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Mr. Spence - M



c.c. Mr. Bloomfield - M  
Mr. Chesterton  
Mr. Rickard

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Mr. Rickard is working on an Agenda for next Wednesday's meeting of PDG. I had intended that we should in any case create an opportunity to talk about the various measures that are currently under consideration in relation to political issues concerning local government in Northern Ireland (including both the effect of continued Sinn Fein presence and of Unionist absences), but having now seen the minute of the Prime Minister's meeting yesterday with the Friends of the Union, I think we may need to take a slightly more formal stab at these issues at our meeting.

... I attach both a copy of the No. 10 letter which records the meeting and an extract from Mr. Gow's letter of 28 January to the Private Secretary at No. 10. From the second page of the record of the meeting with the friends of the Union you will see that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State told their visitors that the Government was ready to discuss practical co-operation, particularly in local government. In this context some of the ideas in paragraph 11 of the delegation's memorandum might be followed up. Paragraph 11 of that memorandum, as you will see, has very little to do with the present arrangements for local government in Northern Ireland and is much closer to a statement of an integrationist policy not all that different from the approach taken in the Conservative manifesto in 1979.

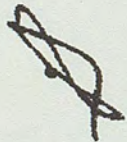
Given what is said elsewhere in the record of the meeting, I am quite clear that Ministers were not intending to suggest that they accepted the substance of paragraph 11 of the paper.

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given the present approach of the Unionist parties, it is quite possible that the Prime Minister's willingness to discuss practical co-operation will not in fact be taken up. Nevertheless, we need to consider what we would say and do if it were taken up, and I shall ask PDG to reflect on this briefly at the meeting next Wednesday. My purpose in writing to you is that I understand you already have in hand some work on local government issues and you may wish not only to bring this to the attention of PDG but also to comment on the implications as you see them of the Prime Minister's willingness "to discuss practical co-operation, particularly in local government".



I.M. BURNS

6 February 1987