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1. Mr. Callaghan 29.9.  
 2. Mr. Humley 29.9.  
 3. Blair To see Lib. We might issue advance to SDLP on mutual basis. Sean Donlon could tell you about G. Fitt's costs.

REPORT OF MEETING BETWEEN MINISTERS AND S. D. L. P. DELEGATION

*Relations with SDLP, under 12.9.76.*

1. The Taoiseach, accompanied by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Industry and Commerce, met a deputation from the S. D. L. P. in the Council Chamber, Government Buildings, at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, 22nd September, 1976. The members of the S. D. L. P. delegation were Messrs. G. Fitt, J. Hume, A. Currie, and P. Devlin. Officials present were Mr. P. Keating, Secretary and Mr. S. Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs and Messrs. D. Nally and W. Kirwan, Department of the Taoiseach.
  
2. The Taoiseach welcomed the S. D. L. P. delegation. He said that the Government here were concerned at the lack of progress on the political front in Northern Ireland. There were a number of possible reasons for this. It might be the result of a deliberate policy on the part of the British Government. Alternatively, it could be the result of the fairly recent change of Prime Minister and the change of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which, while it had taken place only recently, had been in the air for quite some time. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that he would be meeting the new Secretary of State, Mr. Roy Mason, in London on Friday, 24th September. The Government were anxious to have S. D. L. P. views on the situation in the North before that meeting.
  
3. Mr. Fitt said that since the last meeting between members of the Government and the S. D. L. P. many things had happened in Northern Ireland and many things had failed to happen there. He said that there was a very great deal of frustration among members of his party and of other parties in the North at the present time. This arose from the lack of political initiatives by the British Government. It seems that Mr. Enoch Powell was having some success in securing agreement to the policy he advocated of putting the question of devolved Government for Northern Ireland on the long finger. There was a grave danger that the British Government would wish to refrain from initiating any developments in Northern Ireland until the devolution question within the United Kingdom generally was settled. The British Government was in a situation where it could obtain only a small majority for its measures in the House of Commons. In this situation, they had an interest in securing that the 10 Unionists did not vote against them. His assessment was that Mr. Callaghan wished to remain in office as long as possible. It was necessary for the S. D. L. P. and the Irish Government to take account of Mr. Callaghan's likely readiness to neglect Northern Ireland.
  
4. Since the last meeting with the Government, the S. D. L. P. had been involved in the inter-party talks with the Official Unionist Party. It had emerged from the various developments that there was no solid Unionist approach - there had been a great deal of splintering among the Loyalists. This was so particularly in the Official Unionist Party where there were a number of people whom he felt were bitterly regretful about the lack of success in the inter-party talks. The S. D. L. P. now felt they had gone to the end of the road. They had bent over backwards to be reasonable <sup>but</sup> they had been met with a stone wall on the Loyalist side. It now seems that the Loyalists entertain hopes that they will be successful in having their own way. They now seem prepared to go on with indefinite direct rule coupled with an attempt to secure extra seats for Northern Ireland at Westminster rather than to have a further discussions with the S. D. L. P. on how a devolved Government could be constituted by agreement. This was completely unacceptable to the S. D. L. P. It meant that the Unionists were attempting to dictate to the British Government, to all the parties in the British Parliament and to the Irish Government. All these parties and the Council of Europe had agreed that the way forward for Northern Ireland was on the basis of the policies embraced by the S. D. L. P. and the Irish Government. If the British Government continued to adhere to this policy, they should be talking to the Unionists and telling them the realities of the situation. At the present time the S. D. L. P. did not know what British policy was. The tendency had been to throw the responsibility for government in Northern Ireland on to the parties and the people in



Northern Ireland. The S.D.L.P. were now seeking the support of the Government and of all the political parties in the South for their efforts to get the British Government to reaffirm their policy and to take necessary action. The S.D.L.P. were still holding together as a party but no one could predict how long this could continue in a situation of drift and political vacuum in Northern Ireland. The deputation had come to seek the support of the Government.

