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Meeting with Alfie Redpath OUP
on 4 December, 1986

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I met Alfie Redpath OUP Councillor, Belfast City Council in Belfast on 4 December. Despite constant pressure he still refused to toe the Joint Unionist Working Party line. The DUP and some in his own party tried to organise a campaign against him in his own Council area and people were asked to sign a petition asking him to resign. This had to be given up for want of signatures and of those that did sign some phoned him subsequently to say they had been intimidated into doing so. He has had the Ulster Clubs picketing his home, a poster campaign against him, threatening letters and phone calls and even physical abuse at public meetings. To add to his problems he has recently been in hospital where they discovered that he is suffering from angina. Among the points he made during our conversation were the following.

District Councils

- The vote (82-44) by the Official Unionist Councillors on 26/11/86 not to resign from the councils could easily have been predicted. By pushing for the vote, Molyneaux showed the extent to which he is controlled by Paisley and how little he knows about the feelings in his own party. At a meeting of OUP councillors in 1985, when Molyneaux first called for an adjournment policy, Alfie Redpath had pointed out that such a decision would eventually lead to OUP resignations from the councils.

Molyneaux at that time denied it would go that far. Molyneaux's weak and ambivalent leadership has left the OUP divided with the choice of either resigning or returning to council business. The Alliance Party's court action against the councils will force some unionists to return to business and indeed many official unionist councillors would be grateful for the excuse.

Public Bodies

- The Unionist policy of adjourning public board meetings has in general been a failure. Even on a number of boards where unionists are in a majority some of them are voting with non-unionists to continue to do business. On boards where they do not have a majority only a few unionists are failing to turn up for meetings. Last week the weakness of this policy was shown when the SDLP called for the replacement of OUP Councillor Fred Proctor on the Belfast Education and Library Board because he had not turned up at Board meetings for 6 months. After a very heated debate the Council retained Proctor by only one vote. This type of action will obviously succeed in many places and unionist will end up being replaced. The only two public boards which are left out of the policy by the Joint Unionist Working Party are the Local Government Staff Commission and the Road Safety Council. The first because it controls so many jobs and the second because boycotting it might prove bad for public relations.

Unionist Policy

- The Anglo-Irish Agreement is still hated by unionists. Even average unionist voters who do not get involved in politics are still very opposed to it and so this is not the time for any initiatives within the framework of the Agreement. At

present there is very little talk of negotiations within the Official Unionist Party. Most now believe that integration would be the best solution and McCartney has been very successful in selling the idea to the rank and file. Even he himself now feels that it might be the best way out of the problem. However, he agreed that given the opposition from the nationalists, the Irish Government and especially the British Government, it does not seem to be on. The problem remained that the present joint unionist policy could only lead to independence - the worst possible thing that could happen to Northern Ireland. Because the Charter Group proposals could be fitted into the scheme envisaged by the Anglo-Irish Agreement they have not caught on and are losing rather than gaining support.

Security

- The perception of most unionists is that the Agreement has not brought about an improved security situation - in fact many seem to believe the opposite. People were annoyed to see loyalists turn on the RUC and a great many Official Unionists were infuriated by the encouragement which this got from Paisley, Robinson and the DUP. This has helped to make the OUP increasingly wary of the DUP.

SDLP

- The SDLP as perceived by unionists continue being triumphalist because of the Agreement. They demand everything from the Agreement and complain bitterly when it is not delivered immediately but they are not willing to contribute anything. Their statements are nearly always negative even on the RUC who have lately been bending over backwards for the nationalist community. Their reaction against the Minister for Foreign Affairs' helpful statement

recently on the RUC shows that they are not prepared to move forward one inch, even on this vital issue.

Even though the unionists are the ones who can rightly be blamed for not trying to negotiate a way out of the current impasse it seems quite obvious to him that the SDLP do not want devolution, at least for the present. They appear content to let Dublin go on doing their work for them through the Conference and the Secretariat. (I naturally challenged his perception of the SDLP position and ^{was} pointed out that John Hume had made a number of efforts recently to begin talks with the unionists).

International Fund

- While he was interested to learn about the Fund and what it had to offer, he did not believe it will be availed of by many unionists. As part of the Agreement it will be shunned by both Unionist parties while the Joint Unionist Working Party will probably make a statement advising people not to approach the board of the Fund with projects. It will therefore be very difficult for any unionist politician including himself to become personally involved.


Liam Canniffe

9 December, 1986.

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