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Title: Report by Seán Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs, of his visit to Northern Ireland on 11-12 November 1973, where he met with members of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, mainly discussing the allocation of posts in the proposed new Northern Ireland government.

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Visit to Northern Ireland 11th/12th November, 1973

Sent to me please

16/11

[Tasneem Hasan copy]

1. By arrangement with John Hume - who was that day touring Co. Donegal with James Allen of the Northern Ireland Office at the latter's request -- I called to Michael Canavan when I arrived in Derry on 11th November and had about an hour with him before John Hume arrived and joined us for a meal. Later on in the evening, I went with Hume to the Derry Catholic Club for a few hours, stayed overnight at Hume's and drove him to Belfast early on the 12th November where I met Paddy Devlin and Austin Currie before that day's session of the inter-party talks with Whitelaw. I also spoke on the telephone to Gerry Fitt before the session and after it had concluded I met Hume, Devlin, Currie and Cooper. While in Belfast, I also met Tom Conaty and had a meal with some of the staff, including Fr. Brian Brady, of St. Joseph's College of Education.

2. Hume and Devlin were the only S.D.L.P. people who specifically raised with me the publicity about the Minister's meeting with Whitelaw and about our ^{Common} ~~former~~ law enforcement proposals. Hume's view was that by going public in any way on the proposals at this stage there was the danger that Paisley and the other wreckers would denounce them so violently as an infringement of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland that Faulkner would be forced, particularly in the context of next week's Unionist Council meeting, to adopt a public and possibly negative position on the subject. Predictably, Paisley had denounced the proposals but according to Hume there were signs, including the fact that Paisley had drawn only about 200 people to a "monster" rally in Derry on 10th November, that he was discredited in some Loyalist circles at the moment and that his comments would not therefore be a particular source of worry to Faulkner. Devlin's main concern was that by exuding a general air of optimism, the Minister had reinforced an impression which was already in the air that the S.D.L.P. were about to agree to the formation of an Executive

Without getting anything on internment and policing. Devlin also felt that an expression of such optimism from a Minister who was known to be so closely in contact with the S.D.L.P. might have weakened their bargaining position at the inter-party talks which were now at the crunch stage. I showed Hume a copy of the policing/common law enforcement document which had been given to the British on 8th November and he expressed himself as being completely satisfied with it. He felt it would be helpful if he could show it to some of the others and in the interests of restoring any loss of confidence there might have been between the S.D.L.P. and the Government, I gave him a copy and agreed that he could do so.

3. The Hume-Devlin-Cooper-Currie account of the inter-party talks on 12th November is as follows. The session lasted about four hours and included a lunch with plenty of wine. Before lunch the Council of Ireland was discussed for about half an hour and the main point at issue was Faulkner's insistence that there should be no parliamentary tier. The S.D.L.P. took the view that the subject should not be discussed further at all and Whitelaw then handed out a document (annexed) describing the structure of the WEU and suggested that the parties might wish to study it as a possible model for a north-south parliamentary link. Faulkner also asked Whitelaw if he could let the meeting have details of the Dublin Government's document on policing and common law enforcement but before Whitelaw had a chance to do so, the S.D.L.P. intervened to say that it would not be proper for Whitelaw to give details of proposals which the Dublin representatives would undoubtedly be putting forward themselves at a tripartite conference. Faulkner did not press the request and the matter was not pursued further.

4. After lunch, the only subject discussed was the size of and allocation of seats on the Executive. There was no give on any side. Faulkner said he would have to have a majority but he refused to define what that meant in relation to the figure twelve. Fitt said

