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Policy Issue For Determination by Government

After the UWC Strike the Government adopted a position that was particularly conciliatory to the majority community in the North - limiting itself to re-stating the basic principles of power-sharing and an Irish dimension, without spelling these out in any detail, and accepting that the next initiative should come from within Northern Ireland. This was intended to help the Faulkner Unionists and Alliance to recover ground.

At the same time this approach, though valid in itself, has disturbed the minority community, and their principal political representatives, the SDLP.

This has had several unfortunate consequences:

1. It has weakened the morale of the SDLP and has encouraged that party to adopt more intransigent attitudes, which carry dangers for us as well as for Northern Ireland.
2. It has led to public controversy between the SDLP and the Government.
3. It has encouraged the SDLP to seek to exploit differences of emphasis of policy within the Government.
4. It has led to a strengthening of FF-SDLP ties.

There are therefore grounds for considering whether a policy of more active and specific support on our part for power-sharing and an Irish dimension should not now be adopted in order:

1. To improve relations with the SDLP and avoid the dangers mentioned above.
2. To help to consolidate minority support for the SDLP and avoid any shift towards the IRA.
3. To get into a better bargaining stance with the Loyalists, the Northern Ireland Office Civil Servants and the next United Kingdom Government; who might otherwise underestimate our concern for a solution that would have the elements necessary for support by the minority and their political leaders.

Such a shift in the emphasis of policy, if now considered appropriate would, in order to carry conviction, require to be presented by the Taoiseach personally in a statement or speech. The immediate aftermath of the Wilson visit could provide an appropriate occasion.