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Title:	Copy letter from Donal O'Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain, to HJ McCann, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, reporting a meeting with James Callaghan MP, mainly on administrative reform in Northern Ireland, and on proposals to establish a Northern Ireland branch of the Labour Party.
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*Situation in 6 Cos.**Read from P. Kennedy to C.S.
ref. Affairs
25.10.70**Taoiseach**29 10 70**3.11.70
Rufus*

17 Grosvenor Place

S W 1

Confidential

October 22nd 1970

Secretary
Department of External Affairs

I had Mr. James Callaghan, M.P., for lunch yesterday and we talked for the best part of three hours. While our conversation ranged over a wide field, most of it was naturally devoted to the North. I shall be reporting separately on some of the other matters which came up.

Mr. Callaghan showed a particular interest in knowing how we are getting on with the Tory Government and particularly whether the discussions on the North arranged during the period of the previous Government are being continued to our satisfaction. I told him that we are quite happy with the course of events and mentioned the frankness shown at the Ministerial meetings which have taken place so far as well as the close and friendly atmosphere at official level. He said we would find Mr. Heath cold and difficult to know. At the same time, it should be conceded that Heath is a fair-minded and decisive person but he doubted if some of his senior colleagues would share his view on this.

Mr. Maudling, with whom Mr. Callaghan claims to be in close and regular consultation, seems determined to continue Labour policy. He regards Mr. Rippon as a different kettle of fish from George Thomson. He described Mr. Rippon as "a rough type" who is one of the least popular of the Tory front benchers. I said that I had, in my limited contacts with Mr. Rippon so far, found him very pleasant and anxious to be helpful. Mr. Callaghan remarked that he hoped that this would continue to be our experience of Mr. Rippon.

Housing Executive Bill

At this stage, Mr. Callaghan enquired as to how we now felt about the situation in the North and this gave me the opportunity to express to him in detail our views on the two major reforms yet to be introduced, namely, housing and local government. I stressed the paramount importance of effective and speedy implementation of the reforms and emphasised that the Taoiseach's acceptance of British guarantees in relation to them must surely be a revolutionary development. There have been the most firm undertakings on the British side in relation to these reforms and their proper and effective implementation is surely a matter affecting Britain's reputation in the world. I then dealt in considerable detail with the Housing Executive Bill on the lines of the case we made at the recent meeting at official level in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I made it clear to him that the British themselves do not seem to be happy about the Bill as it stands at present. In our view, it fails seriously to respond to the undertaking contained in the Downing Street communique. He was not aware that the Bill was to be given a second reading yesterday and said that, because of preoccupation with Party matters, he had not in fact yet seen the text. He would, on his return to his office, arrange immediately to obtain a copy and would certainly take a strong line if his view on the contents of the Bill happened to coincide with ours.

Mr. Callaghan went on to say that our discussion was most opportune as he had just accepted an invitation from "Jimmy" (Major Chichester Clark) to meet him for a tete-a-tete over lunch on the 2nd November. Mr. Callaghan said it would be most useful to him if I could give him

in advance of that meeting some notes setting out our views on the weaknesses which we saw in the Bill. I then handed to him, for strictly confidential use, a copy of the document prepared by Mr. Kiernan of the Department of Local Government. Mr. Callaghan said he would study the document closely and that I could feel assured that he would treat it with the strictest confidence. The reform programme, he said, was initiated by the Labour Government and I need have no doubts that he personally, and the Labour Party generally, will do everything possible to see that the programme is implemented.

Local Government Reform

We then passed to the subject of local government reform and again I ~~conveyed~~^{covered} the position in detail on the lines of the case we made at the recent meeting in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He took copious notes of all my comments, which I had fully rehearsed before seeing him. Curiously enough, he did not seem to think that the commitment on local government reform was as firm as that in other fields. When I recalled sources to support my view that a firm commitment had^d been entered into, he said he was prepared to accept what I had said but would, on his return to the office, refresh his mind from the relevant documents. He mentioned that the legislation on local government reform is likely to strip the local authorities of most of their more important existing functions. I said that, whether or not this was to happen, it was clearly essential that full equality of treatment, as already guaranteed, should apply. He said I could take it that he was fully with me on this. He will, on the

basis of what I told him and after further study, go over the matter in detail with Major Chichester Clark on the 2nd November and will also take an early opportunity of discussing the matter with his colleagues.

Proportional Representation

I brought up the question of Proportional Representation and again followed the line in the official brief. I recalled to Mr. Callaghan the interesting comment on P.R. made in the Macrory Report. He listened attentively but left me with the impression that he is not an enthusiast for a change in this direction.

Administration of the North from London

Mr. Callaghan paid warm tribute to Major Chichester Clark who he very much hopes can continue in office. It is, he said, important to the situation that we should avoid doing or saying anything which would weaken Major Chichester Clark's position. He described the line which the Taoiseach has been taking as "admirable".

