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ConfidentialMinutes of Fourth Meeting held on 10th September, 1970
at the Department of External AffairsPresent

Mr. S.G. Ronan, Chairman	Department of External Affairs
Mr. E. Gallagher	Department of External Affairs
Mr. D. Ó Súilleabháin	Department of the Taoiseach
Mr. J. Whitty	Department of Finance
Mr. R. McDonagh	Department of External Affairs
Mr. F. O'Riordan	Department of External Affairs
Mr. J. Small, Secretary	Department of External Affairs

Recent Developments

As on previous occasions the meeting commenced with a briefing by Mr. Gallagher on the main developments connected with the North since the previous meeting of the Unit on 6th August. Mr. Gallagher adverted to the increasing right-wing pressure on Major Chichester-Clark and his Government, adding that the crunch was likely to come shortly when the two major reforms, housing and local government, came up for enactment. He saw a great need to ensure that the quality of reform did not suffer and in this connection mentioned that from a cursory examination of the Housing Executive Bill there were real grounds for concern. The Executive as proposed in the Bill would have very little real independence and power and would be under the thumb of Mr. Faulkner's Ministry of Development. We might have to take up the matter with the British to ensure that there is no back-peddalling on or watering down of reforms.

The Chairman referred to the growing pressure from right-wing Unionists and Paisleyites to re-arm the police in the North and Mr. Gallagher said that there was a strong rumour that Sir Arthur Young, the head of the RUC, would not last much longer. In this connection he said that if the rumour were true it would be our hope that he should be replaced by a British police chief.

Mr. Ó Súilleabháin enquired whether the spiking of certain roads near the border by the British army was a direct result of the recent killing of two RUC men by a booby-trap explosion as a recent issue of "Survey of British & Commonwealth Affairs" seems to imply. The Chairman replied that the timing seemed to suggest that that was so, adding that about thirty roads had been spiked immediately after the incident. He informed the meeting that the Department of External Affairs had called in the British Chargé d'Affaires a.i. and pointed out that the spiking of the roads appeared to us to be an over-reaction which would cause great inconvenience and hardship on both sides of the border, and pointed the finger at the South. This coupled with the publicity of IRA connections with bomb explosions in Britain at that time which turned out to be untrue tended to convey a misleading impression. The British position was that the spiking was necessary for security reasons.

Studies

(a) Response to circulars: The Chairman informed the meeting that three replies (C.S.O., Defence and Gaeltacht) had been received to the Unit's circular of 24th July to all Government Departments about the extent, nature and usefulness of current contacts between Departments here and Ministries in the North and sub-ordinate bodies of both. It was decided that the information contained in the replies received should be summarised and placed before the next meeting of the Unit. The Chairman recalled that 1st November had been set as the deadline for replies to the Unit's letter of 12th August to eight Government Departments requesting comparative North/South studies. Mr. Whitty stated that, as regards his Department,

-2-

an internal meeting had been held on 18th August to organise the studies allotted to the Department of Finance. At his request a list of publications dealing with the North of Ireland would be prepared by the Department of External Affairs.

(b) Status of county incomes study: Mr. Whitty informed the meeting that his Department had not succeeded since the previous meeting in getting further information from the ESRI on the status of the current study on county incomes in respect of the Six Counties being conducted by Messrs Cuthbert and Black of QUB. It was decided that the Chairman should have a discussion with Professor Fogarty of ESRI on this point. It was felt that such a meeting with Professor Fogarty would be useful in any event as he might have ideas and suggestions to offer that would be of assistance to the Unit.

(c) Method of Changing Constitution in other countries: Mr. Gallagher distributed a paper prepared by the Legal Adviser to the Department of External Affairs explaining the methods of changing the constitutions in certain countries. It was decided that the document should be studied for the next meeting.

(d) Constitutional and legal safeguards for minorities in other countries: The Chairman announced that arising out of a decision taken at the previous meeting, the Embassy in Brussels was requested to furnish documentation relating to constitutional and legal safeguards in Belgium catering for the main cultural communities. Some material had already been received and more was to follow. He had also written to the Embassy in Ottawa because of biculturalism in Canada. It was decided to discuss the matter further when all the material requested had been received.

(e) Circular to all Departments to promote greater consciousness of Northern feelings: In accordance with a decision taken at the Unit's previous meeting, a draft circular prepared by the Department of External Affairs was circulated at the meeting dealing with the desirability of promoting in the public service here a greater consciousness of the North and of the fears of Unionists when policies were being formulated and implemented by Government Departments. It was agreed that the members of the Unit should study the draft and convey in writing to the Secretary of the Unit any amendments they might wish to suggest.

