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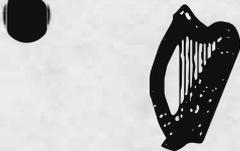
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6 December 1995

Mr. David Cooney,
Counsellor,
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear David,

Mr David Ervine: 'The Way Forward for Unionism'

David Ervine gave a very personal, frank and personable presentation, which clearly impressed the diplomats present. It was suggested to him that far from his description of himself as a representative of 'hardline' loyalism he was, in fact, the most flexible speaker in the series to date.

He began by describing how his father was the only person on his street to support the claims of the civil rights movement for 'British rights for British people'. He said that it was inevitable that years of discrimination and sectarianism would lead to rebellion as it had in 1969 - in the 47 years of parliament in Northern Ireland, the only piece of legislation which Nationalists had succeeded in getting passed was an amendment to the Wild Bird Act.

He gave an account of his arrest in 1974 for the possession of explosives, followed by 'plenty of law but little justice'. He stated that he had joined the UVF because of peer pressure, tribalism, and because he had felt that he needed to protect the future of his son who was born about that time.

He spent his five and a half years in Long Kesh constructively, reading about how to analyse, consider and perhaps even to resolve conflict, coming to recognise that his community had to acknowledge the 'ills' of the past, which were 'carried out by a few in the name of the many'. His unionism is firmly rooted amongst the working-class who, he says, have suffered more and been manipulated by middle-class unionists.

The role of the PUP is, he said, twofold:

- to create the beginnings of commonality between those hitherto divided
- to bring about the democratisation of the paramilitary groups

He said that the origins of the ceasefires could be traced back through ten years of effort - they would not be let go easily. He stated firmly that 'the war is over'. Although he personally came from a paramilitary tradition, he agreed when President Clinton said that the paramilitaries day was done. This was not because they were tired and weary, but because they had come to recognise the futility of what they were doing.

The North was now 'light years' from where it was fifteen months ago - the Tánaiste could now come to Belfast to meet with him, even though the UVF had in the past bombed Dublin. Decommissioning remains, however, a major obstacle. The moral argument in favour of giving up weapons could not be defeated, he said, however such is the lack of trust in northern society that it is not practically achievable at the moment. The IRA and CLMC have signed up to Washington 1 and 2, Washington 3 can be addressed further down the line.

Unlike the UUP and the British Government, the PUP preferred to look at realities. In his view, the Mitchell Commission will suggest a change in criteria for participation in talks - advocating a statement of commitment to wholly democratic means, involving an undertaking to accept the outcome of negotiations if supported by a majority of people. Commitment to the principle of consent, he said, is more meaningful than an instalment of 5% of weapons.

He expressed a belief that all-party talks would only be possible if Trimble's idea for an assembly is adopted - but solely as an elected body for dialogue. Sinn Féin will not give up weapons, but will recognise this as the next best thing to direct all-party talks.

He suggested that the assembly should have no power, no salaries and no timescale. No powers, because Nationalists will not accept anything with resonances of the past, and no salaries because those elected would string the whole process out as long as possible if paid (they should receive attendance allowances only). For it to be acceptable, Nationalists will need to be confident that it does not represent an internal solution in itself. However he looked forward to the opportunity to 'call Adams' bluff' by engaging him in talks.

He described the attitude of the established unionist parties as 'arrogant' - believing that they were 'born to lead' (he mentioned Trimble and Taylor in particular). He was scathing about David Trimble's approach to loyalist paramilitaries, reported in the weekend's papers, and the idea that a 3 minute phone conversation through an intermediary could convince loyalists to decommission. Under no circumstances would they do so ahead of the IRA - they have no vested interest in putting pressure on the IRA that could lead to its fracture.

He said that the most predominant feeling on politics in the North is apathy. 'Trickle-down' politics, with power in the Phands of quangos and the NIO would never work. Community

politics needs to be built from the ground up to build a new Northern Ireland - not a new state, but a new society.

On the electoral prospects of the PUP, he said that he recognised that while they were saying nice things they 'were carrying terrible baggage' and would need to build their credibility over the longterm. However in Belfast City Council, the balance of power can be held with only 3 seats, if they came to do this they would 'stand it on its head'. The PUP could also play a useful role in negotiations, in that if Paisley were to walk-out announcing a 'sell-out', the PUP/UDP would be able to reassure loyalists.

He saw the promotion of class-politics as the only way to defeat sectarianism, this would however inevitably alienate the middle-classes, but would encourage working-class loyalists to take off their 'rose coloured spectacles' about those who have sought to represent them in the past.

In response to a question from Gary Kent of New Dialogue (who Ervine was going on to address later in the evening) on the possibility of organising a non-sectarian 'party of labour' in Northern Ireland (comment: Kent is on the integrationist wing of the Labour Party), Ervine said that eventually there would be a realignment in Northern Ireland politics, when 'green' and 'orange' Tories would come to vote together. However the move towards this would have to be evolutionary, any attempt to artificially create it now could be extremely damaging.

Kent also asked him about the continuation of punishment beatings, and he replied that there could be no future for 'summary justice'. However in the context of increasing problems with drugs and 'ordinary' crime, people prefer it. The paramilitaries do not 'trawl the streets' looking for people to beat, rather they come under pressure from their own communities to intervene.

Peter Robinson, who will address the group next week, will be the final speaker in the series.

Yours sincerely,


Helen Blake
Embassy, London