

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

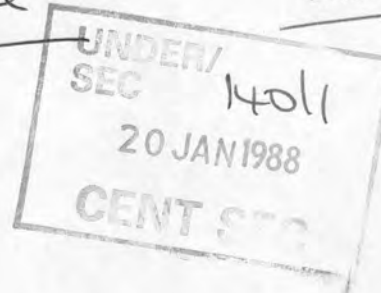
NH 188/1

MR Spence

Mr Hanrahan 21/1

PAB/3570/DP

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



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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

I attach the latest political analysis by PAB of developments in Northern Ireland since the beginning of the year. The first couple of weeks of January have seen a flurry of activity in both the unionist and nationalist camps. The unionists have set up their joint panel to draw up proposals for presentation to HMG and Peter Robinson has been re-elected to the deputy-leadership of the DUP. The meeting between the SDLP and Sinn Fein leaders has surprised many.

The Unionists

2. On Friday 8 January the two unionist leaders and representatives from each party met together to discuss the preparation of a document to table at the next meeting in the series of "talks about talks" with the Secretary of State and his senior officials. Apart from Paisley and Molyneaux the team consists of Peter Robinson and Harold McCusker - two of the co-authors of the Task Force Report - along with the Rev Martin Smyth, Jack Allen (UUP Executive Chairman), Jim Wilson (UUP General Secretary), Rev William McCrea, Sammy Wilson (DUP Press Officer and former Lord Mayor of Belfast) and Nigel Dodds (DUP Councillor).

3. The party leadership and members of the panel have refused to be drawn on the substance of their meeting; Molyneaux is reported as having tried to play down the significance of the meeting, describing it as "very much a preliminary discussion". For his part Paisley is reported as commenting, "everything is going very well". The meeting brought together diverse strands within the parties and was perhaps most notable because it included Robinson and McCusker who had been somewhat out in the cold since the cool reception given

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to the Task Force Report by the two party leaders. Their inclusion (and particularly that of Robinson) was seen by some as an exercise in rehabilitation and is also believed to reflect an attempt by the two leaders to produce a strong united front for the next session of talks with the Secretary of State. Paisley and Molyneaux will also be hoping that the creation of this panel will help defuse the long-standing criticism that they have been too secretive in keeping to themselves the actual content of the "talks about talks".

4. Speculation about what the unionist team might produce has included the abandonment of devolution in favour of a select committee on Northern Ireland at Westminster, extra time for Northern Ireland matters in the Commons, and a stronger and more peaceful local government network, all of which would combine together to help avert confronting the sticky issue of sharing power in a devolved assembly. Sammy Wilson, a member of the panel said, "The formation of the teams should indicate to all and sundry that we are deadly serious about finding an alternative to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We are not engaged in some sort of cosmetic exercise. What will be put to Mr King at the end of the day will be proposals in outline".

5. The return of Peter Robinson to the deputy-leadership of the DUP was announced on 8 January after a meeting of the party's Executive. Although Robinson's return has probably involved a degree of compromise on both his and Paisley's side it is inevitable that the greater retreat is being seen as that of the party leader. Robinson resigned from the post last October and although he has kept silent about the reasons it was widely believed that the two leaders' response to the Task Force Report and the tactics being employed against the Agreement were the main cause of his disquiet. Suggestions that the Task Force authors - Robinson, McCusker and Millar - were perceived as having "sold out" pushed two of them into the shadows and the third into withdrawal from political life. However the political gamble which led Robinson to resign the deputy-leadership appears to have paid off handsomely and his

re-appointment as Paisley's deputy and his membership of the new unionist panel must mean that he is back as a force to be reckoned with.

Hume/Adams Talks

6. In a move which took most people by surprise John Hume had a two hour meeting on Monday 11 January with Gerry Adams. The meeting, which was apparently set up by an unnamed third party interested in stimulating political dialogue, has been criticised by the UUP, DUP, Alliance Party and Workers' Party. Both Hume and Adams have been wholly unrepentant, and Hume has been adamant that the meeting was part of a necessary process for opening political dialogue. The venue was not disclosed and the SDLP and Sinn Fein issued almost identical statements after the talks, saying that they had "covered a range of current issues and allowed each party leader to put his organisation's respective analysis of the political deadlock.After the discussion both agreed to report back to their parties and to develop further dialogue if it were thought to be productive".

