

PAB/4776/DP

FROM: J E McCONNELL, PAB
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PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B

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① Mr Spence
② Mr Robinson - To see
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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

I attach the latest analysis by PAB of political developments in Northern Ireland since the end of January. This period was most notable for the revelations about "the Duisburg talks". A meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference was held in London on 8 February.

Duisburg

2. The disclosures about a meeting between party representatives at Duisburg, and the subsequent informal discussions which took place, have caused a flurry of activity amongst the local political parties. The various parties were represented by Jack Allen (Chairman of the UUP), Peter Robinson (DUP), Austin Currie (SDLP) and Gordon Mawhinney (Alliance Party); the initiative for the meeting came from a local German churchman, Herr Eberhard Spiecker. Although none of the party leaders have disowned their representatives, Molyneaux, Paisley and Hume have all been at pains to emphasise that this meeting was little more than one of those occasions - which happen regularly - when party representatives meet and talk informally.

3. Jack Allen of the UUP dismissed suggestions of a "Duisburg agreement" and said that "the discussions were centred on how we could achieve a suspension of the Anglo-Eire pact". Paisley denied that Duisburg was a secret meeting to establish a model for governing Northern Ireland and he described Robinson's role as reaffirming "that until the Anglo-Irish

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Agreement ceases to be implemented and the Maryfield Secretariat ceases its operations there can be no negotiations with the British Government or the SDLP - there have not been and will not be negotiations about the future of Northern Ireland". Both the UUP and the DUP have made it abundantly clear that there was no contact with the Dublin Government in the talks and Paisley reiterated the unionist view by saying, "We stand by traditional unionist principles that Dublin can have no say in the internal government of Ulster".

4. John Hume has displayed a particular indignation at the disclosures about Duisburg and he referred to the media reports as "widely exaggerated and incredible". Austin Currie has confirmed that he reported back to his Party leader on the talks and in particular on the idea of creating a gap between meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference to facilitate inter-party talks. Hume has firmly rejected any suggestion that Currie went to Germany on a round of negotiations and he has been particularly critical of the source of the leak about the meeting.

5. Gordon Mawhinney, the Alliance Party's representative at Duisburg, has given the broadest hints about what went on. Mawhinney confirms that the party leaders were kept informed and that his own party "had no problems" with the process. He describes the meeting as moving to discussions on the obstacles to the parties "getting into talks" and he refers to the SDLP as being the party with a problem - mainly the idea of arranging a gap between the meetings of the A/I Intergovernmental Conference and the running-down of the operations of the Maryfield Secretariat to facilitate more substantive inter-party discussions. The Alliance Party leader, John Alderdice, has been angered by suggestions that his party was responsible for leaking the news and he expresses dismay "that the news of these meetings and discussions has been made public, for all along it has been my fear that the glare of publicity would frighten off those who were involved".

6. In documents exchanged between the unionist representatives and the SDLP the former described a possible scenario as:

- a. Two Governments making a statement that the next meeting of the Conference was to be fixed for a future date sufficiently far in advance to facilitate inter-party discussions.
- b. In seeking clarification the unionists would meet the Secretary of State who would explain, in confidence, that only a skeleton presence would remain at Maryfield.
- c. Unionists would then avoid any public discussion on the issue but would release a statement saying they believed that they could enter negotiations with the other constitutional parties.

7. The SDLP reply advised that they have no objection to using the period between meetings of the Conference to hold talks but they would not wish to give the impression that the Agreement and its workings had been suspended. It went on to re-echo the view expressed frequently by Hume that talks should take place outside the Agreement with the aim of seeking "an agreement that will transcend any previous agreement ever made and that the agenda of the talks will address all of the relationships that can contribute to the realisation of peace and stability". The SDLP referred to the fact that the representatives of the constitutional parties have already come together outside the framework of the Agreement to discuss other issues eg economic issues such as Shorts and Harland and Wolff. In addition they repeated their belief that before any talks start the parties should "agree on the mechanisms whereby any agreement reached should be endorsed by the people"; this is taken to refer to the SDLP idea of parallel referendums in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on the outcome of any talks.

Unionists

8. In a speech given during a debate on the Anglo-Irish Agreement at Cambridge University John Taylor of the UUP said there was a need

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for contact between the two parts of Ireland and he argued that if the Agreement was suspended unionists could "enter into talks with Dublin about North-South co-operation in parallel with talks within Northern Ireland to create a devolved system at Stormont to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement". In acknowledging that institutions of Government within Northern Ireland must give recognition to minority claims and allegiances he accused Dublin politicians and the SDLP of refusing "to accept the reality of the British dimension".

