

E.P.

CONFIDENTIAL

24/9

① Dr Ewart 2/19
② Mr M
③ For

PAB/3566/RE

cc: PS/S ofS (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Sir E Bell
Mr Bourn, Mr Angel
Mr Merifield
Mr Abbott
Mr Edis

NOTE FOR THE RECORD



MEETING WITH EDGAR GRAHAM: 20 SEPTEMBER

1. Following a number of casual conversations I had with Mr Graham during the course of the BIA weekend conference in Oxford, I met with him today to discuss further his ideas for "administrative devolution".
2. Predictably with unionists, the first part of our conversation was taken up with a pointed discussion of the role of the FCO in NI affairs. Graham's sensitivities had been heightened by a recent debate in Parliament when the FCO had answered questions on the Encounter Organisation rather than the Secretary of State for NI. Although Graham professed to be satisfied with my account of the FCO interest in Anglo Irish but not Northern Irish affairs, no doubt he will return to this subject on subsequent occasions.
3. Graham's remarks on the Assembly were interesting and revealed a difference in his approach vis a vis Mr Molyneux. He thought that the Assembly was generally pursuing a useful course and that it had injected political life into the province. He was, however, worried about the current attitude of the DUP. They seemed to be more concerned with securing purely constitutional points rather than concentrating on overall policy. He said that at yesterday's meeting of the Finance Committee with Mr Patten to discuss Health and Social Services spending, the DUP were more concerned about individual hospitals rather than HMG's overall expenditure plans for the province. Graham also thought that agricultural interests and lobby groups were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with Dr Paisley and his handling of the Agricultural Committee. Although he got publicity, he did not get results.
4. Against this background Graham thought that we should take some "small steps" (an echo of Balliol) to improve and enhance the working of the Assembly in Stage 1. It was interesting that he put no pressure on me over Stage 2. In this respect, he thought that the following points were important:

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- (a) That some kind of Question Time should be introduced in the coming session. He was aware that there were constitutional difficulties about Ministers replying to oral and/or written questions but thought that these should be overcome.
- (b) He had already suggested to Mr Butler that we might consider introducing "supply days" into the Assembly whereby Ministers attended a debate on a draft Order and replied to it.
- (c) On a personal basis he also thought that there might be some merit in a form of "administrative devolution". He emphasised that he had not thought this proposal through but what he appeared to have in mind was a mechanism whereby the Departmental Minister retained responsibility for policy formation but each of the Assembly Committees were given direct oversight as to how that policy was administered by the Department concerned. In effect, the proposal would introduce an extra tier into the bureaucratic machine so that Assembly members could supervise the way in which NI Departments conducted their day to day work. Graham thought that a proposal of this nature might be helpful as regards SDLP involvement since they would be represented on each of the Assembly's committees. He emphasised that this was very much an initial exposition of his proposal. He would give it further thought and come back with more details. I said that I did not think that it would hold sufficient attractions, in itself, to bring the SDLP into the Assembly and that there were a number of obvious constitutional/bureaucratic problems to the kind of scheme he had outlined. Nevertheless we would be interested in seeing his proposal when it was elaborated.

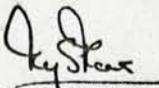
5. We also discussed the Forum. Graham thought that there was some advantage in Sir Charles Carter addressing the Forum on economic issues but said that there were dangers in taking its proceedings too seriously. He felt that there was little chance that the Forum would be able to arrive at a consensus document. Nonetheless he did not take the DUP view that it should be opposed outright. He

had prevented Jim Allister tabling a motion in the Finance Committee censuring Sir Charles Carter for appearing before the Forum by arguing that it was ultra vires.

6. Graham was supportive on supergrasses although he made it clear that he and his party were still concerned about the question of immunity. He was also concerned about the question of police custody for the three RUC constables charged with murder. If they failed in their attempts to be remanded to police custody then he and Mr Maginnis would be making a new approach to NIO Ministers.

Comment

7. It would be interesting to see whether Graham can produce a workable scheme for his devolution ideas. What was apparent was that he has a different approach to the Assembly than many of his OUP colleagues, and his thinking in terms of small steps in Stage 1 leading to an agreed move to Stage 2.



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Political Affairs Division

20 September 1983