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# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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SECRET

## Northern Ireland

Meeting with Messrs Bloomfield and Quigley,  
Head of Northern Ireland Civil Service and of Department  
of Finance and Personnel respectively

Taoiseach

On the Irish side the meeting was attended by Messrs Donlon, McCarthy and the undersigned.

The meeting began yesterday at approximately 11.30 and, despite the intention to finish early, did not, in fact, conclude until 5.15 p.m. when the two visitors had to leave for their train. This is a brief account of the matters discussed. A fuller account will follow.

### Unionist Attitudes

The two visitors were unanimous in expressing concern at the way in which Unionist attitudes are developing. They said that, in Northern politics there is a tendency to extreme language, to emotionalism and to logical cul de sacs. This analysis should not, however, take from our perception of the real dangers ahead. The present situation was, quite simply, that nearly everybody recognised that the Agreement was in place and that neither Government would change it. The Unionists, in their present state of mind, would not draw the obvious conclusions. Instead, they continued along the line which is best described as the "we will eat grass" syndrome. They could bring the whole place down about their ears and, if certain of the extreme elements, had their way, involve the whole island. The present situation was comparable to a building site beside a ravine. All the materials were there to construct a beautiful house with a magnificent outlook over the countryside but there were many people who would willingly throw all the building materials into the ravine. The whole situation must be handled with extreme care, if the Unionists were to be brought inside again - and this was essential to achieve peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

The visitors said that in doing this, it was necessary to look at the whole issue, both in the long and the short term. Essentially, the SDLP should be encouraged to make public expression of support for the security services. The visitors said that they appreciated the difficulties some of which were explained to them, for the SDLP in doing this. They recognised the worth of the SDLP position which described the Agreement as part of a

## ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

2.

"process". If this process could be seen to lead, over time, to more explicit support for security operations, then, the Unionists could, in time, be brought closer to the SDLP and one of the basic causes of tension in the community eliminated. Unionist politicians used extreme language but did we, down here, know the pressures they were living under? Their friends and neighbours were being killed, month after month; they attended funerals of UDR men and RUC men; at the same time these people who were giving their lives to protect the community, were seen as not receiving, at the minimum, the degree of support to which Unionists felt they were entitled, from the constitutional representatives of the minority community. This was a situation which had the seeds of dangerous confrontation.

So far as Dublin was concerned, was there any chance that in commenting on the activities of the security forces, or in putting forward policies, there could be some degree of recognition of the job which those forces were doing in most difficult circumstances? All is not perfect in the court system or with the security forces but, in seeking to correct what was wrong, we should not fall into the trap of approaching the subject only with the idea of criticism in mind. We could get what we wanted, without alienating those whose support was essential to any normal society in Northern Ireland.

All this was part of a policy to try to win back moderate unionism. There was, as yet, little sign that this was happening. When even as moderate a body as the editorial board of the Belfast Telegraph was still fulminating about the Agreement, the difficulties could be appreciated. Was there any way in which influential Unionists - such as the Board of the Telegraph - could be induced to look to the Agreement and see what was in it for them - and for Ulster? What we were doing in this line did not seem, in their state of knowledge, to be sufficient.

### Forthcoming Events

The visitors said that the RUC, in many areas, were under extreme pressure. For example, following the banning of the Portadown march last Summer, some members of the force had been obliged to move house - for their own safety and that of their families. It must be an essential aim of policy to preserve the integrity of the RUC. Their position would become difficult, if not impossible, if they were seen to ban marches simply because the request had come from the Conference; they would be accused of dancing to the tune of the Southern Government. The

## ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

3.

consequences were obvious. Unionists would build the entire situation up into confrontation, in the way they liked best. There would be the opportunity for massive, physical confrontation, particularly during the marching season, at locations chosen by extreme elements, where the largest forces could be mustered.

If representations about parades and processions were to be made, their strong recommendation was that they should come from the locality, through local representatives, direct to the Chief Constable or the local Supervising Officer. The function of the Conference should be in the policy area laying down guidelines and broad indications of what should be done, without the specificity which would give opponents of the Agreement the opportunity to concentrate their forces at particular places. The visitors emphasised these points strongly, saying that if the integrity of the RUC and their ability to control the situation in the North, were damaged, the consequences could be immeasurable.

