

how in e Laughlin
7/2/77

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

MEETING BETWEEN LORD MELCHETT AND BISHOP DALY

1. Lord Melchett met Bishop (Edward) Daly in Londonderry on 24 January. This was in response to a request from Bishop Daly, who had asked to meet Lord Melchett to discuss educational policy. Monsignor Coulter (headmaster of St Columba's College) and Monsignor Kielt (of the Western Education Board) were also present.

Secondary Reorganisation

2. Bishop Daly began by referring to the extensive series of meetings which he had organised in every parish in his diocese to discuss the implications of the Cowan Report. A team of experts had been studying the report in great detail and would be leading discussions with parents and other interested parties, they would then report back, and a submission would be made to the Minister. Lord Melchett said he warmly welcomed this initiative, which he hoped would further broaden the debate.

3. The Bishop gave his own views, which were strongly against reorganisation along comprehensive lines. He said that Northern Ireland was a conservative society ("with a small 'C' if not a large one") and that he felt both communities would resent major social innovation of this nature; the big grammar schools were justifiably famous and should not be changed. Monsignor Coulter quoted Durkheim, saying that it would be wrong to impose an alien educational system on a society which was not structured for it. They both particularly feared that comprehensive reorganisation would be forced on the country by the present government and then abandoned by some future Tory government - this would have disastrous effects on the children. Bishop Daly pointed that grammar schools in Northern Ireland, unlike those in Britain, were socially egalitarian - up to 25% of grammar school pupils in Londonderry received free school meals - so it could not be said that comprehensive education was needed to break down a socially unfair system.

4. It was generally accepted that the 11+ as presently arranged had to go, and Monsignor Coulter proposed that it be replaced by a system of "Election" by which parents chose which schools - grammar or secondary - their children attended. Lord Melchett commented that this was unrealistic as more parents would wish their children to attend grammar schools than there were grammar school places; it was also socially retrogressive, since all middle class parents would opt for grammar schools and most working class parents for secondary schools. Bishop Daly said he feared that if comprehensives were introduced many middle class parents in his community would send their children to independent schools in the Republic anyway, so lowering the educational standards of the whole country.

Sixth Form Colleges

5. Lord Melchett referred to the many comments he had received on the Cowan Report in support of a system of 11-16 comprehensive schools leading to separate sixth form colleges. Again Bishop Daly objected to this idea, saying that it would hive off the best pupils and the best teachers and would effectively destroy the character of existing grammar schools.

6. Lord Melchett commented on more than one occasion during the meeting that it would not be practical to have separate state and voluntary (ie Roman Catholic) sixth form

colleges and that such colleges, if introduced, would have to be integrated. Bishop Daly appeared to accept this but said that he hoped they would not be introduced for this reason alone, but rather that the debate about them would be conducted on educational grounds (on which, of course, he was against).

Integrated Education

7. In a general discussion on integrated education Bishop Daly and Monsignor Coulter said that there were so few parents who wished their children to be educated at an integrated school that it was hardly an issue worth worrying about. Certainly hardly any of their own community wanted their children educated in other than Roman Catholic schools. Bishop Daly said that he continued to put the greatest importance on a close link between the home and the school environment, and so children brought up in the Roman Catholic faith ought to be educated in schools of that faith; schools had proved a rare stabilising influence over the last seven years, and it would be divisive to force integration on the community - "the playground would become a battle ground".

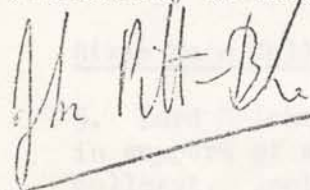
8. Lord Melchett said there was no intention of forcing integrated education on anyone, although he did point out that religion was the only field in which parents had this freedom of choice, they did not, for example, have any say in whether their children attended a grammar or a secondary school. He asked for Bishop Daly's reaction to the holding of the conference on shared schools which had been suggested by the previous Secretary of State - if there really was no public support for the idea such a conference would demonstrate that fact. Bishop Daly's reaction could not be described as enthusiastic. He said that it would be merely a gimmick designed for its media impact and would not reflect any real public interest. He advised Lord Melchett to tell any supporters of secondary reorganisation whom he might meet to "come and have a word with me".

9. It was generally felt that the views of the Protestant church on this matter would be exactly the same.

Bussing

10. Finally Lord Melchett referred to the difficulties which had arisen in Londonderry and in Fivemiletown where individual Catholic families who had sent their children to a state school on grounds of principle had not been granted free school transport as the rules said that they were only allowed free transport to the nearest RC school. (Lord Melchett said that the case of the Londonderry family had been raised with him by William Ross at which Bishop Daly said that he had never met Mr Ross!).

11. Bishop Daly replied that the general issue was one of how the instructions about bussing were interpreted and that this was a matter for the department although he did not wish to see the rules so amended in a way that Catholic families would have the choice between Catholic schools of the same type. Lord Melchett said that this was not a possibility, but that he hoped to be able to amend the rules to allow more flexibility on this matter.



J PITT-BROOKE
PS/Lord Melchett

25 January 1977

cc PS/SofS (L&B)
PS/Junior Ministers
PS/PJS (L&B)
PS/Mr Kidd
Mr Brooke ✓
Mr Jones
Mr McAllister
Mr Ford
Mr Pickering

Mr Wilson
Mr Gilliland
Mr Middleton
Mr Hill
MF