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Note of meeting between the Taoiseach and Messrs Merlyn Rees and Stanley Orme, M.P.s - British Labour Party experts on Northern Ireland.

3.30 p.m., 16th July, 1973, Taoiseach's Room.

Both M.P.s expressed themselves as worried at lack of discussion between the various parties of elected representatives for the Northern Ireland Assembly. Their understanding was that Mr. Whitelaw was not making much progress in promoting discussions. They wished the Taoiseach to know that if the Assembly did not get off the ground and produce a tolerable executive both British political parties would be in trouble with significant sections of their members who were expressing the feeling that the two sides in Northern Ireland should be left to fight it out - saving British troops and money.

They had sensed a feeling among the Northern Ireland politicians that the politicians could drag things out until March next - the deadline of the Election Act. Messrs Rees and Orme were now certain that this was not ~~an~~ Conference season was approaching in England and they felt strongly that the 1st September next was the critical date for the Northern Ireland politicians to work together. Public opinion in Britain was likely to favour a British pull-out then.

That would be followed by catastrophe. Craig seemed to have the view that the 800 fatal casualties so far were tolerable and that if the British pulled out, the Protestants would hammer the Catholics and kill another 800 in a week.

Messrs Rees and Orme said that, in their opinion, it was essential

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to get the Assembly off the ground first - the remaining elements of the solution were a much more difficult matter. It would be impossible to talk, at Council of Ireland or tripartite conference level, with Craig or Paisley - they were too intransigent in their attitudes.

It would also be impossible to get a statement of intent out of the British Government and Messrs. Rees and Orme could not see why the S.D.L.P. could not, in this connection, accept the inference of eventual unity **derivable** from the Council of Ireland and the other elements of recent statements of British policy. All-Ireland involvement in security, policing and law and order would be attractive to Unionists - a declaration of intent would repel them needlessly.

As regards policing Messrs. Rees and Orme seemed to favour local police forces of the same colour as the local inhabitants. The British Army would have to remain under British control - it could not be allowed ever again into Unionist control.

Generally the message of Messrs. Rees and Orme was that there was no time to lose. Talking between the parties was the alternative to a British pull-out and catastrophe. They feel that the Faulkner Unionists, the S.D.L.P. and the Alliance Party could form a tolerable executive and that Mr. Faulkner should be considered a tolerable Chief Executive.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, followed by the date '16/7' written below it.