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Meeting with Dr. Christopher McGimpsey (OUP),
Belfast; 24 October 1985

I met Dr. Christopher McGimpsey on 24 October in Belfast. McGimpsey, who has a painting firm in Dundonald and is a part-time academic, is the Secretary of the East Belfast branch of the Official Unionist Party. It will be recalled that he and his brother, in a personal capacity and without the knowledge or sanction of the OUP, made a submission to the Forum and took part in one of its sessions.

Among the points made by McGimpsey were the following:

- He is deeply worried by the content of the emerging Anglo-Irish agreement (to the extent that he can gauge it from media speculation). Any role for the Irish Government in the running of Northern Ireland's affairs will be resisted by Unionists, initially with political means but later on, he fears, with paramilitary violence. A visible Irish Government presence will quite definitely be interpreted by Unionists as a dilution of Northern Ireland's sovereignty and as the "curtain-raiser" to further concessions leading ultimately to a united Ireland. In this context, Unionists are particularly concerned at the implications of a possible change of Government in London at the next election. While they accept that Mrs. Thatcher is unlikely to make major concessions to Dublin, they have much less confidence in Neil Kinnock or David Owen in this regard. They also have some concerns in relation to a possible change of Government in Dublin.
- The underlying fear of Unionists is that a deal is being worked out by the British and Irish Governments behind their backs and that, while Dublin's role may be presented in public as purely consultative, the reality may in fact

be closer to joint authority as outlined in the Form Report.

- Unionists are on edge and in a particularly distrustful frame of mind at present. Even a TV image of the Taoiseach smiling after a meeting with King can give rise to a suspicion that "something is afoot". John Hume's assurance to nationalists that the present talks do not involve "a final settlement" is read by Unionists as meaning that there will eventually be a final settlement, that an Anglo-Irish agreement now would be a stepping-stone in that direction and that there is all the more reason, therefore, to resist it.

- A Secretariat in Stormont would provide a focus for Unionist grievances. It would be seen as a "Trojan horse" and "you can expect the farmers to arrive on their tractors again". An Irish Consulate in Belfast, in McGimpsey's view, would not provoke quite the same reaction - "in fact, if you were to try to achieve the same results through a Consulate, you could probably get away with it" (on the grounds that a Consulate would constitute recognition of Northern Ireland as a foreign territory and would thus appease Unionists). McGimpsey recognized, however, that this would be incompatible with the Irish Constitution.

- Unionists bitterly resent the fact that their politicians have been kept in the dark by the British Government while the SDLP has been briefed by the Irish Government. When I noted Molyneaux's Privy Councillor status and his recent statement to the effect that Unionists had nothing to worry about in the present talks, McGimpsey conceded that he had personally found this reassuring, though he wondered whether the British Government would have told Molyneaux everything. Most rank-and-file OUP members, however, would prefer to see formal briefing of the party leadership as the Irish Government has done for the

SDLP. He suggested, furthermore, that not just the British Government but also the Irish Government "should try to work on Glengall Street" in order to assuage Unionist fears.

- McGimpsey believes that the OUP would be prepared, if the circumstances were right, to go a stage further than what they proposed in "The Way Forward" and to offer the SDLP power-sharing "in one form or another". However, SDLP sources have told him that they do not want power-sharing as they are opposed to any internal settlement.
- ✓ McGimpsey added that any readiness on the OUP's part to contemplate power-sharing would, in his view, disappear if the SDLP "or, for that matter, Douglas Gageby or anybody else in the South" were to welcome an Anglo-Irish agreement in triumphalist terms.

- It is unlikely that the OUP's pact with the DUP will last much longer. Paisley is "like a boxer recovering his wind between rounds": the pact serves simply as a respite and the "next round" (i.e., a renewal of OUP/DUP hostilities) is imminent. Frank Millar, the OUP General Secretary, has been "playing Paisley's game" by criticising his party colleagues on Belfast City Council for failing to support the DUP's attempt to have the Council adjourned in protest at the Anglo-Irish talks. (This intervention, McGimpsey suggests, was inspired more by Millar's own political ambitions than by the views of the party leader). Assuming that the pact will shortly disintegrate, Paisley will feel free to attack the OUP once more. He will probably claim, with reference to Molyneaux's recent reassuring statement, that the OUP leader has been duped by Mrs. Thatcher and that only he (Paisley) can be relied on to properly interpret Loyalist concerns. The beneficiaries of another internecine feud will be, of course, the Loyalist paramilitaries but the mood in the Unionist community at present is unfortunately one of "doing whatever Paisley and the paramilitaries say".

- From East Belfast sources, McGimpsey has heard that the UDA has recently been holding meetings in Dundonald and East Belfast, possibly in order to decide which roads should be blocked in the event that militant action is decided on. There has also been a rumour that stockpiling of food is going on in some areas. However, McGimpsey has no hard evidence to suggest that Loyalist paramilitaries are actively planning any particular action at present. He would regard a 1974-type strike as unlikely, particularly in view of the setbacks encountered when Paisley attempted this in 1977 and again in 1981-82.
- McGimpsey ruled out any prospect of a comeback for Bill Craig, who has been "totally discredited" following his defeat by an Official Unionist candidate in the Assembly election in East Belfast.
- On the Hermon affair, McGimpsey said that most people in East Belfast would agree with what the Chief Constable reportedly said in Houston and, indeed, would have no objection to the latter making political statements of this kind. Paisley, for reasons of his own, has been conducting a personal vendetta against Hermon for years.
- Recalling his participation in the Forum, McGimpsey told me that this initiative was intended to undercut the foreseeable argument that any Unionists claiming the right to criticise the Forum should at least have attended it in the first instance. While he and his brother received private support at the time from people such as Peter Smith, Bob McCartney and Ken Maginnis, their appearance at the Forum has effectively ended the prospects of advancement in the party for either of them. (Michael McGimpsey, in fact, was penalised by being removed from the Vice-Chairmanship of the party's Dundonald branch following his return from Dublin). A particularly vocal critic at the time was Frank Millar, who is also responsible, McGimpsey believes, for having had him barred from meetings of the British-Irish Association.

- In conclusion, McGimpsey expressed warm appreciation for assistance rendered to him by the Department, the Embassy in Washington and the Consulate-General in New York in connection with a lecture tour in the United States last year.

David Donoghue

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29 October 1985.

cc: PSM
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