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RECORD OF A MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER, 1973, IN STORMONT CASTLE BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND AND MR BRIAN FAULKNER AT 7 00 PM

Present: The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MC MP

Mr F Cooper  
Mr D Trevelyan  
Mr M Reid

Mr Brian Faulkner

Mr Faulkner, who had just arrived from his Party's Council Meeting, said that it had been a tough battle. He had won, but only by a small margin. This showed how far he had pushed his people.

The Secretary of State gave a selective account of his talks earlier in the day with the Alliance Party and the SDLP. Both had quibbled on an overall Unionist majority, basing their arguments on the relative strengths of the parties in the Assembly. This had given rise to a new proposal for the SDLP and Alliance Party each to have two extra departmental posts outside the Executive, producing a Government of 15 and an Executive of 11 on the following lines:-

<u>Unionists</u>	<u>SDLP</u>	<u>Alliance</u>
6	4 (+ 2)	1 (+ 2)

The Secretary of State asked how Mr Faulkner would react to a solution on these lines.

Mr Faulkner said that if the other parties were each to have two extra ministerial posts outside the Executive he would have to ask for more too. Reflecting further, he said he saw no chance of getting away with anything on these lines, especially after his battle earlier in the day at his Council. He had gone to the limit. His people would see what was now being suggested as "fiddling". Mr Faulkner said he would have to have an overall majority (though later he put it differently by saying that he could not be in an overall minority within the administration).

Mr Faulkner said that if the essence of the problem was to satisfy the Alliance Party on jobs he thought this could be achieved by "switching". In discussion it was agreed that if in the end the Alliance Party could not be satisfied and withdrew, the position would go back to an Executive of 6 (Unionists) and 5 (SDLP).

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This would be bad in presentational terms but should be workable and would raise no difficulties at Westminster. But it was also agreed that the Alliance Party would have great difficulty in breaking on numbers.

The Secretary of State then gave Mr Faulkner a brief account of exchanges at the diplomatic level with the Government of the Republic in which the latter had pressed to be consulted before any agreement was announced. The Secretary of State made it clear that the decision was a British decision. The Secretary of State also told Mr Faulkner that the other parties were only concerned at having Dr Paisley at a preliminary conference on a Council of Ireland. On detentions, the Secretary of State told Mr Faulkner of progress made in discussions during Lord Carrington's visit. The Secretary of State said there could be no question of using his powers of Executive release in connection with the formation of an Executive, but a link was possible with Christmas. The Secretary of State could not be seen to be buying agreement for an Executive by releases of detainees: if so, there would just be pressure for more. A further point was that, if there were to be some releases, there would have to be some Protestant releases. On the Police, the Secretary of State said that the other parties accepted the RUC as the police force for Northern Ireland but the SDLP would want the Council of Ireland to have some part to play in policing.

Discussion then turned to a proposal that each of the three parties should have one Ministerial post outside the Executive in addition to the basic 6:4:1 allocation of seats in the Executive. Mr Faulkner said that this would look better, but it was agreed that this solution would be unlikely to succeed because it gave nothing extra to the SDLP. Something could however perhaps be made by the appointment of Parliamentary Secretaries. Mr Faulkner added that one of his problems was Mr Roy Bradford's desire for the post of Minister either of Finance or Commerce. Mr Faulkner also commented that the idea of a Ministerial co-ordinator for EEC affairs was merely a desire to produce a job: surely the Minister of Commerce would normally and naturally do this job.

The Secretary of State concluded by saying that he accepted that the proposal in 2 above was not possible for Mr Faulkner. There was some final discussion of the handling of the inter-party meeting on the following day. It was agreed that the paper to be circulated in advance should not specify any departmental share out.

The meeting ended at 7 20 pm.

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H M S REID