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Taoiseach *D/Sullivan* *del*
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Report of meeting held in Council Chamber, 11 February, 1972

Present: Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Minister for Finance,
 Minister for Labour

Messrs G Fitt, J Hume, P Devlin, A Currie,
 R O'Connor, M Keogh, J O'Reilly, P O'Hanlon (all MP)
 Senator J Lennon

Messrs D O'Sullivan (D/Taoiseach, E Gallagher
 (D/Foreign Affairs), M F Doyle (D/Finance)

The Taoiseach recalled the previous meeting between Government Ministers and Northern elected representatives and invited the latter's views on political developments of recent weeks and on the recent suggestion of political initiatives from Westminster.

Mr Fitt stated that while participation by the non-Unionist minority in the government of Northern Ireland was an acceptable aim some months ago, the determined British search for a military solution before political movement had alienated the entire Catholic population and the Derry shootings had eliminated all possibility of participation by the minority in a Stormont administration. The upsurge of nationalist feeling among the people was such that any other attitude on the part of the SDLP would simply discredit them. He added that many moves were necessary in the 26 Counties to placate Protestant opinion.

As regards the UK political moves, he said that from his discussions in Westminster it appeared that Mr Maudling was now to be regarded as a "hawk", while Messrs Heath, Carrington and Whitelaw were now "doves". A story had, with the approval of the British Government, been leaked to the Washington Post containing the suggestions that -

- (1) 300 internees would be released soon, a further 200 during talks and the remainder charged;

(2) -

- (2) £50m aid would be given to Northern Ireland and
- (3) a P.R. election would be held, with an assurance of Cabinet seats for the minority commensurate with their success at the polls plus (if necessary) supplementary posts to bring their numbers up to one-third of the Cabinet.

The Tories were now committed to these offers but Mr Maudling and Sir Alec Douglas-Home were opposed to making them, suspecting their likely rejection by the SDLP. Mr Fitt said the SDLP would now have to reject this package in view of the total rejection of Stormont by the minority. An all-Ireland republic was now ^{the} an issue; the SDLP would, however, cooperate with a Commission or other similar body for the Six Counties as a step on the road to a 32-County republic. After the events of Derry, the transfer of security to Westminster was no longer acceptable either.

Mr Hume stressed that when the British government announced its proposals, it would be important to delay response for 24-48 hours. In that period, the Unionists would reject the proposals and the SDLP could then point to their unreasonableness.

Mr Devlin said that the UK was subject to world-wide criticism over events in Northern Ireland. This would be of increasing importance as the forthcoming Presidential election in the US approached and the criticism could only get worse. It was vital, therefore, to hold out for ultimate aims and not settle for the first British offer.

Mr Hume -

Mr Hume said that while there was strong support among the minority for the Provisional IRA, support for the SDLP was also very strong. The SDLP, contrary to some opinions, had not changed their demands. These were (1) the abolition of Stormont, (2) the establishment of a commission to administer the North, (3) the instigation of quadripartite talks and (4) the ending of internment. If a commission were appointed - even temporarily - it would mean the end of Stormont. Once a commission took over, Protestants would start to rethink their position. At that point, Dublin would have to give clear evidence (by action as regards contraception, divorce, etc) of movement in the direction of accepting Protestant opinion as a necessary constituent of a united Ireland. The Minister for Labour indicated that he thought it would be unwise to start dismantling our Constitution until something had been offered. Mr Currie disagreed strongly. In his view, it was necessary for the Irish Government to act first - even in the interest of the 26 Counties.

Continuing, Mr Currie said that the SDLP position vis-a-vis the Provisional IRA was now stronger than before: while the people supported the Provos, they looked to the SDLP for leadership. The NICRA relied on the SDLP, so that a stronger NICRA meant a stronger SDLP. The NICRA had asked that three SDLP members become members of the NICRA executive, although two of these (Mr Hume and himself) were not even members of the NICRA. He agreed with Mr Hume that the party's conditions for negotiation were unchanged, but everyone's attitude had hardened on the Border issue: a united Ireland was now the only aim. Even with a commission, any decisions must lead to a united Ireland. He was confident that the section of Unionist opinion represented -

represented by Mr R Ferguson and the NUM would move during the tenure of a commission. He urged that the offer of a UK "package" should be used to weaken Mr Faulkner's position. A pause on their part of a day or two would allow Unionist diehard reaction to be heard. Mr Faulkner had not yet been tested on his meaning of an "active, permanent and guaranteed role".

In reply to a question from the Taoiseach, Mr Hume indicated that he was opposed to a community government because it would be a permanent, elected system. A commission would of its nature be temporary.

