



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2021/44/151
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ConfidentialMeeting with Mark Durkan, 21 February, 1990Talks

1. Referring to Tuesday's meeting between the SDLP and the Secretary of State, Mr. Durkan said that John Hume had told Mr. Brooke that if he were going to deal with the Unionists on the basis of preconditions, the SDLP would introduce their own. In response, Mr. Brooke, while not revealing what had transpired at the meeting with the Unionist leaders on Monday, told Mr. Hume that he "understood" the point he was making. The next step, in regard to the SDLP, is the completion of a paper by them outlining their proposals on the format and substance of a possible talks process. (Mr. Brooke asked for such a paper at the 19 January meeting with the SDLP).
2. Mr. Durkan reiterated his view that the present "initiative" is going nowhere. There is concern in the SDLP at the signals which Mr. Brooke appears to have given the Unionist leaders on Monday. While Mr. Brooke had since described some of their comments to the media after the meeting as a "distortion" of what he had said, the Unionists were clearly left with the impression that he, at least, was keen to "do something" about their preconditions. Mr. Durkan felt that as long as the Unionists were given succour in this way they would not move forward. Indeed it was noticeable that, since Bangor, people like Robinson who had previously been saying interesting things had now retrenched somewhat and Mr. Durkan believed that the slow movement towards change within Unionism which had previously been evident (in some quarters at least) was actually being impeded by the present exercise.
3. Moreover, Mr. Durkan was concerned that Mr. Brooke did not appear to appreciate fully the implications of the failure of the exercise he had embarked on. It was erroneous to believe that if a breakdown point were reached one could simply "pause" and "resume later". There was a price to be

paid for failure and that price was disillusionment with the political process, which would once again have proved incapable of delivering a solution to the conflict. The only beneficiaries in that scenario would be the Provos, who would no doubt be saying "we told you so".

McGuinness speech

4. I asked him about Martin McGuinness' speech at Dunloy on Sunday (see "Irish News" report attached). He felt that the fact that it came from McGuinness ("who is generally regarded as being in charge of the hardware with Adams taking care of the software") gave it particular interest and significance. He believed that it reflected concern within the IRA/Sinn Féin that the present flurry of activity on the political scene was going ahead without any reference to them; this in a sense was their way of saying "we are still players". It was undoubtedly also an attempt to destabilise the current process. Mr. Durkan felt that the speech was at two levels. At one level it appeared to be sending a message to the SDLP to the effect that "we are watching you" (on devolution), thereby increasing the pressure on the SDLP, if talks got underway, in terms of what they could settle for. At a second level it seemed an attempt to "tease" the British - "let's hold out the bait (of a cessation of violence) and see what happens". If the British were sufficiently tempted, it would introduce a new factor into the overall equation and at the very least (from a Provo point of view) inject another "spanner" into the current process.
5. Mr. Durkan is not optimistic about the prospects for a ceasefire in the short term, but feels that McGuinness' speech is a further indication that the Provos are running out of options. First it had been "Freedom 72!", then "Freedom 73!" etc; in 1978 when it was clear that changing the date on the slogan was wearing a little thin they

switched to "Freedom now!". Then it became the "long war". In the early 80s after the hunger strike it became the "armalite and the ballot box". One last heave and they were there etc. When it became clear that this too was not going to happen the focus switched to the "long slog" on the political front also and emphasis was placed on the need for a political base in the South. But now, two General Elections later, that strategy appears in tatters also. Mr. Durkan feels that they are "wandering around in circles" at the moment and there is great uncertainty about what the next avenue of exploration should be. That was why McGuinness' remarks were of such interest at this time.

#### Security

6. I asked him for his views of an NIO observation at a recent meeting in the Secretariat that there appeared to be less complaints of harassment from Derry these days. Mr. Durkan said that the new RUC Commander, McCombe, had made a good start and had recently met all the SDLP Councillors. In general, they were satisfied with the arrangements for handling complaints at present. That was why they tended not to use the Secretariat route. As regards levels of harassment, these tended to vary. It would be erroneous to deduce that there was no harassment taking place. There were still difficulties - with both the Army and the RUC - but they were of a nature and level which for the most part could be handled locally. In regard to the UDR, they were generally not an issue in Derry as they were rarely deployed there.
  
- [7. I should add that Lord Coleville was in Derry on Tuesday in connection with his Review of the EPA. Mr. Durkan did not meet him but I understand from SDLP Councillor John Tierney, who also works in John Hume's office, that Lord Coleville met Derry City Council on Tuesday night. The Sinn Féin members were present, something which Mr. Tierney said

did not "appear to bother Lord Coleville in the slightest"! He listened politely to the trenchant views on his presence and on the EPA put forward by the Sinn Féin delegation, which in response he said he "noted". Mr. Tierney said that he told Lord Coleville that of particular concern to the SDLP was the preclusion of access to a solicitor during the first 48 hours of detention. This was not a difficulty for hardened Prôves but was a major problem in the case of people who had no involvement and were wrongly picked up for questioning - something which occurred not infrequently.]

SC  
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23 February, 1990

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