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Northern Ireland

Note:-

At 11.45 a.m., Mr. Brian Cartledge, Private Secretary to the British Prime Minister, Mr. Callaghan, phoned to inquire if the Taoiseach would receive a call from the Prime Minister. He said that the Prime Minister simply wished to talk to the Taoiseach "in the spirit of Copenhagen", when there was agreement that the two men could phone each other at any time for an informal chat. I mentioned the request to the Taoiseach. The Prime Minister phoned shortly before 12.00 noon.

The Prime Minister enquired as to the Taoiseach's impressions of the meeting on Friday between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Mason. The Taoiseach said that he had not yet seen a written report of the meeting but had an oral account of it. From what he knew, things appeared to have gone quite well. He reaffirmed the view that relations between himself and the Prime Minister had never been anything but good.

The Prime Minister then went on to say that there had been no change in policy in relation to integration, as he had outlined it at the meeting in London last September. The Taoiseach said that we had certain apprehensions here on the report. In fact, in the Dáil last week, Mr. Cluskey, Leader of the Labour Party, had raised the whole issue in a way which was, if not trenchant, at least muscular. Mr. Callaghan said that the basis for the speaker's recommendation was simply to give Northern Ireland the sort of representation it was entitled to, on a population basis. The Taoiseach could take it from him that it was not a move towards greater integration. It was, in fact, nothing to do with integration.

The report could not be implemented in time for the next General Election "whenever that might be". Legislation was necessary for implementation - and there would have to be a commission to draw up new constituency boundaries.

The Prime Minister said that he would also like the Taoiseach to understand that there was no arrangement whatsoever with the Unionists. They were not making any concessions to them. His understanding was that they might abstain in the crucial Commons votes on the budget tax proposals - but whatever they did to alter these changes would have to be backed up with proposals for the provision of £400m which their tax concessions would cost.

The Taoiseach said that he noted the position. He was not at all apprehensive about anything that had happened last Friday - or about the outcome of the meeting.

There was then some general discussion about economic issues, including, in particular of the Post Office and Aer Lingus disputes. The Taoiseach mentioned to the Prime Minister the terms of the National Wage Agreement - and of the proposals for the settlement of the dispute. The greatest danger was, perhaps, a spill-over

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In conclusion, the Taoiseach said that he was glad that the Prime Minister had felt free to phone him like this. He would reciprocate the call, on a future occasion, if he thought it necessary.

SH

8th May, 1978.