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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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Uimhir..... PA.....

Mr. Donlon

M. Maguire

NORTHERN IRELAND

MEETING WITH S.D.L.P.

Taoiseach (on return)

Mr. Donlon (Department of Foreign Affairs) who has been visiting Northern Ireland to continue his contacts with the S.D.L.P. says that the Party will be pressing strongly for a meeting with you before you go to London to see Mr. Callaghan. The principal purpose of their meeting would be to discuss their new policy document, which is due to be published on Monday next, 19th September.

Your schedule at the time during which the S.D.L.P. would be seeking the meeting is extremely full. You will have a Government Meeting on the morning of the 23rd September and a meeting with a delegation from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in the afternoon. It would, I think, be highly undesirable to have the meeting on the 26th September - the day before you leave for London.

Apart from this, there is little or nothing that you will learn from the meeting. The policy document will presumably set out the stance of the S.D.L.P. on the major issues facing us. Their meeting with you, before the Callaghan meeting, could do little but elaborate on the details of that document. The meeting would, therefore, be largely an S.D.L.P. public relations exercise.

The meeting could also have adverse repercussions among the Unionist population in Northern Ireland. And it could, in a way, take from some of the value of your meeting with Mr. Callaghan. The attached copy of a leading article from the Irish Times summarizes some further views.

Personally, I think that it would be better to defer it until after the Callaghan meeting - but the arguments for deferment are by no means conclusive.

If the meeting is to go ahead it will be necessary to contact the S.D.L.P. immediately on 22nd September. The Minister for Foreign Affairs should, I think, also attend any such meeting.

You also have a request from Mr. Frank Maguire M.P. for a meeting before the Callaghan visit. This is, as far as I can recall, the first time he has sought a meeting - and is apparently a move to take from what has been the S.D.L.P.'s unique position as the voice of the minority in Northern Ireland. The infighting between Mr. Maguire and the S.D.L.P. for seats in Fermanagh-Tyrone and mid-Ulster is going to be intense. I think that it would be better, for the present at any rate, to accept only one party as representing the Northern minority - certainly to the extent of holding discussions before Prime Ministerial talks. If you agree, Mr. Maguire might be told that while you would be willing to meet him on another occasion your schedule now would make it impossible to meet him before your meeting with Mr. Callaghan.

[Signature]

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13th September, 1977.