

CONFIDENTIAL

26/1/93-EJ

167/1/93-EJ

062/1/93-NC

FROM: E STRANAGHAN
DATE: 27 JANUARY 1993

Now file pl (C)

PS/MR D WATKINS
PS/MR R MACKENZIE
PS/MR J McCONNELL
PS/MR C MACCABE
PS/MR T McCUSKER
PS/MR S MARSH
PS/MR E JARDINE
Ms CATHERINE GRAY

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR PROTESTANT AREAS

This is to confirm my telephone conversation re a meeting on the above subject arranged for Wednesday 17 February 1993 at 10.00 am in Mr Watkins' office, Stormont Castle.

I attach a copy of the minute which is to be discussed at the meeting.

E. Stranaghan

ELIZABETH STRANAGHAN
PS/MR McCONNELL
STORMONT CASTLE

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

FROM: C G MACCABE
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
21 JANUARY 1993

cc PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Ledlie - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Williams - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr McCusker - B
Mr McConnell - B
Mr Brooker - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Rickard - B
Mr Stephens - B
Dr Smyth

728/1

JMcC
13/1

Mr Bell - B

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR PROTESTANT AREAS

Your minute of 6 January (not to all), sparked by Peter Smyth's note on the "Protestant community" dinner, invited comments on the problem, whether perceived or real, of the Unionist sense of isolation.

2. I think we have to be careful about how we define "the problem". Unionist alienation (or disenchantment of varying degrees) has been with us for a considerable period. What I am not clear about is whether we are now seeing a manifestation of it which is significantly new or different.

3. Arguably, Unionists have been nursing a sense of grievance towards Government since the early 1970s. There is a well-worn litany of betrayal which begins with the abolition of the 'B' Specials and the prorogation of Stormont. At any stage during the last 20 years, Unionists have been capable of offering an analysis of developments which conclusively demonstrated (to them) that Government was only really interested in doing a deal with the SDLP, and was prepared to offer that Party a disproportionate degree of influence in any area where they chose to participate.

Such perceptions are difficult to combat. The brute reality of the political process at present is that all progress seems to be measured in terms of the distance travelled away from the concept of a pre-1972 Stormont. The Cadogan Group have publicly criticised Government policy as being predicated on the assumption that a peaceful solution in NI equates with an acceptance of the Nationalist aspiration. John Alderdice has recently put forward a similar analysis. If political development is a one-way street, the Unionists no longer live at the fashionable end of it!

5. Reaction to the Secretary of State's Coleraine speech conformed to this pattern - most Unionists I have spoken to disliked, but were not surprised by, its content. Despite our adherence to the principles of even-handedness, Government's attempts to remove historic inequalities or otherwise level the playing field are not regarded as an exercise in benign neutrality. The ROI identifies completely with the aspirations of Nationalists, but nothing they have seen in recent years convinces Unionists that HMG is defending their interests with anything like the same vigour or commitment. They think the playing field travelled through horizontal long ago and that the angle of declination is becoming ever more acute.

6. That is why I have difficulty in assessing the significance of the most recent intimations of Unionist disenchantment. I am not disputing that new and additional complaints have been made - sources as diverse as Ken Maginnis and Ken Bloomfield have alluded to the phenomenon; but in my analysis there is a background of static, and we have to interpret whether the new signals are part of, or distinct from, this constant white noise.

7. Your note suggests that the under-privileged sections of the Unionist community have a particularly strong sense of social deprivation, and makes an implicit correlation between this aspect of alienation and the newly enhanced appeal of Protestant paramilitarism. I am not sure that such a conjunction is demonstrable. Young urban Protestants may be joining the ranks because they feel that a deluded Government has failed to keep their interests under review. But more pragmatic factors may be at work, such as a new and more radical Loyalist command hierarchy deciding

that PIRA violence should be responded to in kind and the element of retributive violence may be the main source of attraction. If the root cause is the former, then "the problem" could be amenable to solution by corrective action in regard to the targetting of Government social/economic policies. But if "the problem" derives from the latter source, then a re-direction of TSN programmes is manifestly not the whole answer.

8. In short, I am not yet clear that Unionist disenchantment is a response to a perceived failure of the political process, or a misdirection of social policies, or a combination of the two, but I think we need to get a more accurate fix on this issue before we are in a position to make an informed response. At present, my feeling is that we lack enough hard information to warrant any dramatic change of direction. I am entirely in favour of reassuring the Unionist community that their interests (political as well as social) have not, and will not be forgotten. But if Dr Alderdice's recent remarks are a typical example of what we are up against - and I have reason to think they are - what we can actually do at this stage to give substance to such reassurances is a question I find difficult to answer.

signed Christopher Maccabe

C G MACCABE
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