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FROM: C G MACCABE
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
26 JUNE 1992



cc Mr Thomas - B
Mr Alston* - B *20.6*
✓ Mr Watkins* - B
Mr D J R Hill - B
Mr D A Hill - B
Mr Brooker - B
Mr Marsh - B
(*Earlier papers to be provided)

Mr P Durbin - B
CPL

MINISTERIAL CONTACTS WITH NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL PARTIES

Thank you for copying me your note of 17 June suggesting we now wind down contacts between Ministers and representatives of political parties of small electoral strength such as the UDP and PUP and treat them as we treat Sinn Fein. You also invited comments on Democratic Left and the Workers' Party.

2. It may be helpful to disaggregate some of the issues here:

- i) Should Ministers meet these parties? If not, is it because they are too small and insignificant, or because of their doubtful associations?
- ii) Should Ministers meet representatives of these parties as part of council delegations? If not, can we justify the equation with Sinn Fein?
- iii) Should PAB continue to meet these parties?
- iv) If we change policy, how do we explain that change and what might the repercussions be?

Size

3. On grounds of size alone (none of the parties secured more than 0.5% of the popular vote in the General Election and although

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neither the UDP nor PUP stood candidates, they have only one councillor each) there are clear grounds for rejecting Ministerial meetings with party delegations as the parties are electorally insignificant. To do this, we do not need to place a threshold - merely to say they need to demonstrate a reasonable level of public support. The position could then be reviewed following the May 1993 Local Government Elections. Beyond that, I think we need to examine each party on its own merits.

Workers' Party

4. The Workers' Party has traditionally met both Ministers and officials on an infrequent basis, despite the widespread belief that it has links with the Official IRA. The Party has been much weakened by the split leading to the formation of Democratic Left although most activists in Northern Ireland have stayed put. It seems to me that officials might continue to meet the Workers' Party and that Ministers could agree to meet Party councillors as part of council delegations (although it has only one councillor at present). To change the policy at this juncture is particularly difficult in terms of explaining how the situation is different now from previously. Unless we have clear indications that the Party is merely the political wing of OIRA, and that OIRA is a terrorist or paramilitary organisation in a way that was not so previously, I recommend we continue to meet its members at official level.

Democratic Left

5. Given that one of the causes of the Workers' Party split was the desire to remove the link with OIRA, I see no reason for Government to shun Democratic Left other than on reasons of size. This would allow Ministers to meet Seamus Lynch who is currently Chairman of Belfast City Council Community Services Committee, and who it could thus be embarrassing to have to avoid. Officials would continue to meet the Party to hear its concerns, and if necessary act as the channel of official communication with HMG.

Progressive Unionist Party

6. Hugh Smyth (Belfast City Council) and Councillor S J Stewart (Carrickfergus) are the PUP's only councillors. The Party is

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believed to have links with the UVF, but it is not clear what the nature of these links is. However, the UVF do not acknowledge the PUP (nor vice versa) in the same way the UDA/UDP and Sinn Fein/PIRA relationships do. Ministers currently meet Mr Smyth in council delegations and should continue to do so until there is a significant change in the PUP/UVF relationship. PAB also have contact with Mr Smyth, who is generally regarded as a positive influence on Belfast City Council, and there is no public pressure to alter our handling of the PUP.

Ulster Democratic Party

7. This party was formed as the political wing of the UDA, and currently has one councillor, Ken Kerr of Derry City Council. Comparison of the UDP and Sinn Fein is somewhat complicated by the fact that the UDP's links are acknowledged to be with the UDA (a non-proscribed organisation) whereas Sinn Fein's are with PIRA which is, of course, proscribed. At present Mr Kerr can participate in council delegations (although Dr Mawhinney used to be barely civil to him) and the UDA is careful to present the UDP as a separate body; and Mr Kerr has more than once stated his opposition to violence from all quarters. Until the UDA is proscribed, there is a case for treating the UDP differently from Sinn Fein.

Conclusion

8. Perhaps these issues could best be addressed at a meeting of interested parties before putting recommendations to Ministers? I would, however, strongly favour treating each party separately, on its merits.

9. Finally, Ministerial meetings with Sir James Kilfedder's UPUP can be justified, I believe, because it has an MP.

(SIGNED)

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