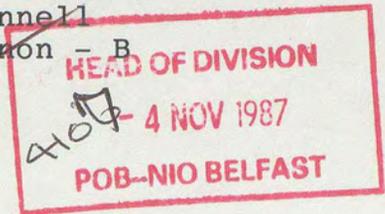


PAB/3306/DP

Mr West (SIL) - B

cc Mr McConnell
Mr Shannon - B



THE ANGLO IRISH AGREEMENT: TWO YEARS ON

I attach a re-written section covering the 'Impact on the two communities'. Unfortunately there are problems in finding suitable quotations from Ministers in the present Irish Government and hence we have had to rely on those to be had from the previous Fine Gael administration. Also it is difficult to find a good recent supporting statement from a leading SDLP figure. Hence I have placed the John Hume statement in square brackets - I am hoping that we shall get something useful from his address as party leader to the SDLP Conference over the weekend. I'll confirm the state of play on Monday.

[Signed]

J R ALFORD
Political Affairs Division
4 November 1987

DP/693

HEAD OF DIVISION

4108 4 NOV 1987

POB-NIO BELFAST

THE IMPACT ON THE TWO COMMUNITIES

As the Agreement has continued to operate the nationalist community has witnessed the evolution of processes which allow their views and aspirations to be heard. Consequently constitutional nationalists remain confident of the future of the Agreement and Cardinal O Fiaich, the Roman Catholic Primate of All Ireland, recently described it as "a shot in the arm for Catholics in the North" because the ability of the Irish Government to keep "an eye on the situation in the North" meant that Northern Ireland Catholics "don't feel so isolated".

In particular there has been widespread recognition that the standing of the RUC has improved among nationalists. Speaking in Donegal in August 1986 the then Irish Minister for Social Welfare, Mrs Gemma Hussey, said: "The television screens have shown night after night that the RUC has behaved fairly and courageously protecting the minority. There have been, in the welter of events, one or two incidents that have caused us serious concern, but the overriding picture is extremely positive and the RUC deserve very considerable credit... I agree strongly.... the police are now being seen to behave even-handedly in the local community." Indeed the situation moved to a point where on 14 November 1986 Peter Barry, Minister for Foreign Affairs in the last Irish Government, and co-chairman of the Anglo-Irish Conference, said: "I would be happy to see any young man who wants to make a career in the security forces join the RUC."

[Mr John Hume, leader of the main nationalist party in Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), recently said of the Intergovernmental Conference: "That is a major achievement and it should not be sneezed at by anyone or tampered with, unless something very much better is going to be proposed" (the Irish Press, Dublin, 30 October 1986).

Within recent months most unionist-dominated councils have started to conduct meetings again so that business can be transacted to comply with statutory requirements, and Members of Parliament have returned to sit in the House of Commons. However these changes should not be taken to signal any weakening of unionist opposition to the Agreement. Instead they are a response to the demands of the unionist community for an effective campaign against the Agreement but from within the democratic process rather than outside it. This reflects a growing acceptance that the Government cannot be coerced into repudiation of the Agreement and therefore if unionists wish to reduce the influence of the Agreement this can only be achieved by provision of a constructive alternative. In June 1987 Peter Robinson, who was at the time Deputy Leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), said: "The search must be for an alternative to the Agreement and a replacement of it. We cannot consider accepting the Agreement's terms or even a modification of them. Progress must be based upon negotiating it out of existence. If the Government agreed to meet the necessary conditions for negotiations then they and we would have to accept that no option could be excluded by the other from consideration."

In line with this new pragmatism the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the DUP set up a Task Force of three influential unionist politicians to review the campaign of opposition and to suggest future strategy. The resulting report, in an unpublished section, was apparently highly critical of unionist tactics and the published section went on to suggest that some form of exploratory talks should be undertaken with HMG to look into ways forward. These so-called "talks about talks" have been in progress between senior government officials - on one occasion along with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland - and the leader of the UUP, Mr James Molyneaux, and the leader of the DUP, Dr Ian Paisley.

As yet no results have been made public from these discussions, however, it is clear that some effort is being made to examine ways that negotiations can proceed, on some basis, which allows unionists to escape from their impossible precondition that the Agreement be

suspended before substantive discussions begin. The Government's public position has been and remains that although it will not suspend the Agreement, it would operate it "sensitively" in the context of a conference with the parties on the possibilities for introducing devolved government. The Agreement supports the principle of devolved government, which remains the preferred option of the Democratic Unionist Party, and of elements in the Ulster Unionist Party.