



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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1. The Conference was attended by Mr. E. O Tuathail, Ms. Doyle, Mr. O'Donovan, Mr. Canniffe, Mr. Corr, Mr. Donoghue, Mr. Hanney, Mr. O Floinn and Mr. Scannell. This is a composite report.

General

2. The mood was positive but not overjoyous. While well attended, it was not larger than in previous years. The leader's speech was very well received. Politically the Conference was good for the SDLP and contrasted in professional and organisational terms very well with the OUP one on 8 November. However the financial problems of the party are severe (it is losing £3000 a week at present) and staff will have to be made redundant at Christmas unless there is a very big turnaround in the next few weeks. The private session discussion on financing apparently holds out little hope for this.

Political Debate on Agreement

3. Following the leader's speech (attached) and S. Mallon delivered an unscripted, witty (and rather abusive) speech opening the political debate (attached). After this the debate was very much a set piece affair, with speakers concentrating on welcoming the Agreement, wishing to see it maintained and strengthened with rather muted criticism of the rate of progress and of some remarks made by the British Government Ministers and of the opposition in the South. (There were stronger criticisms of progress in specific areas particularly during the Justice and Legal Affairs debate from both platform speakers and those in the hall and worries about the effectiveness of the

Agreement and of the attitude of the opposition in the South were also reflected in private conversations).

4. A number of senior SDLP people were unhappy with John Hume's call for discussions with "all constitutional nationalist parties throughout Ireland both within and without the Anglo-Irish Agreement" to ensure a common and solid approach is pursued by nationalists. Seamus Mallon worries that this proposal might in some ways be interpreted wrongly by, among others, the British Government and the Unionists as an indication that the SDLP were weak on the Agreement. John Hume told L. Canniffe that he was upset by the front page story in the Sunday Press which he said read his point absolutely wrong. He had not meant to place emphasis on this proposal which was only another call for united approach. Unfortunately the journalists at the Conference were not interested in the main thrust of the speech which was his strategy for the way forward but rather they concentrated on anything which could be used to highlight the present perceived SDLP/Fianna Fail rift.

5. Privately Hume said in the presence of D.O'Donovan that:-
 - The Taoiseach was mad to have put security on the devolution table. There was not the slightest prospect that security would become the prerogative of a devolved government in Northern Ireland in his lifetime or in the lifetime of anybody present.

 - He assumed that the piece by John Cooney in the Irish Times about the launching of an initiative by the Taoiseach on devolution was officially authorised and wondered what the Taoiseach was at. He told Maurice Manning that he hoped the Taoiseach had a meeting with Mrs. Thatcher next week wrapped up. If no meeting occurred, it would now be seen as a rejection.

Other officers heard him make the same remarks, some in more muted terms.

6. In general, delegates did not appear to be thinking about terms of devolution, although Sean Farren remarked ^(privately) that he did not believe devolution with executive functions could survive the pressures which both extremes would exert. It would be better to have some kind of advisory council with the last Assembly's functions. However he could not see that Unionists would find this attractive.
7. J. McConnell of the NIO in a private discussion with E. Doyle was very critical of the SDLP, their failure to get their act together, to come into the Northern Ireland Ministries, to organise themselves properly. Some of their policies - in particular in relation to Irish were too extreme (promoting bilingualism) and now that they are close to Government they should take a more responsible attitude.
8. Mr. McConnell said that the NIO assessment now is that the Sinn Fein hard rock support which he put at $\frac{1}{3}$ of the nationalist vote cannot be reduced by implementation of the measures set out in the Agreement. Although he said he favoured the repeal of the Flags and Emblems Act and the prohibition of street names other than in English, he gave the impression that they may not be proceeded with as they are not necessary to hold the SDLP and will not impress hardcore Sinn Fein support.
9. In relation to the visit to London by Molyneaux and Paisley, John Hume said that he had arranged to have many sympathetic Labour members get in touch with Kinnock prior to the meeting. He understood that the Kinnock did not

say anything to the Unionists about using Unionist support in the event of a hung Parliament.

Justice and Legal Affairs

10. The debate was deliberately broken up into two Sections for Friday night and Saturday morning in order to give Eddie McGrady the main limelight on the Friday evening (on Sellafield) and to give Seamus Mallon the main limelight on the Saturday morning debate which led off with the Stalker affair. The media picked up the emphasis on Stalker and Mallon gave interviews to a variety of journalists on Saturday.

