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Confidential report of a meeting between Irish Government and SDLP [Social Democratic and Labour Party] delegations at Iveagh House, Dublin, on 20 August, 1974. Topics discussed included the conduct of armed forces in Northern Ireland, policing, the need for the Irish Government to protect the Northern minority, power-sharing and the Irish dimension, the mood of the minority community, the attitudes and intentions of the current British Government and the Conservative Party, the Convention elections, relations between the Irish Government and the SDLP, the question of a third force, the aftermath of the UWC [Ulster Workers' Council] strike and collapse of Sunningdale, tactics to split Unionists, Irish Government policy since the collapse of Sunningdale, policing, and the possibilities for civil war, British withdrawal, and repartition.

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SECRET

Department of the Taoiseach

1. Received to-day.
 2. This is a preliminary version of the note I sent you earlier on the meeting.

Meeting at Iveagh House on 20 August 1974
between Government and SDLP delegations

26/8

(a list of participants is attached)

The Tánaiste opened the meeting by welcoming the SDLP delegation and thanking them for coming at such short notice. The Government was concerned at the deterioration in the situation in the North which had been aggravated by such matters as the behaviour of the troops in the North and the question of the establishment of a third force. He wondered what weight should be given to denials by Mr. Rees that such a force will be allowed in view of the possibility that loyalists may be determined to have one and to have it armed. The Government is also concerned at the possibility of a withdrawal of troops although Mr. Rees has said that this is not on. There is also concern at the impact of the forthcoming British general election and the influence it will have on the situation. In addition there appeared to be dissatisfaction and criticism on the part of the SDLP with respect to the Government and this should be aired at the meeting in the spirit of the friendly relations between the two sides.

Mr. Fitt enquired whether any member of the Government wished to put any point regarding the situation in the North to the SDLP.

The Tánaiste repeated that he would appreciate their views on the current deterioration in the situation and on the question of a third force.

Mr. Hume said that the SDLP was more concerned about the overall policy of the British Government on the one hand and the Irish Government on the other.

At the moment there was a desperate sense of isolation and alarm throughout the minority community and public statements and press briefings had contributed to this.

Whether Dublin likes it or not, the minority have always regarded Dublin as a guarantor in the last analysis against the loyalists. If Dublin turns away from them, the minority may turn to the men of violence. The SDLP had for two years insisted on the involvement of the Irish Government in any solution of the problem both as a matter of right and as an added element of strength to the SDLP's own position. This fundamental position had been ceded following on the publication of the White Paper in which it was proposed to leave it to the Northern people themselves to decide on their future.

The SDLP is the only significant group in the North without a military wing. Its guarantor is Dublin. In a situation where this guarantee appears to be removed where Britain has shown herself to be fatally weak (as seen in her surrender to the loyalists at the time of the UWC strike), the loyalists will feel that they have no opposition to any course they may wish to take. Their strategy is to wait until the Convention elections take place and then to proclaim themselves the majority, confident that Britain will not oppose them.

The SDLP appreciates the need for magnanimity and statesmanship towards the majority in the North but believe that the only solution must be in partnership between the two communities. It is a viable policy to pursue a soft line towards the Northern majority only when they are pursuing a soft line as well. However, in a situation in which the majority is relying on force, the minority needs a balancing force. If this is not there they face a disastrous situation which could lead to a repartition and/or a civil war.

The SDLP was not interested in the fact of the Irish dimension as mentioned in the White Paper and in statements by the Irish Government. They wanted it expressed in institutional form since their electorate relied on them for protection.

Opinions about the policy of the Irish Government were expressed mildly in recent SDLP statements. There was, however, deep anger at the grassroots level.

