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604/2.

E. R.

ME/57/87/JI

Mr Burns - M

cc! PS/Mr Bloomfield ✓  
Mr Stephens ✓  
Mr Chesterton - M  
Mr Spence  
Mr Bell - M  
Mr G Hewitt  
Mr McConnell  
Mr Kirk - M  
Mr S Hewitt  
Mr Wood

2. Pd 2/1

CHANGING THE CLIMATE

I now submit an amended draft for your consideration of the paper on "Changing the Climate" which I was asked to prepare at the PDG meeting on 11 February.

2. I am grateful to all those who offered comments on the first version circulated with my minute of 18 February. I have tried to incorporate in some form or another all the comments made. The general thrust of the paper is essentially the same, but some of the irrelevancies have I think now been removed.

3. I have also taken some account of our conversation in Belfast on 24 February with Mr Chesterton, and of your subsequent minute to Mr Chesterton and myself of 25 February (not to all). The attached draft represents all that I think we can usefully say from the PAB side of your empire at this stage; in other words I do not think that we have any more constructive thoughts to offer in relation to the Unionists, and the ideas which we had in relation to the SDLP figure in the paper to the extent that they are relevant in the short-term. I have no other comment on the formulation in the two relevant paragraphs of your minute on the SDLP, which seems to me to cover exactly the ground which we agreed. Mr McConnell and I stand ready to discuss this further on 2 March when you are next in Belfast.

*Mark Elliott*

M ELLIOTT

27 February 1987

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## CHANGING THE CLIMATE

1. Since the signature of the Anglo-Irish Agreement political dissension in Northern Ireland has paralysed political development. This paper examines the scope for changing the political climate so as to encourage members of both communities to adopt a more constructive attitude.
  
2. The Government's policy, before and since the Agreement, has been in general to seek peace, reconciliation and stability in Northern Ireland; and in particular to seek to establish a form of devolved government in which leaders of both communities can participate with confidence and with the full support of their followers. In the absence of progress towards this goal (and even before the Agreement little progress was being achieved) it is our policy to continue direct rule, ensuring constantly that the administration of the Province is as sensitive as possible to local needs.
  
3. Substantial progress is not likely to be possible in the short term. The attitude of Mr Haughey's administration in the South is an unknown quantity. A general election in the United Kingdom is expected later this year. Unionists in Northern Ireland hope that their campaign against the Agreement will benefit from increased tension in Anglo-Irish relations, for example if Mr Haughey carries out his threat to renegotiate the Agreement or seeks undertakings from the British which are impossible to give. Some Unionists believe also that a hung parliament at Westminster would give Unionist MPs sufficient leverage to ensure the collapse of the Agreement. Unionist political leaders appear therefore to be determined to offer no relaxation in their policy of opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and refusal to enter dialogue with the Government until the outcome of the UK General Election is known and the attitude of Mr Haughey is clearer. During this period of uncertainty any major initiative by HMG, for example in proposing an all-party conference under its own or independent Chairmanship, is likely to founder immediately on the rock of Unionist intransigence.

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4. Once the UK election is behind us the scope for constructive action will be enlarged. The Unionists are highly unlikely to have achieved their objective of a controlling voice in the Government's Northern Ireland policy, and the divisions between them which are already evident are likely to deepen; those who are now pressing for a more moderate approach, not excluding some renewal of contact with Government, may become more influential. The Haughey administration will have had time to determine its approach to Northern Ireland questions and may have discarded or shelved its more extreme options. At that time we shall be able to determine more precisely what action can be taken to engage the Northern Ireland parties in dialogue about the governance of the Province and the best manner of enhancing their direct involvement in the processes of Government.

5. The remainder of this paper identifies a variety of steps which we can take in the immediate future so as to create, by the time of the UK election, conditions in which this dialogue may become possible.

#### The Majority Community

6. Our overall purpose in addressing the majority community is to dispel the image, created by Unionist propaganda, that we are ogres in conspiracy with Dublin. Both in public and in private we can afford to take a rather more aggressive line. We should demolish the more outlandish Unionist allegations, and attack the inconsistency inherent in rejecting democratic institutions while claiming to fight for democracy. It is important to avoid becoming involved in detailed justification of the Agreement, which is unlikely now to persuade Unionists of its merits (although we should make maximum use for example of any identifiable results of improved cross-border security co-operation). Instead we should not hesitate to say that the Agreement represents some shift of influence in favour of the minority, and that this shift has taken place not only on the moral grounds of equity and fairness, but on the practical grounds that the support of wider sections of the community is necessary if Northern Ireland is ever to become a more stable place.

