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Meeting with John Cushnahan on 12 November, 1986

I met the leader of the Alliance Party in Belfast on 12 November. As has been the case since the dissolution of the Assembly, he remains unhappy about his own financial position. He has still had no offer of employment and the prospect of finding something in Northern Ireland, not only to give him an adequate income but a career which he can fall back on if politics fails, appears remote at this time. Apart from his colleague, Sean Neeson, who is in a similiar situation, all other Alliance Assembly members had jobs and businesses to return to after the Assembly and he feels his predicament is not fully appreciated within the party. I gather that a few of the more wealthy party elders offered some financial help which he would not accept. The British Government (mainly Nicholas Scott) hinted that they would endeavour to find something for him but so far it has come to nought. I understand that his grant (£10,000) from the Rowntree Trust came through the good offices of David Steel.

Notwithstanding all this and his pessimism about the prospects of devolution and the return of some sort of Assembly in the short term, I feel he is still reluctant to leave politics. However, the major problem for him is his strong commitment to his large family and he feels that he has to find a solution for their sake in the near future.

During our conversation the following were some of the points he made:

- Alliance Party

The Party still supports the Agreement although there are some notable dissenters like Alec Boyd who tried to change policy. Will Glendinning, Councillor from West Belfast,

while he originally backed the Agreement has also been negative about it over the past few months but so far he has succeeded in keeping him in line. Lately, since the dissolution of the Assembly, those Alliance members who have returned to their former businesses are seldom available for party matters. This effectively means extra work (at meetings, media interviews, etc.) falls to him as all the Party spokespeople, apart from Sean Neeson, say they are unable to devote the necessary time to these issues because of work commitment. He quite often finds his work day so long that he sometimes has problems fitting in time for a course he is doing on marketing which he hopes might help him find a job.

- Marplan Poll

Alliance are furious over the recent Marplan poll which reported that the party's support among the electorate had totally collapsed. While they know it is grossly inaccurate they are nevertheless concerned that some people who are weak on the Agreement might use this as an excuse to undermine party policy on that issue.

He now knows that the poll was conducted in a very slipshod way as the Alliance Party was not mentioned in the Marplan survey and he is waiting until after the Agreement anniversary protests die down to make his protest about it. He would like to see a poll taken by a reliable Irish company such as MRBI. He believes that the Agreement would fare well in a true survey. His party feels it would show that a number of OUP supporters would now support Alliance policy.

- Problems with the British Government

He is becoming increasingly unhappy with the channels of communication between himself and the British side. He mentioned that recently he had problems getting satisfactory

answers from the Northern Ireland Department of Education and the Minister responsible, Brian Mawhinney, was ignoring him. The matter was finally resolved after he contacted the Secretary of State and told him that if he could not get satisfaction directly through the Northern Ireland Departments or the British Ministers he would channel his requests through Dublin and the Belfast Secretariat.

While he said that it is always difficult for a non-unionist to get anything from the Northern Ireland Department of Education which is "an establishment still firmly controlled by the old regime", he had noticed lately that the flow of information from nearly all British Government sources was not as good as heretofore. He was particularly displeased that information which would concern the Alliance Party was being kept from him. In this connection he mentioned that he had heard an unconfirmed rumour that Sir Oliver Napier was going to be nominated Chairman of the Police Authority. While he knew from unofficial sources that Sir Oliver's name amongst others had been mentioned for this appointment before, he had never been informed by the British Government. (Relations between Cushnahan and Napier, who never gave his wholehearted support for the Agreement, are less than cordial). While he would obviously have no problem about Sir Oliver Napier being appointed Chairman, if it is true and the Party were not informed it would strain relations with the British.

- OUP Conference

The Official Unionist Conference on 8 November proved how disunited that party are. The debacle over the integration motion showed that elements within the party were prepared to destroy the organisation for their own ends. It started originally when Robert McCartney had a motion calling on the party to endorse integration as the sole official policy included in the Conference agenda. Molyneaux and others in the party hierarchy decided this motion, if adopted, would

split the party and had it taken off the agenda. However, McCartney threatened to go public if it was not re-instated and so forced it back on the agenda. Powell then introduced his amendment to stymie the resolution. After that McCartney told the newspapers what was happening and the story broke. Molyneaux, Powell, Millar and others decided at the last minute they would not wash their dirty linen in public so they barred the news media from the Conference.

He did not see this as a bid for leadership by McCartney who would not have the necessary approval from the Unionist Council to be successful. Rather he believes McCartney, whose ego is only surpassed in magnitude by his uncouthness has wholeheartedly taken up the integration issue and wants to see it out to a successful conclusion no matter what or who has to suffer on the way.

- District Councils

In spite of a recent statement by Will Glendinning which appeared in the Belfast Telegraph the Alliance Party will take five councils to Court for non compliance with an order to abandon the adjournments. When this happens the Court will fine the councils and unionists will find that they will have to either pay the fines or go to jail. It is expected that a number of them, especially those from the OUP, will not want to go this far and so they will either return to voting to have the council re-commence working or abstain from the vote on adjournment. (It only requires 2 further unionist abstainers in Belfast District Councils for the non-unionists to have a voting majority).

- Remembrance Day

He was annoyed that one of his own people Councillor John Montgomery, by wearing a white poppy at the commemoration ceremony in Belfast, allowed the Unionists (who told the Northern Ireland Secretary of State and his Ministers that

they were unwelcome at the ceremony) off the hook. After the ceremony most of the news on the event was directed at the white poppy incident and little attention was given to the snub. The latter story on its own, especially when it could have been tied to the contradiction that while this was happening in Belfast Molyneux and Paisley were standing with the Prime Minister at the Cenotaph in London, would have proved very embarrassing for the Unionists. He was aware that many Unionists were outraged that politics were dragged into this event.

- Ulster Resistance

While he condemned Paisley for encouraging paramilitaries by the formation of this 'Army' he felt that his involvement in it had some positive elements. It is known that Paisley does not particularly like the UDA or UVF and this organisation takes some influence from them. Paisley is expected to huff and puff but he will always back off from violent confrontation and so it is believed he will be a restraining influence on the Ulster Resistance Movement. His sole purpose is to control it, which is a great deal better than if Peter Robinson was solely in control. He has sucked Alan Wright and the Ulster Clubs into the new organisation and in so doing has effectively put a leash on them.



Liam Canniffe,
17 November, 1986.

c.c. Minister
Secretary
A-I Section
A-I Secretariat
Ambassador London
Box.

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