Mr. Fitt said that since the fall of the Executive a great mood of despair had overtaken the minority community while the majority were in the grip of euphoria, confident that they have the economic and industrial power needed to get their own way. The British appear to be quite unable to give any indication of what their future intentions are and it appears that they would accept any form of power-sharing dictated by the majority. Merlyn Rees makes many peculiar statements which nobody understands, for instance, the UWC after their meeting with him appeared to feel that he had not ruled out a third force. He had attempted to do so subsequently but had added an expression of hope that people who wished to contribute to security would join whatever force he has in mind thus leaving some hope to the loyalists that their force would be acceptable. The uncertainty which he allowed to develop on this subject had given rise to a mood of hysteria in the minority community last week when there had been talk of a Catholic force of 20-25,000 men. The consequences of people being allowed to build up private armies can easily be seen.

The SDLP had been trying to get the British Government to spell out their attitudes to Northern Ireland. He and his colleagues were now convinced that the British and especially the Labour Party want to get out of Northern Ireland. They will hold elections to the Constitutional Convention and take their outcome as the democratic expression of majority rule. He felt that the Labour Government in relation to Northern Ireland had been absolutely disastrous and with great regret was forced to hope for a Conservative victory at Westminster. Merlyn Rees gave the impression at his meeting with the SDLP yesterday of being close to a nervous breakdown. At times he was almost incoherent. On the other hand their talks with

Mr. Heath had been far more satisfactory.

It was necessary for the SDLP to fight tenaciously for the involvement of the Irish Government as well as the British Government in any future settlement. However, after the collapse of Sunningdale, some Irish politicians had been saying that they did not want to have anything further to do with the Northern situation.

If the situation continues its present course of development, the SDLP may not even fight the Convention elections. In order to do so they must have a programme to put to the electors and for this it is necessary that the intentions both of the Irish and of the British Governments be fully expressed. The Irish Government can put pressure on the British to this end.

The SDLP had the impression that the Executive had been sacrificed by the British Government so that Rees and Orme would not have to resign.

The SDLP now wish the Irish Government to backtrack from statements which had been made by certain Government spokesmen and to come out for power-sharing with an Irish dimension. Some spokesmen had suggested that this should not be done in order not to arouse Protestant suspicions. Catholic susceptibilities must, however, also be taken into account.

At this moment the Army were harassing Catholic people throughout Northern Ireland on a far more intensive basis than before. The British want to leave and will use a Loyalist victory to justify their departure. If they depart without leaving institutions behind, a disaster will ensue which cannot be isolated in Northern Ireland. It will, for instance, mean more bombs in Dublin.

The drift has gone too far. Political decisions and action must be taken now.

At this point the Minister for Justice joined the meeting. Mr. Currie conveyed condolences to him on his bereavement.

He went on to say that Mr. Hume had pinpointed the SDLP difficulties with regard to current Irish policy and emphasised that these difficulties were felt at all levels in the parties right down to the grassroots. The minority felt that they had been let down by the Irish Government.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that the Government had been aware that misunderstandings had come about and that the SDLP had strong feelings in the matter. He himself had tried to make the position very clear in winding up in the Senate as had the Taoiseach in replying to a Parliamentary Question. What had been said then had been welcomed in the minority community and he had thought that we had got over that black patch. He was somewhat puzzled by the current criticism since it did not appear that the Government had done anything terrible since but there was perhaps a continuing uncertainty among SDLP supporters that the Government had adopted an over-comfortable position. What we had been doing recently was to get tougher with the British and to let it be known that this was the case. With regard to the White Paper he had spoken to Mr. Hume before speaking to the British to whom he conveyed exactly the same line. After its publication, the White Paper had received a muted reaction all round. His initial personal reaction had been critical on the very grounds mentioned by Mr. Hume but he had waited for SDLP reaction before expressing himself. He did not think that there had been any divergence at that time.

With regard to the policy of the Irish Government, the Minister said that in the aftermath of the UWC strike it had been felt that the presentation of plans in any detail on our side could have been counter-productive vis-a-vis the loyalists. We had reiterated on all occasions that there must be power-sharing in government and that there must be an Irish dimension which must be negotiated with us.

It cannot therefore be said that we have opted out of discussion.

