

CONFIDENTIAL

PAB/3633/DP

NOTE FOR THE RECORD



cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
PS/Mr Stanley (L&B) - B
PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) - B
PS/Mr Needham (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Burns - B
Mr Chesterton - B
Mr Innes - B
Mr Elliott - B
Mr Spence - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Kirk - B
Mr Daniell
Mr Wood - B

I had a lengthy discussion recently with a leading UUP councillor about the current state of thinking within his party on local political issues.

2. He said there was a growing realisation within his party that despite all forecasts the Government was continuing to rule in Northern Ireland. Thus neither of the two extremes originally suggested by the leadership - on the one hand that Dublin involvement would amount to joint sovereignty and on the other that unionist opposition would force HMG to move away from the Agreement - had come to pass. As a result the Government was firmly in control. It was now perceived that HMG was prepared to listen to advice and comment and hence, by their own actions, the only constitutional representatives who were being excluded from any say in the running of Northern Ireland were unionists. Consequently there was a growing mood within the rank and file that they should now try to get back into some position of influence.

3. However this contact said that the main body of UUP opinion now believed that politics at the "Provincial" level would not be important for the foreseeable future, which meant that Westminster and the council chambers were the only avenues open for political activity. He accepted that this would not suit those politically ambitious unionists (from both UUP and DUP) who were

CONFIDENTIAL

unlikely to get a Westminster seat quickly but who would not settle for local council politics. This was the reason that some (like Frank Millar) had left the party and why others were pushing the leaders towards some kind of accommodation with HMG through the talks about talks process. This contact thought that a devolved assembly with any kind of power was unlikely in the near future and thus only a few, albeit senior, members of the parties were pressuring the leaders on the talks about talks issue. Most councillors regarded the whole process as an irrelevance.

4. In response to a question as to whether this reaction was any signal that unionists were more prepared to work with the Agreement in place he said that unionist opposition remained as firm as ever but that there was now clear evidence that the Agreement was bound to fail or at least fall into disuse. He cited the occasions of the extradition debate before Christmas and the more recent cases over the administration of justice issues. These he said were perceived as examples of the fundamental flaw of the Agreement that neither side was prepared to respond when asked to do anything which cut to the heart of their own responsibilities. Consequently unionists need do nothing other than wait for HMG to come to them at some stage since it was quite clear from Hume's actions (the Adams meeting) that the SDLP wanted no part of any solution that involved compromise with unionists.

Comment

5. This contact's view supports the line we have been hearing for some time that there is a realisation that unionist bluster has not, and will not, prevent the Government from continuing to administer Northern Ireland fairly and efficiently. Clearly they remain ever hopeful that some form of external intervention will break the Agreement and cause HMG to seek them out to restore the old relationship. However there does not seem to be any major pressures, on Molyneaux at least, from the grass roots of the party to deliver on the talks about talks initiative.

[Signed]

J R ALFORD
Political Affairs Division
3 February 1988