

CONFIDENTIAL

E6732

SS1/5

1. Mr Bloomfield
2. POL/2

NOTES OF A MEETING WITH THE MINISTER IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
ON 21 MAY 1985

TOPIC: RELATIONSHIPS WITH DISTRICT COUNCILS POST LOCAL
GOVERNMENT ELECTION

In Attendance:

Minister (Mr Patten)
Secretary (Mr Barry)
Mr Carvill
Mr Beckett
Mr Hamilton
Mr Reeve
Mr Hewitt



The Minister indicated that he had called this meeting to examine in the main 2 aspects, viz:-

1. The views of those assembled regarding the the Local Government election results.
2. The attitude to be adopted towards Local Government.

He asked for round the table views.

Election Result

The consensus view was largely as put by Mr Reeve, ie, that:-

- (a) Sinn Fein had won 59 seats (as predicted in earlier DOE/PAB papers);
- (b) this was largely at the expense of the IIP, whose total collapse had been surprising;
- (c) Nationalists had gained control of Fermanagh but had not, as expected, gained control of Cookstown and Limavady due to a tactical error;
- (d) SF held the balance of power in 5 Council areas;
- (e) UUP were still the major Unionist Party, except in some areas around Belfast where DUP had gained seats;
- (f) Alliance now remained only in the greater Belfast area; and
- (g) a large number of new Councillors had been elected.

Contact with Sinn Fein

The Minister asked for a rehearsal of the arguments regarding the justification which Ministers could use not to see delegations which included Sinn Fein members, in view of the criticism that Unionists were expected to work with these people in the Council chamber at local level.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Hewitt pointed out that in running for office, the Unionist candidates were fully aware that Sinn Fein candidates had also sought election. The Unionists could not therefore now cry "foul" since they were prepared to compete with SF candidates for the seats. The situation with regard to Ministers was different in that they were simply continuing the policy whereby they would not work with SF representatives until such time as they publicly denounced the use of violence to achieve political aims. The refusal of Ministers to deal with SF representatives would therefore be seen not as discrimination against a political party, but as an unwillingness to deal with the supporters or advocates of violence. Mr Hewitt continued by saying that Ministers' positions were however somewhat anomalous in that junior officials were expected to work with these people on a day to day basis thereby ensuring that access to government had not been denied to the electorate. The Minister asked that a question and answer brief on the difficulties in not proscribing Sinn Fein be produced.

Visits to Councils

With regard to the round of Council visits, the Secretary pointed out that the Minister's predecessor (Mr Mitchell) had largely been responsible for the type of Council visit to which we are now accustomed. There was in fact no statutory requirement or obligation on a Minister to undertake such visits since the statutory requirements in respect of Planning, Roads, Water could all be satisfied at officer level. He noted the Minister's view that we should perhaps continue Council visits where there are a relatively few number of SF Councillors (ie, 1/2) and agreed that the position was somewhat different where the numbers of SF Councillors in a particular Council would almost certainly lead to a "bear garden". He thought it might be sufficient to find another genuine reason to attend such Councils in the first place, for example, the prime reason could be to open some particular scheme and the ensuing contact in the Council Chamber would be by way of courtesy, etc, rather than a formal question and answer session on all Departmental functions.

The Minister asked specifically about Fermanagh Council since he indicated that it was his hope to launch the Fermanagh Conservation Area. In those circumstances he anticipated that it would be reasonable to invite the Chairman and he sought views on the appropriate course of action to take if the Chairman proved to be SF member. Mr Carvill held the view that the policy with regard to this was quite clear, that the Minister should not deliberately put himself in a position where he would encounter a SF member, whether office bearer or not, especially at a social event. The Secretary and Mr Beckett reminded the Minister of the existing etiquette of inviting Council Chairmen to such functions, and indicated that in circumstances where the Chairman was a SF Councillor, the visit should not then take place. This could present difficulties over time as the Minister could be criticised for never visiting certain Council areas.

Nomination to Public Bodies

Some discussion followed on the nominations from District Councils for statutory boards. Mr Carvill pointed out that although there was some discretion in whether the Minister would accept nominations for Health Boards none existed for the nominees to Education Boards. The position with regard to Health Boards is to be discussed between Dr Hayes and the Minister in the very near future. For the present DOE would fill the nomination role previously held

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

E6732

by ALANI, through direct consultation with all Councils. This would have certain advantages, eg, in ensuring a wider representation on certain public bodies than was achieved before. The failure of ALANI as a body representative of all shades of Local Government opinion was commented on and officials will, in due course examine whether a body on the lines of the LGCC was necessary, and if so, in what form.

Action

The Minister asked that a number of other points be considered viz:-

- (a) A detailed note on those elected SF Councillors who have terrorist connections.
- (b) Security consideration of arranging visits to Council areas with SF presence.
- (c) A detailed note for Ministerial colleagues of those appointments likely to arise soon, with a indication of those likely to cause difficulty.
- (d) A question and answer brief to be prepared on the line which Ministers should take when they are doorstepped by the press following the first round of disruption within Council Chambers.

It was agreed with the Minister that in future when any Local Government delegation is coming to see him at Parliament Buildings, a comprehensive list of names together with party affiliations must be provided in the first instance. Where the membership of the delegation did not agree with that list, officials would have to be satisfied that no SF delegates were in the party and, if there were, then these people must be vetted at the East Annex and prevented from gaining admission to Parliament Buildings.

Lester McCullough
P/ E GUNNING
Private Secretary

23 May 1985

cc PS/SOS (L&B)
PS/Ministers (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Mr Bloomfield
Mr Brennan
Mr Barry
Dr Hayes
Mr Carvill
Mr Beckett
Mr Hamilton
Mr Reeve
Miss Elliott
Mr Hewitt
Mr Bickham

CONFIDENTIAL