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To see please - particularly
the suggestion at X para 3. 5m
Discussions with Hume, Mallon and McGrady.

9th and 10th February, 1991

13/2
PST: Peter
McNeill, POC
Councillor AI
Flax.

1. I had separate discussions with Hume, Mallon and McGrady over the weekend and passed them a copy of our latest paper on the political talks issue. I went through the text in detail with each of them and explained the rationale behind the various changes and additions to earlier drafts. The initial response of all three was very positive, with Hume saying we had made an imaginative effort to find a compromise way forward.

Hume

2. Hume indicated he was very concerned about the attitude of some of the political parties in the South to the talks process. In this regard, he was giving some thought to holding an early press briefing on the issue; I suggested that in order to focus the briefing and ensure that a clear and structured message emerged from it, he should use the opportunity to circulate a considered statement of the SDLP's position on the process.

Mallon

3. Mallon was very happy with the new text, including the paragraph on the timing of North-South talks (para 8), on which we had thought he might have some doubts. He continues to be quite critical of Brooke and made the point in particular that, by seeming to criticise (some five days later) the lack of progress at the Dublin Conference, he

Mr. H. Carthy
Mr. P. Hume
20.3.91
15/3

gave Molyneaux the perfect opening to claim that the talks process was at an end and to put the blame on Dublin for "scuttling it".

McGrady

4. McGrady said he would need more time before giving a definitive reaction to the text: however, his preliminary view was positive: "at worst, there is nothing to which anyone could object; at best, it gives us a way of getting over the humps".
5. McGrady went on to express his frustration (which we would share) at having to assess the Unionist position at second hand and said he was inclined to feel that the SDLP should now seek a face to face meeting with them to thrash out the outstanding difficulties. While doubting that the Unionists would agree to such a meeting, he felt it was important that every possible avenue should be tried before the process was allowed to break down.
6. Reflecting on where any talks might lead, McGrady (and this is difficult to reconcile with his anxiety that the talks should actually take place) dwelt at some length on the difficulties of reaching any kind of satisfactory outcome from the nationalist viewpoint. He argued that any type of arrangement within Northern Ireland would be harder to negotiate and to implement now than in 1973, given the different personalities and the deeper fissures within Unionism (in 1973/74 Brian Faulkner, as leader of a rump Unionist party, had a vested interest in working closely with the SDLP; the position of the Unionist parties was clearly very different today). McGrady went on to say that no matter how sympathetic the British might be for instance towards the concept of power-sharing, "a majority is a majority is a majority" and that, given the political

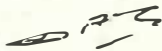
arithmetic within Northern Ireland, nationalists are bound to face an uphill battle in trying to get any real access to the levers of power.

7. Because of this inherent difficulty in being able to envisage any kind of acceptable internal arrangements, McGrady feels strongly that there must be some kind of umbrella body involving the Irish Government to which any possible devolved administration in the North would be answerable. He speculated, for example, that the present Inter-governmental Conference might be given enhanced status and that some or all of the "reserved powers" - which in 1973 remained Westminster's responsibility - might be transferred to the Conference (in effect a form of joint sovereignty).

(Comment: If anything, McGrady's concerns on the substantive issues illustrated (i) the futility, as we have consistently argued, of seeking 'substantial progress' in the internal talks in advance of North/South talks and (ii) the enormity of the gap between what nationalists might want from this process and what Unionists are likely to acquiesce in).

Meeting with SDLP

8. With the Brooke initiative possibly coming to an early end, there would seem to be much merit in an early Government meeting with the SDLP; this would also give Hume and his colleagues the opportunity to meet - as they normally do on such occasions - with the leadership and Northern spokesmen of the other parties here.) X


Dermot Gallagher,
12 February, 1991.