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Title: Copy letter from Minister for Foreign Affairs Garret FitzGerald to Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave regarding the latter's meeting with Prime Minister Edward Heath at Casement Airport on 17 September 1973, and emphasising the importance of Irish government engagement with the Social Democratic and Labour Party.

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September 18th, 1973

Dear Liam

Hugh McCann has given me a very full account of yesterday's discussions. While the outcome was disappointing, I am certain that we took the right line.

Much of the problem may have arisen from a misconception on the part of the British Government of the SDLP position arising from the Ambassador's report of his discussions with Hume and Fitt after the Ortolini dinner 10 days ago. While the Ambassador may have correctly reported what Fitt said, I have considerable doubts about the accuracy of the viewpoint attributed to Hume by Galsworthy. (This would not be the first time that Galsworthy had got hold of the wrong end of the stick - always misinterpreting what people say in the same direction - the one that suits him).

From my conversation with Hume immediately after he had spoken to Galsworthy, I had the impression that he had suggested some degree of flexibility along the lines of the suggestion reported to us by Sean Donlon after his meeting with the SDLP last week.

I understand that you will be seeing the SDLP on Thursday. It is clearly very important that we and they are lined up on this issue on precisely the same lines and I would think it might be wise for them immediately to clarify their position to the British.

In retrospect it seems to me that we will probably have to have a meeting like this in order to confront the British with the realities of the Irish position which they have been refusing to face since I first discussed this matter with Whitelaw in early June, telling him that the problem would have to be settled with some kind of package deal. I would hope that starting from the apparent impasse of yesterday's talks on this point, discussions might now take place at a lower level perhaps between the interests concerned with a view to agreeing on a compromise solution along the

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lines proposed by Hume.

In this connection your contact with Faulkner would be very important. One possible way out of this situation would be to secure a private agreement by Faulkner as to the basic features of the structure of the Council and a minimum content for its work which would enable the SDLP and ourselves to agree to the Executive being formed before final agreement is reached on the Council. If Heath is right about the dangers to Faulkner from Paisley and Craig being represented at substantive discussions on the details of the Council of Ireland, Faulkner could have a very powerful incentive to agree to something privately along these lines in order to get our agreement and that of the SDLP to the formation of the Executive and, consequently, to the Executive rather than the political parties in Northern Ireland being engaged in the final quadrupartite discussions on the Council of Ireland.

A sensitive area in our relations with the SDLP is that concerning the police. The British will almost certainly pursue further with them the line they have already taken - that Dublin does not want the Council of Ireland to control the police. We should as far as possible, I feel, safeguard ourselves against this in talking to the SDLP, warning them that on this, as on other issues, the British will be trying to divide us and that they should not take seriously what they may say on these subjects. At the same time, I would hope that any concern on the part of the SDLP on this issue, (and in particular on our approach to it), would be over-shadowed by the way in which you protect their position in relation to the Executive - even in the face of British allegations that they have weakened on this, allegations which in the case of Fitt, may have no substance.

In general it seems to me that we have reached a point where the emphasis could usefully shift to discussions between the various parties concerned in Ireland - SDLP, Unionists, Alliance and ourselves - all of whom have an interest in reaching agreement. If progress could be made along these lines, we would find Heath a lot easier to handle - the wind would have been taken out of his

sails and his understandable worries would be met.

These are rather "hurler on the ditch" observations which probably won't add very much to your own conclusions on the meeting but I thought nonetheless I should drop you a note on these lines before proceeding onwards on my tour.

Incidentally, we have just had a good meeting with John Davies. I think the British now understand how strongly we feel on the regional policy issue and, hopefully, the need to give ground to meet our point of view.

Yours sincerely

Garret FitzGerald
Dictated by Minister and signed in his absence.

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