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Title: Note by HJ McCann, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a meeting with Ambassador of Great Britain to Ireland John Peck, regarding the effect of the likely appointment of Brian Faulkner as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland.

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Learn of the Taoiseach
5/3/71

SECRET

The British Ambassador called to see me at 11 a.m. this morning. He told me in strict confidence that he had received a message from the British representative in Belfast, Mr. Ronnie Burroughs, who indicated that he had been informed by Mr. Brian Faulkner that the latter is confident of securing the nomination to be the next Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. Mr. Faulkner expects this to be approved about noon on Tuesday and that he will go to the Governor-General about 3.00 p.m. on Tuesday. His nomination has to be approved not alone by the Unionist Standing Committee but also later by the Unionist Council which had been called to meet later this month to deal with the resolution relating to Mr. Chichester-Clark. This resolution will now fall to the ground but there is no doubt but that Mr. Faulkner will have a difficult enough time also with the Council.

Mr. Burroughs said that Mr. Faulkner had assured him categorically that he would be prepared to implement the Downing Street Declaration and that there would be no going back on the policies relating to the B Specials, the RUC and reform. He also indicated that he would not have anyone in his Cabinet who would not support his policies.

In the course of the discussion which followed the Ambassador and I touched on the doubts held by the minority in the North on the sincerity of Mr. Faulkner in relation to reforms. I pointed out that if Mr. Faulkner were going to carry out the reforms as Mr. Chichester-Clark tried to do there seemed little logic in replacing Mr. Chichester-Clark by Mr. Faulkner. In fact, if Mr. Faulkner's assurances to Mr. Burroughs were repeated by him to the Right-wing of the Unionist Party he would be in trouble straightaway. One wondered whether the time had not yet come to think of some new set-up with minority participation rather than to have a succession of rejections of Prime Ministers committed to reform. Mr. Faulkner's earlier Right-wing tendencies did not inspire confidence. The Ambassador agreed but also pointed to Mr. Faulkner's political skill and realism. He said that the message was beginning to get through to a small number of Unionists that Belfast was just a Provisional Government with limited powers and the real responsibility rested in London. If Mr. Faulkner could spread this understanding a little wider he wondered whether he might not survive. He admitted, however, that if scratched he (the Ambassador) would give him about three weeks.

The Ambassador referred to the fact that Mr. Heath would be speaking in the Commons this afternoon and he wondered whether the opportunity might not be taken to make the political facts of life clear to the Right-wing of the Unionist Party. I stressed the importance of restoring the confidence of the minority in the North in the face of the evident tendency to swing towards the Right and the doubts about Mr. Faulkner's real intentions. Some form of minority participation would not alone help to restore their confidence but perhaps also diminish their tendency to tolerate or lean on the extremist elements such as the IRA for protection in the last resort. The Ambassador saw as the only alternative to Mr. Faulkner the

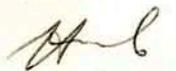
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suspension of the Constitution and he referred to Mr. Maudling's statement that this would be a step which they would be very reluctant to take. He recognised, however, the reality of the present situation which, as he had indicated to me on Saturday, is nothing less than that London and the Unionist Party are on a direct collision course. This crisis can only be resolved by an alteration of course. The Ambassador then went on to refer to the comments in the British papers yesterday and to-day which he thought were reasonably sound. He commended in particular the leading article in to-day's London Times "Last Chance for Unionists". It will be seen that this article reflects largely the viewpoints which the Ambassador had been expressing to me.



22 Márta 1971

Note: - I informed the Minister of the foregoing and brought the Ambassador up to see him.


22/3/71