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From: PS/Sir John Wheeler
5 June 1996

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir D Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Perry - B
Mrs Collins - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Hill - B

Mr Legge - B

SIR JOHN WHEELER'S DINNER WITH UUP REPRESENTATIVES - 3 JUNE 1996

The Minister was grateful for the briefing provided by Mr Maccabe and others for his dinner with Ulster Unionist representatives which took place in Stormont House last night.

The UUs were Ken Maginnis MP, James Cooper (UU Vice Chairman and moderate Fermanagh Unionist), Jack Allen (UU Treasurer), Trevor Wilson (Cookstown Councillor and PANI member), David Brewster (dynamic Young Unionist and Trimble-ite) and May Steele (relatively unknown East Antrim Forum member).

You and Mr Maccabe provided official support.

Parades

Mr Maginnis believed that the Parades issue would be virtually non-existent if clear Province-wide policy guidelines were adopted. These guidelines would include:

- (a) keeping main arterial routes free;

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(b) local Orangemen only in controversial marches;

(c) no bands; and

(d) RUC preventing Rent-a-Mob being bussed in.

This approach, Mr Maginnis contended, represented considerable concessions from the Unionist community in that they could not issue a call to their Brethren for support and they would have to accept local Sinn Feiners marching through towns such as Lurgan. The Minister and Mr Legge welcomed the spirit of compromise which was being embraced. However, it was emphasised that much of the RUC response depended on their operational assessment and preventing Rent-a-Mob from travelling (ala Miners Strike) was hardly practicable in Londonderry or the Ormeau Road.

The Unionists were firmly opposed to my idea of an independent Commission on parades.

Maryfield Invective

The outline of RUC operational independence drew a familiar response from the Unionists expressing incredulity that the Government do not influence the RUC. This approach was contrasted with the perception (put about by the SDLP) that Maryfield got the NIO to tell the RUC to re-route parades. In addition, Mr Brewster put in a plea for Ministers to say something positive about the Union to counter the pro-Nationalist assertions of Mr Spring and his DFA nest at Maryfield.

Exclusion of Sinn Fein

Everyone at dinner was agreed that Sinn Fein were masters of propaganda. The UUs believed that some formula should be arrived at to stop Sinn Fein benefiting from having the gates at Castle Buildings slammed in their face. It was suggested by the UUs that

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the Sinn Fein leaders should be invited into an anti-chamber separate from Talks; when they refused or claimed that they could not deliver a ceasefire they would be offered the door. This approach would save the physical as well as metaphorical slamming of the gate on 15% of the vote. The UUs also sought reassurances, which were given, that Ministers would not allow Sinn Fein to pretend it was a separate organisation from PIRA.

Also on the subject of effective countering of PIRA/Sinn Fein propaganda, Mr Maginnis said that he was thinking of being in New York on 10 June with a UU leg in Washington. Mr Maginnis believed that the NIO should be thinking of the same thing, giving support to Peter Reid and Peter Innis.

Politics

The general UU feeling following the election was a brave face coupled with disgust with Hume and the media. The media had made a Sinn Fein 2% increase appear to be the majority view in Northern Ireland. However, just as a 2% increase was not a victory, a 5% decrease for the UUs could not be portrayed as one either. The UUs were unquestionably under pressure from the DUP and they could not afford to be left high and dry at Talks.

The Sinn Fein vote had to be seen in the context of an SDLP leader who had sold his party down the river, especially Joe Hendron, for personal vanity.

Decommissioning

Fairly standard Ken Maginnis lines on the need for a benchmarked process. "A bit like nuclear disarmament negotiations" he said before he discovered that Mr Legge was a world expert on the subject.

SIGNED

PAUL A JOHNSTON
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