

CONFIDENTIAL

616/8

HCS/299/91

FROM: PS/MR FELL
DATE: 29 AUGUST 1991

cc PS/PUS (L&B) - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Thomas o/r - B
Mr A Wilson - B
Mr Hamilton - B 29/8
Mr Wood - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr D J R Hill - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mrs Collins - B
Mr Marsh/Mrs Black - B

MR LEDLIE - B

GOVERNMENT AND THE NATIONALIST COMMUNITY

Mr Fell has now had an opportunity to read Mr Alston's minute to you of 14 August on the above subject. He found it very interesting and thought-provoking and would like to attend any meeting that may be set up in due course to discuss the paper.

(SIGNED VKD)

V K DOUGLAS

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DH23543

C O N F I D E N T I A L

DUP 610/18.26

418/8

FROM: J K LEDLIE
19 AUGUST 1991

cc PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Wilson - B
Mr Hamilton - B 20/8
Mr Wood - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr D J R Hill - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mrs Collins - B
Mr Marsh/Mrs Black - B

MR ALSTON - B

GOVERNMENT AND THE NATIONALIST COMMUNITY

Thank you very much for your thoughtful note of 14 August. I am delighted that the work you are taking forward under ISG auspices so happily complements the approaches we are, haltingly, beginning to develop in SECRASP.

2. I welcome the prospect of having a discussion on the various aspects of this subject in the Autumn once the main leave season is over. I see the point you are making; but I would be a little wary of suggesting to the various groups you mention that we believe we are entitled to greater public acknowledgement of what has already been done - or is in train. My own experience is that, in fields where a great deal has been done (eg housing, Making Belfast Work etc), there is already generous and quite widespread acknowledgement of this. The problem arises in fields (eg SECRASP agendas) where there is still a great deal to be done; what I regard as helpful in this context is creative and positive (but often critical) thinking, from whatever quarter it may emerge. I do believe that the time has arrived when we can (and should) begin to draw back the veil and to admit to these issues more publicly than hitherto; but I still urge

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th~~a~~ this process should be done slowly, cautiously and step-by-step. It would be all too easy, in seeking to reduce the alienation of some, to increase the alienation of others.

3. I look forward to renewing discussion when you are back from leave.

(signed)

J K LEDLIE
Ext 3286

ID 28884

C O N F I D E N T I A L

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351/8

RJA 55/91/sh

FROM: R J ALSTON
US(POL)

14 August 1991

cc PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Thomas o/r - B
Mr Wilson - B
Mr Hamilton - B
Mr Wood - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr D J R Hill o/r - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mrs Collins - B
Mr Marsh/Mrs Black - B

MR LEDLIE - B

GOVERNMENT AND THE NATIONALIST COMMUNITY

In ISG over recent months we have been working on the idea of assembling together the key messages, both positive and defensive, we seek to get across in the context of defeating terrorism. We have also been looking more specifically at how to target key messages more intensively towards critical sections of the community. The Secretary of State has supported the idea that this work should continue. Associated policy issues are being addressed in SECRASP. It seems to me desirable, as underpinning to all this work, to stand back to review the whole question of alienation in the nationalist community, what we have already done to address it over recent years, and whether we and others have done enough to build on this to influence perceptions amongst nationalists. My own conclusion is that a great deal has been done, but that it has not been adequately acknowledged, and that the agenda of discussion still focuses to an undesirable extent on what remains to be done rather than on what has already been achieved.

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2. Put shortly, the perceptions of government amongst nationalists especially in key areas of the Province, are themselves a critical factor in the fight against terrorism. We should seek every available means to reduce support for the terrorists within their own community, and to reinforce support from within that community for constitutional politics. This is a matter both of getting Government policies right, and of presenting them skilfully. We have come a very long way in recent years. Much progress has unquestionably been made since say the early 80s and the aftermath of the Hunger Strikes. We still have some way to go to get the policies right, thus the work in SECRASP, the review of Lethal Force etc. Nonetheless the agenda set out by people like Cardinal Daly a decade ago has been addressed with real results. There is scope both to do more to publicise this and to encourage the leaders of the nationalist community and the Irish Government to themselves do more to acknowledge it, and thus increase confidence within the community which looks to them for an example.

