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Title: Report on a meeting between members of the Oireachtas All-Party Committee on Irish Relations and a delegation from the Alliance Party in Dublin on 1 May 1974, discussing mainly the constitutional position of the Republic of Ireland *vis à vis* Northern Ireland and the current political situation in Northern Ireland.

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Report of Meeting

1. The All-Party Committee on Irish Relations received a delegation from the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland on Wednesday 1 May, 1974 in Leinster House. The delegation from the Alliance Party comprised the Deputy Leader of the Party, Mr. Bob Cooper, Mr. Denis Loretto, Party Chairman, Mr. Basil Glass and Mr. John Thompson. The All-Party Committee was represented by its Chairman, Deputy Paddy Harte and Deputies Joe Brennan, Vice-Chairman, Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, Dr. Garret FitzGerald Minister for Foreign Affairs, Paddy Smith, Michael O'Kennedy and Barry Desmond.

2. The visitors said that they did not think that it was appropriate for them as a Party to take an official line on certain features of the Republic's Constitution e.g. the prohibition on divorce. They had of course their own personal views on the question and on matters such as contraception. The Alliance Party had however strong views to express on Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution and it was on this issue that they wished to place most emphasis at the meeting.

3. The Alliance Party fully accepted that people were entitled to hold the aspiration towards a united Ireland. They took issue however with people who were not content with the aspiration and who stressed the territorial claim. It should be remembered that the 1937 referendum was voted on only by the people of the 26 Counties. The people of Northern ^{Ireland} had no say whatsoever in the formulation of Articles 2 and 3 and their continued existence in the Constitution was a nonsense. The Alliance Party saw the dropping of the territorial claim as being a considerable help to the implementation of Sunningdale. The Party were anxious to see that agreement implemented in every fashion. It ~~had~~ ^{held} enormous prospects for the future of both parts of the island but Articles 2 and 3 were being used by Loyalists as a stick against Sunningdale. There was absolutely no doubt that the

issue caused a lot of concern in the North and the existence of the Articles rendered meaningless the Sunningdale declaration on status and the Taoiseach's subsequent clarification of it. The Alliance Party did not deny that *voluntarism* had taken place in the North but there was a considerable opening up of the minds and attitudes of the majority there and they could be ^{won} *one*. The Republic was faced with the choice of sticking to the territorial claim or following the Sunningdale road but *it* could not indulge in a "belt and braces" operation.

4. In reply to questions, the visitors said that they were not for one moment suggesting that Sunningdale should be re-negotiated. The support of the majority in the North had to be ^{won} *one*, and, if without any sacrifice of principle, Article 2 and 3 were substituted by a formula which reflected the aspiration towards unity, it would make a considerable impact on the Northern majority. The Articles were only getting in the way of massive support for the new institutions which has been *created* in the North. The best way for the Republic to help the implementation of Sunningdale was to ensure ^{that} the Loyalists were not given any stick ^{with which} to beat it and the power-sharing Executive.

5. The background to the Sunningdale declaration on status was mentioned. The Dublin Government had pointed out that Articles 2 and 3 could only be changed by the people in a referendum and that without a consensus among the main political parties in the Republic there was a distinct possibility that the people would reject any proposal to delete these Articles. The Dublin Government had therefore pointed out that they did not think that the results of Sunningdale should be *linked* to Articles 2 and 3. This was accepted reluctantly by the Unionists but they made it clear that ^{they were} still maintaining their objection to the Articles. The visitors said that in the post-Sunningdale era the most important matter was relations between North and South

We were now discovering the problem of trying to establish these relations on a meaningful basis. In the context of the old relationship between the Republic and Britain national sovereignty as enshrined in Articles 2 and 3 might have been understandable. However in the context of North South relations as these were now evolving these Articles were not understood. They considered that if a proposal to delete the Articles was put to the people in isolation it would be defeated but if such a proposal were part of ~~an~~ an overall revision of the Constitution the situation might not be so bad. In their view, enormous difficulties were created once a country committed itself to a written Constitution. If there had to be a written Constitution it should be as short as possible. A defeat of a referendum proposal on Articles 2 and 3 would have grave effects on the Northern situation.

6. In reply to further questions, the visitors said that a delay in the implementation of Sunningdale would be very dangerous. There was talk of another Westminster election in the near future and this would be disastrous for the power-sharing parties. They would do worse than on the last occasion and the Faulkner Unionists would suffer most. If there was not prospect of an election for two years power-sharing would have proved itself and the recent election would have been seen as a low point. As regards the Council of Ireland the visitors said that as long as it was nebulous it was hard to sell it. A pull back on the Council would affect the SDLP as a party. They thought that it would be unlikely to cause that much concern among the minority community. There was the additional consideration that in the event of a watering down of the Council you would be saying that the Loyalists were right all along. It was probably better that ~~nothing~~ ^{as little as possible} be said about the Council at the present time.

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7. As regards security, the visitors said that it was dangerous to see too strongly the idea of Council of Ireland involvement^{in it}. This had already resulted in suggestions that the Council would control the police forces and look after security North and South. Such suggestions were not acceptable to the Northern majority. The emphasis should be placed on the prospects for peace offered by the Council of Ireland. The visitors did not consider that changes in say our adoption laws would have any significant effect on Northern opinion. Possibly the best contribution that could be made by the Republic would be to change Articles 2 and 3. They did not think that an interim report from the Committee which did not deal with the constitutional issue would help at all. It would undoubtedly be ridiculed and it would be better not to report at all if the constitution was not dealt with. They made a suggestion that the Committee might consider announcing that they had agreed that there should be a new constitution but without saying what would be in it.

8. The visitors said that they had issued a press release earlier that afternoon (copy attached). They agreed with the contents of a draft release prepared by the Committee (attached). The visitors were entertained to a meal in Leinster House following the meeting.