



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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West Belfast. In relation
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Meeting with Dr. Joe Hendron, 27 April 1988

He spoke about the meeting which the SDLP had the evening before with Secretary of State King. In contrast to the previous meeting, he said, the Secretary of State did not attempt to harangue them and the meeting was conducted in a friendly atmosphere. They had been given the following agenda by the British for the meeting; (i) Devolution (ii) Way Forward and (iii) Other issues.

The Secretary of State asked if they had yet come up with a model for devolution. In the face of a negative response, he asked them if they would accept an Assembly as a starting point from where they could begin to negotiate an arrangement acceptable to nationalists. Alternatively, he asked whether they would support the establishment of super councils in which the SDLP would be given some element of control.

They said neither suggestion was acceptable; the Assembly, because it was nothing more than the 1982 model in which they had refused to participate; the "super councils" because they merely represented another form of integration.

Pressed on what form of devolution would be acceptable to them, they said that the only type of devolution which would be even considered was "partnership devolution", though even this would pose a severe problem on the question of security. Given the current lack of confidence in the security forces among nationalist, the devolution of security could prove to be a major electoral liability. If security was not included, the lack of any input into security policy could prove equally damaging to the SDLP's credibility with the nationalist population.

Moreover, the SDLP had been severely damaged politically by the failure of the power-sharing executive in 1974. The SDLP would

have to be convinced that they would not find themselves in a similar position again.

They told the Secretary of State that they believed that the unionists should meet with the SDLP under the auspices of both Governments in an effort to negotiate the best way forward. John Hume told Secretary of State King that he fully agreed with the Taoiseach that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was only a framework and was therefore not sacrosanct. There was, he informed the British side, no reason why it should not be superseded by some other structure if it was agreed by a constitutional conference.

Digressing from the agenda, the Secretary of State attempted to chide the SDLP for not giving full and open support to the RUC and requested them to ask nationalists to join that organisation. Seamus Mallon responded by saying that it was not up to political parties to advise people whether they should or should not join particular organisations. Moreover, he added, the nationalist population would only be aggravated by such a call from the SDLP. He went on to say that the RUC, because of its record of anti-nationalist behaviour, had proved itself unacceptable to nationalists. It would take a great deal of time and a sustained outward show of impartiality to win the nationalist population over. Mallon also pointed out that the Stalker/Sampson affair was unresolved. Nonetheless, the SDLP will continue to support the RUC when they carry out their lawful duties impartially.

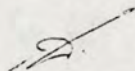
Joe Hendron said he also pointed out that in his area the RUC continue to harass young male nationalists, many of whom have no connection with paramilitaries. He pointed out to the Secretary of State that charges had never been brought against RUC members for ill-treatment at Castlereagh, despite the verdict of the European Court.

Joe Hendron used the occasion to enquire about any possible initiative on West Belfast, outlining briefly the great need for action. King sympathised and said that the matter was currently being considered and he would respond more fully at a later stage. (Note: Dr. Hendron also mentioned that when he had been

speaking to John McConnell of the NIO recently, McConnell said that the Secretary of State had requested a special allocation for West Belfast. McConnell said that it would be later in the year (September, possibly) before any decision would be finally made.)

Seamus Mallon raised the issue of the lack of success of Article 6 of the Agreement whereby the imbalance of public board membership viz-a-viz nationalists was to be rectified. He complained that little had changed since the Agreement and the feeling persisted that the only acceptable Catholic faces on public boards were "Castle Catholics". The Secretary of State asked why the SDLP had not put forward a name for the Police Authority. Seamus Mallon told him that they did not believe that the Authority had any real power apart from nominating the Chief Constable. He also countered the point by raising the issue of the rejection of Kit Napier's nomination to the Police Complaints Commission, saying that the SDLP considered this to be a major rebuff which effectively proved the point he was making. Secretary of State King left it at that.

Seamus Mallon also complained about the inability of people born in the South to obtain employment in the Northern Ireland Civil Service even though they may be resident in Northern Ireland for many years. Sir Kenneth Bloomfield indicated that this reflected the general position within Britain. Mallon rebutted this by pointing out that Irish people were free to obtain Civil Service jobs in Britain and that the regulation was, therefore, confined to Northern Ireland. Dr. Hendron said that King indicated to Bloomfield that this regulation should be changed.


Liam Canniffe
28 April 1988

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