

PT: PETER MAY
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
30 November 1993
2 DECEMBER

Mrs May

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SEC
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CENT MDW

*1. to be in the center
in the narrow
2. Miss Stuch
M. refresh my memory
on X, para 4. (?) H. Lavery
was turned down; but
what about Mallon himself
(+ on what grounds in both
cases?)? *D. V. L.**

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP, B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Williams - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Brooker - B
Mr Marsh - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr Kyle - B
Mr Archer, RID - B
HMA, Dublin - B

SDLP CONFERENCE: OTHER ISSUES

I have minuted separately on Hume/Adams and John Hume's speech to the SDLP Conference in Cookstown last weekend. This minute concentrates on the other issues that were addressed, and particularly on security.

Security

2. Unusually for the SDLP, their "administration of justice" debate did stimulate some debate with one delegate having the temerity to question the Mallon analysis. The debate, which took place on Friday evening with perhaps only 70 or 80 people in the hall, was led by Mallon, who argued the reform of security was at the centre of any political agreement. The motion first addressed was that:

"Conference reiterates the Party's belief that the problems of policing and security can only be properly solved in the

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context of a comprehensive political agreement; restates its view that lasting peace must be based on an equitable system of justice and policing which can command the support of all sections of the community; calls on the British and Irish Governments through the Anglo-Irish Agreement to formulate a system of policing and a process of justice which can effectively serve the needs of all the people of the North of Ireland and commend that active participation and support."

Mallon acknowledged that the motion was rather similar to that which he had addressed for each of the past 15 years. His analysis did not differ markedly from that offered in the Talks, although he was critical of all the other Talks participants, including the Irish Government, for failing to address the issue properly in that forum. Mallon argued that it was the fault of the system that in half the land mass of Northern Ireland no policeman or family of a policeman could live. This was not the fault of policemen themselves, but a reflection of the fact that Nationalists would not join a force to protect a constitutional position they do not agree with. One of the outcomes of any agreement would be the need for Mallon and others in the SDLP to go to Crossmaglen and other difficult areas and ask young men to join the police force. Mallon also focused on the Police Authority, saying that it was widely believed it would be removed by the Government. That would renege on the Hunt Report, and although not a fan of PANI, Mallon believed that would be a backward step. There would be no-one to stand up to the Chief Constable or the NIO, and accountability would be removed from policing.

3. Mallon finished with an impassioned plea to use the Agreement in security terms. He complained that insufficient SDLP members referred security matters to the Intergovernmental Conference for processing, and having asked for figures by area, was confident that the SDLP had failed to make use of the facility they had fought long and hard for in negotiating the Agreement. If the British Government was not informed about the problems then changes could

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be secured. It would enable the British Government to say there were no problems even when there were.

4. Joe Hendron made a short intervention agreeing with Mallon, but paying particular tribute to the RUC for their efforts in recent months to protect both communities at a time of very great tension. This sentiment received considerable applause from the hall.

5. The note of dissent came from Declan O'Loan, a Ballymena SDLP Councillor. He disagreed with Mallon that one would join the police in order to uphold a constitutional position. He argued the basis for joining the police was to uphold the law. He questioned whether Mallon's previous statements were not deeply insulting to those Catholics already in the RUC, and set back the efforts of the RUC to alter attitudes. Police should be seen as a community service for all, and while they were not perfect, he was confident that from the Chief Constable down every effort was made at the superintending levels to see that the police operated fairly in a divided society.

6. O'Loan was grateful for the police support following threats to Party members, and suggested that there was a two-way relationship between the police and community, each of whom required the respect of the other. If community support was not forthcoming then policing was made more difficult. The SDLP should respond to the RUC's efforts, identifying publicly with the police. They should participate fully in Police Liaison Committees, for example, and the SDLP should be willing to be represented on the Police Authority. O'Loan also claimed that intimidation was the biggest reason for Nationalists not joining the RUC, and concluded by saying that it was not the system of policing that was wrong but society which faced the problems. In the event of the constitutional issues being resolved [and peace resulting] there would be no need for emergency legislation, and the difficulties facing the police force would be removed.

