

E. R.

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with

cc. PS/PUS (B&L)
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Thurs. 18²⁷/₃

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BOSTON

1. You will have seen Mr Patten's stimulating note reflecting on his visit to Boston. We have not been asked for comments on it but I expect that the thoughts expressed in it will have to be taken into account in discussions of our post-Forum position. I am therefore letting you have my first reactions to it.

2. The note brings out very clearly the dilemma : the imperative need for an alternative government policy post-Forum and post-Assembly, and the manifest difficulty of identifying a policy which has any hope of successful implementation. It also shows the expectations which the Forum has raised, and which inevitably are going to be disappointed. We may be able to soften the disappointment by some cosmetic changes, but only to a very limited degree.

3. Para 13 of Mr Patten's note seems the key passage : to be firm on the union, but also firm that how the union is governed is a matter for the UK Parliament. I am sure that both propositions are correct, but both need to be qualified:

- (a) The fear/hope that the union could be undermined is at the root of the intransigence on both sides. As long as such hope remains, some people will hold out for it and pursue it by violence as well as by politics; and the corresponding fear will be reinforced. It follows that we need to promote something more than just an intellectual assent among ROI/SDLP that the union is not going to be done away with in the foreseeable future (and that we are looking a good deal ahead!). We need some practical and tangible acceptance of this proposition as the starting point for any further consideration of political developments within NI. I appreciate the difficulties for ROI of any thought of constitutional

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amendments or de jure recognition of NI, but something along these lines may be a necessary preliminary, both to attempt to reassure unionists and to concentrate nationalist minds of the need for an internal settlement. The risk would be that Sinn Fein could then be allowed to monopolise the traditional republican support; the potential gain would be to undermine the basis for that support. It is at least arguable that it is the ambivalence to NI - perceived by both unionists and nationalists to exist in London as well as in Dublin - that sustains the IRA/Sinn Fein campaign, and that the best way to undermine them is to attack that ambivalence.

- (b) Firmness on how the union is governed can only operate over systems which can be delivered. Parliament could legislate for any system of government, but if it is so uncongenial to a major section of the population as to lead them to boycott it or actively oppose it, then it cannot be implemented. In this sense the SDLP have the same "veto" as do the unionists: simple majority rule on the old Stormont model is no more deliverable than is power-sharing. The range of systems which could be "imposed" on a reluctant or indifferent community is therefore limited.

4. The alternative "deliverable" policies seem to be those which Mr Patten rejects : indefinite direct rule, and integration. I am not sure that either is quite as bad as Mr Patten suggests, or that in practice they are necessarily so very different from each other : the unionist versions of integration are not the only ones, and the more institutionalised direct rule becomes the more it shades into some sort of integration. Perhaps the real difference is that direct rule is specifically temporary : if it were acknowledged to be permanent and modified accordingly it would be hard to distinguish it from integration. But I doubt if direct rule - unsatisfactory though it may be - could be fairly

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described as "whips and scorpions"! If however the sting for the minority is in having to accept the (albeit "foreseeable") permanence of the union, this is unavoidable.

5. These thoughts are not incompatible with Mr Patten's conclusions. The Hadden/Boyle model could be developed within a basically direct rule/integrationist framework, provided:

- (a) the position in the union was clearly accepted beyond doubt - on both sides;
- (b) it was equally clear that the Hadden/Boyle developments were not and were not intended to be a step towards a united Ireland (or towards joint sovereignty or any variant of it) but were an end in themselves;
- (c) ROI showed significant reciprocity. Hadden and Boyle talk of the inter-dependence of these islands, but ROI's proposals in practice focus only on Ireland and even then are one-way : they will help to run NI, and we will leave them to their patch. Any proposals for joint security (and I suspect also for joint human rights) frighten them off, ^{but} how can they expect unionists to contemplate their involvement in matters which are of less obvious joint interest?

None of these provisos may seem very likely. But Mr Patten is surely right to suggest that radical shifts of thought will be necessary if the present deadlock is to be broken. This is also a favourite Forum theme, so are we not entitled to suggest what sort of radical changes would really be necessary in nationalist thinking if they are to have any hope of inducing equally radical shifts among unionists?

Jim E Harris

for P CARVILL

Central Secretariat

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