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**Title:** Copy letter from Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain D O'Sullivan to R McDonagh of the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a meeting with Merlyn Rees MP, mainly discussing the formation of an executive in Northern Ireland.

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Personal and Confidential

July 3rd, 1973

Dear Assistant Secretary

Mr. Merlyn Rees M.P. came to see me briefly this morning. He is not unhopeful that early progress on the formation of an Executive will be possible. He had been in touch with Mr. Whitelaw after the latter's return from Belfast yesterday afternoon. The Secretary of State seemed fairly confident following his talks yesterday with the leaders of the political parties in the North that agreement can be reached on the formation of an Executive based on the Faulkner Unionists, the SDLP and Alliance.

Mr. Faulkner's attitude at his meeting with Mr. Whitelaw apparently was that he would be prepared to talk to the SDLP and Alliance if they were to take the initiative in approaching him. Mr. Whitelaw reacted strongly to this "stand-offish attitude" and made clear to Mr. Faulkner his view that it would be "neither wise nor helpful" in the present situation. Mr. Faulkner would be well advised to get off his high horse quickly particularly in view of the strong reservations about him personally in the minds of the SDLP.

Mr. Whitelaw is apparently a little concerned at the suggestion that Roy Bradford may now have his hat in the ring for the top job. This concern is shared by Merlyn Rees. Mr. Bradford lacks the political astuteness and experience of Mr. Faulkner. A more serious aspect of the matter is that if Mr. Faulkner were rejected for the job of Head of the Executive he would certainly resort to a double-crossing operation. In the view of Mr. Whitelaw and Mr. Rees, Mr. Faulkner's talents and experience will be needed, if the Executive is to tackle seriously the responsibilities which will be devolved to it.

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Gerry Fitt gave the Secretary of State to understand yesterday that his party will do all it can to help arrive at a working arrangement. Fitt will himself be ready to take a post in the Executive.

Merlyn Rees expressed himself as personally very worried about the internal situation in the SDLP. The divisions in the party are now quite serious. Relations between Paddy Devlin and Gerry Fitt could hardly be worse. If a crunch situation were to arise, there could be a serious split in the party. The position is made even worse by the fact that Paddy Devlin is now believed to have his eye on Gerry Fitt's Westminster seat. <sup>Mr L</sup> After his conversation with Mr. Craig yesterday Mr. Whitelaw sees no possibility of a link-up between the SDLP and the extreme Unionists even though there could be some initial manoeuvring in this direction.

I will try in the next few days to get from the Secretary of State or from one of his senior officials a first-hand account of the talks in Belfast yesterday. As soon as I have this I will report fully to you.

Yours sincerely

DONAL O'SULLIVAN

Ambassador

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