

P/A- CR Consultation -
Political Parties
2003/118

From: Billy Gamble
Community Relation, Human Rights & Victims Division

14 August 2003

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JOHN SPELLAR (B&L)

MEETINGS WITH DUP, UUP AND WORKERS PARTY – “A SHARED FUTURE”

Summary

Issue: Meetings with DUP, UUP and Workers Party on Friday 15 and Monday 18 August.

Timing: Briefing required by close 14 August.

Presentational Issues: DUP and UUP likely to be critical of the consultation, though to differing degree. Workers Party on the other hand should be reasonably positive.

Recommendation: To consider the attached briefing and press release which has been agreed with EIS.

Detail

You are to meet with the DUP, UUP on Friday 15 August and the Workers Party on Monday 18 August to discuss the consultation paper on improving relations in Northern Ireland - **A Shared Future**. A meeting with Sinn Féin is to be arranged. Des Browne previously met the Alliance Party and the Women's Coalition earlier this year.

2. These are essentially listening exercises to take on board views in advance of more formal responses from the parties. I attach a generic brief for the meetings together with details of the delegations points to make, some defensive material and a press release.

3. I shall be available for the pre-briefs and the meetings.

Billy Gamble

BILLY GAMBLE

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Workers Party

Should be generally supportive. Will probably support the analysis and the need for a more pluralist society.

OBJECTIVE

Welcome the opportunity to meet with the parties. Impress upon the delegations the importance of listening to their views on the consultation document and look forward to receiving their formal response by end of September.

DUP Position

Will probably be uncomfortable with the idea of promoting greater integration and sharing within society; will stress the importance for equality (and rights) for Protestants, not just Nationalists or Republicans. May be dismissive of the approach being adopted – indeed may express the view that there is nothing wrong with ‘benign apartheid’.

UUP Position

Will probably concur with some (though not all) of the analysis set out in the consultation document. David Trimble (as First Minister) was critical of the Harbison review (which preceded ‘A Shared Future’). At one level he viewed it as not radical enough. But there appeared an unwillingness to accept the extent of the divisions in Northern Ireland – although there was recognition of the need to tackle issues at interfaces. He didn’t see the need for a regional body (role undertaken by Community Relations Council); rather, Government (specifically OFMDFM) should lead in coordinating and developing work on community relations. He was also keen on an enhanced role for District Councils with regard to resolving local issues. The Party has serious reservations regarding the Equality Commission and would resist any move to increase its role in the delivery of community relations. There is also, perhaps more importantly, a real concern that the UUP constituency is not ready (yet) for a serious debate on the systemic issues raised by the consultation and what is needed to create a fully shared society. This may, at least in part, be symptomatic of declining confidence among Protestants (and conversely more confidence among Catholics).

David McNarry will almost certainly replay the views expressed previously by the former First Minister.

Workers Party

Should be generally supportive. Will probably support the analysis and the need for a more pluralist society.

Points to Make

- Important debate aimed at bringing forward a new policy and strategy to promote good (or better) relations (and tackle sectarianism).
- No decisions have been made: want to hear views.
- Recognise there are deep divisions in society. There are no quick fixes. Require a long-term commitment by Government. Clearly would wish to see a devolved administration take forward this work. But the issue is too important to leave on back burner.
- A wide-ranging consultation across society will finish at the end September. Extremely important that we hear the views of the political parties in Northern Ireland, particularly in response to the key questions posed by the document:
 - *Should we accept existing segregation and division and focus on stabilizing and managing conflict or should we try to promote progress towards a more integrated and shared society?*
 - *What should be the main policy aims and outcomes to drive the new approach to promoting good relations?*
 - *What principles should underpin the approach? - for example, sharing or separation; public debate or neutral silence; promotion of partnership.*
 - *What action needs to be taken at a local government level? How could district councils play a more central role?*
 - *What functions should be carried out at regional level/central government? Role of Community Relations Council? What more should Departments do?*
- Pay tribute to those within the community who work tirelessly to support local people often in very difficult circumstances (not just at the interfaces where the problems are acutely demonstrated); but those who work behind the scene and rarely attract attention). Include in that local political representatives. **The behind the scenes work this week to deal with the problems at the Broadway interface is a good**

example of local councillors and the community working together to seek a positive outcome.

- Challenges we face in shaping a policy to promote better relations:
 - *facilitate the development of integrated/shared communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together;*
 - *encourage communication, tolerance and trust in areas where communities are living apart;*
 - *promote respect, encourage and celebrate difference;*
 - *eliminate sectarianism and racism - enable individuals to live and work together without fear or intimidation; and*
 - *shape policies and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow.*
- Requires action from Central Government (and local political representatives, absent a devolved administration); action at regional and local levels; and action at community level.

Defensive Lines

Benign Apartheid

Government cannot force people to live together. I believe that Northern Ireland is paying a very high price for allowing division to continue: a high socio-economic price, with scarce resources wasted in providing (in some cases) separate public services for two communities, instead of better services for all to share.

Why need for a new policy

Deep divisions remain which often manifests itself in sectarian violence. We have segregation – in housing, education and in accessing some services. A better relations policy is key to underpinning political progress and creating a more stable and peaceful Northern Ireland.

