

SECRET AND PERSONAL

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POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
9 December 1993

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Mr Williams [1] - B

POSSIBLE UNIONIST REACTION TO JOINT DECLARATION

This note assumes that the text of JD15 is close to the language of the final version which will be agreed with the Irish, and that Jim Molyneaux will sign up to it.

2. In assessing possible Unionist reaction there are a number of assumptions about which we can be reasonably confident, and others which are more contingent.

3. In the first category -

(i) The text is not all bad from a Unionist point of view: the constitutional guarantee is set forth in a very positive way; and the promise, although still highly conditional, to deal with Articles 2 and 3 is given in more forward language than ever before. A close reading suggests that the Nationalists are prepared to accept a compromise falling short of their traditional aspiration, at least for the present. There is the basis of a case which might be sold to Unionists, though the chances of success could easily be overrated.

(ii) Molyneaux is trusted by his own people. Most members of the UUP have no idea of what game he is playing, but currently think he will not sign up to any deal which would be harmful to Unionism. His imprimatur on the Joint Declaration may be a crucial selling point,

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and will certainly be helpful; but there must be a distinct possibility that Molyneaux will be overwhelmed by public reaction and by sentiment in the UUP.

- (iii) Most Unionists instinctively start from a position of opposing anything which they see as fundamentally altering the status quo. In 1985 their opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement was based in the first instance not on its content but on its genesis. Their initial reaction to the Joint Declaration will be, similarly, visceral rather than cerebral. Tone will be decisive, not words. Even though no principles appear to have been breached, the Declaration will be severely criticised for shifting the focus from a UK/Irish interface to a wholly Irish context; and it will be very difficult to argue that the Irish Government in particular has given anything in return, notably on Articles 2 and 3 where the Irish stance will meet with scorn and cynicism, whereas a clear commitment to a referendum, based wholly on this document, might be sufficient to still the main Unionist anxieties and thereby deter a violent reaction.
- (iv) The text, even to an objective observer, has a strong green tinge - inevitably, given its primary purpose. It has to be recognised that much of the language of the Declaration will be a happy hunting ground for those seeking evidence of a pan-Nationalist agenda.
- (v) The DUP's opposition will be absolute, loud and long. Peter Robinson's latest rhetoric about Unionists going to the wall to oppose a sell-out will find favour with many, including those who hitherto have been disposed to put faith in Molyneaux. This is just the opportunity they have been waiting for to pick off the UUP and HMG.

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4 Among the more contingent considerations -

- (i) If the Declaration delivers a permanent cessation of PIRA violence, Unionists may have difficulty in mustering significant external support for opposition. (Paradoxically, of course, the very fact of its proving acceptable to PIRA will predispose most Unionists to suspect that it can only be inimical to the interests of Unionism, irrespective of whether or not there are specific features of the Declaration which can be so identified.) In that sense, the position is different from 1985, when the prospects of peace were more remote, and a body of opinion existed at Westminster which felt that the Unionist case deserved some sympathy.
- (ii) It is very likely that powerful influences within the UUP will repudiate the Declaration, despite Molyneaux's endorsement. He has recently been criticised by Harry West and, separately, Drew Nelson. Martin Smyth has taken a pounding for his mild bout of adventurism, and Molyneaux's daring is several orders of magnitude greater. There must be a distinct possibility that Molyneaux will be swept aside; that Taylor will bid for the Leadership; that the DUP will be initially strengthened; and that the prospects for resumption of Talks blighted for a very long time. There will be those who will see in this a deliberate Irish ploy to kill off talks; thus preserve Articles 2 and 3; convene an Irish Convention (whether mentioned in the text or not); manoeuvre HMG into putting pressure on Unionists to attend; and make Unionists' behaviour so frustrating that HMG will de facto join the ranks of the persuaders.
- (iii) Much will depend on the attitude of the SDLP. The deification of John Hume could probably be tolerated by some moderate Unionists (again, a process helped if

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peace is delivered); but any displays of Nationalist triumphalism would be greatly resented and would inevitably play into the hands of the DUP.

- (iv) The reaction of the Loyalist paramilitaries could be influenced by any or all of the above considerations - or they may already be so locked in to their campaign of violence that they will continue irrespective of external developments. But they will always be susceptible to stirring up by demagogues, and a large-scale defection of UUP members to the DUP could bolster their illusions of a pan-Unionist front. And it would be a mistake to believe that the absence of a defined target or objective would prevent Loyalist violence: that will be based on blind fear.

5. It is possible to envisage both best case and worst case scenarios. In the former, the Joint Declaration is skilfully presented by the two Governments; Molyneaux, Archbishop Eames and other influential figures on the Unionist side extol its virtues; the UUP remain largely united behind Molyneaux; and substantive political progress is made. Alternatively, of course, the DUP could succeed in splitting the UUP, Molyneaux would be deposed and succeeded by someone determined to ensure that years would pass before another Unionist leader was overturned for the sin of being too progressive. The Loyalist paramilitaries step up their campaign and PIRA are unable to refuse the challenge. There is little in experiences rationally to sustain optimism that the former will occur: it may be that the nature of the PAC's reaction will be most decisive in determining which way it goes.

Conclusion

6. In the final analysis, it is impossible to predict the Unionist reaction with certainty. On the basis of past performance, they are virtually certain to see the Joint Declaration in

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unfavourable terms, rather than in a positive light. The key question is, whether they will gather a significant and sustainable level of support.

7. Arguably, the position is comparable to 1985 only superficially. This time around the ground has been better prepared and Unionists will not be taken completely by surprise. There is very little in the Joint Declaration on which they can physically focus their opposition. There is also - and this is particularly difficult to quantify - a genuine desire among Unionists to accept some degree of compromise if it will stop the killings. There is a difference between a disposition to compromise, and the practice of compromising, but if an end to PIRA violence can be delivered, then attacking the Joint Declaration which brought it about will be difficult to present to a welcoming national and international audience in positive terms.

[signed CGM]

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