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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



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for prot. AC
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UNDER/ SEC 195/4

-6 APR 1993

2 April 1993

Dear Roderic

ASST./ SEC

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-6 APR 1993

C.C.R.U.

PROTESTANT ALIENATION

My Secretary of State thought that the Prime Minister and other NI Committee colleagues would find it interesting to see the attached paper which he has just approved on the problem of Protestant alienation within Northern Ireland.

A copy of this goes to the Private Secretaries to members of NI Committee and to Melanie Leech.

Yours ever

W R FITTALL

Ps/SofS (B.L.)

Ps/ Mr Mates (B.L.)

Ps/ Mr Hanley (B.L.)

Ps/ PUS (B.L.)

Mr Thomas

Mr Lellie

Mr Watkins

Mr Bell

Mr Williams

Mr Steele

Mr Cooke

Mr Hill

Mr Teach

Mr Rickard

Mr May

1. cc to Mr McConnell
in Quinn

2. ~~cc to Mr Cuddy~~ 76/4

HB
6.4

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PROTESTANT ALIENATION

1. There has been much talk recently of a growing 'alienation' from Government in the Protestant/Unionist community from a range of sources whose consistency and authority is too great to discount. This phenomenon may prejudice the likelihood of a new round of Political Talks after the District Council elections in Northern Ireland on 19 May; one can reasonably suppose a linkage between a growth in alienation and increasing loyalist terrorism.

Background

2. Such 'alienation' is not a new phenomenon. Like most things in Ireland, it is perhaps best understood in its historic context, which includes a series of hammer blows to Unionist confidence over 20 years, from the prorogation of Stormont in 1972, through the Sunningdale Agreement to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. Unionists believe the slide away from them by the British Government is well established, shows no signs of abating, and may now be accelerating. The Secretary of State's speech at Coleraine last December is now added to the corroborative evidence, which its content in no way supports. There is a kind of paranoid depression functioning here. It even affects Dr Alderdice, the psychiatrist (and leader of the moderate Alliance Party).

The present situation

3. At all events, we are now seeing regular reports of growing 'alienation' accompanied by claims that, from the Unionist viewpoint, 'everything is sliding away', 'the Irish support the SDLP', 'HMG is neutral and withholds support from unionists', 'it's only a matter of time till the Brits withdraw, abandoning us to the Irish'.

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4. Such perceptions are generally deployed in attempts to explain growing Loyalist violence, or when social and economic reforms are (mis)interpreted as being merely pro-Catholic. But there is growing evidence that these views are increasingly common amongst the middle classes, and the more enlightened members of both the main Unionist parties, who may in turn influence political attitudes in the Protestant population as a whole.

5. There is a much more justifiable belief that the Unionist flexibility and readiness to make concessions during the last round of Talks produced no comparably generous response from the Irish Government or more particularly, from Mr Hume, whose basic analysis of the divided community Unionists believe is accepted by HMG and whose negotiating position was virtually the same when last year's Talks opened as when they began. The outcome of the 1991 Census is also a contributor. It has been incorrectly interpreted as meaning that there will soon be a majority in Northern Ireland for a united Ireland, and that it is only a matter of time before the region drops into the Nationalists' lap. In fact, a sizeable proportion of Catholics wish to remain in the Union.

6. Many Unionists are therefore reluctant to take heart from the overtures currently being made to them by Mr Spring, preferring to be miserable instead about both what they see as a 'waiting game' being played by Mr Hume, and the mischievous misinterpretation of our constitutional guarantee by such politicians as Mr Mallon. He says that 'if he were a Unionist' he would be worried because 'the British attitude to Northern Ireland is like a marriage in which one partner says: "of course, I love you dearly darling; but if ever you cease loving me, I will arrange for an immediate divorce, and have already identified a very good divorce lawyer"'. This has made - we have Archbishop Eames' word for it - a huge impact on Protestants, who have interpreted it as indicating that if Mr Mallon had interpreted attempts to reassure Unionists of our sincerity in this way, there must surely be something in his interpretation.

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7. None of this will make getting the Unionists to participate in a successful relaunch of the Talks any easier after the May elections. Our efforts to reassure and rebuild their confidence will include encouraging them to see that the kind of outcome we anticipate from any future Talks is one within their own range of tolerance; that our policies are based on the assumption that NI will remain part of the UK as far as we can see; and that we support the Union because that is what the majority want.

8. It is no less essential to reassure Unionists that HMG will not join the ranks of the 'persuaders for a united Ireland', and does not envisage Northern Ireland being run by any form of joint authority exercised by London and Dublin. This we have repeatedly made clear, but unionists are nevertheless still inclined to shake their heads gloomily over the tea-leaves.