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7. Against this background, our approach should include the following elements:

- (a) We can continue our very discreet efforts at a senior level to engage the support of influential figures in Northern Ireland in encouraging political dialogue between representatives of the constitutional parties.
- (b) At a lower level, we can cultivate and improve our existing contacts with Unionist opinion formers, to encourage what movement there is towards political dialogue, with Government or between the parties. We should stimulate realistic discussion of the options for devolution.
- (c) We should lose no opportunity to repeat at all levels and in public the message that Ministers' doors are open for discussion with Unionist leaders, without any association with the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and that the Prime Minister has herself said that she is willing to meet the Unionist leaders at any time. A part of this message is the sensitivity which we are prepared to show in the operations of the Agreement, but we should have regard also to the attitude of the new Irish Government in determining how we express this thought.
- (d) We should encourage any tendency on the part of Unionist politicians to seek discreet meetings with Ministers, with the purpose rather of re-establishing contact than of achieving any particular or specific measure of progress.
- (e) The programme for Ministerial visits to selected areas of Northern Ireland, to meet the people and show that the normal processes of Government are in operation, should continue and could be intensified. This programme can serve not only to demonstrate that the business of Government is being carried out in a thorough and responsible way, but also in reducing the public's preoccupation with the Anglo-Irish Agreement by encouraging debate on economic and social issues.

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- (f) The suggested programme of speeches and statements by the Secretary of State and his Ministers can help to underline the reality that Northern Ireland is being properly administered by concerned and involved members of the Government.
- (g) We should try to dispel suspicion of the operations of the Conference and Secretariat, by offering regular briefings on Conference meetings to political leaders, and when opportunity offers by explaining frankly to the media how the Secretariat operates.
- (h) Unionist boycotts of Council Chambers predate the Anglo-Irish Agreement and were prompted by the presence there of Sinn Fein members. There is a firm belief held by many Unionists that the Government does not have the will to deal energetically with the problem of Sinn Fein. Any practical steps which we can take to demonstrate the contrary would be helpful.

8. It is not possible to assess with any precision the effect which any of these measures might have. Unionist leaders are not in practice likely to accept invitations to meet Ministers, still less to attend formal or informal talks chaired by the Government, within the timescale of this paper. Any discreet contacts which may be arranged are unlikely to produce identifiable results. These measures (7c and d above) have potential value only in demonstrating the accessibility and reasonableness of the Government, with possibly helpful effects over time on opinion in the majority community generally. Similarly, the activities described at 7e and f are designed expressly to emphasise the human and concerned face of the Government, with no immediate ulterior motive. Briefings on the Conference and Secretariat (7g) are unlikely to persuade many that we are not concealing more than we say, but should nevertheless be tried. Action against Sinn Fein (7h), though highly desirable, has difficulties which are explored in other papers. The efforts to encourage dialogue at various levels (7a and b) are most likely to produce positive movement, although we should not deceive ourselves into believing that the results will be dramatic.

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The Minority Community

9. There is rather more prospect of achieving some significant change of attitude on the part of the constitutional Nationalists, and our overall purpose should be to press them more strongly for positive commitment and involvement. The position of the SDLP will be materially affected by the change of administration in the Republic; the relative influence for example of John Hume and Seamus Mallon may change. If Haughey as Taoiseach overplays his hand, the SDLP may see it as to their advantage to show themselves rather more outspoken in their support of the Agreement and even of working within existing Northern Ireland institutions. They may prove to be something of a brake on the Irish administration. Some SDLP members have been helpful in discreet activity behind the scenes. We can and should demonstrate to them that they should as a constitutional party be seen to be adopting a constructive stance sharply distinct from that of Sinn Fein, and that this can only be to their advantage in electoral terms and generally.

