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Title: Report of meeting between Dr Garret FitzGerald, TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Merlyn Rees, MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, at the residence of the United Kingdom Ambassador to Ireland on 19 April 1975 at which the Northern Ireland Constitution Convention, security co-operation, activities of Loyalist para-military groups, the ceasefire and internment were discussed

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Convention and Subsequent Developments

Rees did not seem optimistic about the prospects for the Convention. A UUUC majority was likely with the Official Unionists, under the increasing influence of Enoch Powell, gaining somewhat at the expense of their coalition partners. There was some possibility of the DUPP's being isolated by a merger of the Official Unionists and VUPP but this was hardly imminent. Another hopeful factor was that Fitt and Craig were now in constant contact and getting on well together but again this would hardly have an immediate impact. In a general discussion as to what might happen in the event of the Convention breaking down, Rees made two noteworthy points. Firstly, he said that the worrying thing was not the immediate reaction in Northern Ireland to a breakdown but the reaction in Britain. The pull-out syndrome there was now dormant but following another political failure it could become a factor to be reckoned with. Secondly it was unlikely that the Protestant para-militaries would go wild and attempt a takeover simply because the Convention failed. Only something like a Council of Ireland would enable the para-militaries to move in that direction. The para-militaries in any event did not have the ability to run anything. The Minister pointed to the UWC strike in 1974 and asked if the British Government now had adequate contingency plans to ensure the provision of essential services,

1. Dr. G. FitzGerald, T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs met Mr. Merlyn Rees, M.P., Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the residence of the British Ambassador on 19 April 1975 from approx. 5.30 p.m. to 7.00 p.m. Also present were Mr. P.J.G. Keating, Secretary and Mr. Seán Donlon, Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Sir Arthur Galsworthy, British Ambassador and Mr. K. Jordan, Private Secretary to Mr. Rees.

2. The discussion was generally friendly and informal and the main matters discussed were as follows:

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particularly power. Rees was generally very negative on the idea of his Government taking over the power stations should the need arise again. He said that these stations, notably Ballylumford, presented grave problems as both workers and middle management were likely to be very hostile to such moves. Even if soldiers were moved in to operate machines that would achieve nothing if middle management refused to co-operate and in this refusal it seemed that the managers could count on the support of their British based union. The Minister asked about contingency plans for the Government's taking over power stations in Britain and Rees replied that he was sure this could be done there if the need arose. But the Northern Ireland situation was not comparable. The British Government would have considerable problems in dealing with a situation where a whole section of the community moved against it. In such circumstances "you don't control the situation and you can't hope to control it".

Rees expressed himself as being happy with the current level of Security Co-operation Activities of the Loyalist Para-Military Groups

The Minister referred to the continuing campaign of sectarian assassinations and bombing and pointed out that this was the one element in the pattern of violence which was not showing any improvement. The minority community were, of course, bearing the brunt to an even greater extent than the figures suggested -- the British figures to 18.4.1975 were 216 Catholics, 119 Protestants and 4 others killed in sectarian attacks -- in that about a third of the Protestants were killed probably because of their association with Catholics. The Minister emphasised that two things were necessary, viz., an effective security presence in danger areas and a visible presence to provide reassurance. The Secretary of State outlined measures they were taking, including the strengthening of the CID and additional Army patrols in interface areas. The Minister commented that normal policing did not seem to be working in dealing with the situation and though one frequently heard of arrests and charges one did not often hear of convictions for murder in cases of sectarian assassination. He had heard that convictions had been

secured in only 12 of the 339 cases. There seemed to be a general imbalance in security policy. The Secretary of State pointed out that of the 231 soldiers killed in Northern Ireland all but 2 had been killed by the IRA.

Rees said he found the current UDA/UVF feud puzzling. The UVF people who were politically inclined had gone from sight and the feuding had suddenly stopped on 15 April. There might be political reasons connected with the Convention elections for this cessation but it was very difficult to work out who the political influences were on the loyalist para-militaries. Craig was close to the UDA but he had no control over them. Paisley had his own TARA but it did not seem to be active at the moment. The Young Militants were a UVF branch.

Security Co-operation

Rees expressed himself as being happy with the current level of co-operation and said that the meeting of officials in Dublin on 14 April seemed to have been useful. He handed the Minister a letter summarising the conclusions, as they saw them, of the meeting. A copy is attached. In reply to questions by the Minister, Rees said that there was still internal movement of arms in Northern Ireland and arms were coming in on a small scale to both sides but there was no hard information on the sources of supply. The loyalists were in touch with Libya and were talking with the Libyans about a number of matters including the supply of arms. The IRSP now had arms, at least some of which had been taken from the Official IRA. In relation to North-South security co-operation, the Minister emphasised the need for any appropriate information, e.g. on explosives or arms to be passed to us very quickly through police channels.

The Ceasefire and Internment

Rees referred to the Sinn Féin incident centres which he said were for all practical purposes meaningless. As long as there was no

Provo. violence, detainees would be released. There were now only 13 people detained whose original detention had been under the old Special Powers Act. His intention was to continue releases at the current pace and have everyone out by October. The Minister referred to the fact that all loyalists were now out and that this seemed to be another instance of an imbalance in policy. Rees replied that the bulk of loyalists in jail were in the special category status which was, of course, another problem which would have to be dealt with. (He seemed to imply that special category prisoners would eventually have sentences remitted, though not in the short-term.) The real problem in releasing detainees would come when he reached the last 100 or so who were the hardest of the hard core. In reply to questions, the Minister felt that the balance of advantage was probably in making the political gesture of releasing all detainees and that was certainly the type of gesture we would prefer to the British talking to the IRA. The way internment had been introduced with brutality and discrimination in its application had created an impossible situation and made internment a very difficult tool for use in Ireland, North or South, in the future. Rees referred to the GOC's remarks a week previously and said the whole episode had been most unfortunate. The Minister agreed and added that what Backbencher had written in that day's Irish Times expressed his own sentiments and probably those of the majority of the Irish people.

Other Matters

Rees made two noteworthy points. Firstly, he said that the worrying thing was not the immediate reaction to the breakdown but the reaction in Britain. He felt Neave knew nothing about Northern Ireland and was not showing any ability to learn quickly. He thought Neave's only interest was in trying to arrange links between some of the UUUC MPs at Westminster and the Conservatives. Rees hoped we would help to give Neave a broader picture.

In reply to queries, the Minister said he thought the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Bill would be through the Senate with a comfortable Government majority before 1 May. Rees thought the timing of the

debate unfortunate in the context of the campaign in Northern Ireland for Convention seats.

Rees mentioned difficulties about the pay and allowances of Northern Ireland politicians and seemed to feel that there was no possibility of improving the emoluments. Many of the elected representatives were in any event doing very little work and they could not, of course, expect as much as Westminster MPs. The Minister argued strongly for the need to make it possible for good leaders to stay in politics in Northern Ireland and pointed out that conditions for politicians there were in no way comparable to those prevailing anywhere else in these islands. Many of those active in Northern Ireland politics in recent years who had made the most constructive contributions were people whose only source of income was politics and it would be ludicrous to make it even more difficult for such people to stay in politics.