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AN SAID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

Confidential

7 December 1989

Mr. Dermot Gallagher  
Assistant Secretary  
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear Assistant Secretary

Ian Paisley

Mr. Farrell and I attended a lunch yesterday at which Ian Paisley was the guest speaker. The lunch was an informal, off-the-record occasion organised by the Consular Corps of London (whose previous invitees have included Enoch Powell and Denis Healey).

The DUP leader was in high good humour throughout, partly a consequence of the Christmas merriment which characterised the lunch.

In initial private conversation around his table (at which we were seated), Paisley touched on the current British political situation. He considered that the Prime Minister's authority had been seriously shaken by the outcome of Tuesday's vote. From conversations he had had on the previous evening with numerous Tory back-benchers, it was clear that many were supporting her with great reluctance. This suggested that there was now a significant silent opposition within her camp who might one day become vocal, depending on circumstances. The Prime Minister might be safe for the moment but, if the economy took a nosedive next spring (with inflation and mortgage interest rates rising and no compensatory wage increases), MPs in marginal seats would begin to get restive. "Politics", he observed, "is the art of survival". He suggested also that the momentum generated by Meyer's challenge would continue; the principle of automatic renomination had been breached and there would henceforth be a steady erosion in the Prime Minister's position.

Paisley also observed that much would depend on whether Labour could get its act together. He himself was far from certain about this. Recalling that he had shared a room with Neil Kinnock when they both became MPs twenty years ago, he described the Labour leader as "a very nice, a very pleasant and a very honest man". He then recalled a wry comment made to him by Kinnock some years ago: "With my friends, who needs enemies?"

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,  
SW1X 7HR  
Telephone: 01-235 2171  
TELEX: 916104



cc  
Mr. Neill - PCO  
Cathal A.  
15/12

NO18

Taoiseach  
To see please  
11/12

in his letter  
1-90

Paisley suggested that it would take only three or four wayward Labour MPs making outrageous pronouncements during the election campaign for Labour's chances of forming the next Government to be scuttled.

Paisley's formal address after the lunch was unexceptional and (in deference to the Christmas cheer of the occasion) delivered with less bombast than usual. He began by asserting his pride in his Ulster Loyalist identity and recapitulating the main features of that identity. The Ulster Loyalist, he said, is a Protestant, a patriot, hard-working and plain-spoken. Just as "Irish nationalists and Republicans" do not apologise for their religion, so the Ulster Loyalist makes no apology for his own. He believes in civil and religious liberty for all. The Ulster Loyalist, Paisley added, is "essentially democratic".

In the next section of his address, the DUP leader invoked statistics quoted by John Hume (in his main speech at the 1988 SDLP Conference) in order to claim that the bulk of NI violence was caused by "Republicans". He went on to attack the Anglo-Irish "Diktat" imposed at Hillsborough four years ago. As the majority of the population had not been consulted about it, the Agreement did not meet basic democratic requirements. As a NI MP, Paisley could propose legislation for any part of the UK - but not for Northern Ireland. Lamenting the limitations of the Order in Council arrangements, he said that a representative government for NI was required. His position was that he was in favour of talks with the SDLP but that two conditions would have to be met before these could take place. First, the Agreement must "cease to be implemented". Second, the Secretariat must "cease to function" for the period during which the talks would take place. The purpose of the talks would be to find an alternative to, and replacement for, the Agreement which could achieve (as they were not being achieved at present) the laudable objectives of peace, stability and reconciliation set out in the Agreement. He wanted to see the Agreement set aside by the two Governments and a negotiating table with the SDLP put in place.

In the subsequent question-and-answer session, I asked the DUP leader what scope he saw for improved relations between North and South in the context of our joint Community membership and, more specifically, of Ireland's approaching EC Presidency.

Reacting in a very positive, indeed jovial manner, Paisley said that this was a very interesting question. The Taoiseach had written to him but he had not yet received the letter. It was apparently in his cubby-hole in Brussels and the Belgian postal system had not yet got it to him. However, John Hume had on the previous evening showed him his own copy of the letter and he was therefore aware of its contents.

"The Unionists", Paisley said, would be issuing a statement on the subject of the Taoiseach's invitation. He had, however, two comments to make at this stage. First, he was puzzled as to how the Taoiseach would be in a position to effect a change in the allocation already made to NI under the Structural Funds. His understanding was that a decision once taken by the Council of Ministers could not be changed unless the Commission put forward another proposal; and that, according to a

conversation he had had recently with Commissioner Millan, the Commission did not plan any revision to the existing allocation (which meant increases of the order of 8%-9% and 80% for NI and the Republic respectively). Secondly, reverting to a more characteristic mode, Paisley contended that in any event the NI people would not "sacrifice principles for money".

(Note: In private conversation afterwards, Paisley indicated cheerfully that he was looking forward to reading the Taoiseach's letter. He also joked that he did not expect the personal introduction to it to be as friendly as that which featured in the letter to Hume. Hume, who had earlier told me that he had shown Paisley his copy of the letter, mentioned that he had proposed to the DUP leader that the latter should convene a meeting of the three NI MEPs for the purpose of responding to the invitation for contact with the incoming President of the Council. There might even be a case for seeing the President of the Commission as well. Paisley's response to Hume was to the effect that there were no circumstances in which he was going to find himself talking to the Taoiseach. Hume told me that he planned to work further on Paisley in this respect. He observed that, if it was a question of contact with e.g. a German President of the Council, Paisley would not be objecting).

Completing his reply to my question, Paisley went on to defend his own record as a MEP, claiming that he had always voted for things which would be of benefit to the Republic, provided, of course, that these did not adversely affect NI's interests. He complained that Irish MEPs had not always reciprocated. (His own philosophy towards Europe, he had earlier indicated in private conversation, was to "get as much as possible out of the cow"; he agreed vigorously when a guest remarked on the benefits which EC membership had brought to Irish farmers).

On the broader issue of the implications which 1992 might have for improved relations between North and South, Paisley said that it was difficult to predict what might happen in that context. After all, who could have predicted that the Berlin Wall would start to come down this year? However, if the Taoiseach were to remove the claim made under Articles Two and Three of the Irish Constitution, he would look forward to a day when there could be "a meeting of equals and - who knows - even a meeting of minds".

Yours sincerely

*David Donoghue*

David Donoghue  
Press and Information Officer