

**CONFIDENTIAL**

NOTE OF MEETING BETWEEN THE NI ADMINISTRATION AND THE PRIME MINISTER IN STORMONT CASTLE ON THURSDAY, 18 APRIL 1974 AT 1 00 PM

Present:

The Prime Minister  
The Secretary of State for NI  
Minister of State for NI  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary  
of State for NI  
Private Secretary to Prime Minister  
Chief Press Officer, Cabinet Offices  
Mr Woodfield, Deputy Secretary, NIO  
Sir Harold Black, Deputy Secretary, NIO  
Mr Trevelyan, Under-Secretary, NIO  
Mr Payne, Under-Secretary, NIO  
Chief Press Officer, NIO  
PPS to Secretary of State

Chief Minister  
Deputy Chief Minister  
Minister for Law Reform  
Minister for the Environment  
Minister of Finance  
Minister of Education  
Minister of Agriculture  
Minister of Information  
Minister of Community Relations  
Secretary, Office of the Executive  
Deputy Secretary, Office of the  
Executive  
Head of Press Services, Office of the  
Executive  
PPS to Chief Minister

Introductory

The Chief Minister apologised for the absence of several of his colleagues who were on business or on holiday out of the country. The Prime Minister apologised for his late arrival due initially to fog earlier that morning and expressed his pleasure at being able to meet the Administration for the first time.

The Secretary of State told the Prime Minister about the previous meeting he had held with the Administration and commented on the desirability of such meetings.

The Chief Minister recalled that he and all his colleagues had taken a considerable political risk in joining the power-sharing Administration. Since they had taken office in January they had been earning the respect of the community but the General Election had come at a bad time and the results locally had been a set-back. The Sunningdale Agreement, which had begun to go sour even before the Election, had become more of an embarrassment since, with the prolonged difficulties over status causing considerable loss of Unionist support and the inability to move on detention alienating SDLP support. In his view the primary need was for peace as there could be no interest or conviction in political developments while violence persisted and while there was still so little sign of security co-operation between the

**CONFIDENTIAL**

CONFIDENTIAL

authorities in the North and the South. He welcomed the support expressed so far by the Government for the Executive and in particular the recent assurance that the Assembly and Executive would be allowed to complete their existing four-year terms. An ambitious economic and social programme was being got ready and after consultations with HM Treasury, should be ready for publication in the form of a Green Paper in the early autumn. It was however, difficult to interest the public in economic and social development while violence persisted and so much good work was being undone. While he and his colleagues had no intention of backing away from the spirit of the Sunningdale Agreement, its early implementation would be impracticable.

The Prime Minister told the Executive that his reason for being in Northern Ireland was to reaffirm the assurance he had given from London of the Government's determination to support the Executive and their determination that there could be no solution through violence. He had already had meetings with the Army and Police that morning and there were some ideas on security to be followed up. Politically, all the Government's hopes rested with the Executive. Direct Rule had been supported by the main parties some two years previously only as a temporary expedient until some solution could be produced. Any return to Direct Rule produced by a collapse of the Executive would come about in radically difficult circumstances. If this solution, so patiently constructed, were to fail, what confidence could there be about finding another? He said that shortly after meeting the Chief Minister earlier in the month in London, he had met the Taoiseach but, contrary to press reports, he had not discussed with him any firm date for the ratification of the Sunningdale Agreement. Their discussion had rather centred on the policies needed to implement full co-operation on counter-violence measures. There was much scope for improvement here as not only policies but technicalities had to be considered. Another development in the near future would be the proposals of the Law Enforcement Commission. He enquired about the thoughts which the Executive might have on the implementation of the Sunningdale Agreement.

The Deputy Chief Minister said that both the Provisional IRA, through its campaign of violence and the Loyalist extremists, by various methods, were hoping to prevent the implementation of Sunningdale, in the one case with a view to bringing unification of Ireland nearer and in the other with a view to a return to something like the old Stormont. While he appreciated the Chief Minister's difficulties about Unionist support for the full implementation of the Sunningdale Agreement, he warned that any derogation from it would antagonise the other parties to it. One of the big problems facing the SDLP was to encourage the Roman Catholic population to identify with the RUC and the only early hope of doing this was through the link-up from the Police through the Police Authority to the Council of Ireland. The other

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

big problem facing SDLP was the phasing-out of internment for, while the Catholic community might accept even severe court sentencing for violence, they could never accept internment without trial, which remained a raw nerve on the political scene. The recent signing of some thirty ICOs had not helped, as it had allowed people to point to the fact that numerically there were more people in detention under the new Labour Government than there had been at the end of the former Conservative Administration's period of office. For these reasons the stalemate would have to be broken by some movement and the only logical form of movement was the early ratification of the Sunningdale Agreement.

