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Mr. O. H. M. O'Connell 8/11/9

Mr. Ruff

To see, L. & return.

Confidential

1. The following rough notes are based on conversations in the week ending 9 September with Messrs. John Hume, Paddy Duffy, Denis Haughey, Mrs. Brid Rogers, Dan McAreavy (all officials of the SDLP), Paddy Devlin, Canon Pádraic Murphy (P.P. Falls Road) and Dr. Maurice Hayes (Assistant Secretary, Northern Ireland Department of Health and Social Security).
2. The SDLP's policy review is now almost completed and the policy statement will probably be issued on 19 September. It will outline the history of recent SDLP efforts to reach an accommodation with the Official Unionists on the basis of principles laid down by the British Government and will make it clear that these efforts failed because of Unionist intransigence. It will go on to say that although there seems to be no immediate hope of a change of attitude from Unionists, the SDLP re-affirms its view that a policy based on a recognition of two traditions within Northern Ireland and two traditions within Ireland as a whole is the correct policy. Given that there is little hope of early progress in bringing the two traditions within Northern Ireland together in an agreed administration, the SDLP policy statement will call for an intensified effort on the part of the two sovereign governments in keeping the Irish dimension alive e.g. by increased co-operation in the economic and social sectors.

3. All my SDLP sources report that there is no serious disagreement within the party in working out the new policy document. The drafting is being done mainly by Denis Haughey (Party Chairman) and John Hume and the delay in getting the policy statement published is attributed both to the Paddy Devlin affair and the need to ensure that all elements in the party viz. the Executive, the Constituency Representatives and various consultative bodies have an opportunity of commenting on the statement and then being committed to it before publication. The party leadership is very conscious of the fact that last year's conference almost succeeded in defeating the platform and rejecting traditional party policy and is anxious to ensure that this year's conference, scheduled for the first weekend in November, will not represent a serious challenge to the platform.

4. Paddy Devlin is unrepentant about his public disagreement with his former friends but is somewhat surprised at the extent of their reaction. He felt it necessary to bring his disagreement into the open mainly because he found himself excluded from the policy sub-committee but also because of increasing personal difficulties with Hume and Currie who were, he said, preventing him from exercising an influential role within the party. Devlin believed that the general trend of political development in Northern Ireland in recent years was encouraging, with both main groups prepared to

to sit down and try to reach an honourable compromise without looking over their shoulders to London and Dublin. If this trend were to continue, an arrangement might be worked out within two or three years and he has never made any secret of his own preference for an arrangement for Northern Ireland independence. By moving now towards increasing the emphasis on Dublin/London activity - and especially on giving Dublin a more central role than it had since Sunningdale - Devlin thought that the SDLP were wrecking any hope of early progress and he was not prepared to lie down and say nothing. He intends to remain on in the SDLP as an ordinary branch member and he has turned down an approach from former colleagues in the NILP to re-join their ranks. He expects his main activity, including political activity, from now on will be within the trade union movement and he has recently been confirmed in a permanent post as a Belfast based ICTU official. The night I met him in Belfast he had arranged to have with him some loyalist trade unionists, mainly from the Electrical Trade Union, to talk to me in support of his view that people in Northern Ireland could work out their own problems if only they were left alone.

5. The ETU people I met were mainly from the shipyards and the Ballylumford power station. Their political hero was Bill Craig and they made no secret of their intense dislike for Paisley and the loyalist para-militaries. They were proud of their role in defeating the Action Council stoppage

earlier this year and were convinced that the work stoppage as a political instrument had been so blunted that it would not be used again unless there was an imminent danger to the union. Their main interest at the moment was in the economy and jobs and they claimed that 4,000 men were to be laid off at the shipyards before the end of the year. They were very gloomy about the immediate future for the Northern Ireland economy and were asking about the possibility of orders from the south, especially for oil platforms. One or two substantial orders would, they said, remove the considerable suspicion they felt towards the new government! There was no doubt about their suspicion which seemed to be founded more on the events of 1969-72 than e.g. the policy statement of 1975 about which they were almost all unaware.

6. Canon Murphy was equally gloomy about job prospects, especially in Catholic west Belfast. He thought that male unemployment in his own parish in the middle Falls was about 40% and he saw no prospect of any change. He was high in his praise - and in six years I have never heard him praise a British Minister - of Lord Melchett whose work in "areas of greatest need" in Belfast is generally admired in the minority community. As Northern Ireland Minister for Health and Social Security (and Minister for Education), Lord Melchett spends a considerable amount of his time talking informally to priests, tenants associations, community leaders, etc. and he is in charge of a special £2 million fund set up to alleviate poverty in the areas of greatest

need in Belfast. Canon Murphy is depressed by the failure to attract any new industry into west Belfast and is himself going on a trip to the U.S. shortly to follow-up what looked like rather unpromising offers of support from well-meaning U.S. contacts. The Canon is also depressed by what he sees as the strongly emerging influence of the Republic Clubs (with which the Official IRA connection is, he said, still evident in Belfast) now that the Provisional IRA campaign is declining. He was in no doubt about the present weakness of the Provos. in his area but there were enough of them around to organise "spectulars" from time to time and he expected that they would soon review their efforts to focus attention on the plight of non-special category prisoners. It is now a year since the first Provo. was convicted and given normal prison category and there was considerable resentment among Provo. supporters that the organisation had apparently abandoned these prisoners.

7. Dr. Maurice Hayes was also gloomy about the jobs situation and said that the areas of greatest need project of which he is the civil service director was barely scratching the surface. No matter how much money was poured into Northern Ireland, it never seemed to have much impact on the worst effected minority areas and there was nothing in the pipeline which would make any serious impact in the traditional high unemployment minority areas. Dr. Hayes described in some detail the work in which he and Lord Melchett were engaged and the most interesting political aspect was that in the case of all the twenty six meetings which were arranged for Lord Melchett in the

minority areas of Belfast, the political parties were invited to send a representative. The Republican Clubs turned up in all twenty six cases and were usually represented by people who were well informed and able to articulate local grievances. The Alliance Party also usually managed to be represented but in no case that he was aware of had the SDLP bothered to send anyone.

(The SDLP have never been strongly organised in Belfast and at last count the party had only 4 branches in the Westminster constituency of west Belfast. This compares, for example, with 26 branches in the Derry constituency. At the local elections, however, the SDLP drew 18.55% of the votes in Belfast as against 18.65% for the Alliance and 4.6% for the Republican Clubs).

8. In reply to my queries, Dr. Hayes said that there was still very few Catholics in the senior civil service in Northern Ireland Departments. There are at present 9 Departments with 35 Permanent ^{or Deputy} Secretaries and Senior Assistant Secretaries. Only two of these posts are held by Catholics and there is little prospect of change. Dr. Hayes thought that, in a situation of continued direct rule, it was unfortunate that there was no Catholic in the Committee of Permanent Secretaries which tended to be the main channel of advice on administrative matters to the Northern Ireland Secretary of State. It was this committee

which was, for example, pressing strongly for increased powers for the twenty six district councils and though he obviously has a vested interest in the matter, it does seem an important group on which not to have a minority voice.



Seán Donlon

(2 September, 1977)

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