

E.R.

Mr Johnston - to see
Mr Foster - please read this note and
arrange for draft paras on
issues where the SOS instructed
to write. Pl draft a
full response and covering
note to R/SOS for say
close of play
Tue 16 Nov.

NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND A DEPUTATION
OF ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS FROM WEST BELFAST IN STORMONT CASTLE ON
8 NOVEMBER 1982

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The Secretary of State met a deputation of Roman Catholic Priests from West Belfast lead by Dean Montague, the Administrator of St Paul's in the Lower Falls Road. Mr Mitchell attended the meeting. Mr Blatherwick and Mr Lyon were also present.

The Secretary of State said that he was very concerned about the economic situation particularly as it affected young people. He believed the Youth Training Programme was a considerable innovation. The Government were also backing a major housing programme. He invited the Priests to let him know the particular concerns of people in West Belfast.

The Roman Catholic Priests were generally highly critical of the Government's political initiative in holding elections and setting up an Assembly. It showed that the British Government continued to be unwilling to accept the views of the minority community. There was no reflection in the legislation of the Irish identity. The Assembly was no more than a forum for Unionists. The proposals had given the SDLP nothing to offer to their supporters, with the result that the way was left open for Sinn Fein. The vote for Sinn Fein was a response to the Government's intransigence and represented a great upsurge of frustration. It did not reflect support for terrorism. There was considerable concern that Sinn Fein should be seen as representing the community in West Belfast. The present position required the Government to put pressure on the Unionist majority, and to seek an initiative with the Irish Republic.

The Secretary of State said that he did not accept that his proposals took insufficient account of minority opinion. They had been fully

described in the White Paper published in April 1982 and the position of the minority was secured in the legislation. He considered the Assembly would be useful in monitoring the effects of direct rule. It also held out the prospect of devolution taking account of the Irish dimension. Assembly membership was an important aspect of establishing the Anglo-Irish Parliamentary body. He regretted that the SDLP were not prepared to have any part in the Assembly. He did not accept that it would be possible to impose any solution on the Northern Ireland communities. The Assembly was intended to provide a forum and a framework. He recognised the importance of improving Anglo-Irish relations and would be prepared to make a fresh initiative following the Elections in the Irish Republic whichever Government came into power.

In further discussion, the delegation expressed lack of confidence in the security forces. The Army harassed young people in West Belfast, particularly towards the end of their tours of duty. The UDR would never be accepted by the minority in Northern Ireland; they were seen as a reincarnation of the B Specials. There was more acceptance of the RUC: some Priests reported that the local community were co-operating with them better and there was praise for the local RUC Commander in West Belfast. Nevertheless, the RUC had behaved badly in Downpatrick and Andersonstown and there was a general feeling that no action was taken against those who broke the law.

The Secretary of State said that he hoped it would be possible progressively to concentrate the Army on a garrison role and restore fully the policing function to the RUC. It was not easy for young soldiers to operate for short periods in a hostile environment. He could not accept the strictures on the UDR and regretted that the number of Roman Catholic members of the Regiment had fallen to such a low level. Errors were on occasions made by the RUC, for example in Downpatrick, but these were investigated and the lessons learned. Police complaints procedures would shortly be reviewed and comments by the Priests would be welcomed. The most important contribution they could make, however, would be to express their support for the RUC.

In continued discussion, the following main points were made:-

- (i) Compensation payments took too long. Claims for bomb damage in West Belfast in July had still to be met. The Secretary of State undertook to make enquiries and see if the procedure could be accelerated.
- (ii) The Divis flats created social, security and moral problems. More stable families were moving out, and trouble makers moving in. The fabric of the buildings was deteriorating. Waste disposal shoots were unhygienic. An early attempt should be made to unlink one of the blocks, for example Church block, to see if a more defensible environment would be beneficial. But what was needed was a commitment to total demolition. Mr Mitchell said that he had accepted the need for further demolition in the longer term; but some improvements could be made before then. chutes
- (iii) The Devonshire Estate was a highly commendable development, but it was being ruined by the nearby Motorway link road. Road works and motorway traffic were damaging the houses. Mr Mitchell undertook to pay an early visit to the Estate.
- (iv) The BAN area should be extended to Twinbrook. It was hoped that the Government would be prepared to make a grant of £30,000 to add to the 75% DENI grant for the building of a Youth Club in the area. Mr Mitchell said that the extent of the BAN area was being reassessed, but it was necessary to balance the relative deprivation in Twinbrook with that in other areas.
- (v) It was suggested that the freeze on capital expenditure for Nursery School building should be ended so that the demand for a substantial number of nursery schools in West Belfast could be met. In particular, it was suggested

that priority had been given to building a Nursery School in Whiterock over a Nursery School in Twinbrook which the Priests had previously been told would be given top priority. The Secretary of State undertook to make enquiries and to write to Dean Montague.

- (vi) The Priests reiterated the importance they attached to maintaining their Teacher Training Colleges at the level which would provide them with sufficient Roman Catholic teachers for their needs. They were not prepared to accept teachers who had not been trained by their system. The Secretary of State said he would bear the Priests' views in mind although some hard decisions would need to be taken.
- (vii) The Priests said they were offended by suggestions in the English Press that the Roman Catholic Church supported terrorists. This was emphatically not true. The Secretary of State said he accepted this and would do what he could to correct this misapprehension.
- (viii) There was concern about the high level of unemployment and the low level of industrial development in West Belfast. They regretted the demise of De Lorean. The level of aid to Harland and Wolff was contrasted unfavourably to the absence of aid for small industries in the West Belfast area. Knowing that the Secretary of State would shortly visit the United States, they suggested that the Secretary of State might ask that there be constructive help for West Belfast from the USA rather than more contributions to destruction. The low level of industrial development in the area lead to higher levels of unemployment and a more fertile ground for violence. The Secretary of State said that aid to Harland and Wolff was not unlimited; substantial cut-backs were being made. Every effort was being made to secure additional industrial development, but he could hold out no immediate hope of an improvement in employment.

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- (ix) The Priests asked for additional expenditure on Further Education facilities in the area; they were currently hopelessly overcrowded. The Secretary of State undertook to make enquiries and write to Dean Montague.
- (x) The delegation regretted that the Belfast Education and Library Board and the Government had refused to finance the ACE Scheme for the St Oliver Plunkett Schools in West Belfast. ACE schemes in England were 100% grant aided; yet they were only 90% grant aided in Northern Ireland. This was inequitable, particularly as considerable support was given to more unorthodox voluntary groups. The Secretary of State undertook to enquire into this application and to write to Dean Montague.

In conclusion, the delegation thanked the Secretary of State for inviting them to this meeting. It was the first such meeting they had had since the establishment of direct rule.

The Secretary of State thanked the delegation for giving him their views and undertook to arrange a further meeting in a few months' time.

J. M. Lyon

J M LYON
Private Secretary

9th November 1982

CC PS/SOS (B&L)
PS/Ministers (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Sir Ewart Bell
Mr Bloomfield
Mr Irvine
Mr Parkes
Mr Dugdale
Mr Bourn
Mr Merifield
Mr Gilliland
Miss Davies
Mr Simpson
Mr Coulson
Mr Blatherwick
Mr Alexander
Mr Russell
~~Mr Crother~~ - for action
Mr Shepherd