7. This meeting was the first between Hume and Adams on an official basis, although three years ago Hume decided to withdraw from a proposed meeting with the IRA after the latter attempted to video-tape the occasion. Sources close to Hume suggest that he had become interested in developing some sort of dialogue with Sinn Fein since Adams was reported as saying that he considered no "military solution" was possible in Northern Ireland. Speculation that Hume met Adams with a view to discussing the possibilities for a cease-fire was knocked on the head when the Sinn Fein leader said "the meeting was not about ceasefires or anything like that". He explained that it was Sinn Fein's policy to talk to people and that this occasion provided an opportunity to put the Republican position to Mr Hume. Neither Hume nor Adams appears to have upset their respective parties by holding the discussion although it is not clear how many knew in advance that the meeting was to be held.

8. Outside the SDLP and Sinn Fein reaction was swift and predictable. Molyneaux described the meeting as "very regrettable" and warned that it could damage the prospects of dialogue between constitutional parties because it had served to blur the lines which had clearly been drawn between constitutional politicians and the supporters of the IRA. Paisley said that the meeting had confirmed his long-held view that "at the end of the day the SDLP have more in common with Sinn Fein than with constitutional unionists. John Hume sees in the unity of unionists a menace to his united Ireland. Therefore he turns to seek new allies with the political wing of the IRA murderers". Robinson accused Hume of deliberately trying to destroy the prospects for genuine political progress, "With the unionist leaders' talks about talks at a crucial stage and offering the hope of negotiations he has chosen to engage in an exercise which he must know the unionist community will find offensive, especially in the light of recent IRA outrages". For the Alliance Party, Chief Whip Tom Campbell said "The fact that John Hume has chosen to meet Sinn Fein in the aftermath of the Enniskillen murders is surely a commentary on this so-called desire for dialogue". Seamus Lynch of the Workers' Party criticised the meeting, saying that demonstrated "clearly that Nationalist unity is more important to Mr Hume than democratic unity".

General - Unionists

9. In an address to the Ulster Society, which promotes Northern Ireland and British heritage and culture, Enoch Powell in his first major speech since losing his South Down seat said that HMG still wanted the outside world to believe that it was making progress towards a united Ireland. He said that the Government was opposed to "home rule" for Scotland and Wales because such a development would mean the eventual break-up of the Union, but HMG still wished to see devolution for Northern Ireland. The logical consequence of such a development would be the removal of Northern Ireland from the Union and a step towards a united Ireland.

10. In an article published recently in the Newsletter the Campaign for Equal Citizenship stalwart, Robert McCartney, restated his

belief that integration gave the best assurance of "equality of individual rights and citizenship". He saw the Anglo-Irish Agreement as having two components. Firstly, the external element of the Anglo-Irish Conference which provides for a foreign government to influence the government of part of the United Kingdom. Secondly an internal component comprising a devolved power sharing arrangement for governing Northern Ireland in accordance with terms approved by the SDLP and confirmed by the Irish Government. On security cooperation McCartney believed that the British, the Irish and the SDLP would all work together for the suppression of the IRA, which would make the unionists so grateful that they would surrender their national and political identity in exchange. This would all be assisted by what McCartney described as well-intentioned but politically unskilled clergymen, ecumenical middle-class nationalists and a compliant media who would combine together to cause the people of Northern Ireland to generate the will which the Government wishes them to generate.

11. A sign that the unionist tactics of protest against the Agreement are changing was reflected in the decision by the Northern Ireland Housing Council to meet for the first time in two years. Since the signing of the Agreement each monthly meeting of the Council - a body which scrutinises the work of the Housing Executive - has been adjourned as part of the opposition to the Agreement and in protest at Sinn Fein members sitting on the Council. The Council, which has a member from each of the 26 district councils, will work under a new committee structure designed to exclude Sinn Fein from business. Newtownabbey UUP Mayor, Jim Smith, who proposed the motion to reform the Council said, "In hindsight the last two years of adjournment were unproductive. In the light of the effectiveness of the adjournment policy it was a bad decision".

General - Nationalists

12. In a recent statement the SDLP deputy leader, Seamus Mallon called on the two unionist leaders to join the SDLP in "starting the long, slow process of healing the wounds of the past". He condemned the continued refusal of the unionist leadership to enter into

"meaningful dialogue" with the SDLP and he said it was depressing to see the start of a re-run of the past two years when Paisley said "no" to recent calls by Archbishop Eames and Bishop Cahal Daly for dialogue to take place. He went on to say that the SDLP stood ready to enter into dialogue with "all those who seek to end the misery of Northern Ireland".

Comment

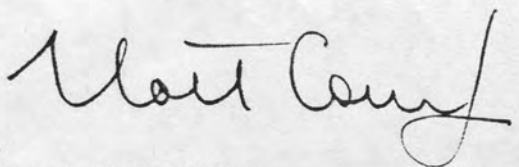
13. There can be little doubt that Hume's meeting with Adams has opened the New Year in Northern Ireland with a political bang. At best Hume's decision is seen as being insensitive to the political realities in the Province and at worst it is being construed as deliberate mischief-making at a time when the unionists appear to be getting their act together. Allowing for the SDLP's avowed position of being prepared to talk to anyone, the timing of this meeting between the leaders of constitutional nationalism and the republican armed struggle could scarcely have been worse. With the series of "talks about talks" reaching a significant stage the Hume/Adams meeting will effectively rule out any prospect of the unionists opening up dialogue with the SDLP in the near future. This possibility was thought not to be entirely out of the question now that the two unionist parties had formed their panel to prepare a paper for submission to the Secretary of State.

14. Unionists have reacted angrily to the meeting and there is a feeling within the Protestant community that the watershed of Enniskillen - with its clear words of condemnation of Sinn Fein and sympathy for the unionists - has all but disappeared with this development. In particular, the actions of the SDLP councillors on Fermanagh District Council in supporting a vote of no confidence in the Sinn Fein Chairman will appear of little significance when their party leader is prepared to meet with Sinn Fein's leader. It will certainly be some time before unionists will treat seriously any SDLP words condemning Sinn Fein or the IRA.

15. Although there has been some speculation that one of Hume's objectives in meeting Adams was to discuss the possibilities of a

cease-fire Sinn Fein have made it clear that this was not on the agenda. The fact that Sinn Fein do not appear to be prepared to discuss any such development and the suggestions that Hume may hold further talks with Adams can only strengthen unionist resolve to oppose the Agreement. It certainly seems likely that the next meeting between the Secretary of State and the unionist leaders will see the latter in a somewhat stronger position. Not only will they have a more united and confident approach following the creation of the panel (particularly with the inclusion of Robinson and McCusker) but they will have an ideal excuse to call off the talks should they wish to do so.

16. In short it appears that it will be difficult to encourage any dialogue between unionists and nationalists and the Hume/Adams meeting must make even clearer the SDLP's stated opposition to the Government's proposal to introduce the candidates' declaration. Just as important perhaps is that attempts to demonstrate to the unionist community that the SDLP is the acceptable face of nationalism will have suffered a major setback.


 J E McCONNELL
 Political Affairs Division
 20 January 1988

DP/1221

cc . PS/Ministers (L&B) - B
 . PS/PUS (L&B) - B
 PS/Mr Bloomfield
 . Mr Stephens - B
 . Mr Burns - B
 . Mr Chesterton - B
 . Mr Innes - B
 . Mr Elliott - B
 . Mr Steele - B
 . Miss Pease - B
 Mr Spence
 Mr Wood - B
 . Mr Bell - B
 Mr Daniell
 . Mr D Kirk - B