



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

25 January 1988

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Dear Assistant Secretary

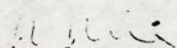
Lunch with David Burnside

1. Burnside has become, if anything, even more implacable in his determination to play a major role in Northern Ireland political life. Lord Havers, with whom we had a drink before lunch, asked him his intentions. He said "I intend to get as much power as I can and to wield it to lead the resurgence of Unionism in an Assembly or at Westminster - wherever the power is". If a sitting Unionist M.P. is shot, he said, he is not yet strong enough, he feels, to get enough backing for a by-election. If he has to wait until the next election, he will in the meantime build up the financial basis for a political career: he has, as Head of Public Relations for British Airways, accumulated a lot of shares; he has negotiated with Lord King a "phased withdrawal" in financial terms from B.A. when he goes into politics; and he has negotiated some other consultancies and directorships which he could, he believes, maintain as an M.P. He has his eye on Harold McCusker's seat, but is not at all sure that McCusker's illness will in fact force him to retire from Parliament.
2. His ideas continue to develop. He would intend, firstly, to heal the split within Unionism and to create a post-Paisley/Molyneux united Unionist political structure. He would then seek, through a referendum, cross-community agreement in Northern Ireland on "voluntary integration". He is confident that as long as the referendum stays above the level of detail, it would succeed. The third stage would be elections to a body in which both communities are represented. Only then, in his view, should specific powers be devolved by Order in Council at Westminster, to the elected body in Belfast.

3. He strongly believes, he said, that across the Unionist spectrum people are fed up with the sterility of the present leadership, and that they are ready to share power with the minority. The key to progress, however, is presentation and getting each step right (as in 2 above). On timing, he feels that the next few years must, in the nature of things, produce changes in the political landscape, including most probably the passing of Paisley and Molyneaux. His scenario is therefore set to emerge following the next British general election.
  
4. He is not too worried about the Agreement. He sees the difficulties we are having in getting what we want out of it. He also feels that the Unionists' obsession with it is less than before and that fears of hidden agendas are also diminishing. Unionists still implacably oppose it, and they hate the existence of Maryfield, but an emerging distinction needs to be made between their hatred of the Agreement and Maryfield, on the one hand, which have not diminished; and, on the other hand, their fear of what the working of the Agreement can do to the Union, which is diminishing. Burnside believes that if he can deliver his scenario he will overtake the Agreement through the transfer of devolved powers. He has none of the distress of the present leadership about the fact that this is envisaged under the terms of the Agreement: he does not care where the power comes from as long as it comes.
  
5. He is aware that his stated intentions are causing ripples of reaction - much of it negative - from within Unionist political circles. He understands that Robinson, on the DUP side, and Taylor on the Official side are wary of him. He understands too that there may be efforts afoot to try and block his selection as a Unionist candidate. He is, he said, not only aware of this but is taking counter measures by building up his network of support.

He is convinced that he is the only one with an across-the-board message to the Unionist community, and single-minded determination may deliver leadership to him.

Yours sincerely

  
Richard Ryan  
Counsellor