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5 July 1996

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Mr S O hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
HQ

Tadiseach

Dear Secretary

The John Taylor we see here is rather different from the one we see at Government - he regards the Irish Embassy in London as the "proper channel" for contact.

Nevertheless, even discounting heavily, there is some encouragement here

John Taylor was my guest to lunch yesterday. I found him in an open and bridge-building frame of mind. His views on the talks, and on IRA intentions, were sanguine. He went out of his way to speak kindly of Cardinal Daly, Gerry Adams, George Mitchell and many other non-Unionists, including Irish Ministers. At the same time, he apologised for descending occasionally into what he described as "cynicism", a habit which he put down to his long years in politics and to the fact that he has "seen it all before".

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The talks

Taylor said that the UUP was right to accept Mitchell, because "all negotiation involves compromise". However the negotiations on Mitchell's role were touch-and-go. Taylor himself was advising Trimble and Empey to brace themselves to take a harder line at the very moment that the three Irish ministers came to the UUP room late at night to settle the deal.

Taylor was warm in his praise of George Mitchell, whom he described as a man of great ability and great patience. In Taylor's view, "it's just possible that Mitchell will bring it off". Nevertheless, from a Unionist point of view Taylor will have a mental reservation about Mitchell right to the end.

This reservation is because of Mitchell's Irish-American connections and not for any religious reason. It was the DUP who started the debate about Mitchell's

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religious affiliation. Taylor joked, as he has done in public, about his own exposure to Maronite Christians in Northern Cyprus, where he has a house.

Taylor believes that the UUP and the SDLP, left to themselves, would probably take the negotiations forward more quickly than the two Governments seem to want. Taylor's impression is that for reasons which he understands, to do with the possibility of another IRA ceasefire, the two Governments are content for matters to develop slowly in Stormont. Taylor remarked in passing, and without any implied criticism, that he can recall seeing John Hume only twice in Stormont since the talks began.

Taylor, expecting that he might be required in Northern Ireland in August, has lent his holiday home in Northern Cyprus to a friend. Now that a break is expected in the talks, the Taylors are making alternative holiday plans at the last moment.

The UUP and other Unionists

Taylor pointed out that on the basis of his performance in the recent elections McCartney would lose his Westminster seat if the DUP put up a candidate in North Down. This goes a long way towards explaining McCartney's alliance with Paisley in the talks.

The wider picture is that UUP seats are strongly threatened by the DUP in North Belfast and East Antrim. Other UUP seats could also face a serious DUP challenge. On a more positive note, Taylor believes that the performance of Peter Weir in North Down on 30 May suggests that if he and not Alan McFarland is the Westminster candidate, the UUP may have a chance of taking the seat from McCartney.

Because all the Unionists will be "looking over one another's shoulders", and similar considerations apply within other delegations, Taylor does not expect major developments in the talks before a British General Election. Between now and a General Election, the best that can be achieved in the talks is to keep things running smoothly.

Sinn Fein/IRA

Taylor offered the personal view that the IRA will restore their ceasefire.

I asked him whether, in principle, it would be better from the UUP's vantage point

for Sinn Fein to be included in the talks or to find itself excluded. Taylor responded that "for the sake of Ireland, meaning Ireland North and South", it is better for Sinn Fein to take part in the negotiations. The problem will be to "engineer this without a political explosion". One has to bear in mind the general rule that "Paisley enjoys walking out" as much as "Sinn Fein enjoys being locked out".

Taylor said that he finds it difficult to understand what is now happening inside the republican movement. He assumes that Gerry Adams is working to restore the ceasefire. He is willing to believe the same of Martin McGuinness. However, the authors of the Manchester bomb must be very extreme. If these extremists are allowed to renew the violence inside Northern Ireland, the Loyalists will most probably follow suit.

The atmosphere at Stormont

Taylor strongly regretted that he has had no opportunity for social inter-action with the Irish Government delegation or the SDLP in the margins of the negotiations at Stormont. The UUP have "no problem" about such interaction with the SDLP and regard the Irish delegation in almost the same light. While the Irish side - unlike their British counterparts, who "dine in style in their rooms" - are seen at lunchtimes, they tend like every other delegation to stick to themselves.

Taylor wondered whether the Tanaiste might wish to invite representatives of other delegations to a dinner, but then immediately corrected himself, saying that such an invitation would be boycotted by the DUP and McCartney which would in turn put pressure on the UUP - although McCartney, having travelled to Dublin some months ago, is in this respect hypocritical. After some further reflection, Taylor came round to the view that a carefully judged social initiative on the part of Senator Mitchell and his colleagues might succeed in bringing all the parties together in a social setting. At first Taylor suggested a "farewell reception" on the last Friday in July. He then corrected himself again saying that if the invitation implied that alcohol will be served, one would once again risk a boycott by the "fundamentalists" on the Unionist side. The best chance of getting all the parties together outside the conference room would be an informal tea party to which the parties would be invited by Senator Mitchell.

