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SECRET



Parasch
To me please
31.1

Duisburg Initiative - Tánaiste's meeting with
Mr. Eberhard Spiecker, Iveagh House, 27th January, 1989

Attendance

1. Mr. Spiecker and the Tánaiste were accompanied, respectively, by the Lord Abbot of Kilnacrott and Mr. Dermot Gallagher.

Background

2. The background to the meeting is that Spiecker, a German lawyer active in German and World Council of Churches affairs, had organised a meeting of Northern political representatives at Duisburg, near Dusseldorf, in October last. He had organised a similar meeting some 18 months previously. Present at the October meeting were:

- Jack Allen, Chairman of the OUP;
- Peter Robinson, Deputy Leader of the DUP;
- Austin Currie, SDLP;
- Gordon Mawhinney, Deputy Leader of Alliance.

Fr. Alex Reid (Clonard Monastery) was also present in the capacity of someone who could convey the thinking of Sinn Féin.

3. The Duisburg meeting seems to have focussed in large part on how political dialogue might be initiated in Northern Ireland while avoiding a formal suspension of the Agreement. One possibility discussed was for the two Governments, at the end of a Conference, to announce the next meeting for a date six weeks or so in advance. It was hoped that this might enable Unionists to enter into talks during this specific inter-Conference period (i.e. in the knowledge that

these talks would not be interrupted by any meetings of the Conference).

4. However, once the Duisburg meeting was over and the politicians involved returned to Northern Ireland, the opinions of the participants seemed to differ quite significantly as to what, if anything, had been agreed.

Discussion at Meeting

5. Spiecker, once courtesies were completed, handed over a copy of his introductory remarks at the Duisburg meeting (Annex A). He said that, in his view, the meeting had achieved a significant degree of progress; this was reflected in the following agreement which had been accepted by the four politicians at the meeting:

"The meetings of the conference will not be held for a period (specified) to facilitate dialogue involving the major constitutional parties in Northern Ireland"

6. Spiecker went on to say that what was required to give effect to the above, and to enable political dialogue to begin, was for the two Governments to allow in the near future for a sufficiently long period to elapse between two Conferences. He accepted that, in a sense, this could be argued to constitute a form of limited suspension of the Conference; for this reason, the Duisburg meeting had been very careful not to use the term suspension. He now wished to ask if the Government would be prepared to go along with a formula along these lines.
7. The Tánaiste, in response, said that while a tentative agreement may have been reached between the politicians at Duisburg, this, he understood, had started to come apart

shortly after the meeting. We, for instance, had heard a number of differing accounts of what had been agreed. Spiecker seemed taken aback by this and said that he had been unaware there had been conflicting interpretations of the outcome of the meeting. (It became clear also, though the issue was not specifically referred to, that he was unaware of the Unionist paper to the SDLP on their understanding of the Duisburg agreement and the SDLP's response (Annexes 2 and 3 respectively).

8. The Tánaiste went on to say that the Government were extremely keen to see the widest possible dialogue being got under way. The present moves to bring the Unionists in from "the political cold" had in fact been initiated by the Taoiseach in late 1987 and Mr. Haughey's invitation to Unionists for talks without pre-conditions had been repeated on several occasions subsequently.
9. The principal difficulty with the Duisburg formula was that it tried to set pre-conditions for the opening of dialogue. Moreover, these pre-conditions were liable to widely differing interpretations and, as such, would be subject to analysis, criticism and attack from every side, including the press. A more honest and tactically-sensible way forward would be through parallel dialogue. At this point, Mr. Spiecker said he could accept the logic of much of what the Tánaiste was suggesting but parallel talks presented a problem, given the direct implication that the Unionists were prepared to accept, while talking, the parallel operation of the Agreement. The Tánaiste, as an alternative, suggested that the terms "separate from", "outside of" or "apart from" the Agreement might be used. Spiecker seemed to find these acceptable.
10. The Tánaiste added that he found it difficult to understand Unionist objections to the above approach as talks on this

basis would enable Unionists to engage actively in dialogue (as we knew they desired), while continuing to maintain their position of principle against the Agreement.

11. Spiecker said he felt the Tánaiste had approached the issue very fairly and objectively and he saw considerable merit in his approach. He would convey the Tánaiste's thinking to the Unionists and would come back to us with their response in due course. He also said that he hoped to see Tom King in the near future.
12. Overall, Spiecker impressed as an extremely sincere and well-disposed person. However, one suspects that his contacts are largely clerical and that he has no close political friends in present-day Northern politics. (It is perhaps significant that he spoke at some length at the end of the discussion, and with feeling, of his involvement with Rory O' Brady and Fr. Piaras O Dúill at the time of the hunger-strike). It was also extremely surprising that he seemed completely unaware of the Unionist/SDLP contacts and exchange of papers after Duisburg. I doubt if he has any great hopes for his initiative but, in a stubborn Germanic way, he will probably continue to pursue it until it finally runs into the ground.

DAG
Dermot Gallagher,
30 January, 1989.

cc: P. S. Taoiseach
PSM
Mr. Nally; PSS
Mr. Mathews; Mr. Brosnan
(3) Counsellors A-I
Box

Man-04 A

Berhard Spiecker
Rechtsanwalt und Notar
Rathausstraße 2
41 Duisburg-Hamborn
Telefon: 02 03 / 55 78 70

Round Table Conference
in Duisburg
vom 14.10.88 bis 15.10.88

Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you here to Duisburg and to thank you for taking the time to attend this conference. Permit me to say a few words of introduction.

