



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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5 September, 1991.

Mr. Sean O hUiginn,
Assistant Secretary,
Anglo-Irish Division,
Department of Foreign Affairs.

Dear Assistant Secretary,

Prospects for Political Talks

Mr. Brooke has now returned from holiday and has taken the opportunity of a lunch for Speaker Foley yesterday to say there is unfinished business (a phrase from his Dungannon speech of 29 July), there is a valuable basis for further progress and he is determined to explore with others the scope for building on it. Minister Mawhinney made a similar remark about unfinished business in a speech at Coleraine yesterday and added a cryptic comment which worried today's Newsletter that any future political accommodation demands a price and that a stable, peaceful, kindly Northern Ireland is not a cost-free option. The Ministers' brief and unexceptional remarks drew considerable media coverage and were seen by the Newsletter as aimed at Unionists. Mr Brooke will be speaking at the BIA this weekend; at time of writing, it is not known what he proposes to say or if his remarks will be released to the press.

Ian Paisley declared early last month (Newsletter of 7 August) that Sir Ninian Stephen would not be acceptable as a Chairman in any future talks, that British-Irish talks would have to take place in London because he did not wish to see the Taoiseach in Northern Ireland and that there would have to be a proper suspension of the Conference with adequate time for discussions to take place. As usual, the NIO have not taken the remarks seriously. They think the outburst was probably due to Paisley's anger at a letter from Brooke telling him he could not have a copy of the briefing provided by the two Governments to Stephen. It seems he received this on return from holiday and happened to take a call from a journalist shortly after opening it.

It was noticeable in contrast that Molyneaux wrote a letter of thanks to Stephen on behalf of his executive although he made no reference to the future.

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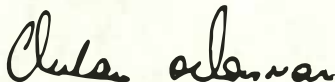
There are slightly different views in the NIO about what Mr Brooke should do now. One is that he should press ahead taking opportunities such as the Foley lunch and the BIA to convince people that he is serious about building on the initiative. The argument goes that he must keep the issue to the forefront if only to ensure that Molyneaux and others are not allowed to dismiss the initiative, to keep pressure on the paramilitaries and to guard himself against criticism from the public which opinion polls show to remain very supportive of the talks process. Another view is that there is little point in preparing ground which cannot be sown and that it may be counter-productive to seek to begin the process again until the question of a General Election is clarified.

I would think that Mr Brooke can hardly avoid continuing to declare his personal determination to continue and that he is likely to repeat his Dungannon speech in which he sought to summarise what had been achieved and argued that the general approach worked out for the talks process remains the only one with a real chance of making progress. Even if there is an early Election, the electorate and his colleagues will at least be reminded of what he has gained so far.

Frank
Mr Brooke is expected to seek at least one round of contacts with the political parties this month but it may well be that the Unionists will take their time in making further contact at Brooke's level; the NIO in fact sought a meeting for next week which was declined on the grounds that Paisley will be in Strasbourg. Mr. Brooke himself will be travelling abroad after the Conference although I am told that there will be gaps in his schedule to permit the holding of talks with the political parties.

If it should become clear by the time of next month's Conservative party conference that no General Election is likely to take place until, say, May of next year (in tandem with local elections), then there would be sufficient time to prepare and hold a further round of talks and Mr Brooke could be expected to press ahead.

Yours sincerely,



Declan O'Donovan,
Joint Secretary.