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*8/10/96*  
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**Confidential**

**Meeting with Alex Attwood**

**Belfast, 3 October 1996**

*Taoiseach*  
*I am raising with*  
*DIFA, the idea of a*  
*consultation service as*  
*well as an adjudication body, in regard to parades*

I met with Attwood primarily to discuss the SDLP's thinking on parades but other matters with inevitably arose and indeed predominated.

*a mandate to*  
*promote local*  
*agreements*  
*huk*

**Political Talks**

*note*  
*I spoke to Mr.*  
*Famenn McKee*  
*on the above lines*  
*huk*

1. On the broad political front, he was markedly more optimistic about the SDLP vis a vis Sinn Féin. He seems more confident that the centre ground has coalesced around the party and that the republicans are in a state of confusion and frustration. He thinks that republicans over-played their hand on the parades issue, that most nationalists viewed with horror the widening of the community divide which the parades issue had caused and, if pushed, the ghettoisation it entailed. They were confused politically and generally floundering (he added that, perhaps indicatively, Adams's performance on the Late Late Show was by general agreement 'appalling'.)
2. Attwood was approached recently by Ambassador Kennedy Smith who asked him about Adams in such a way as to clearly suggest that she now had the gravest doubts about him and the intentions generally of the republican movement. In essence, she wondered whether the U.S. and others had simply been used to further irredentist republican objectives. Attwood believes that republicans do not seem to fully appreciate the extent to which the ending of the cease-fire had closed doors on them, not least in the U.S.
3. He had met with Sinn Féin leaders on Wednesday (2 October), Mitchell McLoughlin (who carried the bulk of the discussion) and Tom Hartley. The discussion was a well thought out one (at one point Hartley lost his way and opened a folder to check the script). While expressing themselves as very satisfied with the level of contact with the Government, they were particularly frustrated that they had no direct link or interlocutor with the British Government. (Attwood wondered whether a safe one with direct access

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might be found in the House of Lords.) It seriously impeded their ability to proceed politically.

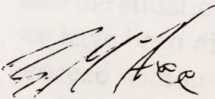
4. They wanted to fully explore the possibilities offered by the current talks. Attwood at length went over the various ways in which the talks had, for example, an in-built dynamic which would meet their concern on a time-frame. Decommissioning remained a difficulty but Attwood expounded on the agreed approach of both Governments. Because the three stranded talks would begin simultaneously and could only be concluded and agreed as a package, republicans could be assured that unionists would not conclude strand one and jettison the rest.

#### Cease-fire

5. Attwood was disturbed that Ervine's reference to a collapse of the peace in two weeks was not merely rhetorical and that he may be aware of actual developments which would threaten it (though perhaps not in precisely two weeks). He had heard a report from a (political) loyalist source that the DUP's Willie McCrea had had a meeting recently with certain named loyalist paramilitaries in mid-Ulster and the implication was that something definite was in the air.
6. There was an element of free-fall currently in the situation with an outcome possible which no one wanted. Attwood wondered what initiative could be taken to provide some brake. He likened the current mood to January last (i.e. on the eve of Canary Wharf). He was concerned that the republican paramilitaries were operating without reference to a political agenda and that they could act at any time. It was now apparently a given that they had to bomb Britain to demonstrate their ability to strike, unbowed by recent setbacks. I wondered whether the U.S. might be engaged in a manner similar to the initiative on the Middle East, though obviously with a prior endeavour to offer U.S. engagement in return for a renewed cease-fire or a political development which would bring one about. Attwood did not indicate that that axis offered any great possibilities, at least for republicans.

Parades

7. The parades issue seemed of manageable proportions after the above discussion. Our approaches were founded on the same principle of seeking a process which brought about agreement and accommodation. The SDLP is developing the details of 'planning permission' approach (see report of meeting with Quakers). We agreed on the efficacy of most aspects of this (i.e. advance notification for the whole parade season, conditions set by an independent authority etc.). On the question of compelling the loyal orders to lodge bonds to ensure compliance with conditions, he said that after prolonged discussion they had decided that this would be seen by the loyal orders as a punitive gesture designed to suppress parades; the SDLP favoured a notification fee. We discussed without conclusion the difficulty of establishing where the authority of an independent body ended and the police began. He will be writing up the SDLP submission to the Independent Review of Parades this weekend and we agreed to touch base on Monday.



Eamonn McKee

Security Section

4 October 1996