

CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

MR Spence

PAB/3978/DP

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 ② Mr Hanrahan 21/5
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PAB (88) 7

PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B

I attach the latest political analysis by PAB of developments in Northern Ireland since the beginning of May. The most notable event during this period was the meeting between the Secretary of State and the two unionist leaders which had been billed by the unionists as the "crunch meeting". Considerable attention has also been devoted to remarks in the aftermath of the meeting especially those of Molyneaux, Robinson and Hume during the "Weekend World" programme on 15 May.

The Unionists

2. In the run up to their meeting on 11 May with the Secretary of State the two unionist leaders created a 'make or break' atmosphere by declaring that the Secretary of State would have to answer yes or no to their question as to whether he was prepared to consider an alternative to the Agreement. The media seized upon this and openly speculated that this could mark the end of the talks about talks phase. After the meeting, the two unionist leaders reported that a further meeting was to be held very soon and that the Secretary of State had indicated that they could put their proposals forward "without preconditions". When pressed by reporters Paisley reaffirmed the unionist stance that they had nothing else to put before the Secretary of State "but an alternative to and a replacement of the Anglo-Irish Agreement" and he went on to say that they would have to consult with party colleagues. In a reference to being "only one third of the way along the road" the DUP leader appeared to see the talks about talks as a first step and to maintain the position that further progress depended on the ending of the Agreement and the closure of the Maryfield Secretariat.

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3. Two differing view-points have emerged within the unionist community. One group maintains, despite denials from the two leaders, that the continuing meetings meant that they were being "strung along". While welcoming the prospect of further talks, the Charter Group warned "We must alert the grassroots to our understanding that NIO strategy is to string out the talks about talks until after the loyalist marching season". The former President of the Campaign for Equal Citizenship, Robert McCartney, accused the unionist leaders of wanting "some form of face-saving device". He also suggested that they had no cards to play and that the Secretary of State would "string them along" until the review period in November.

4. On the other hand these are including many influential members close to the centre of both parties, who have said that there are different paths to progress. Interviews with Molyneaux and Robinson on "Weekend World" programme on 15 May have been seen as indicating a new flexibility in unionist thinking. Molyneaux, while insisting that unionists still refuse their consent to the Agreement, said they were prepared to adopt a constructive approach to a new arrangement. He also indicated that "at some stage it may be necessary and desirable to talk to Mr Haughey" with an exchange of papers as a possible first step in preparing the ground for any such discussions. He said that if the two governments indicated "even by implication" that they were willing to consider an alternative to the Agreement, that would be sufficient for the unionists to put forward detailed proposals. He was also prepared to hold discussions with the SDLP, "if we can go forward a bit from what happened this week with Mr King and have a clear indication that everyone is prepared to look at the possibility of designing a superior agreement....". Robinson said that if the two communities in Northern Ireland came together to reach agreement on "a new structure in Northern Ireland, there would clearly be a relationship between it and the government of the Irish Republic". On talks with the SDLP, Robinson said that if Hume was prepared to consider an alternative to the Agreement, the logical step was for the Secretary of State to convene a conference bringing the two sides together to

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consider new arrangements. In contrast to these signs of apparent flexibility, Paisley, who was not interviewed on the programme, has made clear that he would not talk to the SDLP while its discussions with Sinn Fein were continuing and that the Irish Government could not be involved in discussions on an internal settlement in Northern Ireland.

5. Separately, at a seminar held in Dublin by the Irish Association for Cultural Economic and Social Relations, Ken Maginnis outlined a three-stage process leading to a devolved administration. In the first stage, under the sponsorship of the British and Irish Governments, the Northern Ireland constitutional parties would negotiate the solution to the problem and give a commitment to implement that solution. The second stage would see the creation of a new relationship with the British Government to replace "that which was destroyed in November 1985". The third stage would involve the new devolved administration "talking with the Irish Republic" to define the relationship with Dublin.

6. During the period that these various declarations on future unionist policy were being made some interesting, but not significant, changes occurred affecting unionist personalities. At a meeting on 7 May Jim Nicholson, who lost his Westminster seat in the by-elections held in January 1986, was chosen as the UUP candidate for next year's European elections. Nicholson, a south Armagh farmer, defeated three other candidates to win the nomination and he now looks set to win the Strasbourg seat currently held by John Taylor. It has also been announced that Nigel Dodds has been elected Lord mayor of Belfast in succession to Dixie Gilmour. Dodds, aged 29, will be the city's youngest ever Lord Mayor and for the past five years has been Paisley's adviser and assistant in the European Parliament. He has confirmed his intention of carrying on with the boycott of NIO Ministers and of links with the Republic of Ireland saying these "may be a small thing, but they are the only way we have of showing our resentment. There can be no going back on that until there is some signal that Mr King is prepared to seek an alternative to the Agreement".

