

*with exception of London*

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

CHAIRMAN'S MEETING WITH MR G FITT - 4.40 - 7.10 PM, MONDAY, 25 AUGUST 1975

Mr Fitt expressed gloom at the prospects of the Convention. He considered that most of the Labour Party and many Conservatives were keen to disengage from Northern Ireland once the Convention had failed to provide a solution and a further period of direct rule had elapsed. He thought that the Prime Minister would be one of the main advocates of this method of solving the Irish question.

Mr Fitt took the view that the recent strong attacks on the Secretary of State by UUUC indicated a wish by the latter for independence since they could not rationally expect him to be replaced by anyone who would be encouraged or permitted to reverse Rees's policy on security.

Both his points taken together, he thought, rendered separation from the UK more likely. He foresaw that such a step would be economically disastrous and would result in the slaughter of many Catholics. At one time his friends in England would have tried to avoid such a severance, if only because of the fear that violence would spread to England and Scotland; they did not now fear this and they believed that the new anti-terrorist laws were a protection. The Irish Government, on the other hand, dreaded the effect of mass deportations of 'undesirables' from England to the South.

Boal was a sinister influence who held court at home and entertained Paisley, Devlin and others. Boal favoured some kind of independence and was consumed by hatred of all things English. Devlin was a good man but susceptible to flattery. Hume was an inflexible fanatic who saw everything in terms of Derry and could not take a wider view. Currie was very intelligent, able and sincere.

Mr Fitt complained at the NIO attitude to the IRA and their recent evasions concerning the possible arrest of Twomey. Dublin were disgusted, considering that for years the British Government had been regarding Twomey as one of the most wanted men. O'Connell had, he thought, got himself arrested in order to be out of the way during the forthcoming violence. He then meant to emerge and act as the statesmanlike reorganiser.

On the immediate question, I Cooper was declaring party policy. SDLP considered full power-sharing essential and their contribution to a compromise would be to support the institutions of the State. (This was exactly Hume's line when I saw the SDLP three.)

I observed that both SDLP and UUUC considered agreement to be vital, but each considered that the other party was bound to see sense and abandon its position.

I thought that the SDLP in particular was firmly committed to this line, partly inspired by the fact that the British and Irish Governments had come out clearly in favour of power-sharing. I, however, did not think it likely that power-sharing would be imposed or, if imposed that it could bring a peaceful solution of sufficient acceptability.

We agreed that it was most important that the parties should keep talking in case something could be found on which they agreed and also because it would look absurd to admit failure after the comparatively short discussions already held. A temporary (ie 4, 5 or 10 years) solution would be of great benefit if nothing better could be obtained.

I told Mr Fitt that I intended tomorrow to ask the SDLP three what were their objectives and whether the objectives could be attained by means other than full power-sharing.

Arrangements were made to talk again. The meeting was most friendly but in Convention terms little was achieved. Mr Fitt's most relevant hope was, I believe, that I could make UUUC change their policy towards power-sharing.

ROBERT LOWRY