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**Title:** Report [by an unnamed official from the Department of Foreign Affairs] of a visit to Northern Ireland where the Irish government's draft statement on the status of Northern Ireland was discussed with Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Meryn Rees and his officials, Chief Executive Brian Faulkner, Alliance Party leader Oliver Napier, and Social Democratic and Labour Party leader Gerry Fitt.

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21/3STATEMENT ON STATUS OF NORTHERN IRELAND

As arranged, Mr. Donlon and I visited Northern Ireland yesterday.

In the Northern Ireland Office, where we called first, we met the Secretary of State, Mr. Merlyn Rees, Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office, Mr. Frank Cooper and the Deputy Secretary of that Office, Mr. Philip Woodfield. We handed to them a copy of a letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs about the press briefing given by NI Office officials after the Minister's meeting last week with Mr. Rees. A copy of the letter is attached together with a copy of the draft statement on status and a copy of the draft agreement between the two governments to implement the Sunningdale arrangements.

Insofar as the statement on status is concerned, Mr. Rees enquired as to whether it had been seen by the Leader of the Opposition and his attitude to it. I said that the draft had been seen by Mr. Lynch and, so far as I was aware, he had not objected to or commented on it. Mr. Rees said that in our briefings, it would be important that, as far as possible, we should keep the British press fully informed. This was particularly important, in view of the lack of proper comment on Northern Ireland in the British media.

Mr. Rees also said that it was likely that the Prime Minister in the "Queen's Speech" on Wednesday would be referring to Northern Ireland. Mr. Woodfield, interjected, at this stage, to say that the latest news he had was that there was so much material for the "Queen's Speech" that it might be necessary to drop or certainly to curtail, the references to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Rees also asked for our views on what the British attitude should be to Northern Ireland now - particularly in view of the results of the last election. I said that I understood that the Minister had discussed this subject with Mr. Rees recently and that we would have little to add to what the Minister said then. It seemed important that the British should continue to press for the implementation of Sunningdale - pressure from them could well be more effective than pressure from the South at present.

On the text of the draft statement on status, Mr. Cooper referred to the reference at the top of page 2 to "securing peace and justice in Northern Ireland". He said that, for them, this had the wrong connotation. After some discussion both he and Mr. Cooper suggested that instead of the phrase, it would be desirable to insert some such wording as "peace and progress in Ireland, North and South". If this change is made it will be necessary to make a corresponding change in the first line of paragraph 5.

In paragraph 7, Mr. Cooper objected to the reference to the incorporation of "the arrangements agreed at Sunningdale" in a formal agreement. He said that the form and content of the agreement were still to be settled between the two Governments. I said that we could not conceive of an Agreement containing only the declarations of the British and Irish Governments on status. I referred to paragraph 20 of the Sunningdale Communiqué and to the requirements of the Constitution to the effect that an International Agreement, so far as we were concerned, must be laid before the Dáil, and if it involved a charge on the Exchequer, must be approved by it. I also said that the agreement would have to be registered with the United Nations if it were to be citable before any organ of that body. After some discussi-

Mr. Cooper suggested that the opening part of paragraph 7 might read:-

"The declarations of the Irish and British Governments will form part of a formal Agreement to be signed...."

It should be mentioned also that Mr. Rees during the discussions said that he thought it would be important for you to have a further word with Mr. Faulkner this morning. At the same time, he emphasised the desirability of keeping these prior consultations secret. It must, on no account, appear that the Dublin Government was in "cahoots" with Mr. Faulkner about the statement.

We then visited the offices of the Executive in Stormont. Mr. Faulkner had left at this stage and we conducted our discussions with Mr. Bloomfield, Permanent Secretary to the Executive, and Mr. Sythes, Deputy Secretary. Mr. Bloomfield left his office to read the statement on a security telephone to Mr. Faulkner in his home and when he returned from the telephone after about 20 minutes he was, to my mind, not as forthcoming as he usually is. He said that Mr. Faulkner's impression of the statement could not be conveyed immediately as the draft was "rather dense" for immediate reaction. He said that Mr. Faulkner had stressed the importance of keeping the document and the consultations taking place on it confidential. It was vital that there should be no leak.

Mr. Bloomfield then proceeded to give us what appeared to be his own views of the situation - no doubt influenced greatly by Mr. Faulkner's attitude. During this discourse, I was impressed by the extent of Mr. Bloomfield's emotional involvement in what was going on. He said that the statement on status should not be looked on as "necessarily getting us out of the wood". He said that Mr. Faulkner and his group were in great difficulty. The Council of Ireland was a very difficult thing altogether for them to sell. This was so even before the last election. Now, in the aftermath of that election it was even more difficult. The election, Mr. Bloomfield described as "a howl of rage" on the part of the Protestant community in the North.

