



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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SDLP Annual Conference, Newcastle, Co. Down3-5 November 1989General

1. The general mood of the Conference was self-confident, purposeful and - by SDLP standards - unified. The tensions between the three party M.P.s were, as usual, apparent; however this did not (except to some degree in the debate on political issues) become apparent on issues of substance. The absence of serious differences on policy issues may be viewed, in a positive sense, as indicating a broad policy consensus within the party; critics, however, would suggest that it also indicates a certain complacency in the aftermath of the departure of some of the "young Turks" whose presence lent a creative tension to party debates.
2. Much of the discussion en marge of the Conference was devoted to Brooke's remarks earlier in the week indicating a possible role for Sinn Fein in future political discussions. These remarks were broadly welcomed in SDLP circles and were seen to some degree as conferring a retrospective legitimacy on Hume's discussions with Adams. However, it was noteworthy that British media representatives present were unanimous in their criticisms of Brooke. They felt he had been, at best, imprudent in his choice of words; at worst, he had given comfort to the IRA by his Cyprus analogy and by his admission that security policies could contain, but not defeat, terrorism.
3. British Labour Party spokesman Kevin McNamara was present at the Conference and was appropriately acknowledged and welcomed. It is clear, however, that the relationship between the British Labour Party and the SDLP is not an easy one and may possibly become progressively more strained. McNamara and Mallon for instance, had disagreed sharply in a "Newsnight" interview in their assessment of Brooke's remarks. McGrady is still smarting from his differences

with McNamara on the fair employment debate - he accuses McNamara of poor judgement on this issue and of "badmouthing" the SDLP. There is considerable concern that, as the British Labour party becomes increasingly hungry for electoral victory, it will tend to put party political advantage before the genuine interests of Northern Ireland.

4. Hume's address to the party was wide-ranging, eloquent in parts, and well received by the audience. However, some of the media present were privately critical of what they perceived as a lack of new ideas or fresh thinking in Hume's text. Hume reiterated his suggestion for talks "about the problems, not about solutions" and underlined the necessity for talks between Unionists representatives and the Government and other parties in the Dail; he strongly attacked the moral cowardice of Sinn Fein and the IRA.

#### Political issues/devolution

5. In the debates on specific themes, particular attention focussed on the discussion on political affairs [McGrady said privately that Hume had shown himself "paranoid" as to what he (McGrady) might say in the course of this debate]. In the event, the discussion was carefully conducted with Mallon and McGrady representing distinctive viewpoints but - with a particularly careful choice of language on McGrady's part - avoiding any open clash.
6. Mallon answered criticisms of the SDLP approach by alleging that critics fell into three categories: those who were (a) confused (b) malicious and (c) sceptical. The first group, he said, simply failed to understand SDLP policies, the second were conducting "a phony war" and creating a "distraction" on devolution, the third group doubted that SDLP policies would work only because those policies are

essentially so simple. Launching an attack on the use of the term "devolution", Mallon said that the very word is "insulting and demeaning " because it carries the implication of an administration being set up on British terms. The term "agreed administration" would in his view be a more appropriate description, as it would imply agreement between unionists and nationalists and would be seen as "an exercise in self-determination".

7. Mallon also sketched out the general conditions he would consider necessary for the successful implementation of devolution. It would be essential he argued, to create the proper economic environment - "nobody but a fool would walk into administering this" (i.e. present economic policies). It would also be an essential pre-condition, he argued, to create "a proper system of justice and policing", including the abolition of the Emergency Provisions Act.
8. McGrady, for his part, argued that in the absence of political movement, "integration is a creeping fact of life". "There is no sabre rattling - just a slow shuffle". The objective of Unionists at Westminster is to achieve full integration combined with a modest amount of local administration. The point, he argued, is not to condemn devolution, but to define what one means by it; in his view, devolution must encompass fiscal and budgetary independence and full responsibility for economic and social policy. He called for the SDLP to "shake ourselves and make sure something happens". It is essential, he felt, to begin by building institutions; he expressed his conviction that the Unionists want dialogue and that, "as a matter of urgency, the SDLP must seek out such dialogue at all levels.
9. Among other contributors, Sean Farren said that the absence of any direct input by parties in the North is "inherently damaging to the democratic process". He emphasised, however, that the SDLP will not come up with a blueprint for

new structures; their priority is instead to come to a clear understanding with Unionists of the principles that should underlie new structures. Brian Feeney agreed that the SDLP should refrain from putting forward any precise proposals; his view was that to do so would weaken the SDLP negotiating position - the party "would be stating its minimal position but this would be interpreted as its maximal position".

