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PAB/1251/BN

Mr Bell - M

cc: PS/PUS (L&B) - M  
PS/Mr Bloomfield  
Mr Brennan - M  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Chesterton - M  
Mr Innes  
Mr Merifield  
Mr Gilliland  
Mr Spence  
Miss Elliott - M  
Mr Blackwell  
Mr S Hewitt  
Mr G Hewitt



INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE: BRIEF ON POLITICAL DISCUSSION

I attach a draft brief as requested covering political affairs, for discussion at the morning session of the Conference on 11 December in the general context of programme and methods of work.

2. The draft is divided into an opening general paragraph and a list of point to make. I think that the best way of using this, if you agree, would be for the opening paragraph to be removed and incorporated in your covering brief or steering brief; the points to make would then form the substance of the brief which could be annexed at the appropriate point in your package for the Secretary of State to be submitted this evening.

3. Mr Merifield has commissioned a separate note on the state of affairs in the Assembly, which will be circulated today. You may wish to consider with CPL what use is made of this in the briefing; I think that it may be best to await developments over the next day or two before putting any specific reference into the brief. I have therefore left the reference in the brief attached to this minute relatively general.

4. I also attach a copy of the joint statement which has been amended in the light of comments by Mr Brennan, Mr Innes and Mr Merifield.

*M. Elliott*

M ELLIOTT  
Political Affairs Division

6 December 1985

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DRAFT BRIEF ON POLITICS

1. General

In reviewing the current political scene, the Secretary of State will want to make sure that Irish Ministers fully understand the strength of unionist opposition to the Agreement and that they do not under-estimate the difficulties which lie ahead. The absence of street violence now does not mean that unionists can be pushed aside - in many ways their opposition is deeprooted and carefully targeted towards preventing the two communities from working together. The disruptive effect of this may feed through into community life as it has into many public representative bodies. The Secretary of State will want to emphasise the importance of securing benefits which can be perceived by the unionist community as resulting from the Agreement. He will also want to repeat HMG's commitment to securing political movement within the Province, and to make it quite clear that progress depends to a large extent on the willingness of the SDLP to adopt a positive attitude. This will need to go further than the SDLP's, commendable, restraint in keeping nationalist triumphalism at bay.

2. Points to Make

- (i) The unionist community is solidly opposed to the Agreement. They feel let down and believe their position within the UK is under threat; they see the IC as an engine within NI working towards Irish unity. Article 1 does not (yet) convince them. There are very few moderate voices. The main protestant churches are opposed or express strong reservation and the Alliance Party is deeply divided.

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(ii) Unionist politicians are currently using constitutional and legal means to oppose the Agreement. They are confident that they have enormous popular support. The rally in Belfast a couple of weeks ago gave some idea of the current loyalist mood.

(iii) The forthcoming by-elections will serve to increase the political temperature. Paisley and Molyneaux are seeking a mandate to step up their campaign of disruption. The Assembly is already being used to spearhead the campaign and the protest at Council level is likely to continue. The net result will be increasing polarisation.

(iv) The unionists are planning a long campaign. Strikes and street demonstrations remain a very real possibility. Boycotts of public bodies by unionists, already in train, fuel unionist frustrations and create ill will between unionists and nationalists. The situation is volatile. A security set-back could provoke a very hostile response.

(v) The RUC in particular will be required to 'hold the line' in difficult circumstances. Their professionalism will need to be recognised.

(vi) We therefore need to show some concrete results from the Agreement as soon as possible. Security is of crucial importance to the unionist community and a visible increase in co-operation across the border could help to change the atmosphere. Irish signature of the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism is likely to be an important step.

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(vii) The unionist reaction was made that much more severe because of the secrecy which surrounded our joint negotiations. We need to be open in our dealings from now on in order to prevent further misunderstandings. Where difficult and sensitive issues are being considered by the IC, the greatest care will need to be exercised in how they are handled.

Devolution

(viii) HMG is committed to achieving political progress. We cannot force the parties to reach agreement. Both sides of the community must adopt a more flexible approach.

(ix) The unionists do not believe that the SDLP wants devolution or is prepared to work for it. The SDLP's failure to enter the Assembly has allowed unionists to avoid the issue of minority participation and circumstances have now made the unionists themselves unreceptive to any new proposals. But a more positive attitude from the SDLP, as a party, will be needed if entrenched ideas are to be challenged and unionist moderates given the chance to see a possible way forward.

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ANGLO-IRISH INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

FIRST MEETING: 11 DECEMBER 1985

JOINT STATEMENT

1. The first meeting at Ministerial level of the Intergovernmental Conference established by the Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 1985 was held at Stormont House on 11 December 1985. The joint Chairmen, Mr King and Mr Barry, were accompanied on the British side by Dr Rhodes Boyson and Mr Nicholas Scott, and on the Irish side by Mr Michael Noonan and Mr Liam Kavanagh, as well as by officials.

2. After hearing opening statements and discussing a range of procedural matters, the Conference heard a presentation by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Sir John Hermon, on the security situation in Northern Ireland (with particular emphasis on the importance of the border). The Commissioner for the Garda Siochana was also present.

3. The Conference then gave preliminary consideration to four specific issues:

- a. the development of a programme of measures to improve relations between the security forces and the minority community in Northern Ireland;
- b. ways of enhancing security co-operation between the two Governments;
- c. the importance of public confidence in the administration of justice;

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- d. economic development in both parts of Ireland.
4. On the first item, the Conference exchanged views on the appropriate relationship between the security forces and the public, with particular reference to the safeguards which at present exist and the role of the RUC in association with military operations involving direct contact with the community.
5. During discussion of security co-operation, consideration was given to the methods of co-ordinating the existing security activities on both sides of the border and to possible ways in which further joint approaches might be developed to defeat terrorism.
6. The Conference agreed to establish a working group of officials to consider the machinery for the further discussion of legal matters, including the administration of justice.
7. The Conference reviewed the prospects of securing international support for economic development in both parts of Ireland.
8. The Conference agreed that at future meetings discussion of these issues would be continued, and identified a number of other areas for future discussion.
9. A further meeting will be held in the New Year.

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