



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2019/31/48

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Robinson Visit to Dublin

1. I had a discussion in my office yesterday afternoon (Tuesday) with Miriam Hederman O'Brien concerning a luncheon she attended in Dublin last Friday (December 1st) at which Peter Robinson, accompanied by Roger Hutchinson, attended by invitation. She had been invited to this private luncheon by Barbara Sweetman on behalf of the Irish Association. The attendance also included Mary Holland (who acted in the role of Chairperson during discussions) Enda McDonagh, Dean Griffin (who left early), Nell McCafferty, Patrick Downey and Marie Heaney (wife of Seamus Heaney).

2. Having been invited to make a contribution Peter Robinson opened by explaining his background and entry into politics. A number of points adverted to by Robinson included the fact that he came from a relatively deprived background from which he emerged with a dislike of the Unionists (Official), a commitment which was more socialist than conservative and a view that the political situation looked sterile from the standpoint of his generation. He established a successful estate agency business and the blowing up of a friend of his called Beggs had a marked effect on him. One of his main ambitions was to bring an end to violence.

Current situation

3. Robinson said the Unionists were very disappointed with what they saw as such a negative response from the Minister for Foreign Affairs on suggestions concerning a suspension of the Anglo Irish Agreement. They were still hopeful that conditions could be created which would allow talks to take place. He had received authority and approval from Paisley and Molyneux to put forward a detailed and comprehensive plan if the circumstances were right. The plan which he had prepared was not a rehash of former proposals but was flexible and involved a "new dimension". The conditions for holding talks included an eight weeks gap in meetings of the Anglo Irish Conference. The eight weeks was a minimum period required but will be sufficient and therefore could also be considered the maximum gap required. They, the Unionists, would produce their plan and hold discussions with the SDLP. If the talks did not bear fruit then everybody would go back to square one and the Unionists could probably be viewed as intransigent or alternatively that they had put forward a plan which was a failure.

He declined to be drawn on the nature of the "plan" but said it would be an attractive and enticing one for the SDLP.

He would not use the term "power sharing" as this is a turn off for Unionists but there would be such an element. He repeated a claim as to the existence of a "new dimension" and adverted, briefly, to elements of common defence policy and common policing operations.

4. The Unionists would not mind what the period of "suspension" was called. With regard to the Secretariat at Maryfield he felt that "most senior members" of the Secretariat could leave Maryfield on vacation or because the workload would be reduced in the period of this gap during the Presidency. He acknowledged that the Secretariat could not be closed down entirely.
5. He seemed to envisage that the talks in which the Unionists would engage would take place between the SDLP and the Unionists and if both sides reached agreement they would then come with their joint plan or proposals to both Governments.
6. He dismissed a suggestion that he should have talks with the SDLP first and then make a joint approach to both Governments for suspension of the Anglo Irish Agreement. He cited

against that the experience of Duisburgh (although the Alliance he acknowledged were primarily responsible for the debacle there) and on subsequent unsatisfactory contact with the SDLP.

7. Other points: the discussion at lunch was wide-ranging at times and Robinson stayed on until 4.25 p.m. although he was due back at the border at 4.00 p.m. He referred at a number of points to his high respect and liking for Seamus Mallon. At one point he raised the question of removing Articles 2 and 3 from the Constitution but in the course of conversation acknowledged that it would be unreal, in the pleasant climate, to expect a referendum to be held or to be held successfully for the purpose of replacing those Articles. If an appropriate package could be agreed which would be sufficient to alter the political climate he would wish to see Articles 2 and 3 replaced by Articles which did not make a territorial claim.