#### Administration of Justice

10. Denis Haughey introduced a motion (text attached) calling upon the British Government to establish a special committee of the House of Commons to inquire into intelligence gathering, leaks and allegations of security force involvement in the 1973 Dublin bombings and certain ostensibly sectarian assassinations. He commented on the doubtful reliability of intelligence and, (privately), he gave the Department a list of persons recently found in the possession of a young UVF man. They were obtained from a UDR friend and included people who should not have been on a list of suspects.
11. The motion was seconded by Dr. Joe Hendron who spoke of the concern caused by the appearance of Gerard Sloane's photograph in the UDA paper 'Ulster' a few months after he was murdered by the U.F.F. in September 1988. Dr. Hendron said that his family were certain that this photograph was taken by the RUC at Castlereagh on the one occasion when Sloane was arrested in 1984. Speaking of Castlereagh, he said he was very concerned that physical ill treatment was once again a feature of police interrogation techniques. He had treated, in his medical capacity, individuals with perforated eardrums which he was certain were sustained at the hands of the RUC at Castlereagh. He said that the ill-treatment techniques used nowadays were more subtle than those used in the past.

12. Seamus Mallon recited many instances of police abuse and cover-up ranging from the events which led to the setting up of the Bennett Committee right through to the Stalker Affair and the recent allegations of leaks of security material and security force collusion with loyalist paramilitaries. He said that in all past scandals involving the police and security forces, assurances were routinely given by the British Government that they would 'tighten up procedures' and introduce 'stricter vetting'. He was dismissive of the British Government's most recent assurances regarding control over sensitive security material and the new vetting procedures for the U.D.R. saying "We've heard it all before". With regard to the U.D.R., he said that the issue could no longer be fudged and he called on 'both Governments' to face up to the fact that the U.D.R. will never be a part of a long term political settlement for Northern Ireland. The British Government should begin 'phasing out' the U.D.R. immediately.
13. On the subject of policing generally Mallon said it was unrealistic to expect a community to support a police force when 'not one police officer in that force lived in the nationalist community'. A police force must be indigenous to the community ("It must be our sons and daughters in that force") before it can claim the full support of the community which it serves; where the police are drawn from one side of the community, partiality is inevitable.
14. The motions adopted by the Conference on political and security issues are attached.

Anglo-Irish Division

9 November, 1989

W3846

c.c. P.S.M.  
P.S.S.  
Secretary  
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Box.



Annex.

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SDLP Annual Conference 1989

Motions adopted on Political and Security issues

Political Dialogue

Conference endorses the efforts of the party leadership to create dialogue which addressees the problems of relationships which go to the heart of our problems, and calls for any settlement which may emerge from such dialogue to be put to the people of Ireland, North and South, by means of simultaneous referenda.

Administration of Justice

Conference calls upon the British Government to recognise the widespread and deep public relationship between sections of the security forces and loyalist gangs, and calls for the setting up of a select committee of the House of Commons to inquire into the conduct of intelligence gathering in Northern Ireland over the last 20 years, the continual leakage of sensitive information to unionist politicians and loyalist gangs, and the repeated allegations over the years of direct security force involvement in the bombings in Dublin in 1973 and certain ostensibly sectarian assassinations.

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An emergency motion welcoming the release of the Guildford Four and calling for continued efforts on behalf of the Birmingham Six and the Maquire family was also adopted.

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Among the motions not taken (through shortage of time) was the following: Conference welcomes recent action on release of SOSPs and lifers who have served long prison sentences, urges continued action along these lines and calls upon the Dublin Government to embark on a programme of release of convicted paramilitaries who have served long prison sentences.