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Reference Code: 2021/48/151

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Meeting with Professor John Darby, 9 February 1994

1. I met Darby, head of the University of Ulster's Centre for Conflict Resolution, in his office on the Coleraine campus. He is busy completing arrangements for a collaborative venture with the United Nations University in Tokyo.

Political Situation

2. Darby said that, irrespective of whether Sinn Féin did or did not accept the Joint Declaration, the political landscape had changed dramatically in a short period. Naturally most attention was focused on the internal debate within republicanism. However, he argued that the debate within Unionism was also most significant - there was now a sharp divide between the two parties which went beyond personalities.
3. In his view, neither the DUP nor the UUP were confident that they had judged the Unionist community correctly - he detected nervousness in both camps, and a sense that events could place either of them in the wrong. He saw something half-hearted in Paisley's campaigning.
4. Darby was not sure how accurate a test of Unionist sentiment the European elections would be - the UUP had to bridge a large "charisma gap".
5. I asked him for his assessment of the thesis put forward by the Opsahl Commission that public opinion in the North might be in advance of the politicians and that political minds could perhaps be concentrated by use of "indicative referenda" in which the electorate could set parameters for political progress by choosing between a range of options. He thought the idea entirely impractical; there was no serious evidence that the politicians were in

reality out of touch, and in any event it would be they who would have to interpret the inevitably unclear results of any poll which might be held.

Fair Employment

6. Darby said that the socio-economic agenda of the mid-1980s had, very largely, been implemented. The fair employment legislation had completely changed the climate - employers were now well aware that they had to be meticulous (he described the UU's astonishingly rigid and detailed rules for interview boards). Discrimination was therefore ceasing to be a major feature of the scene. Likewise, education expenditure was now on a level footing. Housing was recognised as being fairly allocated.
7. He agreed that the unemployment differential between the two communities persists as a major source of grievance. However, he argued that while both in its causes and effects the differential might have political dimensions, the policy problems posed by unemployment in Northern Ireland are essentially no different from those encountered elsewhere. He also stressed the role of security-related employment in preserving the differential.
8. Darby said that problems relating to policing and the administration of justice were in his opinion likely to take centre stage once again (he commented that relatively little academic work has been done on these issues since the 1970s - constitutional, cultural/identity and economic matters have dominated).

Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU)

9. So far as Darby is aware, he formally remains academic advisor to the CCRU (though he has not recently been

consulted on any matter). His perception is that staff changes have weakened it and that it has rather run out of steam.

10. He independently confirmed that he was going to put to the NIO through the CCRU Seán Farren's suggestion (of which I had been told the previous evening) of an increase to eighteen in the number of Westminster seats as a means of resolving the current controversy over the Boundary Commission's recommendations.

Rory Montgomery
10 February 1994