the S.D.L.P. should get five posts and Alliance said that they should get two. There was what Hume described as a lethargic, pointless discussion for about an hour during which none of the parties moved an inch but Whitelaw threw out some interesting remarks. He said that he was not committed to having the full twelve posts nor had he ruled out the possibility of appointing an outsider to the Executive, particularly as a legal adviser. He also made it clear that while he would be disposed to accept the parties' recommendations on the size and distribution of posts, he would definitely reserve to himself the decision as to which person would get what post. When the discussion had completed the same fruitless circle a number of times, Whitelaw threw in the suggestion that he should meet next day only with party leaders and this suggestion was immediately accepted by Fitt, Faulkner and Napier, who thereby effectively ruled out any question of a discussion on the desirability of a 1/1/1 meeting. (The Whitelaw move was obviously carefully pre-planned. It subsequently transpired that Fitt and his wife had accepted an invitation to dine that evening with Whitelaw and his wife and that the other guests would be Faulkner and Napier with their wives. Fitt had not mentioned the invitation to his party colleagues and when they taxed him with it he said that there was nothing in it and that Whitelaw had extended the invitation on the basis that it was "time our wives got to know one another"). Hume and Currie did, ^{however,} manage to raise the question of what the leaders would discuss and made it clear that since the S.D.L.P. as a party had not yet decided on what the best number of Departments for Northern Ireland might be, it would be impossible for Fitt to be very helpful on that question. Nor could he have much scope on the personalities who would be appointed to particular posts since that was a matter which Whitelaw had said he wished to retain for himself. The only subject that could therefore be usefully discussed by the leaders alone was the ^{proportion} ~~number~~ of posts which would be allocated as between the parties.

Whitelaw then put a short draft press release on the table for approval. It contained as a final sentence:-

"There will be further discussions to-morrow with the leaders of each Party".

Following some discussion, an S.D.L.P. suggestion was accepted and the final sentence as issued reads:-

"There will be further discussions to-morrow with the leaders of each Party preparatory to a further meeting".

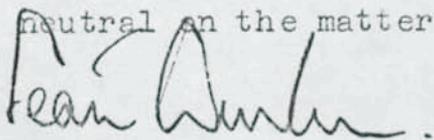
The further meeting will take place on 19th November and as far as my S.D.L.P. informants are concerned that, and not the meeting of the leaders, constitutes the next session of the inter-party talks.

6. Fr. Brady appreciated the tone of the Minister's reply to his (Brady's) attack on the Minister. He now accepts that his attack was inspired by press reports based on British briefings but said that he had for some time been waiting for an opportunity to point out publicly that the Minister seemed to show a disproportionate interest in the plight of the majority at a time when the minority were still suffering not only from fifty years of misrule by that majority but also from the continued military activity of the I.R.A. and the British Army. He accepts that there may be a political advantage in the Minister's taking that position but he says that the deprived people in Andersonstown - for whom, I know from my dealings with him since 1971, Fr. Brady works day and night helping with social and other problems of all descriptions - cannot possibly see that advantage and that as a consequence they feel very let down indeed, particularly as many of them still hold as strongly to the belief that "only Dublin can get us out of this mess" as they do to the belief that there is a life after death. (These seem to be the only two constant articles of faith held by many people in the Catholic areas of West Belfast and they seem to be as scandalised by the suggestion that they themselves can contribute as much as Dublin to

the solution of the political problem as they were by the graffiti in the pub on the New Lodge Road which read: "Is there a life before death?").

7. Tom Conaty continues to keep in close touch with conditions at Long Kesh - the ~~XXXXXX~~ ^{C.C.D.C.} still runs the bus service on visiting days - and says that the lack of interest of the authorities is particularly evident in the failure to repair huts which have been leaking for a year and to correct quickly a heating system admitted a year ago to be totally inadequate. Conaty is in regular touch with the Long Kesh Visiting Committee Chairman, Mr. Hopkins, and has seen the minutes of the Committee meetings which he says prove beyond any doubt that there is full awareness and acknowledgement of the appalling nature of the conditions, particularly for the Winter. The constant response of the authorities (viz. Ministry of Home Affairs) is that the deficiencies will be remedied as soon as possible but new reasons for delay somehow manage to appear every few months e.g. can't get suitable repairmen, shortage of supervisory staff, local shortage of electric current due to blown-up transformer, difficulty in getting materials from suppliers, etc. As Conaty points out, all this is in marked contrast to the erection of enormous military installations (e.g. the so-called Forts in West Belfast) with great speed and efficiency

8. Mr. Canavan told me about a meeting which an S.D.L.P. delegation recently had with the President and Secretary of the Northern Ireland Police Federation. The S.D.L.P. had put three questions. In reply, the Federation confirmed that the R.U.C. would carry out all decisions taken after the formation of an Executive which would include representatives of the minority. They would also agree to comply with any decision taken by the British Government to link the R.U.C. with a Council of Ireland. They would not, however, agree to a change in the name of the force nor would they agree to stay neutral on the matter should it become a public issue.


Seán Donlon

13th November, 1973.