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FROM: PUS
18 MARCH 1992

file

cc.	PS/Mr Fell	- B
	Mr Ledlie	- B
	Mr Thomas	- B
	Mr Alston	- B
	Mr Steele	- B
	Mr Watkins	- B
	Mr Cooke	- B
	Mr D A Hill	- B
	Mr D J R Hill	- B
	Mr Leach	- B
	Mr Maccabe	- B
	Mr Maxwell	- B
	Mr Fittall	- B

MR BELL - B

BRIEFING FOR MR KEVIN McNAMARA, 16 MARCH 1992

I am most grateful to you and all those who contributed for the admirable brief which accompanied your minute of 13 March. It was very well aimed and easy to use. I set out below my principal impressions of the meeting; some will feel the shiver of the wings of recent NIO history when I say the meeting began 4½ hours late and went on until late in the evening! for that reason I saw Mr McNamara by myself.

2. I should be grateful if this minute could be treated with particular care at this sensitive time.

3. I began with the usual exchange of courtesies, reminded Mr McNamara of the basis on which the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State had very willingly authorised the briefing, said that it was my object to ascertain any particular priorities or foreseeable needs which we could prepare for on a contingent footing and said that we had been at pains not only to study his most recent speech in the House of Commons on 5 March but Labour Party policy papers as well, and that we would be keenly interested to see the relevant section of the Labour Party manifesto (which Mr McNamara had with him, having spent the afternoon in helping in its drafting) which he then showed me. I said that Mr Fell would have very much wished to have been present also, but had an unbreakable commitment to be in the United States, although he and indeed I would be very ready to make any time over the next few weeks should Mr McNamara wish it. I took the opportunity in opening to emphasise to him the total

JEN/L/3/26/31660

CONFIDENTIAL

professional commitment of the Northern Ireland Government machine to whatever Government was elected to Office, and to their policies - noting that the central commitment by both major parties in Westminster, together with the four Northern Ireland constitutional parties, to the three-stranded talks process was evidently the keystone of the arch of policies which a new Government would want to construct.

Summary of Mr McNamara's position

4. More detailed comments follow, but Mr McNamara said the essence of the position of an incoming Labour Government would be to honour fully and wholeheartedly their commitment to see the three-stranded talks process go forward; but that he personally doubted whether it had much prospect of success; and that if it failed then the main policy thrust would turn towards North/South harmonisation with the implication (though I warned against any overt brandishing of this in the context of the talks) that the Unionists would need to be cooperative in the talks process if they were to avoid the thrust of policy turning in the direction of "towards a united Ireland". Naturally the consent principle would hold but preparatory policies to encourage eventual unification need not and would not be impeded by the absence of that consent in the short to medium term. COMMENT: I thought Mr McNamara was uncomfortable with my direct reference to and quotation from Mr Kinnock's press conference at the Irish Embassy; and that while his head, and party solidarity and loyalty, lead to the position he enunciated very clearly in the House of Commons on 5 March, his heart tugs him back to "towards a united Ireland" and to the adoption and implementation of policies which the Government would initiate and lead in both the economic and social spheres without the frustration and uncertainty which he clearly associates with the political development process.

Economic and Social Policy

5. Mr McNamara made it clear that in the economic sphere a Labour Government would adopt an altogether more interventionist line, with the specific object of encouraging the growth and development of jobs in manufacturing industry. While especially true in Northern Ireland this would be part and parcel of the Government's wider industrial and economic policy. He was dismissive of service sector jobs as being insecure (though I pointed out the relative resilience of service sector employment in Northern Ireland through the recession) but agreed that ultimately there was a cost per job criterion attaching to inward investment, and that to encourage too much marginal investment by multinational companies produced its own vulnerability through the ups and downs of the global economic cycle. He indicated at this point that he hoped to see Mr Jim Marshall MP appointed as one of the Northern Ireland Junior Ministers, with the overall responsibility for economic policy resting with him (but see below).