We then discussed, on Taylor's initiative, the impact on Sinn Fein and the Unionists of being brought face-to-face in social situations, if Sinn Fein joins the

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talks. Taylor would like to think that barriers would fall, and that Sinn Fein might be brought to accept the principle of consent.

The marching season

Taylor referred to the likely RUC decision to refuse the Orange Order permission to march this weekend on the Garvaghy Road. He has heard that the Orange Order may attempt instead to march within sight of the road on fields owned by sympathisers. If the RUC block this alternative march, "Paisley will arrive within half an hour".

Interdenominational cooperation

Taylor had a great deal to say about his own commitment to interdenominational cooperation. He is proud to have attended services alongside Seamus Mallon in each of the Cathedrals in Armagh. He spoke warmly of individual Churchmen including Cardinal Daly and George Cassidy, the Anglican Archdeacon of London. I was able to inform Taylor, to his surprise, that Cassidy was in earlier years a civil servant in the Cabinet Office at Stormont.

Taylor said that in Northern Ireland politics it is important to use the adjective "interdenominational" instead of "ecumenical", because people like Paisley take "ecumenical" to mean "coming together under Rome".

Taylor went on to joke that wherever there is a significant Protestant population in France, such as Bordeaux, Alsace, and Cognac, there is always good wine. Taylor greatly enjoys outlining this theory in detail to his fundamentalist colleagues in Northern Ireland!

Unionist researchers

Taylor informed me that his researcher Ruaidhri Collins, who was in the Embassy on the occasion of President Robinson's last visit, is shortly to leave for a much better-paid job in the private sector. Taylor chose Collins because of his interesting Irish background. He uses the Irish form of his first name and has family in Galway. Taylor went on to say, however, that even he was taken aback when he discovered that Collins is a descendant of Henry Joy McCracken!

In the same connection, Taylor spoke warmly of his Northern Ireland-based assistant Stephen King. King, like Collins, has an Oxbridge background. Taylor made no secret of his desire, through recruiting people of this kind, to develop a brand of unionism more sensitive to the Irish political context, North and South.

Taylor regards David Trimble's researcher, Patrick Crozier, with whom the Embassy also has good links, as intellectually able but with, as of now, too few ties to Ireland, North or South. Crozier was in Northern Ireland at the end of May to canvass for David Trimble and to his horror was met with cries of "go home, Englishman" from DUP canvassers.

The UUP Parliamentary Party

Taylor chaired a meeting of the UUP Parliamentary Party on the evening of 3 July and is to chair another similar meeting next week when in London for the 80th birthday of Ted Heath. Taylor said that contrary to rumour, the mood in the Parliamentary Party is good, although an effort is required on his part, and that of David Trimble, to prevent the other MPs from feeling left out of what is happening at Stormont.

The Irish Government

I put it to Taylor that some of his comments about the Tanaiste might have been better judged. I emphasised the Tanaiste's commitment to the Downing Street principles and in general to reconciliation in Ireland and I pointed also to the opportunity which the Tanaiste has tried to create for Unionists in proposing a "covenant". Taylor accepted all of this. He said that nothing he has said implies any personal dislike or any opinion of his own about the Tanaiste's political role. In a more general way, Taylor referred to the cut-and-thrust of public life and to his regret that for want of opportunities for social contact, he is on Christian name terms with very few political leaders from the South. His remark repeated more than once, about the cynicism which he has picked up over a long career, seemed applicable in this instance also.

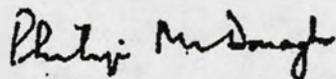
Taylor was anxious to have a sense of Irish Government feeling about the Stormont talks. I said that while I could not endorse his own view that the Government wants to go forward very slowly, we are reasonably content with what has been achieved; in particular, we note that the UUP has operated the 'sufficient consensus' role in order to appoint Senator Mitchell and is working quite well with the SDLP.

Taylor expressed a detailed interest in our Presidency and its implications for the work of Ambassador Barrington and the Embassy as a whole.

Conclusion

Taylor reminded me of his interest in obtaining seeds from the catalpa tree on Victoria Square, outside our house. As we were leaving, he said loudly and comically in the lobby of the Savoy, "have a good Twelfth". In my mind I recalled that Taylor's generous off-handedness regarding the rituals of the Twelfth, of which I formed a strong impression at this time last year, has cost him the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party.

Yours sincerely



Philip McDonagh
Counsellor