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SDLP
Date 16.6.85

cc

- PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - M
- PS/PUS (L&B) - M
- PS/Mr Bloomfield
- Mr Brennan - M
- Mr Gilliland ✓
- Miss Elliott - M
- Mr Lyon - M
- Mr Reeve
- Mr Bickham - M

Mr Chesterton - M

BRIEFING FOR MEETING WITH MR HUME

In preparing briefing for Mr John Hume's meeting with the Secretary of State I suggest that two aspects need probing particularly.

- The extent and meaning of SDLP's commitment to proportionate power-sharing, and its implications for Anglo-Irishry.
- The views of SDLP about a device to provide a self-denying exclusion for Sinn Fein in any new Assembly.

Internal Government

2. In a carefully rehearsed statement on Monday at the dinner for Westminster MPs hosted by the Secretary of State, Mr Dennis Haughey indicated that SDLP were looking for an internal settlement, based on a distribution of portfolios in proportion to party strengths (together with some further recognition of the identity of the minority). He said that in the absence of any overtures from the unionists, indeed in the light of their attitudes on unionist controlled councils, the SDLP had no option but to place all their emphasis on Anglo-Irishry.

3. Very similar statements have been made recently in similar circumstances by Mr Eamon Hanna, SDLP's General Secretary, and by Mr Michael Boyd an SDLP Vice-Chairman. And there is evidence (from the 6 June Conservative Backbench meeting) that the Irish Ambassador has said that under any new settlement there had to be an Assembly.

4. One could guess at several motives for these statements. -

- a. SDLP's realisation that unless they can get onto the ground of government in Northern Ireland itself, they will find it increasingly hard to hold their line against Sinn Fein especially in areas like Fermanagh and Mid-Ulster where distinctions are already being blurred.

CONFIDENTIAL
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L.R.

- b. The party's firm belief that whilst some form of sharing of power is essential to any satisfactory settlement this will not and cannot come from the unionists acting alone—and that to enter negotiations without a firmer statement of the ground rules from the Government would be meaningless. (A belief which has been strengthened by unionist activity on the new District Councils, especially Belfast).
- c. In consequence of this a decision to emphasise the Anglo-Irish process as SDLP's only hope of securing political progress. To the extent that Anglo-Irishry has to bear a "double" weight the demands must be higher than they would be if the Anglo-Irish link were to be diluted by SDLP participation at the top table of NI government. (And, it may be also that SDLP will press Dr Fitzgerald to keep his bid high because that is the only leverage they have on the internal process).
- d. SDLP's wish to ensure that if talks on an internal solution collapse they are not left with the blame (for not being reasonable) within terms that would be understood in USA and in many parts of GB.
5. It is of course possible to argue that SDLP have not been as resolute and open as they ought to have been, and if it is SDLP's wish to find a place within a form of devolved government they should be talking to the other parties. But SDLP say they can have no confidence in the goodwill of the two unionist parties, whose recent behaviour in local government has shown what lies behind the Way Forward. Indeed the DUP have said that while power-sharing is possible in the present Assembly, it cannot be extended to a devolved body. The UUP have gone along with this and no statements have come from Mr Molyneaux to suggest that the largest unionist party really believe in anything much different. Mr Miller has spoken of "some possibilities" but the cypher in which he tends to speak has not yet been broken. In these circumstances the SDLP's stance is understandable.
6. Of course the UUP may be sitting on the fence, but SDLP hold that this is not a seemly posture for the Government, who should make it clear that in their view there can be no devolution without a part in government for SDLP. This would endorse SDLP's aim to be a constitutional party. Only after such a determined statement do SDLP

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J.R. believe the unionists will begin to contemplate any move. It can be argued that, even if the Government made such a statement (and threatened a form of direct rule with minority participation) the build up of pressure would not be sufficient to break the log jam. But a statement of intent might improve the climate in terms of lower nationalist Anglo-Irish demands, and provide an incentive for SDLP to consider seriously talking with those unionists who had not reacted against "attempts to force them to give nationalists a part in the Government of Northern Ireland (sic)".

7. But in this respect the unionist fears of Anglo-Irishry will continue to act as an inhibitor on the internal devolution track. Thus any declaration of what the Government would be prepared to recommend to Parliament as being consistent with its principle of widespread consent (which essentially entails minority participation) would have to be made public early enough to influence Irish/SDLP perceptions in relation to Anglo-Irishry, [and perhaps be made in private early enough to influence ROI decisions], but not so late as to appear to unionists to be the result of Anglo-Irish talks.

8. A judgement on Mr Hume's objectives and tactics will be relevant to decisions by the Secretary of State on his tactics on Anglo-Irishry, and the timing of any Government statement about its preferred option. This meeting with Mr Hume is likely to be very important in shaping policy work over the rest of the summer. It might be asked for example -

- whether Mr Hume and SDLP are really interested in a system of devolution on the lines advanced by Mr Dennis Haughey to the Secretary of State on Monday;
- if so whether Mr Hume would be prepared to state those views more openly and unambiguously;
- whether Mr Hume believes the unionists will agree to the principles which underlie the sharing concept;
- if not, whether he thinks there is anything the Government can or should do to clarify issues to the unionists, and so make a reality of any SDLP/Unionist discussions;
- whether Mr Hume believes that even if agreement were reached the chances of his working alongside Unionist Ministers would be likely to produce stability in practice;

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- whether some arrangements which give the nationalists a share of responsibility in devolved Departments (or even within statutory boards) would have an effect on the "thickness" or "weight" of Irish requirements under an Anglo-Irish agreement; and in this respect
- how does John Hume see the timing of developments on Anglo-Irishry and of progress on internal arrangements, (which is the cart and which the horse for SDLP).

Assembly and PSF

9. Even if some agreement were to be reached on a new internal arrangement, it seems inconceivable now that the unionists could play a constructive part in an Assembly with PSF members sitting in it. The possibility has been mentioned of some form of declaration - whether based on constitutional (and non-violence) principles agreed in the Anglo-Irish context or otherwise - which would force Sinn Fein to exclude themselves. Mr Hume's views might be canvassed on this possibility.

10. There remain also the questions of recognition of Irish identity on which SDLP speakers have been less clear, and the range of law and order/courts issues. These are known to you and in this minute I have drawn attention to what I believe to be two elements that will affect the Secretary of State's approach over the summer.

AJP

A J MERIFIELD
13 June 1985

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