5. Mr. Hume again referred to the efforts the S.D.L.P. had made to secure agreement with the Official Unionists. He recalled that they had gone so far as to propose a review of the Governmental arrangements at the end of a second parliamentary term in order to give the necessary degree of assurance to the Loyalists. At the end of the series of discussions those involved on the Unionist side had agreed to recommend a meeting to their colleagues and indeed the 9th of September had been settled as the date for this meeting. Then, quite suddenly, had come the decision of the Official Unionist Party not to proceed further with the talks. This had left the S.D.L.P. hanging over a cliff, politically speaking. It was now clear to them that the avenue of seeking agreement with the Loyalists was barred or excluded. The S.D.L.P. had been faced with the necessity to re-appraise their policy and they had in fact carried out such a reappraisal. It had been clear that were they to persist in a policy which clearly had no chance of success that they would look very foolish indeed and might face very adverse electoral consequences with all that this implied for the elimination of the political process in Northern Ireland. They had been very conscious that all the other options open involved serious risks. However, they had decided that if they were to allow matters to drift along as at present where the only indication of British intentions was the hope that Unionists would see sense at some stage in the future, the final outcome could be most unsatisfactory. The outcome might be a form of total integration within the United Kingdom involving devolution arrangements on whatever basis was settled for Scotland and Wales or the accession to power of a new Conservative Government in Britain with the possibility that they would be prepared to restore majority rule in Northern Ireland. In the view of the S.D.L.P. either of these outcomes would be disastrous for their party and for the Dublin Government.
  
6. They had decided that the only course open to them to protect their interests and those of their electorate was to put pressure on the British Government who had all the responsibility for Northern Ireland but had been sitting on the fence and throwing the blame for the lack of political progress on to everybody else to exercise their responsibility. They felt that the time had come to bring about a change in this British attitude. In the S.D.L.P. view, the failure of the British to set out clearly their terms for Northern Ireland had been a prime cause of the failure of the Convention and of the inter-party talks. This was the background to the statement which was issued by the S.D.L.P. on 16th September. In this statement they had posed certain questions. They had called upon the British Government to explain the meaning of various things. They had asked what the British Government meant when they said that the Northern Ireland problem can only be solved by the people of Northern Ireland themselves. They had asked whether the guarantees to the Unionist population of membership of the United Kingdom were unconditional. In framing their questions, they had been concerned that increasingly the Provisional I.R.A. were coming to be seen as the core of the Irish problem. In the S.D.L.P. view, it was the Unionists who were at the heart of the problem. The Irish Government had taken strong security measures against the I.R.A. This indicated that we had a security role in relation to the Northern Ireland problem. It followed that the Irish Government also had a political role. The S.D.L.P. felt that the Government here would have greater strength in pressing the British Government than would the S.D.L.P. itself. In their view the British Government had not been meeting the Irish Government politically at all. The S.D.L.P. wished to know what were the views of the Government on the statement which they had issued.



The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that he wished to tease out certain aspects of the S.D.L.P. statement. It was necessary that the Government fully understand the statement before they could give their views on it. He enquired as to what range of possible responses from the British Government the S.D.L.P. envisaged. Mr. Hume said that the whole basis of their thinking was their view that to let the present situation drift continue would be disastrous for the S.D.L.P. He asked whether the Government agreed with this view.

7. Mr. Currie said he appreciated that it was necessary to assess all the implications of a policy and that it was difficult for the Government to give their reaction to the S.D.L.P. statement until they had teased out its meaning fully. On the other hand, he hoped the Government would appreciate their position where their options were running out. They had chosen a course with minimum risks. They were not the only people asking the British Government to clarify their present attitude. The statement issued by the Official Unionist Party at the conclusion of the inter-party talks had also referred to the adverse consequences flowing from the lack of clarity in relation to the British Government's attitude. The S.D.L.P. view was that if they allowed matters to drift, it would be suicidal for them. They were particularly concerned with the danger that the question of government for Northern Ireland would be lumped with the question of devolution generally within the United Kingdom. All present were aware of the argument that had been advanced by Enoch Powell that what was good enough for the rest of the United Kingdom should be good enough for Northern Ireland. When the devolution question in Britain was finally settled, there could be a strong lobby in favour of this attitude of Powell, that the governmental arrangements for Northern Ireland should be the same as those for Scotland - where there had been no mention of power-sharing in any regional government. Since everybody was commenting adversely in relation to British intentions, the S.D.L.P. had thought that this was the thing to home in on.
8. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that both the S.D.L.P. and the Irish Government had hitherto been working on the basis that if the British Government made it clear to the majority in Northern Ireland that devolved Government would only be conceded to the North if the arrangements settled provided for full participation in Government on the part of the minority, the Loyalists would eventually come around to accept that they could only secure a devolved Government for the North on this basis. Unfortunately, the strategy had not been working. One reason for this was that the British Government had avoided clarity of expression in their statements for some time past. A further reason was the hope that the Unionists entertained that a return to power of a Conservative government in Britain would bring them a return of majority rule in the North. The election of Margaret Thatcher as Leader of the Party and the appointment of Airey Neave as spokesman on Northern Ireland had boosted Unionist hopes in this respect. It was likely that the Unionists had concluded that the S.D.L.P. were less able to resist pressure for an early move towards devolved government in the North.
9. Mr. Devlin said that it was not fully true to say that the strategy which had been pursued had not worked. It had worked to some extent although it had not as yet culminated in success. However, the scope of political movement was now greater than it had been at any previous time in the North. The Official Unionist Party had established their right to hold separate talks with the S.D.L.P. At the present time, various bodies such as the trade unions and the official churches were lobbying intensively for the establishment of a partnership government. Within the Official Unionist Party there had been three groups. There was, firstly, a group which had always been ready to accept a settlement based on agreement with the S.D.L.P. There was secondly a group which had been coming around to acceptance of such a settlement. Finally, there was a small group of persons who had been directly involved in the writing of the Convention Report and who were



