

FEB 1993
SA/60/2FROM: C G MACCABE
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
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775/92

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
 PS/Mr Mates (B&L) - B
 PS/Mr Hanley (B&L) - B
 PS/Mr Fell - B
 Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
 Mr Ledlie - B
 Mr Bell - B
 Mr Steele - B
 Mr Williams - B
 Mr Watkins - B
 Mr Wood (B&L) - B
 Mr Hill - B
 Mr Cooke - B
 Mr Stephens - B
 Mr Dodds - B
 Mr Leach - B
 Mr Rickard - B
 Mr Quinn - B
 Mr Caine - B
 Mr Archer, RID - B
 HMA, Dublin - B

Maginnis
McBride
McCrea

PS/PUS (B&L) - B

**TALKS - SECURITY - CONVERSATIONS WITH KEN MAGINNIS MP AND
 STEVE MCBRIDE**

My minute of 4 February recorded my recent conversation with Seamus Mallon and promised to let you know how PAB's conversations with Messrs Maginnis, McBride and McCrea had gone. Unfortunately, Mr McCrea cancelled our meeting at the last minute, due to a family bereavement, so this note only relates to the views of the UUP and the Alliance Party. I hope to re-arrange the meeting with Mr McCrea early next week.

UUP

2. I saw Mr Maginnis on Monday and had given him advance notice of what I wanted to talk about. As I mentioned in yesterday's minute, little of significance emerged. He greeted me with the warning "Let me make one thing absolutely clear, don't mess with the RUC if you don't want serious trouble from the Unionist community." He continued that Unionist confidence had been damaged enough by HMG's apparent willingness to accede to many of the SDLP's insatiable

demands. But the situation would have been a lot worse if security had not been kept out of the debate; and, so far as the UUP was concerned, it would have to stay out until the constitutional question was resolved to their satisfaction. It would be pointless to give any serious thought to the difficult issues that lay beyond that hurdle until it had been safely negotiated. Hence the UUP's continued unwillingness even to consider the SDLP's security proposals (or, as Mr Maginnis stressed, more correctly their apparent proposals as they had never been formally displayed to his party, or to anyone else as far as he knew). That said, he repeated what he told me a couple of weeks ago, namely that what his party knew of the proposals suggested to them that the SDLP could not be serious. Ideas such as an all-Ireland counter-terrorist force and local control of the army (although not, he added, significantly, local control of the RUC once peace returned) came from the realms of fantasy. Even if the UUP got everything they wanted on the constitutional issue the former was a political (and operational) impossibility, whilst the latter was operationally undesirable, unacceptable to HMG, and unwanted by Unionists anyway.

3. As far as Mr Maginnis was concerned, there would be no progress on any Talks front until the Irish Government signified a willingness to change Articles 2 and 3. "Could" to "would" still just might be enough to break the log-jam, although there were signs that Mr Molyneaux (under pressure from the party doubters) would ask for more than this, for example, a commitment to sponsor the necessary constitutional amendment in the context of "nothing agreed until everything agreed" (comment: now seemingly confirmed by Molyneaux's statement following Wednesday's IGC). However, the ball was in Mr Spring's court and he (Maginnis) was prepared to go to Dublin at any time to hear what was on offer: Molyneaux - wisely, he said - was not.

Alliance Party

4. The Alliance Party's analysis of the SDLP's security proposals - as conveyed by Steve McBride - was tinged (not unexpectedly) with the bitterness which now characterises relations between the two

parties. But that said, the party would recognise a degree of validity in some of the SDLP's underlying assumptions. The following were the main points to emerge:-

- Yes.
- the SDLP are right in claiming that the security policy adopted by any devolved administration in NI would be tested virtually to destruction by the paramilitaries on both sides: it would need to be extremely robust to survive such a firestorm;
 - that in itself militates against giving responsibility to local politicians in the first instance: any political configuration which exercised control would be stressed to breaking point by the hard decisions which would have to be taken, and this would have a repercussive effect in all other areas of government;
 - a phased approach was the only realistic option: for a period of years, until they had demonstrated an ability to exercise their judgement on security matters in a responsible fashion, local politicians should be allowed only to advise the Secretary of State;
 - such advice should carry weight with the Secretary of State in proportion to the cross-party unanimity it demonstrated - ie advice agreed by all the parties would have to be taken more seriously than representations from a single grouping;
 - whilst it was sensible to look at the separation of the RUC's security and law and order functions, the practicalities of all-Ireland policing made the idea inoperable: the Dublin Government had already informed the SDLP of their reservations about the proposals (and in private conversation with Alliance Party members had revealed complete disbelief that such ideas should have been brought forward by a responsible political party).

5. Overall, the Alliance Party regard John Hume as being not interested in achieving a political settlement. They think Seamus Mallon's outlook is generally more rooted in reality, but in regard to security, believes he betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of what Unionists will tolerate, or even what it is practicable to achieve in the short term.

Comment

6. These conversations did not take us much further down the path of knowledge. Both parties regard the SDLP's security proposals, as they understand them, as unrealistic and unworkable in any foreseen circumstances. Nevertheless, one might have hoped that the UUP would have taken the trouble to study and analyse them - if only to demolish them in any subsequent debate. This sort of intellectual exercise has not, however, been a prominent feature of the UUP's Talks handling plan. In contrast, and characteristically, the Alliance Party have had their thinking-caps on and in general their conclusions are valid. When I spoke to him recently Dr Alderdice went further than Mr McBride in his criticism of the SDLP's proposals, coming close to Mr Maginnis' position at times.

7. What the conversations have shown is the width of the gulf between the SDLP and the other parties on what they all readily admit is a crucial issue on the road to a solution. But there is no sign that the parties are prepared to seize the initiative to try to confront the issue themselves. Like Mr Mallon's remarks on the subject, this suggests that once again the Government team will have to apply a firm hand to the tiller if the Talks ship is to be brought out of the doldrums.

[signed]

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