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Mr. O'Bannon,
P.L. C.C. Mr. Nally and P.S.S.
AA 8/12.

Confidential

Meeting with Mr. Mark Durkan, John Hume's Office,

Derry, 1 December 1989. *Mr. Kernen (orig)* *11/12*
Mr. McLaughlin *11/12*
13/12 *11/12* *89*

Taoiseach's MEP initiative

Mark Durkan had a long discussion on 29 November with Sammy Wilson of the DUP. They were both addressing a Civil Service seminar in Portrush. Afterwards Wilson indicated that he wished to speak to Durkan privately. Referring to the Taoiseach's initiative in relation to the Northern MEPs, Wilson said that if Jim Nicholson agreed to meet the Taoiseach he and Peter Robinson would not be opposed ("we would not be jumping up and down"), provided the discussions were confined solely to EC aid for Northern Ireland. If the agenda were broadened to include North/South co-operation in the EC context, Wilson felt that the Southern MEPs (and perhaps the British Government) should be involved in the discussions also. When Durkan pressed him on his own attitude to such a wider forum Wilson replied that "nobody had suggested it yet".

Wilson's approach contrasts sharply with that of his party leader, Ian Paisley, who has come out strongly against such talks and who has been particularly critical of John Taylor's positive comments on the initiative. Wilson told Durkan that the fact that they (Peter Robinson and he) had passed up an opportunity to "hammer" Taylor was a measure of how serious they were about the matter! (Durkan said that there is a deep hostility within the DUP towards Taylor).

Prospects for inter-party talks: DUP attitude

Turning to the possibility of getting talks going between the parties, Wilson spoke at some length about the mechanics of a "gap" between Conference meetings. He pressed Durkan on whether, if there were, say, a two-month gap between meetings, the SDLP would be prepared to enter talks with the Unionists directly i.e. without the involvement of the two Governments. Durkan replied that notwithstanding their continued view that the first priority should be the sorting out of the relationship between the Unionists and the rest of the island, they would, of course, be prepared to engage in bilateral talks with the Unionist parties. He pointed out to Wilson, however, that two months was a very short time and that the most they could hope to achieve in that period would be an "understanding" of how each side realistically saw the way ahead, the possible structures which were or were not feasible, the nature of the Dublin/London role etc. Thereafter it would be necessary for each side to go separately to Dublin

and London to tease out the relationships with them ("I told Wilson that he could not expect the SDLP to represent them to Dublin nor could we expect the Unionists to make our case to London"). Both sides would then return for full negotiations, with appropriate arrangements for a Dublin/London involvement. The outcome would be put before the people in simultaneous referenda, North and South.

Durkan said that Wilson "seemed to accept" this scenario including the need for direct talks between the Unionists and Dublin and for joint referenda. He felt that the latter could be rationalised from a Unionist viewpoint on the basis that the outcome could be presumed to include the dropping of Articles 2 and 3 of our Constitution, which would in any case involve a referendum in the South.

Wilson made clear to Durkan, however, that in addition to the gap between Conference meetings, they would need "something on the Secretariat". He said that he understood there was to be a change "at the top" in the Secretariat shortly. He suggested that if for the duration of Ireland's Presidency it could be demonstrated that there was a lessening in the status of the leadership of the Secretariat this would be sufficient to solve their difficulty. He claimed that they would not "trumpet" this publicly as a "victory"; rather they would use it "quietly" to convince their own people that there had been a shift and that conditions were now right for talks to begin. Durkan said that Wilson made a similar point about the public presentation of "gaps" between Conference meetings; there would be no triumphalism. Durkan noted to me wryly that Wilson's approach was that it was the two Governments who were "on the hook" in insisting that there would be no suspension of the Agreement, and that his suggestions, which would not involve the use of the word "suspension", were aimed at helping them off that hook.

Durkan felt that Wilson's comments were encouraging in that they indicated that there was some serious thinking taking place within the DUP. Robinson and Wilson are uncomfortable with Paisley's totally negative approach but clearly they have to be careful as to what they say in public. Wilson commented to Durkan that "you should not pay too much attention to what people say in the atmosphere of a party Conference" - a reference to hard-line speeches made by himself and Robinson at the recent DUP Annual Conference, which were in contrast to more

conciliatory remarks which both had made in other fora in recent months.

Durkan cautioned against making too much of Wilson's comments to him, however.

Most certainly, Wilson was keen to get some form of dialogue going and supported Peter Robinson's approach in this regard, but Durkan felt that he was basically a "creature of fashion" and could quite happily return to the role of "loyalist gurrrier" if the process of trying to get talks going were to demonstrably break down.

Durkan feels that much depends on the role of Nigel Dodds. He has become more and more a key figure in the DUP. He is close to Paisley, who is impressed by his Oxbridge background and following his term as Lord Mayor of Belfast his status within the party generally has increased substantially. Paisley has never been strong in Belfast and he has cultivated Dodds' role there as a counter to Robinson and Wilson. Durkan said that it was Dodds who negotiated Robinson's return to the party last year after his resignation in 1987. Whether Paisley can be moved towards talks will significantly depend on Dodds' position. Durkan believes that Robinson and Wilson have no chance of persuading Paisley directly and that progress will only be possible if they can convince Dodds of the need for talks.

RUC Derry

The RUC Commander in Derry, McCreesh, was recently replaced by a Chief Supt McCoombe. McCreesh, a Catholic, had been in the position for less than a year. Durkan said that there was widespread dissatisfaction with him, one of the criticisms being that he was over-sensitive to his position as a Catholic Commander. Discipline within the RUC was regarded as having slipped and his attitude to complaints was unsatisfactory. Durkan said that the rumour was that Annesley was unhappy with McCreesh as a doubtful appointment made in the closing period of Hermon's tenure as Chief Constable and that this was why he had him replaced.

Durkan raised with me the dramatic increase in the number of cases where the RUC have sought to put pressure on locals to inform on IRA activity. The usual modus operandi was to approach people against whom charges (often minor) were pending. These would be told that the charges would be dropped if they agreed to keep

watch on the movements of neighbours suspected of being IRA activists. While Durkan was aware that this practice had been going on for a long time, there had been a major increase in the number of cases brought to their attention in the last month or so (he calculated roughly 12 cases in that time). Many of the people involved were "vulnerable" in the first instance (drink or drug problems etc) and were in no position to stand up for themselves. The RUC would no doubt argue that every police force had arrangements of this type but the reality was that the circumstances in Northern Ireland could not be compared to those obtaining elsewhere, given that if these people were "found out" it meant almost certain death. He also suggested that the RUC were being foolish in the arrangements which they made for contact with these people. The same locations tended to be used and Durkan felt that it was only a matter of time before one of these occasions was availed of by the IRA to mount an attack.

I undertook that we would raise the matter in the Secretariat.

h.c.

T. O'Connor

7 December, 1989.

cc Mr Gallagher
Counsellors
A-I Secretariat
Section
BOX