

From: A J Whysall
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Date: 30 May, 1996

cc PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) -
PS/Baroness Denton (B&L)
PS/Mr Moss (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Thomas
Mr Bell
Mr Leach
Mr Watkins
Mr Wood (B&L)
Mr Beeton
Mr Hill
Mr Lavery
Mr Maccabe
Mr Stephens
Ms Harrison
Ms Vineall, RID, FCO
Mr Cran MP
Mr Elletson MP
Lady O Maitland MP
Mr Campbell Bannerman

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L)
PS/MICHAEL ANCRAM (B&L)

ELECTION RESULTS: LINES TO TAKE

1. I understand ministers would like lines to take to cover various contingencies that might arise as the elections results become known. I attach a set of bull points and defensive lines. We shall keep them under review tomorrow, and supplement or adjust them as may be necessary. PAB and REL will keep ministers and colleagues informed of major developments.
2. There are of course limits to what ministers can properly say, given that they need to remain clear of any suggestion of partisanship, or involvement in inter-party controversy. There is little advantage, and clear danger, in offering any sort of analysis of the results. Nor will it be possible to comment definitively on the exclusion of Sinn Féin, since there is a requirement of consultation with the Irish Government (my other submission of today). The bull points play up the themes that controversy about the method used to get us here should be put behind us; the important thing now is constructive negotiation.

3. Ministers may also be challenged over the performance of the Conservative Party, and the possibility of its delegates participating in the negotiations. Mr Campbell Bannerman may wish to offer lines on this.
4. The Secretary of State's office was also anxious to have a line for No 10. I attach a draft letter covering one.

or why not

A J Whysall

NORTHERN IRELAND ELECTIONS, 30 MAY

General points to make

What is important now is that the way is open to substantive all-party talks, to which the various parties come, fortified by an elective mandate. We hope that they will feel able in the light of that to make the fullest, most constructive and most productive contribution to the talks.

We have here an opportunity of first importance to set Northern Ireland, and all of us in these two islands, on a new course. There have been very significant shifts in thinking in recent years in many quarters, and we have a chance now to capitalise on this in the interests of everyone. The agenda is open. There is much hard work ahead for us, but also a great deal of scope to improve the lives and prospects of people in Northern Ireland.

We want to see Sinn Féin there; they have an important contribution to make. But it is widely acknowledged that they cannot make that contribution without an IRA ceasefire in place.

Defensive lines

Exclusion of Sinn Féin: we have made clear that we see no place for Sinn Féin in the talks in the absence of a ceasefire on the part of the IRA. That is also the line pyyythe Irish government has taken. We have said we shall consult with the Irish Government before a final decision, but subject to that I do not see any prospect that we shall issue any invitation to Sinn Féin – unless the 1994 IRA ceasefire is unequivocally restored.

[If there is a ceasefire announcement:] appears extremely welcome; we shall need to consider carefully the terms of the announcement, and consult with the Irish Government.

Talks pointless without Sinn Féin: I hope it may still be possible for Sinn Féin to be there, through restoration of the ceasefire. But of course there is a great deal of room for progress without them. There will be a substantial representation from both traditions in Northern Ireland, and a considerable number of issues we can discuss and

resolve. I believe it is our duty, and that of the constitutional parties, to apply ourselves to those issues, and it would be quite wrong to allow ourselves to be at all deterred by the failure of the IRA to renounce violence.

Turnout low: [figures for turnout in recent elections in Northern Ireland – 1992 parliamentary, 69.7%; 1993 local government, 56.6%; 1994 European, 49.4%] we believed it was important to give the people of Northern Ireland a chance to express their views in advance of the talks, and permit the parties to acquire a mandate to participate. A substantial number of voters have turned out. It is disappointing in some ways that there were not more: but it is the voter's prerogative to decide whether he or she votes. The result we have represents a legitimate exercise in democracy. Now we need to look forward to ways in which political progress can be made.

Electoral mechanics ill-judged: We consulted the parties closely over the precise means of electing delegates, and found no agreement. The system we chose incorporated elements from a number of parties' preferred options. *[If pressed:* But there is no purpose in prolonging controversy over this; the electoral system we chose was designed for this occasion only, and nothing similar is likely again]. The important thing now is to focus on making progress in the talks.

Particular results: it is not for me to comment on how individual parties have fared. That is a matter for the electorate, and it is right that I should stay out of it. All major strands of political opinion in Northern Ireland have secured representation at the negotiations (and in the forum). Precise electoral strength will not be a determining factor; any agreement reached in the talks would need to be endorsed at a referendum before it could be implemented.

[If appropriate: failure of loyalists to gain election of delegates]: not for us to comment on the decision of the electorate. Participation in the talks themselves is open to parties that have achieved representation through the elective process. But the PUP and UDP represent an important point of view – like a number of groups that are not participating in the talks. Their restraint and constructive attitude have been valuable in recent months. We shall keep close and regular contact with them.

[If appropriate: success of women's coalition]: not for me to comment on the success or failure of particular parties, as such. But we have said that we welcomed greater participation by women in political life in Northern Ireland, and the return of a number of women delegates is from that point of view welcome.

Forum: the forum has the potential to play an important role in the search for new understandings and accommodations, giving an opportunity dialogue and for groups not represented in the talks to have their voices heard, and encouraging the development of constructive new thinking. *Location:* we are investigating the possibilities. We want the forum to have the most suitable available facilities for the discharge of its functions. We hope to make an announcement shortly.

Draft letter for signature by PS/SECRETARY OF STATE

<i>To</i>	<i>Copies</i>	<i>Hidden copies</i>
J Holmes Esq Private Secretary to the Prime Minister 10 Downing Street	W Ehrman Esq, FCO	PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) PS/Baroness Denton (B&L) PS/Mr Moss (B&L) PS/PUS (B&L) PS/Sir David Fell Mr Thomas Mr Bell Mr Leach Mr Watkins Mr Wood (B&L) Mr Beeton Mr Hill Mr Lavery Mr Maccabe Mr Stephens Ms Harrison Ms Vineall, RID, FCO HM Embassy, Washington Mr Cran MP Mr Elletson MP Lady O Maitland MP Mr Campbell Bannerman A J Whysall

NORTHERN IRELAND ELECTIONS, 30 MAY

You asked for a line to take on the Northern Ireland elections yesterday.

Ministers here will concentrate on the theme that the important point is now to focus on the talks, and making the most of them. There is little to be gained from the Government's point of view by any sort of comment on or analysis of the results, and obvious dangers. I attach a line to take in this sense, with several defensive points.

We should avoid definitively saying at present that Sinn Féin are excluded from the talks, since we have undertaken to consult with the Irish before reaching a final decision. There is no reason to doubt their attitude, and it will be helpful to us to portray the exclusion as a conclusion in which the Irish fully share. We expect to issue invitations to nominate teams for the talks, excluding Sinn Féin if there is no ceasefire, early next week.

I am copying this letter to the William Ehrman in the FCO.

ELECTION RESULTS: LINES TO TAKE

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NORTHERN IRELAND ELECTIONS: LINE TO TAKE

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