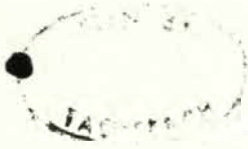




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Meeting with Mr Brooke
Dublin 1 October 1991

1. The Secretary of State was accompanied by Dr Mawhinney, Messrs. Chilcot, Thomas, Bell (NIO), Ambassador Blatherwick, Mr. Fell (Head of the N.I. Civil Service) and Mr. Alston (Joint Secretary). The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Justice were accompanied by Messrs. Dorr, O' hUiginn, O' Donovan, Donoghue and Ms. Anderson. An initial tête-a-tête discussion involving the four Ministers lasted about seventy minutes; the meeting of the full group lasted about an hour and was followed by dinner.
2. The tête-a-tête discussion focused on the interview with Mr Brooke which was published in the Irish Times of 27 September, and the RUC shooting of Kevin McGovern in Cookstown on 29 September. In relation to the interview, Ministers Collins and Burke emphasised the importance of the two Governments continuing to operate within a relationship of mutual trust and understanding; in that context, they underlined their concern about the overall lack of balance in Mr Brooke's interview as well as specific comments on Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution and on the Anglo-Irish Agreement. With regard to the RUC shooting, Mr. Brooke indicated that the inquiry would be conducted by the Independent Commission for Police Complaints (ICPC) and that the ICPC member leading the inquiry would be Ms. Finnuala McGrady, a solicitor and niece of Eddie McGrady.

Opening Presentation by Mr. Brooke

3. At Minister Collins invitation, Mr. Brooke gave an account of his meetings with the various party leaders. In a brief private session in mid-September, Hume had reiterated that the SDLP is entirely ready to come back to talks; his own view is that the Secretary of State should simply issue a statement indicating that talks would resume on the basis of the 26

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March text. (Hume requested an early meeting with the Secretary of State involving the full SDLP team). Alderdice had taken a position remarkably similar to Hume's; he said that the ground rules of 26 March were perfectly satisfactory and the Secretary of State should summon everyone to talks on that basis.

4. Mr. Brooke said that his meeting with Molyneaux and Paisley (on September 20th) took place the day after the IRA murder of businessman John Haldane. This particular murder had a very strong impact in Northern Ireland and inevitably it meant that security issues featured prominently in his discussion with the Unionists. With regard to the prospects for talks, Paisley had made much of the mistaken report in the Belfast Telegraph (which quoted Minister Collins as saying that negotiations must take place "under the auspices of" the Agreement); Mr Brooke had replied that he had no recollection of any such comment and he subsequently sent the Unionist leaders the transcript of the Minister's actual remarks. Mr. Brooke added he could not tell whether this was a genuine issue for Paisley or whether he was making a bogus point with an eye to subsequent public posturing.

5. Mr. Brooke said that his overall impression was that the Unionist leaders wished to build on what was achieved last July and that they envisaged that the participants would be back at the negotiating table. Despite their preoccupation with security issues, Molyneaux and Paisley did not cite this as a reason for not resuming talks; neither did they cite the forthcoming British general election as an impediment. They did make clear, however, that in their view the next step should be exploratory conversations in Westminster involving the Secretary of State, Hume and themselves. (Molyneaux cited a previous occasion when Hume, Molyneaux and Paisley had gone together to see Prime Minister Thatcher in relation to the privatisation of Harland and Wolff).

6. Elaborating on this proposal by the Unionists, Mr. Brooke said he had asked them whether they were deliberately seeking to exclude Alderdice from the talks; they confirmed that this was so. He also queried them as to why his own presence should be necessary but they insisted that they wished him to be there. Mr. Brooke said there was a degree of vagueness on the part of the Unionist leaders as whether they saw the proposed discussion in Westminster as being merely exploratory or tackling issues of substance. He noted, however, that in suggesting the Westminster meeting the Unionists made no mention of anything being done in relation to the Agreement (their previous position had been that they would not talk to Hume except during a gap in Conference meetings); the fact that there was no such language on this occasion may be significant or may simply be carelessness on the Unionist part.