In terms of policy it did not appear that there is any difference between the Government and the SDLP. There is perhaps no difference even in terms of tactics although there may be one in terms of mood since the SDLP is directly in the situation.

The Government had felt the need to make a very strong approach to the British on the question of the third force, even to the extent of trying to have the Bangor meeting banned. We appreciated the need to act early on this matter and had had the Ambassador in London call twice on the British and had leaked news of this and even of the British reply to the papers. We had got a certain limited response. Mr. Rees was worried and pleaded with us to take the heat off.

Northern Ireland was discussed at length at the Cabinet meeting today at which the Government emphasised its concern at the current situation.

Mr. Devlin disagreed that the position was as stated by the Minister. Catholic voters were dissatisfied with the way the Minister had behaved with the loyalists. The minority was losing heart and many were emigrating. The loyalists were confident that the minority's guarantor was no longer there. This fact must be faced.

The Taoiseach had completely changed the theme when he said that some of the SDLP should get down to the job of trying to find a solution. He (Mr. Devlin) understood that the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs had implied, in briefing the press, that the SDLP were coming to Dublin too often and thus frightening loyalists.

Brian Garrett of the NILP who purports to represent the views of the Irish Government had been saying that the SDLP had got too much out of Sunningdale. Officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs had been asking loyalist groups what their attitude would be to a statement by the Irish Government of support for a UDI.

Mr. Devlin went on to say that he appreciated the need to make contact with loyalist groups but said with some emphasis that such steps should not be taken without prior reference to and consultation with the SDLP.

During his recent visit to the North, the Minister had called the SDLP at short notice and had then gone on to talk to loyalists about extra-territoriality, giving the impression that he had merely brought the SDLP in as a cover for his meeting with loyalists.

Four or five days before the White Paper was published, the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs had said that everything would have to be sacrificed for power-sharing. This statement was not repudiated and must therefore be taken as Irish Government policy. Taken in conjunction with the fact that the White Paper contained a clear dilution of the Irish dimension the conclusion was that the Irish Government had represented to the British that the Irish dimension was no longer important.

This situation encourages loyalists to go all out for the final solution when they see that the first guarantor is gone since Britain failed to stand up to the UWC strikers and the second with such statements by members of the Irish Government. For this reason it is not possible to get loyalists to sit down with the SDLP.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out that his remarks on extra-territoriality had been made in response to a question put to him at a press briefing. He had come to the North to see all relevant groups. Notice to the SDLP had been very short for security reasons as is always the case.

Mr. Hume accepted that the holiday period had caused some diffusion of effort. A number of points were worrying such as the continuing reference to the fact of the Irish dimension in Irish papers, the implication being that since it is a fact, nothing need be done about it.

He was also concerned at whether the Government had satisfied itself that it was going to be involved in negotiations. The present position left the SDLP very much in the cold.

He accepted the need to take account of the loyalist position and fears. This, however, did not mean that too much cannot be demanded of them on specific issues. It must be remembered that the loyalists were not relying solely on their political strength but were using threats as well. The SDLP needed to be able to say that they could use threats too.

Mr. Mallon objected to statements that the Northern community in toto was imbued with violence and that the SDLP should stop coming to Dublin.

The question of the mood of the minority was a key point. Previous speakers had identified it as one of isolation. Faced with a Protestant ascendancy the minority had to live with the reality of internment, threatened by a plethora of para-military organisations. It had to endure drastic actions by the Army and the police and contemplate the doomsday situation which would be caused by a possible British withdrawal. In the face of all this what, he asked, could they rely on. Certainly not the British Government. They had only the SDLP and the Dublin Government. After the fall of the Executive, they felt, possibly as a result of misunderstandings, that they were losing even that. When Dublin worries about counter-productivity on the loyalist side it should not lose sight of the dangers of action counter-productive on the Catholic side.