Mr O'Reilly opined that a 48-hour pause would not be possible because the reactions of minority representatives such as Miss Devlin could not be controlled. The Minister for Finance pointed out that a parallel situation obtained on the Unionist side as regards Mr Craig and others.

Mr Devlin was concerned that the SDLP, by delaying a response, might lose support to the Provisionals.

Mr Currie felt strongly that time must be allowed to test Mr Maudling.

The Taoiseach stated that in his conversations with Mr Heath, the latter had always set his face against a commission as being non-democratic; he did not, therefore, think this was likely to be included in the UK offer.

The Tánaiste warned that an SDLP rejection of a "package" would meet with a very unfavourable press reaction. It would be very hard to persuade the British people of the difference between a reorganised Stormont with guaranteed Catholic participation and a commission which would to them

them appear undemocratic. Mr Hume did not accept this view. The Tánaiste argued that either a commission or community government meant the end of Unionism.

The Minister for Finance suggested that it was sometimes unhelpful for SDLP members to make comments on 26-County political matters (he instanced the EEC question): criticism of Dublin on such issues might suggest that we were not helping the Northern Ireland situation. Mr Devlin did not accept this view; as a Northern Ireland nationalist, he considered he had the right to speak on the EEC issue. Mr Fitt stated that he took the British Labour party line on the EEC, but this did not stand in the way of cooperation with Dublin. Mr Currie said he kept out of party political matters in the South, but the EEC was a long-term issue which would affect the Northern people in a united Ireland, and he was therefore entitled to express a view. He suggested as a guideline that statements on such matters should come from the SDLP only, not from individual members.

Senator Lennon thought the SDLP had no room for manoeuvre on the internment question. Releasing 300 internees would not allow the SDLP to participate in discussion; they could not, therefore, wait 48 hours to react to an offer. He wondered what the reaction of either wing of the IRA was likely to be - they had no line of communication with them. Mr Hume emphasised that the Provisionals were not cohesive - they were, rather, a collection of factions. They were not really interested in politics. Mr Currie stated that the community's peace wish was buried at Derry, but it would come again and when the SDLP entered into negotiations at the right time, this would remove support from the Provisionals. Meantime, the SDLP could not accept a

British -

British initiative because of (1) the internment position, (2) it would contain nothing about a united Ireland, (3) it would include power-sharing, which was open to interpretation as a sell-out for jobs) and (4) it would be a repetition of the Treaty situation. The SDLP must, however, make their refusal appear reasonable in order to trap the Stormont government.

The Taoiseach enquired what would be the position if an early general election were called in the North. Mr Currie said that if the SDLP could maintain the position that they had not been "bought over" and internment still obtained, there was no problem. Their only problem might be the effects of abstentionism, especially if backed up by intimidation such as the blowing up of polling booths. The Minister for Finance said that even if the SDLP rejected the British package, it would be necessary (1) to make the rejection appear reasonable and (2) to be encouraging about the acceptable parts of the offer.

Mr Currie said that in his view gestures from the South were needed even at this stage. The Taoiseach doubted whether it was worth while making such gestures without the prospect of something in return. The Constitution could be called theocratic in only two respects - the position of the Catholic Church, where there was really no problem, and the question of divorce. The Minister for Finance pointed out that it was necessary to keep some cards in reserve for the negotiations and maintained that it would be impossible to carry a referendum on the divorce issue except in the content of Irish unity. The Tánaiste agreed with the latter view and pointed out that while the Church of Ireland

acknowledged -

acknowledged divorce, it did not permit remarriage. Mr Currie enquired what were the Government's views on the contraception issue. The Minister for Finance said that there was every expectation that a favourable decision in the current High Court case would settle the matter without need for overt Government action.

Mr Hume said he had been promised a copy of the Sunday Times investigation of the Derry shootings. He said it revealed a definite plan and promised to forward the Taoiseach a copy.

The Taoiseach indicated that the question of Government assistance to the Assembly of the Northern Irish People could be discussed with the Minister for Finance after the meeting. Mr Hume said that they intended launching the fund in the following week. They would approach the political parties for subscriptions in the first place and then would look to the Government for a subvention. The Minister for Finance emphasised that the Government subscription was only intended to cover administration expenses of the Assembly. Other expenditure would have to be met from other sources. This was accepted by the SDLP members.

As regards the proposed Enniskillen march on Sunday, 13 February, Mr Currie said this was not expected to be much of a success. There was less support for the CRA in Fermanagh than elsewhere and the SDLP would not be participating (the march was being organised by the Northern Resistance Movement). The SDLP favoured a major march every 3/4 weeks.

Mr O'Reilly opined that the IRA had done a great deal towards

bringing -

bringing down the Stormont government and it would be unwise to oppose them. Most of those present expressed disagreement with this view.

The meeting concluded at 5.15 p.m.

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