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Report written by John McColgan of the Department of Foreign Affairs on a meeting between Garret FitzGerald, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Stanley Orme, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office. Topics discussed included the Northern Ireland Bill and elections to the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention, the current state of the Unionist parties, a variety of possible political solutions, a White Paper on the financing of Northern Ireland, talks between the IRA [Irish Republican Army] and the UDA [Ulster Defence Association], morale within the IRA, the role of the British Army, policing, the Resettlement Committee for released detainees, the mood of the Catholic community and the SDLP, a proposed EEC [European Economic Community] regional policy study for

cross-border areas, and the harassment of
Greencastle fishermen in Lough Foyle.

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Report on meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, T.D., and Mr. Stanley Orme, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, Department of Foreign Affairs, Thursday, 18th July at 2.30 p.m.

A meeting took place at the Department of Foreign Affairs between the Minister, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, T.D., and Mr. Stanley Orme, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office and officials of both Governments. The British officials were: the British Ambassador, Mr. D.J. Trevelyan, Under-Secretary at the Northern Ireland Office, Mr. Michael Daly, First Secretary of the British Embassy and Miss Frances Elliot, Private Secretary to Mr. Orme. The Irish officials were: Mr. Dermot Nally of the Taoiseach's Department and Messrs. Donlon, Ó Broin and McColgan of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Minister first raised with Mr. Orme the Northern Ireland Bill and the question of the timing of the elections to the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention. Mr. Orme indicated that the British were thinking in terms of an election to the Constitutional Convention, at the earliest in November of this year and at the latest in the Spring of 1975. They wish, if at all possible, to hold the elections after the Westminster elections but they had not even considered what line they would take if the present British Government were to soldier on until early next year before having an election. Mr. Orme indicated that he thought this a most unlikely possibility and this was the reason why it had not been seriously considered as a problem. The British Government had had indications from all sides, apart from the eleven Loyalists M.P. in Westminster, that the election should be delayed until late Autumn at the earliest. He said that the Protestant working class found themselves in a serious dilemma at the moment in that they suspected and detested their own elected representatives more now than at any time in the past. The British felt it was necessary to allow all the various

political forces in Northern Ireland time to reorganise and seriously consider what they wanted from the Convention.

The Minister replied by saying that Mr. Orme's analysis confirmed our expectation and views and that he hoped that the longer time span would give Faulkner and the Alliance Party time to recover ground and the UWC time to solidify its position. Our view was that we did not want a monolith on the Loyalist side emerging from the Convention election. We would hope for as many combinations as possible because this gave us the best hope of there being a constructive dialogue. However, there was a grave danger that if the present Loyalist politicians were elected in a block to the Convention and had more than 51% of the representatives at the Convention, that they would feel a moral superiority in imposing their views. It was vital that the British should lay down carefully and spell out very clearly what were the parameters within which the Convention should work and indicate its functions clearly.

Mr. Orme explained that following the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive the British Government had looked at all possible solutions. The first one of a united Ireland was obviously politically not feasible. The solution of total integration to the United Kingdom was unacceptable to the South, to all political parties in the United Kingdom and to the minority in the North. It also raised fears in Britain of the transfer of violence from Northern Ireland to Britain itself. The UDI solution would not work because it would be impossible to guarantee the minority's rights and impossible not to have Britain and the South involved, if this course was followed. The British, therefore, were faced with either proposing permanent direct rule or seeking a new basis for power-sharing. They had chosen the latter option.

There was a feeling in Northern Ireland that the Executive had been forced on Northern Ireland and while he did not accept this it was undoubtedly true that the Executive did not represent a large section of the working class Protestants there. The present British solution was an attempt to get people involved in Northern Ireland who have not been involved previously and let them try to work out a solution to the problem within the confines of the application of United Kingdom standards and the Irish dimension. Some people had said that the White Paper was for the minority and that the Bill was for the majority. While he did not accept this, the attitude of the British Government was that unless a solution could be found which married the two, it would be unacceptable. The present proposals were not a means to enable the British Government to contract out but a new attempt at power-sharing.

