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REPORT OF MEETING

1. The Taoiseach, who was accompanied by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Posts and Telegraphs and Labour, received a delegation from the S.D.L.P. on Thursday, 27th May, 1976 in Government Buildings. The S.D.L.P. delegation comprised Mr. John Hume, Deputy Leader, Mr. Austin Currie, Mr. Paddy Devlin, Mr. Ivan Cooper, Mr. Seamus Mallon and Mr. Frank Feeley.
2. The Taoiseach suggested discussion on -
 - (1) the recent moves by Messrs. Paisley and Baird for the formation of vigilante groups;
 - (2) private talks which the S.D.L.P. have been having with the Official Unionists;
 - (3) the political situation, etc. in Northern Ireland and
 - (4) the meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the following day.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that no announcement of the meeting with Mr. Rees was being made.

3. Mr. Hume said that a problem was to try to keep the Party together. The Convention members of the party had remained together as a group and have been describing themselves publicly as Constituency Representatives. The Secretary of State had agreed that all of the Party's former ministers in the Executive would be given full access to Government Departments, etc. and that representations by all former Convention members would be given priority treatment.
4. They had a meeting with the Reverend Martin Smyth about a month ago and since then they had four meetings with the Official Unionist Party, all of which have been cordial. The two sides had exchanged documents: the Unionist document was a hard-line one and they have proposed a Council of State with representatives of all parties on it. The S.D.L.P. document had suggested that the best way forward was a review of the 1973 Constitution Act. They had expected that this line would be rebuffed by the Official Unionists but this had not happened and they were prepared to go through the Act. The S.D.L.P. were seeking -
 - (1) an increase in powers for a future devolved Government in Northern Ireland, including responsibility for policing in the area;
 - (2) reducing or removing the influence of the Secretary of State, as enshrined in the 1973 Act. They envisaged him being replaced by a Governor-type figure who would be described possibly as President or Lord President, with titular functions and perhaps an Advisory Council;
 - (3) an Executive or Government^{to} be formed by proportional representation, its composition to be in proportion to the representatives of the parties willing to form a Government, and
 - (4) that the Act be reviewed at the end of the second parliamentary period.

On the question of proportional Government, the Official Unionists had made a suggestion that the pro-coalition parties should go to the electorate for endorsement on their policies. The S.D.L.P. were not prepared to do this.

Mr. Hume said that the Official Unionists had accepted the other three points without question. They undertook to go back to their Party to see if there was prospect of movement on the question of proportional Government. Mr. Hume said that the talks were extremely confidential. In an attempt to stay in the picture, Craig had issued public invitations to all parties to have talks with him. The Official Unionists were obviously uncomfortable about the Paisley-Baird activities. The recent Provo activity directed at police women was not helping the situation. It had caused an emotional upheaval in the Protestant community and the Ulster Service Corps was the response.

6. Mr. Currie said that at the last meeting with the Dublin Government they had expressed the opinion that any political break-through in the North would be in the Autumn. The talks with the Official Unionists were hopeful, but at this stage they are aimed at trying to build up a situation where meaningful discussion could take place in September/October next. Referring to their last meeting with the Secretary of State on 17th May, Mr. Currie said that Mr. Rees had given them assurances that there would be no full-time battallion of the U.D.R. and that any training of this force in England was aiming solely at increasing their experience and efficiency. There was no question of training them in riot control. The S.D.L.P. were quite sceptical about these assurances and Mr. Currie felt that the Minister for Foreign Affairs should raise the matter with Mr. Rees, as well as the important question of the U.S.C. and the need for the British Government to deal with this development immediately.
7. In a general discussion which followed on the S.D.L.P.'s talks with the Official Unionists, the Minister for Foreign Affairs said that there was a danger that there could be a breach of confidentiality at any time. Mr. Hume said that the willingness of the Official Unionists to talk was an indication of an attempt by them to come to terms with the situation. The discussions could be ruined if they got publicity. Mr. Devlin said that press queries had been received, but the delicate nature of the talks were appreciated and nothing had been published. The view was expressed by the delegation that the Reverend Martin Smyth was the only person in the Official Unionist camp who could challenge Paisley. The talks would be strengthened if the U.S.C. challenge, which was inspired by Paisley and Baird, could be successfully defeated. Mr. Currie said that in a recent private conversation which he had with Mr. West, the latter had made quite clear his increasing abhorrence of the actions of Paisley.
8. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that the Government had discussed the question of an approach to the British regarding the U.S.C. Because of the delicate nature of the problem they had decided not to take any action until they had the S.D.L.P.'s views on it. Mr. Mallon said that a soft approach to the U.S.C. patrols would have very seriously ^{repercussions} ~~repercussions~~ for the Party's policy on policing. This policy would be almost impossible to implement if the U.S.C. were not tackled. The whole question of the "Ulsterisation" of the police would be jeopardised. Mr. Currie said that emergence of the U.S.C. could not be separated from the whole position of the U.D.R./R.U.C. reserve. The level of recruitment to these forces had not gone up and the result was that members of these forces were in the ranks of the U.S.C. The latter organisation was, in his view, a cover for sectarian assassinations and he expected that

