

From: Robert Crawford
Political Affairs Division
8 April 1997

UNDER/ SEC 107ke.
10 APR 1997
CENT SEC

ASST/ SEC 8814
14 APR 1997
C.C.R.U.

- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Hill - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr Lavery - B
- Mr Buchanan - B
- Mr Wood - B
- Mr Ray - B
- Mr Perry - B

McLennan 14/4

Julie 11 file

- 1. Mr [unclear] 15/4.
- 2. Ms [unclear]

14/4

AC 18/4

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

SEAN FARREN: CURRENT THINKING

During the course of a very pleasant lunch with Sean Farren on Tuesday 8 April, he provided some further insights into current pre-election activity on the SDLP and their likely stance on returning to Talks. Farren was considerably more cheerful than the days before the adjournment of the Talks.

Parades

2. The first topic we touched on was the situation in Dunloy. Farren was somewhat concerned that the agreement reached between the Orange Order and the Residents Association might... The Residents had been expecting further discussions with the Order, in particular

about the arrangements for the parade, and it appeared likely that this might not happen. The Residents Association had presented the agreement achieved as the beginning rather than the end of discussion and was under some pressure locally on this. Farren spoke very highly of Brendan McAllister of Mediation Network, to whom he gave the credit for securing the agreement which had been reached.

3. On Drumcree, Farren observed that there seemed little prospect of a settlement. His view is that the two sides are too focused on Drumcree as the crucial test to be resolved for there to be much room for negotiation. Although he hoped that the Ormeau Bridge and Dunloy might have a moderating effect, he expects Drumcree to be just as confrontational as last year.

4. Farren suggested that a Parades Commission with only limited powers would be worse than no body at all. It would provide further opportunities for groups and organisations to make mischevous and delaying representations and would be likely to cause confusion by involving itself (inexperienced and untrained) in mediation where other groups and individulas were more effective. Farren was also disappointed that it had not been possible for the SDLP parades committee to meet Sir John Wheeler earlier this week (I understand the meeting was cancelled at the request of Sir John's office as the SDLP could not field an MP).

— if so, disgraceful (on Iw's part).

Elections

5. SDLP campaigning is now beginning in earnest. In the course of a general discussion, Farren revealed that he had invited students from the South to assist with Denis Haughey's campaign in mid-Ulster and that he is having difficulty persuading candidates to

stand in the local government elections. The latter he puts down to the unattractiveness of local government generally, however the former suggests that the SDLP may be having some difficulty recruiting sufficient local campaigners for the mid-Ulster campaign. Farren, while being careful to praise Denis Haughey, acknowledged that Martin McGuinness would do well in mid-Ulster because of his standing as Adams' perceived deputy. Farren himself saw no prospect of an electoral pact. Like Mark Durkan, he sees no basis on which this could be concluded given the lack of an IRA ceasefire and the Sinn Fein position on taking any Westminster seats gained. His own personal view is that he would rather see the Reverend William McCrea elected than Martin McGuinness.

6. There followed a plea for PR as the only way of beginning to moderate NI tribal voting preferences. Under a PR system, Farren felt that people would continue to vote on mainly tribal lines, however preferences between parties of the same "tribe" would be revealed to the benefit of the more moderate parties.

Ceasefires

7. Farren did not believe that there would be an IRA ceasefire before the election, tactical or otherwise. He felt that such would not be in Sinn Fein's best interest. I suggested to him that a tactical ceasefire might be seen by Sinn Fein as a means of putting pressure on an incoming British Government. It might, for example, be used as an argument for the early entry of Sinn Fein to the Talks. I suggested that this could be a useful electoral argument, however Farren remained unconvinced that this would be sufficiently persuasive to secure such a ceasefire. He and other SDLP members (probably including Mark Durkan) had had a meeting with Sinn Fein at which the Sinn Fein members (he did not say which) had seemed unsure

and unclear regarding their party's line on a ceasefire. The SF representatives had recited the standard line that HMG had squandered 18 months of the previous ceasefire and had given no sign of any more forward thinking within the party. Farren's impression was that there was some confusion within the party regarding a further ceasefire.

Talks

8. Farren is not looking forward to the resumption of Talks with any great enthusiasm. The SDLP will re-enter negotiations on 3 June with the intention of picking up where they left off in March. They intend to pick up the previous discussions with the UUP, but are not hopeful of achieving agreement. They are not at all sure that the UUP mean business. I suggested that the coming election might have a positive effect on UUP willingness to move forward and, in particular, that Trimble might feel more secure in his own position if the UUP were able to do well against the DUP and UKUP. Farren was unconvinced by this, although he acknowledged that the possibility existed. Farren thought that Trimble would be influenced by the imminence of Drumcree and unable to move very far because of that; after Drumcree the Talks would be preparing to adjourn for the summer and he expected little movement in that period.

9. Farren was very pessimistic generally about the prospects for movement and was not hopeful that the Talks would continue into the autumn. The SDLP would make a genuine effort, but he expected that the UUP would refuse to engage. Farren did not suggest that there was any likelihood of the SDLP withdrawing, nor did he deploy any argument for a set timescale.

10. On "Pathways to Peace", Farren was sceptical that this was intended as a real set of proposals. he thought it was more likely to be a UUP gimmick, noting that the UUP had produced a paper at the end of the 1992 Talks, but had later withdrawn this. Whatever its status, the SDLP found nothing objectionable about the concept of social and economic co-operation and Farren felt that they would be content to co-operate on individual issues as had generally been the case in recent years. They would, however, not be prepared to develop the Pathways proposals as an alternative approach within or without the Talks, as all of the matters included were already within the three strands.

Comment

11. Sean Farren is one of several SDLP members who have come into Northern Ireland and into the party from outside. Sean himself has twice taught outside Northern Ireland (Africa) for periods of some years. His views are characteristically common sense and pragmatic, and he carries no historical or political baggage, probably as a consequence of not having lived NI before or during the Troubles. His preference for a McCrea victory rather than Martin McGuinness in mid-Ulster would not be shared by all his party colleagues, nor would all of those colleagues be entirely comfortable with his very flexible approach to future discussions with the UUP. His estimate that progress is not likely is not based on suspicion or cynicism, but solely on his experience in the Talks to date.

(Signed)

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