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Reference Code: 98/6/430

Title: Dáil questions addressed to the Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, regarding his visit to Belfast to meet with Prime Minister O'Neill.

Creation Date(s): 10 February, 1965

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 3 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Access Conditions: Open

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Questions Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4.

DÁIL QUESTIONS addressed to the Taoiseach for
answer on Wednesday, 10th February, 1965.

QUESTION NO. 1.

To ask the Taoiseach if he will make a full statement to the House regarding his recent visit to Belfast and the subjects which were discussed by him and the Northern Ireland Premier.
- Brendan Corish.

QUESTION NO. 2.

To ask the Taoiseach if he will indicate to the Dáil the matters discussed between him and Captain O'Neill at his recent meeting in Stormont.

- Liam Cosgrave.

QUESTION NO. 3.

To ask the Taoiseach if he will make a statement to the Dáil on his meeting with Captain O'Neill and on events subsequent to this meeting; and if he will deal in particular with the suggestion that his visit to Belfast involved recognition of the constitutional status of the Northern Ireland Government.

- Seán Brady

QUESTION NO. 4.

To ask the Taoiseach if in his recent discussion with Mr. O'Neill at Stormont he sought any assurance that equal voting rights and equal opportunities in employment, housing and education will be afforded the nationally-minded people in the Six Counties; and, if not, if he intends to raise these matters in future discussions to be held with Mr. O'Neill.

- Joseph Barron.

R E P L Y:

I propose, with your permission, Sir, to take Questions Nos. 1 to 4 together.

As the House is aware I have on many occasions urged the desirability, in the national interest, of achieving, between the two areas into which Ireland is now divided, the maximum possible measure of co-operation in practical matters of public concern, and expressed the conviction that this was possible without sacrifice of principle.

I accepted Captain O'Neill's invitation with the intention of exploring this possibility. I found that he also was of the opinion that action such as I had in mind would be practicable and beneficial. Our discussions were confined to

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this subject, and nopolitical or constitutional topics were touched upon either at our meeting in Belfast, or at the meeting yesterday in Dublin. We have agreed that the scope for practical cooperation is extensive and should be further examined. As the House is aware, arrangements for this examination in respect of matters of trade and tourism were later considered between the Ministers concerned, and further discussions at specialist and official levels are now being arranged.

I have urged that these meetings should not be given a greater significance than they warrant. Nevertheless I regard them as the beginning of a process which has considerable potentialities for good.

As regards the suggestion that my visit to Belfast involved recognition of the present constitutional status of the Northern Ireland Government, if by recognition is meant approval, I did not regard it as implying this, nor should it be so considered. I have just mentioned my conviction that practical co-operation could take place without sacrifice of principle, and it was in this spirit that my meetings with Captain O'Neill took place. In this connection I should remind the House that, on a number of previous occasions, members of the Government have visited Belfast in the course of negotiating agreements with Northern Ireland Ministers relating to Transport, Foyle Fisheries, and other matters.

For my own part, I would regard as an honourable solution of this national problem, an arrangement on the lines of the proposal put forward on behalf of Dáil Éireann prior to the Treaty negotiations of 1921 and repeated on many occasions since, involving, subject to safeguards, the confirmation of the position of the Northern Ireland legislature with its existing powers within an all-Ireland constitution, for so long as the people of the north-eastern counties might desire it.

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I have no **hesitation** in restating our purpose in this regard honestly and frankly, nor do I consider that it can prejudice or restrict the scope for practical co-operation as now envisaged for the benefit of the people living in both areas.