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Title: Letter from Donal O’Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland in London, to HJ McCann, Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs, regarding his meeting with Harold Wilson, leader of the British Labour Party, on 4 November 1971 during which political initiatives towards Northern Ireland were discussed. Some names have been abstracted from this document.

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STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

5th November 1971

Dear Secretary

I had Mr Harold Wilson to lunch yesterday. We had a long and very friendly conversation. While he had a lot to say on the North he was careful throughout to avoid being specific on the line which his Party will take in the Debate which will be taking place in the next couple of weeks.

After some general comments on the deteriorating situation in the North I emphasised the need for an immediate and significant political initiative as the only means of moving towards peace. I described Mr Faulkner's Green Paper as a wash-out which, in my opinion, could not in any sense be regarded even as a beginning in that direction.

Mr Wilson said that there is obviously a lot of new thinking in the two main Parties. He could tell me the position now reached in his own Party, and he could only speculate about the developing attitude in the Government.

There has been a lot of discussion in the Parliamentary Labour Party this week, but an agreed approach has yet to be settled. This may not be the whole story and, for obvious reasons, I could not probe too closely on the basis of what we were told in strict confidence a couple of days ago. Mr Wilson did, however, make a few significant comments. He said he had to confess quite frankly that

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the Downing Street Declaration is now out of date. He would go further and say that his own 12-point plan is also possibly out of date, but he is likely to revert to it "to some extent" in the Debate which will take place later this month. A growing number in the Parliamentary Labour Party and in the Party as a whole feels that a change of policy on the ending of Partition is called for, but a decision to this effect has not so far been taken, and he could not be sure that there will be such a decision.

He shared my view that Mr Faulkner's Green Paper is in present circumstances not "even a gesture in the right direction". The situation has gone away beyond the stage where something on those lines would have any hope of acceptance or of providing a basis for peace. He has no faith either in the Maudling Committee. It will get nowhere because [REDACTED] and the elected minority representatives will not talk.

At this point Mr Wilson turned to what the Government may be prepared to do in the direction of a political initiative. He emphasised that he has no detailed information as to how the Government's mind is turning on this, but he has very good reason to believe that the ideas floated in the newspapers in the past few days about a new approach have been inspired. He went further and said that he has, in fact, no doubt at all on this, as both he and James Callaghan are on close personal terms [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Mr Wilson continued by saying that his great fear at the moment is that Mr Heath will not have the courage to go far enough in a new approach. There is almost certainly some foundation for the suggestion that a Minister Plenipotentiary be appointed for the North. Mr Maudling is almost in daily contact with James Callaghan, but up to the present no proposal has been made to Mr Callaghan. If the idea of appointing a Minister Plenipotentiary were to be put forward the Government would, in Mr Wilson's view, be likely to consider James Callaghan for the job. Mr Callaghan made a tremendous impact on the North during his period as Home Secretary. He has the added advantage of enjoying quite a high standing with the minority and he is "one astute politician" who might be able to bring reason to bear on the situation.

Mr Wilson said, without going into detail, that the appointment of a Minister Plenipotentiary could be a useful move only if the proper terms of reference were provided. His great fear is that Mr Heath "is not yet" in the mood to adopt a courageous and generous approach. Mr Wilson's view is that James Callaghan would be foolish to accept such an appointment if he had any reservations about the scope and nature of the job required of him. Anyhow, no invitation has yet come to Mr Callaghan, but Mr Wilson repeated that he does not at all exclude the possibility of such an invitation. If the post of Minister Plenipotentiary in the North were to be created

and if Mr Callaghan were not to make himself available, Mr Wilson would regard Lord Trevelyan who was mentioned in the papers a few days ago as an excellent choice. One thing which Mr Wilson and the Labour Party would in no circumstances want would be that James Callaghan should accept a position which would entitle him to a seat in the present Cabinet.

I then said that it seemed to me that, as part of any interim solution proposed for the North, it would be essential to involve the elected representatives of the minority in actual government. Even if direct rule were to be a first step - and this may now have to be an inevitable first step in the direction of an acceptable Government at Stormont - the minority elected representatives should, I felt, have at least an proportionate share in any Commission which would be set up. Mr Wilson said he did not dissent from these views and admitted that he could see force in the argument for a short period of direct rule as a running-in operation. He added that a short period of direct rule would show whether there was likely to be a Protestant backlash and his own feeling is that, if there were such a backlash, it would not be of serious dimensions.

At this point I emphasised the need for the involvement of Dublin in any approach to a political solution and, indeed, in any machinery which may be set up. His comment was "it is in this context that my Council of Ireland proposal is relevant". ^{NP.} [Mr Wilson then told me that Mr Faulkner was arriving in London in

the early afternoon of yesterday and that he would be coming to Mr Wilson's home at 4.30 p.m. Mr Wilson gave me the impression that this meeting with Mr Faulkner had been arranged at very short notice, even though the papers have tended to say that the meeting was fixed some ten days ago. What Mr Faulkner had sought was a luncheon meeting alone with Mr Wilson yesterday, but this could not be accepted because of his appointment with me. Mr Wilson had insisted that it would be necessary for him to have James Callaghan present during the ~~period~~^{Meeting}. According to Mr Wilson, Mr Faulkner is "on the ropes" and is almost at the point of throwing in the sponge. Mr Faulkner would probably settle for direct rule at this stage because he is becoming convinced that he has no hope of putting down violence while the position remains as it is.

Mr Wilson said that Mr Heath could now afford to be generous in his approach. In fact, if he has any sense of history he would be very foolish to act otherwise. He has got his vote on the Common Market. The enabling legislation will go through but at the cost of Parliament being rendered incapable of passing any other legislation next year. The Labour Party will see to that. It is possible that up to ten Labour MPs will abstain or support the Common Market legislation, but it is likely now that Roy Jenkins and George Thomson will oppose the legislation except where "the broad principle of joining comes up". Mr Jenkins should have withdrawn his candidature for the deputy leadership, but nevertheless

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Mr Wilson will vote for him and expects him to be reappointed.

Mr Wilson said that he was disturbed to find that "you may be having a General Election in the Republic". He refers ^{ed} to the high personal regard which Mr Heath has for the Taoiseach and added that [REDACTED] is the source of his information on this.

Finally, he expressed warm thanks for the way in which Mrs Wilson was looked after during her recent visit to Dublin and he asked that his warmest good wishes be conveyed to the Taoiseach.

I am hoping that I may be able to see James Callaghan for lunch one day next week.

Yours sincerely

DONAL O'SULLIVAN

Ambassador

Hugh J McCann Esq.
Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs