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CONFIDENTIAL

24 March 1992

CONVERSATION WITH DAVID FELL

Dear Assistant Secretary

1. I had lunch last Friday with David Fell, the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Fell was on a week's visit to the United States, which included meetings in San Jose, New York and Washington, and attendance at the Irish-American Partnership peace dinner in Boston. I had no sense of any overall objective to the visit - except perhaps, to quote the British Embassy off the record, to "balance" John Chilcot's recent visit here! - nor did Fell see anyone at significant political or executive level in the system.
2. Prospects for round-table talks: Fell was not particularly optimistic about the resumed round-table talks going anywhere in the near future. His instinctive view is that no real progress will be made until Paisley retires from the political scene. At that time, he envisages the Rev. William McCrea almost certainly taking over the leadership of the DUP, leading to an immediate split in the party and the merging of its middle ground (Robinson, Dodds, etc) with the Official Unionists. It might be possible in such circumstances for a strengthened Official Unionist party to show the required degree of courage and leadership to enable the process to be moved forward.

3. Fell went on to express severe criticism of all the likely successors at present to Molyneaux - Ross, Smyth, Taylor, Trimble (he referred to Maginnis, in this context, as attractive but not electable). In the circumstances, he took the view that we might all be better off for the moment with the courteous, if unimaginative, leadership of Molyneaux.
4. Sinn Féin: Fell, somewhat to my surprise, raised the ongoing debate within Sinn Féin and the IRA about their future strategy. He dismissed the view that the debate was over and that the "hard men" had won out and had distanced the IRA from its political wing. On the contrary, his view was that Adams was still firmly in control and had, if anything, significantly strengthened his position through forging a strategic alliance with Martin McGuinness and Danny Morrison - and in the process bringing together the three key elements in Northern nationalism, Belfast, Derry and the prisons.
5. Fell also left me with the impression that serious ongoing consideration was being given by the British to ways of bringing Sinn Féin into the political process, with significant support for such an approach existing at senior administrative level in the NIO (Chilcot?). Fell added that he "philosophically" agreed with the argument for Sinn Féin involvement and that, in particular, he saw the need to bring the ten per cent of the electorate who voted for Sinn Féin within the talks process. Indeed, he questioned whether any sustainable agreement would be possible without their involvement.

6. Fell went on to say that the efforts of the Catholic and Anglican Churches to reach out to Sinn Féin/IRA would now be easier in the light of the recent Presbyterian Church meetings with Protestant paramilitaries. He obviously welcomes these contacts and hopes that they can be further developed. (In this general regard, you will have noted the reference in the important Patrick's Day Statement by Cardinal Law of Boston -obviously reflecting Cardinal Daly's views, whom he had visited in Armagh the previous weekend - to the effect that it "may be that preliminary soundings to test the genuineness of Sinn Féin's desire to disassociate itself completely from violence might pave the way for the eventual inclusion of Sinn Féin in multilateral discussions").

7. Peter Brooke: Fell believes that, if the Tories win the election, Peter Brooke has only a five to ten per cent chance of being reappointed. He doubts also if Mawhinney has any real chance of succeeding to the Brooke post - and personally hopes there is no possibility of this! He also lays much of the blame for the Secretary of State staying on in Dublin after the Teebane massacre at Mawhinney's door who, as weekend Minister at Stormont, had (deviously) advised Mr Brooke that he would be giving in to the Provos if he returned to the North! Finally, Fell refused to be drawn on who the likely candidates were for appointment to the Secretary of State position.

8. Possible computer project in West Belfast: In conclusion, Fell mentioned that he had some useful meetings in San Jose

with Tom McEnergy, the former Mayor of the city (who is very helpful to the Consulate in San Francisco and the IDA). McEnergy briefed Fell on an inner city project in San Jose which seeks to exploit the (passive computer) skills learnt by disadvantaged children in gaming and pinball halls, and tempt them into productive work in special computer industries. The San Jose model has already been successfully exported to Costa Rica and, at the suggestion of Maurice Hayes (the former Northern Ombudsman), Fell had discussions with McEnergy, and subsequently with the Apple Computer Company, with a view to establishing a project of this kind in West Belfast. While discussions are on-going, Fell seems quite hopeful of a positive outcome; I will ask the Consulate in San Francisco to obtain further details on the above and report back.

Yours sincerely



Dermot Gallagher
Ambassador

Mr Seán Ó hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs