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Meeting with Dr. John Alderdice

8 March 1988

Unionists

Over the past two weeks, Dr. Alderdice said, unionists, by and large, have been saying little on the question of devolution. This was deliberate, he said, because they believe that the recent security issues are having an effect on the political situation; they are biding their time. He mentioned the Taoiseach's statement in the Dail last week in this regard and asked whether it indicated a change in the Government's commitment to the Agreement.

I informed him that the Taoiseach would be making a fuller statement on the matter in the Dail the following day, adding that the Taoiseach was fully committed to operating the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He took the point that the Taoiseach was deeply committed to a political solution to the tragedy of Northern Ireland which embraced the whole island. While he might differ with this, Alderdice said he could understand the statement from this point of view and he was not, therefore, unduly perturbed by it. Indeed, he felt there was a positive side to it in that a warm welcome for devolution by the Irish Government could have a detrimental effect insofar as unionists were concerned.

Most unionists were now very unhappy with the British Government's attitude to Northern Ireland and any lingering trust there may have been in the wake of the Anglo-Irish Agreement has been shattered over the past few weeks. The various security affairs, he said, are seen by the unionist community as an indication that Britain regards Northern Ireland people as second class citizens. Alderdice pointed to the difference in the treatment of the RUC and the SAS, instanced by the shootings in Gibraltar. Nonetheless, he cautioned against

believing that this made the unionists any more amenable to the Irish Government's position.

Agreement Review

He again brought up the suggestion that the unionists should be allowed to have an input into the review of the working of the Conference. Mrs. Thatcher had listened to his suggestion when he met her last month but while she did not demur, neither did she enthuse. The Secretary of State, on the other hand, was more encouraging recently saying he would look into the matter.

Fair Employment

He said the Alliance Party welcomed the proposed new changes in fair employment legislation but they believe it will have very little real effect in the short term without additional jobs being provided. Because of current British policy, there is, in his opinion, no prospect of this; all that one can expect from the new legislation is that it will create "fair unemployment".

Alliance Party

Nearly all the executive members who had served under Cushnahan had now been replaced by younger men. Alderdice believes this will have a beneficial effect on the party particularly because Northern Ireland faces a period with little hope of political movement. Because none of these members has held any elected office at Assembly level they, unlike the Executive they have replaced, are not pining for devolution. Rather, he thinks, they will be satisfied to fight the council elections in 1989 and wait for a few years.

John Hume and the SDLP

While he admired John Hume's many qualities, he believes him to be, at times, politically naive. This is currently being demonstrated, he said, by Hume's apparent belief that Gerry

Adams will get the PIRA to end violence. He compared this to what he said was Hume's similar and equally naive belief that Paisley will negotiate a settlement with him. Alderdice believes that John Hume will simply give Sinn Fein an opportunity to "outflank him" and this would hurt the SDLP. While this, he said, would gain some extra support for Alliance from disaffected anti-Sinn Fein voters who had voted SDLP, he is nevertheless worried that a weakened moderate nationalism could lead to a dangerous situation in Northern Ireland where there would be little room for moderate politics.

Meeting with Taoiseach

He said he would like to take up the offer of a meeting which, he reminded me, the Taoiseach made when he had visited him in Dublin in January. This might, he hoped, be sometime after his Party Conference on 8/9 April.



Liam Canniffe
11 March 1988

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