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Title: Note [?from D Nally, Department of the Taoiseach] to Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave reporting contacts between Seán Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs, and John Hume of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), in which the legalisation of Sinn Féin and the Ulster Volunteer Force and the proposed delay in the Council of Ireland were discussed.

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NORTHERN IRELAND

Taoiseach

Mr. Sean Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs, 'phoned to say that he had met John Hume, over the weekend.

Mr. Hume had told him that the Secretary of State, Mr. Rees, would be saying in the House of Commons on Thursday that it was proposed to legalise the Sinn Fein and UVF movements in Northern Ireland. This statement would be accompanied by an announcement of the withdrawal of British Troops, without indicating the numbers to be withdrawn.

This intention had been disclosed to the Northern Ireland Executive recently. They had reacted very negatively. One of the principal reasons for the meeting between Mr. Faulkner and Mr. Wilson today was to try to get it over-ruled. (Whatever the outcome of these talks, it may be that events over the weekend may cause a change of heart on the subject of troop withdrawals.)

Mr. Donlon also said that the Secretary of State was pushing Mr. Faulkner very hard to implement Sunningdale. He was doing this on the basis that there would be an agreed report from the Commission on Law Enforcement, before Easter.

Mr. Hume mentioned that Mr. Faulkner had put the following proposals to the SDLP. He said that all of Sunningdale should be implemented except the part relating to the Council of Ireland. Instead of this, there should be an additional paragraph added to the Sunningdale Communique to the effect that there would be a Council of Ministers, whose functions would be to study the functions of a Council of Ireland and to report in six months. There would then be a referendum on the question of a Council, North and South. If the combined majority at this referendum favoured a Council, as proposed in the Sunningdale Agreement, then the Council should be established, as proposed in the communique.

Mr. Hume said that the SDLP were against this proposal, mainly on the grounds that it leaves everything up in the air for a further six months, and would, in this way, give further opportunities for those who wished to attack the entire Sunningdale concept.

He (Mr. Hume) would, however, like to have the attitude of the Government here to the proposals.

You may wish to raise the matter with the Ministers who were present at Sunningdale, or with the Government. Personally, I would incline to the view that any avoidable delay in ratifying the proposals in the agreed communique, in their entirety, can only be for the worst. The longer ratification is put off, the greater the opportunities for those who wish to attack the entire package.

There could, subject to the views of the other parties to the communique, be scope for some minor modifications in the package such as, for example, -

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- (1) a smaller secretariat than was originally envisaged;
- (2) the postponement of the first meeting of the Consultative Assembly for six months;
- (3) the grant to the Council of Executive functions, on a more limited scale than was originally envisaged.

However, the suggestions on these lines would best be considered in the light of developments during this week.



1 Aibreán 1974