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For S19284 under
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Mr. Keenan

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NORTHERN IRELAND

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VISIT BY MR. STANLEY ORME

NOTE:-

1. Mr. Stanley Orme, Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office, made a courtesy visit to the Taoiseach this morning. Mr. Orme was accompanied by the British Ambassador, Mr. Denis Trevelyan and by his Private Secretary. The Taoiseach was accompanied by Mr. Nally.
2. Mr. Orme opened the discussion by referring to the difficulties facing both Governments in relation to Northern Ireland. He said that the present was a sort of twilight period. He would, however, like to assure the Government here that, so far as the British Government was concerned, the policy was still as it had been set out in the Secretary of State's statement in the House of Commons on 14th January. Basically, this meant that if there was a genuine and sustained cessation of violence that certain things would follow. The danger now was that certain groups operating independently of the IRA were indulging in violence. If, therefore, there was to be a cease-fire by the IRA, it would be necessary to monitor the situation carefully. This information had been passed to the Sinn Fein representatives at the recent talks with the British Government. Mr. Orme was at pains to emphasise that these talks were in no way a negotiation. At the same time, he emphasised that the British Government had no intention of playing a cat and mouse game with the IRA. They wanted a genuine and sustained cessation of violence - not a series of cease-fires, each of which was to be the subject of a further set of conditions.
3. Mr. Orme said that in the present situation the Protestant para-military groups appeared to be very relaxed. They accepted completely the stand being taken by Mr. Rees and they appeared to have full confidence in him.
4. Mr. Orme said that the meeting between the Protestant clergymen and the IRA in Feakle had done a lot of good in that it had enabled a comparatively independent group to put strongly to the IRA the point that they should not come to the British Government for what they wanted. It was to the Protestant population of Northern Ireland that they should address themselves.
5. Mr. Orme mentioned Glenn Barr who he said was not to be underestimated militarily. He said that Mr. Barr had mentioned to him his sense of confidence in the Secretary of State and what he was doing. Mr. Barr realised that Mr. Rees had to have room for manoeuvre and, for this reason, was not pressing him too much on matters of detail.
6. The Taoiseach enquired if there were any news as to the timing of the Convention Election.
7. Mr. Orme said that even though there was violence now, it was limited violence. This gave some hope that the Convention could be held in a period of relative peace. The Provos could well wreck the Convention by starting up violence again on a wide scale. This would drive all the Protestants into the one camp. They would all become members of the UUUC and this could mean the end of any hope of a power-sharing Government in the North.

8. Mr. Orme said that they hoped to hold the Convention Elections very shortly but that there was, even now, no date pencilled in. The Referendum in June, the occurrence of Easter and Whitsun narrowed the scope for the timing of the Convention Elections. The new register would be published in or about February 28th and the election would not be held, at the earliest, until four weeks after that.
9. They were still looking for a chairman and thought that they might be able to come up with somebody impartial.
10. The Taoiseach thanked Mr. Orme for his visit and for his exposition of the views of the British Government.
11. Mr. Orme said that before he left he would like to convey the admiration of the British Government for the stand being taken at present by the Irish Government. They fully appreciated the difficulties. He would like the Taoiseach to understand that the situation in Portlaoise had never entered into any of the discussions which had been conducted with the Sinn Fein representatives. The British Army were fully informed of the Government's attitude. They were "very relaxed" about the situation. He asked how the Government here saw the situation now. He had seen recent newspaper reports on the subject.
12. The Taoiseach explained developments in Portlaoise and offered the group a copy of the Government statement of 24th January, which he said represented the Government's attitude. The Taoiseach also mentioned the background to the release of Mr. Cahill - basically that this had been done on health grounds.
13. Mr. Orme then referred to the Gardiner Report. He said that Lord Gardiner had blithely recommended the ending of the "special category" classification of prisoner. This was a totally unrealisable objective. The problem had, in fact, gone completely out of control, so far as the British Government was concerned. It was a far more difficult one for them than anything to do with detainees. The persons concerned were convicted criminals and their differentiation from other types of convicts had led to endless difficulties. The Taoiseach said that he fully appreciated these difficulties.
14. Mr. Orme then enquired as to the Taoiseach's views on the power-sharing Discussion Paper. The Taoiseach said that he had not yet had the opportunity of reading the paper in the detail that he would like.
15. Mr. Orme said that the Paper reaffirmed what the Prime Minister had said in his recent letter to the Taoiseach. They wanted as wide a representation as possible of different views and opinions in the Convention Election, especially on the Protestant side, so that there could be some hope of a solution acceptable to both communities in the North. What could emerge in the end, might well be different from the form of executive which had existed up to early last summer but this did not rule out the possibility of forming a power-sharing executive. There was no movement, so far as the British Government was concerned, on this basic principle.
16. Mr. Orme then went on to refer to developments in relation to the cease-fire - and in particular to the intervention of certain so-called intermediaries, one of whom he named, as causing a great deal of trouble. He emphasised that this

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man had no standing whatsoever with the British Government - and that he had attempted a further intervention last week. The Taoiseach confirmed that nobody except a Minister of the Government or an authorized official had any authority whatsoever to convey messages or to speak on behalf of the Government.

6th February 1975.

Copy to Mr. S. Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs.

Copy of extract dealing with special category prisoners to Mr. P. Colwell, Department of Justice.