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Discussion with Ken Maginnis

19th February, 1990

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1. Ken Maginnis was in Dublin yesterday to address a lunch meeting of the German-Irish Chamber of Commerce; I attended the lunch and subsequently met with Maginnis for an hour or so.

Speech

2. The subject of his speech was North-South Economic cooperation in the context of the Single European Market; however the main points of interest were political:
 - he proposed that the two governments now announce their readiness to suspend the Conference for a four-month period from September, with a series of preliminary talks taking place in the interim to prepare the ground for the negotiations proper;
 - he argued that if the present opportunity for progress is missed, Unionists will go back into the trenches and the political impasse will continue;
 - he strongly criticised John Hume for failing to respond to the flexibility shown by Unionists in recent months.

Discussion

3. In our private discussion, Maginnis made a very strong plea for support by the two governments for the efforts being made by Robinson and himself to move the Unionist leadership forward; his main points (some volunteered, some in response to my questions and comments) were as follows:

Attitudes of the two Governments

- He and Robinson are beginning to feel that they are being "strung along" by the two governments; if in fact London and/or Dublin feels there is no real hope of doing serious business, then it would be as well to be clear about this and he and Robinson will stop wasting their time.
- He is afraid that "bureaucrats in both governments" are stifling the prospects for progress by putting too much emphasis on the arguments against flexibility and too little on the potential benefits.
- He remains convinced that the opportunity is there for progress if the governments show some courage and imagination. It is the governments who need to inject some sense of urgency into the process - Molyneaux and Paisley are in no rush (nor, he added, should anyone delude themselves that either of the leaders is contemplating retirement any time soon).
- He looks to Dublin in particular for some honesty and integrity in its dealings; "The British say flattering things to your face while putting a knife in your back; at least we on this island should be able to deal with each other in a non-hypocritical way".

Comments on John Hume

- Maginnis is convinced - and will not be dissuaded from this view - that Dublin would show far more flexibility if John Hume was not restraining us. (He believes, for example, that it was Hume's intervention which led to what Unionists perceived as a difference in tone between the Taoiseach's initial response to the

Nicholson/Allen interview and his considered response the following day).

- He repeatedly returned to his argument that the Unionists have travelled a long distance in the past four years whereas Hume has not budged an inch; when I defended Hume, he said that many politicians in the South with whom he has spoken are increasingly disenchanted with the SDLP leader.
- By way of illustrating Hume's unreliability, Maginnis said that he had put to Hume ten days ago his proposal (see above) for an Autumn suspension of Conference meetings preceded by informal talks. According to Maginnis, Hume's reaction was that he would have no problem with this scenario except that it would result in triumphalism on Paisley's part. When Maginnis assured him that Paisley's reaction could be managed, Hume promised to reflect further and come back to Maginnis. Since he has not heard subsequently from Hume, Maginnis now assumes that Hume has backtracked on his initial positive reaction;

Content of any negotiations

- As to the substance of what might be on offer from Unionists in any negotiations, Maginnis referred to a ten-page document on which the three-page text presented by Unionist leaders to Mr. King eighteen months ago was based; he said he would be surprised if Dublin was not attracted to at least some of the proposals in that document.
- He argued that it was unrealistic to expect further elaboration from Unionists at this stage as to what their negotiating position might be: "the problem is

that Unionists do not know themselves". (The OUP, in particular, is a "broad Church" where a very wide spectrum of views are represented). So far, the Unionist leaders have been able to avoid giving structure and definition to their views "because they have not had to grapple with any concrete proposals". It was only when confronted with concrete proposals, that Unionist thinking would assume shape and coherency.

- Responding to my question as to whether it was not over-optimistic, in the light of Molyneaux's and Paisley's stated positions, to anticipate a unified and positive Unionist input to any negotiations, Maginnis reiterated his view that if the two governments bolstered the position of the second tier Unionists, and bearing in mind the mood for change at grass-roots level, it would be possible to move the leadership forward.
- He also argued (as Robinson and others have done before) that there would be an in-built incentive for the Unionists to show flexibility in any negotiations since, if the talks broke down, the Agreement would emerge all the stronger - on the grounds that it would have been demonstrated that there was no feasible alternative. (He did not accept my contention that a failed attempt to find an alternative might leave the Agreement damaged rather than strengthened).

Security Issues

- Maginnis referred to the recent shooting down of the British Army helicopter and said that, whether or not the actual shots were fired from across the border, the reality was that the operation was planned and mounted

from the South (by the same IRA gang which was responsible for the recent attack on the Rosslea border post). He said that the security situation in his constituency is deteriorating rapidly and there is a strong sense that cross-border security has to be further improved.

H.A.

Anne Anderson

20 February, 1990

cc: PSM; Mr. Nally; PSS; Mr. Gallagher; Joint Secretary;
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