

Am cc 270/4

C O N F I D E N T I A L

ASST./ SEC 47/4
30 APR 1993
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29 APR 1993
CENT SEC

FROM: PETER MAY
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
27 APRIL 1993

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- Ps/Mr Mates (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Hanley (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas (L&B) - B
- Mr Ledlie - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Hill - B
- Mr Cooke - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Dodds - B
- Mr Archer, RID
- HMA Dublin

240/93

in origin
[Handwritten signatures]

MARK DURKAN

Summary

Durkan was in downbeat mood about the prospects for any agreement being reached in future Talks (which he believed were likely). He was particularly depressed by his contacts with young Unionists at the Encounter conference in Oxford last weekend. Durkan also refuted Hume's claim that the majority could become a minority within 15 years, but in this context seemed particularly drawn to Spring's concept of a covenant.

2. Durkan was also concerned at what he felt was the misrepresentation of the SDLP's position during the previous Talks, and argued against the widespread impression that the Unionists had been willing to make substantial concessions, especially in the light of the "cynical" 9 November paper. He was proposing to set the SDLP's position on the public record after the local government elections.

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Detail: Talks

3. Durkan had attended the Encounter conference in Oxford last weekend, and had found widespread lack of understanding of the SDLP position from among Unionists present. In particular, they had shown a hatred for Hume, a belief that the SDLP as a whole, but the leadership in particular, was travelling on the back of the Provisional movement in order to achieve its political ends, and that the SDLP's intransigence in the previous Talks was part of a wider conspiracy. Measures such as the sharing of responsibility at local government level over the past 20 years was a ruse simply designed to secure reciprocal action from Unionists.

4. Durkan had been depressed by this apparent ignorance, which indicated to him that there was no point in waiting for future Unionist generations to come through and behave more "reasonably". In fact young Unionists appeared even more intransigent than those he had dealt with in the talks process, and the level of political polarisation reflected in what he saw as hatred for the SDLP was particularly worrying.

5. This clearly influenced his wider thinking on political development matters. He accepted that Talks were likely after the Local Government Elections, but showed no enthusiasm for them. He saw no prospect of any resolution to the central difficulties identified in the previous Talks. Indeed the approach of the Unionists to the Talks, with their concentration on building up models for Strand 1 without even allowing a single agreed piece of paper to result from Strand 2 indicated their desire for an internal settlement. They were not interested in Strand 2 issues, nor had the Government forced them to address that shortfall. Furthermore the Government had initially promised that the Strand 1 sub-committee would not work up models, but merely address issues in abstract. This had not been the case. (At least part of this concern over the handling of strand 1 may in part be defensive due to the difficult position he found himself in when the SDLP leadership withdrew the rug from under the feet of the negotiating team).

*Soman
principles?*

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5. Future Talks needed to concentrate on Strand 2 matters which was where no effort to synthesise the views of the parties had been made. Durkan himself would be less willing to be amenable in any further Strand 1 negotiations, arguing Unionists were not serious about reaching an accommodation. Durkan acknowledged that some business had been done in Strand 2 with the UUP, but believed those they were dealing with could not bring the party as a whole with them, especially if they actually meant what they had said in bi-laterals. He doubted even this as the UUP had given a different message in talking to the Irish from that to the SDLP.

Liverpool speech

cf. Nobby
7. Durkan had not had the chance to read in detail the Secretary of State's speech, but did not seem particularly exercised or enthused by it as a result as an initial skim-through. He had noted the reassurance aimed at Nationalists regarding no internal settlement, and that to Unionists regarding no United Ireland or joint authority. He was also supportive of the proposal to put a scheme before the parties in any future Talks, recognising that some starting point was needed. As he mellowed towards the end of the lunch, he suggested two issues which might assist the progress of the Talks. The first was early acceptance by all that a dual referendum would be the means by which any agreement would be validated. This would, he felt, improve the atmosphere of the Talks and provide reassurance for the SDLP. He also suggested that during any future Talks, HMG should announce an embargo on the implementation of those policies which might be seen as unpopular within Northern Ireland, so as to allow the community to see that the Talks process could have a bearing on the future. This would increase the probability of people reflecting their policy as well as communal interest to the politicians involved. He was particularly thinking of areas such as Health, Education and Privatisation.

