

PC 149/7

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CONFIDENTIAL

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

- cc - PS/Secretary of State (L&B) (M)
- PS/Mr Patten (L&B) (M)
- PS/PUS (L&B) (M)
- PS/Sir Ewart Bell
- Mr Bourn
- Mr Brennan (M)
- Mr Angel (M)
- Mr Merifield
- Mr Templeton
- Mr Carvill ✓
- Mr Abbott (M)
- Mr Lyon (M)
- Mr Edis
- Mr Coulson
- Mr Bickham (M)

SEAN FARREN: SDLP

I had lunch today with Sean Farren in Coleraine. He was in a more relaxed and confident mood than on previous occasions. The main points of interest were as follows:-

(i) SDLP

Farren was predictably pleased at John Hume's success in the European Elections and said that this had created a new wave of confidence in the Party. He thought that they were now in a position to enter the 1985 Local Government Elections with a fair degree of success.

His view was that Sinn Fein would probably win 45-50 seats; mainly from new seats, the IIP and other Independent Nationalists. He accepted that this could affect the balance in several councils west of the Bann. He was, however, reluctant to foresee any possibility of SDLP and Sinn Fein working together on council level. (But see (ii) below).

(ii) SINN FEIN

Farren thought that the Sinn Fein leadership (in particular Gerry Adams) was becoming more attracted to 'the political path'. Although he agreed that HMG could not have any dealings with the Party, whilst they still supported the IRA campaign, he personally was attracted to encouraging Sinn Fein into the political process. He was dismissive

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of the recent BBC 2 programme and its opinion poll. He thought that the main conclusion for us to draw was that the large majority of the minority community distrusted the British.

(iii) PARTY TALKS

The recent SDLP conference had given John Hume a mandate for discussions with other NI parties. At present, this was limited to a party leader-to-party leader basis. If there appears to be a sense of willingness to discuss broader questions, then individual members of the SDLP would be involved in the talks.

Farren was convinced that the next six months represented a crucial period. The public statements by Unionist leaders suggested that they may be prepared to move and he personally was encouraged by British and Irish Government statements in recent weeks although he admitted that this latter view was not shared by all members of his Party. He was not, however, personally optimistic. Although the DUP had indicated a willingness to talk, there was no sense of movement from the OUP. Farren did not think that their professed willingness to make concessions amounted to very much in practise.

He was predictably vague on details. It would be necessary for progress to be made - and be seen to be made - on both the Anglo-Irish as well as the internal scene. The more the minority community (ie SDLP) could be convinced that HMG was serious in following up the Forum Report the greater the chances of movement in discussions about the internal framework in the Province. Farren thought that the Secretary of State would have to put pressure on all parties to get the talks moving. If things were left to themselves, nothing would happen.

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