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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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Visit by Speaker O'Neill

1. Speaker O'Neill, accompanied by his aide, Mr. O'Donnell, and the American Ambassador, called on the Taoiseach at 3.30 p.m. in Government Buildings on 19th April. The Taoiseach was accompanied by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Mr. Nally also attended the meeting.

2. The Taoiseach welcomed the Speaker and his party and reviewed the current economic and social scene in Ireland. He said that an essential problem was that, as things were developing, expectations were outrunning realities on the incomes front.

3. Speaker O'Neill reviewed the political scene in America and said, in particular, that his firm opinion was that Carter would run again for President and win. Senator Kennedy would not be a candidate. As far as he could see, Reagan could well be the President's principal opponent. He did not give much for his chances. Speaker O'Neill then enquired as to the most important problem facing Ireland, at present. The Taoiseach said that incomes and industrial disputes, including the Post Office strike were probably the most crucial. He said that from now on the Post Office strike could well start affecting tourism. The demands being made - 30% to 50% were exorbitant. An offer had been made and arbitration promised but this did not seem to be attractive to the strikers.

4. In industrial relations generally, a considerable problem was the relationship between British and Irish trade unions. There was some evidence to support the idea of a Communist element, particularly in Irish branches of British unions. They were there and just wanted to cause trouble. The Taoiseach mentioned some specific cases. There was some evidence that this type of influence had contributed to the Ferenka closure.

5. The Taoiseach then said that when the Government had returned to office in 1977 their objective had been to prime the pump so as to get industry and agriculture moving. Numbers in the public service, including the army, teachers, health authorities and in the construction industry had been increased. Youth employment had been given particular attention. Notwithstanding this, unemployment remained obstinately high at about 10% and inflation also was a serious problem. Oil, wages and food prices were now contributing.

6. The Speaker then said that when the Taoiseach met the Congressional delegation which was in the building at the time the normal practice would be that he should give a discourse on such matters and invite questions. The Speaker continued that insofar as America was concerned, there was a growing consciousness of the importance of culture. When a migrant

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arrived in America, the first generation stressed their American identity. The second generation was less positive. In the third generation there was a strong tendency to go back to the culture and morals of the country of origin. The Speaker's view was that, among the large and powerful Irish community in America, Northern Ireland would grow as a problem in American politics. Some 35% of the Democratic Party were Catholic - and a large number of them Irish. They were saying that if the President could bring about peace between Israel and Egypt, why could he not intervene, on his own doorstep and achieve a similar settlement in Northern Ireland.

7. It was because of this sort of interest that the Caucus had started. He had prevented hearings being held, for reasons which were well known. This policy could, however, run into difficulties from now on. He was particularly conscious of the necessity when the Taoiseach saw Carter later in the year that something positive should be done, and the opportunity could well arise because of the strong possibility of a new regime in the United Kingdom.

8. Mr. O'Donnell said that when the Speaker had visited Mr. Callaghan recently, he had accepted, openly, 50% of the blame for the Speaker's Conference which had led to the increase in the number of unionist members in Westminster. The Taoiseach said that the imminence of an election over the past year or so, in the U.K., had led to great uncertainty there as to policies on Northern Ireland. The campaign would be concerned, like election campaigns elsewhere, with bread and butter policies. Northern Ireland was not greatly noted in the British campaign. It had hardly been mentioned in the manifestos. Roy Mason's brief had been to keep the lid on. The Taoiseach then reviewed the history of the area, from the abolition of the old Stormont through the establishment of the powersharing executive, and the Northern Ireland Convention. He said that there seemed to be evidence of a unionist realisation that a return to unionist rule in the old Stormont sense would not produce stability; and that there must be some change. It was for the British Government to produce proposals for that change. Northern Ireland was costing the British Exchequer about £1 billion a year now. Even so, the area was not an election issue in the U.K. The solution must be through some positive encouragement by the British for the coming together of the Irish people. They must tell the unionist majority - and the minority there - that they would have to find some accommodation. As it was, British policy now was guaranteeing the continuance of the status quo, with all its uncertainties and instability. Unfortunately, the main issue, as some British saw it, was the violence and the killing of soldiers. The Minister for Foreign Affairs emphasised the impossibility of action in the shadow of an election and stressed that many British politicians saw the problem only in terms of security. The Speaker enquired as to whether there was any message that the power of the American Government should be

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brought to bear. The Taoiseach stressed that timing was essential or the whole issue could blow up in our faces. There were many interests involved, not all with clean hands. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that his understanding was that Mrs. Thatcher approached the whole issue on its similarities, as she saw them, with Rhodesia. She was arguing that the British were looking for majority rule there and could hardly refuse it in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach said that this was a subtle argument to counter publicly. The Minister for Foreign Affairs mentioned the degree of co-operation, in border areas, on some of the regional or economic projects there.

9. Mr. O'Donnell stressed that security and Rhodesia seemed to summarise Mrs. Thatcher's interest in the area.

10. There was some further discussion on the extent of terrorist involvement in Northern Ireland and in the island as a whole.

11. The meeting then adjourned - at 4.15 p.m., so that the Taoiseach could meet the Congressional delegation, headed by Speaker O'Neill. There is a separate note on this.

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26th April, 1979.