

COVERING
C O N F I D E N T I A L



FROM CLAIRE MARSON - CPL
7 DECEMBER 1988

① Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr A W Stephens - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Miles - B
Mr Spence - B
Mr Daniell - B
Mr Kirk
Mr Wood - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr J McConnell - B
Mr Masefield - B

cc PS/PUS (L&B) - B
Mr Burns - B

② PDL 3

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP

I attach a record of the last meeting of PDG which was held in the Conference Room, Stormont House on Tuesday 29 November at 14.30.

(SIGNED)

William Keers
for

CLAIRE MARSON
Constitutional and Political Division
7 December 1988

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP:

NOTE OF MEETING ON 29 NOVEMBER 1988 IN STORMONT HOUSE

Present: Mr Burns (Chairman)
Sir J Blelloch
Sir K Bloomfield
Mr A W Stephens
Mr Thomas
Mr Miles
Mr Spence
Mr Kirk
Mr Masefield
Mr J McConnell
Mr Daniell
Mr Leach
Ms Marson

Apologies: Mr Bell

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Northern Ireland Parties

Nationalists

1. The SDLP conference took place on 26/27 November at which Hume received a standing ovation for his speech, which was well received both inside and outside the party. Unionists were looking for signals in Hume's speech but none was delivered intentionally, although he launched an attack on PIRA which was considered helpful by Unionists. They have assumed there will be no further SDLP/Sinn Fein contact and that Hume therefore has restricted any idea of inter-party talks to the four constitutional political parties. However, there were still no signs of movement within the party - Hume was giving different signals to people and deliberately misunderstanding some things. He continued to say he was prepared to talk to Unionists but knew they would not approach him. This SDLP Conference was, as previous ones, self-congratulatory in tone. In spite of obvious rallying around there were cracks.

2. Personality problems within the party between Hume and McGrady and Hume and Mallon were apparent at the conference. McGrady and Mallon had grown in confidence and were not content to be Hume's

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acolytes. In private conversation with McGrady he expressed fears of being excluded by Hume. He felt the SDLP had lost its way. The signs of a Hume/Mallon split were exacerbated by Mallon whose position had strengthened since he became an MP. In summary, senior members of the SDLP believed Hume was keeping too much to himself and behaving autocratically.

Alliance

3. The Alliance party was encouraging dialogue between the parties and putting a considerable amount of effort into Duisburg. If this initiative failed they would question their support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement if they believed that a collapse of the talks was the fault of either the SDLP or the Irish Government. They had frequently attributed their support for the Agreement to the existence of Article 4.

Unionists

4. Within the DUP the situation remained the same. Individual members were trying to circumvent the policy of not talking with Ministers. A perception existed within the DUP that it had lost its dominance within the Unionist group gained after the Anglo-Irish Agreement. They feared they would lose out in the local elections next year.

5. Within the UUP Molyneaux kept much to himself. He had talked about taking the January proposals off the table because he believed another option was available, misled by press speculation of an increase in powers to local councils. Molyneaux, like Paisley, had encouraged the party to move forward on Duisburg although the prime mover within the UUP on this front had been warned that he would be disavowed if the talks became public. McCusker continued to refuse to meet Ministers under any circumstances. Should he do so it would be considered a breakthrough, although he had always been prepared to talk to the Prime Minister. There was a strong element of hypocrisy in local councillors finding themselves in trouble with

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the party hierarchy for meeting Ministers when their political masters were doing so. The local elections next year would highlight the differences within Unionism.

The peripheral political groups continued to talk.