pretty well wedded to the terms of that Report. Mr. Harry West, the leader of the party, had made a statement at a crucial time that it would not be possible to fill all the offices in a Northern Ireland Government from among the ranks of the party because it had insufficient talent. This had led to a backlash from such people as John Laird and John Taylor and the backlash had taken the form of a breakdown of the inter-party talks. The prospects for agreement would have been greatly helped if Mr. Rees or Mr. Callaghan or both had clearly indicated their support for a broadly based administration and if the Unionists had not been receiving comfort from Mrs. Thatcher and from Messrs. Neave and Biggs-Davison.

10. The Taoiseach inquired as to whether what had in fact happened had been a recurrence of the consistent pattern of events in Northern Ireland since the time of Terence O'Neill i. e. that one experiences a certain amount of movement but that this movement stopped completely once the hard-liners cried "stop". Mr. Devlin said that this was so but again stressed that conditions in the North were now more favourable than at any time for the emergence of mass support for a partnership administration. The Minister for Industry and Commerce inquired whether his impression that the rug had been pulled very suddenly from under the inter-party talks was in fact correct. Mr. Hume said that the meeting with the Official Unionist Party to discuss the further progress of the talks was to take place on a Saturday. On the Friday night, Mr. West had made a statement already mentioned. This had been a significant factor in the decision of the Unionists not to proceed further with the talks. The Minister for Industry and Commerce said that he accepted this. However, he felt that there must be something deeper underlying this decision. This might well lie in the evolution of attitudes within the Tory Party in Britain. He inquired as to whether there was any evidence that somebody in this party had actually proposed a deal to the Unionists whereby they would promise support for the Conservatives in return for a promise of a restoration of the old Stormont. Mr. Fitt confirmed that British ambivalence was a powerful influence. When Mr. Wilson had been Prime Minister he had been pulling Mr. Harry West aside and whispering to him that certain things which had been said did not in fact mean what they seemed to mean. Mr. Fitt felt that there was little hope of an agreement at present between the SDLP and the Official Unionists because of the fact that both sides in the House of Commons were courting Unionist support and accordingly, adopting an ambivalent attitude.
11. Mr. Hume said that there had been a constant drift which was bringing them further and further away from power-sharing. The Irish Dimension had gone out of the window first. Following that, there had been the dropping of the term "power-sharing". The SDLP had not objected to the change in terminology so long as there was a commitment to the substance. However, they could <sup>not</sup> acquiesce in the continued drift away from power-sharing. The Minister for Industry and Commerce said that Mr. Heath, when Prime Minister, had been one of the most resolute of British figures in maintaining and expressing British policy. He represented a certain strand in the Tory Party, admittedly not a strand which was in the ascendant. If the British were to come round, it would be necessary to work on both parties there. The Minister posed the question as to whether it was possible to work on the Tories. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that if the Tories made it clear that they were adhering to stated British policy, it would make it less easy for the Labour Party to shift away from this policy. Mr. Currie said that Messrs. Neave and Biggs-Davison had identified themselves more closely with the Unionists than had any previous British politicians. The Taoiseach inquired as to whether this was a straight deal for the ten votes the Unionists commanded in the House of Commons. Mr. Currie said that Biggs-Davison made no bones on this score. Mr. Devlin said that some of those at the helm



in the Conservative Party were the type of people who had links with Rhodesia and the like. If one was dealing with Heath there might be some prospect of progress but at the present time one was dealing with a "Dark Ages" group.

