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Meeting with S.D.L.P delegation, 6 February, 1981.

Introduction

1. The Taoiseach accompanied by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Education met a delegation from the S.D.L.P in Government Buildings on 6 February, 1981. A list of the members of the delegation is set out in the joint statement issued after the meeting, a copy of which is annexed to this note. Messrs. Nelligan and Burke, Department of Foreign Affairs and Kirwan and Murray, Department of the Taoiseach were also present.

Dublin Summit

2. The Taoiseach in welcoming the delegation asked Mr. Hume to give an up-to-date account of the present political situation in Northern Ireland. He asked for any suggestions or proposals which the delegation might have which would help in achieving common objectives. Mr. Hume said that the S.D.L.P. were pleased with the outcome of the summit meeting of 8 December. The agreed communique issued after that meeting showed that the two Governments were searching for a solution and in the process were facing up to all three dimensions of the problem. The agreement to commission joint studies was a major advance. They had noted that the joint study teams were now meeting. Both Governments welcomed meetings such as this, and he hoped that other parties would participate in the process.

Paisley 'hill top assembly'

3. Mr. Hume then referred to the events of the previous evening (Paisley's 'hilltop assembly' of five hundred men in military formation, all of whom had displayed what Mr. Paisley had described as "a legally held firearms certificate").

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The S.D.L.P. did not wish to over estimate what had happened on that occasion. There was a battle going on within Unionist ranks at present. Paisley had been criticised because of his non-delivery on devolved Government, to which he had committed himself last year. He was now trying to recover his position within the Unionist community. Mr. Hume referred to a report which had been broadcast by the B.B.C. in their World at One programme that day, which had stated that "senior Officials in Dublin were deeply depressed " by the Ballymena episode. This was entirely the wrong reaction. Nothing had been done by the two Governments that threatened the people of Northern Ireland in any way. It would be to advantage if that were said publicly. There was a sense of fear among both sections of the community in Northern Ireland. Steady statements could help in this situation.

Joint Studies: Public reaction

4. Mr. Hume referred to the joint studies which he said had received a lot of public attention. The British/Irish relationship aspect had, in particular, been the subject of much comment. Suggested solutions on the lines of the Benelux arrangement and the Nordic Council had been referred to. In addition a form of Anglo-Irish Council had been mentioned and this was something with which he was in broad agreement. He was concerned, however, that the British Government might want to stop at that point. There had been no reference to the third dimension, relationships within Ireland itself. He would advise the Government to adopt the position that participation in an Anglo-Irish Council would involve sacrifices on behalf of the Government here, and this aspect should be represented as a concession to the British. He would like to see several options coming out of the joint studies process. There were three principal models:-

- a confederal solution,
- a federal solution,
- a unitary solution.

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In his view, a most realistic option was the federal model, which would give a substantial degree of autonomy to Northern Ireland. If the joint studies were to go in that direction, the S.D.L.P. would be happy.

B.B.C. Report

5. The Taoiseach referred to the B.B.C. report of "acute depression" in Dublin at the Paisley episode. As far as he is aware, the B.B.C. representative had not been in touch with any Government spokesman in this regard. As to the incident itself, it would appear to be a case of Mr. Paisley jockeying for position within the Unionist section of the community. Mr. Hume agreed with this analysis. The Taoiseach then referred to the statement that the five hundred men were in possession of "legally held firearms certificates". Mr. Hume said that he had challenged Mr. Paisley on this issue. Apart from certain public figures and holders of sporting weapons, only members of the security forces could hold firearms legally. Mr. Paisley, however, would not spell out whether members of the security forces were involved in the Ballymena episode. He was fighting a big battle within Unionism and was whipping up fear. On the occasion in question, he had imitated Lord Carson in several respects, including manner of dress.