At this point I said that it could be mentioned that 30% of the electorate had not bothered to vote at all in the election. Of the remaining 70% or so something like 42% had voted for the Sunningdale parties - even though the matter was not an issue at the election. The results, in terms of seats, (11 out of 12) were altogether disproportionate to the way in which the electorate had voted.

Mr. Bloomfield nevertheless emphasised his view - and the view of many of his friends - that the election was, in fact, a "howl of rage". He said that there was a real danger that there might be no Protestant "at the other end of the bridge" if the Council of Ireland idea were pushed too hard. This concept was only practical if there were consent on the part of a large part of the Protestant community. Mr. Faulkner's Assembly Party was on the edge of the knife and a general improvement in the security situation would be needed before there could be any hope of a significant change in the unionist community's attitude to what they were doing, especially on a Council of Ireland.

He also mentioned that the reaction of the other parties in the Republic was important. He said that Mr. Colley's statement in the recent Dáil debate, emphasising the Constitution here had done a lot of damage. By continuing to emphasise the Constitution, he was giving fuel to the case being made by Paisley and company for the modification of Articles 2 and 3. Mr. Bloomfield said that Mr. Faulkner had recognised the difficulties of the Government in this respect but the continual harping on the Constitutional claim was making his position in the North untenable.

(It should be mentioned, incidentally, that I conveyed, through Mr. Bloomfield, your regards to Mr. Faulkner).

We then called on Mr. Napier, Leader of the Alliance Party. His comment on the draft statement on status, which we gave him, was to the effect that he would like to see the reference to "de facto" omitted since it smacked of "slick lawyer's jargon". He could not give us a reaction to the draft until he had consulted with his Assembly Party. He would do this as soon as possible and then convey his views. His immediate reaction was that the statement would not do any harm but that it probably would not do much good either. The Protestant community in the North were coming to equate Sunningdale with a Council of Ireland and a Council of Ireland with an all-Ireland Government or Republic.

Mr. Napier then went on to discuss the political situation in the North. He said that the result of the recent election reflected the widespread Protestant fears of the intentions of the South. There were fairly widespread support for the persons elected to Westminster who were opposed to both power sharing and a Council of Ireland but if they dropped their opposition to power sharing they would get support from at least 90% of the Protestant community in the North. This was in stark contrast to the position after Sunningdale, as assessed by Mr. Faulkner, who considered that some 40% of the Protestant community and 60-80% of the Catholic community were in favour of the Sunningdale proposals - or some 60% of the entire community. Mr. Napier said that his assessment was that about 25% or more supported it.

He said that the working class Protestants were now more or less accepting power sharing. It had worked reasonably well and it had been seen to work in this way.

I enquired as to the way in which he saw the situation developing when it was borne in on the 11 members elected to Westminster that almost the entire House of Commons was against them. Mr. Napier said that if they were seen to be achieving something, no matter how small, then the community in the North could probably accept the situation and develop with it. If, however, the 11 were seen to be achieving nothing after a few months in Westminster - then there was a real danger that the Protestant community in the North, from a real sense of frustration would turn to violence. What Mr. Napier feared most was that the UVF and similar organisations could do in this direction. He said that they were much more numerous and had access to far greater resources than the men of violence on the other side.

We then called on Mr. Fitt, Leader of the SDLP. Mr. Fitt read the draft statement on status, which we handed to him, and immediately reacted to the end of paragraph 5 and the contents of paragraph 6. He said that this was just what was needed by Mr. Faulkner and that it could be used by him to advantage. Mr. Fitt and his party would press this point on him in their discussions today.

Mr. Fitt then went on to emphasise just how shaky Mr. Faulkner's position was at the moment. He said that last week he had been approached by 3 members of his party with the suggestion that he should resign. This had had a profound effect on him. What he needed now, more than anything else, was some steadying. The SDBP were doing their best to achieve this.

(Shortly before we visited Mr. Fitt's house there had been a shooting incident in a bar just down the road from him. Two men had got out of a car, armed with machine guns and shot up the bar, killing one man and injuring 3. The event was obviously pre-occupying Mr. Fitt during our discussion. It is an illustration of how important the question of security is - in relation to that of status - in the North at present).

The draft agreement between the two Governments was given to Mr. Rees, Secretary of State, but to none of the other persons we visited.

We reached home at 3 a.m.

12 March, 1974.