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Speaker O'Neill's Meeting with Mrs. Thatcher

Speaker O'Neill and his party met Mr. Callaghan and Mrs. Thatcher on 12 April, the former for approximately two hours and the latter for a somewhat shorter period. It is understood that the Speaker took a very tough line with Callaghan on the Northern Ireland question, emphasising in particular the undesirable aspects of the recent legislation for extra Northern Ireland seats at Westminster. To the Speaker's point that there was little likelihood of any of the extra seats going to the Northern minority, various officials replied that they were confident that the minority's seats would increase from 2 to 4 or 5.

The delegation got the impression that Callaghan more or less accepted that there had been an understanding with the Unionists at Westminster and that he himself bore part of the responsibility for this "deal". The delegation noted the contrast between the outrage expressed by Ambassador Jay last summer at the suggestion that there was a deal and Callaghan's apparent acceptance of the idea. Callaghan apparently didn't dissent from the suggestion that the arrangements with the Unionists hadn't, in the event, been worth it.

Mrs. Thatcher's presentation to the delegation appears to have been somewhat superficial. She argued from the desirability of majority rule in Rhodesia to simple majority in Northern Ireland. She also repeated the point made by Pym on 9 April that if the present Conservative fact-finding team in Rhodesia were satisfied during its visit, then an in-coming Conservative government would recognise a new Rhodesian government.

The delegation did not apparently meet Mr. Mason. He had offered to meet them in Belfast but this was not taken up.

The recent Economist references to Speaker O'Neill and his colleagues were apparently very well received in the United States.

On the other hand, publication of the Bennett Report is said to have made life very difficult for the four because it appears to confirm Provisional propaganda in the United States.

Hugh Swift

Hugh Swift

18 April 1979

- c.c. Mr. Neligan
- Mr. Walshe
- Mr. O hUiginn
- PSS
- PSM
- D/Taoiseach ✓

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