The SDLP

7. One immediate SDLP reaction to the meeting between the Secretary of State and Paisley and Molyneaux was to accuse the unionists of having "no constructive ideas" which would lead to reconciliation and progress. Eddie McGrady MP poured cold water over the prospects for early progress saying that it would be much more appropriate if the two unionist leaders engaged in dialogue with the SDLP, "It should be totally evident to unionists that their own supporters are demanding a more positive policy to be adopted. Both leaders must take note of this and undertake, for the first time, a serious effort to come up with proposals which they could put to the SDLP". However some days later, on the Weekend World programme, John Hume appeared more conciliatory and argued that there could be no stable future for Ireland without the agreement of the unionist people. The first step would be for the unionist leaders to talk to Dublin. This would lead to a constitutional conference to decide how nationalists and unionists should share the island of Ireland. Hume's remark that any agreement which emerged from this process would "transcend any previous agreement" and his expression of willingness to talk to unionists outside the framework of the Anglo-Irish Agreement have been interpreted by some unionist leaders as opening up possibilities for political progress. Paisley's interpretation of Hume's statement as acknowledging "that the Anglo-Irish Agreement must now be replaced by a new agreement" has, however, been challenged by Seamus Mallon who made clear that his leader was not suggesting that an arrangement with unionists could replace the Agreement.

The Alliance Party

8. At a meeting with the Secretary of State on 11 May under the broad umbrella of the talks about talks process the Alliance Party reaffirmed its support for a policy of devolution and expressed concern that the opportunity should now be taken to develop a wider dialogue between the constitutional political parties. The delegation was headed by party leader John Alderdice and included party chairman Dan McGuinness and deputy leader Gordon Mawhinney.

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Alderdice said that the review process was one way in which unionists could influence and change the Agreement but the Secretary of State made it clear that it would not be right for the Government to go "touting" for views. It is understood that the meeting did not discuss any details of the Secretary of State's talks with the SDLP or the unionist leaders.

General

9. A meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference took place on 4 May in Dublin when the main topics discussed were security, and social and economic matters. Irish Ministers are understood to have accepted that all relevant information will be available for consideration at the inquest into the controversial shooting of the three IRA members in Gibraltar. During the visit to Dublin the Secretary of State had a meeting with the Taoiseach when it is believed that they discussed both governments' commitment to the Anglo-Irish process.

10. During graveside ceremonies commemorating the eight IRA men shot dead during the attack in Loughgall RUC Station last year Martin McGuinness, a vice president of Sinn Fein, confirmed that the talks between his party and the SDLP "have absolutely nothing whatsoever" to do with ceasefires. He also said, "Those people who say that there will be no place at the conference table for Sinn Fein until the IRA ends its campaign, are living in cloud cuckoo land if they think Sinn Fein will withdraw support from the Irish Republican Army". He accused HMG of having taken a high level decision "to execute" the three IRA members in Gibraltar and contended that a similar decision had been taken in the case of the Loughgall shooting. He argued that that campaign had failed and that the IRA had shown in Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands "that they would not be intimidated".

11. As their response to the proposed fair employment legislation a number of unionist groupings have come together to form the Anti-Discrimination Association. At a press conference in Belfast Gregory Campbell, DUP leader on Derry City Council, said the

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association would insist on merit being the only criterion for job appointments. He emphasised that the organisation had not been formed specifically "to highlight discrimination against Protestants but to highlight the criteria of merit for the employment of any person". He added that the organisation would be looking for representation on the Fair Employment Commission when it was set up. This new body is understood to be supported by the Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys of Derry, and the Independent Orange Order as well as the two unionist parties.

Comment

12. There can be little doubt that most attention has centred on the apparently hopeful mood in which the two unionist leaders came out of their recent meeting with the Secretary of State. What had been billed as the "make or break" meeting, appears to have passed in a constructive mood with the hope expressed that a way can be found round the impasse of the Agreement. Devolution in some guise seems to be the common goal but there is no apparent consensus between unionists and the SDLP as to what form this might take. Unionists are determined that devolution arrangements should "replace" the Agreement whilst the SDLP want such an arrangement within the framework of the Agreement.