11. The effect was to minimise the debate on the previous night about prison releases and the Diplock Courts. Privately, Mallon and Colton (together) complained to me (D. O'Donovan) that the Standing Orders Committee had habitually relegated these matters to low profile time-slots. Alex Attwood argued, more plausibly, that the main prominence needed to be given to SEamus Mallon's attack on Stalker. It is also fairly certain that the Party (Mallon included) had not wished to highlight Adrian Colton's discussion paper on the Diplock Courts especially given Hume's and Mallon's knowledge of the proposed Extradition Bill. The relegation of the prison release issues was a bit unfortunate since it deserves publicity, especially in advance of possible Christmas releases, and the Party could do with a higher profile on this issue vis-a-vis Sinn Fein. Although they cannot be said to say very much that is new or that was not in the Justice Paper of August 1985, the two policy papers adopted by the Party on Friday night can be used to encourage media interest.

Debates

12. Life Sentence Review The mini-debate on Friday night was poorly attended. Alex Attwood introduced his paper on life sentence review. Mallon welcomed the policy papers, though he disagreed with the recommendation made in the SOSp paper (para. 21) that maximum sentences be introduced for juveniles. He said he would discuss this point with Attwood. He welcomed Nicholas Scott's efforts over the past year, particularly in relation to SOSps. This was a beginning but it was not enough. As Christmas approached, he hoped that the "bells of hope" would ring out all over the North. Violence will not be dealt with by punitive measures - rather, those who govern this society must combat violence with the opposite of violence. Mallon asked Scott, who had demonstrated his concern and had taken the first tentative steps, to continue in this direction - replacing violence with generosity, benevolence and hope.

The two policy papers were then adopted by Conference.

13. Diplock Courts Adrian Colton introduced the discussion document on reform of the Diplock Courts prepared by the SDLP lawyer's group. He acknowledged that certain members of the British Government have rejected certain elements of the document's proposals. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, however, commits the British Government under Article 8 to do certain things. If the British Government does not agree with a proposal, the onus is on it to make proposals of its own and to honour its commitment under Article 8. Colton continued by declaring that "we will not fall into the trap of being silenced on fundamental issues simply because we support the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We did not stop thinking as a political party on 15 November last". Matters of justice, he declared, are not matters for political horsetrading. The SDLP will recognise progress

if it is made but it will remain "a restless and reforming party". Part of the purpose of the Party Conference is to let the British and Irish Governments know this.

14. Seamus Mallon supported Colton, congratulating him and the other members of the lawyer's group for having "fire in their bellies". It is crucially important that we realise that the SDLP, in its unique position in Northern Ireland (neither Government nor opposition), creates its own policy positions - "nobody does it for us". Governments of necessity wrestle with their consciences and "the result is a draw". A draw, Mallon commented, is no good for us. We must win justice for everyone on this island - but through the political process. Nobody, he declared, speaks for this party except "this party and its spokesmen".

The motion noting the document was then carried.

15. Stalker Mallon delivered a powerful speech on the Stalker affair on Saturday morning - It goes to the heart of all our problems: policing, political problems, justice. It is a timebomb in Irish politics. The questions which must be answered are simple:

1. Will justice be done to the victims and their relatives?
2. Will justice be done to Stalker? (Mallon: "No, it won't: he was sacrificed to protect people in N.I. and the British Establishment")
3. Will the Sampson Report show that Sampson took up where Stalker left off? Did Sampson (as Stalker planned to do) interview Hermon, McAtamney; did he get the tape sought by Stalker? Did he ask for this tape?

4. Can Hermon remain in charge of the police force when this type of activity was taking place? (In any other force, the CC would have been obliged to resign).
Either Hermon did not know, in which case he was guilty of dereliction of duty and should have resigned. Or he did know, in which case he should also have resigned. There will never be any real change in attitudes until "these changes" take place.

5. Was Hermon out of the country during two of the three incidents? Was the Head of the RUC's Special Branch out of the country for all three incidents?

16. We deserve answers to all of these questions, Mallon continued. We have heard talk recently about support for policing in Northern Ireland. Is the British Government, by its actions on the Stalker Report, prepared to support impartial policing? Will the Unionists stand up with us and demand that justice be done? Will charges be brought? Will those who made the decisions go scotfree while those lower down are charged? The British Government made these decisions and must answer these questions if it is genuinely in favour of impartial policing in Northern Ireland.