7. Mr. Brooke emphasised that, as far as he is concerned, the structure set out in the 26 March statement is the right one and that he is in no sense resiling from it. He feels there is some inclination on the part of Unionists to seek a way of talking about internal arrangements for Northern Ireland in isolation and also some evidence of a wish to take the issues seriatim instead of concurrently. As to other specific points made by the Unionist leaders, Mr. Brooke noted that there was a degree of nervousness about the holding of Strand Two meetings in Stormont - he had the impression that Paisley in particular was under some fire from his own troops on this; there was also a feeling that the delegations on the last occasion were too large. However, there was no query whatsoever about Sir Ninian Stephen - his name was not mentioned. Overall, Mr Brooke's impression was that the main Unionist concern relates to the length of the gap.

9. Mr. Brooke summarised the Unionist attitude at present as "highly nervous". Just as the Irish side tends to be suspicious of Unionist motives, the Unionist leaders are

suspicious of the motivation of Dublin and the SDLP. Nevertheless, Mr. Brooke said, he is convinced it is worth going forward; "the stone has rolled a bit of the way down the hill but it is a long way from having rolled down fully". At the same time, he feels some flexibility will be needed if the Unionists are to be brought back to the table. The issues which might require discussion are (i) the length of the gap; (ii) how to handle a Strand Two plenary meeting in Dublin - the May 14 document, which speaks of a plenary in Dublin "before the end of June" is clearly overtaken by events and (iii) some practical details at the margins, such as the size of delegations.

Discussion

10. Minister Collins expressed appreciation for the detailed briefing. The Irish side remain firmly in support of political dialogue, as the Taoiseach had made clear in his recent RTE interview. We are convinced, however, that the value of such dialogue will be directly proportionate to the extent that it addresses the real poles of the problem (conflicting nationalist and unionist aspirations) and the three sets of relationships involved. The Minister said he was heartened by Mr. Brooke's upbeat presentation of his meeting with the Unionist leaders. In examining the transcript of the press conference given by Molyneux and Paisley after the meeting, there were various points which gave us concern. (The Minister cited a number of passages.) The thrust of the Unionist approach appeared to be that they wanted to start at the beginning again; however, the Minister added, we have not come as far as we have by taking all the public comments from the Unionists seriously!
11. Mr. Brooke said that his interpretation was that Paisley had some problems within his own party and he wanted to be able to demonstrate that there had been a degree of renegotiation.

Minister Burke said that, apart from any pressure on Paisley to toughen his stance, surely there must be strong pressure on both Unionist leaders to get the talks process moving again. Mr. Brooke replied that, in Paisley's case, the hard-line influence is coming from his Church; there are pockets within his Church, particularly in border areas, where he has come under strong criticism. "In the end, his Church matters to him more than his party". Dr. Mawhinney added that Paisley is a very complex character and the problem is to tie his head and heart together. He is definitely under pressure to be seen to have achieved some change in the negotiating terms. The change does not need to be of a significant, qualitative nature - what is needed is a "loincloth".

12. Minister Collins said that it would be extremely unwise if, following all our efforts, there was now an attempt "to put the scrambled eggs back in the shells". If we were to start at the beginning again, many of the same issues would inevitably emerge. A careful balance had been struck at the commencement of talks and this must not now be upset. Minister Burke asked whether, if the package were re-opened, the Irish side should not start putting on table again issues of importance to us? Mr. Brooke replied that it was a minor triumph that a basis for talks was eventually negotiated earlier this year. As far as he was concerned, the logic was to proceed on the same basis as before; indeed, he would be appalled at the prospect of going through another fifteen months of talks about talks.
13. Minister Burke asked whether Molyneaux as well as Paisley was pushing for re-negotiation. Mr. Brooke replied that everyone was aware that Molyneaux was not a passionate enthusiast for the process. However, it is difficult for him to resist the force of public opinion, especially if Paisley is bringing him along. Dr. Mawhinney added that, while Molyneaux is not an enthusiast, others in his party are.

