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10 October

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Lunch with Jeffrey Donaldson

I had lunch today with Jeffrey Donaldson, Honorary Secretary of the UUP and Deputy Grand Master of the Orange Order. Donaldson is close to David Trimble and has been given responsibility for reorganising party structures. He has also been tasked with promoting the UUP position in the US, through its new office in Washington.

A native of Kilkeel, with an auctioneering business in Banbridge, Donaldson has recently moved into the Lagan Valley constituency and is hopeful of claiming what he described as "the safest seat in the country" at the next General election, following the retirement of Jim Molyneaux. Donaldson expects Gary McMichael of the UDP to stand with a view to maintaining his position in the constituency, but sees no threat to the UUP from either then UDP or the DUP.

Donaldson was accompanied by William Sibbett, a civil servant working for the Inland Revenue, who is a member of a newspaper family which formerly owned *The Northern Whig* and *The Belfast Telegraph*. He described himself as Donaldson's "eyes and ears" in the Lagan Valley constituency.

Election of Trimble

We discussed the election and performance to date of David Trimble. I accepted that the initial negative reaction of nationalists and moderate unionists to Trimble's election had not, so far, been justified and that his willingness to debate the issues represented a positive development. Donaldson said that Trimble was a man of conviction and would be a strong leader, something which unionism needed at this time. He would not, in Donaldson's view, be pushed around by Paisley but he had to proceed with caution as there were those who were watching his every move for a sign of weakness.

I welcomed Trimble's determination to present the unionist case at every opportunity and expressed the view that Raymond Ferguson's recent appearance on the *Late Late Show* appeared to be in line with this approach and had given some badly needed balance to a discussion on the North. Donaldson enquired as to the reaction to Ferguson's performance and took note of my positive response.

Donaldson suggested that the Tánaiste's own reaction to the election of Trimble had been somewhat negative. While not accepting this allegation, I pointed out that Trimble's standing with nationalists had been seriously damaged by the events at Drumcree; not by the actual march down the Garvahy Road, which represented an honourable compromise, but by the display of 'elation' which followed. Donaldson, who claimed to have brokered the deal at Drumcree, claimed that Trimble had not intended to get swept along as he did. Donaldson accused Paisley of having exploited the situation.

I expressed the hope that arrangements would be put in place before next year's marching season to avoid the kind of confrontation which marred this years events. Donaldson

replied that steps were already being taken to this end.

Trimble's Assembly Proposal

We discussed Trimble's proposals for an Assembly. Donaldson argued that the an Assembly would allow for the building up of trust "while awaiting the outcome of the Commission". He stated that "if Gerry Adams were to stand for election, take his seat and say the kind of things which he said yesterday, we would have no difficulty working with him". In Donaldson's view, an Assembly would also have the advantage of bringing the DUP into the process from the beginning and offering the UDP and the PUP the opportunity to secure a democratic mandate.

When I probed Donaldson on the differences between Trimble's ideas and those floated by John Taylor, which appeared to be more in line with earlier proposals for a constitutional convention, he replied that Trimble was flexible on the form. He had proposed that the Assembly begin by exercising some devolved powers in the economic and social area in order to build up confidence, but he could also envisage it moving on to constitutional issues once the decommissioning matter was resolved. He stressed that Trimble would be happy to impose a time limit on the work of the Assembly and to accept a role for the Governments, although he did not specify what this would be. I stressed that the involvement of the two Governments would be a matter of crucial importance to nationalists, however the peace process was carried forward.

I pointed out that while the Government continued to be committed to the twin track approach involving a body to deal with decommissioning and all-party talks, it would not reject alternative ideas, or ideas which could be associated with the twin track approach. I explained that, for the moment, the priority was to break the current impasse in a way which keeps Sinn Féin on board and that, in the Government's view, the twin track approach is the most likely way to do this. Indeed, I suggested that if Trimble's ideas for an Assembly - seen by most nationalists as an internal Northern Ireland approach to the peace process - was pushed too hard at this stage it could cause difficulties for the Sinn Féin leadership who needed to show flexibility if the current roadblock was to be breached. That said, I conceded that the ways and means of moving forward the peace process would need to be kept under constant review in light of the progress achieved and the position of the parties.

Prospects for all-party talks

Donaldson pointed out that the unionists would not come to the table unless they were satisfied that Sinn Féin was committed to exclusively peaceful means. I accepted this point and said that the Government had no intention of trying to move to all-party talks without unionist representation. Donaldson warned that the Government should not assume that the unionists would eventually come to the table if talks began without them.