Three years ago the first conference of this kind took place in Boppard - just one month before the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. On that occasion the participants were mostly representatives of church institutions and groups in society.

The second conference was held a year ago in Essen. It was composed largely of politicians. Mr. Austin Currie of the SDLP was there and the Rev. Martin Smyth of the OUP. Martin Smyth had planned to be here too but at the last moment he was prevented from coming. The OUP is represented by Mr. Jack Allen. Mr. Gordon Mawhinney is present for the Alliance Party and Mr. Peter Robinson for the DUP. Father Alec Reid is here so that, as far as it lies within his power, he might influence the forces on the edge of the Republican spectrum. Other small parties have not yet been invited because it is the decisions of the major parties which matter. Mr. and Mrs. Becker who were also at the last conference, are here as interpreters and confidential clerks.

Wieder
Party (Crested)
by SDLP

What is the purpose of this conference held such a short time before the possible review of the Anglo-Irish Agreement? Can the external consensus between London and Dublin which found its expression in the Agreement, be extended to an internal consensus of the political parties in Northern Ireland or can it be replaced? This is what we would like to find out. Such a consensus would have the top priority. It would have an effect beyond Ireland to Continental Europe.

Maybe - you know the bitter words written by the Irish poet Eugene O'Neill:

"There is no present or future - only the past
which is relived again and again, in the
present."

I would be grateful if I could say: the spell has been broken and
O'Neills words are no longer true.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.

E. Giller

Annex 2

Note

Handed to John Hume by Peter
Robinson and Paul Allen (Chairman of
the OUI) in the House of Commons
on 29-xi-78, did it?

POSSIBLE SCENARIO

1. The two governments would make a statement that the next meeting of the conference was to be fixed for a future date (to be stated in the announcement) sufficiently far in advance, to facilitate discussion involving the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland.
2. In their response to this statement the unionist leaders would announce they intend to seek clarification as to the meaning of the statement.
3. The Secretary of State would invite all the party leaders of the main constitutional parties to meet him separately.
4. The Secretary of State, at his meeting, with the unionist leaders, would explain, in confidence, that only a skeleton presence would remain at Maryfield. This would involve only those essential to re-direct mail and telephone calls to the two governments respective offices. The other members of the Maryfield Secretariat staff would return to other duties in their appropriate government offices.
5. On leaving the meeting with the Secretary of State the unionist leaders would respect the confidentiality of the meeting with Mr King, they would circumvent any other questions by stating it would be inappropriate to comment as they must first consult colleagues.
6. After meeting colleagues the two unionist leaders would release a statement saying that they had sought and received clarification from the Secretary of State concerning the prospects for talks among the parties in Northern Ireland. The statement would indicate that they now believe unionists could enter negotiations with the other constitutional parties as their manifesto pre-requisite for entering discussions had been fully met in regard to both the Anglo-Irish Conference and the Maryfield Secretariate. No interviews would be given to the press or media. All would be referred to the statement.
7. The other party leaders, would, on ending their meetings with the Secretary of State, also keep the detail of the meeting confidential. They would indicate that they were willing to enter talks.
8. In the event of the two government's representatives having to meet at any time during the period of the discussions, it would be handled in a sensitive way and under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Council so as not to cause any embarrassment to the politicians involved in talks and not to bring about a break-down of those talks.
9. The most sure way to deflect the press from analyzing whether the SDLP or Unionists had given ground to achieve talks is for the discussions to start immediately thereby providing a new focus of interest. The press if they were to attempt to push the parties into a position where they were defending their presence at talks would cause agitation amongst party supporters which would not be helpful for constructive dialogue.

ANNEX 3

Meeting yesterday evening in House of Commons.
 Doc. presented by us to DUP + DUP reps.

- 1 The SDLP has studied the document presented to us by both Unionist parties and appreciates that it is a serious effort by those parties to break down the barriers that stand in the way of dialogue.
- 2 The SDLP has no objection to using the period between meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference in order to have talks between the parties but we would not wish to give any impression whatsoever that the Anglo-Irish Agreement and its workings had been suspended. In the SDLP view the other proposals in the Unionist document are designed to give that impression and lack credibility insofar as they imply that the full facts should be kept from the public. We believe that such an approach is neither possible nor desirable.
- 3 The SDLP therefore feel that it would be much more credible and much more honest for the parties to openly declare that they were going to engage in talks completely outside the framework of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
- 4 We should declare that this approach is accepted by all parties as without prejudice to the attitudes of any of the parties to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
- 5 We should declare that our objective in these talks would be to achieve an agreement that will transcend in importance any previous agreement ever made and that the agenda of the talks will address all of the relationships that can contribute to the realisation of peace and stability.
- 6 The SDLP believe that such an approach will not compromise in any way the stated positions of the parties in relation to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The parties have already on a number of occasions, outside the framework of the Agreement and without reference to it, indicated their willingness to come together to address serious economic problems. We would believe that our electorate would therefore see no difficulty in the parties adopting the same approach about what are matters of life and death.
- 7 The SDLP believe that in the interests of everyone, before the talks begin the parties should agree on the mechanisms whereby any agreements reached should be endorsed by the people.