There was also a myth which had been swallowed by Mr. Rees and possibly also by the Dublin Government that, given time, the UWC would reform into decent socialists. Instead we have seen Glen Barr march in an Orange parade for the first time in his life. These people in all areas have connections with murderous groups. The Minister's visit to John Taylor had done more harm than

anything else in his (Mr. Mallon's) constituency. He instanced a number of incidents to show that everything "that man" touches has dire consequences.

He agreed with Mr. Fitt that if the present drift continues in the attitudes of the British and Irish Governments, the SDLP may not be fighting the Convention elections and added that nobody else may be either.

There had been five elections and a referendum in the North in two years and the Northern people were still being asked to find a political solution. He felt that moderate parties such as the SDLP, the Faulkner Unionists and the Alliance Party were being made into political eunuchs while still being asked to generate a solution. Initiatives must come from Dublin and from London before the Westminster elections.

The Irish aspiration was the keystone of SDLP policy and cannot be dropped. Appeals such as those from the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs would therefore fall on deaf ears.

The Minister for Industry and Commerce stated that the meeting was useful in that it enabled both sides to listen and to see if there was a consensus on possible lines of evolution.

The collapse of the Executive produced a totally new situation. The Irish Government was caught wrong-footed and emerged somewhat confused.

It seemed clear that there was a mood of despair in the minority. The majority on the other hand were in a state of euphoria having in their sights a restoration of the old Stormont with a new version of the B-Specials. The Convention would give a legal veneer to such an arrangement. The new factor was the possibility of a British withdrawal with the concomitant scenario of a civil war.

Reassurance for the loyalists meant that they would not be coerced into a "Pope's green island", not that they were free to grab power. In a moral sense, where one side was attempting to assert its superiority and the other to establish its rights, we could not remain neutral. Not to talk about unity reassures nobody since the question will not go away.

It was necessary to think about a doomsday situation. This meant a civil war between one million people and half a million people. Because of the long land border there was no way in which the Republic could escape involvement and by not taking a position we were facilitating polarisation.

This evolution is possible when the loyalists lurch under a loyalist umbrella and the minority under another. The moment has come when the Government must think about force. In a doomsday situation it has to be one million against three and a half million. If such a situation takes place in the absence of the British, then we are much stronger. Nobody wants this to happen but we have to think our way through to the end. Doomsday is no longer unthinkable but we must see what can be done to avert it. It is only by contemplating the possibility of doomsday that we can in fact avert it.

Mr. O'Hanlon believed the SDLP had every right "to be sore". The traumatic effect of the fall of the Executive coupled with what had happened in the weeks afterwards had left them with the feeling that they had been left in the lurch. With regard to official statements, it must be remembered that in the North, words can kill.

The SDLP was the only group in the North which had remained stable. The British had bungled in their handling of the UWC strike and in allowing the question of a third force to grow as an issue. It was possible that the drift was no longer controllable at the present time.

He did not like to read leaks in the press which spoke of "ad limina" visits by the SDLP to the Dublin Government.

He agreed with Mr. Hume and the Minister for Industry and Commerce that however horrible some solutions were, they should be looked at. A start must be made by looking seriously at what is likely to happen. He thought the Constitutional Convention would not last longer than a week.

There was in the North an unstable situation in an unstable society. Stability could only be created by the operation of power-sharing and the Irish dimension. He enquired whether the Government was really concerned about a solution or whether they would allow things to drift.

The Minister for Local Government said that he welcomed the meeting. Discussions with reporters was not the best way to deal with the issues. He emphasised that we make references to the fact of the Irish dimension for reasons quite different to those deduced by the SDLP.

With regard to views expressed about statements made by the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, he pointed out that that Minister had been the only person who had consistently warned about the doomsday possibility.

The Minister enquired as to what the SDLP thought the role of the Southern Government would be and whether they had ever spelled out what they could do in a doomsday situation. It was a great mistake to believe that things are when in fact they are not.

If Britain withdrew completely the situation would be such that the Southern Government could not avoid being drawn in. He enquired whether any effort had been made to see what followed from such a Southern involvement and whether there was a possibility of a United Nations involvement. Unfortunately we had a very small army and the loyalists on their own could probably put more armed men in the field than we could. The SDLP was the only significant group

● which did not want an armed solution and they should accordingly devote some attention to this point. The IRA would spare no effort to embroil the South.

