that being given to us by the SDLP. She thought it unfortunate that virtually all our Northern contact was with the SDLP and added that even moderate Unionists like herself thought it a bit much that the SDLP should have found it necessary to run up and down to Dublin "for instructions" even when they were in the NI Executive. I explained that we tried to have as wide a range of contacts in Northern Ireland as possible but that these contacts were not always matters of public knowledge either because, as in her own case, non-nationalists did not find it politically possible to make such contacts public or because there were some contacts that were more fruitful if kept completely discreet. She added that she felt that

My backbench Unionists would welcome an opportunity to meet officials or politicians from Dublin in Northern Ireland provided they could be sure that the contact would not become public knowledge.

4. In relation to recent events, she felt that power-sharing was overwhelmingly acceptable in Northern Ireland and that most people in her constituency were in general happy to accept SDLP Ministers. (They drew the line short of Paddy Devlin, however, [REDACTED])

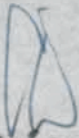
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Council of Ireland was something they could not yet swallow in any shape or form and that was what brought down the Executive. Indeed many supporters of the strike thought they were only on an anti-Council of Ireland strike and were amazed to wake up and find that they had toppled the Executive. While there was no doubting the present support for the Paisley-led UUUC and what she called the "separate but similar" bullies of the UWC, she thought that support would decline in the next few months, both as a result of considerable internal bickering in the UWC and the UUUC - Paisley wanted to dominate everything and that was not acceptable even to many traditional hardliners such as the Orange Order and the Belfast workers - and also because of the realisation that a stable society could only be built with the consent of the minority as represented by the SDLP and it was well known that Paisley would make no concession in that direction. Mrs. Dickson was not sure, however, that the British would allow sufficient time for the situation to develop to the point where enough people swung away from Paisley and company and she was very apprehensive of what might happen if they rushed into early elections. The UUUC people would probably hold their own but the seats now held by the moderate Unionists, in which she included herself, all of Faulkner's supporters, a few of West's and most of the Alliance, would go to new faces from the UWC and similar sinister groups. Faced with such an expression of the public will, the British might be forced

into a withdrawal situation which would be "the beginning of the end".

5. In regard to her own constituency, Mrs. Dickson said she was very apprehensive even now for the safety of Catholics in places like Greencastle, Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus. The "tiger gangs" had moved in from East Belfast and seemed determined to intimidate every Catholic out of the area. (She also mentioned that the small but compact Jewish community in north Belfast had become very frightened and was already beginning to move out to English Jewish centres. I gathered it was more a question of moving out for economic reasons associated with the troubles rather than because of any threats to their safety.)

6. Mrs. Dickson felt that Dublin's best contribution in the next few months would be:

- (a) to keep itself fully in the picture about feelings in the Unionist community;
- (b) not to place too much hope in Brian Faulkner who was now almost certainly politically finished;
- (c) to step up anti-IRA measures considerably and find some way of dealing with notorious IRA people who were well known to be on the run here. (Explanations of the Law Enforcement Commission proposals and the use of the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act did not particularly impress Mrs. Dickson. Nor did an outline of our border security measures seem to make much impact);
- (d) to make it clear that we would settle for a Northern Ireland "solution" which did not contain an all-Ireland dimension.

  
Sean Donlon

12 June 1974