Security Forces involvement

6. Mr. Mallon said that Andy Tyrie had made it clear that Paisley would not be leading the Protestant paramilitaries. The force assembled near Ballymena on the previous evening were another paramilitary group, not the U.D.A. In Mr. Mallon's view, the bulk of the five hundred men in question, came from within the security forces, specifically the U.D.R. all of whom held guns legally. Mr. Canavan was of the view that it would be difficult to say what effect this episode would have on public opinion. A climate of opinion against paramilitary activity had been developing in Northern Ireland. The Paisley assembly, was,

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in effect a group of people meeting just like another paramilitary gang. In this they were going outside the law. The Reverend Sydney Callaghan, President of the Methodist Church, had said clearly that he was against groups acting outside the law. Lord Brookeborough had made a similar statement. In Mr. Canavan's view, Paisley had not picked a good time for his demonstration and he would not succeed in uniting Unionism in this way. In response to a query from the Minister for Education, Mr. Hume said that, on the basis of a discussion with a journalist, he was satisfied that the Paisley assembly had not included participation from the U.D.A. In this connection, Mr. Currie said that Andy Tyrie had always made the point that there were politicians on the Unionists side who led men into prison and then left them in the lurch. This he had interpreted as a reference to Messrs. Paisley and Craig.

Paisley's motives

7. Mr. Hugh Logue referring to the recent B.B.C. and U.T.V. programmes on Irish history said that the Unionist mind was fertile for the image of Carson to be thrown up again. Paisley wanted to reinforce that the Unionist cause was in as good a hands now as in 1912. The Taoiseach asked if it was now the case that Paisley was trying to intimidate the British Government. Mr. Hume agreed. Mr. Feely expressed the view that Paisley's parliamentary influence had been declining in recent years. He had, in effect, been thrown out of his meeting with the British Prime Minister following the Dublin summit. He had never been adverse to going outside Parliament to seek publicity and this was the real danger. He was using the pretence of military force and the fear that this would generate to prevent the two Governments from going as far as they might wish, or at least to dilute what had been agreed between them.

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8. The Taoiseach enquired whether it was possible to assemble a force of five hundred men from the U.D.R., without the R.U.C. knowing what was going on. Mr. Hume said no, and that reaction to the occurrence would have to come from the security forces. Mr. Mallon stated that the Officer Corps of the U.D.R. on the ground, were Paisley supporters. Mr. Feely added that half of the small farmers of Antrim are members of the U.D.R. or the R.U.C. reserve. The balance would probably be holders of licenced shotguns. Mr. Currie reminded the meeting that the Ulster Protestant Volunteers had ^{been} created by Paisley in the mid sixties. This organisation had been responsible for a number of explosions, which in turn contributed to the downfall of Captain O'Neill. Mr. Hume spoke of Mr. Paisley as Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Last year he played the Dr. Jekyll role, but this year things were different. Mr. Currie added that Paisley had brought down local institutions in the past. There was no local institution to bring down now. Mr. Canavan reiterated the view that Paisley was now trying to dislocate the talks going on between the British and Irish Governments. The S.D.L.P. would tackle him on the illegality of what he was doing, i.e. introducing another paramilitary agency into an area which had already suffered too much because of the activities of paramilitary groups.

9. Mr. Austin Currie said he had spoken to Harold Mc Cusker, M.P. about the Paisley assembly. Mc Cusker would not condone the move but said he could well understand the frustration which brought it about - bad security. Mr. Logue was of the view that Paisley would try to repeat this "performance" in another area. It was all part of the lead up to the local Government elections. Dr. Joe Hendron agreed with this and said that this type of

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activity would be the main plank of the D.U.P. election campaign.

Government reaction to Paisley move

10. Mr. Mallon said that the British Army were not operating in many areas in Northern Ireland at present. Patrols were in the main carried out by the U.D.R. He was satisfied that there was nowhere in Northern Ireland where twenty men or more could gather without the security forces being aware of the position. The Taoiseach expressed the view that this event must be worrying for the British Government. Mr. Canavan, in response described it as a direct challenge. The Taoiseach said that the Government here, would let the British Government say whatever they were going to say on the subject first. Mr. Hume cautioned against over reacting. In relation to the present meeting he was of the view that " we should put out our own statement in the ordinary way". There was a brief discussion as to what this statement might contain.