Anglo-Irish Relations

6. Anglo-Irish relations were currently quieter than might have been expected, not because the Irish were being less contentious but because they had other concerns; there were tactical problems in the Dail and the Taoiseach had been seriously ill. Whether or not he would be well enough to attend the Rhodes summit, the Prime Minister should use that occasion to make a number of points to the Irish including the extradition of Ryan. The Irish should be told that it was not a choice between devolution and direct rule but devolution or another alternative entirely, which could well be less agreeable to them. Pressures for movement in a local government direction would increase. Current briefing for the Prime Minister to speak to Haughey was termed in a way the Irish would find unacceptable (insisting on support for devolution); consideration should be given to rewording the same sentiment to make it more palatable. The Irish were already apprehensive about the Local Government Consultation Paper, exacerbated by press speculation concerning increasing local government powers. There was no detection of any increase in realism on the part of the Irish concerning the real meaning of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. HMG should aim to draw the Irish into the political development process; progress in Northern Ireland had to be through devolution and not aspirations for a united Ireland. The Government should emphasise its good intentions and achievements, notwithstanding recent measures.

7. At IGC on 14 December confidence matters would be raised by the Irish who would complain that they had not been adequately consulted on recent measures. However HMG had no obligation to consult on

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announcements. The Irish also expected to raise the question of three judge courts as they did at the Foreign Secretary's meeting in Dublin on 7 November. From the Irish point of view there might be an election next year in which developments on the Anglo-Irish front in political terms would naturally assist them on the domestic front. The Temple-Morris group had made fair progress on the question of the British-Irish Parliamentary body. The group's proposals were broadly acceptable. Any attempt to link the Parliamentary body and the Anglo-Irish Agreement would offend Unionists but it could be advantageous from the Irish point of view if catalogued as an achievement. Lord Lyell's visit to France was marked by a very negative speech by the Irish Ambassador there, written by the DFA. The Secretariat would query with the Irish the drafting of speeches for overseas consumption.

NEXT STEPS

Duisburg

8. There was to be a meeting in London on 29 November between Hume, Robinson and Allen. The purpose was to reach an agreement, with which the Unionists could live on the Duisburg proposals. Allen felt he was out on a limb in relation to the Unionist party; if Duisburg became public he would have to resign from Chairmanship of the party. Robinson's position was also difficult and therefore he too was committed to the success of Duisburg. The intention was that all four parties having agreed would see the Secretary of State together; the parties wanted a gap in the Conference and the Secretariat. If agreement was reached and too long a period elapsed before talks took place, there could be considerable political risk for the Unionists if the press discovered the nature of any compromise over the Agreement.

9. The most important factor was that parties were trying to work together on their own initiative. The Secretary of State was very sceptical about the likelihood of success; his instinctive view was that even should Duisburg succeed HMG would be unlikely to be able

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to accept the terms. Certainly a round of failed talks would not help Northern Ireland. There were two considerations.

- i) Duisburg might initially succeed and consideration should be given to the Government's response.
- ii) Duisburg might fail. The Irish would be sceptical and HMG would need to consider ways of ensuring that the parties did not become too discouraged.

There was an important distinction between discussions concerning conditions for dialogue and content of dialogue. HMG should be ready to encourage any talks to be constructive. A fig leaf would be necessary for the Unionists; and Ministers had yet to agree that fig leaves were respectable in principle. There was however a distinction between formal talks, and talks about talks. While it might be wiser to defer the Secretary of State's involvement he should not be seen to be playing games with the parties. The parties appeared to envisage all meeting the Secretary of State on the same day, separately, when the Secretary of State would explain to each of them any proposed statement on suspension of the Conference. It was agreed that the parties must be left alone for the time being.

10. The Government should be prepared with its response in the event of the parties submitting proposals to the Secretary of State. If the parties did not come back to the Government, and any proposal died benignly HMG should perhaps take the lead with the parties if they still supported the idea of talks but not, on this occasion, the detail; the Secretary of State would have to encourage the parties by offering help. If the parties failed this fairly low level test, prospects for working out any reasonable form of political development looked less optimistic. If the parties came to the Secretary of State with proposals for talks, the Government must have details of the content of those talks if the Secretary of State's authority and office were required. There should then be a pause for extended dialogue between the Secretary of State and the parties. The parties appeared to expect the Government to provide

