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AND JUSTICE

MEETING BETWEEN MINISTERS FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, MR. REES.

Taoiseach

Re 3/1/576

At the meeting on 28th May the principal points made were -

- (1) Mr. Rees said that he intended to introduce legislation in the next month or so to continue -
 - (a) direct rule, for a year, and
 - (b) the emergency provisions^{Act}; and
- (2) there would be a day's debate at the end of June on Northern Ireland generally, possibly covering aspects, if not all, of these provisions. He said that over the past year the most important changes had, possibly, been the ending of detention, and of political status for prisoners sentenced after 1st March;
- (3) there was a committee of civil servants looking at the long term needs of security in the province. They had produced a preliminary report, the principal purport of which was that the primacy of the police should be emphasised. In the North at present there was the army and the Ulster Defence Regiment. These were assisted by the RUC and the RUC Reserve. The report made the point that on no account should the RUC or the Reserve become a para-military force; and on no account should they be allowed to return to the pre-1969 position. Mr. Rees was considering whether the report might not be made the basis of a White Paper on security in Northern Ireland;
- (4) Mr. Rees said that what had happened in Rolls Royce, the running down of the defence establishment, the problems in Harlands and the structural problems of Northern Ireland industry generally had created, for some, the impression of a British economic pull-out. He said that this just was not on. The IRA had spoken of a long hot summer. He foresaw ten long hot summers and many more long cold winters but they would not pull out of Northern Ireland unless the people there wanted them to;
- (5) Generally, there were no serious problems with direct rule as it now operated;
- (6) The Minister for Foreign Affairs inquired as to what was positive in the programme Mr. Rees had outlined. The Minister for Justice pointed to what could be grave legal difficulties in proving many offences, for which police re-organisation was being undertaken. Mr. Rees said that the offences against the State legislation operating here would not suit in Northern Ireland. He said that once they departed from the rule of law they would have lost the battle;
- (7) The Minister for Foreign Affairs raised the question of action against the threatened para-military action by the USC. Mr. Rees said that there was no desire for a political initiative at present. There was little desire even for a devolved administration now. Direct rule was accepted, perhaps even with relief. His strong advice was that nothing would happen as a result of the USC action. It would probably fizzle out. The Chief Constable, in whose jurisdiction the matter lay had issued a statement saying that anyone

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who breaks the law will be dealt with. The whole matter had been "over-mediaised." It must be played down. He had one proviso to all this - if more policemen or policewomen were killed there could well be trouble. The Minister for Foreign Affairs inquired as to the possibility of "D" notices. Mr. Rees ^{said} were just not on in the circumstances of Northern Ireland. They were intended to deal with things like the Polaris submarine and missiles. The Minister for Foreign Affairs emphasised the point that even if there were only a small amount of activity and if no-one were arrested, the effect could be disastrous. It could snowball. This might happen, particularly, in South Down, Armagh, Tyrone and perhaps South Derry. Mr. Rees said he appreciated this;

- (8) The Minister for Justice inquired as to whether the RUC and Prison Officers were standing up to the campaign. Mr. Rees said that their morale was high. In reply to a question as to the morale of the Provos, Mr. Rees said that he had been told that some months ago in Provo areas like the Divis Flats, all the windows had stickers asking for the release of persons in detention and generally indicating sympathy with the Provos. These had now all disappeared. His information was that Provo morale was at its lowest ever. Since the beginning of this year some 319 persons had been sentenced in the courts for ~~Terrorist~~ offences. The pike was going back into the thatch. The game had changed - there was now longer any confrontation in the streets. The one thing which could change this was an atmosphere of fear - which could develop if the USC thing were over-dramatised or mishandled. He was not sure as to who was running the Provos now - whether it was O'Connell or Twomey. Certainly much of their **old coherency** had gone;
- (9) In reply to queries by the Minister for Foreign Affairs as to whether this would not be the proper time to end the contacts with the Provos, Mr. Rees said that they had not been frequent in recent times. There was no question of negotiation. It was advantageous to them to get an idea of what the Provos were thinking. On this, the Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out that it was to their advantage to give misleading information. Mr. Rees referred to his reply in the Commons indicating that "if it was considered necessary, the contacts would happen again". The Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out that these contacts were the only real card the Provos now had, North or South. They gave ^{them} a standing ^{take} they would not otherwise possess. Mr. Rees said that they would very much into account what had been said at the meeting;
- (10) The Minister for Justice said [redacted] in reply to queries that their impression here was the same as that that had been given by Mr. Rees. The Provos appeared to be off-balance. There was no group in clear control. A hard core still existed in Belfast;
- (11) On the question of the Unionist/SDLP contacts, [redacted] raised by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Rees said that it would be counter-productive for him, or, as far as he knew, anyone else, to get involved in these talks as yet. In reply to a query as to whether if something happened quickly as a result of the discussion, Mr. Rees could move, on, say, security, or police control, Mr. Rees said that the answer was "yes";

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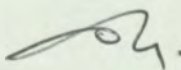
- (12) On general questions affecting security the following issues were discussed -
- (a) explosives;
 - (b) cross-border cooperation - on which Mr. Rees said there had been a great improvement;
 - (c) vehicle control, where it was indicated that a permanent vehicle check-point, which would exercise random checks, had been established on the southern side of the Dublin/Belfast road (while there was some doubt as to whether a similar check-point now existed on the Northern side of the Border);
 - (d) overflights - where certain British requests are to be looked at by Foreign Affairs in more detail;
 - (e) communications (where certain technical questions affecting telephonic and radio communications are being advanced as far as possible);
 - (f) railways security; and
 - (g) the procedures for the exchange of information;

There was general agreement on the need for a clear procedure where cross-border violations occurred. The nature of the border made these inevitable.;

- (13) The question of the delays at the *Aughnashilly* check-point was specifically raised and Mr. Rees undertook to look into it;
- (14) The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that last year three per cent of all terrorist incidents in Northern Ireland were on or near the Border. In the first three months of this year the figure was 1.5%. Having regard to these statistics, it seemed that the border was getting proportionate share of the publicity, in Northern Ireland and British newspapers. He asked that this be specifically adverted to by the British;
- (15) The Criminal Law Jurisdiction Bill was mentioned and arrangements suggested for procedures. ~~The British were asked that~~ It was mentioned to the British that it would be desirable to have witnesses come here rather than have evidence taken in Northern Ireland - unless there were some overriding consideration which made this undesirable;
- (16) The general question of contacts between Northern Ireland Departments and Departments here, at civil service level was raised and received sympathetically by Mr. Rees, who said he would do everything possible to encourage them;
- (17) The Minister for Foreign Affairs raised the question of whether a planning study could not be done of the North-eastern region - on the lines of that now beginning for the North-west. Mr. Rees received the suggestion sympathetically and said that it would be looked into.

A further, fuller note, on the discussions will be coming from Foreign Affairs.

The meeting was attended by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Justice, Messrs. Keating, Donlon and Swift from Foreign Affairs, Messrs. Donnelly, Colwell and (NAME WITHHOLDN), Department of Justice and by me.



31st May, 1976.