10. Specific elements in our approach to the constitutional Nationalists could include the following:

- (a) We should make more effort to cultivate the leaders of the minority community, not forgetting Roman Catholic church leaders, at all levels including the Ministerial level.
- (b) We should emphasise to them the problems which they face by being seen not to be involved locally in the administration of Northern Ireland. A greater involvement would serve to strengthen the SDLP's position against erosion by Sinn Fein and might demonstrate to Unionists that they had a genuine desire to play a responsible role in running the Province.
- (c) We should stress that the Anglo-Irish Agreement is important not as a step towards a long-term solution, or even merely as a means of security reforms designed to benefit Nationalists, but as the clearest possible demonstration of the Government's recognition of the Nationalist identity. We can ask the SDLP to attempt to get this thought across to the Irish Government, so that they do not ask for more than HMG can deliver through the Conference.

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- (d) This approach can be backed up with public statements which emphasise our appreciation of the minority's position.
  
- (e) In return, we should ask the SDLP to take a less grudging and more forthcoming attitude towards the institutions of Northern Ireland, not only in public statements but also in putting forward credible and powerful candidates for membership of appropriate bodies. The SDLP's failure to put forward candidates for the Police Authority is only one instance (and the difficulties of identifying willing candidates are real), but it has assumed considerable symbolic importance in the absence of any change to the Party's public stance on the RUC more generally; without movement of some kind, the majority community will be very reluctant to accept that Roman Catholics will ever be willing to play their part in the administration of Northern Ireland.
  
- (f) Looking further ahead, we should privately encourage senior members of the SDLP leadership to give some advance consideration to their objectives for participation in a devolved administration and to the means and feasibility of achieving those objectives.

11. The several elements of this approach are complementary. Their effect cannot be assessed separately. The purpose would be to bring the SDLP, in whose interest the Agreement is generally perceived as having been signed, forward to a position of public and open participation in the business of Northern Ireland, so as to deprive the Unionists of the Argument that it is the Nationalists who are inhibiting progress. The SDLP are seen as having a more powerful influence on decisions of Government, through the Irish Government and the Conference; unless they are seen to be offering something in return for this, in the form of a more forthcoming attitude, the Unionists will see no inducement to moderation on their side. Against the background of a Haughey administration, and with a UK election imminent, the SDLP should see the advantages of this course for themselves.

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The Irish Government

12. Our relations with the Irish Government through the Conference and the Secretariat, in particular with the change of administration in Dublin, are the subject of separate papers. However we should not lose sight of the effect of Irish Government statements and contacts on political attitudes in Northern Ireland. Through our contacts with Irish officials we can seek to influence the new administration to avoid giving encouragement to Unionists by casting doubt on the permanence and effectiveness of the Agreement; and to maintain the pressure on the SDLP to take a more positive attitude towards Northern Ireland institutions. Of these, the former is rather more likely to prove achievable than the latter.

Conclusion and Summary of Recommendations

13. In preparing the ground for possible initiatives to be taken after the UK election, we need to show ourselves sensitive to the conflicting aspirations of both communities without delivering messages to each which are seen to be inconsistent. We shall not in the short-term be able to change any fundamental perceptions. Our recommendations for this period therefore fall short of radical action, and concentrate largely on presentation.

14. We recommend:

Majority community

- a) continued discreet efforts at a senior level to promote political dialogue;
- b) development of contacts with Unionist opinion-formers;
- c) emphasising the willingness of the Prime Minister and Ministers to meet Unionists, and "sensitive operation" of the Agreement;
- d) developing direct contacts between Ministers and Unionist politicians, if possible;
- e) intensifying the programme of Ministerial visits around the Province;
- f) a programme of speeches and statements;
- g) seeking to demystify the Conference and Secretariat;
- h) steps to control Sinn Fein.

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Minority Community

- a) Active cultivation of Nationalist leaders;
- b) emphasising the advantages, generally and for the SDLP themselves, of more active involvement;
- c) emphasis on Agreement for itself and not for results it can bring;
- d) statements recognising Nationalist identity;
- e) calls on SDLP to participate actively in Northern Ireland institutions;
- f) encouragement to SDLP leaders to give some thought to possibilities for devolution.

The Irish Government

Seeking to influence new administration to avoid casting doubt on Agreement's continuance.