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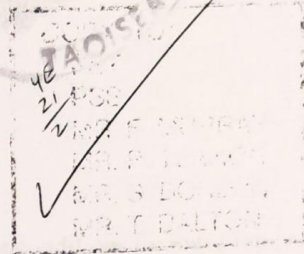
AMPASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



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20 February, 1996.

Mr. Sean O hUiginn,
Second Secretary,
Anglo-Irish Division,
Department of Foreign Affairs,
St. Stephen's Green,
DUBLIN 2.

Conversation with Seamus Mallon

Seamus Mallon came to lunch at the Embassy where we discussed the SDLP's meeting yesterday with the Prime Minister. I was accompanied by Philip McDonagh. Following are the main points.

Attendance

The Prime Minister was accompanied by Mayhew, Ancram, Chilcot and Holmes. Major did most of the talking. Mayhew rarely intervened. Ancram said nothing, but was active in passing notes to the Prime Minister.

Atmosphere

Mallon described the atmosphere as decidedly frosty and argumentative. Major looked tired and ashen faced and conducted the discussion in a formal manner. He was at times, according to Mallon, vindictive and offensive in his tone and statements. Major and Hume had sparked off each other and there was "a lot of throwing pencils about".

Loyalist Violence

Major began the discussion with a reference to the possibility of Loyalist action in retaliation for the resumption of the IRA campaign, but the conversation did not go into detail and Mallon did not deduce any assessment on the British side of an immediate threat to the South.

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Peace Process

Major said he was working on what he called 4 "principles":

- the British Government could not bow to violence,
- they were determined to keep the peace process intact,
- the need to find the right response to violence,
- they wanted to construct a route into all party talks.

Proximity Talks: Major was open on this and did not stipulate conditions for entry into such talks. I queried Mallon on the point and he was clear that no condition, e.g. re establishment of the ceasefire, had been mentioned. He did however say that Mayhew had appeared to row back on the issue in the debate on the 12th last night (extract from Mayhew's speech attached) and he does not expect the Unionists to agree.

Elections/All Party Negotiations: Major confirmed his intention to pursue a direct route into talks through elections. All parties would be required to sign a "piece of paper" but the British side had not indicated what the specific requirement or requirements would be. At one point Mallon had attempted to establish whether the British had in mind the Local Government test or some other test, such as the Mitchell principles, but had been restrained from going down this road by Hume. He conceded that it is sometimes better not to ask questions that could evoke unpalatable answers. On the form of the elections the British favour the 18 by 5 approach. Hume had insisted that the only basis on which he would contemplate elections is on a Northern-Ireland wide vote in which the sole question would be "which party do you support for all party negotiations"? The SDLP had made it clear that they would have wide support in the nationalist community if they decided not to take part in elections (Mallon said that he personally continued to have deep reservations about the election idea which could produce a sympathy vote for Sinn Fein, strengthen the DUP and polarise opinion. He would say this in any debate within the party but would of course abide by the Party's decision).

Referendum: Major appeared open to the idea but had categorically rejected Hume's second question. Mallon was unclear why the Prime Minister should take such a strong line since support for all-party negotiations is implicit in his proposals for the electoral route.

Legislation: Major had made clear his determination to proceed quickly with the legislation on elections.

Timetable: Hume asked for a fixed date for all-party negotiations within three weeks. The Prime Minister had said that he aimed to have the process up to the commencement of negotiations over in 8 weeks from now.

Meeting with Adams: Major is willing to meet Adams after the elections are announced on condition that the ceasefire is restored.

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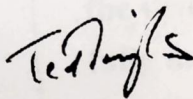
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Unionists: The SDLP side had questioned Major about the Unionist position and the possibility of the Unionist parties refusing to negotiate seriously or even walking out of the talks. They had suggested that parties to the negotiations should have a "duty of service" to engage fully in the negotiations and to see them to their completion. Questions about the position of the Unionists and their attitude were met with an impatient and brusque "leave the Unionists to me" from the Prime Minister.

Yours sincerely,



Ted Barrington
Ambassador