

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

Ireland



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London
SW1.

8 February 1980

kg. [unclear] 8/2

Dear Michael,

NORTHERN IRELAND CONFERENCE: FOURTH WEEK'S SESSIONS (4 - 5 FEB 1980)

The Conference met for two full days, which it devoted to serious and detailed discussion of what is in effect the heart of its Agenda - how to give the minority community a positive part in a devolved administration.

Of the four sessions, the first was devoted to finishing the examination of the Alliance Party proposals for a committee-style partnership administration. The Alliance plan, though it can be subjected to serious criticism, is well worked out and has stood up well under scrutiny; their moderate and thought-out approach has served as a valuable catalyst to the proceedings of the Conference.

The remaining three sessions were spent on an exposition and subsequent examination of the SDLP proposals, which are for a Cabinet-style partnership administration, similar to, but distinguishable from, the 1973/4 power Sharing Executive. With some prompting from the chair, the SDLP have laid out a good detailed case and have answered questions equably and with some skill and confidence.

In the course of their exposition they made some telling criticisms of the unwillingness of many Unionist dominated District Councils to share power with representatives of other parties, in contrast to the more generous approach of District Councils where the Unionists are not in the majority.

The UDUP have still not had to lay their cards upon the table, and have been playing an increasingly defensive game. They unsuccessfully attempted to force the SDLP to declare whether

their power-sharing proposals were conditional upon acceptance of links with the Republic. Understandably the SDLP are not yet showing their hand in this respect.

The Conference does not meet again until Monday 18 February, when there is a single day's meeting only. But in the following week we have been able to persuade delegates to meet on Wednesday, Thursday (morning) and Friday, 27 to 29 February (though some of the talks will for some sessions be represented by a deputy). There will also be meetings on Monday to Wednesday of the following week (3 to 5 March), giving a clear run of 6 days in which we hope to make substantial progress, notably in getting the UDUP to present their proposals for examination. By 5 March it should be easier to gauge what are the prospects for agreement at the Conference and in what kind of time scale.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Private Secretary to each member of OD Committee and to David Wright.

Yours sincerely,
R. A. Harrington

R. A. Harrington

Faint, illegible text at the top of the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side.

- 8 FEB 1980

