

NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE
AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY AT
STORMONT CASTLE AT 5 30 PM ON TUESDAY, 12 DECEMBER

Present: The Secretary of State

Mr Gerry Fitt MP
Mr Ivan Cooper MP
Mr Austin Currie MP
Mr Paddy Devlin MP
Mr John Hume MP
Mr Paddy O'Hanlon MP

Mr McDowall
Mr Steele
Mr Whalley

THE SDLP'S GENERAL APPROACH

The SDLP said that the basis of their proposals was to secure harmonisation and reconciliation. The two most important aspects of the proposals were the need to set up joint sovereignty for Northern Ireland and the need to secure an acceptable police force. They had with some difficulty come to the Conference Table but had done so in no spirit of submission. They were aware of the difficulty of balancing Protestant and the Catholic points of view; Equally they were aware that Catholics could no longer be treated as second class citizens. In this context Army harassment of the Catholic population was putting difficulties in the way of progress towards a political settlement. The threat from the Provisional IRA was not what it was. The Army should therefore act impartially between the two communities thus making it easier for the Catholic population to co-operate with the Government. They believed that the Secretary of State was aiming basically for a pragmatic settlement in the hope that he could win the common ground in the middle. It was also based on the immediate situation and thus any new settlement might not last, especially since non-sectarian parties had never flourished in Northern Ireland. It was important to realise that the publication of the White Paper might provoke a violent Protestant reaction; indeed, the continuation of violence seemed implicit in the proposals of the Unionist and Alliance Parties. It was a short-term solution merely to look at Northern Ireland as the basis for any settlement. A framework of reconciliation should be provided on the basis of absolute equality between the two communities. It was also important to remove the

R.
SECRET

present uncertainty which was a continuing source of instability. It was no use repeating pledges which, although frequently given, were never believed; what was needed was the long-term certainty of political union by 1980 within the context of the European Economic Communities. It was also important to make radical concessions to the minority community since all Governments in the past had been concerned too much with what was acceptable only to the Northern Ireland majority, which was a minority in the whole of Ireland. The mistakes made in 1920 should not be repeated and any solution should as far as possible be acceptable to both sides. It was important to keep the support of the moderates; at the same time the national aspirations of so many people could not be brushed aside.

The Secretary of State said he was grateful to the SDLP for the careful way they had put forward their proposals. At this stage the process of consultation was still continuing and he could not give any indication in advance of discussions with his colleagues of what the White Paper might contain. He believed that there should be an Assembly which would have devolved powers. The difficulty arose over deciding what powers should be devolved and in what form the Executive should be formed out of the Assembly. An important point was that the Assembly would have a degree of legislative power which would thus make it more powerful than the Greater London Council. The minority should be given a share in the government but how this was to be done was a problem of extreme difficulty. He was determined to find a solution which was as acceptable to both sides as possible and he found that in the proposals which the SDLP had put forward there were many aspects which would be repugnant to the majority in Northern Ireland. One had therefore to face the fact that violence might continue and the Government would have to deal with any intensification of violence which followed the publication of the White Paper. As far as the question of joint sovereignty was concerned, the Secretary of State accepted the need for co-operation with the Republic, not least in matters of security, but he believed it was important to explain carefully to the Northern majority what any proposal for a Council of Ireland might entail. He believed that there would continue to be a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whose task would be to try to promote an evolving solution to the problem. As far as any

2.
SECRET

SECRET

ultimate question of uniting Ireland was concerned, that must be a matter which only the Irish themselves could decide.

JOINT SOVEREIGNTY AND AN ALL IRELAND COUNCIL

In the view of the SDLP, there was a clash of national aspirations. The majority of the people in Northern Ireland wanted to remain British and would continue to do so under the concept of joint sovereignty. They would be able to maintain their own traditions and their own way of life. Equally, the minority community in Northern Ireland could not be denied the same rights and aspiration. If both sides were thus allowed to have the symbols of their beliefs, then the beliefs themselves would recede in importance. Joint sovereignty would involve shared political control for law and order, for taxation and finance, and for a wide range of social, economic and political functions. The basis for this would be a National Senate of Ireland which would deal with matters of Commons concern, would be served by an independent secretariat and would also concern itself with the eventual evolution of Irish unity. Not only would the Northern Protestants retain their British membership but the Government of the Republic would give up its claim to sovereignty over the whole of the 32 Counties. Disagreements between the two communities would be resolved in the constitutional court which would also have the power to pass legislation provided a 75 per cent majority were forthcoming. The two Commissioners would also have an important role in the resolution of problems. Above all, these institutions should have power; they should have the necessary authority and executive control to deal with situations of common concern. To it must be recruited the most able and ambitious of the people in the Dail and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Secretary of State said that any concept of an all-Ireland Council was bound to be seen by militant Protestants as the first step to a United Ireland. He did not accept that such a proposal would be convincing enough to the majority to bring about the reasonable acceptance of the settlement which the SDLP thought would occur. In particular he foresaw difficulty over a constitutional court being able to reconcile the differences in the way the SDLP suggested. Equally he believed it was important that changes should be made and that a solution should be evolved which would give the minority in Northern Ireland a much greater share in the affairs of state. It was important

SECRET

therefore to make efforts to retain the support of the moderates and thus there should be no hasty steps towards a solution, but he believed it was important that there should be some sort of institution which provided co-operation between the North and the South. This was something which had been envisaged in the 1920 settlement but which had never got off the ground. It was important therefore that it should succeed this time.

