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10/2/50. E. K. Molyneux
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*Taoiseach
To be placed
on
1912*

Telephone Conversation with Jim Molyneaux, 18th February, 1990

1. Jim Molyneaux telephoned on Sunday evening to inform us, as a matter of courtesy, of the prospects - as he saw them - for today's talks between the Unionist leaders and the Secretary of State.
2. Molyneaux said he was not "terribly optimistic" about the talks making any worthwhile progress. The Secretary of State did not seem to have a clear strategy worked out and was putting more emphasis on the framework for, rather than on the substance of, talks. Neither was he saying much about the possible role or involvement of Dublin - his co-partner in the Agreement - in any new arrangements. In short, the noises they were hearing from the Secretary of State, including his constant references to progress being possible rather than probable, were the "usual vague NIO stuff". If anything indeed, Brooke seemed to have backtracked from his Bangor speech and was now attempting to say that there had been nothing new in his text on that occasion.
3. In so far as any policy element could be identified in Brooke's approach, this was a preference for the "old familiar internal arrangements". Everyone was of course willing to consider proposals for devolution but they had to be on a realistic basis. The British were "aiming far too high" at present and seemed to envisage the establishment of a power-sharing Government in the North. In Molyneaux's view, if any future devolved institution in Northern Ireland was to be "over loaded with power and responsibility", it would be liable to "collapse in ruins". The lessons of the past should have surely taught the British that they needed to be modest in their aims for political progress in the North.

[Signature]

4. In response to a question about Ian Paisley's likely approach to the meeting, Molyneaux said that the DUP Leader tended to share his approach. Paisley was moreover very annoyed with his Deputy at present - who was attempting to develop party policy without clearing his lines in advance - and Robinson may well as a result have "his knuckles rapped in the near future".

Taoiseach's address to Institute of Directors

5. Molyneaux finally said that he was delighted the Taoiseach had accepted the IOD invitation to address them in Belfast and that his visit and speech could only do a "world of good".

Comment

6. Molyneaux - somewhat surprisingly - made no attempt to establish how we saw developments over the coming weeks; his own presentation confirms our view that Molyneaux is essentially an integrationalist and sees far more risks than potential benefits in any move to full-scale devolution; his preference obviously remains for enhancement of local government powers in Northern Ireland, with legislative control remaining at Westminster.

Dermot Gallagher,
19 February, 1990

cc: PST; PSM; Mr. Nally; PSS; Mr. Mathews; Mr. Brosnan;
Ambassador London; Joint Secretary