9. In a recent interview in the Irish Times Molyneux said that the paper passed to the SDLP on the aftermath of the Duisburg talks was not a unionist policy document. He returned to an idea - raised by him last summer - of "wider British-Irish relationships" and talked about the two Governments giving "serious thought to designing a new agreement which would not put the unionists in a position of outsiders, which would not exclude unionists, but which would supersede this Agreement". In regard to the speculation last year about exchanges of papers between Dublin and the unionists Molyneux denies that an exchange of position papers took place and whilst acknowledging that there were "three or four exchanges openly and publicly" he rejects any suggestion that there have been ongoing private contacts between his office and Mr Haughey. As to the Agreement Molyneux sees the unionists not so much as winning but that those who support the Agreement are losing and he argues that the removal of the Agreement would allow the two communities to "take their rightful place in seeking to end the ancient quarrel which has plagued the two nations for far too long".

10. In an address to the Young Fine Gael Conference UUP MP Ken Maginnis expressed his dismay at what he believed was the "unnatural haste" with which the two Governments reaffirmed their commitment "to the rigidity of the Anglo-Irish Agreement" and he suggested that the local parties would take this as a signal that they should resume their "seige positions". Maginnis asserted that it was the constitutional parties of Northern Ireland who had the potential to resolve the problems of the Province and he called for an agreement reflecting the two traditions and the fact that they must share the

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same piece of soil. However such an agreement should not be seen as a stepping stone either to a Northern Ireland eventually totally integrated within the United Kingdom or as a half-way house to a united Ireland.

11. A statement issued on 10 February by the UUP has the potential to create problems for the joint policies being followed by the UUP and the DUP. There is concern amongst DUP ranks that the statement leans too heavily towards integration and away from devolution for Northern Ireland. In saying that HMG does not appear content to suspend or replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement the UUP argued that the Government must "now decide to govern Northern Ireland on the lines of existing and proposed institutions of government in Great Britain". Some elements in the DUP may well see this as an opportunist move by the UUP to pursue integration and it is likely that both of the unionist leaderships will be involved in face to face talks to clarify the position.

General

12. The Secretary of State's call to parties to consider how further progress might be made has been welcomed by the Alliance Party and the SDLP. The reaction from the unionist parties has been guarded although there are strong suggestions that Dr Paisley may have thought of making a quick statement in strong terms rejecting any possibility of agreeing to the proposals for further talks. In the event it seems that Mr Molyneaux persuaded him to tone down his reaction, at least until they had had opportunity to discuss the matter together, and after they had closely studied the text.

Sinn Fein

13. The Sinn Fein Ard Fheis was held in Dublin over the weekend of 28/29 January. In his address the Sinn Fein President, Gerry Adams, referred to an "exceptional and regrettable level of civilian casualties" and his comments are seen as a warning to the IRA that civilian deaths can be counter-productive to Sinn Fein's political needs. However there was no suggestion that the "armed struggle" was seen as inappropriate or immoral and the "armalite and ballot-box" strategy of Sinn Fein remains unchanged.

Comments

14. If nothing else the disclosures about Duisburg at least set the discussions in a public context and have allowed the party's to gauge community and other reaction. There has been some disquiet expressed but generally no permanent damage appears to have been caused to any of the participating parties or individuals, at least for as long as the party leaderships continue to play down the significance of this development. There can be little doubt that the revelation about Duisburg caught the imagination of the media and the fact that the party leaderships, and to a lesser extent the British and Irish Governments, were aware of the initial contact and subsequent exchanges has given a air of authority and significance to the story.

15. It will take time for the waves to subside but indications so far would suggest that the parties have not closed the door on future talks. There will be a period of review and consolidation within the parties but the hope must be that they will not retreat back to their entrenched position. In view of the publicity surrounding these events it may be some time before there are any further developments on a face to face basis and it may prove difficult to engineer further inter-party contacts in the run-up to the local government elections. Nonetheless some mild encouragement may be taken from the fact that the Secretary of State's invitation has not been rejected out of hand and there remains the option that some discussions may yet take place between Dr Mawhinney and a number of the parties here.

(signed)

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cc PS/Ministers (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Burns - B