The Minister for Law Reform said that while the Northern Ireland Executive had no statutory responsibility for security, they suffered from each bombing incident as showing that the new institutions had failed to restore peace to Northern Ireland. The ordinary person was perhaps, over-simplistic in his interpretation but he failed to discern any underlying security policy. It was evident that not just since the coming of the present Labour Government, but over a much longer period, there had been a widening communications gap between the security forces and the public, who could not understand what was being done on their behalf. On the political front there had been a vacuum of four months since Sunningdale, among the sticking points being cross-border security and the long-awaited report of the Law Enforcement Commission. In his opinion, implementation of those parts of the Agreement which could be got moving was much more important than formal ratification of the total agreement. Indeed a formal ratification could produce a D-Day with violence from both extremes of the political spectrum. The Law Enforcement Commission on fugitive offenders had been set up by the British and Irish Governments and while the Executive was not a party to its proceedings it would be vitally affected by its findings. It was therefore essential that the UK Government should consult the NI Executive before publication. He reinforced the view of the Chief and Deputy Chief Ministers that the UK Government must confirm its support for the Northern Ireland Executive because if that institution failed there could, in his opinion, be a collapse into civil war.

The Prime Minister confirmed that the Secretary of State would meet the Executive to discuss the findings of the Law Enforcement Commission. He agreed that to allow the present vacuum to continue would be wrong and enquired what kind of reaction the Executive had been receiving from Dublin as to the ratification of the Sunningdale Agreement.

The Chief Minister said there had been no clear reaction yet, as before going formally to the Taoiseach to discuss these matters, he had had to clear the lines with his

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Executive colleagues. He had, however, kept the Taoiseach informed about the general atmosphere. While considerable progress had been made in his internal negotiations, he was not yet in a position to speak with authority to either the Taoiseach or the Prime Minister about these proposals. It was clear, however, that formal ratification of the Agreement, including the provisions for a Council of Ireland with a permanent headquarters and staff and executive powers, could deprive the pro-Assembly Unionist group of much of its existing support. He thought it should be feasible to establish the Council of Ministers without executive powers to agree policy on matters of mutual interest to North and South. He had reason to believe that the Taoiseach would give a sympathetic hearing to any proposals which bore the authority of the combined Executive.

The Prime Minister said that while these talks were proceeding within the Executive, the Secretary of State would be developing further their security proposals with the Republic as he realised that the institutions visualised, either in their original or modified form, would be meaningless unless there was a marked improvement in the security situation. The Deputy Chief Minister remarked that there had been some improvements south of the Border and the Minister for Community Relations told the Prime Minister that he lived in a Border town - Strabane - which had already had 242 bomb attacks. He had recently seen something of the security measures south of the Border and was impressed by the fact that the IRA pocket in Lifford had been virtually flushed out but admitted that there were still pockets of terrorists on the Cavan and Monaghan borders. His contacts with the Taoiseach and the Minister for Justice convinced him that they were determined to increase their security measures to make them fully effective. He, too, urged the full backing of the UK Government for the terms of the Sunningdale Agreement and for the Executive and went on to take up the Deputy Chief Minister's theme that until there had been some linkage between the Police through the Police Authority with the Council of Ireland, the Roman Catholic population could not fully identify itself with the Police Force.

The Minister for the Environment noted that, while the SDLP members of the Executive thought that Sunningdale should be ratified at an early date, such a course would deprive the pro-Assembly Unionists of their support. Even before such a development as a non-executive Council of Ministers could be considered, a substantial reduction of violence would be necessary. The Minister quoted from Mr Wilson's fifteen points of 1971, one of which had been a reduction of violence. The Minister went on to compare the pattern in 1969 where the Police had been civilianised on the understanding that the Army would be available to deal with security situations and 1974 where there seemed to be a reversal of policy but not, so far, any evidence that the Police Force was being expanded, trained or equipped to deal with riot situations.

CONFIDENTIAL

**CONFIDENTIAL**

The Secretary of State intervened to confirm that there would be no early or wholesale withdrawal of troops and that their recent plans had merely been to make available Army forces more easily deployed and therefore more effective for counter-terrorist activity.

The Prime Minister said that in his fifteen points he had been looking forward to peace-time conditions when the Police should be able to cope with minor outbreaks of violence and fully agreed that in present conditions the Army would have to bear the brunt of the burden. There would be no less of effective retaliation against violence. There was no question of any change in the Government's determination to end violence. There was, however, a problem of morale among the Army, and particularly among Army families and the Government would have to give serious thought to the prolonged use of troops in a police role in Northern Ireland.

The Minister for the Environment said the Government would have to demonstrate to extremists that they had no hope of succeeding through violence. It was also essential to assure the majority community that the United Kingdom was not attempting to disengage over a shorter or longer period. There was a lack of confidence among the majority community in Her Majesty's Government and this was having its effect on recruiting for the auxiliary security forces.

The Prime Minister recalled his Government's various declarations going back to the Downing Street Communique of 1969 on the rights of the Northern Ireland people to determine their own destiny. He was against setting a fixed date for the withdrawal of the troops as this could only lead to an escalation of violence. He backed the Executive in what they were trying to do and said that he would be in an increasingly difficult position should the troops become caught up in cross-fire between the two communities as then the pressure to pull out completely would be hard to resist. Long-term he hoped to see the Army reduced to a presence on a garrison basis but as violence seemed to recur in cycles in Northern Ireland, one could not really speculate about the future.

L S DUNCAN

22 April 1974

Distribution:

All Members of the Administration  
Secretary, Office of the Executive  
Deputy Secretary, Office of the Executive  
Assistant Secretary, Office of the Executive  
Director of Information  
Head of Press Services

**CONFIDENTIAL**