3. Although there are variations of emphasis the arguments developed over the years by Cahal Daly, John Hume and Seamus Mallon and the likes of Father Faul about nationalist alienation have many common threads. They would argue that the nationalist community in general does not support IRA violence, that their natural inclination is to support constitutional approaches to tackling political and economic problems, but that the way Government conducts its security and other policies is itself a major variable in determining how much support the IRA can depend on. They would probably all acknowledge that, in certain areas at least, there is hard core support for the Republican approach which will be difficult to shift away from at least passive support for those who argue for its violent pursuit. However Father Faul at least appears to argue that the hard core is extremely small unless the broader

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and more porous community which surrounds it is hardened with its views by insensitive policies. Some of what PUS heard in West Belfast this week suggests that other priests also believe the Catholic community there is responsive to evidence of efforts to meet their needs.

4. John Hume has tended to set out his agenda as to how Government should respond in political terms, and he has expressed himself well satisfied with the response he has had from the Secretary of State both in the Talks process and in his public statements, notably the Whitbread Speech. Cahal Daly and Father Faul, as well as Seamus Mallon, put greater emphasis on the management of security policy and on economic and social policy. There is a passage in Cahal Daly's recent book (page 140) which reads as follows:

"The problem in Northern Ireland is basically one of building or restoring trust between the unionist and the nationalist, the Catholic and Protestant communities: in a word of reconciliation; it is one of creating confidence between alienated sections of the public and the security forces; of restoring credibility to the legal and judicial system and to political processes and institutions; it is one of tackling unemployment, poverty and urban decay, of redressing alienation, especially among the young"

5. What we have all been at in recent months and years gives us a very respectable platform from which to argue that this is precisely the agenda from which we have been working, and to seek recognition for those efforts. Major planks of that case include:

- (a) the primacy the Secretary of State has given to the search for ways of re-vitalising political processes which will command general consent;

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- (b) the priority given in public expenditure and other terms to a range of economic and social policies such as the Belfast and Londonderry re-generation programmes as well as the CRISP programme, the greater emphasis on rural development, targetting social need, fair employment, and housing;
- (c) the Community Relations Programme and associated programmes such as Integrated Education;
- (d) the principles of security policy as set out in the Security Policy Statement, the steps taken to implement these and the channels of redress, offset by the need for exceptional powers and measures to ensure that the IRA do not get its way;
- (e) prisons policy.

6. The note for this week's Office meeting spelt out a number of channels through which we can seek to get across more specific messages. These are also open to us in the broader presentation of policy. They include Ministerial speeches and statements, media programmes, working through Church and other opinion formers, the local Press, and techniques such as advertising (the Chief Constable has for example shown me some recruiting advertisements in preparation which are very much designed to get across the sense of the RUC as a non-sectarian body). With the opinion formers, and with the Irish Government, I think that we can legitimately seek not only to bring home the range of approaches which Government has pursued in recent years to address their agenda, but to invite them to consider carefully whether they might acknowledge them more fully both in public and in private in their own dealings with the nationalist community, because the ends we and they are seeking are in the end identical. It would probably be wrong to put explicit

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pressure on such people; they must be the best judges of how to maintain their own credibility in the community, but the general proposition is a perfectly legitimate one.

7. In the Irish case, we might think how best to develop this series of messages through the Conference machinery. They clearly find it more comfortable to continue to concentrate on the perceived outstanding issues. To a degree this is legitimate because they too must maintain their credibility with the nationalist community if the Agreement is to have real value. It can however be argued that their present approach represents the easy way out, and that they should be prepared to put more effort into presenting the case for what has been achieved as well as continuing to seek further improvements. If we are to get anywhere this is likely to be more fruitful as an approach if pursued in private than in public. There may be a parallelism which we can exploit between security co-operation, where we seek improvements and they seek a public presentation which emphasises what has already been achieved, and the Confidence Issues, in which the roles are basically reversed.

8. I would welcome a chance to discuss this thesis with you and others once the leave season is over, if other commitments permit. The objective of the discussion would be to see whether there is a consensus that this kind of approach is worth following up through the ISG machinery, in parallel with the continuing work on policy issues in SECRASP, as well as in the planning our strategy for business with the Irish in the Conference.

[signed]

R J ALSTON

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