

E.R.

CONFIDENTIAL

PA: Pol Dev file

PAB/7819/RE

Mr Angel (M)

cc: PS/Sir E Bell
Mr Brennan(M)
Mr Merifield
Mr Carvill
Mr Boys Smith(M)
Mr Abbott(M)




DIRECT RULE AND THE MINORITY COMMUNITY

~~James' Commission X 127 R~~

1. In your minute of 19 April you asked PAB to make enquiries about what measures Government could take to somehow recognise the "Irish identity" and reduce the feelings of alienation amongst the minority community. The following is based upon a series of contacts with political and church leaders over the course of the past week.
2. We have concentrated our attention on ways of trying to prevent the hardening of attitudes in the minority community and of countering the apparent drift towards Sinn Fein. It is clear to us that the demise of constitutional nationalism and the emergence of Sinn Fein as the sole voice of the minority community would make the Province very difficult to administer. We began originally by looking at the "package" of measures which might be welcomed by the minority community and might help to reduce their sense of alienation - franchise, flags and emblems, Irish street names etc - but it quickly became apparent that, in themselves, such measures are generally regarded as being of only marginal importance.
3. The Government's policy in Northern Ireland is based upon the three strands of support for the economy, maintenance of security and the search for a political solution. The sense of "alienation" has arisen from all three categories. All need, therefore, be considered.

The Economy

4. It is a fact that the current economic situation and subsequent levels of unemployment have hit hardest at the urban, Catholic areas of Northern Ireland. One only has to look at the statistics for West Belfast, Londonderry and Strabane. It has also hit hardest at the young school leaving population. It is within this group that Sinn Fein has made significant inroads by putting into question the effectiveness of British economic policies and offering the solution of both a united Irish and a marxist alternative to the

CONFIDENTIAL

existing capitalist system.

5. The Government's ability to make dramatic progress in this area is clearly limited - not merely by public expenditure criteria. But it is an area where we need to act visibly in order to maintain any credibility for normal standards of democracy. It is not for PAB to advise on economic strategy but we have been struck by the importance placed by political and church leaders on the activities of community workshops, ACE, and community self-help schemes. Under direct rule, opportunities for meaningful involvement with Government will be necessary and such schemes continue to provide a method of ensuring that community leaders, in particular district councillors, are involved in constitutional activities which are clearly seen to be of benefit to local people. The existing schemes are having an impact and are giving to young people, to a greater or lesser extent, a stake in their community. On the basis of our contacts, it would seem that the relatively modest financial investments in these schemes are having a substantial return.

6. There is the related area of housing. It has been argued to us that the removal of such complexes as Divis and Rossville would help to demonstrate that the Government is concerned about the plight of the poorer sections of the minority community. Again, PAB would hesitate to suggest deliberate "skewing" of Departmental priorities but these are areas where long-term political benefits might be achieved.

Security

Since the beginning of the troubles, the minority community has been unable/unwilling to support or relate to the security forces. Their fear and distrust of the RUC and Army and their lack of confidence in the administration of justice remain as major sources of alienation. What is more, the belief that the RUC operate a "shoot to kill" policy and the general feeling that the courts are unfair to Catholics produces an equivocal attitude towards violence which makes it easier for the Provisional IRA to sustain their campaign. In Bishop Cahal Daly's own words - "The UDR is still the most effective recruiting force for the IRA in rural areas". Given the continuing threat, it is unrealistic to think in terms of any significant dismantling of emergency legislation for many years to come. Any relaxation in our security effort would not only enrage the unionist community but would,

of course, make it much more difficult to deal with terrorism.

8. The RUC have made great strides in recent years to improve their image but such progress can all too easily be undermined by individual incidents. These considerations are well understood and need no further comment in this paper: but it is worth recording that our contacts in the minority community are invariably critical of the Army - especially the UDR - and genuinely believe that their activities make it much more difficult for us to achieve political progress.

Politics

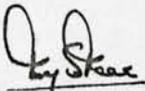
9. In our discussions, we have acted on the (unspoken) premise that in a period of direct rule we are seeking ways of making it more "sensitive" to the minority community. We have therefore tended to think in terms of the well established "package" of measures relating to franchises, flags and emblems and use of the Irish language. It has become apparent that, in the absence of movement on the economic and security fronts, the individual measures in themselves would probably have little impact. Nonetheless, such a "package" would serve as an early indication of our intention to administer the province in an even-handed way, and as a signal to the Dublin Government and international opinion that we respect and understand the Nationalist tradition. It has always been argued that the need to find parliamentary time and the opposition to such measures would arouse our sufficient excuses not to take action. But since so much of what passes for politics in Northern Ireland is bound up with symbols and emblems we need to demonstrate that we are prepared to accord respect to the "identity" of a significant proportion of the Northern Ireland population.

10. We have little doubt that good Anglo/Irish relations can help to improve our image in the minority community. The Government's response to the Forum Report will be an essential ingredient in this area and any future positive developments in relations between London and Dublin would almost certainly have a "spill-over" effect in the province. The mirror image of this argument is that any steps we take to recognise the "Irish identity" are noted in the South and abroad. The Bunscoil Irish school grant has been received with approval in the South and Bishop Edward Daly says that the Londonderry name change issue was widely reported (approvingly) in Italy.

11. In addition to the general "package" there is the separate but related question of a Bill of Rights. Again, I am aware of the difficulties but until recently the only constitutional party which had not expressed a view in favour of such legislation was the OUP. This position was changed with the publication of the document on administrative devolution.

Conclusions

12. The main areas where direct rule could be seen to be "even-handed" are the economy and security. The political gestures are worth doing in themselves but would not make a significant contribution to the overall impact of Government policy.



R'S REEVE

Political Affairs Division

2 May 1984