6. Turning to education and training, Mr McNamara said he would want to see a major effort to improve skill training and the proportion of those achieving qualifications. This was part and

JEN/L/3/26/31660

parcel of their economic approach. He did not elaborate further. On education he emphasised two particular points: as a matter of general educational policy he would wish to bring an end to selection in secondary education; and would wish so far as practicable to advance the course of integrated education while recognising the hostility of the Catholic Church to it. So far as Catholic schools were concerned he implied that they would have to choose between 100% state funding, or the retention of something like the existing degree of control by the hierarchy over the management of Catholic schools.

7. Other particular concerns which emphasised in this part of the discussion were to bring an immediate end so far as was possible given contractual and other commitments to any further privatisation in Northern Ireland (I reminded him about the position reached in respect of the privatisation of NIE); and he would want to see further progress made towards ending discrimination in employment by wholehearted support for the Fair Employment Commission (I think he must have seen the summary of the 1991 monitoring returns published in the FEC Research Report No.2 though he was not inclined to enter into any interpretation of the material).

Political

8. Mr McNamara repeated the essence of what he had said in the House of Commons on 5 March, with the crucial addition summarised above that he thought the talks process had only a low probability of success and if they could not be brought to a successful conclusion (he did not imply a time limit) then there would have to be a successor policy, in effect picking up "towards a united Ireland". In this he echoed what both Mr Haughey and Mr Reynolds had indicated privately, both about the prospect of the three-stranded talks process reaching a successful and complete conclusion and about the need for the two Governments to take the initiative if not in imposing a solution at any rate in defining and driving towards it. By contrast, however, with John Hume's analysis Mr McNamara said that he saw little prospect of political movement producing an early end to violence by the direct route and confirmed the very hard line on dealings with Sinn Fein and the Provisionals which he and Mr Kinnock have enunciated.

9. In that connection, however, he said that it would be an early and high priority to win and build confidence in the nationalist community including non-violent republicans. The next comment might more properly belong under the heading of security, but he introduced it as a political matter and it was that he would wish to see an immediate end to the broadcasting bann on Sinn Fein, and the transfer to Northern Ireland prisons of republican prisoners in Great Britain. I enquired whether he would see gestures of that kind as being linked to movement by the Provisionals; I think the thought was new and perhaps a difficult one for him.

JEN/L/3/26/31660

10. He emphasised two other planks in the political development platform on which he stood. The first was total and complete rejection of any moves eg in terms of the legislative process, or the setting up of a Select Committee for Northern Ireland Affairs, which had any tinge of integrationism. It was fundamental to his position to strengthen and harmonise all-Ireland matters, while resisting the blurring of Northern Ireland's separate identity of that of either party of Great Britain. Second, and quite apart from political development he wanted to see the rejuvenation of local government - looking to far fewer local authorities and the present 26 District Councils, with perhaps three ranges of powers available to them with their present set basic level, but extra powers and responsibilities becoming available where local authorities met certain tests (cross community representation on committees etc) and perhaps a top level to which a particular advanced authority might aspire. I said this looked like the mirror image of rolling devolution but in an upward rather than downward direction but wondered how this would affect the fabric of the existing boards as well as the DOE if their writ ran for different purposes in different local authority areas. Mr McNamara indicated that present this was no more than an outline concept and not a fully worked up scheme.

11. Mention of the boards prompted an observation with wider significance, though hardly unexpected, which was that he and his Ministerial colleagues would want to comb through existing public appointments in Northern Ireland for the usual reasons. I said that any government was bound to want to pay very close attention to the exercise of its powers of appointment but that he would be aware of one particular difficulty in Northern Ireland which was that of finding the men and women able and willing to give public service over and above those who already do so frequently in several capacities at once. Mr McNamara expressed polite scepticism but I reminded him of the host of obstacles, both political, security and personal which stood in the way of the free offer and acceptance of public appointments.

