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Meeting of Captain O'Neill and Taoiseach,
Dublin, 8 January, 1968

This note refers in summary form to the matters discussed.

In his after-lunch speech, replying to the Taoiseach's welcome and toast, Captain O'Neill remarked that this series of meetings of Prime Ministers, which began three years ago, was a bigger break with the past than many people realised. In the North there had been a rigid policy of "no meetings before recognition". It was possible to interpret Mr. Lemass's agreement to come to Stormont as "a kind of recognition". While he knew we had our problems, too, he hoped that we would at least be able, in the interest of improving relations, to use and promote the use of the terms Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Government instead of the Six Counties and the Six County Government in all publicity, including radio and television.

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At the conference afterwards, which was attended by the Ministers and officials as well as the two Prime Ministers, the Taoiseach initiated a general discussion with the remark that, apart from the proposed extension by Aer Lingus of their trans-atlantic jet service to Belfast there seemed to be little fresh to add to the similar review conducted a few weeks ago in Belfast. He asked the Ministers present to outline the position on matters of interest to them.

The Minister for Transport and Power referred to the satisfactory cooperation which was proceeding on tourism. A new brochure dealing with Ireland as a whole had been prepared

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jointly by the two Tourist Boards and should shortly be cleared by the two Governments. An agreement had been signed for an electricity link-up which would save both Governments money. It would also enable consideration to be given to sharing the output of the much larger generating stations which must now be contemplated for economic operation. The cost of producing electricity in atomic plants was falling but the capacity of such plants was very large in relation to the annual growth of demand in Ireland. Mr. Childers also referred to the desirability of easier access by air to the North West. The possible use of the Ballykelly airport for civilian purposes when it ceases to be a military airport was mentioned but so also was the difficulty of economic operation of an airport with virtually no winter custom and the N.I. officials pointed out that, with the new main road system, Derry and the Donegal border would be only 40 minutes' drive from Aldergrove in the 1970's.

The Minister for Agriculture dealt mainly with the need for continued vigilance in both parts of Ireland to keep out foot and mouth disease. He feared that, as the situation improved in Britain, a feeling might develop that it was all over. While recent policy regarding Ministerial attendance at various functions, particularly that applied in the North, might now be considered too extreme, the Minister was against relaxations here which might create a sense of complacency and hoped that the present close arrangements with the North would extend to simultaneity of any relaxation measures.

Captain O'Neill, recalling Mr. Blaney's interest as a former Minister for Local Government in road safety, inquired whether

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we were likely to introduce the breathalyser test. Pressure was developing in Northern Ireland for the introduction of a system of tests as in Britain, and Captain O'Neill referred to the desirability of a similar situation existing on both sides of the border in order to facilitate the growing number of tourists who bring their own cars.

The Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries explained that there was already a Bill before the Dáil, of which the second reading had been taken, providing not only for a breathalyser test but also for a urine test and a blood test. The main difference from the British scheme was that a higher limit of alcohol tolerance was allowed for in ours. This was in line with a recommendation of a commission which had been set up to examine the matter here. The Tánaiste suggested that the Northern authorities might consider adopting our standard in the interests of uniformity in the island as a whole.

The Minister for Finance said that, because of Mr. Faulkner's special interest in the Belcoo-Florencecourt Road, he had instructed the Revenue Commissioners to agree to the request of the British Customs that this be classed as a concession road. The Minister recalled that exchange of objects of interest between the two Museums had been mentioned at the Stormont meeting on 11 December and suggested that, as the Rosc Exhibition was now coming to an end, this would be an appropriate time to lend the Ulster Museum the Killymoon Hoard and any other objects of special interest. Captain O'Neill said that the Minister had "taken the words out of his mouth", as he intended raising this general matter of cultural exchanges, our Museum and National Gallery being much richer than anything in the North.

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The N.I. Government would be very appreciative if at least the Killymoon Hoard could be lent for a period right away. The Taoiseach said that this would be arranged. Captain O'Neill also wondered whether the Lane pictures might not spend a while in Belfast on their way back to London and was assured that, so far as our Government was concerned, we would be agreeable to such a change in the arrangements if the Trustees of the British National Gallery also agreed. In fact we would be willing to let Belfast have the pictures for six months, which could be taken out of our entitlement.

In response to an inquiry about our currency decimalisation intentions, the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance explained the position. We had issued a booklet analysing the advantages and disadvantages of various systems and had received the reactions of all the important representative bodies and many members of the public. A decision would shortly be reached. Captain O'Neill referred to the fact that a considerable amount of Irish coin circulates in Northern Ireland and asked whether the new system would be such as to result in this continuing or not. He seemed to accept the reply that, whatever system we adopted, we would probably continue to have coins corresponding in size and value to the present two shillings and one shilling, if not also to the half-crown, and that these would probably still circulate in Northern Ireland.

As regards the metric system generally, the Minister for Industry and Commerce said that our general policy was to let the pressure for change develop and support it rather than take a positive initiative which might carry with it a liability for compensation. It was confirmed that this was the general line which was being followed also in Northern Ireland.

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The Minister for Industry and Commerce also explained the position regarding the requests which had been made for acceleration of tariff reductions on various products in favour of Northern Ireland manufacturers. He referred to the broad assessment of advantages and disadvantages by reference to which the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Area Agreement was reached, because he felt that at times people took too narrow a view of the contrast between free entry for Irish goods to Northern Ireland and Britain and the tariffs to which imports into Ireland were subject. It was not possible where an industry was not in a reasonably strong position (e.g. furniture) to agree to acceleration of the tariff reductions in favour of N.I. manufacturers but where at all possible this was being done and a reply to the latest requests by the N.I. authorities would be ready for issue soon.

There was a brief exchange of views on the possible effects - which were not considered unduly adverse - of the recent U.S. restrictions on investment and tourist expenditure.

Before the visitors left, there was a television interview and a press conference. These are reported in the press of 9 January.

A copy of the communiqué issued at 5 p.m., when the visit concluded, is appended.