Donaldson also warned of the dangers of proceeding without the DUP. While openly critical of Paisley, he expressed the view that if Paisley did not come in at the beginning he could well stay out and make a virtue of staying out. He said that it would be very

difficult for the UUP to do business in such circumstances and warned that it would be unwise to underestimate Paisley's potential to drum up opposition to any settlement agreed without his participation.

Decommissioning

We had an exchange of views on decommissioning. I pointed out that the Government wanted all the guns out of Irish politics, today, if possible. I reminded Donaldson that successive Irish Governments had devoted substantial resources over the years to trying to track down these weapons. The Government had made clear its desire for the decommissioning of illegally held weapons and would continue to do so.

I explained that if the Government is taking the line that Sinn Féin cannot deliver IRA weapons as a precondition for entry into all-party talks, it is not because it is acting as an apologist for Sinn Féin, but because it holds the informed view that setting such a precondition would not advance the peace process.

Donaldson stressed, in forceful terms, the lack of trust on the unionist side in the assurances of Sinn Féin, referring to ongoing punishment beatings, intimidation, attacks on property, and training. He indicated that the decommissioning of a quantity of offensive weaponry, such as some semtex and heavy weapons, would have a deep psychological effect on unionists and would be an indication that Sinn Féin actually meant what they said. I repeated that while the Government would be only too delighted if this were to take place, it was unlikely to alter its view that decommissioning, however desirable, should be imposed as a precondition to talks.

I pointed out that nationalists, who in the last months of violence had suffered more than unionists from sectarian attacks, were nevertheless prepared to sit down with the loyalist parties for the sake of peace, even though the loyalist paramilitaries had not surrendered their arms. I urged that unionists show themselves willing to make a similar leap of faith.

Donaldson asked me if I thought the British Government would be prepared to give way on Washington 3. I confessed that I did not know and queried whether the British Government itself knew the answer to that question. I suggested that it would depend on the conditions applying at the moment the question fell to be answered. Donaldson agreed. I pointed out that neither the Irish nor the American Governments were in a position to give guarantees to Sinn Féin about the future position of the British Government on Washington 3; the British Government was a sovereign government and would take its own decision.

Concluding our discussion on decommissioning, I expressed the hope that even if, for the moment, the Government and the UUP would have to disagree on whether a gesture on the surrender of weapons should be a pre-condition for all-party talks, we should not allow that to determine the tenor of our relationship; we should not lose sight of the many points on which we were in agreement.

Tánaiste's meeting with Trimble

Donaldson asked about the Tánaiste's forthcoming meeting with David Trimble. He seemed to fear that it could be a difficult meeting and urged that the Tánaiste think carefully about what he was going to say. I pointed out that the Tánaiste would be coming to Belfast in friendship and had no intention of entering into confrontation. He had made the point of offering to meet Trimble in Belfast and would be endeavouring to communicate with unionists - to demonstrate a recognition of their identity and concerns - during his visit.

Donaldson referred to the negative image of the Tánaiste among unionists. I reminded Donaldson that the Tánaiste had gone out of his way to reach out to unionists when he announced his six principles, shortly after coming into office. (Donaldson intervened to say how well this statement had been received by unionists.) I stressed that he had not abandoned this positive attitude, but that he had a responsibility to the peace process; the cessation of violence was the single most significant factor in transforming the current political climate and if Sinn Féin were dropped from the peace process we could end up worse off than before we started.

Donaldson asked about the Tánaiste's programme for his visit to Belfast and whether he would be making a set speech. I replied that we were looking at a number of possibilities and that it was expected that the Tánaiste would deliver a statement directed primarily at unionists. I agreed to Donaldson's request to inform him of the Tánaiste's programme in advance of his meeting with Trimble.

Donaldson also suggested that the Tánaiste raise with Trimble a proposal which I had put to him for the systematic exchange of Government and UUP speeches and statements between Glengall Street and Iveagh House. I had suggested that since this material is usually of mutual interest it would be useful to base our reactions on original texts rather than media reports. (Comment: the fact that Donaldson suggested that the Tánaiste take up this relatively minor administrative matter with Trimble demonstrates the degree of caution which still exists within unionist circles in relation to contact with Dublin.)