Joint Studies: Confidentiality

11. The Taoiseach referred to his meeting with the British Prime Minister on the 8th December and to the Communique issued after that meeting. It had been agreed that there should be complete confidentiality about the studies. He suggested that the S.D.L.P. should proceed with their own studies so that when the opportunity arose, their input would be available. The official study groups, would in his view, have to "lead to something". Any input which the S.D.L.P. would have at this stage would be accepted informally. Mr. Hume agreed with this approach.

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Ulsterisation of security forces

12. Mr. Canavan referred to the dangers involved in the "Ulsterisation" of the security forces in Northern Ireland. The strength of the British Army in Northern Ireland was being run down and their places were now being taken by the U.D.R. This in his view was a mistake. At the same time he recognised that to raise the question of stopping the withdrawal of British troops was a very sensitive issue. The maintenance of the British Army in the North, could, he suggested be cloaked by political developments. The Government here, might, he further suggested, convey that view privately to the British Government. The S.D.L.P. for their part would continue to comment on the Ulsterisation policy publicly. Mr. Canavan went on to refer to the recent reports of co-operation between the British and Irish armies, which he saw as a "healthy step" and one which would make Ulsterisation more difficult. The Taoiseach in response explained that the Irish Army had a different role to that carried out by the British Army in the North. Contact with the British security forces by our Army, must go through normal Gardai channels, and this was an important principle for us. The Minister for Foreign Affairs added that the recent reports to which Mr. Canavan had referred were inaccurate.

Stronge murders

13. On security, Mr. Mallon referred to the Stronge murders and the failure of the Northern Ireland security forces in this instance. The R.U.C. had been unable to cope in this case. There had been, in consequence, an attempt in some quarters to put the blame for these killings on the South. The fact remained that there had been two police cars involved in the incident, and that the R.U.C. were unable to cope on that occasion.

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Joint Studies: S.D.L.P. input

14. Mr. Hume at this point, referred again to the joint studies process and the significance of this meeting. The S.D.L.P. would be saying that they put their point of view to the Government here, on a regular basis and that they do the same with the British Government. As regards the matter of input into the studies, they would "put stuff privately, but this would not be for public comment".

Economic Co-operation

15. Turning to economic co-operation, Mr. Logue said that Mrs. Thatcher had indicated that this area as such, was not political. He would disagree strongly. Economic co-operation was intensely political. The Northern Ireland economy would have to be shifted away from its U.K. base, where it was but a small isolated area, and integrated into a vibrant all-Ireland economy.

This was an integral part of the political process. He urged strongly, that the two economies be blended together, which he saw as the best way forward for both North and South. The Taoiseach in response said, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the course of his recent visit to Northern Ireland had, in effect, said that. Mr. Hume referred to a dinner, he had attended in honour of the Chancellor's visit, at which leading Northern Ireland bankers and Mr. J. Molyneux, M.P. had been present. The Chancellor said on that occasion, referring to the Dublin summit, that he had been astonished at the positive relationship between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister. Mr. Hugh Logue continuing, said that, more and more Northern Ireland businessmen were questioning their present economic situation, particularly in the light of the relationship with the pound sterling. There were many companies in Northern Ireland, who were anxious to acquire the guaranteed Irish label. He asked what could be done on this. Mr. Currie taking up this point, said that Tyrone Crystal in Dungannon were very concerned

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about this. They wanted to get involved in the guaranteed Irish campaign. The Taoiseach in response, said that this matter was being pursued with the Irish Goods Council. Mr. Feely referred to the introduction of the non-quota section of the Regional Fund, and to the urgent need to improve the Newry-Dundalk road which he said was a bottle-neck and an obstacle to North/South trade. Mr. Mallon expressed the view that, anything which made British rule more acceptable in Northern Ireland, he would view with distaste. Cross-border economic co-operation had, in his view, been an excuse for doing nothing in the past. The joint studies now embarked on, were as he saw them, essentially political. He would not favour piece-meal advances on specific items. The whole thing has got to be settled, he said. He would hope that the Government would be going for broke, in the context of the studies. Mr. Canavan said that while it was desirable to have movement on all fronts, the most important area was the political one. Co-operation on matters such as tourism should not be the end result of the current process.