12. The Minister for Foreign Affairs posed the question as to what tactics would be sufficiently powerful to deflect both British parties from courses of action and attitudes that eminently suited them at the present time. Both had very strong incentives to continue the equivocation which is undermining our policy on the North. Mr. Hume suggested that the objective should be to get a very clear statement from them as to their continued support for a partnership administration. If they were not prepared to give such a statement, he considered it unwise to co-operate with them in any area. The Minister for Foreign Affairs remarked that this was not a way to make the British change from their present positions. In practice, Messrs. Heath and Whitelaw who continued to have influence in the Tory Party would probably not tolerate implementation of a sell-out. However, the Unionists do not believe at the present time that these people would be in a position to stop adoption of such a policy by the Tories, if in government. The Minister again posed the question as to what weapons we had to persuade the British. Mr. Fitt said that the statement which had been issued by the S.D.L.P. reflected very faithfully the views of the party Executive and of the former Convention members. No words of his could adequately convey the depth of the frustration in the party at the present time. The minority population in Northern Ireland would not meekly accept a continuation of the present situation of drift and vacuum. Some members of the SDLP were beginning to think in Provo terms. It was no use waiting for another two years. By that time the SDLP would no longer be in existence. One could not expect men to continue to bear the burdens involved in a situation where there was no light at the end of the tunnel. Where were SDLP supporters to go if the party disintegrated? Some might go to the Alliance Party which was basically a unionist party. Others might turn to support the Provisional Sinn Féin and IRA and this was bound to lead, in the end, to an overflow of violence throughout the whole island. He remarked on how quickly Ruairí Ó Brádaigh had sought to exploit the SDLP statement.
13. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that he had not yet received any adequate reply to his request on a suggestion for appropriate tactics vis-a-vis the British. Mr. Hume said that the first thing was for the SDLP and the Irish Government to agree on what was happening and for both to go and see the British on the matter. The SDLP had already put their views before the new Secretary of State, Mr. Mason. They would also be putting their views before Mrs. Thatcher. An approach to the British by the Irish Government would have the effect of clearly disassociating the Irish Government from the politics of drift. The Minister for Foreign Affairs remarked that the suggested type of approach would be all right if it worked. Mr. Hume suggested that it was necessary to make an approach whether it worked or not. It would have the effect of making clear one's political position. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that this was all right up to a point but that if one went public, one might have started a drift towards an outcome which one regarded as very undesirable. Mr. Currie inquired as to the Government's view as to the extent to which their strong security policy would give added leverage on the British. The Minister said that it had the effect of putting the Irish Government in a strong moral position.
14. The Taoiseach said that as on a previous occasion, the result of the last General Election in Britain had not helped the situation. Mr. Fitt said there would probably be a further election in Britain next year. The Taoiseach said that it was very clear that the British Prime Minister had considerable problems in relation to devolution. The basic question remained how did you bring pressure on the British to change attitudes that suited them and how did you get them to adopt courses of action which both major parties there might consider likely to



jeopardise their prospects of forming a Government after the next election. On the 'Tories' attitude, Mr. Devlin said that while they gave some comfort to the Unionists, they were not in Government at the present time. His view was that it was better to concentrate attention on the present British Government. If they stiffened their attitude, this would act as a pole of attraction, given the assistance of the bi-partisan policy. In any case, his view was that the Conservatives would not be successful in the next election in Britain. Mr. Devlin referred to the very large British balance of payments deficit and to the continuing fall in the value of the pound. The British Government require as much good will as possible from other countries in the circumstances. The situation might assist us to put some pressure on the British through other people within the European Community. The Taoiseach said that the attitude of Irish voters in Britain would have some influence. Mr. Currie said that he fully recognised that it was absolutely vital for the British Labour Party successfully to resolve the devolution in question. The only lever he could see which the Irish Government possessed was the way in which it dealt with subversives. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that the action taken by the Government here against illegal organisations was dictated by domestic concerns and that any indication on our part that we were easing up in our pressure on these people might give the British a further excuse to get out of the North.