13. Without doubt observers have seen the reaction of the two leaders after their meeting, and the comments by Robinson, and Maginnis as positive signs. The unionist leaders have, however, declared their intention of consulting with the inter-party working group and the expectation is that the next meeting with the Secretary of State will further clarify the position and also signal to what extent the leaders believe that they can carry their parties with them.

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Political Affairs Division
18 May 1988

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NOTE: For reference purposes a diary of the main political developments between 1 January and 30 April has been attached to this Bulletin.

cc PS/Ministers (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Burns - B
Mr Chesterton - B
Mr Innes - B
Mr Miles - B
Mr Steele - B
Miss Pease - B
Mr Spence
Mr Wood - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Daniell
Mr D Kirk - B
Mr Coston
Mr Hewitt - B
Mr A Mackay MP c/o PO
NIO(L) - B
Mr George RID FCO - MUFAX
Dr C Sperling, Research Dept
FCO - MUFAX
Mr P J Weston, Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall - MUFAX
Mr G C Gillham Assessment
Staff, 70 Whitehall - MUFAX
Mr Cowper-Coles, British
Embassy, Washington
British Embassy Dublin
Mr J Harrison CIVAD HQNI

DIARY OF SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS

1 JANUARY TO 30 APRIL 1988

- 8 January Peter Robinson re-elected as DUP deputy leader.
- A meeting of UUP and DUP strategists took place to draft proposals to put to HMG at the next 'talks about talks' Session. Those involved - Harold McCusker, Rev Martin Smyth, UUP Chief Executive Jack Allen and General Secretary Jim Wilson. DUP members Rev Wm McCrea, Sammy Wilson, Peter Robinson and Nigel Dodds, as well as Paisley and Molyneaux.
- 11 January John Hume meets for talks with Gerry Adams. The get-together was initiated by an unnamed 'third party'.
- 17 January Sunday Tribune report that Charles Haughey knew of the meeting between John Hume and Gerry Adams and gave his approval to it going ahead.
- 19 January Bishop of Derry, Dr Edward Daly, lifts his ban on the remains of IRA men being admitted to churches in the city for Requiem Mass.
- 23 January A meeting of SDLP constituency representatives unanimously supports the opening of dialogue with SF.
- 25 January The Attorney-General, Sir Patrick Mayhew announces that no prosecutions are to be mounted against RUC officers in the wake of the Stalker/Sampson investigation of shoot to kill allegations.
- 26 January Seventh session of the "talks about talks" between the Secretary of State and the two unionist leaders.
- 28 January Birmingham Six Appeal dismissed by the Appeal Court in London. Cardinal O Fiaich said the dismissal would shake whatever confidence the nationalist people of NI may have in British justice. Bishop of Derry, Edward Daly said he was devastated and heartbroken by the decision.
- 2 February Anglo-Irish Conference Meeting at Stormont.

4 February John Alderdice has a meeting with the Prime Minister in London.

8 February Sean Neeson of Alliance Party announces his resignation from politics.

11 February An 'informal meeting' held in London between SofS and Mr Stanley and Dublin Ministers Gerry Collins and Ray Burke.

16 February A/I Intergovernmental Conference at S/Castle.

21 February Aidan McAnespie dies as a result of a shooting incident at the border crossing point at Aughnacloy.

24 February Meeting of A/I Intergovernmental Conference - Dublin

6 March Three IRA terrorists shot dead in Gibraltar.

11 March Andy Tyrie resigns as the leader of the UDA.

14 March Mr Bob McCartney, President of the Campaign for Equal Citizenship resigns.

16 March 3 people killed in Milltown cemetery during the funeral of the IRA team shot in Gibraltar.

19 March Corporals Derek Wood and Bob Howes attacked and killed during funeral in West Belfast.

23 March John Hume has further talks with Sinn Fein.

25 March Anglo-Irish Conference meeting in London

28 March New Political pressure group launched - The Campaign for a Devolved Parliament. Prominent members are:- Harry West, Austin Ardill, David McNarry and James Gorman. The aims are presented in 'A Better Deal Together'.

16 April Workers Party Ard Fheis held in Dublin. The party calls for the removal of the A/I Secretariat from Belfast and the holding of all future meetings in London and Dublin so that all-party conference talks on devolution can take place.

26 April SofS meets SDLP party delegation led by John Hume.

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