

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: sbwhoeop [redacted]
Sent: Monday, January 11, 2010 4:19 PM
To: H
Subject: Memo: Latest NI crisis/UK coup. Sid
Attachments: hrc memo ni crisis 011110.docx

B6

CONFIDENTIAL

January 11, 2010

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Northern Ireland crisis and latest UK coup

The political crisis in Northern Ireland is fast moving and fluid. On Friday, January 7, after reading a lengthy statement on TV denouncing his wife repeatedly for her affair (with a teenager), Peter Robinson assured Shaun Woodward privately that no financial irregularity was involved. Then, within hours, it was reported that Iris Robinson secured 50,000 pounds from government contractors to give to her lover to set up a restaurant. Peter Robinson in fact knew of the money all along. Robinson had an opportunity to save himself, perhaps, by declaring himself for engagement on devolution, freeing himself of the DUP hardliners and throwing himself on public opinion, but was incapable of acting. By accepting his withdrawal as First Minister for six weeks today, the DUP has maintained a modicum of Robinson's authority, though it is in suspended animation. His temporary replacement, Arlene Foster, according to Shaun, comes from the modernizing wing of the party. Shaun does not know if her naming indicates a potentially positive direction or makes her a prisoner of those who put her in place. The silence of Sinn Fein is telling. Not reacting in horror, Sinn Fein is unsure whether this is good or bad news, and it's willing to wait. But the waiting game is untenable without forward movement on devolution.

Here's why: Without positive steps from Foster and the DUP, the situation will become swiftly unacceptable to Sinn Fein. It will speak out. Martin McGuinness will have to express his opposition to DUP recalcitrance and paralysis. Earlier, Shaun sent signals to leaders of the DUP that Robinson's resignation would provoke a series of events leading rapidly to Shaun calling an election in which they would be tainted by him and suffer a catastrophic defeat, followed by the general UK election (almost certainly May 6) that would compound their misery. Shaun was trying to push them not to scuttle the peace process but to embrace it and move forward. Robinson's six weeks hiatus puts the DUP in a fugue state, a twilight zone of disorientation, that cannot be sustained even this week. Shaun is also working through the Irish government to communicate to Adams not to provoke a full-blown crisis, ruining peace prospects in order to advance the dream of a united Ireland.

There's more to come, hour by hour, but the situation remains extremely murky. It should clarify within days.

On the latest coup attempt against Gordon: The plotters, Patricia Hewitt and Geoffrey Hoon, had no one behind them. It was a fizzle. This is the third and likely the last attempt. It's the end of the coup season. Ironically, the coup was announced just as Gordon had had his best week, last week, after David Cameron flip-flopped on a marriage tax and Gordon walloped him in Question Time. The coup obviously halted that momentum and shifted the subject to disunity within the Labour Party. Gordon and Labour lost a bit of time and ground it will have to make up. But various polls show almost no negative movement of Gordon in a matchup with Cameron. He has pulled to within ten points and remains steady. However, a poll in the Guardian today shows that while Gordon has actually improved his standing within the party the party itself has taken a hit.

David Miliband was the loser in this coup attempt. He took seven hours before responding, issuing a tepid statement saying he expected that labour would win under Gordon's leadership. His vacillation marked him. Neither willing to strike nor support, he seems unsure, wobbly. His performance has made people wonder if he's the man to be leader after Gordon. David's brother, Ed, the environment minister, meanwhile, reacting swiftly in his backing of Gordon, and has emerged as a sterling fellow. Mandelson, for his part, waited to go on TV to express his public support. No one trusts him, yet he's indispensable. If somehow Gordon wins, he would likely be the first one defenestrated. More to come soon...