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Reference Code: 2001/8/3

Title: Letter from Seán G. Ronan, Assistant Secretary, Department of External Affairs, addressed to Dr. Nicholas S. Ó Nualláin, Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach, enclosing a copy memorandum of a conversation between Ian Mikardo, M.P., and Fintan M. Tallon, Irish Efficiency Centre, concerning a visit by a British Labour Party Executive Committee delegation to James Callaghan, M.P., British Home Secretary, to discuss issues relating to Northern Ireland, such as political and electoral reforms

Creation Date(s): 25 Aug 1969-1 Sep 1969

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 5 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Access Conditions: Open

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2001/8/5 (1)



ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Taoiseach $\frac{1}{7}$
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BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2
DUBLIN 2

SECRET

/ Meán Fomhair 1969

Dear Dr. Ó Nualláin

I enclose, for confidential information, a copy of a Memo of discussion with Mr. Ian Mikardo M.P. on Monday 25th August on the North of Ireland question, which came into my hands privately.

Yours sincerely

Seán G. Rowan

Assistant Secretary

An Dr. N.S. Ó Nualláin
Rúnaí
Roinn an Taoisigh
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH

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*of Fintan M. Tallon,
Irish Efficiency Centre,
10 Merrion Sq., Dublin.*

MEMO OF DISCUSSION WITH IAN MIKARDO ESQ MP ON MONDAY 25th Aug 1969

RE NORTH OF IRELAND QUESTION

Mr Mikardo was a member of the Labour Party Executive Committee Delegation to the Home Secretary, Mr Callaghan, concerning North of Ireland and in fact was appointed by the Home Secretary to lead the Labour Party investigation team before Mr Callaghan's own visit to the North. Unfortunately, because Mr Mikardo had to undergo surgery he was unable to make the trip. Mr Mikardo informed me that he found Mr Callaghan was very forthcoming with the Executive Delegation. He stated that he and his Cabinet colleagues had no doubt whatsoever but that the majority of the accusations made by the leaders of the Minority Group in the North and especially by the Church leaders were well founded in fact. The Labour Government, too, doubted very much the sincerity of the Unionist Government or Party in the North on the matter of any major reforms. In this respect he indicated that the downfall of Capt T O'Neill had come very shortly after he had reported to his Cabinet colleagues on discussions held in London with the British Government. At those discussions the British Government had informed Capt O'Neill that all the basic reforms sought must be granted without delay and that in relation to Local Government franchise the Government in Westminster must be completely satisfied that boundaries were drawn on a totally impartial basis. It was indicated that if the Northern Government proposed any basis which was open to criticism on the grounds of partiality or on the grounds of preservation of privilege, it would be rejected by the Westminster Government. It was also pointed out to Capt O'Neill at that time that it was the view of the legal advisers to the Home Office that very little amending legislation was needed to introduce reforms since existing legislation in their opinion gave ample power to the Northern Government by Ministerial decree to introduce many of the reforms sought without any Parliamentary approval or at best by merely laying the matter before Parliament in the normal way.

Mr O'Callaghan intimated to the Labour Executive Delegation that it was his opinion that the Northern Government had used the alleged need for legislation as a delaying tactic and in fact had told Westminster that their advisers did not agree with the Home Office's legal advisers. Mr O'Callaghan had formed a firm impression that Capt O'Neill was convinced that the survival of Northern Ireland Parliament depended on immediate reform and was unwilling to be party to delay in this regard, but that he was overruled

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by dissenting voices within his own Cabinet and within his own Party.

The Home Secretary also informed the Delegation in reply to searching questions that the British Government were only too aware that the Unionist Party was not a political party in the accepted sense of the word in Britain or in Southern Ireland but in fact appeared to be little more than the political arm of the Orange Order and very subject to the Orange Order.

Mr O'Callaghan also informed the Delegation that in his personal view the Irish Government would not immediately want the ending of Partition and the creation of their own "Bog Side". But he felt that the Irish Government like the British Government believed that Partition would be an anomaly within a very short period once Britain and Ireland became members of the Common Market. In this respect he mentioned that it was his view (Mr O'Callaghan's view) and the view of many of his colleagues in the Cabinet that there was nothing sacrosanct about the existing Border and if the Unionist and/or Protestant minority in the North felt that they had the right to vote in favour of remaining within the United Kingdom it was true to argue that there was a similar right for the majority say in Derry and elsewhere, where a geographical unit existed to vote to opt out of Northern Ireland and into the Republic. He personally felt however that this might not be wise in the ultimate since if the minority in the North were given equal rights in respect of housing and jobs that same minority in a relatively short space of time might no longer be a minority and the number of diehards could be proportionately lower. However, he did make it clear that existing Border was negotiable if a substantial volume of opinion in any area wished to opt out. He did feel it unlikely that the Irish Government would wish to consider negotiations on that matter at the present or in the immediate future.

On the broader issues he expressed himself rather strongly in relation to the Police Forces in the North of Ireland and guaranteed the Delegation that the British Army would not be withdrawn until the complete reorganisation of the Police Force had taken place and until what was seen to be and accepted as a totally impartial Police Force established.

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He expressed the fear that what they were demanding of the Unionist Government could very well prove a breaking point, but if it did then Westminster could deal with any UDI type tendency by simply refusing to channel its subvention through the Stormont Regime. He agreed with the Delegation on the total illogicality of the Unionist Party claiming they want British citizenship and rejecting direct rule from Westminster. However he emphasised strongly to the Delegation that it was the British Government's view that change and drastic change was needed in the North, but before Westminster Government or Parliament could move it would be best for them to have the advantage of an impartial Tribunal Report and this was the purpose of the Hunt Commission. He anticipated that the Hunt Commission Report would be a strong indictment of the Unionist Party but that existence of such an impartial report placed before Westminster Parliament would give the Government of Westminster an opportunity of moving on proven facts and give the Unionist Government of the North or the Tory Party in Britain no grounds for attacking any action they might take as a result of an impartial Commission Report.

The Labour Executive Delegation came away from the meeting completely satisfied that the Home Secretary and his colleagues had no illusions about the situation but were willing to let the Unionist Government in the North have the stage insofar as public announcements were concerned, until the Hunt Commission Report was available. They also formed the view that the British Government felt that very many of the Unionist Government statements at this point of time were largely statements to goad the Labour Government in England into premature action before the Hunt Commission findings were available. It was a trap they were unwilling to fall into.

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FMT mentioned to Ian Mikardo that it was possible that some of the refugees in the Refugee Camps in the Republic who have been driven out of the North by fear might have useful further evidence to give to the Hunt Commission and that this evidence might not be available because they were outside the jurisdiction. Mr Mikardo indicated that he would raise this point with the Home Secretary and felt that the Home Secretary would be disposed to either officially or unofficially contact the Irish Government with the view to seeing how best the evidence of these people could be obtained by the Hunt Commission

* Fintan M. Tallon

Mr Mikardo also stated to me that most of the Cabinet in Britain knew full well that the United Nations approach was the only course open to the Irish Government if they were to avoid very real pressure in the Republic for action. In fact the Politicians in the Labour Party were not against that approach at all but the Foreign Office were afraid that if they did not oppose the approach there was a very real danger that if Scottish Nationalists or Welsh Nationalists became a major force at any time in the future, they would have created a precedent for these matters to be brought before the United Nations, and it was this line of argument that prevailed.