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an agenda formulated in consultation with them. The Secretary of State would receive a bad press if he refused to accept what the parties suggested. For this reason the Government's reaction must be fully and carefully considered beforehand. The parties needed to be told that firstly business would go on between the Governments during the period of any talks but this would not be emphasised publicly; secondly, the Conference would meet again regardless of what stage the talks had reached and this had to be understood from the outset. Consideration had to be given to the workings of the Conference for the future. While there were problems inherent in the nature of any decisions on the conference, the content of discussions with the parties must be considered properly. Ministers would be very reluctant to modify the conference without a clear indication of something positive at the end. However, it was a considerable achievement that the parties were talking together on their own in the first place. The Secretary of State should not say anything of a new initiative nature before Christmas. The Article 11 Review would be finalised in March or April next year and sometime in February when the conclusion of the Review was emerging HMG should focus on what political message should be given to the Irish, and what would be the attitude to the operation of the Agreement. There may then be new political messages.

11. Accordingly SIL should start work, in consultation with CPL, on a paper about how to respond to a proposal from the parties. Ministers must be given alternatives. The options would be agreed by the Foreign Office. The paper must be more useful than a simple contingency plan.

12. In the event of Duisburg failing, but the parties still wanting to work together, CPL should consider how the Secretary of State might constructively intervene in these circumstances. The Secretary of State would use the Second Reading of the Elected Authorities Bill to talk about good government. Any message must reach the rank and file and not simply the cognoscenti. The Secretary of State had two speech opportunities and a TV opportunity

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should be investigated. Mr Miles would produce a timetable and detail the substance of a speech which would be circulated for comments. Any thing the Secretary of State said should not prejudice him later from providing parties with an opportunity to continue talks.

13. PAB would consider what messages the Government should give to the SDLP and the Unionists in the face of Duisburg failure and what levers could be used on the SDLP to encourage interest in devolution, although these would be private rather than public ones. Two points should be borne in mind:

- i) no progress on political development would succeed unless it simultaneously addressed the problem both within and outside Northern Ireland.
- ii) Hume's suggestion of a double referendum was to counter Sinn Fein ability to undermine the SDLP on referenda until the 1918 experience was mirrored. Therein lay Sinn Fein's claim to have an historic mandate. Unionists and the SDLP had common ground in defeating Sinn Fein. Perhaps the Government should consider telling Unionists that Hume's point about settling the constitutional debate had considerable point.

Friends of the Union

14. The Secretary of State was meeting representatives of the Friends of the Union on 30 November. The alternative agreement was not particularly significant, having received no specific endorsement from the Unionists.

Irish views on Article 11 Review

15. Discussed in paragraphs 6 and 7.

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INFORMATION STRATEGY GROUP PROGRESS REPORT

16. A report on the group's progress was deferred.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

17. PAB had been commissioned to produce a paper which considered the effects of developments in recent months (remission/right to silence/declaration against violence) and whether the public believed the Government had abandoned any political development in favour of an undiluted security policy.

18. SUMMARY OF ACTION REQUIRED

- i) SIL to produce paper, in consultation with CPL, on how to respond to a proposal (or Duisburg lines) from the parties, and how to take it forward.
- ii) CPL to produce a paper on the Government action that might be taken in the event of its present inter-party initiative failing.
- iii) PAB to produce a paper on what short-term messages should be given to Unionists and the SDLP if Duisberg appeared to be making little progress, and encouragement is needed.
- iv) Secretariat to raise with Irish question of content of speeches written officially for overseas consumption.

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19. At a later stage it may be necessary
- v) to consider in more detail how, if talks start, they can be reconciled with contrivance of the Conference
 - vi) to reconsider our line to take with the Irish towards the end of the Article 11 Review, on the subsequent approach to political development.

NEXT MEETING

20. Week beginning 9 January. Details to be circulated.

CLAIRE MARSON
Constitutional and Political Division
December 1988

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