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PAB/2155/DP

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - 11
PS/Mr Scott (L&B) - 11
PS/Mr Needham (L&B) - 11
PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) - 11
PS/PUS (L&B) - 11
PS/Mr Bloomfield
Mr Stephens
Mr Brennan - 11
Mr Chesterton - 11
Mr Innes
Mr Elliott
Mr Ferneyhough
Mr Spence
Mr Gilliland
Mr Bell - 11
Mr G Hewitt
Miss Elliott - 11
Mr Blackwell
Mr S Hewitt
Mr Mackay c/o P/O NIO(L) - 11

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LUNCH WITH DISTRICT COUNCIL CLERKS

A group of district council clerks including some of the more senior and influential in the Province, came to a lunch organised by PAB on Monday 6 October. Mr Barry was present along with Mr McConnell, Mr Hamilton, PS/Mr Needham and Dr Alford. Mr Needham joined the group during lunch.

2. A number of issues were discussed in some depth. This note records the main points of interest.

- Relations and cooperation between the clerks (and their staff) and central government continued to be good. It was suggested that more frequent meetings with officials under the umbrella of SOLACE would be useful to ensure consistency of approach.
- Clerks felt that they were becoming more and more exposed as they were seen by certain Councillors as thwarting the objective of the adjournment policy by keeping most functions running. This situation was likely to develop further.

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Minimum intervention by government and low profile operation by the clerks is undoubtedly the best course during the present adjournment action. However major intervention might cause councils to believe they need to take a strong line which would place clerks in a totally invidious position of having statutory responsibilities on one hand and yet have contradictory direct instructions from their councils on the other.

- There is a widespread belief that some action (probably repeal) would be taken in respect of Flags and Emblems. This may attract some reaction but because it is thought to be almost a fait accompli and generally accepted by the public it may not be used to precipitate mass resignations. However the issue of street names in Irish is seen as potentially much more divisive. Whilst a number of clerks took the view that any legislative change would need to describe in detail how Irish language street names might be agreed, the majority view around the table was that any change should be the minimum necessary. If such a scheme were to be introduced, it was felt that it might be sufficient only to ensure that Irish names were not prohibited and thus allow councils to act on their own discretion (it was suggested for example that repeal of the 1949 Act would be sufficient).

- There was also general agreement that action should be taken against Sinn Fein. Although straightforward prohibition was attractive the practical difficulties were recognised. It was thought that it would be better to have some form of declaration of non-violence, which would catch all of those, on both sides of the divide, who had some paramilitary affiliations. Sinn Fein in particular would not find it easy to agree to a declaration divorcing themselves from proscribed organisations.

Comment

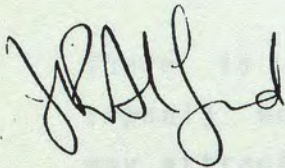
3. The clerks present were drawn from council areas that reflected both the geographical and the political differences throughout the

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Province. Although there were differences in emphasis there was broad unanimity on most issues. Surprisingly perhaps the issue which provoked most discussion, even amongst those clerks that came from mainly nationalist councils, concerned the possibility of implementation of legislation to provide for dual language street names.



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Political Affairs Division
9 October 1986

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