Security

12. I found Mr McNamara very ready to accept the points suggested in the briefing and in particular that would be for an incoming administration to set down its own security policies while having a duty fully to inform itself and to hear both factual briefings and responsible argument on policy questions from the RUC, HQNI and the NIO itself. Mr McNamara said there were a number of firm planks in their security policy platform but he was very ready to listen to and entertain responsible argument. The key issue was of course confidence (and he accepted that the morale and confidence of the security forces themselves as well as the community on all sides were pivotal). He had not wanted and still did not want in advance of taking Office to be given inside information or any detailed assessment of the situation or on any particular issue. There was always the difficulty of remembering what was to be kept secret and what no and he emphasised to me his

JEN/L/3/26/31660

concern to keep secrets secret. We both understood that to be burdened in Opposition with information which might inhibit free debate and argument was not advantageous.

13. Turning to particular points he repeated his intention to bring about the early return of republican prisoners in Great Britain to Northern Ireland prisons (he thought that an Easter move might have positive symbolic significance). He repeated his expectation that the ban on broadcasting would be lifted virtually at once. Moving on he repeated what we knew from Parliamentary and other exchanges that the Prevention of Terrorism Act would be replaced with more effective measures. I asked him whether this was to be interpreted in the light of Mr Hattersley's recent remarks in the House in the debate on 24 February, but Mr McNamara said with perhaps a glint of success in his eye that the key text would be the wording of the Labour Party manifesto on the point which would repeat the pledge to replace the PTA. I asked him about the continued exercise for example of the executive power to extend detention for up to 7 days pending whatever review process an incoming Labour Government set in hand and he acknowledged at once that he found this very difficult indeed. He could see where they wanted to get to but had not thought about surviving the rigours of the journey. He touched very briefly on issues such as strip searches (of female prisoners), the video recording of interviews and on the unsatisfactory nature of the inquest process together with a concern about the law and procedures surrounding the use of lethal force by members of the security forces and the old problem of the initial response by the Government and the security forces to cases of doubtful killing. He mentioned in passing that he hoped it would be possible to confer the right to a service pension on RUC reservists rather to illustrate his understanding of the need to maintain the confidence and morale of the security forces when the bulk of an incoming Labour Government's policies might be seen as inimical to their interests. He confirmed that the doctrine of police primacy was fundamental in his scheme of things, but interestingly said he thought its exercise could be more vigorous and that it should not simply be used as a passive defence against incursions by the Army or Government. On cross border security, he emphasised his liking for Mr Flynn (he shares our assessment that Mr Flynn's closeness to the new Taoiseach and the latter's lack of historic and political hang-ups in cross border security creates a more favourable climate for cooperation than we have had in recent years).

14. In sum, there were no surprises on the security policy front and by contrast with the political and economic issues, rather little weight of emphasis (though that may be in part because of a sense of difference arising from lack of detailed knowledge and insight, coupled to a few very well established public positions on security policy issues).

JEN/L/3/26/31660

Other Points

15. Mr McNamara asked me about relations with the Irish Government system. I gave a brief thumbnail sketch of the impact as seen by officials of the working of Anglo-Irish Conferences over recent years and the growing closeness through regular contact as well as mutual liking and respect between officials in Belfast and London on the one hand and Dublin on the other. Mr McNamara was keenly aware of the jealousies between Dublin Departments and their general difficulty of coordinating inter-Departmental programmes, and did not resist my observation that I thought the Northern Ireland Government system was very much stronger in terms of its cohesion and ability to coordinate activity across the range. I also said that the North/South links between Government Departments were frequently much stronger than was generally recognised, and did not always find a reflection in the reluctance of Departments in Dublin to funnel their contacts through the mechanism of Anglo-Irish Conferences and the Anglo-Irish Secretariat.

16. Looking to the first days of an incoming Labour administration in which he would be the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr McNamara very readily accepted the advice that depending on the timing of the formation of a new Labour Government and the timing of the announcement of his appointment, it would be desirable to make a very early impact by going to the Province, issuing a prepared statement (while staying away from press conferences and doorstepping), calling in the Chief Constable and the GOC (in that order), and making contact with the Northern Ireland political leaders and Church leaders.

Signed:

J A CHILCOT

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JEN/L/3/26/31660