POLICE

The SDLP put forward the view that one of the major problems would be control over the police. The RUC were not acceptable to the Catholic community, where violence and crime ran rife. Some police force should quickly be devised which would be able to go into the Catholic areas and thus tackle the growing crime problem. For this reason control of law and order and of the police should be a matter of joint sovereignty. This was the only way that an acceptable police force could be devised. The party's proposals for internal security were based on their practical experience and they therefore saw a need for policemen to come on secondment to Northern Ireland from the London Metropolitan Police and from the Garda. The Catholic population had always regarded the RUC as a sectarian force because they saw it as the physical arm of the previous Government. But they did not believe that the sectarian feeling should be institutionalised by the development of separate police forces. What was needed was an attempt to find a force which would be at one and the same time suitable to both communities. At most Catholics had only made up 12 per cent of the RUC and it was pointless to think that they would join as their experience in persuading people to join the Ulster Defence Regiment convinced them that both these forces were regarded as sectarian. The RUC should be changed out of all recognition.

The Secretary of State said he believed that there were considerable difficulties in devising the kind of police force the SDLP had in mind. The RUC would not accept being treated in the way suggested. He realised that there was a problem over the acceptability of the RUC to the minority but he thought that this would be improved if Catholics were to join the police. He did not believe there was any hope of reconciliation between the Protestant community and the SDLP on this point.

SECRET

ECONOMIC ASPECTS

The SDLP put forward the need to act swiftly about the economic situation especially in the spectrum of providing employment for the minority. This problem had always been a social evil and a breeding ground for trouble. It had suited the Unionists in the past to create high unemployment in the Catholic areas and thus force them to emigrate. The economic policies of the Unionist Government had been capital intensive rather than labour intensive and what was required was not so much Government intervention to assist ailing companies but the positive creation of jobs. They presented the Secretary of State with a memorandum on the economic problems (see Annex).

The Secretary of State said he was glad to have the detailed proposals of the SDLP in the economic sphere. He would be glad to arrange, as requested, for a meeting between the Minister of State and the SDLP on economic questions. The need to attract investment and Government spending to Northern Ireland should not be overlooked.

Amongst other matters raised by the SDLP and not directly concerned with the Paper for Discussion were the following:-

a. Photographing and taking of census of the Catholic population by the Army was still continuing. This was a bad military strategy because it was alienating the Catholic people. The search in Londonderry the previous day had done a great deal of harm in this respect. The Secretary of State said that he had given an absolute assurance on the matter of photographing and census taking. Any individual cases which the SDLP cared to raise would be investigated. Searches were only carried out on the basis of information received, and would take place in Protestant areas as well. There had been successes in the recent problem of petrol bombing at Carrickfergus. The Task Force was operating in East Belfast with a heavy commitment of Royal Military Police and detectives.

b. As far as appointments to public boards were concerned, the SDLP felt that people were penalised if their participation in the rent and rates strike excluded them from consideration. The Secretary of State pointed out how difficult it would be to

SECRET

appoint people to public offices who are on rent and rates strike. If such people indicated their willingness to come off rent and rates strike, it might be possible to consider them for appointment to some of the area boards.

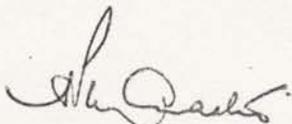
c. The SDLP asked about the position in respect of the Army's presence at Casement Park. The Secretary of State said that he would be discussing the matter with the GOC. If he could not meet the point of view Mr Devlin was putting forward, he would see the delegation from the County Armagh Gaelic Athletic Association. He would keep Mr Devlin informed of the situation.

d. The case of Mr Madden was raised. He had been denied parole although his sister was dead, his farm business was in disarray and he had a young person to look after. A formal request was made that he would be released for a day on parole. The Secretary of State pointed out that his second application had been made for business reasons and not the compassionate grounds which were usually the only ones for the granting of parole, but he said that he would look again at the case.

e. The SDLP asked about progress on the point they had recently raised about appointments to the Ministry of Development. The Secretary of State said he would enquire into the matter.

f. The SDLP believed it was wrong that a mandatory sentence of six months should be passed for offences of riotous behaviour. A suspended sentence, not a mandatory sentence, should be passed. The Secretary of State said that he would make enquiries into the point.

g. The SDLP raised the problem of their own personal security. It was particularly difficult to travel after dark and they also feared attacks on the policemen who guarded their homes. They wondered whether they could have financial assistance to employ people to travel with them at night. The Secretary of State said that the police were always glad to advise members of the SDLP on their personal security. He would make enquiries into the point about making funds available.


for R. M. WHALLEY
13 December 1972