U.D.A. personnel employed in power stations

Ballylongford 16. Dr. Joe Hendron referred to the number of U.D.A. members who were on the staff of the Ballylongford Power Station. He urged the Government to impress upon the British Government the need to ensure that there are reliable workers in the power stations. In this regard, Mr. Canavan referred to the attempted Loyalist strike in 1977 which did not succeed in taking over the power stations on that occasion. Mr. Logue referred to the access which Loyalist workers had, by virtue of their dominance in the engineering industries, to facilities which could be used for making cru arms, particularly in Belfast. The Taoiseach thought that this "facility" might not be as important today, having regard to the access to other firearms. The Taoiseach went on to refer to the difficulties, which the British Government have had in Britain, in relation to the running of the prisons, where

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the Army had to be brought in, because of industrial relations problems. This type of situation gave rise to many difficulties. However, as regards Northern Ireland, the point was whether the British Government had the political will to cope with the situation.

N.I. local elections

17. In response to a query from the Taoiseach on the forthcoming local elections in Northern Ireland, Mr. Hume confirmed that the S.D.L.P. would be contesting the elections on all fronts. They expected to have a particularly dirty fight in Belfast. However, with P.R., vote splitting was not as great a problem in this respect as in the case of other elections. The successful impact which the Dublin summit meeting had had, was a help to the S.D.L.P. in this respect. It helped to counteract the charge made by others, that the S.D.L.P. were only engaged in "green rhetoric".

H-Block and Armagh Prisons

18. Mr. Currie expressed concern about the situation in the prisons in Northern Ireland. Mr. Hume said that there had been a lot of confusion and disillusion among prisoners, following the conclusion of the hunger strike, in December last. That strike had been called off to save the life of Sean Mc Kenna. The prisoners had said at the time that they were responding to appeals from clergymen. Statements claiming a victory had then been issued by outsiders, and this had caused problems for the prisoners among their own ranks. The fact was that the prisoners did not get an agreement with the British authorities.

The prisoners themselves, had not claimed a victory. When victory was claimed, by persons or groups outside the prison, the British Government had slammed the door. There was now deep division among the Provos, as to what course to follow.

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There were two wings involved, one of which blamed the Taoiseach, Mr. Hume himself and the Cardinal for the present situation. A poster campaign of the hate variety had commenced in the North in this connection, but it was notable that these posters had not been put up in some areas. This type of activity was divisive. The families of the prisoners were very disturbed, and a lot of people had objected to the statement issued on the previous day about a proposed new hunger strike. The deadline for the proposed strike was 1 March, and it was possible that there might be further developments before that.

19. The Taoiseach said that all along people outside the prison had been trying to make capital out of the hunger strike. These people are now trying to get it going again. "If it does, there is nobody going to involve themselves in it", he said. Expressing pious hopes about the situation at this stage would only be "debasing the coinage." Mr. Hume continuing said that, in planning a further hunger strike, the organisers were timing the crunch for Easter, and after that the local Government elections. The Taoiseach in conclusion on this item, said that, if the prison authorities had been a bit less bloody-minded, it would have helped. A good liberal prison Governor would have it solved by now. Mr. Logue agreed, adding that, a refusal by the prison authorities to accept socks and underwear from the prisoner's families was a petty thing. Both sides agreed that the joint statement to be issued following the meeting, should not contain any reference to the H-Block or Armagh situation. Mr. Hume said that if the matter arose, subsequently he would say that the position had been fully discussed.

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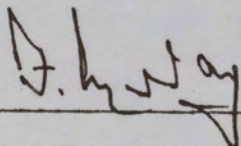
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Conclusion

20. The meeting then considered a draft statement, which was agreed following amendment. The meeting which had commenced at 4.30 p.m., concluded at approximately 5.20 p.m.



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