14. Referring to Mr Brooke's comments about Unionist difficulties with Stormont as a venue for Strand Two meetings, Minister Collins said much of the problem about venue had arisen because of 'crazy' Unionist suggestions in relation to Brussels, Luxembourg etc. Were these likely to be resurrected? Mr Brooke said he saw the suggestion for a Westminster meeting as something of proxy; in his view "we will end up back at Stormont because of the impossibility of doing otherwise". Minister Collins lightly referred to the Throne Room in Dublin Castle or the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham as possible locations.
15. Minister Collins asked if Mr. Brooke wished to elaborate further in relation to his earlier comment about the length of the gap. Mr. Brooke said it adds up to the Unionists wanting confidence that there would be sufficient time within the gap to get things done. Given the experience of last July, the Unionists now know that, in setting a date for the Conference at the end of the gap, the Governments will stick to that date. Mr. Brooke emphasised that he was not envisaging a flexible or open-ended gap; he was talking about a gap of fixed duration but longer than ten or eleven weeks. He added that he was not himself in favour of building in any provision for "injury time" but felt we needed to have a concerted response to the Unionists on that point.
16. Minister Collins said there are certain basic points on which there is no scope for movement. Dr Mawhinney had spoken of a loincloth or fig-leaf and the Minister did not exclude that there may be some scope for "turning up the odd stone". However, if the issues were re-opened, he genuinely feared the whole basis agreed earlier would start unravelling. Dr. Mawhinney said there was no attempt being made by the Unionists to raise again their original three pre-conditions for talks and to re-open the arrangements reached in relation to them.

Next Steps

17. Dr. Mawhinney said the talks had finished last July on the basis that the parties would wish to reflect on their experience and convey their reflections to the NIO. In recent weeks, he had made approaches to each of the four parties, at a level immediately below the leadership, suggesting that they might wish to reflect together over a dinner in Stormont hosted by himself. (He had stipulated that the party leaders must know about this proposal.) All four parties had now agreed to send senior people to such a dinner and a date was now being sought for around the end of October. While the purpose of the dinner was to reflect on the experience to date, "it would be amazing if the conversation did not stray from the past to the future". Mawhinney added that, at the level below leadership, there is a strong desire to resume talks - the second tier is generally younger and more sensitive to pressures within the community. Minister Collins responded that he wished the proposed dinner every success and would like to hear in due course how it went.

18. Minister Collins referred to the Unionist suggestion of a meeting in Westminster. Mr Brooke said that he would put this suggestion to the SDLP team (Hume, Mallon and McGrady) at the meeting he proposes to have with them shortly. At that stage, Hume can say whether or not he wishes to rule out such a meeting; alternatively, Hume might seek further details as to what the Unionists would wish to talk about at a Westminster meeting. If Hume takes the latter approach, Mr Brooke will arrange a further meeting with the Unionist leaders to seek clarification as to what they have in mind. Mr Brooke added that he would try to have had these further meetings with the party leaders before the next Conference (October 17th) so that could report back at that stage.

19. Mr Brooke went on to say that he felt there would be virtue in a meeting of officials before October 17th to see if there might be some scope for a change in the ground-rules within

the framework described by Minister Collins; he emphasised that the discussion would be on matters of degree and detail and not at the level of principle. Minister Collins accepted this suggestion and it was agreed that a date would be agreed among officials.

20. The meeting adjourned following some remarks by Mr Brooke in relation to the forthcoming Tory Party Conference and the approach being adopted by the Northern Ireland Conservatives.

A.A.

Anne Anderson
Anglo-Irish Division
2 October, 1991

c. c. PST, PSM, Mr Nally, PSS, Mr Brosnan, Mr O' hUiginn,
Joint Secretary, Ambassador London, Counsellors Anglo-Irish

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