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SIR EWART BELL

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

c.c. PS/PUS (L & B)

Mr Brennan
 Mr Bourn
 Mr Merifield
 N I Permanent Secretaries
 Mr Burns
 Mr Angel
 Mr Buxton
 Mr Carvill —
 Mr Norris
 Mr Gilliland
 Mr Abbott
 Mr Boys-Smith
 Mr Edis
 Mr Reeve
 Mr Bickham

Pressing demands on other fronts have meant that I have not been able to devote as much time and thought as I would have liked to the question of political development. But in any event, it is unnecessary to invent the wheel a second time, and I can therefore be mercifully brief in saying that I agree with virtually every word of Maurice Hayes' letter of 27 March to you.

His principal conclusions - that it is the power to run services rather than the power to legislate which has always been the main bone of contention, and that the SDLP would find little to attract them in being "captured" within a system effectively controlled by others - seem to me to be wholly realistic. In a climate of increasing rather than diminishing political polarization, and with Sinn Fein coming up fast on the rails alongside the SDLP, I cannot see any joy for Northern Ireland in a wider influence for local democratically-elected bodies. In my view there is no alternative at present but for Ministers to retain control in this atmosphere, coupling this with the maximum local involvement through appointed bodies such as NIHE. As you know I think this "functional body" approach might be extended in some directions, but I do not believe that there is any means at present open to us to give real power to local politicians, however you describe the context, without being crushed between the irresistible force of minority insistence on a share of real power or a real share of power and the immovable object of majority opposition to it. In my view we will delude ourselves if we believe there is some clever way around this central dilemma.

K.P. Bloomfield

K P BLOOMFIELD
 30 March 1984

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