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Telephone call from John Hume on venue issue.

8th May, 1991

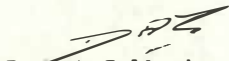
1. John Hume telephoned (4.00 pm) to say the SDLP had just come from a meeting with a quite agitated Secretary of State. They took a very strong line with Brooke - emphasising that Unionist behaviour on the venue underlined again the SDLP thesis that the central issue to be resolved in seeking a solution was the Unionist relationship with the rest of the island. Hume said that the SDLP now believes more than ever that part of the talks must be held in Dublin.
2. Hume repeated to Brooke that the preferred SDLP option at this stage was for a Belfast-Dublin rotation. However, in order to show maximum flexibility, they were agreeable to a Dublin-London rotation. If the Secretary of State now had suggestions for other locations in the two jurisdictions, but outside Dublin and London, the SDLP would be prepared to consider these seriously.
3. The Secretary of State then sounded out the SDLP on a number of options as follows:
 - (a) Belfast for all of the talks. The SDLP rejected this suggestion;
 - (b) a location in the North outside of Belfast (probably in the greater Belfast area) for all of the talks. Again the SDLP said no;
 - (c) a location in Europe (Brooke said the Unionists would be prepared to go along with a European venue). Hume, in response, said that locating the talks in Europe would hold all the participants up to ridicule, including on the cost factor.

Possible SDLP Declaration

4. At the end of their discussion, Hume handed Brooke a copy of the SDLP analysis document. He read extracts from it and said that these demonstrated clearly that the SDLP objective was not to wipe out but to accommodate the Unionist identity. He quoted paragraphs 10-12 in particular (text attached) and said that, if the Unionists found a declaration along these lines to be helpful, he would be prepared to draft and release a statement immediately. Brooke responded by asking Hume to give him time to consider this suggestion.

Comment

5. The SDLP would need to be careful in rejecting the European option; it is clearly important that they are not seen as the party holding up agreement. It might be more prudent for them, if this continues to run as an option, to suggest a European location for a ceremonial opening (the initial week at most), and then a rotation between either Dublin and London, or venues close to the two cities.


Dermot Gallagher
8 May, 1991.

cc: PST; PSM; Mr. Nally; PSS; Mr. Brosnan; Ms. Anderson

only to public order, all cultural, political and religious belief can be freely expressed and practised. Fundamental to such a society are freedom of conscience, social and communal harmony, reconciliation and the cherishing of the diversity of all traditions... The implementation of these principles calls for deepening and broadening of the sense of Irish identity."

10. *From the inception of Northern Ireland until the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, the Nationalist identity was denied political expression and validity, and Nationalists were excluded from effective participation in the institutions of Government. The particular significance of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was the acknowledgement - first signposted at Sunningdale - by the British Government of the legitimacy and validity of the Irish identity of Northern Nationalists, and that any way forward in Northern Ireland had to incorporate a formal "Irish dimension". For the Nationalist community that dimension must be a fundamental element of whatever new arrangements might emerge from the current process.*
11. *The Unionist community, on the other hand, perceives itself as British. The majority of Unionists are also Protestant and, as such, are strengthened in their allegiance to the British Crown by the latter's essential Protestantism. They regard the Nationalist aspiration to a united Ireland as representing a fundamental threat to their own sense of identity; furthermore, they see the Nationalist ethos as pervasively Catholic and incapable of tolerance and respect of the Unionist heritage, tradition, rights and civil liberties. At the same time, it can also be said that many Unionists feel some affinity for aspects of Irish life and culture and would regard themselves also as Irish. To protect their identity, the primary means that they have used or sought to use has been the exclusive exercise of power.*
12. *From a Unionist perspective, therefore, whatever may emerge from the current process will have to be such as to guarantee their sense of identity and to assuage their fears in terms of the perceived threat posed by Irish Nationalism to their ethos and way of life.*