Section 42 (deploring Stalker's removal) was then carried.

17. Portadown Parades At this point, a ten-minute debate on Portadown parades intervened after Standing Orders were suspended by Conference vote. Ignatius Fox (SDLP Councillor for Portadown) and Michael McCoo delivered fairly emotional speeches and denounced the RUC decisions on Portadown. Senator Rogers agreed with their condemnation, but pointed out that there had previously been six provocative parades in Portadown and now there is

only one. She commended the local police "on the barricades" (much applause).

Mallon's view of Extradition Bill

18. In a private conversation with D. O'Donovan late on Friday night, Mallon was more pessimistic in relation to the Extradition Bill than he had been when the Secretary and David Donoghue discussed it with him earlier this week. He was highly gloomy about his prospects at the next General Election. He said that the security co-operation measures alone, especially the new observation towers along the Border, would cost him his seat at the General Election. He was in no doubt that the Extradition Bill would make his prospects worse. He said he was thinking about coming out with a critical statement on the Bill and at one point said he would do so. He was especially harsh about the commencement provision describing it as a flash-harry trick to dump the problem into the lap of the next Government. Mallon commented bitterly that delegates couldn't be bothered coming to the justice debate on the Friday night because they knew the action was elsewhere. He referred here to Hume's meeting with the Taoiseach and to being "told" rather than consulted about the Extradition Bill by the Secretary on Monday last.

19. This conversation occurred late at night and after a poor justice debate, and security section do not make too much of it. The following afternoon, following his well-publicised remarks on Stalker in the morning and his well-received main speech to the Conference in the afternoon, Declan O'Donovan and D. Donoghue found Mallon in better form. D. O'Donovan would not expect him to rush out with a statement on Tuesday, but it is certainly possible that if a major storm develops he will not keep silent. David will be in touch with him on Monday.

RUC

20. The Minister's remarks on television about Catholics joining the RUC came up repeatedly. Austin Currie opened a conversation with some mild criticism of the remarks ("How did he get himself into saying what he said?"). He said he himself had been caught unprepared by Eric Wall of the BBC with a similar question at his economic press conference. He said he hoped that he had been helpful on the RTE Morning Ireland programme. Sean Farren also felt that the remark was very premature; he believes that the issue will have to be faced sometime but does not know how it can be done. Both of these conversations, however, occurred late at night after a poor justice debate and may not mean very much. John McConnell of the NIO also noted the remark and said that they had received a number of letters and calls from Unionists who were pleased with the Minister's statement. Some had contrasted it with that of the SDLP. *speakers*.

UDR

21. Fergus McQuillan, SDLP Councillor Newtownbutler, Co. Fermanagh was characteristically a bit complaining. The UDR were all over his area since early Summer where previously they had rarely been seen and they were not being accompanied. Notwithstanding all this, McQuillan enthusiastically applauded Hume's condemnation of begrudgers and whingers as the curse of the Irish nation.

Education

22. The Education debate was on the first night; it was low key, sticking closely to the policy document and stressing in particular cuts in university student assistance and the evils of the 11 plus. Only 2 of the speakers J.

Hendron and P. Gibson were not directly involved in education.

International Fund

23. The motion on the International Fund was not reached during the debate on Economic Development and Employment Issues. The Party Spokesman on the Fund, Hugh Logue in his contribution to the Economic debate warmly welcomed the setting up of the Fund and gave a factual account of how the International Fund would operate.

En marge of the Conference, Dennis Kennedy the EEC Belfast representative mentioned (to B. Scannell) that he was a little more optimistic now of a Community contribution but that it was a pity the British had dragged their heels last March when the mood in the Community was very favourable.

Housing

24. Eddie McGrady indicated to the Conference that he hopes to complete a policy paper on housing before next year's conference. (He has asked the Department for assistance on this and a meeting between McGrady and officials from the Housing Section of the Department of Environment is being arranged). The housing and health debates at the Conference largely related to this year's expenditure cuts.

Several speakers, notably John Hume and Joe Hendron made reference to the demolition of Divis and Rossville and ascribed credit to the Conference.

