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10 MAY 1995

Meeting between the Taoiseach and James Molyneux MP

The Taoiseach and the Leader of the UUP met for some 50 minutes this morning. The meeting was private. The following account is based on a de-briefing given by the Taoiseach to the undersigned shortly afterwards.

An Advisory Council

My Molyneux referred to "withdrawal symptoms" in the Unionist community since the ceasefire and the publication of the Framework Document. In the short term, his goal is to build confidence among Unionists. To this end, and in the light of discussions with the SDLP, he feels that it might be useful to establish, in London, an Advisory council of Northern Ireland representatives which would keep the Northern Ireland administration under review. Mr. Molyneux said this would counter a tendency towards unaccountability in Government reflected, for example, in the lack of an electricity regulator, the break-up of the Department of the Environment into agencies, and similar developments in the field of education. Mr. Molyneux referred to a precedent in the 1970s - apparently the Advisory Commission set up by William Whitelaw in 1972. It was unclear whether Mr. Molyneux intends the Council to be made up solely of Northern Ireland MPs. He did not seem to object in principle to Sinn Fein participation once that party qualifies in Unionist eyes for participation in all-party talks.

The Taoiseach pointed out that at first glance the proposal would seem to represent a departure from the rule that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed". He noted at the same time that some elements in the SDLP may be open to ideas of this kind and drew attention to the delicacy of Sinn Fein's position.

The Framework Document

The Taoiseach and Mr. Molyneaux reviewed Unionist concerns over the Framework Document under three headings:

(a) The North/South body

Mr. Molyneaux objected to the idea that the North/South body is to be set in place by legislation on the part of both Governments. In his view this amounts to an exercise of joint authority. Mr. Molyneaux also queried the practical benefits of a North/South body.

The Taoiseach emphasised the value of a North/South body both for practical reasons and to reassure Nationalists in a psychological sense.

Mr. Molyneaux said that symbolism reassuring to Nationalists is worrying to Unionists.

(b) The "Default Mechanism"

Mr. Molyneaux expressed concerns regarding the proposed duty of service and the provision that the two Governments would get together to review the workings of a future agreement - which in Mr. Molyneaux's view would involve "imposing" solutions. He argued that these aspects of the Framework Document also amount to joint authority.

(c) Stability of a future agreement

The Taoiseach and Mr. Molyneaux broadly agreed that the image of a "moving staircase" summarises one of the major Unionist fears, which is that the approach of the two Governments, in so far as it provides for an evolution of

Northern Ireland politics, points only to the destination of a united Ireland.

Under these circumstances the position of Unionists - as perceived by them - is that they can halt or postpone progress towards an unwelcome destination, but can make no progress towards objectives of their own. Mr. Molyneaux referred to a conversation with Tom King while he was Secretary of State in which King accepted that Northern Ireland could be part of the United Kingdom or in principle of a united Ireland but that it could not become independent.

The Taoiseach, responding to perceptions of this kind, wondered aloud whether a settlement arising out of all-party negotiations would not be more stable than some Unionists imagine.

By way of illustration, he made reference to ideas floated by commentators independent of the Irish Government - and on which the Government has not adopted a position - to the effect that a future agreement with popular endorsement could be entrenched to the satisfaction of Unionists. He referred to the Institute for Policy Studies report by Breandan O' Leary. Similar proposals were made in the Opsahl Report. This could be done, for example, by requiring the support of a greater than 50% majority in Northern Ireland to bring about any either further, post-settlement constitutional change, or change to the all-Ireland arrangements agreed.

More generally, the Taoiseach asked Mr. Molyneaux whether Unionists would be more ready to go to their bottom line in a negotiation once they were persuaded that a new dispensation would be more than temporary.

While Mr. Molyneaux made no specific commitment in response, he pointedly made a written note of what the Taoiseach had said, and seemed receptive.

The urgency of a settlement

The Taoiseach said that there is an obligation on all sides to define a lasting settlement over, perhaps, the next two years or so. A political agreement will remove for good the conditions under which there is a temptation to have recourse to violence. In the absence of an agreement, some of the younger generation in some of Northern Ireland's communities could, some years from now, be exposed again to the temptation to violence.

Intentions of Sinn Fein/IRA

Mr. Molyneaux observed that a programme of demonstrations by Sinn Fein could risk getting out of hand. The Taoiseach concurred.

Molyneaux then asked what the IRA needed to make the ceasefire permanent.

The Taoiseach referred to his conversation with Prime Minister Major in Moscow on 9 May. John Major is convinced that the leadership of Sinn Fein is hard-headed and realistic. While it seeks significant progress towards its goals, it also knows the limits inherent in the political situation. The Taoiseach said that this assessment tallies with the view of Fr. Denis Faul that many Sinn Fein supporters, at least unconsciously, are ready to accept, on suitable terms, Northern Ireland remaining in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Molyneaux commented that the SDLP political machine was "weak on the ground".

Taoiseach's invitation to the Northern Ireland political parties

The Taoiseach mentioned his intention of inviting all the Northern Ireland political parties to meet him. He emphasised that he would wish to handle this issue in such a way as not to cause avoidable embarrassment.

Mr. Molyneux said that his party's reaction to any invitation at the time of its issue would take into account the course of the Ancram talks and developments in connection with Sinn Fein's proposed street demonstrations. In the latter connection he remarked that Orange marches, properly conducted, can be a force for stability. They are "ancient landmarks" which create a sense of continuity and any decision to curtail them would make Unionist uncomfortable.

Mr. Molyneux went on to say that he would consult senior colleagues about a possible invitation from the Taoiseach. The Taoiseach undertook to get back to him on this point in due course when Mr. Molyneux had completed his consultations.

Mr. Molyneux suggested that it would be helpful for the invitation, as and when it issues, to refer generally to talks rather than specifically to Strand Two. The Taoiseach agreed. The Taoiseach indicated that he would hope to be able to have informal private discussions with Mr. Molyneux in any event.

Prisoners

The Taoiseach, raising the prisoners' issue, said that the British need legislation in order to improve the rate of remission in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Molyneux said that the British Government would have difficulty in carrying such legislation in the House. Anti-IRA sentiment is strong in Britain, is focussed on the person of

Adams, and has intensified of late. The emotion generated by VE Day and memories of the Second World War has not eased this situation. Mr. Molyneaux did not, however, signal an inclination to be in the vanguard of any campaign to oppose more generous provisions on remission.

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10 May, 1995