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E/166/86/SB

cc PS/SofS (L&B)
PS/Mr Scott (L&B)
PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Mr Bloomfield
Mr Stephens
Mr Chesterton o/r
Mr Innes
Mr Spence
Mr Bell
Miss Elliott
Mr G Hewitt
Mr S Hewitt
Mr McConnell
Mr Clark, RID, FCO

BS/166
Mr Brennan

CALL ON UUP ASSEMBLYMAN

Mr McConnell kindly arranged for me to call, with him, on a UUP Assemblyman, an influential member of the party's Policy Committee, outside Belfast on Friday 13 June. We had a useful discussion.

2. Perhaps the most useful feature was that the individual in question, who was aware of my Civil Service grade and may have regarded me as a very senior official, was prepared to meet me and to talk frankly about Unionist attitudes to the Agreement and to the Government. He was also prepared, significantly, to listen to what we had to say and to consider seriously such tentative suggestions as we made about the way forward.

3. The main points which struck me were:

- a. He accepted that the Irish Government had on the whole behaved remarkably sensitively since the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed. His venom was reserved for the SDLP leadership; John Hume had for years consistently ignored Unionist proposals for talks, and his declared readiness to talk now could not be taken seriously.
- b. Devolution was the only way forward. The party's resolution had stated that an attempt should first be made to secure integration, but this would fail.
- c. As a devolutionist, he could contemplate either power-sharing or a role for Dublin (though not of the kind set out in the Anglo-Irish Agreement), but not both. The problem was that John Hume wanted it both ways, making

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power-sharing a necessary condition for any scheme of devolution but also insisting on the Anglo-Irish Agreement which gave the Irish Government a role in devolution.

- d. He was not clear about what the Dublin role might be, although he described it as "second-stage" (presumably being brought in after the Unionist-dominated North had made up their own minds and were ready to negotiate). The problem which he saw with the Anglo-Irish Agreement was its failure to define a sufficient area of activity which was not subject to Irish interference; the effect was that Dublin's involvement in the running of the Province was plainly excessive.
 - e. He paid lip-service to the party's doctrine of the need to have the Conference suspended before "talks about talks" with the Government could take place, but was plainly more interested in the opportunity which might be offered by the gap between Conferences over the marching season and/or the summer. In this connection he cross-examined us about the likely date for the next Conference, but got no clear answer (although we said that as a month had passed since the last meeting, one could come at any time). He also expressed interest in talks with the Government which did not necessarily involve the two party leaders, while accepting that no such move could be made immediately, and pointing out that even if it was, the leaders could easily disown their representatives.
4. The Policy Committee is to meet today (16 June), and I had the impression that he will be pursuing some of the ideas in (e) above. We made it clear that the Government wanted talks, or talks about talks, without pre-conditions. It was for the unionists to determine what they wanted and to put constructive ideas to us.

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5. Our interlocutor was not much moved by the announcement of the dissolution of the Assembly, which he regarded as inevitable; and he did not seem to think that an imminent meeting of the Conference would destroy all hope of progress towards Government/unionist contact. Others in his party are likely to be less realistic.

M. Elliott

M ELLIOTT

16 June 1986