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IMPLEMENTATION OF SUNNINGDALE

Taoiseach

As arranged, Mr. Donlon of the Department of Foreign Affairs and I travelled to Stormont yesterday to deliver your letter of 3rd ~~April~~ ^{May} to Mr. Faulkner.

We were met by Mr. Bloomfield who indicated that Mr. Faulkner was not at that time available. He said, however, that he would receive the letter. We gave him a carbon of the original.

On reading it, he said that he could not comment definitively for Mr. Faulkner but his impression was that Mr. Faulkner would find the contents of the letter extremely helpful. He said that feelings in the North were beginning to "gel". These were to the effect that the decision on a Council now rested primarily with the Executive and that they intended to discuss the entire question - particularly the question of functions and of a Consultative Assembly which were the major points of difference at present - at today's meeting of the Executive.

Mr. Faulkner was extremely anxious now to have a decision on the outstanding matters as soon as possible. He found himself now in the impossible position of not being able to sell the Sunningdale arrangements until there had been some form of consensus in the Executive. A further reason for speed, as they in the North saw it, was the possibility of a British general election either in June or in October, at which the British policy on the North could become an issue. There was, Mr. Bloomfield seemed to think, a real danger, in these sort of circumstances, of the bipartisan policy on the North breaking up.

Mr. Bloomfield said that it would be essential before the next inter-Ministerial meeting between the North and South (which he indicated as being essential, in their view, before any "ratification") there should be some consensus in the Executive on what could be agreed at the meeting. An attempt at this consensus would be the main purpose of the Executive meeting today - and possibly within the next few days. On the question of venue, Mr. Bloomfield indicated that, to achieve balance in these North/South meetings, it would seem desirable that the meeting should be held in the South. The further meeting, at which the British would be involved and where ratification was the main purpose, was a different matter and would require further consideration. (We will require to consider carefully the venue for this inter-Ministerial meeting at which accommodation and security problems will arise.) Mr. Bloomfield was in agreement that not only should the broad issues now outstanding be settled, if possible, at the inter-Ministerial meeting but that any outstanding questions on the drafting of the minute, agreement, or statute, in which North/South were involved, should also be disposed of. On this point, we indicated that there did not seem to be any great differences of principle between us. The points which Mr. Bloomfield had raised on the statute on his recent visit to Dublin could, we thought, be disposed of reasonably easily.

On the general political scene in the North, Mr. Bloomfield said that the SDLP were very much alive to the need to reach some form of consensus in the Executive. The formation of Mr. Faulkner's new Unionist Party gave this same issue an

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added impetus. Mr. Bloomfield thought that there could soon be a considerable organisation on the ground behind this Party. The Sunningdale arrangements could give the Party something to sell - once they were out of the way and "ratification" had taken place".

Finally, on this subject, Mr. Bloomfield noted the sort of timing envisaged in your letter to Mr. Faulkner and said that arrangements as to announcements on the law enforcement commission report, security etc. seemed reasonable.

On the Report of the Commission, he said that there was a considerable amount of disappointment among Unionist circles that extradition had not been recommended wholeheartedly. There was still the feeling in the North that extradition was the only way of dealing with the problem of fugitive offenders. The general background to the Report was explained to him and it was indicated that if speed and effectiveness were what was desired, then our advice was that the extra-territorial method was the best. We could not, of course, guarantee, that it would not end up in the courts, but if it did then our advice was to the effect that it could be disposed of more quickly than the extradition method.

Mr. Bloomfield raised the question of retrospection - so that persons already living in the South who had been guilty of offences in the North could be dealt with. It was explained to him that this was completely out so far as we were concerned, mainly on constitutional grounds.

The atmosphere of the meeting was friendly. What impressed both Mr. Donlon and myself was the new air of optimism which replaced what had been some extremely gloomy prognostications on Mr. Bloomfield's part during his earlier visit.

Probably what emerges from it all is that there may be some give on Mr. Faulkner's part on the question of executive functions for a Council of Ireland and that the most difficult problem of all will be that of the Consultative Assembly. These issues are for the parties in the Executive in the first instance.



7th May 1974