

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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**Title:** Note by Walter Kirwan, Principal Officer,  
Department of the Taoiseach, reporting on  
telephone conversation with Sean Donlon,  
Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign  
Affairs, concerning inter-party talks aside from  
the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention

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NOTE:-

Mr. Seán Donlon, Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, phoned me this morning to acquaint me with the position in relation to the inter-party talks aside from the Constitutional Convention in Northern Ireland. He told me that he had already explained the position to the Secretary on last Friday evening.

He said that both sides of the talks now accepted that it would not be possible to reach agreement. The talks will be continued this week but this would be to deal with procedure matters, as both sides agreed that there was little point in discussing further matters on which they were unable to bridge their differences. Sir Robert Lowry was trying to retrieve the situation. He had said to the parties that while he accepted that they did not agree on power-sharing, he understood that there were a number of areas in which they did agree and that these should be established, so that the Convention could produce a report, which, even if this registered disagreement on the Crux issue, was the most favourable possible in relation to the current situation in the North. However, while some further meetings will be held this week, the parties were not inclined to prolong their discussions unduly to satisfy Sir Robert Lowry or anyone else of what they themselves already knew to be true i.e. that they could not agree.

Mr. Donlon told me that he had given the bulk of the notes I had supplied on power-sharing to the SDLP (orally as I understood it). He had not given the full document, as had he done so at the particular time in question (last Thursday), it might have been seen as pressure from Dublin. At that time, the party was being subjected to considerable pressure from a number of quarters, basically saying the same thing, i.e. that there must be something in this committee system being offered by the UUUC and that the SDLP should examine it more closely. In that situation, the full text of the notes, which involved a very political concept, might have been understood in the wrong sense by the SDLP, no matter what emphasis was laid on their being purely personal etc. I told Mr. Donlon that I fully understood and accepted that it had been necessary to do as he had done. When drafting the notes I had been very conscious of their political dimension. It was for that reason that I had been at such pains in the covering letter sending them to him to stress my recognition that the SDLP were in the best position to assess the politics of the matter: it was also for this reason that I had left it to his discretion as to what should be done with the notes. Mr. Donlon said that the SDLP wished to flesh out their part of the Convention report as much as possible and possibly to go public to appeal to the people of the North generally over the heads of the UUUC. In this connection, they would wish to demonstrate that they had taken the whole exercise quite seriously. They were therefore anxious to secure further advice in relation to the financial aspect of a devolved administration for the North. I told Mr. Donlon that I had gone into this matter and that I would provide notes either today or tomorrow.

I mentioned to Mr. Donlon that there was a question of my attending the meeting between he and the Minister for Lands on the one side, and Mr. Michael Canavan, of the SDLP, on the other. There was a possibility that the Government might discuss Northern Ireland at their meeting fixed for next Friday. This Department would wish to submit a

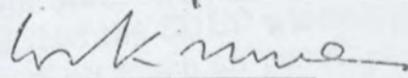
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supplementary memorandum on the relief of distress bringing Ministers up to date on developments since the previous memorandum was submitted. It might be necessary to refer to matters relating to this subject which arose in the meeting with Mr. Canavan. As time was short, I thought it better not to have to await a report from Mr. Donlon before commencing to draft the Supplementary Memorandum. Mr. Donlon had some reservations about a 3 man delegation from our side meeting a single representative of the SDLP. He also thought it unlikely that the Government would have a substantive discussion on Northern Ireland next Friday, as his Minister would not be present and so far as he was aware neither would a number of other Ministers who would be concerned directly. His Minister would probably be submitting a further memorandum on the developments in the Convention and on the whole spread of Northern Ireland policy. It would be desirable that any memorandum on relief of distress should not be considered by the Government in isolation. I assured Mr. Donlon that I was quite conscious of this and had assumed that his Department would be preparing a Memorandum on the broader aspects and that the two memoranda would be considered simultaneously by the Government. In the circumstances, I agreed that I should not attend the meeting between the Minister and Mr. Canavan, on the understanding that Mr. Donlon would give me a telephoned account of anything that transpired relevant for a Supplementary Memorandum on relief of distress. Mr. Donlon mentioned that he expected that this element would be touched on only very lightly in the meeting which he expected, would be largely concerned with other elements of contingency planning. He thought that in this connection, the Minister for Lands should be aware of this and that it would be desirable that he (the Minister) should simply listen to Mr. Canavan. I told Mr. Donlon that the Secretary had seen the Minister on last Friday. The Secretary was aware of the decision that the Minister should simply listen to Mr. Canavan and he had almost certainly advised the Minister accordingly.

In conclusion, I told Mr. Donlon that I would finalise the notes on finance and forward them to him as soon as possible.



25 August, 1975.