the proof of this would be apparent before long. The Provisionals were just waiting for this type of development so that they could retaliate. Replying to questions from the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, the visitors said that the fact that Paisley and Baird were calling out the U.S.C. made that organisation more dangerous than the existing para-military ones. As regards the manner in which the U.S.C. would operate, the visitors felt that a large number of mobile patrols would be used, concentrated on rural areas. Most of the meaningful activity of the U.S.C. would be in the Moy/Portadown areas. There would probably be road-blocks for the ostensible purpose of checking driving licences. These licences betrayed one's religion. The delegation also felt that there would be a publicity dimension to the commencement of U.S.C. patrols, with a possible photograph of a patrol operating in a "safe" area, such as the Shankill, being published in the "Newsletter".

9. As regards the best manner of dealing with the U.S.C., Mr. Hume expressed the view that they should be arrested immediately they appeared - for being armed. It was an extremely dangerous situation and if it once got started the cry would go up for protection for the minority community and such a plea would be directed to Dublin. Mr. Currie said that the Party as a whole did not have an opportunity of considering the U.S.C. development but his personal view was that pressure should be put on the police initially, to deal with the threat. If the police could not cope, the British Army would have to go in. Mr. Mallon felt that it would be impossible for the police to deal with the situation as the U.S.C. would have information available to them as to where R.U.C. patrols would be operating at any given time and would avoid such areas. Mr. Feeley felt that because of the close link between the U.S.C. and the police, only the British Army could be trusted to deal with the situation. Mr. Devlin said that it was necessary to put on the record that the police had improved immensely, - there were some very good officers now working in their own area. In response to a question from the Minister for Labour, Mr. Currie said that it would be difficult to adopt a flexible response to the U.S.C., using the Army against them in one area and the R.U.C. in another. The Army depended a lot on the local knowledge of the R.U.C. and the U.D.R. He had the strongest reservations about the R.U.C. reserve. Mr. Currie felt that from a tactical point of view it seemed to him that the R.U.C. should be used in the situation. Paisley and Baird would be far more discomfited if there was confrontation between fellow Ulstermen than if the British Army were used. The situation could vary from area to area and it was accepted that the impartiality of the police was open to question in some localities. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that public statements on the matter might not be helpful and enquired as to the possibility of preventing a propaganda exercise being made of the operation.

10. Mr. Hume said that they would like to take up the question of cross-border co-operation. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that he had just announced that the two Governments had recommended to the EEC the consultancy firms who would carry out the cross-border study in the Derry and Donegal area. Mr. Feeley said he believed that the first EEC aid for cross-border studies should have been to the North-East area. There was over 30% unemployment in the Newry/Warrenpoint district. With the new port in Warrenpoint and the deep sea facilities at Greenore the necessary infrastructure existed for export

projects operating on a cross-border basis. Mr. Feeley also mentioned the possibility of a bridge-link between Warrenpoint and Omeath.

1. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that the North-East had been proposed by the British originally. It was a question of putting proposals to the British and he would take the matter up with them. Mr. Hume mentioned that Northern Ireland Civil Servants were saying that the relevant Government Departments in Dublin were dragging their feet in relation to Carlingford Lough. He also felt that the possibility of a joint industrial estate in the North-West area might be looked at. The Minister for Foreign Affairs said that the Northern Ireland Ministers were not showing much enthusiasm in relation to cross-border co-operation.
12. Mr. Cooper said that the opportunity might be taken in the talks the following day with Mr. Rees to refer to the continuing talks between the British and the Provisionals or representatives of Sinn Féin. These talks eroded the position of the S.D.L.P. and Mr. Rees had refused to say that the talks would not be continued. Mr. Devlin confirmed that meetings were still going on at fairly frequent intervals.
13. The terms of the statement which might be issued to the press were agreed and the meeting then concluded. A copy of the statement which was issued is attached.