

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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27th October, 1976.

Dear Jim,

I feel it necessary to bring urgently to your attention a matter which is causing my colleagues and me grave concern. You will be aware that we see as dangerous tendencies on the political front in Northern Ireland the growing intransigence on the Unionist side and increasing depression amongst the S.D.L.P. As Garret FitzGerald suggested to Roy Mason five weeks ago, to stop this rot requires, in our view, a clear-cut re-statement of the British Government's commitment to the policy of participation by both sections of the Northern Ireland community in executive power as a precondition of devolution.

My Government are very concerned at the proposed terms of a reply to a Parliamentary Question in the Commons to-morrow. We fear that, in its present form, this reply would be taken by both sides in Northern Ireland as evidence that participation in government by valid representatives of both sections of the community is no longer a precondition for the restoration of devolution, and that some watered-down alternative would be acceptable to the British Government. The words "widespread support throughout the community", not linked to the concept of participation in government, and the use of the words "acquiesce in that system", are open to this interpretation both by wishful thinking Loyalists and depressed S.D.L.P. politicians.

As the foundation of our common policy on Northern Ireland has been the principle of 'no devolution without participation by both sections in self-government', any slippage of this kind could not alone be seriously damaging in Northern Ireland but could create difficulties for my Government's policy of co-operation with your Government in pursuit of a common political goal by mutually-agreed means. For that reason, and because of the immediate difficulty for us of avoiding in these circumstances public clarification of our position should your proposed statement of your present policy be raised with us in the Dáil or by the Press, the Government has asked me to urge on you the vital importance of maintaining, and being seen to maintain, in an official statement of British Government policy to the Commons, the position on participation in government in Northern Ireland which has been the fundamental basis of our common approach throughout the lifetime of my Government.

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES CALLAGHAN

The Right Honourable James Callaghan, M.P.