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Reference Code: 2021/48/96

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Conversation with Professor Paul Arthur
7 September 1994

Philip McDonagh and I met Paul Arthur, Professor of Politics at the University of Ulster, for lunch on Wednesday. As you know, Arthur is attending the BIA in Oxford this weekend but he had travelled to London a few days early to pursue some research for a paper he is writing on the Heath administration.

While in town he had also been approached for comment by BBC Radio Scotland, The Mail on Sunday and The Guardian, though he remarked ruefully that The Mail had subsequently decided to drop his article. He also regretted that he had missed an opportunity to anchor a discussion on Newnight on the evening of the IRA's declaration as he was tied up with university business in Limerick.

Because of absences in both Limerick and London over the last week he admitted to feeling slightly distanced from the current mood in Northern Ireland. However, he did make a number of observations, in particular on the unionist position, which may be of some interest.

1. He was generally positive about current developments and optimistic that the IRA ceasefire would hold, though there could be up to two years of negotiations ahead. He was not too perturbed about the Prime Minister's cautious response as he believed that this was one policy success that Major was not going to run the risk of losing. Mayhew's reaction, he felt, was yet another indication of the Secretary of State's legal background, he was more of a lawyer than a politician and this was coming through in many of his remarks. He hoped for an increase in the use of religious language such as "the healing of wounds" as distinct from the less helpful "quarantine period" and "decontamination.". Peter Brooke, he felt, would have handled things differently and having started the ball rolling must be feeling very frustrated now.
2. While he agreed that the Taoiseach's meeting with Adams had to come when it did, he was concerned that Dublin should not make too much public capital out of current developments at the risk of antagonising unionist opinion. He recalled receiving a number of calls from contacts in the unionist community, who were worried by some statements originating in Dublin in the run up to the IRA's announcement and had attempted to reassure them by pointing to the tough briefing which the Taoiseach had given the Morrison delegation on the necessity for a complete cessation of violence. It had helped that this sense of the tone and content of that meeting had been confirmed to unionists by other sources.
3. Arthur was upbeat on the prospects for a loyalist ceasefire. He maintained that the UVF and at least part of the UDA were now ready to react positively but were looking for a lead. These elements had, he said, nothing but contempt for Paisley and would be more interested in

what Molyneux had to say. It would be very important now to reach out to people like the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Hugh Smyth, who had made a helpful statement after the IRA announcement. Arthur said he had tried to get the BIA to invite Smyth this year but that they had refused on the grounds of his supposed closeness to the loyalist paramilitaries. Arthur's point was that that was precisely why they should reach out to him and others like him. However, he was pleased that he had succeeded in arranging for the attendance of Rev Roy Magee.

4. Arthur expressed concern at the current lack of self-confidence in unionism which he felt needed to be urgently addressed. In this context, he spoke about the possibility of establishing a unionist forum. This idea had been raised in a positive way prior to the IRA's declaration but had been blocked by Paisley. Now he had adopted it because it suited him to present it in reaction to and in competition with the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. Arthur felt it would be most unfortunate if this meant that the idea behind it was therefore seen as negative. It could only be a good thing to get all elements of unionism talking and it might help to give the loyalists the signal they too needed to come in from the cold. The biggest danger at the moment was the lack of a unionist big idea. They had the ability to knock the whole house of cards down but they had nothing to put in its place.
5. Arthur had been concerned to learn of Molyneux's forthcoming two week trip to Australia, which the Ambassador has reported on separately. He had heard that Molyneux, who is well aware of the eagerness of some of his colleagues to succeed him, had remarked that he wondered how "the five contenders" would behave themselves in his absence. Of the five, Arthur was most anxious about the activities of Taylor and more particularly Trimble whom he described as a dangerous man. The only upside was that he had already irritated so many of his party colleagues by "showing off" that his ambitions were unlikely to come to fruition.
6. On the general point of Molyneux travelling outside of Northern Ireland and the Westminster parliament, Arthur felt that this was in principle a very good thing. He understood that Molyneux had been so pleased with his first visit to Australia as a guest of the Orange Lodge that he now made regular trips back there. Arthur had also heard that when Molyneux went to the States recently, possibly for the first time, he had been very impressed by the reception he had received. Other such visits might be very helpful towards addressing the unionist sense of isolation.
7. In the longer term, Arthur foresaw some possible party realignments in Northern Ireland with Paisley losing out and, as he put it, rediscovering his religious roots. He wondered where Peter Robinson might go. At the moment, in Paisley's presence, he was like a rabbit caught in the headlights. It seemed there would be nowhere he could go but to the OUP but there were already too many egos there and the relationship between Taylor and Robinson was as

bad as that between Paisley and Adams. He didn't expect anything as dramatic as a Sinn Fein/SDLP merger but felt that in the context of electoral cooperation or understandings Joe Hendron would be very likely to lose his seat.

8. He had not followed closely the current media speculation that Tony Blair had begun to shift the party away from unity by consent but remarked that John Hume had said he wasn't losing any sleep over Blair's election as Labour Leader. He had read Richard Holme's article in The Guardian and noted the low ranking of North-South links and the all-Ireland dimension which he felt was uncharacteristic of Holme and even out of touch with John Alderdice who "had completely changed his tune and decided to run with this thing".
9. He speculated that the BIA might have been done out of a job by developments. While he accepted the need for continued links of that nature, on the lines of the Anglo-German Konigswinter meetings, he felt they would be less political and less urgent and that in any event the BIA should never have considered itself a potential broker.
10. As a final point he recalled the words of Bernadette McAlliskey when she described the Downing Street Declaration as a funnel - wide at the top but narrow at the bottom. The further down the IRA went the harder it would be to get out without going all the way through to what lay on the other side. An example of light at the end of the funnel perhaps?