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27 September 1972

Dear O'Dowd

I enclose herewith copy of a record of the first day of the Darlington talks received from Mr. Peter Evans of the British Embassy.

Yours sincerely

*H. J. O'Dowd*

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## RECORD OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE DARLINGTON TALKS

The Monday morning session began with the three parties presenting their proposals. Since the documents themselves had been available earlier, Mr O'Neill, Mr Simpson, and Mr Faulkner in turn spoke briefly, emphasising certain points. Both Mr O'Neill and Mr Simpson, when commenting on North-South relations, dwelt on the prior need for improved security, the former stressing extradition problems and the latter the difficulties caused by the Republic's territorial claim. All three spoke of the possibilities of EEC membership, Mr. O'Neill in the context of an Anglo-Irish Council on North-South Relations, and the other two more in the context of Northern Ireland's particular economic problems.

The meeting then turned to particular proposals, not necessarily from the published statements. U.D.I. was swiftly dismissed as utter nonsense, and inconsistent with Her Majesty's Government's pledge on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, which no one questioned and which it was agreed need not be discussed. Integration on the Scottish model would, it was agreed, be consistent with that pledge, and produced a more thoughtful discussion. All opposed the idea, though the arguments were more in favour of a local assembly or parliament than against integration.

The afternoon session considered the question of any future parliament or assembly. There was a considerable

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degree of agreement on the size (between 75 and 100: no one was insistent on a particular figure), and fair agreement also that it should be unicameral. (N.I.L.P. proposal for Council of State led to a digression into the powers of the Governor, Privy Council, etc). Mr Faulkner maintained the Unionist position against proportional representation in elections against the arguments of the other two, but this could be for the record, and I think it possible the Unionists would not worry overmuch about proportional representation in elections, which they believe will make no great difference, provided the principal of proportional representation is not applied to ministerial and committee appointments.

This theme of committee structure and powers was still under discussion when the session closed, and will be continued tomorrow. The Alliance Party in effect see committee chairmen taking over the functions exercised by ministers prior to direct rule. The Unionists insist on an executive chosen by the leader of the majority party, with committees in an advisory role. N.I.L.P. want the committees collectively to take over ministerial role. The division that is emerging is between, on the one hand the Unionists, who seek a concentration of power, and the others (here unrepresented), who seek a genuine diffusion of power.

The Secretary of State, despite needling by Mr Faulkner, is insisting that it is for Northern Ireland parties to put forward their ideas, and that he cannot give any indication of Her Majesty's Government's thinking at this stage. Mr O'Neill

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and Mr Simpson seem content. The conference, after the initial presentations, has been tackling particular questions raised by the Secretary of State, and by this method hopes to define the common ground and, where differences persist, to see whether there are possibilities for compromise. Themes for future discussion are local government, and the relationship of the local government machine to any assembly or parliament: security: the relationship with Westminster: and the relationship with the Republic.

Papers by other parties not represented at the conference are available, and are being referred to, but are not being formally introduced.

BRITISH EMBASSY  
DUBLIN

26 September 1972