



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Joint Secretary

As you are aware myself and Dermot Cole met with two NIO officials, Peter Smyth and Peter May for lunch on 14 January. We were joined by David Kyle and Clive Barbour from the British Side of the Secretariat. Smyth operates as a NIO contact with Unionist Councillors while May is one of their SDLP "travellers". The most interesting points to emerge during the conversation were

1. Sinn Fein/IRA Reaction to the Peace Declaration. They asked us repeatedly whether the Irish Government was speaking directly to Sinn Fein. I repeated the Tanaiste's recent statement that no Irish Government official was authorised to speak to Sinn Fein. It was apparent throughout the lunch that the two NIO officials believed that we were in some form of contact with Sinn Fein. Both were of the opinion that the IRA had already rejected the Declaration in its present form. Hence they were perplexed by the upbeat noises in the form of speeches and comments coming from Dublin. The only explanation was that we had access to information directly from the Republican movement.

2. Unionist Reaction to the Declaration. Both officials said that they were certain that James Molyneaux was sincere in wanting the Provos to accept the Declaration. Molyneaux has rarely taken a political gamble in his life and his acceptance of the Peace Declaration represented his last major fling. He has two or three years at most left as leader and badly wants to leave on a positive note. The NIO officials said that Molyneaux is actually more broadminded than he is given credit for but has always had to keep DUP reaction in mind over the last few years. He is at last free from that particular "monkey on his back" and is relieved to be following his own policy. In support of their thesis that Molyneaux is more liberal than he is painted, they pointed to the people closest to him in the OUP in recent years, Frank Miller, Martin Smyth, Ken Maginnis etc.

They and David Kyle believed that the average Unionist is actually more in favour of the Declaration than has been articulated so far. However everything depends on the end to violence. If the IRA end their campaign then Molyneaux will be completely justified and Paisley will be discredited. However if the present situation drags on then the "Big Man" will be proved right again. The biggest casualty in those circumstances apart from Molyneaux would be the moderate Unionism. They believed that Molyneaux is now mentally prepared to sit down with Sinn Fein once the violence ended and to do so within a reasonably short time.

According to the NIO people it looks more and more likely that John Taylor will succeed Molyneaux as OUP leader. Taylor because of his long political career in areas like South Tyrone, Armagh

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and now County Down has a very broad support at grass roots level across the party. The NIO people believe that Taylor's accession would damage political relations. Taylor has a very poor image in the Nationalist community, many remember his time as Junior Home Affairs Minister at Stormont. If Molyneux goes then the future could be bleak.

4. Ancram Talks. There appeared to be an acceptance on the Other Side that the Ancram Talks should now be pursued with the utmost vigour and that they should proceed without Sinn Fein's involvement. They clearly wanted to see a locally elected Assembly established as soon as possible. They asked whether the Nationalist Community was afraid that a Stormont type regime could be re-established. I said that the Taoiseach had addressed that issue recently.



Ray Baseett
15 January 1994.