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Taoiseach's meeting with Messrs. Hume and Currie
of the S.D.L.P.

The following is a list of items to which the Taoiseach may wish to refer in the course of his meeting with Messrs. Hume and Currie of the S.D.L.P. today.

S.D.L.P. Annual Conference

Mr. S. O hUiginn's report on the 8th Annual Conference of the S.D.L.P. which was held in Newcastle Co. Down last weekend has been received. The item of business at the Conference which probably received the most publicity was the motion moved by Mr. Austin Currie urging British disengagement from Northern Ireland on an orderly and phased basis. In his speech in favour of the motion, he emphasised that this was not a mere "Brits out" motion as the S.D.L.P. were committed to an agreed Ireland based on partnership between the different traditions. Mr. Hume in his speech in support of the motion commented adversely on the British Government's pledge to the unionist population which has remained static since the 1920s. In support of unification he argued that his party sought unity not conquest; agreement not conquest.

Mr. O hUiginn in his report makes the point that despite the elaboration which the various S.D.L.P. spokesmen gave on their policy of British withdrawal the unionist would simply see the motion passed at the Conference as another sample of the "Brits out" policy. The Financial Times had a brief item in Monday's edition on the S.D.L.P. Conference with the headline "Troops must go says S.D.L.P. Conference". In this instance as indeed in many other cases British withdrawal is seen by the media in the U.K. as simply return of British troops to the U.K. itself.

By way of follow up to the Conference the S.D.L.P. party executive will, it is understood, select a delegation of prominent members of their party who will seek talks with the British and Irish Governments and the British and Irish Opposition parties to further the policy advocated in Motion 70 as proposed by Mr. Currie. The Taoiseach may wish to enquire from the delegation as to what their intentions are in this respect.

Long Kesh

Motions in support of prisoners rights and declaring the Party's opposition to inhuman and degrading treatment to which persons held in Long Kesh are subjected were passed by the S.D.L.P. Annual Conference, although they did not have the support of the platform. A further motion proposed by Paddy Duffy advocating emergency status for "political prisoners at present in Long Kesh" was referred to the incoming executive for consideration following the intervention of

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Mr. Hume. The Taoiseach may wish to avail of the occasion of his meeting to ascertain the strength of feeling among the S.D.L.P. party members as a whole on the this issue. In correspondence on the subject, we have adopted the line that the Government are doing and will continue to do what they can to help resolve the distressful situation at Long Kesh but that attempts by the provisional I.R.A. and other groups involved in violence to manipulate the plight of the prisoners and their families for their own propaganda purposes has greatly complicated the task of securing an equitable solution. As the Taoiseach will be aware, contacts by the Department of Foreign Affairs with the British authorities on this matter have been on a low key or private basis in which we have urged that every effort should be made to devise some measures to improve the situation without any concession on the principle of special category status. We have also pointed out that as long as conditions remain bad the provisionals had a potential weapon which they might use to regain support in minority areas.

Economic co-operation

The Taoiseach might wish to avail of the opportunity of the meeting to bring the S.D.L.P. delegation up to date on recent developments in the sphere of North/South Economic co-operation. At present studies are in progress or have been completed in three main areas - the Erne Catchment, Newry/Dundalk and Derry/Donegal.

Erne Catchment: A meeting will take place in the Department of Foreign Affairs tomorrow to finalise agreement at official level on the Consultants to be appointed to undertake this study. It is envisaged that the study of the Catchment area with its emphasis on tourism development and development of land resources through arterial drainage will commence next month and will be completed by the end of 1979. As in the case of the Derry/Donegal study, the cost of the Erne Catchment study will be defrayed by the U.K. and Irish Government s together with the European Commission.

Newry/Dundalk study: A proposal for a study of various aspects of cross border co-operation in the Newry/Dundalk area was approved by Ministers at a meeting in Dublin on the 2nd May last. Mr. Roy Mason attended this meeting. An Ad hoc committee of officials from the relevant Departments North and South is to be established shortly to review the adequacy of existing coordination of infrastructural planning and development on both sides of the border in this area and to identify those sectors where coordination could be improved or where further studies would be of mutual benefit. A preliminary meeting of the

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Dublin Department's likely to be involved in the study has already taken place and it is envisaged that there will be a meeting of officials from North and South on the subject later this month.

Derry/Donegal Cross-Border Study: there has been considerable progress in the implementation of the recommendations of this study in so far as roads, bridges, telephones, postal arrangements etc. are concerned and it is expected that a joint North/South progress report will be issued in the not too distant future. Consideration of some of the recommendations contained in the Consultants report such as improvement of the Lough Swilly Bus service and the setting up of an air link between Derry and Dublin are receiving consideration by the relevant Departments concerned, North and South. In relation to tourism, the recommendation that there should be a local tourist association established to support the development of the Derry/Donegal area is under examination in Dublin and Belfast. This has been the subject of specific meetings between officials North and South in the tourism sphere.

Anglo-Irish co-operation: The next meeting of the Steering Group of officials established following the Taoiseach's agreement with the British Prime Minister in September, 1977 will take place on 12 December, in London. A review of progress made to date in the area of practical North/South cooperation will take place at that meeting. It will also attempt to charter the way forward in so far as further opportunities for economic cooperation are concerned - i.e. Electricity interconnector, possible gas link, drainage projects.

Meetings such as that scheduled for London in December, together with the various meetings between officials North and South which have taken place in Belfast and Dublin over the past year, provide a momentum for closer cooperation in the economic area between the two parts of the country. As such they are in line with S.D.L.P. policy which sets out, inter alia, to establish closer links between North and South in all possible areas and also seeks to eliminate the economic disadvantages which border areas (on both sides) have suffered since the creation of partition.

Devolution

Mr. Mason's five point plan for a system of devolved Government in Northern Ireland has not received the support of the S.D.L.P. A copy of the five points is filed underneath. Mr. Mason recently attempted to revive this plan but so far without any apparent success. The Taoiseach may wish to ask Messrs. Hume and Currie

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for their assessment of the possibility, if any, of agreement being reached on a system of limited devolution in Northern Ireland which would involve powersharing, participation or partnership - however described - on the basis acceptable to both sections of the community in Northern Ireland.

Speakers Conference

As we know legislation is to be introduced in the current session of the House of Commons to implement the recommendation of the Speakers Conference. There has been some speculation about the possibility of P.R. being introduced in Northern Ireland for House of Commons elections. Mr. Gerry Fitt is on record as supporting such a move. How do the S.D.L.P. in general feel about the idea?

S.D.L.P. Chairman

Mrs. Brid Rogers, a native of Gweedore, Co. Donegal and a well known S.D.L.P. personality was elected party chairman at the Annual Conference. Despite her standing in the party she failed to secure a seat on Craigavon Borough Council in a recent bye election. She polled 1,456 votes against 1,759 for the Republican Clubs candidate Mr. Tom French (Quota 1,721). The percentage poll was low - 43% and the seat was formerly held by the late Malachy McGurran (Republican Clubs). As stated in the press cuttings attached this was Mrs. Rogers second defeat at the meetings in Craigavon in the past 18 months. It hardly argues well for the S.D.L.P. in that town at least.

J. h.

8th November, 1978.

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