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Meeting with Eddie McGrady
2 November 1990

1. I met Eddie McGrady in Downpatrick on 2 November to update him on where matters stand in relation to the talks process. (We also discussed a number of other issues which are being followed up separately.)

Political Talks

2. McGrady was anxious to hear about developments in the interval since the SDLP meeting with Mr. Brooke on 28 September. I briefed him on the thrust of discussions at official level and at the Conference on 25 October; I also conveyed a general sense of the latest British text given to us at the Conference.

3. McGrady's reaction was decisive - indeed uncharacteristically vehement. He is convinced that the Government should hold out for certainly on the opening of North-South talks. In his view, it would be foolish to put our trust either in the "logic of the process" or in any assurances (short of a totally unequivocal commitment) which Mr. Brooke might give us. Without a cast-iron guarantee, he said, the British "will sell us down the river" - "they have done it before and will do it again."

4. He referred to reports he has heard (mainly from journalists) that the British tend to quote "the McGrady wing of the SDLP" as being pro-devolution. Firstly, he said, there is no such thing as a "McGrady wing" of the party; secondly, he has repeatedly argued that devolution will never work in isolation and can only be envisaged as part of an island-wide arrangement; thirdly, he resents the implication that, because he is profoundly concerned about the drift towards integration, he would "sell his soul" on devolution.

5. McGrady feels that Dublin has in fact a very strong argument in principle to be present at the internal talks - the Anglo-Irish Agreement gave us a role in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland and there must be no retreat from that.

North/South co-operation, no matter how extensive, cannot substitute for a role for Dublin within Northern Ireland. He fears that, if talks got underway, the Unionists, supported by the British, would try to differentiate the agenda of the internal and the North/South strands so that the former would deal with devolutionary structures and the latter would be essentially concerned with "good neighbourly" relations between North and South. He is adamant that this must be resisted - the agenda for North/South talks must be wide enough to allow Dublin to have its say on all the issues that are under discussion in the internal talks.

6. Despite McGrady's conviction that the basis for talks currently being proposed is unacceptable to nationalists, he is deeply depressed at what he fears will be - at best - a sterile period ahead. In the aftermath of the failure of the Brooke initiative, the British will be extremely "bloody-minded"; their sympathies will be with the Unionists and they will blame Dublin and the SDLP for the failure to make progress. According to McGrady, Molyneux is already smugly anticipating that the Select Committee he has so long been seeking will at last fall into his lap. (McGrady mentioned with some concern the report of the Westminster Committee on Procedures which he had just seen.)

Accompaniment

7. I told McGrady that at the Conference on 25 October the Minister had raised in strong terms the lack of UDR accompaniment in South Down; the British response was that McGrady had not complained directly to them. McGrady said he could not understand such a response - he had sent dozens of complaints of harrassment to the NIO; since lack of accompaniment was a major factor in harrassment he was of course implicitly raising the accompaniment issue. (McGrady is sending us a full list of complaints he has recently submitted.)

A. Anderson

6 November, 1990.