7. Perhaps unsurprisingly this analysis was rejected by all the speakers who followed, culminating in an impassioned rebuttal by Mallon, who nevertheless claimed to be grateful for the fact that

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debate had been raised. Privately afterwards a number of SDLP members said that O'Loan represented the views of a proportion of the SDLP membership. A minority would go along with much of what he said. The rebuttals are familiar, but I record them for completeness.

8. Alban Maginness sought to draw a distinction between 'Catholic' and 'Nationalist', clearly implying that Catholic members of the RUC could not be Nationalists. He saw the RUC as a manifestation of the State, and argued the State was antipathetic to Nationalist interests and aspirations. Nationalists would only be comfortable joining the RUC when it was representative of a state whose institutions all could sign up to.

9. Mallon also disagreed with O'Loan, claiming the Secretary of State had said it was the duty of the police to uphold the constitutional position. That made the law a secondary consideration to political service. Mallon himself would currently find it impossible to join the police, given its name, origin and current role. On the Police Authority, he claimed the SDLP had nominated an individual who was turned down because he was a committed Nationalist. Furthermore, when goaded by Ministers at a Stormont dinner party, Mallon had thrown down the gauntlet asking them to appoint him. In the event, that had not happened either. It was therefore wrong of Government to criticise the SDLP for not nominating to PANI. The fact was that Nationalists would strike a discordant note in such a body and would be seen as too much of a disruptive influence.

10. On Police Liaison Committees, Mallon used the traditional line that many Councillors, including SDLP ones, met regularly with the RUC without needing to join Police Liaison Committees where Unionists were looking to drive wedges. The SDLP should not be looking to become a part of a phoney consensus, particularly when real issues like the direction of marches could not be decided by these Committees. It was a vintage Mallon performance, which was well received, but reflected some fairly unreconstructed views on Nationalism and the police force.

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11. The final debate on security concerned the motion that "Conference views with grave concern the upsurge in Loyalist paramilitary violence and notes the difference in response by the RUC to such paramilitary activity." This had initially been the first motion to be taken, but following an intervention by Hendron, again paying tribute to the RUC, it had been demoted. In the event, Denis Haughey, Cookstown SDLP Councillor, proposed the motion, although clearly rather embarrassed by it.

12. I understand that the motion had been agreed by the Cookstown Branch two months previously, in the immediate aftermath to perceived difficulties with the return of the all-conquering Derry GAA team and its followers through Cookstown. Haughey himself recognised that things had changed in the subsequent months, and whilst claiming the Branch had the right to put the motion forward, offered no other collaborating evidence to suggest the motion should be passed. Nonetheless, when put to the vote (and all motions are voted on at SDLP Conferences), the motion was carried by six to two with about 60 abstentions. This reflected more an unwillingness to disagree with an SDLP Branch than a strongly-held belief at the current time within the SDLP that there was a problem with the way in which policing happens.

Other issues

13. The other issue of major interest was the debate on electoral issues. The main motion recommended the introduction of electoral identity cards. There was apparent support for this until Mark Durkan and other executive members weighed in to suggest ID cards might have other uses, and would in any case not help resolve the proxy voting and postal vote abuses. In the end the SDLP used their traditional 'get-out' by referring the issue back to the executive.

14. A panoply of motions were passed criticising Government policy on social and economic involved, and they provide the bread-and-butter of any 'opposition' approach. Particular stress

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aid on health and education, and VAT on fuel was roundly condemned. (The first two may reflect the number of teachers and doctors in the SDLP). There were also warning shots against additional powers for local councils and a select committee at Westminster.

Comment

15. Mallon's claims with regard to PANI were news to Chris Maccabe and myself. If further information about them is needed we can pursue it with his office. His comments on 'working' the Agreement are also of interest, confirming a covert SDLP policy that had long been publicly suspected.

16. The Conference as a whole was dominated by Hume and the prospects for peace. It becomes ever more apparent as the years go by that the SDLP is a middle-class party dominated by professional people (and perhaps unsurprisingly given their socialist views, with very few businessmen). The party's leadership is now ageing, and its appeal to school leavers in West Belfast must be doubtful! The DFA arrived in force on Saturday, clearly intending to stay for the SDLP Dinner Dance, and together with Kevin McNamara, were very well received. The aura from the Conference was a slightly self-satisfied one, as though the SDLP had done all that could be expected of them and others were to blame for the problems that remained.

[Signed]

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