The SDLP and the Government had been sniping at each other on minor matters while overlooking basic questions.

Mr. Currie said that the SDLP members would appreciate the remarks of the Ministers for Industry and Commerce and Local Government. They had had a partial discussion on precisely these kind of questions in a previous meeting with the Ministers for Finance and Posts and Telegraphs. With the best will in the world we could find ourselves in a doomsday situation. He suggested that a further full meeting be devoted to this question.

In a doomsday situation it would be impossible for the South to avoid becoming embroiled. The possibility of a repartition would have to be faced since areas like Derry, South Armagh and South Down would not accept loyalist domination. Their worst fear was that there would be repartition along the line of cease fire. While contingency planning required to be done, the politicians should see how the doomsday situation could be avoided.

SDLP policy was shattered after the fall of the Executive. It was no longer possible to go into negotiations with the politics of Sunningdale particularly at a time when there is greater cohesion among loyalists and British policy is vacillating. A conference will be held next week in Donegal to prepare a fresh policy and enable the party to achieve a negotiating position.

Every possible pressure should be brought to bear on the British Government to spell out the realities of life to the loyalists. They represented 1.8% of the population of the United Kingdom and should not be allowed to dictate the rules of membership of the United Kingdom club. Such action could have the effect of splitting

the loyalists and unless they are split there will be civil war. The South must make it clear that it is not in a neutral position. In a doomsday situation the South is the guarantor of the minority. Ideally the minority would like to be in a Turkish Cypriot situation but they realised that they were not. He agreed that the South was in a weak military situation. It should nevertheless stand by the Northern minority so that they will not be thumped into the ground.

Mr. Currie emphasised that the sentiment expressed by Mr. Devlin regarding statements by the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs were shared by every member of the party from the grassroots up.

There was a negotiating position to be retrieved. Mr. Rees had to be firmed up by the SDLP and by pressure from the Irish Government on him and on the British Government.

Mr. Hume said that there were dangers even in talking about the spectre of a hypothetical situation in that to do so may create a sense of alarm while any leak may serve to bring the doomsday situation closer.

The Dublin Government should be active on the political front and on the contingency front.

The strategy of the loyalists is directed at first winning the elections. While the SDLP and Irish Government's positions were moderate ones, their negotiating positions needed to be very tough to achieve anything. It would also be necessary to split the Unionist monolith. It may be too late to do that but the only way in which it could be done was for the British to spell out the way in which the loyalist path leads, that is, either to a confrontation with the British or to a British withdrawal. If the British spell things out clearly the bandwagon may be stopped. Mr. Heath personally believed that Labour were withdrawing.

Some negotiating positions had been surrendered, including Dublin's right to be there. The White Paper states that any settlement must have the approval of Britain. It must also have the approval of Dublin and Britain should say so.

Contingency plans must be available. It was necessary to avoid rash statements such as had been made in 1969.

Loyalists were a minority on this island who were poisoning relations between the communities in the North and between Britain and Ireland. This should be put to the British who should be further pressed to say what they intend to do.

The Minister for Justice spoke of our limited military potential and pointed out that the minority could well be wiped out by the time we had mobilised and fielded our full force. The minority must then decide how far it can go to protect its own existence. He wondered whether it was possible to split the loyalist monolith at this stage. If the ploy fails, would the minority be prepared for some forfeiture of their position which might split off moderate Unionists?

Mr. Hume said that the crisis in the North was not about power-sharing but about ascendancy. In these circumstances the minority had nothing to give to the loyalists.

Mr. Fitt said that the British Government had tried and failed to split the loyalists. There was some sign that the four UDA leaders to whom the SDLP had talked were trying to get away from sectarian politics but after the talks a gun had been put to their head and a hardline statement issued.

