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CONFIDENTIAL

Conversation with Harold McCusker, M. P.

1. Harold McCusker, M. P., the Deputy Leader of the Official Unionist Party, told me in a recent conversation that he saw little prospect of serious political movement in the North in the short to medium term. The British seemed to be backing away from their intention of launching an initiative in the autumn and, in McCusker's view, this was the correct decision. The reality was that there was no possibility of movement while Molyneaux and Paisley remained at the head of their respective parties. Both were firmly opposed to any serious cross-community political movement and were ready to undermine and marginalise anyone within their parties who encouraged moves in that direction.
2. Overall, McCusker felt the British were resigned to continuing the present status quo until circumstances might be more conducive to political movement. At that time, they would almost certainly move to have Molyneaux replaced as leader of the OUP through offering him a seat in the House of Lords which, knowing Molyneaux, he could not possibly resist. (An additional British reason for not "sidelining" Molyneaux at present was the unattractiveness of the leaders in waiting, John Taylor and Martin Smyth).
3. Turning to Peter Robinson, McCusker said that he was a much more friendly and sociable person than his public profile would suggest. He was not altogether happy in the DUP at present, which was probably not unrelated to a continuing deterioration in his relationship with Paisley. He might indeed be tempted in due course to join forces with the Official Unionist Party, but only if he saw this as benefitting his considerable political ambition. Robinson above all was desperately anxious for power and would,

without doubt, be prepared to make significant concessions in pursuit of this.

4. Other points made by McCusker were:

- (a) while the OUP/DUP pact would continue to exist, the reality was that in the foreseeable future it would have no real political substance or significance;
- (b) he believed Jim Nicholson, the new Unionist M.E.P., had made a mistake in immediately joining the Christian Democratic Group in the European Parliament. Nicholson himself was a very pleasant person but, in political terms, was no more than an adequate County Councillor;
- (c) contrary to general rumours, he believed that the UDA were having considerable recruitment difficulties. His information was that young loyalists took the very pragmatic view that, if they were to join organisations like the UDA, they would sooner or later inevitably end up serving extremely long sentences in prison;
- (d) for much the same reason, McCusker believed that the IRA was also having difficulty both in recruiting new, and retaining their existing, personnel. This was happening at a time when their more political wing, led by Adams and Morrison, had been significantly weakened as a result of the recent election results North and South. As a result of both these developments, there seemed to be considerable disillusionment among Sinn Fein and IRA members at present; and

- (e) finally, McCusker mentioned that many prominent people in the North were watching carefully to see what response the Government would make to the request from the Board of the Adelaide Hospital that their existing "ethos" be maintained and protected within the new Tallaght hospital complex.

DOT
Dermot Gallagher,
21 July, 1989.

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