

FROM: PETER MAY
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
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S155 / 87

Mr. M. May
- to note, especially para. 11

- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Atkins (DOE, DED & L) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mr Cooke - B
- Mr Dodds - B
- Mr Maccabe o/r - B
- Mr Collins - B
- Mr Archer, RID - B
- HMA Dublin - B

M. Loughran (o/r)
M. Spence
M. Gibsa
M. Cumble
M. Taggart
M. Corr

PA
stand file
24/8/93

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

** to note para 11*

SEAN FARREN: HOPEFUL BUT NOT EXPECTANT

24/8

Summary

Farren was in frank and fairly reflective mood, still clearly committed to reaching an accommodation. He believed bi-laterals were the way into any future talks, and welcomed the prospect of party leaders meeting Michael Ancram. Relaxed about the possibility of a select committee, although not about more powers for local government. Signs of distance between Hume and Farren on a number of issues.

Detail: Talks

2. I met Farren last week. Farren was eager to know the latest position with regard to the political process, and the prospects for further dialogue in the autumn. He volunteered the suggestion that bi-laterals, involving the party leaders, were the way forward, after which have some form of inter-party talks might follow. The immediate need was to seek to identify the areas of flexibility on all sides, and build on what had been achieved in previous talks. He was content to see the Strand 1 sub-committee report as a



starting point for the next round of talks (although that is no particularly surprise given his role in the sub-committee that drafted that report). He suggested, not without irony, that one of the problems of the previous talks had been the unwillingness of the participants to expose their bottom lines. When pressed on what this meant for Strand 1, Farren suggested, as we have heard before, that the key for SDLP was the need to ensure their representatives on the executive were not captured by Unionist-controlled committee or Assembly. He did not view the SDLP's proposals as definitive, recognising the inherent difficulties of any system should one side choose not to play ball. He did not believe the SDLP would hold out for the commission proposal in its current form, but required more than was currently on offer. They would consider any proposals. Farren also recognised it was unrealistic for an assembly to have as little power as envisaged in the Hume model, not least because of the inevitable relationship between those on the commission/panel and the party they represented in the Assembly itself. (Comment: There was no suggestion that this flexibility was reflected in SDLP work to refine their proposals).

3. The Anglo-Irish Agreement represented such a big step forward for Nationalists that it meant for the first time in talks they had something to defend as well as interests and proposals to pursue. They wanted to maintain the gains achieved under the agreement (and naturally some within the party would seek to advance beyond that point). They had been cautious in the Talks, therefore, to ensure that the Unionists were serious before exposing their bargaining position. There had been growing signs towards the end of the process that the UUP were serious about Strand 2, even though those proposals they had put on the table were not sufficient to meet the SDLP's needs. The failure to develop those proposals had meant the SDLP had taken a hard line position on Strand 1, not willing to show flexibility until they could be sure there was a prize worth having overall. They could not be seen simply to be signing up to a deal which secured them "jobs for the boys".

4. He stressed the often - mentioned consequence of any accommodation for the SDLP - that they needed to be able to sign up to the institutions of the state, and support those who seek to protect and secure them. That caused them some difficulties within

their constituency, which could only be overcome by the clear understanding that the SDLP had had input into the formulation of those institutions, and to the security agenda. The Mallon proposals were, as with the SDLP's Strand 1 ideas, not set in stone, but indicative of that requirement. Not to achieve any changes in security would make the job of selling any package practically impossible, thereby giving Sinn Fein a boost electorally. He recognised the need for the SDLP to demonstrate leadership in selling any package, but argued they must have something to sell. He wondered whether Unionists recognised the SDLP's needs in security terms, or whether they had merely been put off by the substance of the Mallon proposals.

5. The key to any accommodation was the allegiance of both communities to the institutions agreed. Reaching this state of affairs would bring peace closer. That was what made the talks so important. It was why he did not believe it was enough to work the agreement and rely on direct rule (which he suggested had provided the best form of Government Northern Ireland had ever had over the past 6-8 years since the Agreement), although he acknowledged this was a tempting proposition for the SDLP.

Irish Government

6. He mentioned once again that he failed to understand the reasons for the Irish Government not having agreed to change from "could" to "would" during the last talks, and asked whether, Spring's comments in March were sufficient. I suggested it may be necessary, at least, for the Taoiseach to repeat them, not least because Spring's credibility among Unionists was at a very low ebb currently.

7. In a discussion on joint authority, Farren said that for many in the SDLP that was an ideal, because it recognised both communities. However he recognised the reality of the position with regard to Unionists, and the difficulties for any British Government joining the ranks of the persuaders. He was unclear as to the logic of the Labour party position if they failed, having joined the persuaders, to convince Unionists. Would they advocate acting over the people's heads, or do nothing? To do the former would be very dangerous.

Hume/Adams Talks

8. Having been involved in the 1988 talks, Farren could not oppose Hume's dialogue with Adams. However he had serious doubts as to whether it would lead anywhere. He was somewhat uneasy about the joint statement that had been issued in April, and while acknowledging Hume's belief that he was more likely to get somewhere with Adams than through the Talks process, doubted whether that was correct. Sinn Fein, despite having done reasonably well in the local elections, had done themselves no favours politically, and may even be bolstered by the dialogue with Hume, which gave them respectability. The SDLP would need to evaluate a fairly shortly what was in the dialogue for them. (Calls by Garret Fitzgerald over the weekend will add weight to such a move).

Select Committee

9. Farren acknowledged that SDLP concerns over a select committee on Northern Ireland were largely a matter of symbolism rather than substance. He believed the SDLP would participate in any such committee, and did not seem to believe either it or the prospect of legislation being introduced by Bill rather than Order were a talks-threatening issue. He was however less sanguine about the prospect of greater powers for local authorities, offering the standard case against any development in that direction. He did, however, acknowledge that many councils were moving in a positive direction in terms of sharing responsibility and ensuring positions in the council's gift were fairly allocated.

Opsahl

10. Farren had been pleased to note the Commission had majored on the need to give the two communities equity of treatment and respect - features the SDLP had long stressed. While, it would suit the SDLP to have fifty/fifty representation on any body governing Northern Ireland, he recognised that those proposals were impractical.

Economic Issues

11. Farren welcomed the recent meeting he had held with Mr Atkins to discuss economic matters, and suggested he might be seeking a further meeting in a few months to discuss the SDLP's submission to the Fair Employment Act review process.

Comment

12. Much of what Farren said was not new, although he was frank about the fact that the stance taken by the SDLP had been for negotiating purposes. He also confirmed that the SDLP had not reached the point of entering negotiations because of their desire to ensure they did not lose ground as a result of the talks. His commitment to reaching an accommodation is clear, and may have resulted in a distance (although by no means a spilt) developing between him and Hume on a number of issues related to talks. It may be useful for Michael Ancram to meet with Farren once Ancram Round II meetings are well under way.

[Signed]

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