

ASST 754/3
SEC 24 MAR 1995
CENT SEC

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281/3
23 MAR 1995
CCMU.

FROM: C G MACCABE
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
22 MARCH 1995

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23/3
1. Mr Alexander MB
2. Mr Caplan 23.3
3. Mr Hargreaves Mrs Keating
4. Mr Hargreaves LD 24/3
21.1

- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Wood (B&L) - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mrs Brown - B
- HMA Dublin - B
- Mr Lamont, RID - B
- Mr Caine - B

JUDERY 1050/3
SEC 22 MAR 1995
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PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L) - B

ASST 20 651/3
SEC 24 MAR 1995
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POLITICAL UPDATE: WEEK TO WEDNESDAY 22 MARCH

Summary

Three issues dominated the political scene. Jim Molyneux comfortably survived a leadership challenge at his Party's AGM in Belfast; and in Washington, Gerry Adams reached new heights of political respectability. In both cases, the long-term implications could be significant. More widely, Nationalism remains content with the direction of political progress, while Unionism continues to lack a coherent stance. The successful entry of Michael Ancram into LXD was generally welcomed across the political spectrum.

UUP

2. The 88 votes accorded to Lee Reynolds (plus the 10 spoiled votes which counted as abstention) were significantly more than had been forecast for such an unknown challenger, and sent the clear message that, beneath the strong personal loyalty the UUP feel for

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Jim Molyneaux, there is a sub-stratum of discontent with the direction recently taken by the Party. Some of the more thoughtful newspaper editorials suggested that change was necessary, in that a strong, self-confident UUP is crucial if the search for a balanced political accommodation in NI is to lead anywhere: others criticised the Party for being too complacent under Molyneaux, thus failing to ensure that the position of the largest political grouping in Northern Ireland was given the recognition it deserved.

3. Party spokesmen, meanwhile, continued to re-state their position on the Frameworks. Molyneaux, during Northern Ireland Questions in Westminster, compared them to an Inland Revenue circular. Martin Smyth claimed that the almost universal reaction had been "dismay and disappointment". David Trimble emphasised that the Party was willing to talk about their own proposals, but cast doubt on the trustworthiness of the Government in any such discussions. John Taylor, addressing the Galway Chamber of Commerce, held out the prospect of closer (but definitely non-political) social and economic links between North and South - the latter rejoining the sterling area, and Aer Lingus becoming a subsidiary of British Airways were two examples of what he had in mind!

DUP

4. Perceived inconsistencies in the Government's attitude towards Ministers entering dialogue with Sinn Fein gave Dr Paisley the opportunity for a comprehensive review of recent developments. The Queen's visit to Northern Ireland (which he claimed was intended to deceive Unionists as to the extent of the capitulation to Sinn Fein which has already taken place) was seamlessly blended with troop withdrawals, a watering-down of Government requirements on arms decommissioning, and the perfidious behaviour of President Clinton, to prove to Paisley's satisfaction that the policy of HMG was one of total capitulation to Republicanism and a removal of Northern Ireland from the UK by stealth. Peter Robinson, announcing

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the publication of his detailed analysis of the Frameworks, "The Union Under Fire", claimed that obsolete weaponry had already been stockpiled for surrender by the IRA, to allow them to make the gesture which would meet the Government's minimalist standards for political acceptability.

SDLP

5. John Hume used the St Patrick's Day celebrations in Washington to re-cycle his traditional appeals for dialogue and mutual understanding. Internal reports suggested that he was less than happy at the amount of attention devoted to Adams. There were certainly signs that he took pains to emphasise his status as senior visiting Irish politician.

Sinn Fein

6. Some commentators took the opportunity to emphasise the distance travelled by Adams from obscure Belfast barman to (at least temporary) star of the Washington media circus. Others pointed out that a price would have to be paid for the Presidential handshake, and that attempts to continue distancing SF from the decommissioning of Republican arms would be difficult to sustain back in Northern Ireland. A bomb which partially exploded in Newry was dismissed by Adams as "British dirty tricks", but was interpreted by everyone else as a reminder of the need to engage in meaningful talks about decommissioning. The opening of a permanent SF office in Washington was a tangible reminder of the continuing importance to the Party's finances of US funding. Speculation, coupled with a certain amount of confusion in the public mind, continued about when and how SF might pass the test necessary for Ministerial involvement in XD.

Alliance Party

7. During his US visit, Dr Alderdice had two opportunities for discussion with President Clinton, and on each occasion attempted to

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provide a corrective view of the peace process. At home, newly appointed Party Chairman Steve McBride criticised the "arrogance and triumphalism" of SF, and suggested that they should pay more attention to meeting the concerns of their fellow citizens. A Party delegation led by Alderdice had a useful meeting with the Secretary of State this morning to discuss the current political situation and the way forward in the light of the Frameworks.

Others

8. The eighth meeting of LXD also took place this morning. For the first time the Government team was led at Ministerial level, by Michael Ancram. This development was possible as both the PUP and UDP had confirmed that they would seek to be genuinely constructive in addressing the key issues, including arms decommissioning, and would join in an exploration of the ways this could most effectively be achieved. And, furthermore, because it was the shared view of all sides that a Ministerial presence would facilitate constructive discussion and a successful outcome on the key issues, including the decommissioning of arms. The meeting went well and the date of the next has been set for 29 March.

9. The decision of the UDP to accept President Clinton's invitation to Washington was criticised by the DUP as lending credibility to the presence of Adams. Gary McMichael stressed the importance of making the Unionist position known on the Hill - a view which was tacitly endorsed by suggestions from the UUP that they should (like SF) open a permanent office in the US.

10. Following the death of Sir James Kilfedder on Monday, speculation about a successor in his North Down constituency has already begun. Unionists seem determined to make the by-election a mini-referendum on the Frameworks. Possible candidates could

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include Reg Empey (a member of the UUP Talks team) and Robert McCartney QC (an independent Unionist who contested the seat in the 1987); but given the strongly personal nature of the vote for Kilfedder, and without knowing the line-up of candidates, it is impossible to predict the future mood of the electorate.

[Signed]

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