If the SDLP surrendered the Irish dimension then their electoral base would go. The Irish dimension was in the hearts and minds of the people.

He agreed completely with the remarks of the Minister for Industry and Commerce and felt that the Irish Government should make it quite clear to Britain that Britain was not going to impose another partition on Ireland.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out that militarily, the loyalists could not hold West Ulster while it would be militarily impossible for us to get near Belfast. There was nothing which we could do in a timescale of years in terms of men and arms which could change that. Repartition would create an Israel in the North-East of Ireland which we must at all costs avoid.

Contingency measures were well advanced and all possible contingencies were being considered.

Mr. Currie intervened to say that he hoped we were not thinking purely in military terms but that we would also take account of factors such as electricity and water supplies.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs assured him that this was the case and went on to say that reports would be available soon although they were not likely to provide a very cheerful picture.

With regard to the political picture, the Minister pointed out that we were also endeavouring to split the loyalists although our tactics might be different from those of the SDLP. To get the British to spell out the consequences of loyalist behaviour as suggested by Mr. Hume was an important tactic. If it did not have the desired effect on the loyalists, however, to employ it is, in effect, tantamount to asking the British to withdraw. From this aspect it could be quite a dangerous tactic.

Mr. Hume intervened to say that he had not proposed that the British be asked to withdraw but rather to say what they were going to do.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs replied that if they did not produce the right result, they could precipitate the very course they wished to avoid. The point must accordingly be considered very carefully. Another way of approaching the matter was to try to convince the loyalists that power-sharing and the Irish dimension do not threaten them in any way. It was to be hoped that 25% of Protestant voters could be persuaded to vote for moderate parties such as the Faulkner Unionists and Alliance to ensure that the loyalists get 38 seats or less at the Convention.

Mr. Devlin said that the suggestion made by the Minister for Justice was a logical development of what the Government had been trying to bring about.

The strategy outlined by the Minister for Foreign Affairs had not been discussed with the SDLP before and the Government's attitudes had led to fear and despair in the minority. Article 2 of the Constitution was still there and Ministers were bound by their oath to implement it. They had an obligation to rise to the needs of the doomsday situation. Instead officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs had been encouraging loyalists to take certain courses of action. The Minister strongly denied this latter statement.

Mr. Mallon said that the need was to diversify rather than to split the Unionists. While Dublin and London have many options open to them to achieve this aim, the SDLP has only one, that is, by making concessions. They had, however, nothing left to concede. The loyalists must be divided before the Convention elections and consideration must be given as to how it can be done in that very short time-scale.

Mr. Currie said that when the SDLP had met Mr. Wilson, Mr. Heath and Mr. Thorpe within a week of the fall of the Executive, they had pointed out the need to split the loyalists by spelling out the

consequences of their action to them. It was not a question of forcing the loyalists out of the United Kingdom but of forcing them to decide themselves whether to leave.

Mr. Hume remarked that the meeting had established that the objectives of the Government and of the SDLP were identical and that only the means were under discussion.

The Minister for Lands said that the SDLP seemed to feel that the Government's fundamental policy had changed since Sunningdale. In fact, it had not changed in the slightest and there was nothing which could be taken as an indication of change. Power-sharing was the immediately important thing and in going all-out for it, the Government was not conceding its position in the slightest on the Irish dimension despite what newspaper reporters might say in the interests of newsworthy presentation. He felt that approaches to the British before the Westminster elections would not be productive.

The Attorney-General said that Dublin and the SDLP need each other, quite apart from a crude political sense, in order to avoid a possible disaster. They must try to work together since a failure to do so could mean that both sides contribute to the outcome they were trying to avoid. Hence personality differences should be swept aside and not be allowed to cloud the picture. It was realised that the increase in loyalist strength had greatly increased their responsibilities. If the SDLP had been told by journalists that members of the Government had complained about the frequency of their visits to Dublin, this should be treated as irrelevant. As responsible men in a serious situation, the Government realised the need for co-operation.

