



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2018/68/19
Creation Dates:	7 September 1988
Extent and medium:	3 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
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Meeting with Dr. John Alderdice

7 September 1988

He welcomed the ending of the SDLP/Sinn Féin talks saying that pressure would now be put on unionists to negotiate with the SDLP. He was under no illusions about Molyneaux's and Paisley's commitment to dialogue. They in his opinion were not interested in new political structures for Northern Ireland but the ending of the talks would put renewed pressure on them from the unionist community to seek a solution. In Dr. Alderdice's opinion it would also have the effect of freeing people like Ken Maginnis and Peter Robinson whom he knew were genuinely interested in trying to achieve a devolved system of Government for the North.

While he accepted that John Hume entered the talks with Sinn Féin with the best intentions he argued that the outcome will have harmed him personally.

The Alliance party he said have just completed a study which after its clearance by the party's Council will be their new plan for the Government of Northern Ireland. The proposal is for a system of devolution which would have the necessary inbuilt protection for nationalists. Political parties who would not condemn violence would not be given any responsible posts in the proposed new administration. He agreed that devolution did not seem a bright prospect in the near future but he argued that it was important for some party to come up with some clearly defined proposals for a way forward to bring the political debate into the open. While he acknowledged that unionist leaders were not interested in devolution he claimed that a majority of the unionist community would be in favour of it and this would find expression with some unionist politicians.

With WWH
Dr Alderdice
7/9/88

Alderdice said that he believes that Molyneaux was not really seriously seeking a genuine dialogue with the Taoiseach and he warned against allowing Molyneaux to slow down the political process by holding out the promise of a meeting at some indefinite time in the future. He said Molyneaux was well known for his studied inactivity and he made it a virtue.

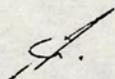
Jim Kilfedder, the North Down M.P., Alderdice said, told him last week that Molyneaux was content to procrastinate until such time as the North's unionist population, believing there was nothing else on offer would start agitating for full integration with Britain. Alderdice said that Molyneaux's now well-published promised talks with the Irish Government have been welcomed by the unionist community and have given him an enhanced reputation as the unionist politician with whom the Irish Government will deal. Alderdice advised that the Government would make more inroads if it spoke to other unionist politicians who were prepared to negotiate. This would have the dual effect of opening up the debate at a time when fluidity exists and giving these politicians extra status within their own community.

Secretary of State King recently reassured him that the British Government were not planning to bring in super-councils to replace the local district councils. The Secretary of State said that this rumour was being spread by unionists but had no basis. Mr. King said that the local (district council) elections would be run off on schedule.

On the November review of the workings of the Conference he again advised that the unionists should be encouraged to put forward views which might be incorporated into the review. Alderdice pointed out that while there was almost no likelihood of the unionists taking up this offer it would put them in an awkward position later with their own people. The Alliance Party on the other hand are formulating suggestions which they will ask to be taken into consideration during the Review. This will take the form, he said, of a request for more openness in respect of the Intergovernmental Conferences and more consultation with Northern Ireland political parties on matters for discussion. He advised

that, notwithstanding what both Governments would finally decide, the Review should be completed on 15 November and that prolonging the dates would only play into unionist hands.

He mentioned that he was available if the Taoiseach wished to see him at any time.



Liam Canniffe

4 September 1988

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Box