



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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6 December 1991

TO: HQ

FROM: London

FOR: A/Sec O hUiginn

FROM: B. McMahon

1. The SDLP (Hume, Mallon and McGrady) met with Secretary of State Brooke this evening (5/12) in the House of Commons. I met Hume later who provided the following summary of the meeting:
 - The Unionists are prepared to resume the Strand 1 (internal talks but in a more informal context and away from the public gaze (i.e. "away from journalists"). They want smaller delegations (though without specifying numbers) and for the talks to be located at Westminster.
 - They continue to insist on a gap, though they could accept Strand 3 (London-Dublin) talks taking place simultaneously with Strand 1. There was apparently little in the way of an indication as to the timing or location of Strand 2 (North-South) talks, though Brooke did not foresee all meetings taking place in Westminster. Neither did Brooke envisage the exclusion of the Alliance Party from the talks.
 - In response, the SDLP were non-committal: indicated that they would need to consult their colleagues about what the Secretary of State had told them: and reiterated their general position - viz - a preparedness to resume the talks process without any further preconditions.
 - For the future, Brooke apparently envisages a further meeting with the Unionists on either the 12th or the 16th, and a further meeting with the SDLP before the next Conference Meeting on the 18th.
2. Hume's reading of the Meeting is that Brooke wants to keep the initiative afloat up to the next election by involving himself in consultations up to the Christmas period: pausing for Christmas: holding a further Anglo-Irish Conference in January and (hopefully) a resumption of the talks after that date. Brooke envisages a suspension of talks during an election period, during which an Anglo-Irish Conference Meeting would be held.

3. While Hume adopted a outwardly positive (though non-committal) stance it was clear from our conversation that he is privately cynical about the exercise. He sees little prospect of anything emerging in the short term owing to continuing Unionist intransigence - pointing to Paisley's recent public hardline comments. In the meantime, he feels that Brooke is anxious to keep matters moving into the new year when Hume expects an election to be called - "sooner rather than later" (in this he echoed some current speculation here that Major may well call an election shortly after Maastricht - "seeking a mandate from the people for his stance in defence of British interests". Current speculation is that this would provide him with a relatively popular platform, as opposed to either the economy or issues like the National Health Service, and would have the advantage of outflanking Thatcher and others in the Conservative Party who are calling for a Referendum).
4. In his press briefing (Millar of the Irish Times and Graham of the Irish News), Hume told me that he avoided getting into any detail and stuck by his earlier general public comments - viz - that he favoured a resumption of the talks process without any further preconditions.

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