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Title: Report written by Liam Cosgrave, Taoiseach, of a meeting he had with Canon [Pádraig] Murphy [parish priest in the parish of Ballymurphy] and Tom Conaty [Independent politician] in which the participants discussed the situation in Northern Ireland, and in particular, the need a more proactive Northern policy from the Irish Government

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Meeting with Canon Murphy and Tom Conaty20th November, 1974

1. Mr. Sean Donlon of the Department of Foreign Affairs informed me that Canon Murphy and Mr. Conaty wished to see me to discuss the Northern situation so that their views could be passed on to Members of the Government. I saw them to-day.

2. Mr. Conaty began by expressing the disillusionment which the minority feel toward the U.K. Government. He stated that previously relations between himself and Canon Murphy with the British Secretary of State had been good and they felt that discussions were worth while. The position now is that they feel that discussions with Mr. Rees are of no value and they have no confidence in what might be said at such a discussion. In particular they place no faith in the statements that the United Kingdom Forces will not be withdrawn and they referred to the various factors which would make a withdrawal possible in the not too distant future. They claimed that the minority were convinced that they would be unprotected and the only protection available could come from the Dublin Government.

3. Both raised the question of political attitudes in the South. It was stated that on the one hand there is agreement not to interfere in Northern Ireland Affairs and on the other, statements which refer to Irish Unity as a desirable goal. In particular it was stated that statements which referred to the amendment of laws in the 26 Counties for the purpose of helping ~~the~~ a movement towards the United Ireland were harmful. They stated that when such views were expressed Northern Ireland Unionists would see no distinction between those who expressed them and I.R.A. leaders - both, in the view of Northern Unionists, were aiming for the same objective. They both expressed the view that the policy of wooing Northern Ireland Unionists was, in any event, a fruitless one because the Unionists were interested merely in maintaining a position of power and a concession made by the Dublin Government would not in any way alter their determination not to share power with the minority.

4. They proposed that the Dublin Government should do two things. Firstly, clearly and publicly disengage

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politically from Northern Ireland. Secondly, publicly *make* ~~the~~ *known* intention to assist the minority in a doomsday situation. It should back up this declaration by concrete action in the form of creating a territorial reserve, investing in equipment such as helicopters field kitchens, mobile generators etc. They explained that the object of the second part of the strategy was political. It was thought that the threat of intervention by the Irish Army would have two consequences;

- (a) It would strengthen the resolve of the British Government to keep ~~the~~ ^{the} Army in Northern Ireland and
- (b) It would frighten the Loyalist "Bullies".

They were at pains to explain that any intervention, in fact, by the Irish Army would result in more Catholic deaths than would be saved and so the policy was one similar to that of a country with the Nuclear Bomb - the threat to use it would be a deterrent but it would, in fact, not be used.

5. In addition, they urged the creation of an All-Party Committee in the South. They were critical of the North being made a football in Irish politics and referred to statements recently made in the Cork by-election. They urged that a Minister of Cabinet rank should be in charge exclusively of Northern Ireland Affairs.
6. They referred also to the desirability of further action by the Dublin Government against the I.R.A. They stated that it was very difficult to answer Unionist criticism of the inactivity of the Dublin Government. They suggested, as an example, that the photographs of the Portlaoise escapees should be outside every police station and that the Government should offer rewards for their apprehension. They were also critical of R.T.E.'s bias towards the I.R.A. Canon Murphy stated that he had many times complained to R.T.E. of biased pro-I.R.A. reporting.

The question of assistance by an International Organisation was raised by them. I referred to the possibility of a U.N. intervention. They expressed the view that this would be greatly welcomed. A discussion took place on the possibility of a joint U.K. - Irish approach to the U.N., followed by a U.N. security force ~~introducing the idea of~~ *introduced after* a phased withdrawal of the U.K. Army.

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They appeared to think that such a policy held out ~~great~~ ^{helpful} prospects. I took pains to point out that such ideas were merely part of a general contingency planning by the Dublin Government. In the same context I discussed with them the possibility of a cancellation of the proposed Convention Elections. Canon Murphy stated that he would enthusiastically support such an idea but both expressed the view that it would be extremely difficult to obtain the agreement of the U.K. Government to this course.

7. They informed me that they were seeing representatives of the Fianna Fail party this afternoon. They would treat our discussion as a confidential one. Mr. Conaty said that he might make public his views that there should be an All-Party Committee and that he had expressed this view to representatives of the political parties in Dublin. I stated that I could not express any view on the proposals which they had made but that I would see that they were conveyed to the Government.

JL.

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