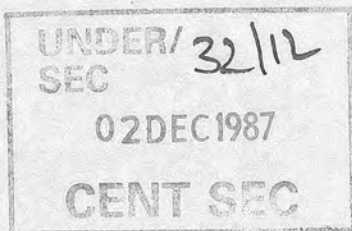


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PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B cc PS/Mr Stanley (L&B) - B
PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) - B
PS/Mr Needham (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Mr K Bloomfield - B
PS/Mr Barry (DOE)
Mr Burns - B
Mr Elliott - B
Mr Spence - B
Mr Daniell - B
Mr Hewitt - B



BELFAST CITY COUNCIL MEETING, 2 DECEMBER

1. The meeting of Belfast City Council on Tuesday, 2 December was marked by a fracas as a group of 8 Sinn Fein Councillors were confronted by very angry Unionist members. Initially both sides exchanged insults but pushing and shoving moved quickly to a scene of flying fists. Attempts by the Lord Mayor to restore order and start business were drowned out and in the end a show of hands vote on a motion to adjourn the meeting was carried on the casting vote of Dixie Gilmore.
2. Nigel Dodds of the DUP said the trouble had been a "reaction to the provocative presence and bullying tactics of Sinn Fein." For the SDLP Alasdair McDonnell said "This action was terribly self-defeating. The DUP have hijacked the whole Unionist grouping and have allowed Sinn Fein to debate what goes on in the Chamber." It is also reported that Sammy Wilson of the DUP proposed that the council inform the NIO that it was not prepared to sit with Sinn Fein.

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3. The Council Clerk, Cecil Ward, spoke to me this morning and indicated that the Unionist action had not been pre-planned but was a spontaneous reaction to the arrival of the Sinn Fein Councillors as a group, followed by their supporters. Mr Ward is very concerned that the situation will deteriorate further as time passes.

Comment

4. This is clearly a very disturbing situation not only because of the anxieties for the future expressed by the Town Clerk, but also because this incident follows closely on the heels of a verbal clash (bordering on an exchange of blows) between William McCrea (DUP) and John Davey (Sinn Fein) in the Magherafelt Council Chamber. Many of the Unionist Councils in the Province take their lead from their counterparts in Belfast and it is seems likely that such confrontations may become more frequent.

(Signed by)

J E McCONNELL
Political Affairs Division

2. December 1987

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