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cc Mr Watkins
Mr Maccabe
Mr Jordan
Mr Canavan 229
Mr McWhinney
Mr Corbett
Mr May

NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN MICHAEL ANCRAM AND A DELEGATION FROM THE PEACE TRAIN ORGANISATION (PTO)

RATHGAEL HOUSE - 16 AUGUST 1994

Present: M Ancram
Mr T Canavan, CCRU
Mr P May, PAB

Peace Train:
Mr Sam McAughtry, Northern Chairman
Mr Chris Hudson, Southern Chairman
Rev Roy Magee

In Attendance: Mrs M Brown

INTRODUCTION

1. The agenda for this meeting (as submitted by the Peace Train Organisation) was ostensibly about sectarian tension and Protestant alienation in terms of economic disadvantage but in fact became almost entirely political.
2. Sam McAughtry and Chris Hudson gave a brief background to the Organisation and explained that it was largely about offering people from both sides of the community, the opportunity to express their disapproval of the continuing violence in Northern Ireland. The Organisation also plays an important role in terms of informing public opinion and exploding myths. On this occasion their focus was on Protestant alienation but they commented that next time it could just as easily be focused on problems within the Nationalist community.
3. In recent times, the PTO had become increasingly concerned about Protestant alienation in the North. Rev Magee suggested that Unionists had moved from a position of perceived strength to one of fear and suspicion. The perception was that their love of the 'mother country' was being rejected and that the IRA had demonstrated that the bullet and the bomb achieved desired

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objectives. This perception had, he felt, been fuelled by a number of historic turning points including the abolition of Stormont; structural changes in the RUC; the Anglo Irish Agreement; the introduction of Proportional Representation and most recently the Joint Declaration. All of this was resulting in greater proactivity on the part of Loyalist parliamentary organisations. In recent years, 'walls' had come down all over the world but in Northern Ireland, he commented that 'walls' remained in the minds of the Protestant community - built of fear and suspicion. The Peace Train Organisation was of the opinion, however, that Protestant alienation could, to some extent, be redressed in a number of ways.

Ministerial visits to Protestant areas

4.1 The PTO had welcomed the Secretary of State's recent visit to North Belfast and urged Ministers to make more visits to Protestant areas - even though they may not be in a position to announce funds for whatever. The important thing was that Ministers should be seen on the ground. Rev Magee specifically mentioned a possible visit to the Museum at Glencairn (action: PS/M Ancram).

4.2 Michael Ancram replied that Ministers welcomed invitations and submissions from Protestant community groups - all of which are considered on their merits. Ministers regularly visited all parts of Northern Ireland, however the PTO could assist by ensuring invitations were forthcoming.

Language/expertise in submitting views

5.1 Sam McAughtry suggested that a whole new language had emerged after the Hume/Adams Talks. He urged that the Government should take care in the language it used as it often added to fears. When asked about specific examples they were very vague. He also made the point that Protestant community groups tended to be less experienced in submitting views to secure Government funds than their RC counterparts and were at times less articulate. As a result, they sometimes wrongly felt at a disadvantage.

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5.2 The Minister appreciated the difficulties on the language issue and assured those present that Government was sensitive to this matter - the aim was to achieve a 'level base'. He also recognised that there can be an imbalance of skill in presenting cases. Again Government is sensitive to this and he emphasised that all cases/submissions are considered on their merits regardless of their degree of sophistication. On the latter point, the Minister explained that EC funding was available for training purposes and suggested that this might be pursued further.

The 'wishes of the Northern Ireland people'

6.1 Sam McAughtry referred to the Joint Declaration and to the term often used concerning the 'wishes of the NI people'. This tended to be interpreted in the context of a Unionist veto. He felt however that it would help the situation if someone could quantify the number of RCs who wished to remain within the Union.

6.2 The Minister replied that a survey figure of over 30% had been used when answering questions in Parliament. The problem however was that the position could not be measured on an electorate basis.

Conclusion

7.1 The delegation acknowledged that much of their concern emanated from impressions and perceptions. For example, Sam McAughtry suggested that Northern Ireland Ministers gave the impression of being a little 'too neutral' on occasion.

7.2 Chris Hudson referred to the fact that his Trade Union had passed a motion to the effect that Irish Unionism was just as valid as Irish Nationalism. He felt that there were indications of a sea change - helped by Peace Groups - but more needs to be done to get the message across that ROI does not want a 'take-over'.

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7.3 The Minister concluded by saying that he had found the meeting very useful. He was aware of the difficulties and fears within the Protestant community and reassured those present that:-

- there would be no constitutional change without the consent of the majority of Northern Ireland people. Although the negotiation of the Joint Framework Document remained confidential and "needed to be for obvious reasons" he hoped to be able to share its contents with the political parties shortly after it had been agreed;
- the bullet and bomb could not be seen to succeed;
- he and his fellow Ministers were always open to hear representations from the Protestant community.

Mrs M Brown

M BROWN (MRS)

22 August 1994