

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL.

Note of a meeting between the PUS and NICS Permanent Secretaries held in Stormont House at 9.20 am on Tuesday 1 March 1977.

<u>Present:</u>	PUS	Mr J Finney	
	Mr R H Kidd	Mr S F R Martin	
	Mr W E Bell	Mr A A Pritchard	<u>Apologies</u>
	Mr R H A Blackburn	Dr W G H Quigley	Mr J F Irvine
	Mr K P Bloomfield	Mr K R Shimeld	Mr J M C Parke
	Mr A C Brooke	Mr J A Young	
	Mr N Dugdale		

1. In reviewing the political/constitutional scene since the last meeting, the PUS said that the main events had been the Secretary of State's meetings with the political parties, the first of which, with the SDLP had taken place immediately prior to the previous PUS/Permanent Secretaries' meeting, when the Secretary of State had reassured the SDLP that there was hope in their continuing in existence. The meeting with the Official Unionist Party the following day was much as expected with hard line adherence to the implementation of the majority convention report. The meetings with the Alliance and UPNI which followed were more wide ranging, taking in both the economic and security situations. The Secretary of State had also met the Democratic Unionist Party led by Dr Paisley. The views expressed at that meeting had indicated a certain amount of withdrawing behind established positions in readiness for the forthcoming Local Government elections in May. Their thinking was that the British Government would be watching for any move from those established positions. The PUS said that attention was now focussed on the May elections and the general expectancy was that there would be little overt sign of movement away from entrenched party positions between now and May. The PUS also pointed out that the political parties had come to see the Secretary of State at their own request and that the Secretary of State was keen that the political talks should not be viewed as a round of talks which he had initiated. His speech of the previous day at the luncheon for representatives of the Northern Ireland weekly newspapers had been aimed at drawing the line below the talks and at saying, if not in so many words, that no further initiative by Government on the political front could be expected. Mr Kidd said that he likewise did not foresee much, if any, un-freezing on the part of any of the parties who were even looking beyond the local government elections to the next general election.

2. Dealing with a question about full integration, given the fact that the Westminster MP's favoured this course and wished to see all Westminster legislation extended to Northern Ireland, the PUS did not see this as a

possibility. The point was made, however, that in view of the increasing tendency for Westminster legislation to extend to Northern Ireland, it seemed that Northern Ireland was already on the road towards integration. Not everyone agreed, though, that there was in fact pressure to extend Westminster legislation to Northern Ireland. Referring to the issue of recent instructions on the extension of GB legislation to Northern Ireland, the PUS saw advantages in this practice, given some of the drawbacks of the Order-in-Council procedure, eg the need for the pre-publication of a draft, no allowance for amendments, and delays in the Northern Ireland Committee, which had no cut-off point. Discussion on the floor of the House had clear time-table advantage. Dealing with a further question about the possibility of a 'half-way house' between power-sharing and no power-sharing, the PUS said that once the political parties showed a willingness to talk together, there were any number of possibilities open to consideration. The Clerk to the Assembly pointed out that during the life of the Convention the Chairman had suggested a number of permutations, but none had proved acceptable. General opinion was that, if anything, the parties were being driven apart and there seemed to be less and less likelihood of an accommodation being reached.

3. The PUS then invited members (as suggested at the previous meeting) to consider the general question of the divisions in the Northern Ireland Community, and to suggest what steps, if any, might be taken by Government to help bridge those divisions and promote a greater sense of reconciliation at grass roots level. As the Department of Education occupied a central position in this field, the PUS invited Mr Brooke to give his views. (The discussion has been recorded separately and is attached as Appendix A).
4. At the request of Mr Kidd who thought it would be useful for the PUS and Ministers to have a checklist of coming events in the life of each Department, members gave a brief account of their main "attractions" over the ensuing 2/3 months. (The composite list is attached as Appendix B).
5. Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 5 April 1977 at 9.20 am.

- Copies to:
- |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| PUS           | Mr Martin     |
| Mr Kidd       | Mr Palmer     |
| Mr Bell       | Mr Pritchard  |
| Mr Blackburn  | Dr Quigley    |
| Mr Bloomfield | Mr Shimeld    |
| Mr Brooke     | Mr Young      |
| Mr Dugdale    | Mr Janes      |
| Mr Finney     | Mr Waterfield |
| Mr Irvine     | Mr Parkes     |
- }for in-  
}forma-  
}tion

*H to*  
H COOTE  
3 March 1977.