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C.R.

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PAB/3701/JS

Mr Reeve

① Sinn Fein ^{5/10}
you may be interested
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cc - PS/ SofS (B&L)
PS/ Mr Patten (B&L)
PS/ PUS (B&L)
Mr Bourn
Mr Carvill
Mr Merifield
Mr Abbott
Mr Edis

McR



5/10

PADDY DEVLIN

1. I visited Paddy Devlin at home yesterday evening. The following points from our discussion are worth recording.

Political Developments

2. He is depressed that the political situation seems to him to be at its lowest point for some time. He sees a minority/majority coalition in Government as the only real way to bring political stability and encourage political development. He personally has little sympathy for those in the SDLP who pursue the "Irish Dimension" as a priority. In his opinion if some form of acceptable minority participation in Government was achievable and allowed to operate for a time the Irish Dimension would take care of itself.

3. He had no strong reasons for optimism that cross community devolution was achievable though he thought that the SDLP would be totally eclipsed by Sinn Fein if they did not soon get down to hard bargaining to achieve this. He said that he could see a change in the previously less flexible attitude of the DUP whom, he thought, now sensed the possibility of exercising power. He also thought the UUP and the majority community in general were now less fearful about coalition politics - though he acknowledged that any development at least initially would have to be seen to be institutionally different from power sharing. He suggested devolving some non-contentious Government functions ie not necessarily departments - agriculture, labour affairs, industrial development, community relations, arts and cultural affairs etc - to individuals from the Assembly parties who would then form part of a coalition team with NIO ministers who would remain responsible for the more contentious functions - at least until the limited arrangements began to work.

4. He dismissed the possibility that the Forum could produce any sensible way forward. The problem he said had to be solved in N.I. He acknowledged that the SDLP would not reconsider their attitude to the Assembly nor to exploring the possibilities for the devolution of power

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until the Forum had reported and he emphasised his view that the party could collapse in the likely failure of the Forum; his pessimism. He said that any movement towards cross community devolution could only be achieved if the SDLP were prepared to fully commit themselves to a hard bargaining process with the unionists before their support fell any lower.

5. Paddy Devlin is no longer close to the SDLP and operates very much now as a loner on the periphery. He is still though a reasonably perceptive commentator. He maintains a good working relationship with members of all parties on Belfast City Council. His views on the relative priority of coalition government compared to the Irish dimension is very much in keeping with his long held views that social and economic matters are paramount and that nationalist aspirations are secondary.



D G McNeill
PAB

28 September 1983

Footnote

He told me that he is preparing a detailed submission to the Secretary of State and/or Mr Patten concerning alleged irregularities in Belfast City Council tendering arrangements. He did not go into detail other than to mention a recent decision against accepting a tender from a Co Antrim firm, McQuillans, for work on the Belfast Meat Plant as a typical example.

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