9. We can only do so much, and, ultimately, we can never satisfy Unionists entirely: they want, deep down, a guarantee that Northern Ireland will always remain part of the UK, irrespective of the wishes of a local majority. They dare not quite bring themselves to say this.

10. Our efforts with Unionists must combine with continuing pressure on the SDLP in particular to demonstrate flexibility (as well as abstention from mischievous provocation) of a kind the party has not recently displayed. Unionists argue with justification that the very existence of the Anglo-Irish Agreement provides comfort to the SDLP who can be satisfied with the status quo and have no incentive to be accommodating. Although Mr Spring is both courteous and perceptive towards Unionists, his colleagues have a long way to go to catch up with him.

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The Social and Economic Dimension

11. Much of the reporting of 'alienation' has focused on economic and social problems; various major social and economic initiatives are widely misperceived as 'Catholic support programmes'. There may well be both an ignorance and an envy factor at play here: ignorance of the fact that disadvantage still does bear more severely on Catholic communities, and of what the Government is doing for Protestant communities; and envy of the greater relative success of Catholic communities in accessing Government funding and that from the (largely US-financed) International Fund for Ireland.

12. There is also, more generally, the hard fact that all our efforts to remedy historical imbalance will inevitably benefit the Catholic community disproportionately, and will be resented for that fact alone by sections of the Protestant community.

13. There is major Protestant deprivation (even if, in general, Catholic deprivation is more widespread and often more intense). It is easy, for instance, to find mainly Protestant Wards in Belfast in particular, where levels of male unemployment are, for instance, now well above 30%. There is a worrying movement of the Protestant population away, for instance, from North Belfast or Londonderry West of the Foyle.

14. Short of abandoning our commitment to tackling social injustice and economic deprivation throughout Northern Ireland - which is, of course, unthinkable - our room for manoeuvre is limited. What we must do, we recognize, is not to give the impression that our various social and economic programmes are solely for the benefit of the Catholic disadvantaged. We are tackling all disadvantage. We shall continue to target our efforts on enabling Protestant areas to access Government (and IFI) funds by, for example, encouraging the formation of responsible community groups. Protestants are not so advanced as Catholics in this respect.

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Loyalist violence

15. The phenomenon of 'alienation' has a lethal dimension. There has been a clear resurgence in Loyalist paramilitary violence. For some time now, loyalists have murdered more people than Republicans.

16. In the first 3 months of this year 60% of the 104 people charged with terrorist related offences were Loyalists. There are several reasons for this. They include the RUC's own success in removing an older generation of leaders; the loss of Nelson, the UDA 'double agent'; and the widespread belief that republican violence had paid off in terms of advancing the wider nationalist political agenda and in securing more resources under Governmental social programmes.

17. The chief Loyalist paramilitary organisations are now more efficient; their targeting of Republicans is more accurate and their attention to internal security more rigorous. They also have no difficulty in recruiting. The threat they represent for the future remains very serious, and their planned action against nationalists in general, including SDLP activists, is a particular concern.

18. This resurgence may also reflect changes in social conditions in some Protestant areas, for example the weakening of social, family based disciplines and controls which have previously inhibited the growth of Protestant paramilitaries. Whereas in the past a major Loyalist atrocity has created enough revulsion for that brake to be applied effectively, it is no longer so effective. There have been ominous signs, even within the middle class Protestant community, of tacit support being given to terrorist actions by 'their' side (a straw poll of 'Newsletter' readers this week gives 42% support for loyalist paramilitaries).

19. It will not have helped that a further new feature is the widespread nature of IRA bomb damage in Protestant residential and business areas eg Bangor and Coleraine. These have affected more

Protestants, and in places which have previously not suffered greatly from the Troubles.

20. For all these reasons, the risk of still more intense Loyalist violence exists. Moreover, if the IRA are thought to be attacking the Protestant community as such, then the tendency to turn to the paramilitaries, rather than the RUC or army for protection, may be greater than in recent years. This underlines the continuing importance of increasing confidence in the effectiveness of the security forces, reassuring the civilian population, deterring or frustrating terrorist operations, and bringing terrorists to justice through the courts. We must also take care not to give the impression that we think that only deaths in Great Britain matter.

Conclusion

? 21. All is not gloom. There is a growing and increasingly influential ground swell of support in both communities for a continuation of the Talks process, and a determined rejection of a future for Northern Ireland replicating the history of the last 23 years. Likewise, in security terms, the Province is far from being a Yugoslavia or a Lebanon. Political progress can do much to deflate the attractions and pretensions of the paramilitaries. But we shall have to continue to keep an even closer watch than hitherto on the mood of the Unionist community.

2 April 1993

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