

State papers

Collapse of Hume-Adams talks anticipated

Éamon Phoenix

THE anticipated collapse of the Hume-Adams talks of 1988 – castigated by unionists and criticised by some in the SDLP – features in official files from that year.

In a memo to secretary of state Tom King, dated August 3 1988, a Northern Ireland Office (NIO) official named D Chesterton felt that it was possible the talks would end that month.

In these circumstances, the official wrote, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, the head of the civil service, should "have a discreet word with the unionist leaders" on the British government's hopes of launching inter-party talks.

He noted: "The leaders of the SDLP and Sinn Féin [John Hume and Gerry Adams] last met on July 11".

The fact that they were unaccompanied by other party members and agreed to review progress to date suggested to him that the dialogue was about to terminate.

He added: "The Falls Road bombing on July 8 [in which two civilians died in a blast intended for security forces] led some in the SDLP to voice disquiet about the talks with Sinn Féin."

Outlining several possible scenarios, the official felt that

the end of the talks might range from "at one extreme, acceptance by Sinn Féin of the SDLP's thesis to a complete breakdown".

In between there were other options including "a pan-nationalist conference" or agreement to explore a joint approach to some lesser objective such as fair employment and security issues, as identified by Sinn Féin's Danny Morrison.

However, the official noted presciently that "the ending of the talks will not be clear-cut".

The Hume-Adams talks were resumed in early 1993.

Reviewing action by the British government, Chesterton felt that this would stem from two sources: first, a response to John Hume's "request for HMG (her majesty's government) to make clear that it has no strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland and is effectively [neutral]".

Secondly, if the talks collapsed, the government should be ready to instigate the inter-party talks which it sought.

As regards the suggestion that Mr Hume might press the British government for a statement "emphasising their effective neutrality in Northern Ireland", the NIO official proffered a draft text – an early version of the British position finally encapsulated

in the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993.

It stated: "Northern Ireland remains an integral part of the

United Kingdom because... of the wish of the majority... it is not because the British government has some ulterior or

selfish motive which requires NI to be part of the UK.

"There is no overriding strategic or economic inter-

est which requires the union to be retained. It is quite simply the democratic voice of a majority."

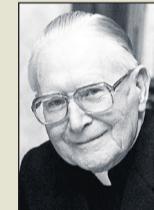
■ LEADERS: Controversial talks were taking place between SDLP leader John Hume and Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams in 1988

Bishop warned of 'deep scepticism'

WORKING-class Catholics in the mid-1980s were "anti-authority and anti-everything", Cahal Daly warned.

Secret files suggest the future head of the Catholic Church in Ireland blamed a deep scepticism among some of his flock on the SDLP.

In remarks made to a senior Irish government official in 1986, the then Bishop of Down and Connor claimed the party, at that time under John Hume, had made no serious effort to challenge Sinn Féin in Catholic ghettos. The result was a wary



response to the fledgling Anglo-Irish Agreement in areas such as west Belfast. Gerry Adams was "the working-class hero" and the SDLP "count for nothing", he said. Notes show Bishop Daly believed middle-class Catholics strongly supported the new agreement.

"In the working-class Catholic ghettos of west Belfast, however,

where people are 'anti-establishment, anti-authority and anti-everything', the mood is one of deep scepticism," he said.

Bishop Daly – later made a cardinal – blames the SDLP for having made no serious effort in the past to penetrate west Belfast and to challenge Sinn Féin's monopoly there".

The Loughgiel-born cleric also took aim at unionist leaders for rising loyalist violence and sectarian murders.

"Bishop Daly blames the 'totally irresponsible' attitude of unionist

politicians for much of this militancy," the notes state. "There are moderate voices in the unionist camp but they 'cannot be heard about the din' (a metaphor which he applied also to the SDLP in west Belfast)." This had the effect of Catholics "in the ghettos" turning "all to easy to the Provos for their protection". He also said there was considerable anger that then DUP leader Ian Paisley had managed to take control of the unionist community and made then UUP leader Jim Molyneaux "look like a small boy".

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Tensions in the SDLP

Éamon Phoenix

TENSIONS between SDLP leader John Hume and his deputy Seamus Mallon were reported by NIO officials in 1990.

Differences between the two nationalist leaders emerged over a unionist demand for the suspension of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat during any major talks between parties. In a memo dated June 20 1990 for secretary of state Peter Brooke, J E McConnell of the NIO claimed that Mr Mallon stated that the secretariat was "the core of the (Anglo-Irish) agreement" and must be protected. Unionists had reacted furiously. Mr McConnell reported how (future SDLP leader) Mark Durkan had informed him "that Mallon's remarks had



■ REMARKS: SDLP deputy leader Seamus Mallon and leader John Hume

been deeply unhelpful, not least because they were forcing the unionists to respond in public, hence raising the temperature". Mr Durkan, he reported, "said that Hume was furious with Mallon (repetition of what Hume told me on Sunday)". In a separate conversation, Mr Mallon told the official "rather wryly that he now

required protection from his own party rather than the media". Meanwhile, in a conversation with an NIO official on December 13 1989, the Ulster Unionist MP Ken Maginnis was said to have described the hardline East Derry MP Willie Ross as "someone who could, if he were there, stop political progress in Eastern Europe".