There had been no change in the policy of the Dublin Government. He personally was not interested in the unity of Ireland as such but in securing peace and justice for all on this island. He hoped Sunningdale had only failed temporarily. He agreed that in

working for a new situation called for since the May revolution not much could be done before the Westminster elections (likely in early October).

It was necessary to discuss seriously what the attitude of the SDLP would be to the Convention elections. They could put it to the new British Government that if the elections are a farce they will refuse to participate in them. Britain should return to the Constitution Act which should be the anchor-sheet of their policy.

The SDLP also had to consider how best to work P.R. in the Convention elections in alliance with moderate Protestants.

Mr. Fitt said that he had been impressed with Mr. Heath's view that the only acceptable terms for Northern Ireland were those enshrined in the Sunningdale idea.

In reply to the Minister for Foreign Affairs who enquired about SDLP ideas on policing, Mr. Fitt said that a full discussion with Mr. Rees on the matter would take place in Belfast next week.

The SDLP wished to see a police force with which both communities could identify. It was not now the time to get into discussions on the question of a police force since the party had little else to bargain with at this stage.

Mr. Hume expressed the delegation's appreciation of the work and arrangements made for them by the staff of the Embassy in London, particularly Mr. Gaynor and Mr. Lynch. Responding to the Tánaiste's invitation to describe their meetings there, he said that they had had a two-hour discussion with Mr. Heath at which Mr. Gilmour was present. The SDLP had put to Mr. Heath how they saw the situation developing in Northern Ireland and Mr. Heath agreed completely with their analysis. Understandably, he (Mr. Heath) appeared to have a particular attachment to the Constitution Act. Mr. Heath detected

a neurosis in the Labour Party and felt they would be tempted to withdraw from Northern Ireland if the Constitutional Convention fails. The SDLP felt that Mr. Heath was a strong ally who would intervene in the public debate at an opportune moment. Mr. Gilmour did not speak at the meeting.

Mr. Rees on the other hand did not appear to be in control of himself and had come to the meeting with a lengthy defence in his own handwriting of his policy since taking office. He spoke at length on the question of policing. He is writing a personal foreword to the forthcoming White Paper in which he will spell out the necessity for power-sharing. On the role of the military, where the SDLP wish to see a reduced military presence in minority areas, Mr. Rees spoke of getting more of the minority into the RUC and the RUC Reserve. Mr. Hume described this as a pipe-dream. The SDLP had urged Mr. Rees to take the big gamble and end internment to which he responded by reciting statistics.

In reply to a query by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Fitt said that while 40-70 Conservatives may favour a deal with the loyalists, he was satisfied that Mr. Heath personally had nothing to do with it.

Mr. Hume confirmed that Mr. Heath had been extremely forthcoming and had told them that he felt he had been expressing their (the SDLP's) fears when he spoke in the Commons debate on the White Paper even though others in his party had said to him that he was living in the past.

Mr. Currie had the impression that Mr. Gilmour was very much subordinate to Mr. Heath and had no great weight in the Conservative party. He had in the past suggested to the SDLP that they should concentrate on power-sharing to the exclusion of the Irish dimension.

At the end of the meeting, the Minister for Foreign Affairs suggested that they might meet again in about a fortnight's time. It was agreed that the press should be informed that the meeting had taken place at the Government's request, that the two sides had carried out an in-depth review of the situation in Northern Ireland and that the Government had been brought up-to-date on current SDLP thinking. It had been agreed that the two sides should meet again.

Government

The Tánaiste
The Minister for Lands
The Minister for Local Government
The Attorney-General
The Minister for Industry and Commerce
The Minister for Foreign Affairs

SDLP

Mr. Gerry Fitt
Mr. John Hume
Mr. Paddy Devlin
Mr. Austin Currie
Mr. Paddy O'Hanlon
Mr. Seamus Mallon

Officials

Mr. P.J.G. Keating
Mr. Dermot Nally
Mr. Seán Donlon
Mr. John Swift
Mr. Gearóid Ó Broin