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cc/PS/Mr Bloomfield

Mr Burns

Mr Parkes

Mr Chesterton

Mr Elliott

Mr Spence

Mr Warburton, DOE

Mr Blackwell

Mr Kirk

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Mr Bell

IRISH LANGUAGE AND OTHER ISSUES

1. It is a pleasure to have these exchanges: I am sure policy has suffered from lack of open debate within the system about presuppositions and objectives.

2. I very much appreciate your receptiveness to my proposition that future policy should presuppose permanent Direct Rule and some form of Anglo-Irish institutional link.

3. Where we may differ lies in our different degrees of respect for Irish and Ulster nationalism and for existing UK and Irish policy. The proposition I put is that both types of nationalism are reactionary, and that it is self-defeating for a UK government to treat either with much respect. Privately we all recognise that the ROI state is deeply flawed by clientism and corruption, and that by definition its public attitudes are unpleasantly insular. It is unable to face up to the narrowness of its founding fathers because to do so would destroy its collective *raison d'etre*. Ulster nationalism is even more flawed than Irish nationalism because its ground is even narrower and its resistance is on two fronts rather than one. Nevertheless, the potential flaws of NI public administration, even under Stormont, were largely counter-balanced by participation in the UK and a powerful local bureaucracy. The pedestrian old Stormont system was never remotely like the smoking brimstone of 'The Boss'.

4. Fortunately it is unnecessary to take either nationalism very seriously. It takes a very old fashioned person to say with a straight face that he is a nationalist. Politicians do so in Ireland because they lag behind current movements of opinion. In this Bob Geldof is more illuminating than Gerry Adams or Enoch Powell. And when the SDLP acts as Johnny come lately for the Irish language I am reminded that a recent spokesman said that if Irish were not compulsory for entry to university in the Republic, it would disappear, like Latin, overnight. Enthusiasm for the Irish language is enthusiasm for an unpopular and doomed cause. The language will shortly be confined to a few scholars and a few fanatics, and this should be welcomed.

5. My proposition is that the Agreement enshrines unworthy cultural differences and hence make Northern Ireland problems worse rather than better. This occurred because it was self-serving for both governments to attribute the problems to internal Northern Ireland issues rather than to see Northern Ireland tensions as a consequence of British/Irish tensions. The opportunity was lost to reach a healing British/Irish compact, and I would say that our objectives should be to get as near as we can to the benign model sketched in my Harvard paper. If that is to succeed it will require greater UK self-esteem. In my view, NI public policy has suffered because the liberal consensus sees virtues everywhere but in itself. A classic example is the high level depreciation of Direct Rule tout court. So far as the Agreement is concerned in its present form none of us should readily accept that we have anything to learn from outside the UK.

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6. This would be a very new tune. In my view it is part of the right wing adjustment which needs to be made very widely in Northern Ireland public policy. Most of us still adhere to welfarist, devolutionist and collectivist models, at a time when the rest of the United Kingdom has changed. To my mind we should be thinking in terms of the virtues of low taxation and reliance on local capitalism, and we should be providing for the training and export of thousands more people. We should stop sentimentalising about local identities, or about power sharing, or about local political structures or indeed about the economic differences between the communities. We should assume that in so far as large scale solutions exist they are already in place. The aim should be to de-politicise, to avoid the insoluble, to stop treating the Province as an playground for adventurers whether from Dublin or the USA or elsewhere. The charm of all this is that it would be a far easier policy to follow than the model that government is committed to.

7. These are generalities, and no doubt I should express them more modestly. But they seem to me to be worth stating. We are stuck with Butskellism when instead we should be tuned in to the Adam Smith Institute.

8. I am grateful to you for provoking me so much. In disagreeing with you I am also disagreeing with most of my elders, youngsters, and certainly betters. But I am quite sure that I am right.

AJS

A J Green
26 February 1987

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