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SECRET

Visit by Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Peter Barry T.D.,
to Northern Ireland, 18/19 January 1983

1. The Minister's first meeting was at Alliance Party H.Q. where he met Oliver Napier, Leader, David Cook, Deputy Leader, John Cushnahan, Chief Whip, Seán Neeson, Chairman of the Party and Susan Edgar, the new General Secretary of the Party. In response to a question from the Minister, Mr Napier said that the Assembly and its committees were working well. The NIO was committed to making the system work and there was no difficulty in getting Ministers to attend committees or receive delegations. In addition the parties outside the Assembly (SDLP and PSF) were given very good access and PSF in particular were sending a constant stream of delegations to Stormont on constituency issues. David Cook was not optimistic on the possibility of moving to stage 2 and felt that the Assembly would not last much beyond one year. The Alliance members present were all mystified by Paisley's consistently moderate behaviour in recent times. He was in total control of the party, even its more extreme elements. In their view, however, Paisley could revert to a more hardline approach at any time and could not be trusted. The Official Unionists (OUP) were in a very disorganised state. John Cushnahan listed six OUP members who had in the past few weeks been designated as official spokesmen in dealings with him as Chief Whip. Molyneaux had strengthened his position in recent weeks by allowing these "spokesmen" to fail in their discussions with the DUP and Alliance. The majority of the OUP still wished to see the Assembly continue for the present and it was likely that the boycott of committees would not continue. Negotiations were continuing to find a compromise which would allow the OUP to attend. In relation to the Westminster election the Alliance people felt that PSF would compete and would win West Belfast and perhaps South Armagh/Newry. John Hume should win the Foyle constituency and mid-Ulster and Fermanagh/South Tyrone could go to the Unionists if SDLP and PSF compete against each other. Reference was made to the resources available to PSF and the massive personation campaign which has been waged by them in recent elections. Unionist intransigence had weakened the

SDLP's position and allowed PSF to move into the vacuum. On the recent RUC shootings the Alliance Party had expressed concern but felt that Senator Mallon had gone too far in his pronouncement on a "shoot-to-kill" policy. The only way in which political progress could be made was if the British leaned on the Unionists to produce a power-sharing arrangement with some form of Irish dimension. It was conceded by Oliver Napier and John Cushnahan that this was unlikely to happen particularly in view of the fragile state of the Official Unionist Party. The meeting lasted about one hour and concluded at 6.15 p.m.

2. The Minister then went to the SDLP H.Q. for a meeting which lasted for about an hour. Members of the party executive had been invited to meet the Minister. Those present included Dr Joe Hendron (chaired the meeting), Bríd Rogers, Seamus Mallon, Pascal O'Hare, Denis Haughey, Seán Farren, Paddy O'Hanlon, Frank Feeley, Tom Connolly and Eddie McGrady. The Minister spoke of the Irish Government's support for those who represented the nationalist community and who sought political progress by non-violent means (i.e. SDLP). He asked for views on a number of issues such as the Assembly, the Council for a New Ireland proposal, security and human rights issues and ways in which political progress could be made. In relation to the Assembly the SDLP members present spoke vigorously against it and said that there was no possibility of the SDLP having anything to do with it. It was generally accepted, however, that the Assembly would last at least until the next Westminster election. Seán Farren surprisingly felt that it might last for up to four years as a form of talking shop and adjunct to direct rule. Seán Farren envisaged the revival of the Anglo-Irish process with a Council for a New Ireland operating "within" the overall structure. He emphasised the need for consensus in the South to this approach. Seamus Mallon felt that the Council for a New Ireland would be useless if it was approached simply as a tactical manoeuvre. It must be used to bring about a "fundamental change" in the present situation. He felt that action was required immediately

and that "real" rather than tactical decisions were required. Frank Feeley in a long intervention said that there had been two years of "real" politics (Sunningdale and the 1975 Convention) out of the last ten years. The SDLP had managed to "keep it going" up to this but they couldn't sustain their position and relationship with the minority indefinitely. He and others at the meeting made it clear that the SDLP had done everything possible and were now in a virtual cul-de-sac which only Dublin could help them to get out of. The Minister was questioned on his attitude to the Council for a New Ireland idea and in response he stressed the need to hear the detailed thinking behind it and also mentioned the lack of consultation with his party prior to the announcement of the proposal in the SDLP election manifesto. This drew a response from several SDLP members that they had not been consulted about it and it was understandable that the Government wished to consider the matter further. On security and human rights issues Dr Joe Hendron and Séamus Mallon spoke strongly about the continuing harassment of young people in minority areas. Constant security checks were counter-productive and alienated a large section of the minority. Séamus Mallon spoke about the alarming situation created by recent shootings of unarmed people. There was no doubt in his mind that the RUC were out to get certain people and this would only create further dissension and alienation on the part of the minority. Security policies would not provide a solution and Séamus Mallon stressed the need for immediate and fundamental action to deal with the situation. In general the SDLP members present were looking towards Dublin to provide assistance in handling the situation which the party now faced. Several people spoke of PSF success in capitalising on the younger generation's disillusionment and the lack of constructive politics on offer from the SDLP.

