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FROM: PETER MAY
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
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NOTE FOR INFORMATION

*D Done A
8.4.92*

*in the Journal
interesting. Mr. covering the
points in para. 9 to 10B.
4.6*

- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) -B
- PS/Mr Atkins (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Mates (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Hanley (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Ledlie - B
- Mr Alston - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr D J R Hill - B
- Mr D A Hill - B
- Mr Cooke - B
- Mr Rickard - B
- Mr Petch - B

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CONVERSATION WITH TOM KELLY

On Tuesday I had a long conversation with Tom Kelly, election agent to Joe Hendron in the recent General Election. Kelly, who is young and articulate, has now returned to his full time management consultancy job (although he is looking to move into marketing). He has in recent years run a number of successful election campaigns, including Mallon's victory in the 1986 by-elections and McGrady's in 1987. He is well respected within the party for his organisational capacity, and is currently a member of the SDLP executive. He is on the right of the Party, and would not be as green as Mallon. He has the job of convening a Party finance committee made up of businessmen to try and bring the SDLP back into a less precarious financial position. He claims not to have political aspirations to become a full time politician. In the forthcoming (May 1993) local Government elections, Kelly will once again run the West Belfast (ie Upper and Lower Falls wards) campaign.

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West Belfast Election

2. Kelly's view of the election campaign was not markedly different from the PAB analysis circulated earlier. He estimated some 1800 Protestants had voted SDLP, and suggested that the vast majority of these had come from the middle class area, in which he claimed the SDLP had outpolled Fred Cobain, the unionist candidate. Their willingness to canvass Unionist areas, rather than taking for granted the fact that there would be tactical voting had been appreciated locally, and a number of follow-up measures were envisaged in order to ensure the interests of the protestant community were borne in mind. Among these were the opening of a new constituency office in Northumberland Street, which is easily accessible both from the Shankill and Falls areas. Kelly also said that he would be in touch with a Methodist Minister in the Shankill area to ask whether a further office might be established there. (He seemed less sure of his ground in talking about this and we must wait and see whether there is any substance behind it.)

3. Kelly paid tribute to the electoral machine Sinn Fein had brought into action on election day. He felt that Sinn Fein had been allowed to get away with an intimidatory presence outside polling stations for too long. He suggested that personation was rife, accounting for up to 2,000 of the Sinn Fein votes. Armies of supporters had been bussed from polling station to polling station and he had nothing but condemnation for the failure of the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff to prevent this. He alleged that offences had been committed which the Chief Electoral Officer's staff were too frightened to pursue.

4. The SDLP for the first time had for the first time managed to cover all the polling stations throughout the day, and this had helped to restrict personation abuse through frequent challenging. Kelly argued that this was not the SDLP's job. He was dismissive of Mr Bradley's refusal to acknowledge a problem existed in West Belfast. Kelly had approached Bradley in the run-up to the election in order to resolve a number of points, but the assurances had not always been honoured. He did not believe Bradley had a good awareness of the problems in the constituency, nor that

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was willing to address the possibility of the need for further change. (This is not the first time the SDLP have been extremely critical of Bradley's performance, with Mark Durkan another notable critic). He said the Party were considering taking the CEO to judicial review over his handling of the election in West Belfast (comment: it is not easy to see what case they could make, and it may be bluster). The RUC came in for praise, however, for their helpfulness in curbing the excesses of Sinn Fein electoral manipulation.

5. Kelly said that Sinn Fein had been complacent in their approach to the election. Despite their substantial efforts in terms of personation, he believed they had miscalculated, reckoning the emigration of middle-class SDLP voters to South Belfast combined with their vote stealing would ensure the SDLP could not win. They had been shocked to discover the SDLP's efforts, not least in covering all the polling stations, and were desperate now to fight back. Sinn Fein had been very quiet since the election, and he surmised this would not last for much longer. Adams needed to re-assert himself rather than indulging in the introspective navel-gazing which appeared to be taking place at present. He had noted, with some surprise, that McGuinness had not dismissed Hume's commission proposal out of hand, and saw this as part of the ongoing and deepening debate within the provisional movement as to future policy. He did not believe the result of this would be a renunciation of violence.