Future of Community Relations Council

Views are being sought as to whether the functions at a regional level would be best delivered, as at present by the Community Relations Council, or some other body, or indeed by central government. We will listen to those views and consider them carefully.

Integrated Education

This is a key question for consultation. Seeking views on whether people wish to see greater integration in education and, if so, how this might be promoted.

Promoting Mixed Housing

The issue of segregated housing is also a key question. While government would wish to see more mixed housing (and indeed promotes it through the Regional Development Strategy) the reality is in many parts of the community people do feel safer living with people of the same religion. Though not confined to urban areas this is particularly the case in lower-income communities.

Community Action Group

The Community Action Group, set up under Ministerial chair, has developed a £7.4 million programme of measures to tackle disadvantage in working class communities across Northern Ireland targeted at improving health, education, physical and community regeneration.

Support for divided communities in loyalist areas

The Local Community Fund (£3m) will be used to develop capacity where there is none, and that unfortunately is sometimes in loyalist areas. The Fund will encourage people in local communities to respond effectively to local priorities Both District Councils and Local Strategy Partnerships will be in discussion with officials from the Department for Social Development to finalise provisions and ensure the Fund is working for communities as soon as possible.

Following consultation with local communities, £2.7 million has already been allocated to communities in Belfast (£1 million), Londonderry and the North West (£780k), East Antrim (234k), North Down & Ards (£166k) and Ballycastle/Coleraine (£150k). Other areas to be targeted include Mid Ulster, South Down, Omagh, Newry & Mourne and Craigavon.

Conflict at interface areas – East Belfast/North Belfast/Broadway

Improving communication between communities is vital to the process of building trust. Pay tribute to those who continue to work behind the scenes to reduce tensions. And we will continue to support their work.

Maurice Martin

Existed agent by profession. Former Director of Social Development, U.K. and then Director of
Fermanagh District Council. Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, 1996-2001.

Sarah Pugh

Formerly a community worker. Worked in a voluntary sector for 15 years. She was a member of the
Fermanagh District Council. Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, 1996-2001.

Paul McKeown

Formerly a community worker. Worked in a voluntary sector for 15 years. He was a member of the
Fermanagh District Council. Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, 1996-2001.

David McFarlane

Fred O'Brien

Lord Mayor of Belfast 1989. Elected to Assembly as DUP member for North Belfast in 1998.
He is involved in community development.

David McNarry

Was Special Adviser to David Trimble (former First Minister). He was party's candidate to
succeed John Taylor, (Strangford Constituency) in the 2001 Westminster Election. came
second to Iris Robinson (DUP).

A N OTHER

Workers Party

John Lowry, General Secretary, The Workers Party.

DELEGATION LISTS

Democratic Unionist Party

Maurice Morrow

Estate agent by profession. Former Minister of Social Development, MLA and local councillor Fermanagh District Council. Member of the NI Forum for Political Dialogue, 1996-1998.

Edwin Poots

Farmer by occupation. Elected to Assembly as DUP candidate for Lagan Valley constituency. Was chair of the Committee of the Centre. Also a member of the NI Forum for Political Dialogue, 1996-1998.

Peter Weir

Barrister, called to Northern Ireland Bar, 1992. Elected to Assembly as a UUP candidate for North Down in 1998, but since joined the DUP.

Ulster Unionist Party

Fred Cobain

Lord Mayor of Belfast 1990. Elected to Assembly as UUP member for North Belfast in 1998. He is involved in community development.

David McNarry

Was Special Adviser to David Trimble (former First Minister). He was party's candidate to succeed John Taylor, (Strangford Constituency) in the 2001 Westminster Election: came second to Iris Robinson (DUP).

A N O T H E R

Workers Party

John Lowry, General Secretary, The Workers Party.

DRAFT PRESS RELEASE

BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE BETWEEN AND WITHIN COMMUNITIES ARE KEY PRIORITIES - SPELLAR

John Spellar, MP, Minister with responsibility for community relations, today held meetings with representatives from the Democratic Unionist Party and Ulster Unionist Party to discuss the future direction of community relations policy.

The meetings are part of a series with political parties following the launch in January of 'A Shared Future', a major public consultation document on the future direction of community relations.

John Spellar said: **"Building trust and confidence between and within communities and tackling sectarianism are key priorities for this Government. In order to achieve this we must all work together to create the necessary climate for peace and reconciliation. I welcome this opportunity today to have meetings with representatives from the Democratic Unionist Party and Ulster Unionist Party on this important issue and will be giving their views very careful consideration.**

"Meetings have already taken place with representatives from the Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and I will be meeting other political parties to discuss this important subject over coming weeks.

"A shared society cannot simply be imposed on people, it must be built on consensus. In order for progress to be made, it is essential that there is wide ranging debate. Government will do all everything it can to develop and facilitate that debate and I would encourage other political parties, the churches and the wider civic society to engage with us on this issue."

The closing date for receipt of responses is 30 September 2003.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Copies of the consultation document 'A Shared Future' can be obtained by telephoning Freephone 0800 7837210. Copies can also be obtained by writing to Stephen Hill, Room A5.10, Castle Buildings, Belfast BT4 3SR or by email to stephen.hill@ofmdfmi.gov.uk. The consultation document is also available on our website: www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk

Responses should be made in writing and sent to Stephen Hill, Room A5.10, Castle Buildings, Belfast BT4 3SR before 30 September 2003.