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*Mr. W. Wilson (on leave)
Mr. W. Wilson
For Wilson pl.*

*Copy sent to MR W. Wilson,
Dept. of Foreign Affairs this
morning on receipt.*

CONFIDENTIAL

27/5

PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE RT. HON. HAROLD WILSON MP
TO MR LIAM COSGRAVE TD

Thank you for your personal message of 23 May which was delivered by your Ambassador personally. I do fully understand that you find the introduction of a Council of Ireland by phases a disappointment of earlier hopes and intentions. Brian Faulkner had, I believe, given you some advance indication of his plans, and I expect that Gerry Fitt will have kept you informed. They both had to take account of the actual situation in Northern Ireland, reflecting as it does the fears and misconceptions among many people in the majority community about the whole concept of a Council of Ireland. The price of moving too fast and too far would have been to postpone the setting up of a Council for many years, and would have put the whole fabric of the existing Northern Ireland Constitution at risk. The Northern Ireland Executive have achieved much in reaching agreement and both the Unionists and SDLP have shown much political bravery. We too have welcomed the compromise proposals and your ready and early acceptance of them was a great help both here and in Northern Ireland. I told your Ambassador when he delivered your message that I thought you and your colleagues had shown statesmanship of a very high order.

Your deep concern about the strike is fully shared here. My talks with Brian Faulkner, Gerry Fitt and Oliver Napier at Chequers on Friday went over the ground and concentrated on the immediate next steps. I agree on the political dangers to the continued existence of the Executive which are posed by continuation of the strike. The strike must be brought to an end:

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/but



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but a direct and violent confrontation between the Army and the strikers would have profound political effects too. We are working closely with the Northern Ireland Executive to safeguard essential services and I will keep you informed of the situation.

I should also stress that there has been no consultation or negotiation with the armed gangs involved. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has made it explicitly clear that there has been, and can be, no question of negotiation on constitutional or political matters with anybody seeking to operate outside the established constitutional framework. This was endorsed in the communique issued from Chequers yesterday.

The strike should not deter us from getting on with the Sunningdale settlement. The agreement of the Northern Ireland Executive on a Council of Ireland opens the way for further work on the various documents which will be needed for Sunningdale II. A good deal of preparatory work is now called for and officials from here and Belfast should meet with yours to draft the necessary documents. This should be done as soon as feasible, and I have asked for arrangements to be made for an early meeting between our officials and yours.

Meanwhile, thank you again for your letter. As I told your Ambassador, we are in no doubt of the gravity of the situation facing us.

25 May 1974

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1. Original seen by ^{Mr} Taoiseach and Secretary
 2. Mr M. Caithan
 For file of
 1915



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