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PS/Secretary of State (L&B)

cc: PS/PUS (L&B)  
PS/Mr Bloomfield  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Brennan  
Mr Chesterton  
Mr Merifield  
Mr Gilliland  
Mr Carvill  
Mr Reeve  
Mr Lyon  
Miss Elliott  
Mr Gavin Hewitt  
Mr Nigel Hamilton (DOE)  
Mr Bickham

26 APR 1985

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VISIT TO LONDONDERRY 22 APRIL 1985

I had a short meeting with John Hume in his constituency office in the presence of Mark Durkan and Pat Hume.

We had a brief discussion about the forthcoming local government elections during which Mr Hume expressed the view that his party would hold their position overall and that the "gains" by Sinn Fein would largely be:

- (a) at the expense of the Irish Independence Party
- (b) seats currently held by independent nationalists
- (c) new seats.

I asked about recent statements from Seamus Mallon in which he appeared to be saying that it is a united Ireland or nothing but before Mr Hume could discuss this point with me he was called away by Clement Freud MP who was on a visit to the city. Mark Durkan took up the point and told me that Mr Hume's position is that if it is a question of the status quo or an improvement then he will lead the party towards an improvement. Mr Mallon's statements were passed off as an effort to encourage the party before the election.

I asked what the party would agree to by way of improvement but Durkan would not be drawn on this topic though he did say that recent newspaper speculation about possible settlements emanated from unionist circles and not from Dublin.

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Comment

Local Government Election: There is within SDLP a feeling of optimism in the Derry City Council area which was not evident before the European Election in June 1984. This optimism has been encouraged by a feeling that Sinn Fein has been unable to maintain the commitment to advice centres etc which had seemed to be permanent fixtures early in 1984.

Mallon's Statement: This is the third time within the last ten days that Durkan has tried to play down the strength of Mr Mallon's statement and, as previously, he emphasised that he was stating John Hume's position. I do not think that Mr Mallon is simply electioneering and the fact that John Hume felt it necessary to make a special trip back from America to attend the SDLP Executive Council Meeting is indicative of his view that it is necessary for him to ensure that Seamus Mallon's influence in the party is maintained at its present level. (Durkan gave me this information in the second of our two conversations on this topic).

When discussing Sinn Fein prospects Durkan (he expects 4/5 Sinn Fein Councillors) was particularly scathing about their candidates and their policies. He went on to tell me that he represented SDLP at a students meeting in London when the Sinn Fein case was put by Leslie Huckfield MP and is proud of how he managed, in his words, to put Huckfield in his place. As a result of this debate Durkan is representing SDLP in Glasgow this weekend at a similar conference. I have no doubt that Durkan is in John Hume's confidence and as such is a very useful contact.

Both Pat Hume and Mark Durkan are sure that the UUP position on a separate Waterside Council will backfire, as it did in the last by-election, and simply increase votes for "the real thing" ie DUP. He had heard the rumour that whoever succeeded for the UUP in the election would in due course take their seats.

Comment

The rumour about the UUP position quite clearly comes from Jim Guy (UUP) camp but the position could be changed if the DUP led by Gregory Campbell decides to enter the council to fulfil the party manifesto and confront Sinn Fein.

This possibility is being discussed in the city and was mentioned to me by Bishop Mehaffey and Dr Addley before their meeting with the

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Secretary of State (afternoon 24 February 1985).

Electioneering in the city is now in full swing with SDLP trying to combat the republicanism of Sinn Fein by putting forward or supporting popular but divisive issues. The most recent examples of these issues is the request to the Secretary of State to dissolve the Honourable the Irish Society (proposed by Fergus McAteer (IIP) supported by SDLP) and most recently the approach, following an initiative by Pat Devine (SDLP Council leader), to the Secretary of State asking him to instruct government departments to allow their staff to use either Londonderry or Derry on official correspondence. Obviously these moves will simply inflame unionist opinion and will make any return to the council chamber more difficult for the moderate unionists.

I will be speaking to Pat Devine next week when perhaps I can talk to him about SDLP tactics and how he sees the position vis a vis the unionist population.



J E McCONNELL  
Political Affairs Division  
25 April 1985

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