

P1. file

Prime Minister

THE RT HON J ENOCH POWELL MP

I saw Enoch Powell at his request in the House of Commons on Friday morning last, 22nd July.

First, he wanted me to remind you that, on 2nd February 1978, you voted (together with Geoffrey Howe, John Biffen and Willie Whitelaw) in favour of the principle of a uniform system of voting throughout the United Kingdom for the European Assembly Elections. The implication of his reminder was that, now that there will be no European uniformity of procedure for the 1984 elections, we were honour bound to consider, at least, allowing "first past the post" in Ulster for the forthcoming Euro-elections uniformly with the rest of the United Kingdom. He was at pains to point out that the effect of PR in Northern Ireland is to turn their elections into "one-man popularity stakes", in that Paisley, for example, can base a claim to be the natural leader on the large number of first preference votes he receives. Enoch Powell did not press the point especially vigorously, apart from pointing out that to allow non-uniform Euro-elections to go ahead in 1984, tends to erode your general position of hostility to PR. He said that he intended to write to the new Home Secretary about it, reminding him of Willie Whitelaw's earlier position in the matter. I attach a letter Willie wrote to Jim Molyneaux about the matter in May this year.

Secondly, and more delicately, Enoch reported an incident which I am to convey to you using the formula "should you be surprised to hear..."

The incident concerns an initiative taken by our Ambassador in Dublin, Mr A C Goodison.

On a recent routine visit to London, he took the initiative of asking Jim Molyneaux to receive him for a private talk. This Jim did, in his room at the House of Commons. The conversation largely turned on the general prospects for political (or any other) progress in Northern Ireland, with particular reference to the future of the Assembly. Allegedly, the Ambassador used the phrase, in the course of an exchange with Jim, "do you trust the Prime Minister?" Enoch reports that, in context, the question is no way implied disloyalty to yourself by the Ambassador; rather it raised the question of whether the Official Unionists believed - or did not believe - that in your meetings with successive Prime Ministers of the Irish Republic, you sought to pave the way towards the realisation of an all-Ireland federal state. In other words, the Ambassador was enquiring whether the Official Unionists felt that they were being, or had been, "double-crossed," both by the FCO and yourself.

It was a bit difficult to disentangle from all this exactly what Enoch was trying to convey, although he was certainly not trying to alert me to the disloyalty of our Ambassador.

I think that what he was trying to convey was that, whatever you yourself may have felt about the FCO's attitude towards Irish unity in the past, it was now clear to Enoch that the FCO had itself more or less abandoned any belief that there could be meaningful political progress in Northern Ireland, of the sort which might issue (eg through power-sharing) in Irish unity or an all-Irish Federal State. In consequence, they had now decided that, the Official Unionists having emerged as the largest and strongest group in the Province,

new bridges must be built with them, and their confidence won, since the FCO was reconciled to securing its own Foreign policy objectives, (eg. with our European partners and with NATO, etc) by making the best of the Official Unionists programme and philosophy. But Enoch speaks in increasingly Delphic and convoluted terms when he gets on to FCO machinations.

25.7.83

MICHAEL ALISON