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Prior Initiative - Conversations with Rev. M. Smyth Mr. D. Trimble

L. The two proposals of the Secretary of State (rolling devolution; separation of powers between Assembly and Executive) were not raised formally by him at the meeting with the OUP on 12 January but were mentioned in the margin of the meeting to some of the delegation. Mr. Hutton had earlier indicated that the two proposals had been raised formally. He did not attend the meeting and his understanding of the proceedings was mistaken.

2. There was a negative reaction from the people to whom the proposals were mentioned. The OUP had stuck to the Convention Report line and had spent most of the meeting asking the Secretary of State to explain what was wrong with the proposals in the Convention Report. The meeting therefore was of an unreal nature with no serious discussion of the Secretary of States real proposals.

3. The OUP are shocked at the speed with which Prior proposes to move which does not involve real consultation with the OUP on his new proposals.

4. Rev. Smyth indicated that the OUP might not be prepared to meet the Secretary of State again as requested for purely tactical reasons. In other words if he is going ahead with novel proposals they would not wish to be associated with them in any way.

5. They will await the announcement of Prior's proposals before making up their mind on elections to a new Assembly but are likely to participate at least in the election stage. Rev. Smyth in particular is very much afraid that Prior would use the Assembly to set up the Parliamentary tier which is completely unacceptable to the OUP.

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6. The pro-devolution forum comprising the various Unionist Parties should have its report ready in mid-February and this may provide a rallying point for the various Unionist Parties in opposition to the Secretary of State's proposals. Trimble who is involved in the drafting has told me that it is very much on the lines of the Convention Report with one or two minor additions to try and involve the minority at committee level but not in what would be a majority rule Government.

7. Rev. Smyth has put his name forward to the selection committee for nomination for the South Belfast seat. He hopes to get the nomination but Robert McCartney Q.C. has joined the OUP and also put his name forward for the nomination. The Rev. Smyth is still likely to get the nomination and the election is likely to take place in March/April.

*Dictated over the telephone
and signed by Corkindale
on behalf of*

M. Burke

21 January 1982

C.C. PSM

PSS

PST

Mr. Neligan

Ms. Hennessy

Mr. Lillis D/Taoiseach