Information Activity

(a) Recent Developments: Mr. O'Riordan briefed the meeting on recent activities. It had been decided to invite a number of top journalists to Ireland, in some cases with their families, as the summer vacation presented a favourable opportunity. Such invitations were normal practice from other countries. The Ulster Office in London was also very active in this way. One of our difficulties was the lack of knowledge of Ireland among journalists dealing with the North. The idea was to let them see things for themselves. Briefing was given in Dublin at official and ministerial level; in the case of the most important ones a request was made to the Taoiseach for an interview. The Taoiseach had agreed to see a number of top people, who had been very impressed. These journalists were on friendly terms with British and Northern political personalities. The results had shown much greater understanding of our position. Special attention had been paid to conservative journals, who had been rather neglected in the past. Arrangements were being made with the "Spectator" for a special issue based on an interview with the Taoiseach as centre story. The Chairman mentioned that he became aware some days previously that the editors of the Belfast "News Letter" and "Belfast Telegraph" were being conducted around the CIE hotels as guests of CIE. It was not possible to arrange interviews for them with the Taoiseach as requested by the Public Relations Officer of CIE.

-3-

(b) Extension of RTE reception to the North: The Chairman referred to the decision taken at the previous meeting to enquire of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs whether they had, or contemplated, any feasibility study on the extension of RTE reception to the North. He said he wrote to that Department on 25th August in that connection and had received a very fine feasibility study that had been completed some weeks previously and which would require careful examination by the Unit. Mr. Gallagher gave a brief summary of its contents and expressed the view that the Unit should, at that stage, support the principle of the extension of RTE radio and television reception to the North. Because of international agreements there were certain political problems involved which would have to be removed in discussion with the British but it was anticipated that by taking the matter up at the highest level these could be overcome.

In view of the importance of getting through by radio and television to the Unionists there was agreement on the principle of extension of RTE reception. Mr. Ó Súilleabháin said he would like to study the feasibility report. The Chairman mentioned that the Department of Posts and Telegraphs would have to submit a memorandum to the Government on the subject in due course. It was agreed that the Chairman should avail himself of an offer by the Secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs to discuss the contents of the feasibility report.

Unit's relations with the Public

(a) Correspondence: The Chairman informed the meeting about a letter addressed to the Unit by the Dublin Chamber of Commerce advising that the Chambers of Commerce in Dublin, Dundalk, Newry and Belfast have a joint committee working for the past five years on the question of outlets for possible North/South cooperation. That letter had been acknowledged with an intimation that the information it contained would be placed before the Unit at its next meeting. A discussion then followed as to whether the Dublin Chamber of Commerce should be requested for further particulars about the activities and findings of the joint committee. The Chairman felt that caution was called for because of the involvement of certain politically motivated personalities with the Dublin Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Gallagher mentioned that one danger in pursuing the matter further was the embarrassing possibility of members of the Unit being invited to attend a meeting of the joint committee, the Unit having already decided not to accept such invitations. On Mr. Ó Súilleabháin's suggestion it was decided that a draft letter should be prepared and circulated to members of the Unit for consideration requesting further particulars from the Dublin Chamber of Commerce.

(b) Invitations to Unit to attend meetings: The Chairman informed the meeting that three invitations had been received to-date by the Unit for members to attend meetings that had a bearing on North/South relations. These invitations had been extended by Mr. T.C.G. O'Mahony (solicitor), Rev. Michael Hurley S.J. and Senator Ruairi Brugha. Mr. Gallagher expressed the view that voluntary organisations often like to get involved with official agencies and in doing so risk losing their identity and purpose. He said that the Minister for External Affairs agreed with the decision of the Unit not to get involved in outside meetings or discussions.

Future Work Programme of Unit

Constitutional studies: Mr. Ó Súilleabháin stated that at the previous meeting he undertook to seek the informal guidance of the Taoiseach on the question of the Unit's attitude to the Constitution and the 1967 report of the Committee thereon. The Taoiseach had certain reservations but said that the Unit could proceed cautiously with its studies in that area.

-4-

Cultural Relations: Mr. Whitty suggested that some work might possibly be done on the question of cultural relations between the two communities and between North and South. It was for consideration whether the general area of the two Irish traditions might not be investigated and researched. At the practical level North/South exchanges could possibly take place between the Arts Councils, theatres, etc.

Local Government Franchise: There was also a brief discussion on the proposed abolition of plural voting in local elections arising out of the ownership of property in more than one local government electoral area. Mr. Gallagher mentioned that Unionist propaganda had already fastened on to the existence of plural voting rights in certain circumstances in the South and was exaggerating its incidence. The sooner we got away from it and adopted the one-man-one-vote principle the better. In any event this was consistent with modern thinking and we should not shrink from the idea.

Tariffs: With regard to the question of the lowering of tariffs against the North at an accelerated rate, it was agreed that this should not be contemplated until full, genuine reforms had been legislated and implemented.

Next Meeting: The next meeting of the Unit was arranged for Thursday, 1st October, 1970, at 10 a.m.

Circulated to

The Taoiseach
The Minister for External Affairs
and Members of the Unit.