

HCS/12/22

cc. PS/SOS (B&L) -M
PS/PUS (B&L) -M
PS/Ministers (B&L) -M
Mr Stephens
Mr Chesterton -M
Mr Gilliland
Mr Spence
Mr Innes
Mr Merifield
Mr M Elliott
Miss F Elliott -M
Mr Sullivan
Mr Ehrman -M

Mr Brennan -M

FUTURE OF THE ASSEMBLY

1. The Speaker of the Assembly, Mr Kilfedder, came to see me at Stormont Castle this morning. Essentially this was to say that he believed it would be a great mistake on the part of Government to wind up the Assembly in the near future. He personally was "fed up" with the Assembly and in that sense would shed few tears at its demise; but a premature end to the Assembly in the current difficult political circumstances would only further heighten tension.
2. He said he believed that the Assembly would take up its scrutiny role again after the "Committee on the Government of Northern Ireland" was out of the way. Those who were behind the exercise had spoken of completing the bulk of its work before Christmas but he himself believed that it was bound to last well into January. However, the Assembly itself would normally be in recess from mid-December to mid-January in any circumstances, and he believed that the Committee and other staff would be able to keep themselves reasonably occupied in the meantime, having regard to the leave season over Christmas and New Year. He mentioned that Dr Paisley had originally wanted him to chair the "Committee on Government", but apparently this had been black-balled by the UUP.
3. Later in the morning Mr Kennedy, Clerk of the Assembly, came to see Mr Spence and myself accompanied by Mr Tait. I attach a note which Mr Spence has made of that meeting.
4. I am of the view that it would be premature to burn any boats in relation to the Assembly at this stage. If, as seems likely, the "Committee on Government" is

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going to be something of a fiasco, it would be better to let it proceed than to place ourselves in the false position of seeming to have prevented that careful scrutiny of the Anglo Irish Agreement which the Secretary of State has himself commended. We have a much sounder case for warning words and/or actions in relation to the abandonment or neglect, for the time being at least, of aspects of the Assembly's proper statutory role.

4. I attach a draft letter to the Speaker which embodies this line; but it is, of course, a line which could be adapted, if desired, for use in Parliament or elsewhere.

KPB

K P BLOOMFIELD

9 December 1985

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RBS/12/7

cc. PS/Ministers (B&L) -M
PS/PUS (B&L) -M
PS/Mr Bloomfield
Mr Stephens
Mr Brennan -M
Mr Chesterton -M
Mr Gilliland
Mr Innes
Mr Merifield
Mr M Elliott
Miss F Elliott -M
Mr Sullivan
Mr Ehrman -M

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) -M

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND

During a meeting with Messrs Kennedy and Tait in Mr Bloomfield's room this morning, the following points emerged:-

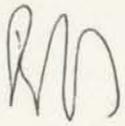
- (1) the Presbyterian Church had declined to give evidence; the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church were also unlikely to give evidence; the Reformed and Free Presbyterians would;
- (2) there had been a few responses from individuals and small organisations (including the Joe Lindsay Memorial Band - apparently a nationalist one!);
- (3) the television and broadcasting authorities were not planning extensive coverage;
- (4) indications at this stage were, therefore, that the Committee would not make a big impact and would have to take evidence largely from its predictable supporters;

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- (5) the Committee would be serviced by the Assembly's Clerk plus Mr Tait and Mr P Smyth;
- (6) the Clerk was taking a careful line in relation to expenditure being sought by the Assembly and the Committee; he had, for example, declined to authorise expenditure on the banner which the Assembly had voted to display across the front of Parliament Buildings.



R B SPENCE

Central Secretariat

9 December 1985

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consideration will inevitably have to be given to the future deployment of such staff. It is not acceptable to Government that they should be under-employed or diverted to tasks other than those for which they were seconded.

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