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Call on Dr. Hillery, Minister for External Affairs, by
Mr. James Callaghan, M.P. 5th February, 1971.

The conversation began at 11.05 and continued until noon. Mr. Eamon Gallagher, Department of External Affairs was also present.

Mr. Callaghan opened the conversation by asking the Minister's view on the cause of the present troubles. Dr. Hillery said that the basic cause was the 1920 "solution". Indeed London could not provide a solution. The current situation derives from army raiding which aggravates the dissatisfactions which the minority have suffered for so long. The British Army was brought into the situation in August 1969 when the then forces of law and order were attacking the minority. Now the Army itself is engaged with the minority.

Mr. Callaghan enquired as to how the Minister would handle the present troubles if he were Major Chichester-Clark. The Minister replied that the question presumed that the Northern State was a viable one. In fact it was not. It had been created and maintained by force and was still being maintained by force.

Mr. Callaghan enquired whether we would not have to use force if we found a final solution satisfactory to our point of view. Dr. Hillery replied that we had no desire whatever to recreate the situation of the North in reverse. Our policy was unification by peaceful means. Mr. Callaghan remarked that he was aware that this was our official opinion and Dr. Hillery said that it was also his personal opinion. Mr. Callaghan said that, of course, his expression was not meant to suggest anything else.

He enquired, nevertheless, whether we would not find ourselves replacing one unnatural situation with another.

[At this stage there was a short interruption].

Dr. Hillery now took up Mr. Callaghan's question and said that our policy had an internal logic as well as a lengthy history. Mr. de Valera had said that a solution would be found if, in principle, the British agreed to leave Ireland and allow the Irish to solve the problem. This is still our view. We believe that, whereas nothing can be done to persuade the Shankill Road, there is a body of moderate Unionist opinion which we are trying to reach and to reassure.

Mr. Callaghan commented that the Taoiseach has said and done all the rational things that he could say and do and he warmly commended this.

Mr. Callaghan then went on to another subject. He was anxious to contribute to the eventual unification of Ireland. He thought that the Social Democratic and Labour Party could not win Protestant support and was never likely to succeed. The only political party in the North which had coherence is the Unionist Party; all Opposition Parties have been generals without followers, each man a power in his own locality but, as a group, powerless. He wished to give the people of the North the opportunity of an alternative Government. He considered that the Unionists had achieved their maximum position and were now on the way down. He conceived that an alternative party with a reasonable chance of achieving Government would have to begin by attracting Protestant support without antagonising Catholic opinion. He was prepared to put funds at the disposal of an alternative party and to aid it in every way.

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Dr. Hillery said that the NILP accepted the basic Unionist position on unity. If it put up 52 candidates for Stormont it would lose 50 deposits. He was in no position to find a solution.

Mr. Callaghan said that the present situation in the North was an affront to human dignity.

Dr. Hillery said that, nevertheless, what Mr. Callaghan suggested amounted to a step backwards, even if allied to the intention of making eventual a greater step forward - "reculer pour mieux sauter".

Mr. Callaghan said that his idea was to broaden the base of the NILP. He would wish to bring in Northern industrialists and trade unions and to give financial and other aid to the party - all as part of stage 1. In a second stage he would wish to bring in people like Gerry Fitt. He was not asking anyone to support the existing NILP. His view was that the SDLP could not win Protestant working-class support.

Dr. Hillery commented that Mr. Callaghan seemed clear in his purpose of breaking the Unionist hegemony and that his final objective was to arrive at the unity of Ireland.

Mr. Callaghan said that he would say yes to unity when the Irish people are ready for it.

Dr. Hillery then made several suggestions to Mr. Callaghan in regard to what might be said by him to the Press in the light of the forthcoming Fianna Fail Ard Fheis and the elements who disagree with the Taoiseach's general policy and would take advantage of any remark which could be used against the Taoiseach.

Mr. Callaghan said that he would say that in his discussions with the Minister for External Affairs, the Minister had repeated almost verbatim what the Taoiseach had said in his speeches last year. He would add his personal view that much work must be done in the North and he would also say that he fully understood the Irish Government's position.