Mr. Callaghan went on to say that, at the time of his leaving office, he personally still had strong reservations about the advisability of a take-over by London in almost any circumstances. He has, however, changed his mind somewhat in the meantime but still feels that, if Chichester Clark were to fall, the administration in the North should be given a last chance under a new leader. This is a matter which he has discussed many times in recent months with "Reggie". His latest advice to Mr. Maudling was that, if Chichester Clark should fall, the administration should get one other chance even if the leader were to be Craig. He told Mr. Maudling that, in the "admittedly unlikely event" of Craig coming to

the top he (Craig) should be summoned to London within forty-eight hours of his appointment and given the most precise instructions to carry on the policy of his predecessor. I said that his readiness to give even Craig a chance greatly surprised me. Did he think that Craig, or indeed most of the others for that matter, would toe the line? Would he be prepared to countenance an almost certain bloodbath in the initial forty-eight hours not to mention what would follow later? He admitted that his advice surprised Mr. Maudling too but he did, however, think that Faulkner would be worth a trial. I told him that we would not regard Faulkner as acceptable nor would he be acceptable to the Minority in the North. He was no doubt aware, I said, that Faulkner is now in the unhappy position of not being trusted either by the Moderate or the Right Wing Unionists. He wondered whether this was not a rather harsh judgement on Mr. Faulkner whom he described as a most able politician.

General

Mr. Callaghan then went on to say that it may come as news to me to learn that he is at heart strongly in favour of the unification of Ireland. The present division is unnatural and the constitutional problem will certainly have to be resolved but the approach must be a gradual one. I intervened to stress that the earliest possible implementation of genuine reforms must be a sine qua non of peace in the North and of any worthwhile approach to the solving of the constitutional issue. He said he could not agree more. I went on to say that given the part played by the Labour Government in forcing a reform programme on the North, there is considerable expectation

in Ireland and, to my certain knowledge among the Irish in this country also, that the Labour Party in opposition will throw its full weight behind reform. He said that he is chairman of a committee concerned with the formulation of Labour policy for the next four years. The Party's attitude on the North will figure prominently in that policy. If a suitable overall policy can be developed, he saw no reason why the Labour Party should not get back into Government in the next election. In this context, apart altogether from genuine feelings, the significance of the Irish vote can certainly not be ignored.

Proposed Establishment in the North of a Branch of the Labour Party

At that stage, Mr. Callaghan said he wanted to tell me of the efforts he is making to set up in the North a regional branch of the Labour Party. He has been working very hard on this matter in recent months and is hopeful of getting approval for the idea fairly soon. Under the arrangement he has in mind, the headquarters of the regional branch would be in Belfast and agents would be appointed in all the constituencies. He stressed that he is not at all motivated by any consideration of getting more Labour seats in Westminster. His plan would, in fact, be geared essentially to the building-up of a genuine Labour opposition in Stormont. I recalled that he had already mentioned this matter to me when I called on him in the Home Office in March last. My understanding then was that his plan was related to Westminster seats and he told me that he has changed his mind on this in the meantime. I recalled the misgivings I expressed

to him off the cuff at our earlier meeting and said I could now give him a more official view as to what our attitude would be. We would, in fact, view such a development with disfavour. It would mean a more positive recognition by the Labour Party of the continuing division of my country. He said he would greatly regret it if we were to take this stand officially. He, and many of his colleagues in the Party, are convinced that only through a sustained and systematic operation aimed at workers and small farmers in the North will it be possible to build up an effective opposition to the Unionist Party. He would envisage having Labour candidates in all constituencies in the next general election in the North and he hoped that we would see our way to fall in with the plan he has in mind which would be introduced as an experiment confined to a ten year period. With the type of organisation which the Labour Party would set up in the North there would be no danger of infiltration by undesirable elements. The policy of the Northern branch would certainly have to be that unification of Ireland could come only when the majority of the population in the North favoured this change. I remarked that the development he has in mind could do serious damage to the new opposition party in Stormont and we would regard this as unfortunate. He brushed this comment aside by saying that the new party has no future. It will disintegrate quickly because it has no genuine basis of cohesion. I said that, with a strong reaction at home to such a development, the standing of the Labour Party in this country with the Irish voter might be seriously damaged. He said he doubted if this was likely even though people like Maurice Foley would share my view.

Possible early visit to Ireland

Mr. Callaghan had mentioned to me when I phoned inviting him to lunch that he is anxious to go to Ireland shortly visiting Belfast and Dublin in that order. Immediately following that telephone conversation, I consulted Mr. Eamonn Gallagher as to what our view would be ^{on} ~~to~~ such a visit. Mr. Gallagher told me that it would be preferable from our point of view if Mr. Callaghan were not to take the two capitals in the order suggested. Because of this, I took the line that, while he could be sure of a most warm welcome in Dublin, it might be a little embarrassing for us if he were to take Dublin in after a visit to Belfast. He said he would be prepared for appearances sake to go to Belfast and then spend some days on a short holiday in the West of Ireland after which he would drop in on Dublin on his ^{way} ~~return~~ home. As I failed to show enthusiasm for this idea, he asked me bluntly if there would be any possibility of an early official invitation to him to go to Dublin. If such an invitation were forthcoming, he could clear it with Major Chichester Clark on the 2nd November and would then have no difficulty about going to Dublin first. He said he is most anxious to have a detailed talk with the Taoiseach and with other Ministers as well. I asked him what timing he had in mind for such a visit and he said he could go over in late November or early December. As he is such a smooth operator, it could be that a main purpose of the suggested visit would be to try and kill any possible objection by us to the proposal to establish a regional branch of the Labour Party in the

North. All I could do was to promise to put his suggestion to my authorities and to get in touch with him again before the 2nd November.

BONAL O'SULLIVAN

Ambassador