

HCS/11/46

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Meeting with Mr Peter Robinson MP

Mr Robinson called at my home last night, it having been agreed that I should respond to his request for a 'private' meeting.

Mr Robinson made it clear at the beginning that he had come to talk to a fellow Ulsterman who had the ear of those in authority and that in no way did he wish to prejudice my relationship with and responsibility to the Secretary of State. He had not told his party leader of his intention to talk to me but would do so later.

He then went on to express his extreme concern about the mood of the Protestant people and the possible consequences if some significant steps were not taken by Government. He saw advantages in Monday's day of protest as a means of "letting offsteam" and thereby reducing the temperature. But the reduction would only be temporary if advances on the security front were not made. If he or one of his fellow politicians were murdered the situation would boil over.

We next discussed at some length the Anglo-Irish scene. This on the one hand reflected Mr Robinson's concern about the ultimate objective of the British Government - "to get rid of us by pushing us into the Irish Republic as soon as possible" - and on the other gave me the opportunity to put the Anglo-Irish exchanges in their proper perspective, namely a desire for a closer and more harmonious relationship to the mutual benefit of the two countries.

There then followed consideration of how political development within Northern Ireland itself might be associated with the development of the London-Dublin axis. I re-iterated the options open to the people of Northern Ireland and pointed out the desire of the Government to give more powers to locally elected representatives. One interesting point which emerged was a query by Mr Robinson about the form of devolved administration which might be considered compatible with a "triangular relationship". Clearly he was thinking that something less than power-sharing with the minority might now be acceptable to HMG alongside the new relationship being developed between Dublin and London.

Mr Robinson had the impression, based on some recent remarks by Mr Molyneaux, that a

very early announcement of the Government's plans for political development in Northern Ireland was about to be made. I said that this was not the case.

The concluding part of the discussion was about security and nothing that I said did anything to abate the torrent of criticism. The Government had no will to defeat terrorism. Its policy was solely reactive. Bringing the "Spearhead" battalion to Northern Ireland was not going to stop UDR and other murders in the border areas. The border could have been sealed off in 1971, according to John Taylor - why not seal it off with the greater resources available today? The security forces should be free to go looking for the IRA. If they did not the Protestant people would go and do the job for them.

Mr Robinson rounded off his discourse by reverting to what would happen next. There would be the protest on Monday. Hopefully this would help the situation if it was allowed to act as a safety valve. There would then follow the advertisements for the recruitment of the "third force" and the Government would have to make up its mind how to handle this body. (I made it clear in answer to a direct question that the Government would not tolerate private armies.) If after Monday's protest the necessary improvement in the security situation did not follow the Protestants would take on the IRA. There could be "war" before Christmas.

My summing up of Mr Robinson's position is as follows -

1. He is deeply concerned at the mood of the Protestant community who have now concluded that the Government has not the will to overcome the IRA.
2. He would like to bring what influence he can to calm the situation and to find a way forward, hence his interest in the Anglo-Irish scene and scope for political development in Northern Ireland.
3. He wants the Government to handle the day of protest judiciously so that steam can be dissipated and the temperature reduced.
4. He wanted to warn the Government that the precipice was near at hand. If the security forces were not seen to be taking on the IRA and advancing, the Protestant community could be restrained no longer.



W E BELL

20 November 1981