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Meeting with S.D.L.P. on 8th November, 1978.

Note:-

The Taoiseach, accompanied by the Minister for Tourism and Transport and the Minister for Economic Planning and Development met Messrs. Hume and Currie, by arrangement, in Leinster House on 8th November. Mr. Nally also attended the meeting.

The Taoiseach opened the meeting by welcoming the S.D.L.P. delegation. Mr. Hume said that their purpose in seeking the meeting was, generally, to acquaint the Taoiseach and the Government here with developments in Northern Ireland, as the S.D.L.P. saw them, and, in particular, with what had been happening over the past few months. About three to four weeks ago they had met the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and had been amazed by the line he had taken to the effect that neither the Irish nor the American Governments had anything to do with Northern Ireland, which was entirely an internal British matter. Mr. Hume said that he had countered this argument by saying that if this were so he would be suggesting to the Dublin Government that Portlaoise and Mountjoy be opened and that they could draw their security forces from the border. If they had no interest in Northern Ireland, this seemed a logical development. Mr. Mason had quickly changed his tune.

Mr. Hume then went on to say that Mr. Mason had suggested that it would be in the interests of the S.D.L.P. to be involved in discussions on the five point programme which Mr. Mason had put forward for political evolution in Northern Ireland, essentially on the argument that if these discussions were in progress when a general election occurred in the U.K., the S.D.L.P. could always say, if the Conservatives won, and tried to change the course of events, that the Conservatives had, in fact, been disruptive of progress in Northern Ireland. Mr. Hume said that this was an argument which they could not accept. There was no way in which they would accept the five point programme as it now stood. It did not and could not produce any form of acceptable government in Northern Ireland. Mr. Mason had then suggested that the S.D.L.P. put forward their own programme for discussion. Mr. Hume said that they had done this but that the response from the Unionists was, and was likely to continue to be negative. The S.D.L.P. saw proportional representation as a way forward in Northern Ireland. It would give the parties of the centre a stronger chance of representation there and would not polarise politics to quite the same extent as at present.

Continuing, Mr. Hume said that they had a second meeting of some relevance recently, with a group of Northern Ireland Civil Servants and with Messrs. Martyn Smith and Austin Ardell. At this meeting, Martyn Smith had put forward the interesting proposition that, in his view, the Unionists would be willing to consider participation in a form of Anglo-Irish council. This would be something established between the two Governments in which the Northern Ireland issue would be dealt with between them, as a foreign affairs matter. Mr. Hume said that he had not thought out fully the implications of this type of development.

The third matter to which Mr. Hume wished to refer was the Party

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Conference, at which there had been a wide degree of acceptance for the resolution calling for a declaration by the British of their intention to withdraw, when suitable arrangements had been made. There was some reference also during the discussion to the question of independence for Northern Ireland, which Mr. Hume said could be an utter disaster for the minority population since there was no way in which their rights could be guaranteed. Mr. Hume then went on to say that it had been resolved at the Party Conference that a formal approach should be made by the S.D.L.P. to the two sovereign Governments in Dublin and London so as to discuss with them the form in which future development might take place.

Mr. Currie said that they had approached the three parties in Westminster and were reasonably hopeful of early meetings there. He expressed some doubt as to the usefulness of proportional representation in Westminster elections in Northern Ireland since, in his view, this could lead to further integration with the United Kingdom. A possible development if proportional representation were introduced would be that the Tories or the Labour party would offer the Northern Ireland unionists and the S.D.L.P. party positions as junior Ministers in Westminster. In other words, attractive as proportional representation might be in some ways, it could be a further step towards integration. Mr. Hume expressed some agreement on this point.

Mr. Currie then went on to describe a recent meeting with Mr. Neave and Mr. Biggs Davison where, he said that in his experience British politicians had never come off so badly. They had come to the meeting fully expecting the S.D.L.P. delegation to turn down their position flatly. Instead, the delegation had asked questions which had revealed the complete emptiness of the approach which Neave and Davison had been adopting. They were, in fact, shaken by being brought face to face with the consequences of their proposals.

The Taoiseach reviewed, for the S.D.L.P., the meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Martin Smith, his discussions in Copenhagen with the British Prime Minister and the meeting in Dublin between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Mason, early last summer. He emphasised, in particular, the desire for economic cooperation and the necessity of getting rid of the negative guarantee which was blocking political progress in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Faulkner referred to a recent meeting which he had with Mr. Carter Environment Minister in the Northern administration. Mr. Faulkner's impression was that Mr. Carter was enjoying his life, as Minister, immensely. Mr. Currie agreed that British Ministers in Northern Ireland were enjoying their existence there. What he objected to most in Mr. Carter was the sort of support he was giving to the republican clubs who had produced the extraordinary doctrine that Stormont could be revived, so long as Northern Ireland was given a code of civil rights.

Mr. Hume then said that the entire purpose of British policy at present was to keep ^{the} Northern Ireland situation sweet. This might not necessarily suit Irish needs. It was essential that British

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public opinion be aroused. Perhaps a repetition of what the Taoiseach had said last January could achieve this effect. What was necessary was a sustained campaign, possibly in advance of the British General Election, to make Northern Ireland an issue to which the British public paid attention. He suggested a strong statement by the Taoiseach, action through the press, and at party conferences etc. with the ultimate aim of making Northern Ireland a live issue in the British General Election.

There was some further discussion at this point of independence for Northern Ireland - during which Mr. Hume said that there could be no question of power-sharing in a sovereign state. He said that it was important to put the Unionists in the position of saying what they wanted in Ireland. The obvious block to this was the British position, behind which the Unionists sheltered. So long as the British guarantees remained as at present the Unionists just would not budge.

The meeting then went on to discuss the situation in H Block. He said that there were two issues involved here. One was the quest of the Provisionals for political status. That was a matter entirely for themselves. The other was the humanitarian and other issues raised by the authorities' reaction to the campaign. He said that he had the feeling that the British were on weak ground in relation to the punishments they were administering in the H Block. If they were brought to Strasbourg on this issue we would all be in trouble. Would it be possible to have the Attorney look at this question. The H Block was the only thing going for the Provos at present. It was a very poor issue and it would be a pity if wrong reactions produced a favourable outcome for them.

The Taoiseach asked the S.D.L.P. their attitude to the forthcoming visit by Mr. Biaggi. Mr. Hume said that it was their intention that no elected representative in the North would meet him. His position would then be that no elected representative in the island would meet him during his visit.

Mr. Hume then went on to say that essentially what they were seeking was another Sunningdale. They would look to a meeting between both sovereign governments and representatives of Northern Ireland - for which suitable terms of reference could be hammered out in due course. What was important was to continue to hammer home that there could be no solution in Northern Ireland on the basis of policies which had been operated for the past 60 years.

Finally, the implications for Northern Ireland of the proposed European Monetary System were raised. Mr. Hume said that his gut reaction was that our approach should be favourable. It could mean final and total independence from the British. If we succeeded, on entry, and achieved stability, competitiveness, and victory over inflation, then the economic progress we made here would inevitably suck the North in. Mr. Currie said that if the system did not work well, the effect could be the opposite.

The meeting then concluded.

10th November, 1978.

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