The Minister asked Mr. Gallagher to discuss in greater detail the current difficulties in Belfast. Mr. Gallagher suggested the necessity for re-examining the tactics of the British Army in the present situation. Following the revelation in December about new rifle clubs formed by associations of ex-B Specials, which legalised guns in one part of the Northern community, it was asking too much of the patience of the minority to expect them to acquiesce in arms searches for the occasional illegal gun in Catholic areas. There was no instance of these guns having been used to start trouble either with the Army or with Protestant areas. The security authorities could afford to be more relaxed about that situation and to leave well enough alone.

Mr. Callaghan expressed interest in this thought but said that, as a former Secretary of State for Home Affairs, he could not endorse the notion of illegal guns being left untouched.

Mr. Gallagher put it to him again that there should be no question of legally rearming the majority either in present circumstances and Mr. Callaghan did not demur from this.

The Minister warned against the use of the British Army in a B Special role. This was how the Army was coming to be seen by the minority. He emphasised that he was not in any way attacking British soldiers as such - what he wanted to emphasise is that tactics are extremely important and appear to have gone wrong.

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Mr. Gallagher added that a further deterioration in the political situation had occurred in the North because of the violence of Mr. Faulkner's attack in Stormont two weeks ago in response to Mr. Currie's suggestion that multi-seat proportional representation should be introduced in local government. Mr. Faulkner had chosen to describe the Opposition as ~~indefensible~~ ^{indefensible} in their demands - one demand leading to another. The fact is, said Mr. Gallagher, that the suggestion of introducing PR has been on the cards for well over a year and it was quite wrong to describe ~~it~~ ^{it} as a new demand or an unreasonable one. The Opposition took the view that Faulkner's attack signalled that the Unionists were prepared to concede demands which in fact were enforced on them by Westminster and then to describe anything else as minority intransigence.

Mr. Callaghan said that he was convinced that there was a far greater change in Unionism than this suggested. Major Chichester-Clark is a simple Guard officer who will do his duty in the best way he can. If he can maintain control of the Unionist Party apparatus he will do much more.

Dr. Hillery said that he had much less faith in people like Craig and Faulkner. Mr. Callaghan showed no regard for Mr. Craig either.

Mr. Gallagher then suggested that no reforms had been made other than those imposed; there was no *act of volition* by the Unionist Party.

Mr. Callaghan asked for an example and was referred to the fact that there is a requirement, either statutory or regulatory (we are investigating this currently) that the Union Jack be flown on all public buildings in the North on Easter Sunday. This had provoked a riot in Derry last Easter Sunday and would do the same next Easter Sunday. Mr. Callaghan replied that after all, the North was part of the United Kingdom. Dr. Hillery said that the North is a divided community and that the Union Jack is a provocation on certain days in certain areas and that sensitivity on this subject should be exercised rather than letting the situation run to riots. Mr. Callaghan again did not demur.

Mr. Callaghan enquired whether we had any ideas about extending cooperation with the North. The Minister said that we had made some suggestions e.g. transborder regional development areas, all-Ireland tourist development, an economic council of Ireland perhaps based on mutual problems connected with the EEC etc. but we had received no favourable reaction either from the North or in London as yet. Mr. Callaghan said that he was interested in these things and asked the Minister if he would agree to his being briefed occasionally on such subjects by Mr. Gallagher on his visits to London.

The conversation ended in some friendly badinage between the Minister and Mr. Callaghan on our general policy.

As the meeting had run a bit late the Minister called the Taoiseach to explain this and to suggest to the Taoiseach that he draw Mr. Callaghan's attention to the statement by the SDLP on eventual reunification and enquire whether Mr. Callaghan could not endorse this. The statement is worded as follows in the political programme of the SDLP -

"To promote cooperation, friendship and understanding between North and South with the view to the eventual reunification of Ireland through the consent of the majority of the people in the North and in the South".