Local Government

25. At the debate on local Government, Eddie McGrady called on the British Government to take a stand against the Unionist District Council adjournment policy. He complained that the Department of Environment had left the matter to individual councillors to force the Unionists to abide by the law. He said it was the responsibility of central Government to respond to the need of local Government. Needham is quoted as saying that "if basic services were provided (i.e., bins and burials) the Government would not intervene. McGrady regards this as a total abdication of responsibility. He reminded the Conference that when the SDLP withdrew from Councils, unlike the Unionists, they did not try to stop local democracy. He asked and got the Conference to call on the British Government to allow those Councillors who were willing to fulfill their responsibilities to carry on where there was a quorum, and to bring in administrators where a quorum could not be found.

On the recommendation of Paddy O'Donoghue the Conference agreed that the Executive should immediately set up a committee to formulate a plan to deal with different problems in the various councils in the event that the Unionists withdraw.

Fair Employment

26. The debate (which took place on Sunday afternoon) was sparsely attended and lasted about twenty-five minutes. Sean Farren's speech gave a guarded welcome to the Consultative Paper on Employment Equality and covered the points in the recently published SDLP policy document on fair employment.

27. Paddy Ritchie a teacher who sits on a liaison committee between career teachers and Shorts management praised Shorts for making a serious effort to correct the imbalance in the workforce. He accepted Short's explanation for the drop in Catholic recruitment in 1984 (to 14% of applicants, as outlined in the last FEA report on Shorts).

(In subsequent conversations, Mallon, Feeney and Sean Farren were dismissive of Ritchie's intervention. They considered him to be naive in the extreme concerning Short's Employment policy).

28. Other speakers in the debate made the following points:

Brid Rogers Withholding grants from local councils which have not signed the Declaration of Intent will not solve the problem. Such a move would only hit both the Catholic and Protestant inhabitants in the districts involved. Instead, Councillors who oppose signing the Declaration should be individually surcharged.

Brian Feeney The SDLP Policy Discussion document should not be the Party's official response to the recent Consultative Paper on fair employment. The British Paper was "a wolf in Sheep's clothing", a publicity exercise designed to counter pressure from the US. The timescale involved was not acceptable. The current indication was that there would be no serious legislative reform until 1990. The Intergovernmental Conference and the SDLP must apply pressure to ensure rapid progress as quickly as possible.

In subsequent conversation, Sean Farren said that John Hume had agreed to table a Private Member's Bill on fair employment in the House of Commons in the New Year. The Bill would embody the suggestions in the SDLP Policy

Discussion document on fair employment. While such a Bill would have no hope of being passed, it would keep the pressure up on the British side and would gain useful publicity for the SDLP's policy.

Farren also mentioned that Derry City Council would shortly be faced with a motion approving the McBride Principles. The motion had the support of the Sinn Fein members. The SDLP members on the Council would table the Party's discussion document as a counter proposal. Farren was relieved that the McBride Principles were not even mentioned during the Conference debate on fair employment

Irish Language

29. Due to pressure of time the debate on the Irish language policy paper was curtailed. Executive member Hugh Carr from Warrenpoint moved a motion briefly welcoming the paper and asking that its main proposals be implemented through the Intergovernmental Conference. Paddy O'Donoghue spokesman on Irish and Senator Brid Rodgers praised the work done by Carr and the new General Secretary Patsy McGlone on the policy for the language. Executive member Cormac Boomer struck the only cautionary note and warned against a Sinn Fein-type politicisation of the language. The Conference unanimously adopted the policy paper.

The Media

30. Only one of three motions on the media requesting the Irish Government to seek new broadcasting structures through the Intergovernmental Conference which would better provide for the nationalist identity and ethos in Northern Ireland was moved, again due to pressure of time. Hugh Carr was the only speaker and Conference

adopted the motion unanimously. (The other motions tabled sought RTE reception in all of the North and opposed Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act).

Postscript

31. At the end of the Conference on Sunday evening at about 5pm cars coming from Newcastle were stopped by the UDR (unaccompanied) on the Castlewellan Road. Liam Canniffe was detained for about 15 ^{minutes} ~~months~~ while they took particulars of his driving licence. He told the patrol in response to their questions, that he was coming from Newcastle. One of the UDR men retorted "from some meeting I suppose". Other than that the interview was conducted in a reasonable fashion.

C. O Floinn and T. Hanney were also stopped and questioned by the patrol but they were not detained.

The RUC's handling of security for the Conference was considered both courteous and efficient by the SDLP.

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