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REPORT ON MEETING.

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The Taoiseach accompanied by the Tanaiste, the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs met a delegation from the S.D.L.P. in the Council Chambers, Government Buildings on 12th July, 1973. The S.D.L.P. delegation comprised Mr. John Hume, Mr. Austin Currie, Mr. Paddy O'Hanlon, Mr. Paddy Devlin and Mr. Pat O'Donohue.

The Taoiseach welcomed the visitors and congratulated them on their excellent showing in the Assembly elections. He outlined the contents of his talks with the British Prime Minister on 2nd July last and said that it was his impression that in the event of an alignment between Official Unionists and Loyalists, Britain would intervene in the situation. In relation to the adjournment of Ireland's application to the Commission of Human Rights in Strasbourg, the Taoiseach said that the Government had given detailed consideration to the matter. Britain applied for the adjournment and the Irish Government agreed to this. The main consideration was that, with the developing situation in the North, the unheard Strasbourg application was a vital bargaining weapon and the Government considered that it was important to retain it for as long as possible.

Mr. Hume thanked the Taoiseach for his welcome and congratulations. He stated that there was quite an amount of concern within his Party at the apparent drift of Government policy in the South. There appeared to be a definite policy of appeasement of the majority in the North. His Party also felt that they should have been consulted about the adjournment of the Strasbourg case. Mr. Devlin pointed out that the S.D.L.P. had done most of the ground work for the submission to the Human Rights Commission and they now had the situation where solicitors acting for the parties concerned were withholding alternative action until the Commission decided the submission.

Continuing the discussion Mr. Hume said that there were three broad areas of discussion namely the likely course of events in Belfast, Dublin and London. The Northern Assembly would be restricted to discussing matters over which it had control and no contentious issues would be raised by the S.D.L.P. in that forum. The procedures of the Assembly, its standing orders etc. would have to be worked out but one of the immediate difficulties in his view was the voting system that would be adopted in the Assembly for the election of a Speaker and for subsequent business.

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In regard to London's involvement Mr. Hume said that that the crucial matter there was policing in the North. They envisaged joint control of the Northern Ireland police service by Britain and the 26-Counties or by the Council of Ireland. He stressed that what they had in mind was political control and not joint policing. His Party were very concerned about discrimination in the public sector. The investigations of discrimination by the Ombudsman had been in individual cases but the ombudsman was not empowered to investigate patterns of discrimination. Without this power very little progress would be made in resolving the difficulties in this area. An anomaly existed now in that because there were no Stormont M.P.s questions of maladministration could only be taken up through Westminster M.P.s. Mr. Hume said that the role of the Dublin Government in future developments would be of crucial importance. There would have to be a real Irish dimension now and his Party felt strongly that a Council of Ireland was the best means of achieving this dimension. They envisaged an all-Ireland authority for tourism, electricity etc. which would also examine differences in social services, etc. and plan a constitution for a new Ireland. A Council which had only advisory functions would be of no benefit whatsoever towards the long-term settlement of the Northern problem. His Party were seeking the Dublin Government's support in all these areas.

The Taoiseach said that he would be reporting back to the Government on the views that had been expressed by the visitors. No Dublin Government could commit itself to supporting any party in the North and it must take decisions in the light of the overall situation. On the Strasbourg case, the Taoiseach said that the main concern had been to retain it as a bargaining weapon. Had no adjournment been sought by the British, the application might have been disposed of by now and once a decision was taken that would be the end of the matter. There was always the possibility that a settlement under the friendly settlement procedures of the Commission might be decided on. The Dublin Government was committed to nothing except the adjournment of the hearing of the case until around the beginning of October. The Government was anxious to proceed in conformity with developments in the North. In his discussions with Mr. Heath, he had given no commitment on a Council of Ireland and the procedures of such a Council were not raised. The Taoiseach said that his Government was anxious to achieve a solution to the Northern problem.

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Mr. O'Hanlon said that what was involved was a package-deal comprising power-sharing, a Council of Ireland and quadripartite talks. The S.D.L.P. felt strongly that there must be simultaneous progress and pressure on all fronts. The important thing was to get the Unionists involved in a Council of Ireland and if there were settlements in other areas, but not in that area, they would be "sold down the river". The British Government had not given any declaration of intent in regard to their disengagement from the Six Counties and they should be pressed to do so.

Coming back to the question of the voting system in the Assembly, Mr. Hume said that there was a dilemma posed here. If they agreed to a majority vote for the election of a speaker, this could be very dangerous for the future. If a blocking system involving approval by three-quarters of the Assembly was agreed to, there would also be dangers in relation to issues which might arise in the future.

The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs thought that the voting system might not be so crucial as the visitors thought. The consent of the Secretary of State would be required for any decisions taken in the Assembly and this was a vital safeguard.

Mr. Hume said that it was essential to plan all the way so as to avoid catastrophes. As long as Britain guaranteed the aspirations of the majority in the North there would be no change. This was a fundamental issue and should be faced up to. A declaration of intent to disengage by the British would provoke some backlash but no progress would be made until this was done.

The Taoiseach pointed out that the British had made it clear that they would only support an executive which had support from the two communities. It would be open to the S.D.L.P. to block any decisions being taken with which they were in disagreement. The visitors stated that they were committed to being constructive in the Assembly but that they would stand firm on fundamentals.

A general discussion of a Council of Ireland followed, the Minister for Foreign Affairs pointing out the desirability of the Council having built-in power to evolve and both Governments agreeing beforehand to implement whatever proposals emerged from the Council's deliberations. The Minister for Posts and Telegraphs suggested that a Council of Ireland which was seen as a step in the direction of unity might only serve to exclude Unionists from participation in it. Mr. Hume said that Unionists may not object to a Council. There was no clear Unionist position on the matter though some seem to be accepting the idea of a Council.

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Referring to his recent meeting with the New Ulster Movement, the Taoiseach said that members of the Government were hitherto prepared to see any group they thought could contribute to a solution of the problem. In response to a complaint by the S.D.L.P. that the Government should not deal with non-elected people the Taoiseach promised to consider confining meeting at Ministerial level to elected representatives.

In a discussion on policing which followed, the visitors pointed out that this was a crucial issue and the problem was to get the people to identify with the police force. They did not consider that the Secretary of State was giving reform of policing the priority it merited. What was required was a new police force to replace the R.U.C. and to operate under new political control. The Taoiseach indicated that he understood that the policing situation in Derry was now satisfactory and Mr. Heath had informed him that, £2 million was being spent on a new police college. He pointed out that it would be necessary to decide on the procedure to be adopted for re-structuring the police force. Would members of the force be retired early on full pay or would it simply be a question of increasing the size of the force? The visitors thought that a combination of both procedures would be necessary and they pointed out that the police themselves were disenchanted with the present situation. They were hoping to meet the Police Federation in the near future and with the momentum for change which existed in the police force itself they were hopeful of getting commitments from the members, particularly senior officers. The visitors mentioned that it was their intention to launch a public campaign about the re-structuring of the police force.

Mr. Hume thanked the Taoiseach and the members of the Government for meeting him and his colleagues. He asked if they might state, in reply to any questions from the Press on the Strasbourg case, that they had received an assurance at the meeting that the Government had no intention of withdrawing the application to the Commission. He was informed that he could do so. A statement for the Press was agreed on ^{and} the meeting then concluded.

Hume

*c.c. members of Govt
present at the
meeting
Messrs. H. H. H. H.
Dunlin, Dept of
Foreign Affairs*