3. The Minister hosted a dinner that evening and a lunch the following day for a range of people (see list attached). Discussion at these social occasions revealed a depressing situation. Both communities were seen as being further apart

than ever and although no future was seen for the Assembly it was expected that it would continue for at least a year. It was generally accepted that the SDLP could not now participate in the Assembly process. One was left with the feeling that politicians within N.I. could not deal with the situation on their own but those with a Unionist outlook were more inclined to talk about repartition or independence than to look to a new relationship with Dublin. Barry White of the Belfast Telegraph posed the question in stark terms by referring to population trends (48% of all school children and 40% of the population are now Catholic) and the inevitable erosion of the Unionist majority. The Unionist viewpoint did not accept that this would of necessity lead to a change in the relationship with the South and pointed to an even more recalcitrant and entrenched attitude. The Minister was questioned about the Irish Government's attitude and the likelihood of the constitutional crusade being resumed. There was some discussion of the likely impact of constitutional change in the South and again the view was expressed that such changes would not sway Unionists towards a new arrangement North and South. Rev. Callaghan was critical of the pro-life amendment which he saw as being unnecessary. Conversation over lunch on Wednesday 19 January was dominated by Senator Robb's elaboration of his thinking and a defence by Dr Jack Weir of traditional Unionist attitudes. Dr Weir took the view that the majority community even where demographic trends and a more realistic approach appeared to point towards a new arrangement with the South that the majority would seek another way - repartition or UDI in the event of the British Government abandoning them. Senator Robb pointed to the dangers of this approach and has since called on me to explain in detail his current attitude to the N.I. situation (a separate report is being prepared on this).

4. Bishop Cahal Daly called on the Minister on the morning of 19 January. He spoke of an extremely depressing situation in West Belfast. The IRA was permeating and controlling almost every aspect of life there. He pointed to the following aspects of life in West Belfast:

- most social outlets (drinking clubs etc.) are owned by the

IRA and provide a lucrative source of finance;

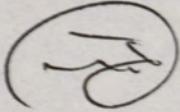
- unemployment is rife among the younger people and, combined with the romantic image of the gunman, provides all the recruits and support necessary for the IRA;
- the people involved in the actual killing and bombing are aged from 16 - 22 and are generally not in a position to implicate the more hardened older people who orchestrate the violence;
- the IRA are successfully combining politics and murder in the person of people such as Gerry Adams whom Bishop Daly believes to be the Chief of Staff of the PIRA;
- money is flowing in to the IRA in large quantities not only from the drinking clubs but from protection money on normal businesses, "rent" collected from property which has been acquired and from the "black taxi" operation;
- while the clergy in West Belfast were working extremely hard to alleviate social conditions and provide moral guidance they found it extremely hard to combat this situation. Young people of both sexes were influenced by a deterioration in moral values and would certainly never consult the clergy on problems arising from an involvement with terrorism. It was impressed on all young IRA volunteers that they should never tell their parents or the clergy anything about their involvement in the IRA;
- a combination of fear and some sympathy meant that the general populace tolerated what was going on;
- some of the older volunteers had managed to "escape" from the IRA into a more normal existence usually as a result of marriage and a wish to "settle down".

In general therefore Bishop Daly was extremely pessimistic about the situation and in response to questioning from the Minister as to how the Irish Government could help he spoke of the necessity of some form of political progress involving the two

communities although he could not propose specific ideas on this subject. The Minister later toured West Belfast in the company of Dr Joe Hendron and saw the obvious physical deterioration and unpleasant conditions in which the people live there.

5. After lunch and a variety of media interviews the Minister went on to Derry where he was welcomed by the Lord Mayor, William O'Connell, and a cross-section of the local community at a reception organised by John Hume. The Minister spoke of his willingness to help in any way possible and indicated that his door was open to any approaches which local people wished to make to him. At a dinner held afterwards in the Everglades Hotel, the Minister met Bishop Daly, Bishop Mahaffey, Russell McCay, Principal, Faughan Valley Secondary School, Mr Jim Guy, OUP, Deputy Mayor, Brian Friel, Pat Devine, SDLP, Dr Jim Cosgrave, John Hume and Dr Frank O'Connor, consultant at the Altnagelvin Hospital. A large part of the conversation centred on the position of the majority community and the way in which that community would react to changing circumstances. Russell McCay took a strong traditional Unionist attitude discounting the possibility that Unionists would enter into a relationship with the South and dismissing arguments on population trends undermining the Unionist position. Bishop Mahaffey had a more accommodating approach and spoke of the need to recognise and give expression to the two traditions in N.I. Bishop Daly pointed to the need for the British and Irish Governments to work together and find a way forward. He referred to a British lack of understanding for the problem and the desperate straits that Northern Ireland was in at present. He mentioned security policy and the alienation that this created on the minority side particularly among the young. One got the impression from the discussion of a stalemate in N.I. between the two communities with the minority seeking a way forward via the Irish Government, and a majority community unwilling to any real extent to consider a change in outlook from their entrenched position.

6. A copy of the Minister's programme and Press coverage is attached. It should be noted that all shades of opinion whom the Minister had contact with stressed the value of such visits and the greater understanding which they created between North and South.



Martin Burke

24 January 1983