6. Taking account of the migration of mainly middle-class catholics to South Belfast, and the prevailing difficulties the SDLP faced with a less than charismatic candidate, Kelly believed the party had done extremely well to hold its vote firm, compared to 1987. (This ignores Protestant tactical voting.) He acknowledged that the advantages of incumbency meant the party ought to retain the seat at the next General Election. He believed it essential that Hendron stand again, although a number of the other local councillors in Belfast had been arguing Hendron should stand down after his four or

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...ve year term (mainly because of their own political ambitions). The result of the election had been a shot in the arm for the local SDLP organisation. A number of new members, perhaps amounting to as many as 20, had come forward and would be prepared to help in elections. In addition, now the existing party workers had tasted success, Kelly was most hopeful that the current majority Sinn Fein council representation from the two Falls wards could be ended next year. (At present Sinn Fein hold 3 of the 5 council seats in each ward, with the SDLP holding the other 2.) *Atwood think they'll increase by 2.*

7. There was also the question of whether and, if so, where Hendron should stand. He was already a councillor for Lower Falls, but were he to stand there again, Kelly believed Sinn Fein would stand Adams against him in an attempt to show Adams was more popular. Hendron might therefore shift to Upper Falls, (where Kelly believed the SDLP could top the poll in any case) or not run at all. Upper Falls was the area where they were more likely to make a council seat gain, thereby *by* evening up representation in West Belfast. (Note: the longstanding SDLP councillor, Cormac Boomer, is now an independent and would be standing against the SDLP in that ward. Kelly said it was vital that Boomer be beaten in order to achieve that aim, but his 15 years experience would make him a credible candidate, although the split with the party over his advocacy of internment would not help his case.) Kelly also hoped that a Protestant might stand in the Upper Falls constituency for the SDLP, as Robin Mullan, who is Director of the Northern Ireland Council on disability, was interested.

Joe Hendron

8. Kelly was clear that the coming year was an important test for Hendron's credibility in advance of the local elections which would be seen as a referendum on his first year in office. Hendron needed to be fed information frequently and steered in the right direction. There were plans for a group of professionals in different fields, such as social services and health to assist Hendron by providing him with material. Kelly himself had been offered the job as research assistant to Hendron but had turned

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down. The interviews for the post would be held shortly, and Kelly was clear that a strong bright individual, prepared to work unselfishly on Hendron's behalf, was what was required. He did not believe that for that reason that Alex Attwood (SDLP Councillor for Upper Falls), who had his own political ambitions, would be suitable for the job. He gave no hint as to who his preferred candidate was

9. Hendron was being encouraged to concentrate on the economic development side; there was the possibility of a link between West Belfast and Cleveland, Ohio. Kelly hoped that a group from Cleveland comprising politicians and leading businessmen would come to West Belfast sometime in the summer. He also envisaged the link including Toronto (a candidate for twinning with the whole of Belfast already), which would help keep the Protestants on the Shankill happy.

10. Hendron's prospects of Westminster re-election would be much damaged were the Poleglass and Tawnbrook areas to be included in the constituency under the Boundary Commission proposals. It would be preferable for the SDLP if the Constituency were included to include part of the current South Belfast constituency.

Talks

11. In a brief reference to the talks process, Kelly made clear his view that the SDLP should continue to negotiate. He wanted the SDLP to be the last out of Parliament Buildings on this occasion. He believed it was crucial to Hume that Strand 2 should begin, but offered no view on the SDLP proposals themselves.

Other issues

12. Kelly mentioned, in passing, that the SDLP were likely to re-institute the post of General Secretary in a slightly different form.



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13. Kelly, who used to work for Seamus Mallon, commented that Mallon himself never offered any positive views, nor contributed to party policy. He was critical of Mallon and his attitude generally, which he characterised as maintaining maximum independence for the Newry and Armagh area so that he could act without constraints. He acknowledged both Hume and Mallon were not party men, unlike McGrady who had been a member of the National Democratic Party prior to joining the SDLP.

14. Kelly is able and respected for his organisational ability. He is less interested in the day-to-day issues. His views on the election, and particularly the CEO, are heartfelt. His estimate of personation does, however, conveniently allow him to claim the SDLP would defeat Sinn Fein in a straight fair fight. This may be rather over-optimistic.

[signed R Neill for]

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