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AJM/B/348

Mr Angel M



ANGLO-IRISH INFLUENCES

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cc Mr Buxton
Mr Abbott M
Mr Boys Smith M
Mr Reeve

1. Sir Ernest Bell
2. Mr Carvill. *OR*
you may be interested. This is a starting up document.
AJP
g/n.

1. The reflexes of the two Unionist parties in evolving proposals for administrative or legislative devolution confirm the extent to which the Forum report will provoke pressure for a response. It is fairly clear that if no constructive response is forthcoming from the British Government the SDLP leadership will lose momentum and then will forfeit a proportion of active voting support. And there would be a negative effect on Anglo Irish relations (the Irish Government having invested so completely in the Forum). And if the Forum "fails", or delivers a weak report, Dr Fitzgerald at least will want to pluck what he can from the fire.

2. In considering arrangements that might be developed it would be vital to assess the weight of the basic priorities of the parties in Northern Ireland.

MAJORITY COMMUNITY

3. The order of Unionist priorities may vary from one wing of the party to another but is broadly as follows

- (1) Guarantee of the border
 - to resist incorporation into United Ireland
 - to maintain a link with British culture.
- (2) Security against terrorists
- (3) A degree of self government independent from that of Westminster
- (4) A position within NI's local institutions that would offer protection should there be any weakening on 5(1) or 5(2)
 - this may be presented as majority rule; or as a weighted system with some sharing of power
 - harder attitudes on this point may reflect the extent to which Unionists feel that there is little accord on the guarantee within the British Administration or across British parties generally.

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- (5) Economic support as a region of UK (no less deserving than GB regions).

CONSTITUTIONAL MINORITY

4. On the minority side the priorities might be for

- (1) institutions of state which recognise the legitimacy of the Irish identity, and thus contain an Irish ingredient sufficient in the circumstances to enable loyalty to be given to the public authority concerned
 - the strength of the recognition/ingredient would need to be greatest in security institutions; less in the political administrative arena; and less still in the bureaucracies
 - the ingredient could be external or internal. At present external elements (ie an ROI input) seem to carry more significance in SDLP thinking.
- (2) impartial security measures, within a framework strong enough to include participation of Catholics in the security forces, which provide a powerful counter to non constitutionalist elements and the men of violence (3) (on which a harder line could be taken if 6(1) was secure).
- (3) maintenance of living standards at least at the present levels afforded by UK support; with equality of economic opportunity.

5. I have omitted the political concept of "Irish Unity" because I believe that in practical terms it is less important to the minority community at large than the extent of cultural recognition and the Irish ingredient in public authority. But without a sufficient Irish ingredient the republican parties will always find it possible to outplay the SDLP where basic loyalties are concerned, eg over the hunger strike or when there is a security incident reflecting (or being perceived as reflecting) adversely on the government's security forces which can be portrayed as partial. This is not to underplay the strength of the Irish aspiration to unity, which remains an important legacy.

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OTHER BACKGROUND

6. There are however other ingredients which need to be kept in mind.

- (a) the strength of seemingly irrational community pressures. The Hunger Strikes, and recent events, illustrate the power of incidents to call forth responses governed largely by loyalty to kith and kin. Such responses are not readily understood in Parliament which has a different historical perspective. This reinforces the need to see that any political accommodation has a firm security dimension for which there is commitment across the community and whole hearted support from Dublin;
- (b) the element of complacency which underlies many basic attitudes in the North. The Unionists hold their position by standing fast, and if inroads are made West of the Bann by Catholics the possibility of falling back to a new laager is subconsciously accepted. The Catholic community see their strength growing in the Western constituencies, and to some degree grass roots opinion believes that the tide is turning. The fact that it may turn only very slowly is itself a recipe for future disappointment and all that may bring. And despite the initiatives since 1972 I think the British view is that there is no solution. The South, plagued increasingly by social disorder and the threat of a Sinn Fein majority in the North (which would attract kith and kin support in the Republic however reluctantly), are more positive in their need for an answer. To some extent this makes them vulnerable in negotiation, but such vulnerability is probably counterbalanced by the acute sensitivity that Ireland has at being treated as a younger brother or junior partner by Britain.

THE GUARANTEE/SECURITY

7. The Constitutional Guarantee is important to both sides of the community. But it is interpreted differently by the various communities

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- (a) it is seen as applying to the border and the British/cultural connection as well as to the internal structures of the Province. SDLP therefore argue that the constitutional guarantee is responsible for unionist intransigence and that internal systems of administration need not be included within the same veto (sic) as the border. But Mr Hume has made it clear that an internal solution on power sharing lines which did not cover security would no longer be acceptable, or would not be acceptable unless the security element was shared under separate UK/ROI arrangements.
- (b) to many Unionists the guarantee is viewed with grave suspicion. They feel that it is not whole-heartedly underwritten by all British political parties, and fear it could be removed by a future Parliament. In the light of the Irish aspiration to unity they interpret its terms as at best neutral and at worst simply a holding clause whilst plots to increase Anglo Irish links and then hand over the North are worked out.

8. In Catholic terms, the inability/"unwillingness" of the British Government to deliver in 1974 (and some would say in 1912 also!) reinforces their view of the guarantee. Their criticism of lack of internal movement have encouraged Unionist opinion in its belief that the British connection itself is the prime and only target.

CONSIDERATIONS

9. In addition to continually assessing any proposals against the priorities mentioned above, I think we thus need to consider

- (a) the extent to which we could expect any one political party to move on its own. I suspect none could for fear of being outflanked, and on the unionist side for fear that any "concession" might become the start of the slippery slope - certainly unless the correct guarantees could be strengthened by full endorsement from all parties in Britain and the Republic;
- (b) the implications of the way in which the guarantee is presently phrased and presented, ^{bearing in mind} given demographic trends (or the way in which these are perceived as

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developing especially by the Catholic community), the precise nature of the British link which would be central to Unionist opinion, and the value of all party support in Britain. Could the 1973 Act provisions be re-interpreted and reinforced without driving the SDLP and Dublin out of play?

- (c) the stability of shared arrangements. Power sharing seems essentially unstable, as it is dependent on accord over "sectarian" issues and accord in terms of conservative or socialist approaches to politics. Personalities have an important bearing on its success. Sharing based on London-Dublin co-operation or consultation may well be vulnerable to personality clashes or "Falklands", but they may be more stable overall;
- (d) how to combine the lowest common factor in internal administration with the need for a security arrangement attracting maximum confidence from both communities. Administrative devolution may prove to be the more flexible of the local arrangements, but it would be inadequate without a new security dimension;
- (e) what form of security co-operation would attract the commitment of the bulk of the Catholic community and Dublin. A willingness of the Sovereign Government to share some of its responsibilities through joint authorities at Ministerial level, supported perhaps by complaints and investigative machinery in which both Governments could have confidence, seems a starting point. Operational exchanges of personnel and information, and greater freedom of police pursuit, would tackle problems affecting both North and South but do not seem to be enough to get the whole-hearted commitment which Mr Hume (and no doubt Dr Fitzgerald) seek.

10. PAB's paper for the PDG elaborate on many of these issues.

ATP

A J MERIFIELD
8 December 1983

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