16. Mr. Fitt said that unless the British gave a clear indication of their support for a partnership administration there would be no SDLP after the elapse of some time. Recently a resolution suggesting that the party should call for a declaration of British intent to withdraw from Northern Ireland had gone to a vote in the a party and it was only the strong advocacy of the members of the deputation which had led to its being defeated. If such a resolution were adopted it would get into the press, with all that this implied. Mr. Hume wondered whether the British Government cared whether or not the SDLP survived as a party. The Taois ach commented that they did not care who survived so long as they (i.e. the British Government) survived. The Minister for Foreign Affairs again suggested that if the British wished to get out there were dangers in any action which might give them an avenue to do so. Mr. Currie felt that if they were proposing to get out, it would be as well to know it.
17. Mr. Hume said that the SDLP were very concerned about the extent of unemployment in the North. They thought that we could probably pressure the British Government to take the necessary action in this sphere. A start had been made on cross-border co-operation in the EEC-supported studies. However, this was only tinkering with the matter. The SDLP had developed proposals for joint industrial estates. It was not envisaged that these would actually straddle the border physically but rather that labour could be drawn from both sides of the border. They had identified three specific possibilities - the first was an estate on Lough Swilly, drawing labour from the Northern Ireland side of the border. The second project was joint promotion of Strabane and Lifford as an industrial centre. The third project was an industrial estate at Newry which would draw labour from the Republic side of the border. They felt that this approach would help to build up the Irish Dimension in a way which would not impinge on the political area. However, successful progress in this economic area could have political effects as a by-product. Their proposals would be facilitated by the fairly imminent expiry of the Safeguarding of Employment Act in Northern Ireland under the provisions of the EEC Accession Treaty. They wished to have consideration given to the proposals they had mentioned. Mr. Hume mentioned that the Northern Ireland area of the Confederation of British Industries had also put forward proposals for cross-border industrial cooperation. They had suggested that a petrol-chemical industry in the Republic might provide raw materials for other industries in the North. The Minister for Industry and Commerce said that further investigation of the possibilities in this area would be extremely valuable. A considerable amount of work had been done at the time

and pointed to the fact that the disappearance (or continuance) of the 10 Unionist members might be crucial to this.



of the Sunningdale talks but there had been little follow-up on this since. This area could now be re-opened. Mr. Devlin asked whether the Government would be prepared to provide facilities for discussions with competent persons here to a small delegation from the SDLP who had been dealing with economic matters. The Taoiseach and the Ministers indicated that the Government would be very happy to provide such facilities. The Taoiseach had to leave the meeting at this point.

18. In further discussion, the SDLP indicated that there had been considerable intensification of British Army harassment recently. They expressed their misgivings at the conjunction of Mr. Mason as Secretary of State, Sir Frank Cooper as Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defence and Sir David House as General Officer Commanding in Northern Ireland.
19. In bringing the meeting to a conclusion, the Minister for Foreign Affairs said that while his meeting with the Secretary of State on the following Friday would inevitably be in the nature of a preliminary reconnaissance of the ground, he would nevertheless put strongly to Mr. Mason the points which had been made by the SDLP. The Minister said that it would probably be necessary in the near future to go to a higher level with the British Government and also to have talks with the Tories and attempt to influence them, possibly through the agency of Messrs. Heath and Whitelaw. The Government would require some time, say, two months, to pursue diplomacy and he asked the SDLP to give them this much time before they (the SDLP) took any further action. The Government were quite clear that the situation could not be allowed to drift and the SDLP could be fully assured that the assessment they had put before the Government would be considered very carefully indeed.

24th September, 1976.



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IMMEDIATE FOR NEWS EDITORS

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THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT IS ISSUED BY THE GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE TAOISEACH

THE TAOISEACH, MR LIAM COSGRAVE T D, THIS AFTERNOON MET A DELEGATION FROM THE SDLP. THE TAOISEACH WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DR GARRETT FITZGERALD T D, AND THE MINISTER FOR INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE, MR JUSTIN KEATING T D. THE SDLP DELEGATION CONSISTED OF MESSRS GERRY FITT, JOHN HUME, AUSTIN CURRIE AND PADDY DEVLIN.

DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND SITUATION WERE REVIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF THE RECENT BREAKDOWN OF THE INTER-PARTY TALKS AND THERE WAS A FULL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON ALL MATTERS OF COMMON INTEREST. THE SDLP EXPLAINED IN DETAIL THE BACKGROUND TO THEIR RECENT POLICY STATEMENT.

THE QUESTION OF A JOINT APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF BORDER AREAS WAS ALSO DISCUSSED.

G I S 1900 HRS WED