The Minister indicated that he accepted what Mr. Orme said and appreciated the reasons why the British had acted the way they did. Nevertheless, the Constitutional Convention seemed to him to have a number of inherent dangers and it was absolutely vital that the British spell out more clearly the terms of reference within which the Convention would work. The words "power-sharing" and "Irish dimension" were vague terms and they needed to be clearly defined. The British should be conscious of the dangerous power a Constitutional Convention could give to the majority community if the hardliners found themselves with an absolute majority within the Convention. Mr. Orme replied that the British Government were aware of this danger and that they would stand firmly by the position that any proposal which was not acceptable to the minority community would not be agreed to by the British Government. Mr. Orme went on to say that the British Government hoped to produce a White Paper on the financing of Northern Ireland in September. It would be a detailed document which would indicate in non-provocative terms what the realities of the situation were.

The Minister replied that what people like Jim Smyth needed in the financial White Paper was a simple comprehensive document which would meet and demolish their myths. It would be very dangerous if the British Government assumed that there was any economic expertise on the UWC side. There was also the question of credibility. It had been quite clear at Oxford that people like Jim Smyth do not accept anything which the British Government or even somebody like Professor Norman Gibson say on this subject. They may listen a little more readily to us in the South but even this is doubtful. There was, therefore, an argument for having an independent body examine the financial implications. It should be somebody from outside these islands.

Mr. Orme replied that the White Paper would go into considerable detail. He had asked for figures on the amount of money given to public companies via loans, grants or regional premiums in Northern Ireland over the past five years. The object of the exercise would be to show, not that Northern Ireland business depended on British Government money but that even firms like Courtaulds would not be there at all if it was not for British Government support.

The Minister then raised the question of the IRA-UDA talks. He wondered if the British Government had any idea how these talks would evolve? He himself had the impression that IRA morale was low at the moment and clearly the leadership is so fragmented that there is no control at the top.

Mr. Orme replied that the British Government was not in communication either officially or otherwise with the IRA. The Minister replied that others were and Mr. Orme said he did not know if this was true or not but if they were talking it was up to them and if it produced a cease-fire that would be a good thing. He agreed that the Provisional morale was low. The

British Government were presently looking at the role of the Army and at the whole question of policing but if they are to make progress on this they need the co-operation of the Catholic minority. The solution of a community police force had its dangers in that it could well play into the hands of people like John Taylor. Nevertheless the Army could not be a police force and the British were looking at the possibilities of extending the present police force in a way that was acceptable at the same time linking this with the ending of internment. The present bombing incidents in Britain were not helping in this regard. He asked that whatever influence we have with the minority community in Northern Ireland should be used to help in this situation.

The Minister replied that we would help in any way we could. He agreed that policing was vital but he was very worried about the Army's behaviour at the moment. There seemed to be no overall policy in the matter and different regiments behaved in different ways in different areas in the North, independent of any conformity to a political policy. It was particularly bad in the Creggan at the moment where thousands of people in the last few weeks had been harassed, apparently at the whim of the local Commander whose only ambition seemed to be to finish his tour of duty without any casualties. Mr. Orme accepted that there were difficulties and said they wished to explain their thinking at the moment but that we should not note what he was going to say. In substance he said that they were re-examining the whole role of the Army and had had consultations with the SDLP in the matter. They were aware of the difficulties and they were genuinely trying to find a solution.

The Minister then raised the question of detention and in particular the Resettlement Committee for released detainees, which had recently been set up. The members of this Committee

seemed to have a strong "Provo" orientation and to have been designed specifically with a view to being acceptable to the "Provos". This was very unfair on the SDLP whose difficulties with internment Mr. Orme knew well and who needed to be seen to get the credit for the ending of internment. The present policy was weakening the SDLP's position with the minority community and could have very serious long-term consequences.

Mr. Orme replied that it was very difficult to see how he could associate the SDLP with this Committee. As the Minister was aware, the SDLP were not acceptable, for example, as visitors to Long Kesh. What the British Government had tried to do in setting up this Committee was to pick on people who were acceptable to the communities in Northern Ireland, in the internment context. SDLP members would not be acceptable. Therefore, on the Protestant side they had nominated people like Sandy Scott and on the Catholic side Sean Mackle. They had also nominated Miss Betty Sinclair, a Communist, but who is acceptable to the Official IRA. The Government money which was being put into the project (£20,000) was for a secretariat and a field force. The operation would be run by a fieldworker with the Community Relations Commission. In setting up the Committee, they had looked for people acceptable to extremists but people who were, of course, unconnected with violence and acceptable in their individual communities. The Minister said that the phraseology "acceptable to the community" was rather worrying. He could accept that the Committee had to be acceptable to the detainees but the implication of saying that they had to be acceptable to the community and then excluding the SDLP led inevitably to the conclusion that the SDLP was not acceptable to the minority community. Obviously his definition of community was somewhat different from Mr. Orme's.

