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SECRET

Meeting with Belfast Lord Mayor John Carson, 11 April 1986

Having met with Alfie Redpath (OUP) Belfast City Councillor the previous night, 10 April (see separate report), I was asked to have a short meeting with Lord Mayor John Carson (OUP) next morning.

He said he was concerned because a request which he made for a meeting with the Taoiseach through Minister of State, Fergus O'Brien had gone without a response. The request had been made on Monday, 7 April. The meeting asked for was between the Taoiseach and 5 OUP politicians, John Carson, Alfie Redpath, Harry West, Austin Ardill and David McNarry.

I answered that I knew nothing of the request but that the Taoiseach was away until early that week and a quick response was probably not possible. The Lord Mayor emphasised that he felt the tension in Northern Ireland was at a dangerous level and it was vitally important that talks should commence as soon as possible. Jim Molyneaux had painted himself into a corner and so others in the Party had to come forward. He said Molyneaux was aware that they were seeking a meeting with the Taoiseach and had given it his consent.

Aware of the publicity which Harry West gave the O'Hanlon/Caraher and Ardill/McNarry talks, I suggested that perhaps it might be better if an initial contact was made by the Lord Mayor and Alfie Redpath. I said we would be concerned at this stage lest the matter would become public which might have the effect of setting back the process. I recalled to John Carson that Harry West's press conference did not help relations between the OUP and SDLP.

The Lord Mayor, who mentioned that he had a long standing invitation from the Taoiseach to call on him, said that he wished for a strictly confidential meeting with the Taoiseach and agreed that it would be best if Alfie Redpath and he only would see the Taoiseach at this time. He asked that a meeting be arranged soon because of the volatile situation in Northern Ireland and suggested Wednesday next, April 16 (a day he had left open in the hope he would get this meeting) as a date. I said I would let him know as soon as possible.

When I met the Lord Mayor, the pending court action (to be heard next Friday, April 18) by David Cook of the Alliance Party against the Unionist Councillors, was very much on his mind.



Liam Canniffe,
14 April 1986.

c.c. Taoiseach
Minister for Foreign Affairs
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SECRET

Meeting with Alfie Redpath (OUP) on 10 April, 1986.

At his request it was agreed that I should meet with Alfie Redpath, an Official Unionist Councillor in Belfast City council. A meeting was arranged and we met at his home in Belfast on Thursday night 11 April, 1986.

Mr. Redpath, a teacher by profession, is considered by SDLP councillors as a moderate Unionist who could be relied on to seek a reasonable solution to the Northern Ireland problem. Even though he has taken a moderate line in Belfast Council and disagreed with the Unionist decision not to strike a rate he is personally well liked by the Official Unionists and considered by them one of their most able councillors. His relations with the DUP are not good, especially since his recent attack on some of their politicians for encouraging the paramilitaries and not unreservedly condemning the attacks on the RUC and their families. Lord Mayor John Carson, one of the other few Unionists moderates in Belfast City Council, is a personal friend. However, notwithstanding their moderation both Alfie Redpath and John Carson have backed the adjournment policy of the Unionist parties in Belfast City Council.

During our meeting, which was informal and friendly, he made the following comments:

The Unionist population are still opposed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement which they see as handing them over to the control of Dublin. He would interpret the Agreement in much the same way as did Peter Smith in his booklet "Why Unionists say No". He believes the problem for the Unionists is that the Agreement, which they had no voice in framing, is too open to interpretation and they see great dangers in this for them.

The major stumbling blocks in the Agreement for the Unionists are the Secretariat and Conference which the Unionists feel will always work against their interests. However, notwithstanding all of this he himself could see "an opportunity for peace, security and prosperity" arising as a consequence of the Agreement.

At present there is no effective leadership in the Official Unionist Party. Not only is James Molyneaux unable to give direction but no other member of the party at Westminster has emerged as a likely successor. Jim Molyneaux's solution to the problem is to push for integration with Britain but most politicians in the party realise that this will only exacerbate the situation and he is not taken seriously.

The feedback they are getting from their community is that even though there is still a great resentment for the Agreement, people believe their politicians should be involved in some negotiations as a way out of the impasse. They are fearful of what might happen if the matter goes on with no solution in sight. "Jim Molyneaux (and the other Official Unionist leaders) are unable to do a U turn now" so it is therefore up to middle management within the party to start the process of negotiations. Names he mentioned who would be involved with him in this process were John Carson, Harry West, David Trimble, Austin Ardill and David McNarry.

The main stream of Official Unionism was very annoyed that Jim Molyneaux gave in to extremist pressure to back down from further talks with Prime Minister Thatcher. When he returned to Belfast with Paisley and McCusker after their meeting in London with the Prime Minister, the hardline Workers Committee had somehow got into OUP headquarters in Glengall Street and forced them to change their minds in the corridor before they entered the meeting room to see the OUP executive. All the OUP MPs had previously agreed to further talks. Pressure is now on

Molyneaux to resume talks with the Prime Minister, and a great deal of their people would like the OUP to go ahead on their own without the DUP.

He believes the DUP are not interested in any solution which will not give them control and at present they are forging ahead towards UDI. He believes Peter Robinson's recent vitriolic statement against Prime Minister Thatcher, where he said Dublin were willing to suspend the Agreement, was made to stop any negotiations which might be about to take place. He feels the DUP are very involved with the loyalist paramilitaries and people like Peter Robinson are very dangerous. He would continue to attack the DUP in public for their support and ambivalence to violence even though he had recently received a number of threats from loyalist extremists. He also believes that Paisley, whom he considers less radical than Robinson, is not interested in negotiations at present.

He drew a big distinction between what the Unionist councils were doing since the Agreement and loyalist violence on the streets. Although he is not altogether happy with the Council adjournments, and failure to take decisions etc. he considers that in the circumstances there are not many other avenues of non-violent protest open to the Unionists. The problem in Northern Ireland is that the politicians have very minor roles to play and therefore there is a danger that unless they show protest in some way people might ignore the politicians and take to the streets to protest themselves. He is annoyed and concerned by the second court action (to be heard on April 18) taken by David Cook of the Alliance Party which will penalise individual Unionist Councillors.

John Carson and he would like to come to Dublin to meet with the Taoiseach if this was possible. They were interested in at least opening avenues between the OUP and the Irish Government and felt that a private informal meeting with the Taoiseach would be very useful to this end.

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Liam Canniffe

14 April 1986

cc: Taoiseach
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