Alleged divergence in Government policy

Responding to repeated suggestions from UUP sources of a divergence in Government policy, I stressed that there was no difference between the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste on the peace process; there was a single Government policy, as the Taoiseach had made clear during his meeting with Trimble. I pointed out that a degree of elasticity was required in our approach in order to allow the Government to reach out to unionists and the British Government, while simultaneously bringing Sinn Féin along. I warned that continuous criticism of alleged differences of approach could serve to limit the Government's room for manoeuvre and result in a more rigid approach which would ultimately benefit no party. Donaldson appeared to accept this point.

A future accommodation

Donaldson expressed confidence that a comprehensive settlement could be reached which would allow all the people of the island to live together in peace, although he could not predict the shape of that agreement. I asked what he felt about the proposals contained in the Joint Framework Document which, I pointed out, at their most basic, envisage the maintenance of Union subject to certain all-Ireland arrangements designed to make it acceptable to nationalists. Donaldson pointed out that a major shortcoming in the proposals in the JFD was that they offered a one-way street to a united Ireland; nationalists would be free to work for a united Ireland but there was no provision whereby unionists could aspire to movement towards greater integration with the United Kingdom.

Donaldson asked me for a reaction to unionist proposals that the Republic develop closer ties to Britain, particularly the idea that Ireland rejoin the Commonwealth. I pointed out that the two Prime Ministers had already decided to review ways of strengthening East-West relations. As regards the Commonwealth idea, I offered the personal view that, while it would be a non-starter if taken in isolation, I could not see an overall peace package being rejected on the grounds that it involved Ireland rejoining the Commonwealth, if such a gesture was necessary to secure a comprehensive settlement. I drew a comparison with the revision of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution which could only be contemplated as part of an overall settlement.

Developments in the UUP

I took the opportunity to question Donaldson about who is close to Trimble, specifically referring to John Hunter, who has been mentioned in reports. Donaldson's reaction indicated that while Hunter may be close to Trimble, he is regarded with some suspicion by Donaldson and others. Donaldson described Hunter, a barrister from Omagh presently working in Belfast, as a right-wing radical. Sibbett offered that Hunter, who is also something of an amateur historian of Orangeism, "seems to be everywhere these days".

I expressed surprise at the sudden resignation of Stephen Cranston from his post as UUP Press Officer. Donaldson, who appeared from his reaction to regret Cranston's departure, advised that internal politics were the cause and that there would be a meeting of party officers later this week to sort out a number of organisational issues.

The Orange Order

Turning to the Orange Order, I asked Donaldson about the role of the Order and pointed to the discomfort caused to nationalists by its anti-Catholic orientation. Donaldson pointed out that unionists feel under threat; Ireland is their home but they have never felt welcome or accepted here. In Donaldson's view, the Orange Order has provided unionists with a sense of solidarity and has served as a channel for letting off steam. He suggested that were it not for the Order, the level of loyalist violence would have been much greater over the last twenty-five years. I suggested that nationalists no longer questioned the right of unionists to be here, nor their Irish identity. I pointed out that

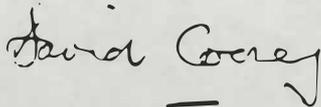
everyone on this island was descended from colonists as is evidenced from the fact that one of the earliest historical records of the origins of the Irish people is called *The Book of Invasions*. Donaldson warmed to this theme and stressed the historic connections of unionists with Dal Riada and the Cruithin people.

I asked him about the role of the 'Spirit of Drumcree' movement within the Order, which is trying to replace the Grand Lodge system with a more democratic system of decision making within the order. Donaldson, who judging by his status has benefited from the Grand Lodge system, said that he was not sympathetic to their activities; they wanted to make the Order more political and many of the people concerned were very right-wing. Nevertheless, Donaldson saw the emergence of this trend as evidence of the new mood within unionism; a determination not to be taken for granted.

Donaldson said that Martin Smyth showed no signs of being willing to step down as Grand Master without a fight.

Reception of RTÉ in Northern Ireland

Donaldson and Sibbett expressed regret at the difficulties which they experience in receiving RTÉ television programmes. I explained that the difficulties were due to technical problems which the two Governments were working jointly to overcome.



David Cooney
Anglo-Irish Division

10 October 1995

cc PST, PSS, Second Secretary,
Counsellors A-I, Section,
Messrs Teahon, Murray, Donlon, Dalton,
Ambassadors, Washington and London,
Joint Secretary, Belfast.