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Nally K...

20 June, 1996.

Mr. Seán O hUiginn,
Second Secretary,
Anglo-Irish Division,
Department of Foreign Affairs,
St. Stephen's Green,
DUBLIN 2.

in Hare
Please follow

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MR. P. TEAHON	
MR. S. DONLON	
MR. T. DALTON	

8. 7 96 -

Tairiadh

Sir Patrick's positions, - some
such as X, page v, overpaken by
events, are, on the whole,
encouraging

Dear Secretary,

Conversation with Sir Patrick Mayhew

21. 6 96

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland came to lunch at the Embassy today accompanied by his private secretary Martin Howard. I was accompanied by Colin Wrafter.

Belfast Talks

Sir Patrick described himself as being in "chirpy mood" after the two weeks of talks in Belfast. The talks themselves were wearisome but at least people were getting together and some progress had been made, especially on the chairmanship issue. I pointed out that progress had been achieved at the price of opening up the texts that had between negotiated at some length between the two Governments and that we were particularly concerned at the efforts of Robinson yesterday to bring the Ground Rules Document into the frame. Sir Patrick admitted the difficulties posed by this. The British Government did not want to reopen Ground Rules which remained the bedrock for the talks. On the other hand there were things in the Ground Rules that the Unionist side had difficulties with, in particular the references to the Framework Document. He

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X had some understanding for the Unionist position on this point and for their desire to have a single set of guidelines for the conduct of the negotiations. It was for this reason that he wondered whether it would be possible to import into the guidelines paper elements of the Ground Rules. I pointed to the risk that this would allow an opening to the Unionists to renegotiate Ground Rules. Sir Patrick said that he had spoken to Trimble yesterday and had concluded that, for the UUP at least, the problem was not with the procedural content of Ground Rules but with the political aspects. He thought that Trimble would be willing to incorporate the procedural aspects of Ground Rules virtually unchanged in the Procedural Guidelines. The Ground Rules document itself would remain unaltered as the agreed reference document for the talks. It had after all been referred to in British legislation and issued as a command paper.

Mayhew was amusing on the antics of Paisley and others and keen to recount anecdotes from the negotiations which I need not go into here. Some of his comments on individuals may however be of interest. He said that Trimble was "having a ball" and that Robinson "would like to have a ball". Both were anxious to be involved in real politics on issues of relevance to Northern Ireland and not to be simply sitting on the sidelines in Westminster. This was what was motivating them and we should be encouraged by it and exploit it. Trimble in particular wanted to make the process work. McCartney on the other hand was out to play a spoiling role and had been well described as "a Shankill thug with brains". He was clever but not as clever as he thought. Robinson was probably brighter than both. Trimble of course had to contend with enormous difficulties within his own party few of whose MPs liked or trusted him. Taylor was childish, "a villain" who would use every opportunity to embarrass or wrongfoot his leader. That of course was one of the reasons why Trimble tried to bind Taylor to him by including him in all important meetings. I mentioned that Empey appeared to be playing a constructive role. Mayhew said that Empey was personally a likeable man who was trying to win his way back with Trimble. But we should be wary; he himself had found during the earlier talks that Empey could not be counted on.

Ceasefire

Sir Patrick said that in the British view the Republican Movement was confused on its tactics and strategy and really did not know where it was going. He accepted that Adams wanted to pursue the peace strategy and McGuinness probably did also. But McGuinness was still the Northern Commander of the IRA. If things got tough within the movement Adams would probably be the

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first to go. On his second meeting with Adams last year Adams had accused the British of trying to split the Republican Movement. Mayhew had replied that this was the last thing they wanted; this remained the British position. At this point Howard enquired whether we had any worries that the very specific questions asked of Sinn Féin by the Irish Government might create further tensions within the Republican Movement and exacerbate the risk of a split. Mayhew seeing the difficulty with this line moved in quickly to say that the Irish Government knew best how to handle its own relations with Sinn Féin and the British Government would not wish to advise us on that. He did however say that he felt that Adams's answer in this morning's Irish Times to the question about Sinn Féin's attitude to violence was inadequate. To say that Sinn Féin did "not advocate armed struggle" was very weak indeed. I pointed out that Adams's article had gone somewhat beyond non-advocacy of violence but refrained from further comment on the point other than that we were analysing Adams's replies. — *What is there to analyse !!!?*

At several points in the discussion Mayhew emphasised that the British Government wanted to keep the door open to Sinn Féin to enter the talks. The Manchester bomb had objectively made this more difficult but he wanted to avoid getting hung up on language and on words such as "permanent". Such an approach would get us nowhere. I asked whether a restoration of the 1994 ceasefire was sufficient, as demanded in the February Communique, or were the British now looking for 1994 plus. Mayhew said clearly that they were not looking for 1994 plus, but that a ceasefire would have to be a clear and demonstrable reality on the ground. This was more important than demands for new language. In this respect he agreed with the Taoiseach's "wise words" on Sunday that Sinn Féin must now respond in their own way to the requirements of the two Governments.

Commenting on the Manchester bombing Sir Patrick said that he had been struck by the relatively restrained reaction in Britain. Most people in Britain knew that the atrocity had nothing to do with the people of Ireland who had made clear their overwhelming rejection of violence. He did not yet know how the bombing had come about. The IRA operated on a cellular structure, not on a clear, linear line of command. He expected that he "may very well" know more about this soon.

Contacts with Sinn Féin

I referred to the reference in Adams's article to the British Government's

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"refusal to have any contact with republicans" and asked if there had been a change in policy. Had they turned down requests from Sinn Fein for meetings? Sir Patrick said that there had been no change in policy on contacts since Canary Wharf. Ministerial contacts were prohibited but official level contacts could continue. The last substantive meeting had taken place in February and there had been the meeting on 10 June to explain to Sinn Fein representatives why they could not be admitted to the talks. As far as he knew there had been no requests for meetings since February. In other words the link was there but had not been activated. He added that he wanted to avoid the situation that existed before of clandestine contacts.

Is this true

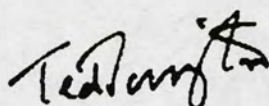
Backbench Reaction

Sir Patrick was confident that the Government could withstand pressure from the backbenches and "the likes of David Wiltshire" for fundamental changes in British policy. We should have no worries on that score. The Government was determined to press ahead. Any revolt was likely to be small, but if the worst came to the worst they would see off the rebels, if necessary with the support of the Labour Party.

Comment

Sir Patrick was in an upbeat mood, as he himself admitted, and wanted to project a relaxed attitude. Clearly the British now feel that the pressures within the Belfast talks are on the other Parties, and that the pressures outside the talks are on Sinn Féin. Of the various points made I was struck in particular by the emphasis on the need to keep the door open to Sinn Féin to enter the talks and to avoid getting caught up in new language that would make this more difficult.

Yours sincerely,



Ted Barrington
Ambassador