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PC 26 9/3

Secretary of State (L&B)-M.

cc PS/Mr Scott
PS/Mr Patten
PS/PUS
PS/Sir Ewart Bell - M
Mr Angel
Mr Merifield - M
Mr Abbott
Mr Reeve - M

① Mr Cooke 26/3
② Mr Callaghan
③ P. O. H.

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MEETING WITH MR JAMES HOLYNEAUX - 22nd MARCH 1984

I called on Mr Molyneux this morning with Mr Alistair Cooke of the Conservative Research Department. On a Party level Mrs Hazel Bradford has invited Sir Russell Sanderson, Chairman of the NUFC GP Committee, to visit Northern Ireland as guest of the UUP.

Mr Molyneux said that since our last talk his Party's proposals on administrative devolution had 'rather run into the sand'. He attributed this to: your remarks about joint sovereignty which, he claimed, had given the SDLP new hope for an Irish dimension and which had made them lose interest in discussion about internal arrangements (I said that this was not our experience); and because the UUP Assembly Party are not as interested as previously because of the hostility which had arisen over 'the NIO's attempt to bounce them back into the Assembly.'

Two slight changes of emphasis were apparent on the subject of administrative devolution, first he advocated using the Assembly's membership to form the regional council so as to save the SDLP from the immediate embarrassment of an election, and second he laid much greater stress on giving more power to the district councils. He praised the calibre of district councillors (who, he said, were a lot better than the old County Councillors!) and said that the district councils should be given power over planning and, perhaps, roads. He did not endorse Frank Millar's proposal of

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sharing committee chairmanships in an upper tier proportionately and stressed that the protection for the minority's interests at both district council/^{and} upper tier level would be provided by their right of appeal to the Secretary of State. He saw positive merit in local councillors being let off the hook of having to make difficult decisions on matters with sectarian overtones through being ^{able} to tell their supporters that if they pursued a partisan approach their decision would be overturned by the Secretary of State.

He felt that there was little chance that local politicians would be able to produce an acceptable framework for political progress. The Alliance Party were showing interest in administrative devolution but the SDLP would only be brought back into play when it became apparent that the Forum Report could not lead anywhere. The British Government would have to impose a settlement after bilateral consultations with the parties as to what they would each be prepared to accept.

Because of the DUP's intransigence Mr Molyneaux could see no prospect of the Report Committee being launched. Although Dr Paisley had pretended to be flexible about the issue of UUP participation the DUP were not genuinely interested in reaching agreement on a form of devolution, they are happy, he said, with the Assembly as a propaganda platform. He went on to say that he could see no circumstances in which his Party were likely to return to the Assembly until the Government gave it powers and a clearly defined role.

With regard to the European elections Mr Molyneaux expected Dr Paisley to do well but thought he would fall short of his 1979 percentage vote; He also stressed that the DUP had rarely proved capable of delivering Dr Paisley's personal vote to lesser candidates.

On the Forum Mr Molyneaux accepted that the Unionists would have to address a number of tenets of the Report. He didn't want to

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appear reactive but, both in relation to informing opinion in Britain and, more particularly, in America he said that his Party would be laying stress on a number of points including; reminding people of the nature of the Republic of Ireland (which he saw as a theocracy riddled with corruption); making clear that the result of forcing Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom would not be a united Ireland, but an independent Ulster; stressing the importance of a reliable Northern Ireland to NATO rather than a wavering/neutralist Ireland; and affirming the correctness of the Roman Catholic Church's stand on moral questions, in refusing to compromise their beliefs for reasons of political expediency - this was something with which Unionists could identify. Mr Molyneaux was predictably damning about the likelihood of the Forum producing anything of worth. He was confident that if the SDLP survived the experience they would soon be forced into seeking an internal accommodation with the Unionists.

In answer to my question about whether the deletion of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution would create a new climate in the North, Mr Molyneaux thought it would make little difference and would not be deserving of any reciprocal concessions with regard to the minority's position in the governance of the North. It would merely be a recognition of reality and was the least that could be expected of a friendly neighbouring country.

In all a rather depressing and unproductive discussion. His remarks were liberally peppered with references to the evil intentions of the Northern Ireland Office and also to the plots within his own Party. I gained the impression that although he felt reasonably confident of his grip on the Party at the moment his central obsession was maintaining that control - and the best way of achieving this may be inertia.



EDWARD BICKHAM

27. March 1984