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Secretary of State (L&B)-M

cc PS/Mr Scott (L&B) -M  
PS/Mr Needham (L&B) -M  
PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) -M  
PS/PUS (L&B) -M  
PS/Mr Bloomfield  
Mr Burns -M 2 cc Mr Spence  
Mr Stephens 3 sec 3  
Mr Chesterton -M  
Mr Elliott  
Mr McConnell  
Mr Wood  
Mr Blackwell

CONSULTATION PAPER ON DECLARATIONS FOR CANDIDATES AT LOCAL ELECTIONS

I have read Mr Needham's draft submission on the above subject with care and not a little sympathy for the arguments he advances.

2. I will alas be absent when the meeting to discuss this takes place and I hope that this note may serve two purposes - to respond to PS/Mr Needham's note of 11th March and to be a record of my views for the meeting to discuss this issue.

3. Having looked at all this again and recognising the work that has gone into this matter and the strength of Richard's feelings that this is central to his strategy regarding local councils I still remain doubtful about the proposition that we should proceed to early publication. Some of my reasons are touched on in the draft paper but for convenience I set out my 5 main worries as follows:

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1. Sinn Fein have just suffered a major political set back in the Republic's election. To move in this area now would be to give them an issue round which to mount a major campaign in Ireland, Britain and the US. Why give them such an issue?
2. One of the key seats in contention in the next General Election in Northern Ireland is West Belfast. Here there is a major opportunity to deal a blow to Sinn Fein and boost constitutional nationalism. Publication of the paper in advance of the General Election would do nothing to help the SDLP.
3. We are now faced with the delicate task of ensuring that the Anglo-Irish Agreement continues to be implemented following the change of Administration in Dublin. Mr Haughey has become more warm and more positive in his attitude to the Agreement but not all in his Party agree.

To proceed with early publication of this document would in my view be bound to make the task of developing a good early rapport with Fianna Fail Ministers more difficult.

4. It was strongly impressed on me at QL on 4 March that we do not have policy clearance for the introduction of legislation in this field. Indeed I was told that there remain substantial doubts about the wisdom of our idea. We have got clearance to publish the consultative document but in my view if we were to publish and then not be able to proceed to legislation at the end of the consultative period the end result would be worse than not publishing now.

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5. Finally, and I realise that I do not have the advantage of Richard's close contact with local government, I do beg leave to doubt whether the publication of this document now or in the immediate future would 'take the tricks' of 'returning stability' to local government or of 'getting the constitutional parties back to the negotiating table'. Deeper feelings dominate the local political scene and I fear that early publication could lead to the loss of what could at some point in the future be a valuable card to play.
  
6. For these reasons I have to say I remain opposed to publication now.

*Nick.*

NICHOLAS SCOTT