Mr. Orme replied that before the Committee was nominated he had shown the names to Gerry Fitt and John Hume and that Fitt had objected to one person whose name was promptly withdrawn. The British Government had not been under any pressure from the SDLP to be represented on the Committee. The Minister replied that the SDLP had not asked us either to raise the question of their possible membership of the Committee but the worrying feature was still there of giving credit to the SDLP for the ending of internment. Otherwise there was a danger of setting up an alternative relationship within the minority community with people who are not democratically elected. He accepted Mr. Orme's general thesis about the Committee being acceptable to detainees but could not emphasise too strongly that it needed counter-balance in favour of the SDLP as otherwise it could be politically disastrous for them. Mr. Orme said that he frankly thought there was no kudos for the SDLP in the detention issue except in seeing it brought to an end completely. The areas where the British Government could give credit to the SDLP were in projects such as the £¼ million grant to the Hughes Bakery in Belfast and the Regna factory in Derry.

The Minister replied that the Provisionals' tactics in the matter had been impeccable and he could not fault them on it. He noted the British position but he also noted that they were not sufficiently sensitive to the effect of their present policy on the SDLP and the likelihood of an alternative axis in the minority community being set up. Mr. Orme replied that the Committee was now a registered charity, managed by seven independent people without Government control. It had not been set up for propaganda purposes for anybody. Its object was to resettle people and to help them in finding jobs and housing through field workers who would be attached to the Committee. He did not see that it would in any way harm the SDLP and in many respects he thought they were better out of the operation. The Minister said he accepted

that the establishment of the Committee was not a propaganda exercise but that he would only like to underline once again the need for the British Government to be extremely sensitive to the SDLP in the matter. Mr. Orme accepted this.

Mr. Donlon intervened to say, from his recent contacts with the SDLP he found them more depressed by the current actions and attitudes of the British Government than they had been for a considerable time. Mr. Orme replied that he was aware that the Catholic community in general was depressed at the moment. They had been very depressed after the UWC strike, had recovered temporarily, but that now a more deep-seated depression was setting in. We could be fully assured that the British Government would continue to support the minority. Both sides were frightened and fragmented at the moment and the British will try to play the situation as even-handedly as possible.

The Minister pointed out that the SDLP had a specially difficult problem. There was a move in Northern Ireland for worker to talk to worker and in this context the UWC were equating the SDLP with the Faulkner Unionists. The SDLP feel they are being bypassed and this is a serious problem with deep-seated ^{causes} ~~causes~~ which could have disastrous long-term effects. Mr. Orme replied that the SDLP still have good support in the minority community. He realised that they were footloose at the moment, there was no simple answer to the problem, but he accepted the general drift of the Minister's representations.

The Minister then raised with Mr. Orme the possibility of a joint approach to the EEC Commission by the British Government on regional policy studies for cross-border areas. This was a matter which had originally been raised between Mr. Heath and the Taoiseach at their Baldonnel meeting last September and, while

for various reasons, mainly connected with the discussions on the Council of Ireland, it had been postponed, it now seemed to us that it should be revived and that the studies should be got going.

Mr. Orme replied that he was not briefed on this subject but that he would certainly take it up. It was agreed that the Irish Embassy in London would follow the matter up with the British authorities and that Mr. Orme would do what he could to help.

The Minister also raised the question of the Greencastle fishermen and handed the British side a Note setting out in detail the matters discussed the previous day with the British Ambassador. He did not wish to go into the matter in detail because of the legal and other complexities. However, he pointed out that the fishing season would only last for another few weeks and if harassment could be stopped for that period it would help everyone and then the three agencies and three governments involved could get together to try and reach a solution.

Mr. Orme concluded by saying that the British found the situation extremely fluid at the moment. There was great movement, especially on the Protestant side, and he hoped that in the Republic we would do nothing which would drive either community back into the tribal areas. The bipartisan approach in the South was vital and he hoped that it would continue. The British are re-examining the role of the Army and the police and we could rest assured that the safeguards and parameters within the White Paper were meaningful and would be honoured.

The Minister thanked Mr. Orme and said that the IRA were under pressure from both Catholics and Protestants at the moment and that that perhaps was a hopeful sign. Mr. Orme replied somewhat wryly that if the IRA could agree to a cease-fire the whole situation could be radically altered and changed for the better in a period of three or four months.