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Reference Code:	2021/45/208
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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

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15 October, 1991.

Mr. Sean O hUiginn,
Assistant Secretary,
Department of Foreign Affairs,
Dublin.

PSM
PSS
Mr Nally
Joint Secretary
Counsellor
Box
H.S. 80w
16/10
17/10

David Trimble and the Friends of the Union

Dear Assistant Secretary,

The principal speaker at the fringe meeting organised by the Friends of the Union was David Trimble. The meeting was poorly attended and for the first time there was no mainland MP present. Nick Budgen, the right wing inheritor of Enoch Powell's Wolverhampton seat and their most active supporter at Westminster had departed the conference the previous day.

The Talks

In his address Trimble expressed himself as "considerably disappointed" with the talks. The Unionists had been very anxious to have talks and had made every effort to get them off the ground.

In relation to the Agreement they recognised that both Governments had to be offered "a face saver" but when the Unionists speak of a new agreement "we mean it". There must be a new agreement "with none of the evil features of the Anglo Irish agreement".

Brooke's first mistake had been to go along with a procedural framework whereby the two Governments would reach agreement on some issue and then present it to the parties. While the parties tried to examine what was before them they were constantly put under pressure by leaks to the press. He recalled "a senior colleague" refusing a lift from Eamonn O'Maillie who told him that he should accept if he wanted to be told what was really going on. When the breakdown came the leaks were designed to suggest that it was the fault of the Unionists.

Brooke's second mistake had been to concede ultimatums from the nationalists. The SDLP did not want to talk about details insisting in the corridors that if they put their detailed position on the table they would give a hostage to Sinn Fein. Brooke mistakenly accepted this. The Secretary of State had

been equally concessionary in relation to procedure. The opening SDLP gambit for strand two was to suggest "talks in Dublin under the chairmanship of Charles Haughey." The Unionist position was that the talks should be in Belfast under Peter Brooke's chairmanship. (1) Dublin's veto on this had been accepted by Brooke and the question then arose of appointing an independent chairman.

The Unionists did not like the way the actual talks were structured. "With 40 people in a room there could be no discussion." There had been "no debate" just "general statements with people keen on making debating points" and "some people engaged in a filibuster". The next time round there should be "smaller groups."

New talks

The Unionists were not "overly anxious" to rush into a fresh round of talks "now or in the next few months." "We need to know who our interlocutors are." After the general election for example who could say if Peter Brooke would remain on as Secretary of State? "We have our doubts on this." In any case a Government needs to be in office "long enough to deliver". That is why the Unionists had hoped for a November election. Peter Brooke had however made approaches and "we will respond in due course."

Devolution

Trimble went on to speak about the need for the creation of regional assemblies much to the chagrin of his audience which was composed mainly of integrationists. This, he told them, was an issue which the Liberal Democrats and Labour had sought to come to terms with and he hoped that the Conservatives would examine it more rationally. In his view if you looked to the European dimension answers could be found to some of the problems which might arise vis a vis the other regions by giving devolution to NI only.

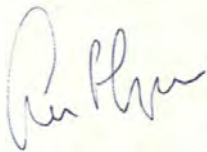
Apart from his selective one sided account of the talks Trimble's remarks were notably restrained given the audience he was addressing. In fact it was clear that he was something of a disappointment to them compared to the fire and brimstone robustness of last years speech by Willie Ross. His strong pro devolution line also came as a surprise.

Subsequently Mr MacMahon and I had dinner with the BBC NI correspondent, Tom Kelly. He remarked on Trimble's efforts to develop a milder more statesmanlike approach and on his open espousal of devolution which Kelly saw as evidence that Trimble was looking to his future within the party.

Trimble happened to be dining at a nearby table with the organisers of the meeting viz Lisle Biggs Davison and Viscount Cranbourne and an MP from the RSFSR with a half dozen words of English whom Cranbourne had met on a recent trip to Moscow and whose strong nationalist views would have caused some dismay if they were known to the Friends.

Trimble, who in the corridors at Westminster avoids any contact and who, even at last year's BIA conference, was clearly uneasy in his limited social contact with us, surprised us, and his hosts, by joining us briefly. Mr MacMahon asked him about the electoral situation in a number of NI constituencies. The only point of interest was his disparaging comments on the McGimpsey brothers. Their father he said had been a Tammany Hall style political fixer and they had sought to emulate him but failed and had to move to new pastures to try to construct a fresh political base.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joe Hayes', is written above the typed name.

Joe Hayes
Counsellor