

HL1.

CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

RJA/537/91/sh

141/8
-6 AUG 1991
CENT SEC

3937 -

FROM: R J ALSTON
US(POL)

25 July 1991

cc PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B

7/8
cc Mr ~~Alston~~ JRA/20/7

MR THOMAS - B

THE DIALOGUE WITH THE IRISH (AND THE UNIONISTS)

Recent reports and analyses circulated separately have underlined how sharply the Taoiseach's agenda for Ireland may diverge from ours, despite the mutually supportive position maintained with Dublin over the political talks. The briefing prepared for tomorrow's Diner concentrates on providing a number of key correctives. It is not however a separate "vision" in itself. It seems to me that we ought to be working towards putting forward an overall view of our own in the further meetings due in the Autumn. This minute sketches out a view of the shape that might take, which we might have in the back of our minds tomorrow night. I think it is consistent with the steers we have had from Ministers. The need for it is underlined by Sir N Fenn's note of his call on the Taoiseach - "he hoped to try another way".

2. I leave the electoral factors to one side. Were Labour to win policy will need to be re-defined anyway (and we shall be discussing this next week). If the Conservatives win there will presumably be broad continuity of policy. One significant factor is that, after the British General Election, it will be the Taoiseach who is the man in a hurry. This will leave us not badly placed to spell out fairly firmly the limits on what can be tried in the relatively short time remaining to him. I also have the feeling that a more limited approach would be not unwelcome to many if not most of the other key actors on the Irish side.

CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

3. The essential message to get across will be to confirm the signals in the brief for this week which exclude withdrawal and the New Ireland Forum options whilst confirming that significant steps forward are possible if the two Governments continue to work together on the basis of 26 March, with the prospect of a deal which on the Irish side has a Haughey label on it and which marks real steps towards reconciliation and prospects of ending violence. Elements of the message (many but not all of which are in this week's briefing material) would include:

- (a) the approach sketched out in April 1990 and enshrined in the 26 March statement is basically the only one which holds out a real chance of progress in the next few years;
- (b) the key to progress is natural growth in relationships within Ireland. We are committed to encouraging all concerned in this path. Our role is not the central issue but maintaining the balance enshrined in Article 1 of the Agreement is an essential stabilising factor. The key will be whether Dublin and Unionists can begin to build a relationship with each other. In this context the Irish constitution is bound to remain a central element;
- (c) there can be no coercion and no imposed approach. We start from the other end, the need to re-establish more than normal democratic processes in Northern Ireland. But the broader relationships are also essential. It is premature to try to escape the lesson of history that models involving Dublin authority in Northern Ireland will get nowhere. But the evolution of the EC does provide a context in which links can be built without whilst avoiding the arguments about sovereignty, and a new political

CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

structure in Belfast will be well placed to build its own links to Dublin. [Between now and the Autumn it will also be worth thinking through amongst ourselves whether there is any mileage in Sir Robin Day's thought that new British/Irish links could also help to provide a framework for new intra-Irish ones];

- Did we find the history Day asked - the book? yes*
- (d) there should be parallel emphasis on economic co-operation on a basis of equality and in mutual self-interest and on all the programmes which seek to break down mistrust and suspicion between the two traditions in Northern Ireland and between North and South;
- (e) the Provisional movement cannot be bought off as part of this process. The Governments recognise that the Republican tradition cannot be wished away but must seek to persuade it that there can be no place in the political process whilst violence continues. In the meantime the Governments must work more visibly and more effectively together in countering the IRA, and in seeking to marginalise it within the nationalist community (which we have to recognise will involve unremitting effort by us in economic and social policy, and the substance and presentation of security policy). This, plus success in the talks, would provide a powerful stimulus to them to reconsider their approach.

4. In parallel with this it may be useful to set out the elements of the complementary position to be adopted with Unionists. These might include:

- (a) HMG's position on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland is firm;
- (b) HMG has no self-interested agenda in Ireland. Direct rule is no more satisfactory to us than to people here. We will adhere to the principle of seeking to strengthen the democratic processes in Northern Ireland;

CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

- (c) we are also committed to encouraging the natural development of relationships between the communities of Northern Ireland, and between them and those in the South. This requires a real effort by all concerned;

- (d) beyond Northern Ireland itself we do not see the way forward as lying primarily in discussions about authority and sovereignty (from Dublin or London) but in increasing working co-operation at all levels in mutual self-interest. The relationship between Unionists and Dublin is central to this process. We look to a positive and imaginative approach on both sides. In that context, but no other, the Agreement and the symbolism it has for Unionists can be looked at again;

- (e) there can be no question of buying off the Provisional movement as part of this process without an end to violence, though all concerned will need to recognise a long-term need to accommodate the Republican tradition. Progress in the three stranded talks would be a powerful stimulus to them to rethink what they seek to achieve. Meanwhile the efforts to counter violence and marginalise the IRA will continue. This is not just a question of more activity but of skillful management and presentation of security policy to the nationalist community. Unionists have their own part to play in this.

5. Questions to test further along the way if we do want to develop this kind of approach might include:

- (a) the continuing validity of the judgement that Unionists can be led but not pressurised;

CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

- (b) that the goals of political progress and any kind of deal with the Provisionals are incompatible and that the probabilities continue to make the former clearly more attractive as a goal;
- (c) the potential of the Day concept (paragraph 3(c)) above.

[signed]

R J ALSTON
Ext 2507