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Mr Merifield

cc PS/SOS (B & L)
PS/Mr Scott (B & L)
PS/Mr Patten (B & L)
PS/PUS (B & L)
Mr Brennan
Mr Carvill
Mr Burns
Mr Buxton
Mr Gilliland
Mr Reeve

SPEECH BY BISHOP CAHAL DALY: 24 NOVEMBER 1984

1. I was grateful to receive a copy of your minute of 3 December, and of Bishop Daly's speech, of which I had not previously seen a complete text.
2. The Bishop's formal statements are invariably not only, as you say, well-prepared but well-written and presented. One could argue rather unprofitably for a long time as to whether the Bishop exaggerates the degree or misunderstands the nature of alienation amongst the nationalist minority. What is perhaps more relevant is that one is not aware of any leading member of that minority who is likely to make a statement from a more moderate standpoint.
3. Unfortunately the Bishop's speech illustrates the degree to which we may be asked to square the circle. Bishop Daly's remarks come close to calling not just for a proper recognition of the "Irishness" of the minority, but for a parity of position as between the two "nationalisms", British and Irish. With such powerful reinforcement, it seems to me all the more unlikely that the SDLP could or would involve itself, in the Assembly or any other context, in discussions with other parties on the agenda of a purely "internal Northern Ireland solution".
4. Even if such dialogue were to take place, the prospects of success would be unpromising. I find it hard to believe that even as the internal dimension of a settlement with both external and internal dimensions, the SDLP would ever concede the restoration of "power with safeguards" to the unionist parties. But that hypothesis is highly unlikely even to be tested, if further dialogue cannot produce some respectable basis to get the "constitutional nationalist coalition" off its present hook. I doubt myself if this basis can be provided solely by "internal recognitions of Irishness" through action on such matters as use of Irish on street names or the amendment of the law on flags and emblems.
5. We must, it seems to me, pursue the possibility of a more formally institutionalised relationship with the Irish Republic, falling short of any co-responsibility for the executive government of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. But

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even if we can make progress in this direction, I am myself sceptical that it will provide the key capable of unlocking the door into devolution.

K. P. Bloomfield

K P BLOOMFIELD

4 December 1984

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