

NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND LEADERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ON WEDNESDAY 6 DECEMBER 1972.

Those present:-

Rt Rev Dr R V A Lynas - Moderator  
Very Rev Dr Haire - Former Moderator  
Rev Dr J W Orr - Moderator Designate  
Rev Dr A J Weir - Clerk of Assembly

The Secretary of State welcomed the deputation and explained the reasons for holding the series of discussions.

Dr Lynas said that many people were very concerned about the security situation, the breakdown in law and order and also feared that the new assembly would be nothing like the old Stormont. As a result such people felt that this was the beginning of the end. If the new assembly was to be a watered down Stormont Dr Lynas expected that there would be a violent reaction on the Protestant side, it was difficult however to assess the likely strength of this reaction and the numbers of people who would be willing to resort to violent means. He suggested that the referendum and the White Paper should be presented as quite separate although he recognised that if the White Paper came first then the plebiscite would be regarded by many as a vote on its proposals. He had noticed in speaking to people throughout the Province that there was a tendency to think that the minority were getting more in terms of concessions than their numbers would justify.

Dr Weir thought that the Protestant community were in greater fear about what they saw as excessive appeasement than they were about the task of reconciliation. Many took the view that concessions had been made exclusively on the Unionist side in Northern Ireland, a willingness to change had also been shown both in Dublin and London; however, these movements had not been matched by any show of flexibility on the part of the representatives of the minority in Northern Ireland. As far as the Irish Dimension was concerned he suggested it was important that the elected representatives in the new Northern Ireland assembly should have sufficient standing to talk on the same footing as the political representatives in the Republic. It was very important that matters of mutual concern to North and South should be discussed on such a basis rather than between London and Dublin. He also wondered how the acceptability of the proposals in the White Paper could be measured. The Secretary of State said

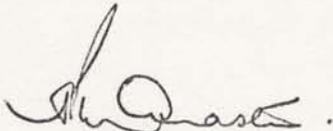
that this was difficult; obviously the reaction would vary as between the minor parties and the Unionist Party and therefore would be difficult to quantify. There is also the problem of knowing who is truly representative. It would be possible to have an election on the proposals in the White Paper, but what happens if the proposals are defeated? In any case he could not see Her Majesty's Government putting such proposals to the test in a referendum.

Dr Lynas said that at a recent meeting of the heads of the Churches the consensus was that they should advocate acceptance of the White Paper. This approach would be based on the idea that any new structures should at least be given a fair trial and if necessary be modified in the light of experience.

Dr Weir said that it was also vital that the new structure should be acceptable to a majority (in fact it would probably require acceptance by the majority of the majority) if it was to be workable.

The Secretary of State said the proposals would obviously have to be reasonable if they were to be accepted by a majority.

Dr Lynas asked the Secretary of State if he would be willing to meet the General Board of the Presbyterian Church early in the New Year, when he would have an opportunity of hearing grass roots opinion. The Secretary of State agreed to this being arranged on a Monday or Tuesday towards the end of January.



A P McMASTER

7 December 1972

Copies to:-

Lord Windlesham	Mr J T Williams, NIO
Mr David Howell	Mr K D McDowall
Mr Wm van Straubenzee	Mr T M Roberts
Mr P Mills	Mr J L L Imrie
Sir William Nield	Mr Stevens (2)
Mr P J Woodfield	Mr K J Jordan
Sir David Holden	
Sir Harold Black	
Mr J T A Howard-Drake	
Mr F A Rowley	
Mr K P Bloomfield	
Mr F F Steele	
Chief Constable	
Deputy Chief Constable	
GOC (2)	
Mr D G Hughes, NIO	