

FUS

c Mr Bloomfield ✓

DISCUSSION PAPER: PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

One of the least engaging traits of British policy, as it has always appeared to foreigners, is its hypocrisy. In fact, more often than not, it is not hypocrisy at all; it is a process of double-think whereby British governments persuade themselves that something is so because it is evident to them that it ought to be so and it would be a lot more comfortable for all concerned if it were so.

2. Thus it is with power-sharing and the Irish dimension. A ray of reality has burst through the clouds of wishful thinking with regard to the latter but not, so far, with regard to the former. Is there, however, any informed individual who really believes that power-sharing, in any sense approximating to that of the 1973 Act, is a feasible solution in Northern Ireland? That we are committed to a show of believing in it during the period leading up to the Convention and during the Convention's early stages, I accept, but should not our efforts now be directed towards the situation which will emerge when the Loyalist two-third majority rejects power-sharing, except perhaps for granting the chairmanship of some Parliamentary committees to the SDLP, which is what O'ring seems to have in mind as his ultimate concession?

3. If this is so, as I believe it to be, should not the constitutional agility of Messrs Bloomfield and Trevelyan, for whose efforts I have great admiration, be following another tack? That is to say, to define the means whereby majority rule in Northern Ireland can be made, if not acceptable, as inoffensive as possible to the minority.

4. There are several means which can be combined to this end, viz:-

- i. A Bill of Rights, passed by the United Kingdom Parliament.
- ii. Entrenched provisions making certain legislation require a 75 per cent majority.

- iii. Reserved powers exercised by a Secretary of State.
- iv. A Council of State, with equal representation of the two communities and power to disallow legislation in certain areas.
- v. Something on the lines of Mr Bloomfield's functional proposals, taking many matters out of the hand of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

5. In this package, which is of course only one of many which could be devised, (ii), (iv) and (v) all have a power-sharing element in them. The SDLP, for example, could be given the chairmanship of an Entrenched Provisions committee of the Assembly in order to have a leading voice in the drafting of legislation which might be contentious.

6. It is, however, not so much the details which concern me at present as the principle of preparing a fall-back position against the time when everything falls round our ears in six months or so from now.

F W ARMSTRONG

NIO (Belfast)
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