### Communications with Unionists

On this, the visitors repeated their suggestions about communications with more moderate elements on the Unionist side, with the idea of getting them back onside, over time. They said that if it were possible to devise some method of letting Unionists know in advance what was coming up before the Conference, so that they could have an input, a good day's work would have been done. They appreciated the difficulties. The present situation was that people not involved in the Conference only knew in retrospect what had happened.

Another point was that it seemed desirable to avoid a situation where the Conference seemed to be a place where the Irish - or the British - were always the demandeurs so that in the communiques issued after the meetings anybody could point to a particular conclusion and say that "the Irish had won that one" and "the British had won that one". Sometimes this sort of situation would be inevitable. It was important, to emphasise more the commonality of interest of both sides in what was happening - and if at all possible to devise machinery for the involvement of people whom, they appreciated, now did not want to be involved but simply wanted to destroy the whole thing.

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# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

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## Handling of the Press

There were some exchanges on possibilities of improvement in this area.

## Devolution

There was discussion of the establishment by the Assembly of a Grand Committee which now seemed to be on the point of demanding that Northern Ireland civil servants should appear before them to explain the work of their Departments. The attitude being taken to this was that Ministers were the political masters of Departments and if the Grand Committee wished to develop along the line it seemed to be going, then they should deal with Ministers. This could lead to difficulties - possibly even to the dissolution of the Assembly. The possibilities of confrontation between the British Government and Unionists, on this and other aspects of the Assembly's work were obvious.

What was really happening was that the Unionists were casting about, without any very clear thought as to where they were going, for a way of being involved in the administration. There were many different strands of Unionist thought but an important element in it was that which saw the necessity to get power back in Northern Ireland. Many of these could, perhaps, be brought to accept that devolution, on the basis of widespread acceptance throughout the community, was the only way in which they could now achieve this. If there were any possibility that the SDLP could now indicate that they were willing to engage in serious discussion on the subject, this could be extremely helpful. Better still, if they could set out their ideas in a blueprint or paper. The timing of this would be important. At present, with the Unionists in their present mood, it was quite possible that any initiative would fall flat and the Unionists would talk themselves into a cul de sac - they were quite good at this! And they would find great difficulty in extricating themselves. So far as they were concerned, they had their devolution report on the table and serious account might be taken of this. Though it would not be easy, they should, at the right time, be given an opportunity of getting themselves off the hook onto which they were so good at impaling themselves.

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# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

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## Assembly

Nobody quite knew what the future of the Assembly was. In the present state of Unionist opinion, with the work of the "Grand Committee" taking the direction in which it seemed to be moving, forecasts were more than usually difficult. However, decisions would have to be taken soon, as to what was to happen to the body after next October, on one scenario or another.

## Fund

There was a brief discussion on what was happening in the U.S. Insofar as contributions from the EEC were concerned, the visitors indicated that an ordinary contribution, financed, in the ordinary way, from the EEC Budget, would not suit. They did not want a situation where Greece and Portugal contributed; Britain would also find it difficult - arguing that they were already pouring massive funds into the province, and on top of that, they should not be asked to contribute a further 20% or so of what the Community contribution was. There seemed to be a possibility that an instrument could be devised under which countries could contribute through the EEC, selectively. This seemed to be the line to be followed.

*Amendment  
to  
Finance  
(1975)  
Treaty*

## Public Appointments

The visitors said that they would welcome suggestions on names and on the structure of the bodies covered by the Agreement. They had computerised lists, to which they would be only too glad to add any names we wished to suggest so that, over time, the suggestions could be fed into the system in the normal way, with the least possibility of controversy. They were under an obligation under the 1973 Constitution Act not to take into account creed, race, etc., in making appointments to public bodies; and this would have to be watched carefully. Our views on the general issues were made known.

## Civil Service Appointments

There was some brief discussion on this over lunch.

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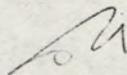
# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

6.

## Conclusion

Both men appeared to be genuinely anxious to make the Agreement work. The suggestions they offered were, as might be expected, based on their experience of working various administrations in Northern Ireland, largely under Unionist or British direction. All found the meeting useful and there is agreement that if necessary, the contacts can be renewed at any time. (Both Sean Donlon and I have known Bloomfield for over 12 years.)



28 January 1986

Copies to:

-Tánaiste  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Minister for Justice  
Attorney General.

Mr Ward, Mr Donlon,  
Mr O Tuathail and Mr Russell.