8. Durkan's concern about the misrepresentation of the SDLP's position during the last Talks, and that of Hume in particular, led him to consider how best to put that right. He believed it would be

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necessary to go public, explaining the SDLP's position, the lack of substantive movement offered by the Unionists, despite their promise to be generous, the charade of the 9 November paper and what he saw as unwarranted pressure by HMG on the SDLP in Strand 1, while the Unionists were allowed a free run. (This is a recurrent theme of Durkan's, and one which cannot, despite many attempts, be shaken by insistence that HMG put pressure on all parties in the attempt to seek agreement. One instance of HMG's calumny was the private letter to the two Unionist leaders by the Secretary of State, which had a very nearly led to an SDLP walkout. Durkan himself had been among those who would have favoured that course of action, but had been persuaded by Hume that it was important to remain at the negotiating table.)

Local Government

9. When asked how the SDLP would react to any changes in Council leadership and approach in areas such as Belfast and Cookstown, Durkan was cautious. He argued that if the Unionists were to take such a course it would be a ploy for them to achieve their dual ends of a select committee and greater powers for local government. The SDLP would not be fooled by this. They would want to see proof that Unionist action was for real over time.

10. He also indicated that the SDLP would be expecting similar responsibility-sharing arrangements as those employed in Councils they controlled. (This would mean an alternation of the Chairmanship of the Council and not merely the award of some committee chairmanships or vice chairmanship of the Council. By taking this position Durkan had safeguarded himself from having to welcome any Unionist actions, which he described as 20 years too late in any case. Although Durkan did not say it in terms, it was clear that Durkan would not be supportive of further powers for local government in any case, even though he would find it difficult to argue the case in the unlikely event of Unionist Councils calling his bluff.

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Local Government Elections

11. Durkan was standing as a candidate in Derry for the first time. It is almost certainly not a reflection of his desire to become involved in Local Government, but rather an acknowledgement of the necessity of building a local powerbase if he is to succeed Hume as MP for Foyle. SDLP hope to take overall control of the council (currently have 14 of the 30 seats), and may take one seat from Sinn Fein. Durkan thought the SDLP should gain a few seats overall, but would not increase their overall vote by much. In West Belfast he seemed resigned to failing to match Sinn Fein. He acknowledged that Joe Hendron had an insufficiently high profile.

Rosemount

12. Durkan acknowledged the work of the RUC in helping to defuse recent protests at Rosemount. Their attitude had been most helpful, but nothing could take away from the unpopularity of the Rosemount Tower, and the fear that invoked in local people. Sinn Fein were seeking to make use of local feeling in fighting the Local Elections, but the SDLP hoped to be able to counter that by standing a local shop-keeper.

Census

13. When asked about Hume's comment to the Secretary of State that 15 years would see the minority become a majority, Durkan was dismissive. He did not believe that to be the case, and acknowledged that a proportion of the Catholic population were content with the status quo in any case. Durkan also noted that Mallon had made some comments on the census in the US (which I have not seen reported), which he indicated were also unhelpful.

Comment

14. Durkan had clearly been influenced by his bad experience in Oxford, and appeared rather shaken by the vehemence of the views of Unionists there. This undoubtedly coloured his view of the likelihood of Talks success, but his overall lack of optimism is not

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new. He had had contact with Chris McGimpsey on a couple of occasions since the end of the Talks, but did not feel their contacts had taken them any further. Durkan seem in no mood to approach any future Talks in positive frame of mind.

15. I suggested to Durkan that his analysis had offered almost as many conspiracy theories against Unionists as he reported them having shown against the SDLP. He did not dissent from this view, nor from the need to break the cycle somewhere, although he said his position was not strong enough within the party, nor was his will currently sufficient for him to try to play that role. He had little to offer when asked what the consequence of failed Talks would be. He clearly saw a return to direct rule and the operation of the Agreement as the only alternative.

[Signed Linda Ogilby for]

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